

**KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT LEUVEN**  
FACULTY OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES



**The Historical Evolution of Missionary Practice of Bethany  
Ashram in the Syro Malankara Catholic Church (1912-2012)**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the Research Master:  
Master of Advanced Studies in Theology  
and Religion

**Supervisor**

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**by**

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## SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

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The primary focus of our study is the historical development and missionary practices of Bethany Ashram in relation to the dynamic interaction between the charism of the Bethany Ashram and post conciliar mission concepts. The central research question revolves around, what the historical contributions to and contemporary mission significance of Bethany Ashram in the Syro Malankara Catholic Church and to the world at large is. We divided the thesis into three chapters. The first chapter studies the evolution of missionary vision of Mar Ivanios. In the second chapter we discuss about the growth and contributions of Bethany Ashram for mission and evangelization. In the third chapter we explore the different elements of Bethany Mission in correspondence with the Charism of the Congregation and new mission concepts.

Fr. P. T Geevarghese (Later Archbishop Mar Ivanios), as a priest of the Malankara Orthodox Church, was aware of the lack of missionary orientation of his own Church. In order to address the issue, he decided to start a missionary movement. However, later he realized that starting a religious congregation for the mission and evangelization and spiritual renewal of the church would be more effective to make the church more committed to the mission. He eventually started a religious Congregation named the Order of the Imitation of Christ (OIC) popularly known as Bethany Ashram in 1919. He envisioned a blending of oriental monastic tradition and Indian ascetic movements. It was the first indigenous religious congregation in the Malankara Orthodox Church. Mar Ivanios had a deep knowledge about the history of Indian Church and ecclesial situations. He desired for the unity with the Catholic Church. There were many attempts to bring the Malankara Orthodox Church back to Catholic communion. Finally, Mar Ivanios succeeded in making communion with Catholic Church when he, along with four other members, joined the Catholic Church in 1930. This is also the beginning of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church.

In the second chapter, we make a descriptive study on the mission history of Bethany Ashram in various stages. The development and missionary activities are divided into four stages. First, we analyze the establishment of the religious congregation and the missionary activities in the Orthodox Church. In the second period we focus on the contributions of Bethany Ashram in the development of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church after the communion with the Catholic Church. The mission activities got another face after becoming a pontifical congregation for mission specifically among the migrants and other evangelization activities. Finally, the doors of mission were expanded to other countries outside India especially in Africa and reverse mission in Europe was initiated.

Finally, the history of the mission also challenges to evaluate the mission theology of Bethany Ashram in relation to the charism of the congregation and to the new perspectives of the mission found in the post conciliar documents. An analysis of charism shows that there are three dimensions for the Bethany mission namely contemplative, active and ecclesial. A study of the post councilor documents reveals that interreligious dialogue, inculturation, proclamation and witness, liberation peace and justice, new-evangelization, ecumenism and reconciliation as part of the mission in the contemporary world. All these are also the characteristics of Bethany mission. In the contemplative dimension mission reflects inculturation and interreligious dialogue. Active dimension consists of witness and proclamation and mission as liberation peace and justice. Ecclesial dimension encompasses new evangelization or re-evangelization and mission as ecumenism and reconciliation. To sum up, it is a historical journey into the missionary dynamism of Bethany Ashram in the Universal Church in general and to Malankara Catholic Church in particular.



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Leuven

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Baiju Pappachan

(Fr. Benedict Moozhikkara OIC)

## ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Ad Gentes
GS	Gaudium Et Spes
PC	Perfectae Caritatis
UR	Unitatis Redintegratio
GE	Gravissimum Educationis
IM	Inter Mirifica
NA	Nostra Aetate
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi
RM	Redemptories Missio
EG	Evangelii Gaudium
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
HROIC	Holy Rule of the Order of the Imitation of Christ

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“Go into the entire world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” (Mark 16:15)<sup>1</sup>With this mission statement of Christ, the disciples proclaimed the good news from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. It is popularly believed that St. Thomas, one of the apostles of Christ, traveled to India and preached the good news and established Christian communities there in the 1<sup>st</sup> century itself. However, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of Portuguese missionaries the history of the mission in India moved into another period. Their missionary tasks brought various changes to the Christian communities in India which eventually divided the Church. This division remained as a stumbling block for the greater expansion of mission and evangelization in India. Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Fr P.T. Geevarghese (later Archbishop Mar Ivanios), a priest from the Syrian Orthodox Church, with his profound vision and mission brought out a new phase in the history of the Church by establishing a religious congregation called Bethany Ashram in 1919. His mission was to bring about spiritual renewal in the Church and to evangelize the whole of India. The establishment of a religious congregation made remarkable impacts in the spiritual and ecclesial life of the Orthodox Church. Historically, many attempts were made to bridge the division which existed in the Church, but all were in vain. To fulfill his ideas of mission and evangelization to its fullness Mar Ivanios and the members of Bethany Ashram embraced the Catholic Church in 1930. After the establishment of the Malankara Church Hierarchy in Catholic Church, Bethany ashram became the cradle of its fast growth in various ways and continues its mission with new challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the universal Church.

Our study is on the mission history and the missionary role of Bethany Ashram between 1912-2012. We intend to study the historical background of Syro Malankara Catholic Church and how the missionary vision of Mar Ivanios was evolved in his life time. This research focuses on the various missionary practices of Bethany Ashram in the Orthodox Church and later in the Malankara Catholic Church. Furthermore, through this historical investigation we study on the mission practices of Bethany Ashram and how it has contributed to and reflected upon in the ecclesial, social, cultural as well as the spiritual growth of the Church and society in its broader perspectives. We also examine the mission theology of Bethany Ashram as expounded in the Charism and study the new trends initiated by conciliar and post conciliar documents. The study moves to reflect on the various constitutive elements of Bethany Mission today.

As Bethany Ashram is celebrating the centenary of its foundation (1919-2019), it is a right time to have an introspection into its missionary contribution over the last 100 years. The time span of this study is highly significant in this context. Moreover, much studies have not taken place in this field. It is against this background we have undertaken this study on the role and responsibility of Bethany ashram in the mission and evangelization of the universal Church.

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<sup>1</sup> The Biblical references are taken from New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

## Structure and Content of the Study

We divide our research paper into three chapters. In the first chapter, we review the historical background leading to the establishment of Bethany Ashram by Mar Ivanios. We start with presenting a historical overview of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church followed by the short biography of Mar Ivanios paying special attention to the events and factors that motivated him to envision a new religious congregation for the evangelization of India. This missionary vision of Mar Ivanios was a paradigm shift in the history of the Malankara Church, which was revolutionary within the Orthodox Church. We analyze the various factors which influenced his missionary vision starting from his childhood, the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910 and his life at Calcutta. He was in close contact with Catholic, Protestant and major Hindu religious renaissance movements and leaders. It helped him to propose a syncretic and synthetical model of religious renewal within the Church. This dream finally culminated in the erection of Bethany Ashram in 1919, a religious congregation that is Indian in culture and oriental in faith.

In the second chapter we investigate the mission history of Bethany Ashram. This chapter is divided into four parts. In the first part we explore the foundation, contributions and initial mission practices of the congregation. In the second part we analyze the reunion movement of the congregation from the Orthodox Church to the Catholic Church. It is also the beginning of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church. In this part we further examine the contribution of Bethany Ashram for the growth of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church. In the third part we study the extension and growth of Bethany Ashram after becoming a Pontifical congregation in 1966. In addition to this, we shall examine mission through the various apostolic activities such as ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, educational activities, media and communication and various social service projects for the poor and marginalized in the society. In the fourth part we mainly focus on how Bethany Ashram is participating the mission of universal Church in Africa and Europe.

In the third chapter we evaluate the charism of the Bethany Ashram in dialogue with the post-conciliar understanding of mission and evangelization. First, we analyze the different dimensions of charism namely, contemplative active and ecclesial. We will explore the post-conciliar understating of mission and evangelization as envisioned especially by *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris Missio* and *Evangelii Gaudium*. The missionary practices of Bethany Ashram had undergone some significant structural shifts due to various reasons and re-examining the history of missiology and missionary practices will help to bring a methodology to actively engage in evangelization globally and to develop a unique mission policy, missionary methods, and mission practice in modern Church and society. Finally, we examine how the mission elements of the charism of the Bethany Ashram reflects the teachings of the above-mentioned documents.

## Research Questions

Therefore, the central research question of this study is: What is the historical and contemporary missionary dynamism of Bethany Ashram in the evolution and growth of Malankara Catholic Church in relation to new perspectives of mission? To this effect, a few guiding questions are deduced from the main central research questions: 1) How does the

missionary vision of Mar Ivanios make an impact on the Church and Indian society? ; 2) What are the historical contributions of Bethany Ashram after its post-establishment period for the pastoral and ecclesial development of Syro Malankara Catholic Church? ; 3) What is the dynamic relationship between elements of Catholic mission in interaction with the missionary practice of Bethany Ashram?

### **Research Objectives**

The objective of the research is to identify various challenges of mission and to establish a mission theology for Bethany Ashram suitable for Indian contexts. In the process we will question the historical contributions of Bethany Ashram in the Catholic Church for the effective evangelization in the future. The recent development in mission studies is slowly becoming more systematic. “The focus expanded, and various sub-disciplines developed such as mission theology, mission history, missiography (describing the current state of missionary work), mission law and mission methodology.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, mission studies are also getting insights and methods from other social sciences and secular sciences. Mission cannot be understood from missiological perspectives alone; rather it requires an interdisciplinary approach for fruitful and comparative study. It is remarkable to focus on the interaction between history and theology which is research objective of recent missionary approach in context of missionary practice. Moreover, it is an attempt to discover the roots of Bethany Mission and its progress and its current status.

### **Methodology**

The method of research is based on a historical-critical and analytical approach which furthermore adapts a hermeneutical reference to focus on the study. The primary tools we employ are the original writings of Mar Ivanios, the founder, and the documents in the archives of Bethany Ashram will be studied in their context and critically evaluated. Furthermore, we analyze a number of secondary sources related to the topic. The historical and systematic research methods will definitely be helpful in discovering the sources of study in my context and its application will bring different insights and development of research topic.

In short, this present study is a humble attempt to bring light to the mission history, missionary thrust and significance of Bethany Ashram within the universal Church and particularly in Syro Malankara Catholic Church. We hope that this study will enrich the members of Bethany Ashram to reflect on a missionary consciousness rooted in the history of the Church, vision of Mar Ivanios the founder, charism of the congregation as well as with teachings of the Church. I do not claim that this is a comprehensive study in this line, but only a start, because historical study is always subjected to further research and reflection.

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<sup>2</sup>Carine Dujardin, “Missiology as a project of modernity and a contemporary form of Apologetics,” in *Mission and science: Missiology Revised 1850-1940*, Carine Dujardin and Claude Prudhomme ed. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015) 10.





## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE MISSIONARY VISION OF MAR IVANIOS

#### Introduction

Archbishop Mar Ivanios one of the greatest visionaries of 20<sup>th</sup> century who changed the history of the Indian Church with his challenging life and determined decisions made him to move ahead of time. He emanated from a traditional Church system however, swam against the tide to live as an ascetic by establishing a religious movement, becoming a bishop in the Orthodox Church, and finally reached his dream of communion. The seeds of his vision were sprouted in both favorable and challenging situations which appropriated him to contribute various initiatives to Indian Church and society. The history of mission in India traces its origin from first century itself. So, we explore the origin and establishment of Syro Malankara Catholic Church and a short biography as a background of this study. Moreover, in this chapter we focus on his early life especially about his family, educational background, activities as a deacon and priest, his professorship at Calcutta which helped him to prepare a missionary vision to establish religious congregation for indigenous mission and evangelization. It is fitting to analyze the various factors that influenced Mar Ivanios to formulate his missionary vision according to the need of the time.

#### 1. A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SYRO MALANKARA CATHOLIC CHURCH

St. Thomas, one of the Apostles of Christ, arrived in India<sup>3</sup> and laid the foundation for Christianity in Kerala.<sup>4</sup> “He is considered as the Apostle of India.”<sup>5</sup> This is the reason Christians in Kerala were known as St. Thomas Christians (*Marthoma Christianikal*).<sup>6</sup> “St.

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<sup>3</sup> There are two views regarding the origin of Christianity in India. According to one source, it was St. Thomas or St. Bartholomew, one among the two disciples preached Gospel in India. The other view attributed to the arrival of Christianity in India to trade relation of merchants and missionaries of the East Syrian or Persian Church. It is traditionally believed that St. Thomas landed in India in the year AD 52. Cf. Mathias Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India: From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century*, vol.1 (Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 2001), 24-32.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the arrival of Apostle Thomas, there are two different traditions. 1) The oldest internal tradition upholds that the apostle came by sea from Arabia and landed on Malabar Coast in *Maliankara* (Malankara) which was located in historic seaport of Kodungalur (Cranganore) situated in the ancient city of Muziris. Thus Malankara has got the strategic importance in St. Thomas tradition in its history. 2) The oldest external tradition suggests that the apostle might first have come to North India at the court of a king named Gonopharus and later he went down to the south. Cf. Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From the beginnings to the Present* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 91-93.

<sup>5</sup> Sylvester Kanjiramukalil, *St. Thomas Christians in India* (Kottayam: Bethany Publications, 2016), 17.

<sup>6</sup> The Apostle Thomas established seven Churches in Kerala. These ancient communities are at Cranganore, Palayur, Kottakavu, Kokkamanaglam, Niranam, Kollam and Nilakkal. The different local traditions and evidences affirm that existence of Christian communities in these places from first centuries itself. The existence of living tradition of St. Thomas Christians known as “*Thomayude Margam*” (Law of Thomas) can be considered as the most important local evidence. Among the chief local sources in popular art forms such as *Ramban pattu*, *Margamkali pattu* continued as local traditions handed down through generations reflected the life of the community. Cf. Xavier Koodapuzha, *Christianity in India* (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1998), 31-33.

Thomas established seven Churches in Kerala. *Seven* could be understood in the sense that he established several Christian communities throughout India.<sup>7</sup> St. Thomas Christians believed that their Apostle was martyred in Mylapore, presently located in Tamil Nadu, India.<sup>8</sup> “Many of the early fathers of Christian antiquity give testimony to the Apostolate, martyrdom and tomb of St. Thomas. Fathers like St. Ephrem, St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Ambrose [...] connect St. Thomas with the Indian Apostolate.”<sup>9</sup>

There are very few written documents detailing the early history of the Malankara Church. Some of the later documents indicate that the Malankara Church had contact with the Persian Church in west Asia,<sup>10</sup> but it is unclear when this had been initiated. “We do not get any idea of the Indian Church during the first four centuries. But from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards the Indian Church grew up in relation with the East Syrian Church.”<sup>11</sup> The members of the early Church practiced their faith by amalgamating the teachings of St. Thomas with their indigenous traditions and culture.

### 1.1. Arrival of the Portuguese Missionaries

A new era in the history of St. Thomas Christians began with the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. They came to preach the Good News to the various communities in India. They entered into *communicatio in Sacris* with the St. Thomas Christians. In the beginning their relationship was cordial but later the Western missionaries wanted to bring the St. Thomas Christians under the western (Latin) Church.<sup>12</sup> “Thus together with the political authority, the Portuguese also grew as an ecclesial power in India. With the erection of the dioceses of Goa and Kochi, the western missionaries began their concentrated missionary activities in India.”<sup>13</sup> The Portuguese missionaries started to impose the Latin liturgy and opposed the use of the east Syrian liturgy, which had been in Kerala for sixteen centuries. “The Portuguese policy was to get rid of the Persian Syrian bishops completely and appoint Latin bishops in their place.”<sup>14</sup>

### 1.2. Diamper Synod

Diamper synod of 1599 was a turning point in the history of the Indian Church. “The synod of Diamper convened by the Goan Latin Bishop Dom Menezes in 1599 was meant to give a legal colour to the Portuguese plan to merge this Malankara Apostolic Eastern Church with the Latin Church and make it a part of it.”<sup>15</sup> The synod compelled the St. Thomas Christians to accept the Latin bishops and reject the Persian bishops. It tried to introduce Latin practices, which were alien to the local traditions. Syriac liturgical books were destroyed and were replaced with Latin books. They also made changes to the existing priestly formation process.

<sup>7</sup> Geevarghese Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, trans. A. J. Joy Angemadathil (Kottayam: Bethany Sisters Publication, 2003), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Mathias Mundadan, *Sixteenth Century Traditions of St. Thomas Christians* (Bangalore: Dharmaram College, 1970), 1-30.

<sup>9</sup> Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Placid J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1970), 63.

<sup>11</sup> Kanjiramukalil, *St. Thomas Christians in India*, 27.

<sup>12</sup> Mathias Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 283.

<sup>13</sup> Kanjiramukalil, *St. Thomas Christians in India*, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 31.

<sup>15</sup> Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 36.

It also sanctioned changes to the existing system of Church governance and administration at the central level as well as in the local communities. “The synod of Diamper was a historical event which had drastic, lasting, disastrous and subverting consequences upon the ecclesial life of the St. Thomas Christians so as to shake the very foundations of this Church.”<sup>16</sup> “Almost for a period of half a century from 1599, the Malankara Christians were suffocated under the Western domination.”<sup>17</sup> After the synod, the pastoral visits from Archbishop Menezis to the Churches initiated the implementation of the decrees of the Diamper synod. During these visits he also administered the sacrament of confirmation according to the Latin tradition. The synod of Diamper marked the complete submission of the St. Thomas Christians, who were thenceforth ruled by the Latin bishops.

### 1.3. The Coonan Cross Oath

In 1652, a Syrian bishop named Ahathalla arrived in India pursuant to the request from the St. Thomas Christians. When the Portuguese learned of his intentions to meet with the St. Thomas Christians, they arrested and imprisoned him; he was not allowed to land on the Malabar coast.<sup>18</sup> When the people heard of this they rose in revolt against the ecclesiastical domination of the Portuguese missionaries. On January 3, 1653<sup>19</sup>, 25000 Indian people, both priests and laity, took an oath against western domination and the Portuguese ecclesiastical colonialism. This oath was known as the Coonan cross oath. They tied a rope to the stone cross at Matancherry and made the oath “we will never remain under the *Sampalur Pathiris* as long as our generations continue to exist”<sup>20</sup>. After the oath they made a resolution that they would never accept the western bishops and they wanted bishops from their own community. Although the arrival of Ahathalla, a Syrian Bishop, was the instigating factor for the Coonan cross oath, the true motive was to preserve the ritual autonomy and identity of the St. Thomas Christians.

### 1.4. Division of St. Thomas Christians

A month after the Coonan Cross Oath, the Archdeacon, the head of the St. Thomas Christians, and the other leaders assembled to discuss the future plans for the Church. They decided to consecrate the archdeacon as the Bishop of the community.<sup>21</sup> “Meanwhile Anjilimootil Ittithoman Cathanar produced a forged letter of Ahathalla, authorizing the Archdeacon to handle the Episcopal powers if there are no Bishops to rule them.”<sup>22</sup> “According to this letter, on May 22, 1653, on the feast of Pentecost, twelve priests of the Syrian community ‘consecrated’ the Archdeacon as the bishop with the title of Mar Thoma I,

<sup>16</sup> Jacob Kollaparambil, “The Impact of the Synod of Diamper on the Ecclesial Identity of the St. Thomas Christians,” in *The Synod of Diamper Revisited*, ed. George Nedungatt (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2001), 147.

<sup>17</sup> Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 46.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Xavier Koodappuzha, *Bharathasabha Charitram* (Kottayam: Oriental institute of Religious Studies, 1980), 316-320.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Koodappuzha, *Bharathasabha Charitram*, 320-322.

<sup>20</sup> Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 52.

<sup>21</sup> After the historical event of Coonan cross oath, the leaders of St. Thomas Christians assembled at Edapplally to discuss their future plan and selected four among them to assist Arch deacon as councilors. They were Parambil Chandy, Anjilimootil Ittithomman, Kadavil Chandy and Vendoor Gheevarghese Cf. Xavier Koodapuzha, *Christianity in India* (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1998), 97.

<sup>22</sup> Koodapuzha, *Christianity in India*, 97.

and all the Churches, except for a few, followed him in denying obedience to their legitimate bishop.”<sup>23</sup> Mar Thoma I knew the invalidity of his consecration and began corresponding with Patriarchs of different Churches in hopes of obtaining a valid Episcopal ordination. In response to this request, a Jacobite Bishop of Jerusalem, Mar Gregorios, came to India in 1665 and thus established a relationship with the Patriarch of the Antiochian Jacobite Church.<sup>24</sup> This caused a division within the Church which resulted in the formation of two separate Churches.

1. In 1663, Bishop Sebastiani ordained Parambil Chandy as the indigenous bishop. Those who recognised Parambil Chandy, and continued East Syrian liturgy, were known as *Pazhayakuttukar* (Old Group). This group of the St. Thomas Christians later became the Syro Malabar Catholic Church. On December 21, 1923, Pope Pius XI by the bull ‘*Romani Pontifices*’ established the Syro- Malabar hierarchy.<sup>25</sup>
2. Those who recognised Archdeacon as their head, welcomed bishop Mar Gregorios of Jerusalem and accepted Antiochian rite and liturgy, are known as *Puthenkuttukar* (New Group). “The whole *puthenkuttukar* community came fully under the power of the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch, and the Malankara Church became a part of the Jacobite Church.”<sup>26</sup> Thus the newly divided community lost its communion with the Catholic Church.

### 1.5. The Establishment of Syro Malankara Catholic Church

In the subsequent centuries, the prelates of the Malankara Church made many attempts to be in communion with the Catholic Church; all their attempts were futile.<sup>27</sup> However, by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the relationship between the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch and the Malankara Church became strained. There was a struggle for an ecclesial autonomy.<sup>28</sup> In 1912, a ‘*Catholicate*<sup>29</sup>’ was established in Malankara. However, a small section of people preferred not to be under Patriarchal jurisdiction, and formed an independent Church called the Malankara Orthodox Church.<sup>30</sup> The independent Malankara Orthodox Church had now attained more freedom to bridge the broken relationship with the Catholic Church. Mar Ivanios, the Metropolitan of Bethany, was entrusted to start the correspondence with the Holy

<sup>23</sup> Cyril Baselios, *The Syro Malankara Church* (Thiruvananthapuram: St. Joseph Press, 1973), 18.

<sup>24</sup> Baselios, *The Syro Malankara Church*, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Kanjiramukalil, *St. Thomas Christians in India*, 69.

<sup>26</sup> Kanjiramukalil, *St. Thomas Christians in India*, 76.

<sup>27</sup> Many documents were drafted to initiate the Communion with the Roman Catholic Church by the eminent prelates of each era. (Cf. Sylvester Kanjiramukalil, *Reunion Documents*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Kottayam: Bethany Publications, 2012), 13-106.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Baselios, *The Syro Malankara Church*, 154.

<sup>29</sup> The Catholicate was established in Malankara Church by the Jacobite Patriarch Abdul Messiah II who visited India in 1912. (Fr. Geevarghese (Later Bishop Mar Ivanios) played a crucial role for the arrival and establishment of Catholicate. Catholicos means head of the Church and throne of the Catholicos is known as Catholicate. The Catholicos has all the juridical power and privileges of equal to a Patriarch. By the establishment of Catholicate in Malankara Church, the Church was divided in to two groups. The group stood with the Antiochian Patriarch came to be known as Patriarchal group or *Bawa Kakshi* and the group stood with the Bishop Divaniasyos came to be known as Bishop Group or *Metran Kashi*. Eventually they were called as the Jacobite and the Orthodox Church respectively. Cf. Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Baselios, *The Syro Malankara Church*, 156.

See.<sup>31</sup> Rome accepted the proposal for communion. On 20 September 1930 Mar Ivanios, Mar Theophilos, the suffragan Bishop of Bethany, and three members professed the faith before Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger of Kollam, delegate of Pope Pius XI, and thus came into communion with the Catholic Church.<sup>32</sup> On 11 June 1932 the Malankara Catholic Hierarchy was established through the Apostolic Constitution ‘*Christo Pastorum Princip*’. The unification of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church with the Universal Church paved the way for expeditious expansion of mission and evangelization in India.<sup>33</sup> On 10 February 2005 Pope John Paul II elevated the status of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church to Major Archiepiscopal Church and appointed its Head as Major Archbishop through the Papal Bull ‘*Ab ipso Sancto Thoma*’.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF MAR IVANIOS<sup>35</sup>

Geevarghese Mar Ivanios, the first Metropolitan Archbishop of Trivandrum, was born on 21 September 1882 in a conservative Syrian Orthodox family at Mavelikara, Kerala, India. His parents christened him Geevarghese Panickeruveetil. Upon the completion of his primary school education in 1897, he joined MD Seminary for his high school studies and clerical training. Bishop Dionysius ordained him a deacon on 9 January 1900 at Puthenkavu Church. There upon he continued his studies at CMS College<sup>36</sup> Kottayam. He followed it up with a bachelor’s degree in Economics and Indian History from Madras Christian College and subsequently a master’s degree in 1907. After his studies he was appointed the Principal of MD Seminary High School. There he organized various activities for ecclesial and spiritual renewal within the Malankara Church.

Bishop Vattasseril Mar Dionysius, the Metropolitan of Malankara Church ordained him a priest on 15 September 1908 at Parumala. He was popularly known as *MA Achan*<sup>37</sup>. As a zealous priest toiled for and effected revival and rejuvenation in the ecclesial life of Church, which had been wrestling with spiritual decay and degeneration and lust for power. He choked out for ecclesial rejuvenation plans successfully executed them to give a hierarchical autonomy to the Church and was instrumental in the establishment of the throne of the Catholicos in the Malankara Church on September 1912. In the same year he participated in a conference in the company of Metropolitan Vattasseril Mar Dionysius in Serampore College Calcutta. There he happened to meet the principal of Serampore College, Dr. Howels who asked him for his service as professor in the College. He accepted the offer because he foresaw it as an opportunity to educate the young men of his Church. During his stay there, he got acquainted with people belonging to diverse cultures and faiths. This acquaintance

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Koodapuzha, *Christianity in India*, 164.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 99.

<sup>33</sup> Baselios, *The Syro Malankara Church*, 165.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Kanjiramukalil, *St. Thomas Christians in India*, 110.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. For this section mostly depend on the following two sites. The Syro Malankara Catholic Church, “Servant of God Arch Bishop Geevarghese Mar Ivanios,” <http://www.catholicate.net/Church/LateHeads> [accessed May 02, 2017]; Rajan Mathew, “Arch Bishop Most. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Ivanios” [http://www.lightoflife.com/LOL\\_Arch\\_ArchBishop\\_Ivanios.htm](http://www.lightoflife.com/LOL_Arch_ArchBishop_Ivanios.htm) [accessed May 02, 2017].

<sup>36</sup> CMS (Church Missionary Society) College is the first college in Kerala for English Education which was founded by Church Missionary Society in 1817. Cf. Kanjiramukalil, *St. Thomas Christians in India*, 86.

<sup>37</sup> Fr. P. T. Geevarghese is also called *MA Achan*, because he was the first one to secure Master of Arts degree among the Syrian Orthodox priest. *Achan* in vernacular language is priest.

deepened and equipped him better with evangelization, mission and monasticism. Gathering momentum from these experiences, he decided to found a religious society to contribute to evangelization in India. He wanted the same to be rooted in oriental monasticism and Indian asceticism because of his constant interaction with Indian culture and oriental monastic life. To realize his dream of founding a religious congregation he resigned from the college and returned to Kerala in 1919. He established the Order of the Imitation of Christ or Bethany Ashram at Mundanmala in Ranni Perunadu. His students at Serampore College played a vital role in the same. The congregation soon became a centre of spiritual renewal through its life of prayer. It ventured into various missionary endeavours through various activities aimed at the development of society and Church. In 1925 he also founded a religious congregation for women in order to empower the women of the Church.

On May 1, 1925 he was consecrated as the Bishop of Bethany. He received the name Geevarghese Mar Ivanios and eventually he was elevated as the Metropolitan of Bethany. He was disturbed by litigations and division in his mother Church. He regarded communion with the Catholic Church as the only remedy for peace in the Church. In 1926 the Synod of Malankara Orthodox Church held in Parumala under the leadership of Baselios Geevarghese Catholicos delegated Mar Ivanios to negotiate the possibilities for reunion with the Holy See in Rome. But later the synod withdrew its decision of communion owing to a favourable civil court verdict on *Vattippanam*<sup>38</sup> case. However, Mar Ivanios adhered to his conviction and Rome accepted his proposal for reunion with the Catholic Church in 1930. The communion of Mar Ivanios and his followers was a historic event in the history of Church as it brought back the divided people of God into the Catholic fold. On his visit to Rome in 1932 he received the pallium from Pope Pious XI. During this visit he also participated in the thirty second Eucharistic Congress held at Dublin, Ireland. The monastic Order Bethany Ashram which he founded pioneered the missionary activities and evangelization and laid a strong foundation for the establishment and development of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church. On 15<sup>th</sup> July 1953, the Archbishop was called to eternal rest and on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2007 the Church declared him as Servant of God.

### 3. EVOLUTION OF A GREAT JOURNEY

#### 3.1. The Childhood and Youth

Mar Ivanios was born in renowned traditional and noble *Mallitti -Panicker*<sup>39</sup> family and was the eldest son of his parents Thomas and Anna Panikar. A few days after the birth, he

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<sup>38</sup> The meaning of *Vattippanam* is money invested for interest and the deposit of money is called *vattippanam*. There are two versions regarding the source money. A prevalent opinion is that Thachil Mathutharakan deposited this money. Another opinion is that the British Resident Macauley deposited for the developmental activities of the Syrians Christians. But when the Malankara Church was divided in to two groups, the dispute began over the ownership of money. The Civil case began in 1913, and after many judgments and appeals, it was finally judged in favour of the Orthodox group. Cf. Sylvester Kanjiramukulil, St. Thomas Christians in India, 78.

<sup>39</sup> '*Mallitti Panicker*', is a title name given to families who were traditional guards of Kings of Travancore in south India. The family of Mar Ivanios belonged to a warrior family and his father himself was running a military academy.

received baptism and confirmation and assumed the name of Geevarghese<sup>40</sup> at his home parish Puthiyakavu.<sup>41</sup> Mar Ivanios hailed from a prominent and established St. Thomas Christian family, both his parents Thoma Panikar and Anna Panikar were highly religious and influenced him different ways in shaping his thoughts and future missions. Being a member of a warrior family Mar Ivanios was strengthened with much courage to take up any challenges in his future life. The absence of a male child in the long line of the family caused Anna Panikar discontented. Her prayers and sacrifices particularly through the intercession of the Blessed Mother Mary, gifted with a male child on the day of Nativity of Our Lady. His mother was well educated pious lady, prepared him meticulously in the matters of faith especially to special devotion to Mother Mary, learning Bible, catechetical training and all the traditions of Church.<sup>42</sup>

According to biography written by Thomas Inchakkalody, a significant incident happened in the early childhood of young Geevarghese to focus his attention of his mission of unity at early stage itself from his beloved mother herself. One day he was taken into the nearby Catholic Church, she confidentially said to Geevarghese that “the Church we now pray is the real Church of God. And one day we shall enter in communion with this Church”<sup>43</sup>. Thus, she triggered in the young mind of her son an ecumenical spirituality and vision which was to grow in him and make him a prophet of communion in his later life. The religious education at home and the good examples of the parents, especially of his mother might have naturally enkindled in himself to the service of the Church. Another important figure who influenced mar Ivanios in his early stage was his priest uncle Fr Zacharia who remained as celibate till end of his life to serve the Church and thus inspired him to opt an ascetic life. As Gibbons describes that, “It was this Priest Uncle who held up to Geevarghese the ideal of the monastic life”<sup>44</sup>. Thus, the idea of vocation sprouted in the family background and is nurtured by the social milieu. The Panikar family in which he was born and brought up ever remained faithful to the religious traditions of its ancestors and to the religious education which has made the family a domestic Church.

On general educational level, we know that he was admitted in *Kalari*<sup>45</sup> where he trained the basics of languages like Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit. Later he joined in CMS school (Church Mission Society), however he was transferred to Government English Medium School due to the intervention of Metropolitan Mar Joseph Pulikotil to keep the boy away from protestant influence where he was described as “intelligent, observant, and

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<sup>40</sup> Mar Ivanios had known in several names such as Geevarghese Panikar, P.T Geevarghese, M A Achen, Bethany Metran, ‘Abun’- father Bethany and Mar Ivanios the Metropolitan. After his reunion the Catholic Church in 1930, was generally known as Arch Bishop Mar Ivanios.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Thomas Inchakkalody, *Arch Bishop Mar Ivanios: Biography*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Kottayam: Bethany Publications, 2012), 27-40.

<sup>42</sup> Margaret Gibbons, *Arch Bishop Mar Ivanios: Apostle of Church Unity* (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds Ltd, 1962; Reissued Kottayam: Bethany Publications, 2002), 23.

<sup>43</sup> Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 46.

<sup>44</sup> It was the custom and tradition of the Orthodox Church that priests who are intending to become parish priest must marry or get dispensation from the patriarch with sufficient reason. Cf. Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 23.

<sup>45</sup> *Kalari* is the basic educational system where the little children were formed and trained the fundamentals of different language and mathematics under a teacher whom is known as ‘*Asan*’.

considerate<sup>46</sup>. It was these qualities which enabled him to meet with success in all his future undertakings and mission endeavors.

### 3.2. Activities as a Deacon

In 1891 at the age of fifteen Geevarghese entered in the MD seminary at Kottayam for priestly training and for high school studies in MD seminary high school. His stay at MD seminary was yet another factor which shaped his future missionary zeal where he planted the seeds of his call and even planned a missionary circle among the students. “He utilized every free moment in the old seminary to organize a missionary circle amongst the deacons resident there. He took up with his companions the study of apologetics and Christian doctrine. He prepared with them sermons, instructions, discourses on the liturgy and commentaries on scriptural passages.”<sup>47</sup> Above all, he motivated his fellow students to steep themselves in the study of the sacraments, especially that of penances. His mission circle gave him every assistance during the school time. Thus, he lived the seminary life very seriously and exemplarily with the goal of becoming a zealous priest or in other words he lived it with full pastoral involvement effected from the missionary vision he had in his mind. He completed high school studies with remarkable results and received minor orders from Metropolitan Pulikotil Joseph Mar Dionysius. On his minor orders he took vow which would clearly affirm his future mission towards his Church and enthusiasm to dedicate himself to an instrument in God’s hands. “I vow to dedicate my life to the spiritual uplift of the community that gave me birth. This I hope to accomplish by means of the education and sanctification of the clergy.”<sup>48</sup> On January 9, 1900, with consent of parents and the members of home parish, he was raised as deacon in Orthodox Church.

The newly ordained deacon continued his education in CMS College, (Church Missionary Society) Kottayam for F.A [First examination in Arts] and passed with distinction. P T Geevarghese was such a promising and brilliant student that his Bishop in consultation with his seminary Rector selected him for higher studies of BA and MA at Madras Christian College, which had been established by the Free Church of Scotland.<sup>49</sup> There he took Indian history and economics as optional subjects to deepen his knowledge about both western and eastern world. His profound historical knowledge enabled him to research his on a controversial topic “*Were the Syrian Christians Nestorians*”? He collected historical documents and manuscripts about eastern Syrian Christians from various libraries and proved Syrian Christians were never been part of Nestorians.<sup>50</sup> His dissertation was translated in to vernacular and was strongly recommended for the faithful to have a systematic and scientific knowledge of the history of the Syrian Christians. Being a great organizer Geevarghese conducted various sessions on history, theology, and Bible to Syrian students in the university to create awareness among them to enlarge their knowledge about Church and traditions.

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 46-49.

<sup>47</sup> Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 32

<sup>48</sup> Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 30

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 50.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 59.



During his study in Madras he acquainted with many European Missionaries and was inspired by their missionary zeal. This had a tremendous effect in his life. The determination and zeal for the Church made him a promising young personality to take up new responsibilities in the Orthodox Church. After his return from his studies, he was appointed as the principal of MD Seminary High school at Kottayam.

Even as a deacon he worked hard for the integral, spiritual development and improvement of the community. He organized seminars and retreats on different topics like God, religion, incarnation, sacraments and thus he came to be known as '*kudasa semmasan*'.<sup>51</sup> "The preaching was concerned largely with Gospel themes and their practical application. There was also a daily demonstration of the liturgy and a detailed explanation of the significance of its ritual, besides instructions on its doctrinal content."<sup>52</sup> Apart from his hectic work schedule as the principal, his daily life began with spiritual reading of the book 'Imitation of Christ' written by Thomas a Kempis followed by the recitation of his divine office in Syriac. He spent a lot of time for his personal prayer.<sup>53</sup> Being truthful and determined to his mother's advice "Priests ought not to marry,"<sup>54</sup> this option had inserted root in his heart. He decided to remain a celibate to commit himself totally in behalf of his future ministry and he strongly believed that an unmarried priest could contribute significantly to the work of evangelization. He received the sacrament of priesthood from Vattasseril Mar Divannasiyos on 15 August 1908.<sup>55</sup>

After his ordination, he continued as the principal of MD seminary High school with the vision to lead the institute to a prestigious college in Kerala and train the aspiring priestly students for the growth and development of Malankara Church. He introduced various events in MD seminary such as the 'Student's Conventions' by inviting international personalities to empower the education system. As an eminent speaker, he continued his mission by preaching in different parishes for spiritual awakening and exercised ardently the priestly duties assigned to him. Thus, he came to be known as the "Priest of Sacraments"<sup>56</sup>. Apart from his dynamic involvement in the administration of MD Seminary and teaching career he also actively initiated in the establishment of Catholicate in the Malankara Church in 1912.<sup>57</sup>

#### 4. THE FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED THE MISSION THOUGHTS OF MAR IVANIOS

##### 4.1. The World Missionary Conference in Edinburg 1910

The World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910 was "the great ecumenical missionary conference" and "epoch in the missionary progress of the new century" for its unique contribution to the realization of mission, evangelization, and ecumenism by collaboratively exchanging the missionary experience in all parts of the

<sup>51</sup> It means 'Deacon of Sacraments'

<sup>52</sup> Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 34.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 92.

<sup>54</sup> Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 34.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 94.

<sup>56</sup> Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 36.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 94 -96.

world.<sup>58</sup> “It was both the culmination of the nineteenth-century protestant Christian Missions and the formal beginning of the modern protestant Christian Ecumenical Movement. It was unprecedented in scope, preparations and consequences.”<sup>59</sup> The conference was a true world conference; the large majority of those who attended were persons who were engaged in active missionary work in various parts of the world. Among them many were specialists in various subjects, some of them were the highest Church authorities. A rich representation of 1200 delegates participated from different continent.<sup>60</sup> During the conference, John Raleigh Mott and John Houldsworth Oldham had been elected as the chairman and secretary respectively.<sup>61</sup> Eight commissions were formed to discuss and research on diverse topics related to mission and missionary activities. There were long-term preparations prior to the conference to accumulate various topics to be discussed in the conference for the renewal and acceleration of missionary movements around the world and formed eight commissions. The topics of the commissions are following:

- I. Carrying the Gospel to the whole non-Christian world.
- II. The Church in the Mission –field
- III. Education in relation to the Christianization of National Life.
- IV. The Missionary Message in relation to the Non- Christian Religions
- V. The Preparation of Missionaries.
- VI. The Home Base of Missions.
- VII. Relation of Missions to Governments.
- VIII. Co-operation and Promotion of unity<sup>62</sup>

The main focuses of the discussions were on advancement of evangelization through missionary cooperation and Church unity. “It revealed that unmistakable and even passionate conviction that the evangelization is the paramount duty of the Church. The place of missions in the life of the Church must be the central place, and none other: that is what matters.”<sup>63</sup> The participants from Asia in the conference actively involved with the discussion on various subjects and presented challenges of evangelization and missionary actives which made huge impact on the sessions to adduce the emergency of evangelization in Indian context. Moreover, the conference decided that “Further, the stupendous task of world evangelization had been categorically declared impossible without a far greater measure of cooperation; and an equally categorical demand had been made that Conference should not be dispersed without taking some definite step to meet the need.”<sup>64</sup> Thus the conference unanimously agreed to form a continuation committee to implement the decisions and thoughts on mission and evangelization all over the world.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Andrew C. Russel, “Edinburgh Forgotten: The Christian and Missionary Alliance and the Disappearance of an Epoch –Making Conference,” *Missiology: An International Review* 39 (2011): 473-484.

<sup>59</sup> Gideon Goosen, “The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910-2010: A Time for Reflection,” *Compass* 44/3 (2010): 26-32.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. William Henry Temple Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 48-50.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Brain Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference Edinburgh* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), 24-32.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910*, 19.

<sup>63</sup> Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910*, 43.

<sup>64</sup> Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910*, 179.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910*, 202.

“The Edinburgh conference was a superbly organized and high-minded attempt to present and analyze scientifically what appeared to the best western Christian minds of the day to be the observable facts of missionary expansion and policy. The measure of missionary success enjoyed by Christianity in the century that followed arguably owed rather little to the priorities set and the objectives enunciated at Edinburgh.”<sup>66</sup>

#### 4.2. The Participation of the Conference in Calcutta

The most significant aspect of the legacy of the World Missionary Conference 1910 was the continuation of regional conferences in different parts of the world and to discuss the topics of Edinburgh committee to foster the evangelization and co-operation toward the issue of Church union.<sup>67</sup> The first Asian regional continuation committee conferences were convened, in November 1912 in Ceylon and in December 18- 21, 1912, at Serampore college<sup>68</sup> Calcutta, India under the chairmanship of Richard Mott, who was the General secretary of YMCA international and the organizer of the Edinburgh conference.<sup>69</sup> The propagation of Good news, missionary education, and Church unity were the main thrust of the conference. To realize this, Mott called up on the cooperation of all Christian denominations. Accordingly, Mott had invited representatives from different Christian denominations. Hence representing the undivided Malankara Church, Fr P.T Geevarghese participated in the conference in his capacity as companion secretary to Bishop Vattasseril Mar Divannasios.<sup>70</sup> Participation of representatives from different Christian denominations made ecumenism an important concern of the conference along with evangelization. Followed by student’s conference J. R Mott also chaired “Syrian Church Unity Conference” in Serampore in which both Mar Thoma and Malankara Church heads have actively participated in the discussion on the desirability of cooperation for evangelization.<sup>71</sup> “The meeting publicly recorded the determination of leaders of the largest community in India to unite with the Christians of all communions in a forward movement for the evangelization of Southern Asia, which had been the context of Mott’s appeal to his guests.”<sup>72</sup> The impact of conference which eventually led to the formation of the Church of South India<sup>73</sup> in 1947 and of the Church of North India in 1970 began at Edinburgh.<sup>74</sup> The participation in the conference made a tremendous impact on the thoughts and visions and was a pivotal moment in the life Fr. P. T Geevarghese.

<sup>66</sup> Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, 17

<sup>67</sup> Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, 310.

<sup>68</sup> Serampore College was founded in 1818 as an educational institute for arts and science. The college received a University status in 1827 with a charter to the College by the King of Denmark. Later, in 1845 the ownership of the College was transferred to the British Government. In 1856, The Baptist missionary Society of England has took over the management and in 1857 it became affiliated with the University of Calcutta. From 1883 the College has become a Christian training institute for the Baptist Churches in Bengal. The college faculty was international and interdenominational. Cf. Serampore College, “A Brief History,” <http://www.seramporecollege.org/arts-science-commerce/history> [accessed on May 2, 2016].

<sup>69</sup> Cf. C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott 1865-1955: A Biography*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 390.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 34.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Hopkins, *John R. Mott*, 392.

<sup>72</sup> Hopkins, *John R. Mott*, 393.

<sup>73</sup> The Church of South India (CSI) is formed by the unification of various Anglican Churches like Church Missionary Society (CMS), London Missionary Society (LMS), Wesleyan Methodists Churches in South India in 1947. Imitating this model of unity among the Anglican Churches of South India northern Anglican Churches united themselves and formed Church of North India.(CNI) Cf. Kanjiramukulil, *St. Thomas Christians in India*, 69.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Stanley, *The world missionary conference*, 311.

### 4.3. The Professorship in Serampore College

The close contact with Dr. Howells<sup>75</sup>, the principal of Serampore College, led to the invitation of Fr. P.T. Geevarghese as professor at this university. Mar Ivanios in his autobiography writes that “the close acquaintance we had with Dr. Howells, during the conference has made a remarkable change in our life”<sup>76</sup>. He accepted the offer with the formal consent of his bishop and occupied the chair of Syriac, Church history and political Economy in the Serampore University.<sup>77</sup> His core concern behind the acceptance of this endeavour was his conviction that a good education of clergy could heal the spiritual wounds of the community. He said “to accomplish the spiritual uplift of the community by means of education and sanctification of its clergy”<sup>78</sup>.

"Therefore, his first aim was to form a group of a clergy which would be educated in the truths of the Church. This was the main reason why he left his native land and went to Serampore, where he accepted a professorship in a Protestant university. He thought that taking such a step would help to realize his long-cherished desire of educating the clergy of his Church. He also thought that it would eventually lead to the opening of a theological seminary."<sup>79</sup>

Thus, education of clergy was in his eyes the stable remedy for the substantial changes to innumerable problems of the Church and Fr. P.T. Geevarghese considered this as his sole mission to bring deacons to Calcutta. As soon as he arrived in Serampore, he persuaded many young men, clerical as well as lay, in his Church to come to Serampore, to initiate them higher studies in a variety of subjects and sacred theology.<sup>80</sup> He himself was paying or partly paying from his salary the expenses of deacons who studied in Serampore and other parts of India. His mission on the educating and training of deacons was based on the traditions and liturgical spirituality of the Church. Therefore, he set up a Syrian Chapel for the Syrian Students which provided them with the facility to conduct their own prayers and liturgical services. He introduced classical Syrian language in the university syllabus to acquire knowledge about liturgy, scripture and Church history which were originally written in Syriac, by doing this he kept them away from protestant influences.<sup>81</sup> It was indeed a gradual preparation for them to take up the challenges to accept a new way of life to choose vocation for religious life. However, his vision on the formation of future priests turned to different phases as he was growing in his spiritual advancement and horizons of his mission.

### 4.4. Educating Women for Emancipation

Having recognized the situation of women at that time, Fr. P.T. Geevarghese took many initiatives for the upliftment and revival of women within the community. In his autobiography *Girideepam*, he wrote

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<sup>75</sup> Dr. George Howells was well-known educationalist and principal of Serampore College from 1906 to 1929. Cf. Serampore College, “A Brief History.”

<sup>76</sup> Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, trans. Rehmas (Kottayam: Bethany Sisters, 2005), 57.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 39.

<sup>78</sup> Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 40.

<sup>79</sup> Louis Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious studies, 1977), 25.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 50.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 53-54.

“Prosperity of any community depends on the character formation of its women. The women folk of our community are at its lowest ebb in the matter of education. In order to raise them up from that level, there should be facilitated for their education.”<sup>82</sup>

He knew that the women in his community were backward in the field of education. Fr. P. T. Geevarghese was much concerned with the advancement women and also for providing higher education to upcoming talented. He recognized the role of educated women in the progress of the family as well as society.<sup>83</sup> With this outlook, he approached the principal of Diocesan College, Calcutta, Sr. Mary Victoria. The college was run by European nuns and famous for the higher education for women. The principal appreciated and accepted the remarkable recommendation for the young Malankara girls to pursue their education in Calcutta.<sup>84</sup> Fr. Geevarghese realized that the proclamation of the Gospel through the education of women and children would be better accomplished by educated and consecrated women. “For, it is a fact that where religious men could not get access or cooperation for work of evangelization, the religious women could easily get both.”<sup>85</sup> He was fully convinced of the dire necessity of dedicated religious women in his Church, so he encouraged those girls to who had chosen the vocation of religious life. Mother Edith, the High-Church sisters of Oxford mission in Barisol expressed her willingness to train the woman for religious life.<sup>86</sup> These tireless efforts later led to the foundation a religious congregation for women for the evangelization and the emancipation of women in the society.

## 5. THE PRESSING NEED OF A MISSIONARY SOCIETY

His deep persuasion regarding the sanctification of clergy through education that would stimulate the spiritual revival and the development of his Church had been changed during the stay at Serampore. “Even if they are realized, would they last long? Even they did, by that alone, would that bring about the progress of the Malankara community? Is the prosperity of the community embedded solely on these?”<sup>87</sup> He realized that providing education or establishing a theological seminary is not the fundamental obligation of a Christian. “The most important duty of the Christian is the spread of the Gospel. Its watchword is to show the Savoir Jesus Christ to all. Evangelization is inevitable for the glory of the name of God.”<sup>88</sup> The thoughts of evangelization were overwhelming in his hearts all the time, although a strong transition has taken place from education to evangelization. What was the motivating force for this change of idea that inspired this transition to the foundation of a missionary society as an inescapable obligation of a Christian to propagate the Good News to all over India?

“I cannot say definitely why such a change of mind came about during the course of my stay at Serampore. But anyhow this idea of the Missionary Society had taken

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<sup>82</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 62.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Augustine Kavungal, “Role of women in the Participatory Church: A Vision of Mar Ivanios,” in *The Theological Visions of Mar Ivanios*, ed. Antony Valiyavilayil (Pune: Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth, 2004), 238.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Peter C. Abraham, *In his Master's Footsteps: Life Story of Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, (Kottayam: Bethany Publications, 2001) 97-100.

<sup>85</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 64.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 63.

<sup>87</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 56.

<sup>88</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 57.

possession of my heart to the extent that I could not get rid of it even in my sleep. When I had to engage myself in any act of divine service, I used to offer God this heart of mine burdened with the thought of missionary society.”<sup>89</sup>

Many days and month passed away. Fr. P. T Geevarghese a man of prayer and penances was guided by the power of Holy Spirit. He experienced in his heart and mind that some invisible power had taken possession of him and was drawing him along the road of a missionary society.

### **5.1. The Discontinuation of the Missionary Task of St. Thomas Christians**

The mission command of Jesus Christ “Go into the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15) was directly received by the apostle St. Thomas and planted the mission of the Church in the first century itself. The primary obligation of the Church is to continue this mission of communication of faith to the world. “Each Christian community has the responsibility of communication of faith because of Christ’s command and Church’s mission. Ever since the dawn of Christianity, faith–communication is being increasingly carried out by the local Churches and individuals. It is generally believed that the Church of the Christians of St. Thomas had not done much in this direction before the arrival of the Europeans.”<sup>90</sup> An objective appraisal of the Malankara Syrian community in propagation of the apostle faith, acknowledged him that the Church had extremely failed in her fundamental duty of preaching the word of God to all nations and this irresponsibility battered his consciences. He deplored the wretched situation of the Church.

“The Malankara Christian community, which esteems to have been founded by St. Thomas and takes pride in its traditions for the past twenty centuries, has not done hitherto anything worthwhile with regard to the chief objective of its establishment. This is to be considered as a serious crime. It is the fact to be admitted that the lamp lit as directed by the savior Jesus Christ in the year 52 AD, still remains just like that without shedding light or giving energy to the surrounding places remaining in the darkness.”<sup>91</sup>

During his journey over northern and southern parts of India, he had experienced directly and realized the thousands of catholic and protestant missionaries enthusiastically carrying out the missionary task and bared much fruit in all their endeavors.<sup>92</sup> “Many have come from abroad for the spiritual advancement of India. They had spent their health and wealth for the spread of Gospel in our country. In spite of witnessing their zealous missionary work and their pointing out of lethargy, we did not do anything to overcome our culpable laziness. For, life we had worked zealously for the evangelization, the whole Indian Empire would have spiritually been enlightened long ago.”<sup>93</sup> He deeply regretted the negligence of his Church’s mission of perching the kingdom of God as the primary responsibility. So the formation of a missionary society would definitely overcome the situation and could continue the responsibility to evangelize India.

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<sup>89</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 58.

<sup>90</sup> James Aerthayil, *The Spiritual Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*, (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1982), 88.

<sup>91</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 56.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 157.

<sup>93</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 56.

## 5.2. The Realization of the Ecclesial Spiritual Degeneration

A genuine priest who actively involved in the administration affairs of the Church, could find out and experience “duels, internal feuds, avarice, selfishness desires, etc.”<sup>94</sup> of the Malankara Church. “He was very much preoccupied with the litigation that was going on between the two parties in Jacobite Church. He had to go around, meet many people, procure witnesses and attend to so many matters that he had neither rest nor peace.”<sup>95</sup> He was convinced that the social and moral degradation had been the consequence of the spiritual degeneration. Thus, he recognized his mission to transform the Church by leading the upcoming generations to upright the aisle of their commitment towards evangelization and prepare them spiritually to respond as dedicated labourers for the kingdom of God. He thought that the spiritual improvement of his Community and Church could be made through a missionary society for the revival in the Church and to evangelize India.

“Our life in Serampore should be spent to prepare labors for the afore-said evangelization. There are many things, which the preachers of the Gospel and thus heal the wounds of the community, to repair the spiritual maladies here and there, to enhance spiritual conscientiousness in men and women by teaching catechism, to preach the Good News to the infields and make them true believers.”<sup>96</sup>

All his attempts were made to fulfill his vision on evangelization by establishing a missionary society after the higher studies of deacons in Serampore and other places. He completely surrendered his thoughts and ideas to the will of God through prayer and penance to take a sober decision.

## 6. THE PARADIGM SHIFT: MISSIONARY SOCIETY TO MONASTIC ORDER

Fr. P. T Geevarghese responded to his inner guiding power with all openness and without any prejudice and with the intention of finding out the will of God to establish a missionary society, however, he continued and remained in prayer and severe penances. He experienced that “as we earnestly seeking the will of God regarding the foundation of a missionary society, we resorted to strict discipline. As a result of this, our mind was revolving within the limits of thought of a missionary Society in those days. We felt as if an unseen force was guiding our mind through the path of the thought about a missionary society. We did not resist that force, but let the mind free without being bound firmly to any pole to freely have its course and prayerfully waited to reach its goal.”<sup>97</sup> “After a long examination and consideration of several factors, he came to the conclusion that a mere missionary society could not serve the objectives and aspirations on his vision on mission and evangelization. If the members of the society were to get married, they wouldn't be able to carry on the work of evangelization zealously. All the members should live in a common life as an ideal way of life. Moreover, “it is only through founding an institution by chosen people, who have chosen themselves the service of God as their life principle and who are nourished by ardent love to God, we could bring about development of Syrian community and effectiveness to the work

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<sup>94</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 27.

<sup>95</sup> Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 40.

<sup>96</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 57.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 58.

of evangelization”<sup>98</sup>. He attained his spiritual vision by placing his heart before God to serve him by renouncing the world, family and even himself. "Relying on the grace of God we have decided to spend the rest of our life to establish a religious congregation consisting of members, who have voluntarily dedicated themselves to God. We firmly believe that that is the will of God on our behalf and that should be our sole life concern. We esteem this as a precious gift of God, which we received as a result of serious deliberation, research and of persistent prayer and repeated celebration of Holy Eucharistic Sacrifice.”<sup>99</sup>

## 7. THE PREPARATORY PHASE AT CALCUTTA

The Calcutta days of Fr. P.T Geevarghese (1913-1919) was a turning point in shaping his future mission and life. It opened the door for opportunities and gave him the occasion to acquaint himself to a new world which changed his ideas radically to reach his dreams of mission and evangelization of India. It was also a place where he entered in deep conversation with the Lord God and discerned the God’s plan from an establishment missionary society to monastic Order.<sup>100</sup> He himself practiced the monastic way of life and formed the young aspiring men in the ascetic life. It was also a place where he was exposed to the thoughts of the ‘Renaissance’ and to the intellectuals of Indian Theology. The six years of professorship in Serampore widened his horizons by getting into touch with different systems of faith and institutes of both Indian and western way of monastic life.<sup>101</sup> There are many factors that influenced and helped Fr. Geevarghese in molding his missionary vision during the stay at Calcutta.

### 7.1. Calcutta: The Cradle of Renaissance

Calcutta being the capital of British East India Company, it has become the center of academic *intelligentsia* who fought against British Raj. Calcutta was also the cradle of Indian renaissance. Movements like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission and great Luminaries like Rama Krishna Paramahansa, Rajaram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore etc. illumined Indian Renaissance. Mar Ivanios who was fortunate to live in Calcutta from 1913 to 1919 grew in the spirit of Renaissance. His academic engagement at Serampore and at the University of Calcutta opened the way to the intellectuals of Calcutta. His visits to different religious institutions and other important centers of religious renaissance helped him to get acquainted with the thoughts of Indian renaissance.<sup>102</sup> The spirit of renaissance helped him to launch a spiritual and religious renewal in Malankara.

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<sup>98</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 59.

<sup>99</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 61.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 57-83.

<sup>101</sup> Abraham, *In His Master's Footsteps*, 113-118.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. George Onakkoor, *Mar Ivanios: the Prophet of Ascetic Wisdom* (Kottayam: Bethany Sisters Generalate, 2003), 57-62.



## 7.2. The Oxford Movement and Oxford Mission in Calcutta

The Oxford Movement and Oxford Mission<sup>103</sup> is another major element that contributed in widening the missionary vision and helped him to move forward to his dream of founding a Religious movement. He experienced the missionary work of the Oxford mission and especially of the pioneers Rev. Fr. Strong and Mother Edith who were engaging the propagation of Good News, educating the local children, preaching the Gospel by visiting houses and meeting people was the model of mission for him. Moreover, Fr. Geevarghese while progressing with his concept of consecrated women for evangelization sought the service of Mother Edith to train them in Barisole and later in Kerala from 1915 to 1930.<sup>104</sup> The Oxford mission fathers were regular visitors to Kerala conducting summer camps for the students' conference at Kottayam.<sup>105</sup> In a report, the Oxford Mission describes the contributions and life of Mar Ivanios.

“A young priest who is the head and front of all that is progressive in the Church, to whom indeed we owe it that we were able to make this journey at all; for he has been our guide and helper at every point, our friend our interpreter, and the constant watchful guardian for our comfort and enlightenment. A learned man, he has accepted a post at Serampore College, near Calcutta, in order that he may provide for the education of several young students whom he hopes ultimately to train for the ministry.”<sup>106</sup>

The mutual and such close acquaintance had a great impact in shaping the monastic his ideals and helped him many ways to the formation of men and women at Serampore. In particular, their deep commitment for social upliftment, education for the marginalized etc influenced Fr. Geevarghese the need for evangelization through an organized movement. Vernacularization of liturgy was another major concern of Oxford mission which was widely discussed in the summer camps and thus stimulated Mar Ivanios and Bethany to initiate the translation of Syriac liturgy into Malayalam.

## 7.3. The Indigenous and Inter-Religious Influence

After having decided to start a monastic congregation in 1917, Fr. Geevarghese began his search to learn and experience religious life among various monastic centers in and around Calcutta. Moreover, Calcutta was a land of rich heritage and traditions of monastic communities founded by great personalities and they were flourishing on that time.

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<sup>103</sup> The Oxford Mission was the result of the initiative of Bishop Ralph Johnson of Calcutta who requested the University of Oxford to send young men to work for the education of poor young people in Calcutta in 1879. At his request, 10 young people from Oxford gathered together at Christ Church in Oxford and decided to form a brotherhood of Epiphany. Bishop Charles Gore of the Oxford movement drafted the rules. Few young people came to India in 1880 and started working among the youth studying in the Colleges and Universities. Later in 1902, Fr Strong OM and Mother Edith founded the community of the Oxford mission sisters of Epiphany. Cf. Georg Longridge, *A History of the Oxford Mission to Calcutta* (Oxford: 1910), 5-10.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 40.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Report of Oxford Mission Brotherhood of Epiphany, *The Eucharistic Life: the Substance of Addresses Given by Two Members of the Oxford Mission Brotherhood of the Epiphany, at the Students' Conference of the Syrian Christian Church, Held at Kottayam, May 1st-5th, 1916* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green and Co., 1918).

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Oxford Mission Brotherhood of Epiphany, *The Eucharistic Life*, 13.

“He read all the books he could find on spirituality and went on searching rare books. He also read everything he could find on the monastic life, most of them being from Hindu tradition. He went to the *Sri Ramakrishna Ashram*<sup>107</sup> and borrowed the *Ramayana* and *Bhagavad Gita*, the Puranas, and the Vedas, and he read them all and absorbed their ideas. He also had endless discussions with the monks he met.”<sup>108</sup>

However, his research on various topics related to the ascetic life and practices continued during his stay at Calcutta. His visit to *Santiniketan*<sup>109</sup> and serious discussions with Rabindranath Tagore changed his perspectives. His acquired courage to establish a religious community based on Indian tradition and culture. He also used to visit *Sabarmathy Ashram*<sup>110</sup> founded by Mahatma Gandhi to dredge the insights of ascetical practices to be practiced in his monastic way of life and to the foundation of his monastic mission which is based on true indigenous and Indian style.

#### 7.4. The Influence of Catholic Missions and Teachings

Being an Orthodox priest Fr. P. T Geevarghese always recognized and accepted the universality of Catholic Church and expressed “I envy the Catholic Church her universality. It is only the catholic Church that the Scriptural text fulfilled”<sup>111</sup>. His primary catholic association in Serampore was with members of Society of Jesus who were well established with missionary works in Calcutta. He was attracted by the noble religious life and activities of the Society of Jesus and attended Holy Mass with his students in their parish Church.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, this opportunity and relationship provided possibilities to discuss numerous topics of catholic monastic life mission. About his exploration life at Serampore, he writes “we used to visit the many Ashrams of both the catholic and of the High Church in North India and held discussions with their superiors and gathered many things from them. During that period, we read many books regarding the religious life and regulations of monastic life”<sup>113</sup>. Thus, he gathered available books inspired by adequate knowledge about monastic life in Catholic Church both in west and east. He was much motivated with ascetic life and activities

<sup>107</sup> Ramakrishna Math is a religious monastic order, known as Hindu reform movement based on the teachings Sri Ramakrishna at Calcutta in 1886. Ramakrishna Mission is a worldwide spiritual movement founded by Ramakrishna's chief disciple swami Vivekananda in 1897. Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are a twin organization which aim at the harmony of religions, harmony of the East and west, harmony of ancient and modern, spiritual fulfilment, all-round development of human faculties, social equality, and peace for all humanity, without any distinctions of creed, caste race or nationality. Cf. Belur Math, “Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission,” <http://www.belurmath.org/> [accessed May 2, 2017].

<sup>108</sup> Abraham, *In his master's footsteps*, 113.

<sup>109</sup> Santiniketan is a spiritual centre where people from all religions were invited to join meditation and prayers. It was started by Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, the father of Nobel Prize winner, great Indian poet and pioneer educationalist Rabindranath Tagore. He founded an Ashram in Calcutta 1862 and became the initiator of Brahma Samaj. In 1901 Rabindranath Tagore started a School modeled on ancient Guru gul system and later it expanded as Bisava-Bharathi University. Cf. Santiniketan, “Santiniketan” <http://www.santiniketan.com/> [accessed May 2, 2017].

<sup>110</sup> Sabarmathy Ashram was founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1915. The main objectives of Sabarmati are as follows: education, truth (non-violence and love), celibacy, control of palate (no liquor or meat), no stealing, non-possession (simple living high thinking), use of homemade articles, conquer of fear, and the eradication of untouchability. Cf. The Sabarmathy Ashram, “The Sabarmathy Ashram: A Reflection On Gandhi's Vision” <http://www.indcast.com/ms/ASHRAM%20HISTORY.htm> [accessed May 2, 2017].

<sup>111</sup> Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 39.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. E. R. Hambye “Mar Ivanios, His monastic ideal and Ecumenism,” in *Bethany Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (Trivandrum: 1969), 135.

<sup>113</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 65.

of St. Basil, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Benedict and St. Francis Sales. This experience of his life he expressed during his speech on the occasion of the first anniversary of his communion with the Catholic Church.

“My study of early Christianity helped me to appreciate the sanctity and beauty of the lives of men dedicated to God in the Religious life. I thought that the model of St. Basil, the great founder of organized monastic life in the East, would satisfy the aspirations of an oriental mind; but I continued my study of the lives of other saints, both Eastern and Western. If I found St. Basil laying great stress upon religious chastity (interpreted widely) as the foundation of monastic life, St. Francis of Assisi seemed pointing to Holy poverty as its basis, and St. Ignatius Loyola seemed to teach that Religious Obedience, which means living in the closest possible union with God, enabling the perfect accomplishment of His Holy will, was the be- all and end-all of the means of attaining perfection. St. Benedict, however, regarded stability as so fundamental to the religious state as to make it one of the four vows of religion. And as if to crown all, came St. Francis De Sales, teaching that the sanctification of the common actions of everyday life was indispensable to the attainment of sanctity in the Religious life-, in any life.”<sup>114</sup>

He was also enchanted by the evangelization and missionary works of St. Francis Xavier in India. Once he said “I am sorry I cannot pray to Xavier because I am not a catholic”<sup>115</sup>. Fr. Geevarghese in his search for monastic ideas unearthed the treasures of monastic life from the catholic faith and sources which triggered him to establish a religious movement.

### **7.5. Social Commitment Towards the Marginalized in Calcutta**

Along with the academic activities at Serampore College, Mar Ivanios found time to help the poor and needy in Calcutta. During his visit to the poor children in the streets and slums of Calcutta, always accompanied by group of deacons to experience the hard realities and to teach mission among poor, he experienced this inevitable part of evangelization. His biographer mentions one of such visits: “Then there were his visits to the sick of the Calcutta slums. Taking that same deacon with him he used to go at frequent intervals to the crowded dwellings of the wretched and unfortunate, where babies suffering from malnutrition were to be found. He would wash the smelly little bodies, bathe them in oil and give them back soothed and refreshed to their poor mothers. Moreover, in his ruthless efforts after self-conquest, he would force himself to kiss the scrofulous eruptions that disfigured the burning skin of those pitiful little ones before he applied the salves he had brought with him”<sup>116</sup>. His realization of mission truly embedded in Gospel values to reach out other in the society.

## **8. THE UNIQUENESS OF MAR IVANIOS ON MISSION AND EVANGELIZATION**

The colonial nature of christian missions had been recognized by characteristics of imperialism more over colonialism and mission were intertwined not only politically but also

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<sup>114</sup> As quoted by James Illitharayil, “The Pastoral Vision of Mar Ivanios,” in *The Theological Visions of Mar Ivanios*, ed. Antony Valiyavilayil (Pune: Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth, 2004), 238.  
theological visions

<sup>115</sup> Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 39.

<sup>116</sup> Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 51.

ecclesiastically<sup>117</sup>. The conquering and overwhelming attitude somehow permeated the missionary zeal. Christianity wherever it was preached, at least to some extent, failed to acknowledge and assimilate the local culture, ethos and other religions. So, tensions occurred in many parts of Christendom and the history of the Kerala Church never been exception to this process. Mar Ivanios always be mindful of these historical facts when he spoke about his concept of missionary work and evangelization among non-Christians. He had a far sight vision on mission extensively explained all throughout his autobiography. He said mission is not out of any compulsion or something to be forcefully imposed upon anybody. He exhorts that we should not persuade any non-christian by offering them any material or monetary benefits in order to convert them into Christianity<sup>118</sup>. In short, he was against any kind of forceful conversion. The best mission work, according to Mar Ivanios, is to be christian presence in a place where Christ is not known and witness Gospel values with one's own life. Our responsibility to preach gospel and if anyone approaches with a sincere heart to become a christian, we have to make necessary arrangements through training and preparation. He points out that it is just like the presence of a doctor in a community. Those who are sick will naturally seek a doctor, or one who is thirsty will naturally seek a spring to quench one's thirst. So, what is important is witnessing Christ and His values among people who have not yet experienced Him. Therefore, he identifies missionary work to witnessing Christ.<sup>119</sup> Conversion happens by the work of Holy Spirit. Mar Ivanios realized that evangelization of India would be successful only if we remove the western grab and put on the Indian grab. He believed that only through inculturation, the evangelization of India would be effective.<sup>120</sup> This missionary approach is different from colonial mentality of conquer and subdued. It fosters mutual respect and cooperation, and it takes seriously the good things of other culture and religions; at the same time, it is open to all those who find Christianity meaningful. Mar Ivanios preached and advocated a distinctive missiology long before conciliar and post conciliar approaches.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have examined the historical origin of Indian Christian community and its various divisions which decelerated the missionary expansion. The rise of Mar Ivanios as a remedy by establishing a congregation for the renewal of mission and evangelization. His preparation began from childhood, moved through different stages of life, inspired by various people and diverse circumstances and accomplished in historical feats. It was indeed his days at Calcutta which transformed him and motivated him to realize the vision on mission and evangelization. The analysis of the different factors that influenced Mar Ivanios in his vision and mission provide innumerable scope for the further development on the topic.

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York, NY: Orbis, 2009), 226-228.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 128.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 128.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. James Illitharayil, "The Pastoral Vision of Mar Ivanios," in *The Theological Visions of Mar Ivanios*, ed. Antony Valiyavilayil (Pune: Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth, 2004), 281-283.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE MISSIONARY PRATICE OF BETHANY ASHRAM

#### Introduction

An individual's creativity or creative works is a manifestation of his/her spirit and charisma. This notion is applicable to the formation of religious communities as well. Divine Providence is the origin for the initiative to form religious orders within the Catholic Church. In addition to this, the values of the religious order will be further inspired by the characteristics of its founder's personality. From the founder's mentality and disposition, emanates a creative thought process, which is later put into action with the grace of the Holy Spirit. This creative process, that has its origin in the divine, is an extra ordinary charism and supernatural gift. This is not given to many but only to a few who are open to God's call. Those who possess this supernatural gift are immune against the foreign influences attempting to thwart them. This creative activity is the outward expression of the self-realization of the founder, which has become inseparable from his/her person. The creative activity cannot be detached from the founder to preserve its essential integrity. Bethany Ashram and its foundation is a good example of this general rule. The foundation of Bethany Ashram was the long-cherished dream of Mar Ivanios that was turned into reality during his journey to realize his vision. In this chapter, we will focus on the missionary practices of Bethany Ashram, from its foundation to how it became an instrument for the growth of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church and evangelization in India.

#### 1. THE FOUNDATION OF BETHANY ASHRAM

Though he had aspiration towards religious life from early childhood itself, this aspiration took a firm grip on the very being of Mar Ivanios during his tenure as a professor in the famed Serampore College in Calcutta from 1913 to 1919. In spite of his busy life as an academican, he made it a point to learn more about religious life in different religions and various cultures. He led a strictly monastic life in Serampore inspired by Eastern Christian monasticism and influenced by the models of Indian Sannyasa by Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. He was more convinced than ever before that founding a monastic community and thus initiating a spiritual renewal was the solution to address the issues that the Malankara Church was facing in Kerala during that time. Thus convinced, he wrote a letter to Mr. E. J John, a leading lawyer in Kerala then, intimating his desire to establish a monastery. Mr. John replied that "It is not necessary to move to north India to establish a monastery; instead an isolated place in Kerala is what we need. I am ready to provide 100 acres of land for this purpose"<sup>121</sup>. Thus, the initial piece of land at Perunadu in South Kerala was provided by his friend Mr. E.J John and later an additional 300 acres of land was added

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<sup>121</sup> James Puthuparambil and Aby Abraham eds., *The Chronicles of Bethany Ashram* (Kottayam: Bethany Publications, 2018), 39. The original chronicles were written by Fr. Joshua Thavalathil and John Kuzhimeppurath and are kept in the archives of Bethany ashram Generalate, Kottayam. Later it was edited and published.

from government property. The location was conducive to starting a spiritual center as it was surrounded by hills and mountains and thus quite isolated.

Under his supervision, a group of lay people helped him clear the forest and make a spacious hut of wood and bamboos. The roof was made of grass and bamboo curtains were used as partitions to create separate rooms such as the chapel, kitchen, living room etc. With the arrival of the monks, the mountain became an abode of spiritual renewal and nourishment. The sanctuary lamp lit on the chapel led way to the spiritual awakening of many people.<sup>122</sup>

In his autobiography Mar Ivanios explained how he was inspired to choose the name “Bethany” for his monastic order. He wanted the name of the order to reflect the intentions for which it was established as well as reveal the nature of its relationship with God. It is said that while pondering which meaningful biblical term would be the most accurate reflection of the vision and mission of the order, and thus could be used as the order’s name, he opened a biblical dictionary and his eyes fell on the word “Bethany.”<sup>123</sup> The images associated with Bethany are that of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. These three prominent figures are each a representation of the different dimensions of Jesus’ life- as witness, prayer and service. Mar Ivanios wanted all of these values to be intrinsically blended into his community. So he was thoroughly convinced that ‘Bethany’ was the most fitting name for his community. He also adopted the Indian term ‘ashram’<sup>124</sup> with Bethany and called the monastic order Bethany ashram. Moreover, after consulting with his disciples he named the religious congregation as “the congregation of the Imitation of Christ” which canonically came to be known as the Order of the Imitation of Christ (OIC).<sup>125</sup>

The Bethany Ashram at Perunadu was inaugurated on 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1919.<sup>126</sup> It was the beginning of the first monastic community in the history of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1919, the first four members who were at Serampore, namely, Fr. P. T. Geevarghese, Fr. Alexios, Dn. Jacob and Dn. Koshy drew up the first constitution of Bethany ashram. Fr. P. T. Geevarghese was elected the first superior of the congregation for the next three years.<sup>127</sup> The original copy of this first constitution in content, is a synthesis of the Rule of St. Basil the Great, St. Antony of the Desert, St. Benedict and St. Francis of Assisi.<sup>128</sup> The community also welcomed new candidates for religious life. After six months of rigorous religious formation, Fr. P.T Geevarghese, Fr. Alexios and Dn. Jacob dedicated themselves to religious life through religious profession on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, 1920, which incidentally was the day of the Feast of Pentecost.<sup>129</sup> On this day of dedication Fr. P. T.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Santhosh Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany* (Kottayam: Bethany Publications, 2017), 69.

<sup>123</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 71.

<sup>124</sup> *Ashram* denotes a term for hermitage in which persons who practiced religious life. It is considered as the dwelling place of any ascetic or group of ascetics situated in forest where people frequently visits as religious pilgrimage. Ashram is an Indian term for monastery Cf. W. J Johnson, *Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 71.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The chronicles*, 42.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 71.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 47.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 43.

Geevarghese made a remarkable speech on religious life which expressed his theological and biblical foundations on monastic life and practices.

“The monk can be compared to the sacrificial animal. The individual of his own volition comes to the monastery and there prepares himself. As his tears of contrition flow down he casts off all that is evil in him. When he comes to the church to take his vows he is in fact killing his worldly desires. The vow of celibacy, poverty and obedience that he takes helps him sacrifice himself. Just as the sacrificial animal is skinned and cut into pieces and all that is bad thrown away, so our novitiate skins away everything unwanted, cuts himself up and leaves within himself only that which is pure. Then he surrenders himself to the superior in the monastery, and the latter surrenders himself to God, and receives him into the monastery in His Holy Name. Like Jesus Christ, he too sacrifices himself. That is what the monastic life is all about.”<sup>130</sup>

The monastic vision of Mar Ivanios was based on the complete renunciation and self-surrender to the will of God and for the service of others. He called Christian monastic life as “*Christian sannyasa*.”<sup>131</sup> Mar Ivanios, who felt and touched the heart of Indian Sannyasa, envisaged it as a *marga* (way) in addition to the threefold traditional *margas* of *Bhagavat Gita*, namely, *Karma Marga* (way of good deeds), *Bhakthi Marga* (way of devotion) and *Jnana Marga* (way of knowledge). He calls Sannyasa as the *Sneha Marga* (way of love). According to him, love of God alone is the sole purpose of monastic life. He says:

“God is love.” God created man through love. The ultimate end of man is God, the embodiment of love. This final end is attained when one becomes perfect in his love for God and for his fellow beings for God’s sake. God calls man to attain that perfection. God gives the grace to attain this holy final end to those who listen to his call and approach him prepared for a life of complete dedication. Human beings attain this ultimate end through the path of love (*Sneha Marga*).<sup>132</sup>

It was very clear for Mar Ivanios that the ultimate end and sole purpose of Sannyasa is the union with God and the *marga* (way) for it was that of love. Therefore, in the Holy Rule of the Bethany Ashram it is clearly stated (3b):

“The members of our congregation should always remember that it is the essential nature of our inherited spirituality and religious life to strive to attain union with God, the Lord of all and foundation of all goodness and try our best to live constantly in Him and with Him. They must, as much as possible, realize that glorious ideal in their lives.”<sup>133</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios* 174.

<sup>131</sup> *Sannyasa* is a Sanskrit term means renunciation. It is a way of life of a person known as *sannyasi* to pursue personal liberation or *moksha*. *Sannyasi* (Monk) is a renunciant who has taken *sannyasa* as his way of life, who has formally renounced external life of house holder to dedicate oneself to the search for ultimate truth. It is way of life characterized by celibacy, homelessness, the abandonment of external ritual, economic inactivity, and mendicancy. The term is also applied to the members of a monastery or ashram. Cf. Johnson, *Dictionary of Hinduism*, 284-286.

<sup>132</sup> Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sannyasa Jeevithasahayi*, trans. Samuel Thaikkootathil, ed. Antony Valiyavilayil (Trivandrum: Cause of Canonization of Mar Ivanios, 2006), 23.

<sup>133</sup> Jose Mariadas, “*Sannyasa Yaga and Sneha Marga – Mar Ivanios’ Vision of Religious Life*,” in *Trppadam: The Role of Religious in Serving Humanity*, ed. James Puthuparampil (Pune: BVP Publications, 2007), 16.

The soul of Christian *sannyasa*, according to Mar Ivanios, is love. The commitment and service, which a *sannyasi* undertakes in his life, is out of love – love towards God and his fellow beings. The relevance of *sannyasa* lies in giving a meaningful witness to the love of God in this world.

Even the three religious vows – obedience, chastity and poverty – are understood as the meaningful expressions of Christian love – love for the true treasure of eternal life – a love for God. The vows help the *sannyasi* to liberate himself from the bondage of selfishness and love for the values of this world. Thus, for a *sannyasi*, with the observance of the three rules, God alone becomes the law of life and the enabling power to observe the law, the beloved and ultimate happiness and the asset and treasure.<sup>134</sup> “In short, Mar Ivanios considered *Sannyasa* as a *Sneha Marga* which takes one to his/her absolute end of life, namely, the union with God.”<sup>135</sup> According to him, love is the essential form of all the three vows which helps one to grow more and more in Christian love. He points out that religious life is the best possible way to live the Christian love and therefore it is the *Sneha Marga*.

Mar Ivanios considered religious life as an invitation to serve God and human beings. The radical vision of Mar Ivanios was that one’s proclamation of the Good News should go along with a virtuous life and charitable acts with social concerns. Mar Ivanios never considered religious life as a means for personal sanctification alone. It also includes the perfection and sanctification of other fellow beings. According to him, one who serves humanity serves God:<sup>136</sup>

“The first temptation in *Sannyasa* is to seek the self instead of God. The second is to seek God for the good of the self alone forgetting the neighbor. We may easily conclude that we love God since we experience joy in prayer and peace. But “one who loves God should love one’s neighbor too” is a commandment that we received from God. The *sannyasi* should be a real sharer in the work of the Lord for the salvation of the world.”<sup>137</sup>

Mar Ivanios gives not only spiritual exhortations but also practical directions to this end:

“We should examine how much time that God has given us to pray for the good of our brethren and to serve them is utilized for the same. We have to examine how faithfully we utilize each occasion we get in order to truly love our brethren and to serve them just as our Lord served them and to see Messiah in them.”<sup>138</sup>

The various charitable works like running orphanage, dispensary etc. undertaken by Bethany Ashram, Perunadu are examples of this vision.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Malankara Sannyasa Jeevithasahayi*, 24.

<sup>135</sup> Jose Mariadas, *Sannyasa Yaga and Sneha Marga*, 17.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Malankara Sannyasa Jeevithasahayi*, 105.

<sup>137</sup> Ivanios, *Malankara Sannyasa Jeevithasahayi*, 102.

<sup>138</sup> Ivanios, *Malankara Sannyasa Jeevithasahayi*, 106.



### 1.1. An Inculturated Vision for Mission

In his research on religious life, Fr. Geevarghese, the first superior of the community, had direct contact with Hindu ashram and other centers. He was determined to make his religious congregation the face of Indian culture in all feasible ways and means. His experience and work in northern part of India prompted him to realize the rich religious and spiritual traditions of Hindu *sannyasa* which he decided to accommodate in to the life of Bethany. He has explained in one of his pastoral letters:

“As you know India is very rich in her ancient religious traditions. The Church must accept from such traditions whatever is not opposed to Christian faith and morals and Christianize them. Thus, we must prove that Christianity is not as foreign in India as many accuse us today. This idea has very much influenced and inspired me in forming the ideal of Bethany, which is nothing other than preaching the Gospel of Christ handed over to us by St. Thomas the Apostle all throughout country and making it grow in an indigenous manner.”<sup>139</sup>

Therefore, he adapted for himself and his followers a purely Indian monastic life, a life of the Hindu monks. He discerned that adopting these ancient Indian traditions and lifestyle practices into his envisioned monastic life would foster assimilation of Gospel values in Indian soil with the view of evangelization in India. Bethany monks followed and practiced Indian monastic ways and life style and became an inculturated expression of christian monasticism in India.

Bethany monks, imitating the Hindu monks, started a simple life in all external manners. Inspired by the lives of the Indian *rishis*<sup>140</sup> who lived in the forest, they began a monastic life in the wilderness, a place quite unknown at that time. They modeled their monastery building according to the Indian Hindu architecture of ashram, the wooden and grass thatched hut.<sup>141</sup> In the mountain wilderness first Bethany ashram was built, according to the pattern of a Hindu ashram. Mar Ivanios recollects the experience of building the first ashram in his autobiography:

“the first ashram was built out the bamboos and woods which were collected from the same surroundings. Its roofing was of a kind of grass that grew in that forest. bamboo curtains served the purpose of walls and window curtains. The floor which was earthen was painted with a solution of cow dung.”<sup>142</sup>

The construction of the Ashram structure was completed using the resources from the forest and remained as a symbol of simplicity.<sup>143</sup> For Mar Ivanios and his followers, it was not a

<sup>139</sup> Mar Ivanios, “Daivavili Pariposhanam,” in *Jagarukanaya Ajapalakan: Collection of the Pastoral letters of the Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, ed. Prabeesh George (Trivandrum: Cause of Canonization of Mar Ivanios, 2006), 148.

<sup>140</sup> *Rishi* is a sanskrit term which means seer. Indian ascetics were called *rishis*.

<sup>141</sup> The ashram had the meaning of a hut in the forest, the dwelling place of a seer (rishi). A rishi is one who has had the vision (*Darshan*) of God. The ashram figured prominently as a center of refuge and hospitality; also as a place of ascetic exertion. Hence it is in the forest becomes the abode of peace and harmony; between animal and man, between God and nature. This positive quality of peace was characterized as nonviolence (*Ahimsa*). Ashram concept was a unique institution of Indian origin. Cf. Vandana, *Gurus, Ashrams and Christians* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), 40.

<sup>142</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 80-81.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 80.

question of adapting mere externals of Hinduism or adapting certain ceremonies of Christianity to cater to the Hindus; it was a question of an essentially indigenous growth, a new off-shoot of Christianity in all its native vigor and riches.

Preaching the Word to the “gentiles” in India was one of the missions of the order. So picking the color of their religious habit was done with fastidious care. He wanted to choose a color that was relevant to all Indians. He wanted a color that was acceptable among all castes and religions. After consulting his bishop and other concerned people, he finally chose the indigenous saffron<sup>144</sup> color which was used by the Hindu *sanyasis* all over India.<sup>145</sup> This color was also accepted among the Buddhists, Jains and the Muslims in India. The tradition of wearing saffron clothes by the Indian religious people has existed from the earliest period in the Indian history. Saffron cloths were made by dipping the white clothes in red mud, that signified the external poverty and the holiness of the *sanyasis*. It also reminds the monk who wears it that ‘you are dust and unto dust you shall return’ (Genesis 3:9). The saffron colored habit is a great symbol for inculturation and indigenization, even in the present day Christian mission works in India. The Hindu and Buddhist monks usually wear a saffron shawl covering their shoulders which reminds them of their nihility before God and their obligation to respect their neighbor. Bethany monks also adopted this practice of wearing the shawl as symbol of total renunciation.<sup>146</sup> In this way, the monks were often called *swami*<sup>147</sup> like Hindu monks.<sup>148</sup> He also decided to wear a wooden cross attached to a saffron thread around the neck, imitating the practice of the Hindu *sanyasis* who wear *rudraksha*<sup>149</sup> beads on their neck. The wooden cross proclaims that Bethany monk who serves in India represents the Resurrected Christ. Moreover, the cross is a symbol of victory and the one who wears the cross has won over the world.<sup>150</sup> Bethany monks were encouraged to grow their beard as a sign of austerity and detachment from the world. Their appearance in the attire, dress and food habits helped them to freely associate with their Hindu brethren.

For Bethany monks, imitation of Hindu values was not a mere method to please the Hindu minds. For them, rather, it was a question of essentially indigenous growth, inculturation of Christianity in its full native richness and vigor. They accepted a mode of life that was blended with Christian principles and Indian customs. In the Indian *sanyasa* context, the *sanyasis* renounce all their material possessions. They usually wear a loin cloth, use a begging bowl and wander from one place to another (*bhiksha*),<sup>151</sup> begging for food and other items.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Saffron color is symbol of total renunciation, sacrifice and abstinence. It is the sacred color of Hindu monks who have left home to pursue the ultimate truth of life. It is often associated with the color of mud in nature. Cf. Vandana, *Gurus, ashrams and Christians*, 40.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 92.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 93.

<sup>147</sup> *Swami* denoted Guru or teacher.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 43.

<sup>149</sup> *Rudraksha* means beads

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Varghese Thykoottathil, “Influence of Indian heritage in the formation of Bethany Congregation,” in *Platinum Jubilee of Bethany Religious Congregation (1919-1994)*, ed. Santhosh Madathil (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 1995), 79.

<sup>151</sup> *Bhiksha* means begging or asking oneself available for alms and food as part of an ascetic way of life. Cf. Johnson, *Dictionary of Hinduism*, 57.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 135.

Accepting the life style of the Hindu monks, members of Bethany led a modest and frugal life. Remaining faithful to the custom of Hindu ideals, they followed the strict observance of vegetarianism. In the Indian concept, eating meat is disrespectful to life and one must depend on the products of one's own labor. Indians consider vegetarianism a higher step to attain refinement of culture and civilization. The monks cooked their own meals and washed their own dishes.<sup>153</sup> Their main food *kanji*, made of rice and vegetables produced in their gardens, was served in earthenware pots and leaves. They ate their meals by squatting on the ground.

Mar Ivanios adapted many of these Hindu and Indian customs and attitudes and Christianized them. He also accepted the Hindu tradition of growing beard as a sign of austerity and severe penance. He took a deep interest in learning the Hindu ideals and encouraged his disciples to have a good understanding of the same, which helped them to follow Christ closely. From all these facts, we can conclude Bethany monks accepted and followed many of the Hindu customs in a Christianized version in the community which helped them for better evangelization and an effective mission in Indian context. The genuine Indian values of simplicity, renunciation, detachment, seeking truth were highly regarded and practiced in the ashram. With all these facts Bethany was a pioneer of inculturation.

## 1.2. Spiritual Renewal through Liturgical Practices and Religious Life

The Malankara church was yearning for spiritual nourishment while the church itself became a site of periodic quarrels and litigation. The transition from the decision to the establishment of missionary movement to monastic community was to regain the lost spiritual image and to revive the community. Thus, the new monastic community started to prepare itself to achieve spiritual strength through religious and liturgical practices.<sup>154</sup> The monks practiced and followed rigorous spiritual life focused on the sacred liturgy, the divine praise or divine office, the spiritual reading, meditation, the reception holy sacraments, silence, holy recollection days, community life etc.<sup>155</sup> The liturgical practices in most of the parishes of the Orthodox Church were conducted in an unattractive manner. They were not spiritually inspiring. However, appreciative efforts were done by the Bethany monks to reorganize the existing practices. The practices of the monks created a desire among the lay people to join in the unity of worship, in chanting hymns fervently, in preserving the sanctity of the church and conducting prayer sessions during Lent. The refinement and harmonization of liturgical practices of the Jacobite Church was inspired mainly by deliberate attempts of Bethany monks during that period.<sup>156</sup>

Moreover, thousands of people walked to Perunadu Bethany Ashram searching for spiritual enlightenment. During Lenten season temporary sheds were erected to accommodate the large number of pilgrims who had gathered to attend the retreat preaching from Mar Ivanios and his monks.<sup>157</sup> The monks practiced what they preached. Their exemplary commitment to their vocation and faithfulness to their call helped them to witness the Gospel among the

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<sup>153</sup> Cf. George Thomas, "Bethany Ashram: Birth and Growth," in *Platinum Jubilee of Bethany Religious Congregation (1919-1994)* ed. Santhosh Madathil (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 1995), 70.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 118.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 73.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 183.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 55.

people. Their lives were resplendent with religious fervor. Even Hindus showed considerable interest in the sermons of these monks. Prayer and fasting was an integral part of their personal lives.<sup>158</sup> Thus, Bethany monks brought to light a new monastic life blended with eastern tradition and Indian asceticism to the Malankara church. The monks were given radical spiritual formation in view of their personal sanctification and spiritual upliftment of the community through various apostolates. Mar Ivanios had written many prayers for the divine office and later those were added to the official liturgical worship of the church.<sup>159</sup> “Bethany ashram aimed at the formation of men and women who have vocation and good will to commit themselves to work for the glory of God and salvation of souls.”<sup>160</sup> This internal discipline and formation has yielded men who were dedicated to serving the church and the community. Thus, the intention of the establishment of the congregation for spiritual renewal in the Malankara church gradually came to fruition in due course of time and its fruits were reflected in the ecclesial life of the Church through the pastoral and missionary activities of the Bethany monks.

### 1.3. The Establishment of Bethany Churches and Mission Centers

Once they finished the intensive pastoral training and preparation, the Bethany monks were sent to different places to preach and to organize local church communities. The monks went out to far away villages and held missions and spiritual conventions. Many people gathered to hear the spiritually enriching sermons and homilies of the monks. These monks also meticulously organized catechetical formation to the children and the youth with a view to build up religious persuasion, in the community. These conventions furthered the restoration of spiritual wealth within the community.<sup>161</sup> In course of time Bethany ashram took the supervision of the parishes. And these parishes became good examples of spiritual vigor and excellence. Seeing this spiritual progress, they were invited to establish mission centers in different places. Some of them were established at the initiative of monks and others on demand from the faithful themselves.<sup>162</sup> The innumerable spiritual benefits and inestimable services of Bethany monks found favor in the eyes of the synod of bishops of the Malankara church. Moreover, it was necessary for Bethany to have a bishop to administer its spiritual demands. Considering these benefits, the head of the synod, bishop Dionysius decided to consecrate Fr. P. T. Geevarghese the bishop of Bethany. He was consecrated as the Metropolitan bishop of Bethany in 1925 at Niranam and came to be known as Bishop Mar Ivanios.<sup>163</sup>

Bethany remained as an independent institute in the Malankara church.<sup>164</sup> As the Bishop of Bethany, Mar Ivanios established three categories of Bethany churches: chapels, mission churches and parish churches.<sup>165</sup> Chapels were constructed mainly for private use and mission churches were constructed for the spiritual needs of the public. Bethany parishes

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Thomas, *Bethany Ashram*, 72.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 76.

<sup>160</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 91.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 55.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 129.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 190.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Joshua Thavalathil, *Bethany Governing Body Reports* (Kottayam: Bethany Publications, 2017) 59.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 130.

were established for the members of the parish with obligations, duties and rights. Churches were established in fifteen places and twelve plots were purchased for building churches. As people were aware of the advantages of having a church owned by Bethany in their respective places, they encouraged and supported all these ventures.<sup>166</sup>

After the establishment of independent churches, the monks toiled for the pastoral development and faith formation of the people of the church in various ways in several regions:

“Besides faith instruction on Sundays, in order to enhance devotion to God, each parish will have Holy Family Association, Mutual Service Association, Mar Yuhanon Association for the unmarried men and the Martha Mariam Association for the unmarried women. For the benefit of the youth and the aged, adult catechism is held in a special manner, wherever convenient.”<sup>167</sup>

The monks were able to change the parishes and parish communities from places of quarrel and litigations to a spiritual arena. Thus, they could restore peace and tranquility in the Malankara Church to an extent. The monks did all of this because they were convinced that the parish community does not exist for itself, but for the mission of Christ.<sup>168</sup> The sole purpose of the parish community is to continue the mission of Christ. The uniqueness of parish community is in leading its members to salvation by helping them to know the gospel values and to live it in the society.

#### **1.4. The Foundation of the Third Order**

Mar Ivanios recognized the importance of family in the proclamation of the gospel. So, he formed a third order for the married people, to help them lead a true Christian life.<sup>169</sup> The members of the third order were not obliged to follow the religious obligations of the congregation but they were expected to lead a holy and pious life in their families modeled after that of the holy family of Nazareth. They were not asked to abandon their property, or to live in the ashrams or convents. They were asked to witness the love of God by having a life centered on prayer and Christian principles in their respective families. For Mar Ivanios, the place of the family was as important as that of the church in the kingdom of God. In building up the kingdom of God, the role of the Christian family was very important for him. By witnessing the gospel values in the family, the Christian family primarily evangelizes itself and thereby converting itself to the sign of the gospel.<sup>170</sup> Mar Ivanios distantly elucidated the objectives and significance behind the foundation of third order after his episcopal ordination:

“We intend to establish a third order ashram to enable those already established in family life to lead a Christian life. We have started the initial work for the same. Anyone who wishes to continue in family life with piety and deep devotion to the Lord can become members of this order. They need not observe the practices of the

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 184.

<sup>167</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 130.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 184.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 85.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 180-181.

*sanyasis*. Their only obligation is to lead a holy and pure family life. They need not give up their wealth, leave their native place and take up residence in any convent or ashram, since those leading a family life will not be accepted there. Though they can continue in their family and native place, their lives should reflect their innocent love for Jesus Christ and they should lead a devout life in accordance with the doctrines of the Catholic Church. The Bethany Ashram Father will be giving them the necessary regulations, which will help them in this. We only want to present before you this ideal way of living. We are not eager to make this order flourish among those already settled in family life, by imposing it upon you. We believe that this way of life will be well received among the Christians at the time appointed by God. Much evangelical work will be successfully carried out in our country, through the initiative of the Christian families who accept this way of life.<sup>171</sup>

He was convinced that the family serves as the greatest preserver and transmitter of spiritual and Christian values from one generation to the next. The family is the starting point of evangelization and the place where vocation develops. It is the source of all wisdom, virtues and the sanctuary of spiritual values. A family that is deeply united in prayers is also united with the church and its teachings. Formation of such families, through the third order, strengthened the process of evangelization. The pastoral care of the family is an indispensable aspect in the mission work of Mar Ivanios. Many people joined the Bethany Third Order to live a flawless spiritual life and to strive for the evangelization work in various ways. Bethany monks fostered the aspirations of households to spread the faith through the activities of the third Order.

### **1.5. Orphanage for the Abandoned**

Immediately after the establishment of the Bethany Ashram, Mar Ivanios and members lay the first stone for an orphanage adjacent to their abode. Mar Ivanios, from his time in Serampore, had conceptualized a mission for the poor and the needy as an explicit extension of Christian charity: “we had decided even when we were in Serampore to give a considerable importance to orphanage among the charitable works of the Ashram.”<sup>172</sup> The doors of the Ashram were open to all children, irrespective of caste and creed. The orphans stayed with the monks in their hut. The monks went from house to house begging for money and other necessities to provide for the orphans.<sup>173</sup> Many people voluntarily came forward to support the initiatives of the Bethany monks.<sup>174</sup> The monks took responsibility for the education and the personal development of the children. The monks of the ashram cared for the orphans’ character formation and they gave them primary education. The orphans were given proper care in developing their personal talents. They were also sent to the nearby school for their higher education. They were taught stories about the lives of saints, Bible stories and prayers as a part of their catechetical formation.<sup>175</sup> The monks also took them to their homes during their holidays. This gave them social and cultural formation.<sup>176</sup> Within a few years Bethany Ashram was able to build a permanent house for the orphans. Thus,

<sup>171</sup> Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 180.

<sup>172</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 102.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 134.

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *Chronicles*, 55.

<sup>175</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 108.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 84.

through this charitable and apostolic activity Bethany was trying to imitate Jesus Christ who drew especially near to those on the margin of society and revealed the mission commitment to humanity and meaning of ascetic life to development of deprived individuals and improvised society.

### 1.6. Option for the Poor.

As part of compassion and concern to the neighbor, Bethany ashram cared for the sick, and considered it as their mission activity. They considered Jesus' ministry of healing as the expression of God's compassion and care for the neighbor. Realizing the importance of the healing ministry, Bethany started a small dispensary under the guidance of a deacon P T Thomas who was specially trained specially for the homeopathic medicine from Calcutta.<sup>177</sup> Care and concern for those who were suffering was considered as an integral part of their mission as monks. Mar Ivanios believed that without this pastoral activity their mission works would be deprived of fundamental characteristics.<sup>178</sup> He always accepted the poor, helped the needy and healed the sick. He instructed his monks that the doors of Bethany shall never shut against the poor, sick and the needy. Those who were considered as marginalized and neglected were always kept in his heart and he prayed for them before God. His prayer is as follows:

“O! Jesus Christ, who shed blood for the whole mankind; look with mercy upon all those who are in bondage and suffering. Look with pity on the bewailing of the oppressed, the afflictions of the widows, the sorrows of the destitute, the hunger and the thirst of the poor, the sick and the weak. have mercy on the poor and protect the impoverished.”<sup>179</sup>

The monks of Bethany ashram took maximum care for the poor, the marginalized and the sick.<sup>180</sup> As health care workers they paid special attention to educate women and children in hygiene and healthy life. They cared for those who were at the verge of death and gave them a peaceful and graceful last moment.

### 1.7. The Mission of Press and Publications

During the first half of the twentieth century, social communication came to the point of exercising an enormous effect on all the aspects of the society. There was a huge influence of press and publication in the society. They led to the communion and solidarity of all human beings.<sup>181</sup> Mar Ivanios used this means of communication for the providential development of the Church. He realized the importance and influence of social communication on evangelization. The media of writing and preaching, press and publication played an important role in the propagation and consolidation of the kingdom of God on the earth.<sup>182</sup> One of his American friends donated him a printing machine which he redesigned into a printing press and set out a venture at Thirumoolapuram.<sup>183</sup> Mar Ivanios, the bishop of

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 89.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 109.

<sup>179</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 109.

<sup>180</sup> Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 45.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 182.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 131.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 131.

Bethany, used the printing press for the cultural and social development of the people by spiritually renewing them through the same media:

“It was his intention to publish works that would create spiritual awareness among the people. The *Bethany Magazine* was published under his guidance and articles, which dealt with spiritual themes and subjects, were regularly included. It was his intention to publish works that would create spiritual awareness among the people. The publications included spiritual books, prayer books, Sunday school texts, etc.”<sup>184</sup>

The bishop knew the necessity of a printing press in spreading the Christian doctrine and gospel values among the Christians and the non-Christians. *Bethany Magazine* was a monthly publication to reach out to many families, with Christian articles on spiritual life and orthodox doctrines. This was a forerunner of numerous Christian books and literature. The names of some of the books are given below:

1. *Kurbana Dhyanam* (Meditations on the Holy Qurbano), 2. *Jeeva Prakasanam* (Light of Life) [3 Volumes], 3. *Atma Prakasam* (Light of the Soul), 4. *Pratidina Prakasam* (Daily Light), 5. *Chodyotharangal* (Questions and Answers), 6. *Vedapata Pustakangal* (Books of Catechism), 7. *Aradhana Sahayi* (Hand Book of Liturgy), 8. *Papamochanam* (Forgiveness of Sins) [4 Volumes], 9. *Marga Prakasika* (Light of the Way), 10. *Satya Veda Kathakal* (True Bible Stories), 11. *Namaskarakramam* (The Order of Prayers), 12. *Qurobonokramam* (The Order of the Holy Qurbano), 13. *Misihanukaranam* (The Imitation of Christ). 14. *Nammude karthavinte Jeevacharithram* (Biography of our Christ) 15. *Bethany Balapadam* (Bethany Children’s Book), 16. *Athbhuthakaramaya Kodiadayalam* (Miraculous ensign) 17. *Bethany Haardhava Prathana* (Bethany Heart Prayer), 18. *Bethany Lakhu Pathanakal* (Bethany short Prayers), 19. *Cherupaithangalude Sanmarga Patha* (Moral ways for little ones) 20. *Rahasya Prathanakal* (Mystery prayers).<sup>185</sup>

It is evident that the publication of these series of liturgical books and articles were aimed at the spiritual renewal of the people. Mar Ivanios himself was a writer and he had been writing for decades. He wrote many articles and booklets in the vernacular Malayalam and in English.<sup>186</sup> It is because of this character that he realized the necessity of establishing a printing press for evangelization. It is very important to note that Mar Ivanios made use of the mass media, even before the council of Vatican II:

“It may be appreciated that even before Vatican II, he was conscious of the importance of the mass media for evangelization and through this instrumentality he tried to disseminate sound Christian literature among the people.”<sup>187</sup>

The evangelization of Bethany through the press was indispensable for the Syrian Christian community as well as for the missionary movement.

<sup>184</sup> Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 183.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 54.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 6.

<sup>187</sup> Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 6.



### 1.8. Mission among the “Gentiles” (Bethany *Vijathiya*<sup>188</sup> Mission)

God wants the good news to be taught to all the humankind. The values of the Gospel are not only given for the Christians but for the whole world. One of the important missions of Bethany was her proclamation of the Gospel among the low caste people. The pastoral concerns of Bethany missionaries were not limited among the Christians. By reaching out to the nonbelievers their pastoral actions became missionary activity. Mar Ivanios wanted his missionaries to spread their mission activity among the “Gentiles” so that they too will get a chance lead a good faith life in its mature form. He was also motivated by numerous Christian communities ardent work to spread the Gospel among the “Gentiles”<sup>189</sup>. He had a vigorous energy to evangelize the whole India irrespective of caste and religion.<sup>190</sup> In his mind he also had the aim to improve the religious and social welfare of the untouches and the lower-class people in the society. The people in the low caste belonged to the aboriginal races and the down trodden who were the prey to the cruel caste system that prevailed in India during the time. These people were poverty stricken and they were living in miserable situations without being cared for, by the society. As they had no primary education, they all were illiterate and did not have any basic knowledge of hygiene and cleanliness. These people believed in superstitions and worshipped demons. Mar Ivanios went to their huts and visited the sick and gave them medicines and food. These low-caste people were moved by his compassion and as a result of his preaching and life-witness, hundreds of low castes were converted to true faith.<sup>191</sup> It was a bold venture from the part of Mar Ivanios considering the social situations at that time. The motivation force for Mar Ivanios was his missionary zeal and glory of God.<sup>192</sup> For Mar Ivanios, the low caste were also the children of God, who had their share in the kingdom of God.

“Gentile” mission from the Bethany missionaries aimed at the spiritual enrichment or renovation more than social development. They were not forced to convert to Christianity. Conversion to Christianity was not considered as an escape from the clutches of caste system but it was the acceptance of true faith. The basic purpose of Bethany mission was never aimed at a forceful conversion to Christianity. However, “the mission among gentiles of Bethany never compels anyone to become a Christian. It does not promise any social welfare or any financial help or assistance. But if anyone approaches Jesus, the Lord, with a sincere desire to become a Christian, arrangements are done for him to get necessary training and preparation.”<sup>193</sup> All those who willingly came to accept true faith were only given baptism. Only after given proper catechesis and Christian instruction they were accepted to Christian faith. The missionaries did not stop their mission work after giving them baptism. They continued on-going faith formation even after the baptism of the “Gentiles”. Bethany mission wanted them to see the true way and life, therefore it led them to Christ, the liberator and savior. There were a lot of “Gentiles” who desired to accept Christ and to be instructed in Christian values especially in different places like Thirumoolapuram, Pulladu, Vennikulam,

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<sup>188</sup> ‘*Vijathiya*’ a term denotes “Gentiles”, or “the people that never had known about Christ”.

<sup>189</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 127.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual*, 6.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 185.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 127.

<sup>193</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 128.

Thumpamon, Vadasserikkara, Perunadu etc.<sup>194</sup> For Mar Ivanios the “gentile” mission was a ‘spiritual well’ for all those who had the thirst for true faith. Bethany “gentile” mission was a source of consolation for all those who suffering with various problems in the society.

Salvation of the souls was one of the important aims of the Bethany mission.<sup>195</sup> Mar Ivanios believed that the non-Christians too have the right to know the riches of the Christian mysteries. By keeping the oriental monastic spirit and traditions, the Bethany missionaries proclaimed the gospel of Christ to the under privileged and down trodden which helped the latter to liberate themselves from false believes and customs. The religious life of the monks was permeated with missionary spirit and zeal.

Mar Ivanios never considered *Sannyasa* as a fleeing away from the world. If we take all his writings together in the light of his life, it will be very clear that Mar Ivanios never advocated any anti-worldly or other-worldly spirituality. For him, *Sannyasa* is never a fleeing away from the world, but a meaningful commitment and involvement in this world in the spirit of the love of God and without selfishness. It is true that, true to Indian spirit, he promoted an attitude of detachment from the fruits of work; but he was concerned with the well-being of his fellow beings and of the whole world. This concern for the humanity stems from his deep relationship to God. He performed all his religious duties, together with God. He says: “Just like a fish, which remains always in water, a *sannyasi* must always be in the presence of God.” Thus, all the activities of Mar Ivanios were the natural outcome of his deep and ardent love towards God.

## 2. THE REUNION MOVEMENT AS COMMENCE OF NEW MISSION

Ever since the division of the St. Thomas Christians in India into diverse factions, this Christian community lost its inner strength and unity as the Church of Christ. Deprived of its autonomy and individuality, this community declined in its growth, and being cut off from communion with the Apostolic See of Rome and thereby from the ancient apostolic Churches, the Malankara community was torn in to pieces by vicious power struggles and litigations and slowly lost its spiritual vigour and missionary vitality. Mar Ivanios was convinced of the necessity of a healing touch to the Malankara Church which was in disarray due to disunity and spiritual decadence.<sup>196</sup> Being disturbed by this reality, Mar Ivanios with his leadership brought in a spiritual renewal through the foundation of Bethany Ashram. After the establishment of Bethany Ashram, Mar Ivanios pursued his dream of communion as a new mission to be continued and prepared himself with his fellow monks in Bethany Ashram. Moreover, his further studies and observations helped him to arrive at a conclusion that the true and the only one Church founded by Christ is the Catholic Church to which all faithful are to be united<sup>197</sup>. When Mar Ivanios began to reflect on the nature of the Church and its missionary dimension, he realized that the isolated existence of separated groups was contrary to mission witnessing and evangelization.<sup>198</sup>

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 88.

<sup>195</sup> Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 128.

<sup>196</sup> Antony Valiyavilayil, “The Ecclesial Vision of Mar Ivanios,” in *The Theological Visions of Mar Ivanios*, ed. Antony Valiyavilayil, (Pune: Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth Publications, 2004), 67.

<sup>197</sup> Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 91.

<sup>198</sup> Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 104.

Mar Ivanios strongly nurtured his conviction and finally, together with a group of his people, embarked an exodus – to the communion with the Catholic Church. This gave rise to the great Re-union movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>199</sup> The history of reunion movement and the history of Bethany ashram are intertwined in its growth and development. Bethany monks strongly stood with the daring and bold decisions of Mar Ivanios and continued with movement in its growing stages of Malankara Catholic Church with great missionary zeal through various ways. The mission history of Bethany Ashram and its steady growth can be studied in the background of the missionary consciousness of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church. Many factors have contributed to the beginning of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church as a concrete expression of the missionary dynamism of Bethany Ashram.

### 2.1. From Bethany Movement to Reunion Movement

Mar Ivanios was a dynamic person, and his perception on mission had undergone various breakthrough moments which accelerated new course of actions in Church life. Bethany Ashram was started not merely as an institute of religious people but for the whole Church. Within a short time, Bethany had been expanding predominately all over the life of the Church as a movement.<sup>200</sup> The life and mission activities of Bethany Ashram created a confidence and reliance in their pastoral leadership among faithful to accept any initiatives of the Bethany Monks. Bethany Ashram became an instrument to Mar Ivanios and his monks to attain full communion with the Catholic Church. However, Mar Ivanios had been influenced by many aspects of the Catholic Church even prior to the establishment of Bethany.<sup>201</sup> When he wrote the Holy rule for the first monks, he wanted it to be “catholic” in the most universal and traditional sense of the word. For the new religious community of the Imitation of Christ he chose as patrons St. Basil, St. Benedict and St. Francis of Assisi. Thus, the congregation became a bridge between Latin and Christian East.<sup>202</sup> Mar Ivanios fostered many catholic spiritual practices for Bethany monks like daily Mass, preservation and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the Ashrams etc. All of these had never been known before in the Orthodox traditional Christian life.<sup>203</sup> In the Bethany Ashram, the founder and the members were already experiencing a foretaste of catholic spirituality and method of religious life. It was evident that the books they had read and the rules they had consulted and followed, were of catholic origin.<sup>204</sup> Coming to know about the way of life in Bethany Ashram, some of the then prominent leaders of the Malankara Orthodox Church had foreseen that the Bethany movement would end up in the Catholic communion.<sup>205</sup> As Cyril Baselios rightly observes:

<sup>199</sup> Cf. C. Malnancharuvil, Foreword to *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, written by Louis Moolaveetil (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious studies, 1977), 9.

<sup>200</sup> Bethany Ashram is also known as ‘*Bethany Prasthanam*’ or *Bethany Movement* Cf. Varghese Kilichimala, “Religious Attitude and Response of Malankara Church,” in *Platinum Jubilee of Bethany Religious Congregation (1919-1994)* ed. Santhosh Madathil (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 1995), 70.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Illitharayil, “*The Pastoral Vision*,” 67.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Chacko Narimattathil, “Arch Bishop Mar Ivanios: Pastor and Prophet of Ecclesial Communion in the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, (1882-1953),” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pontificia Universita Lateranense, Rome, 1993), 130-133.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 53.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 65.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Arch Bishop Mar Ivanios: Biography*, 257.

“As it is now evident, this was a spiritual movement that had its cradle and development in the Bethany Ashram, a religious movement which Mar Ivanios himself founded. Due to intellectual and mystical experience and transformation that Mar Ivanios underwent in the course of time, he could lay foundation to the communion movement of the Malankara Church in the Catholic Church.”<sup>206</sup>

The Bethany movement was the starting point for reunion movement which created changes in every aspect of Church life. Mar Ivanios realized that the Bethany movement was successful in actualizing his vision, so the next unpredictable step would also be favourable under God’s providence and with the support of his fellow monks. Thus, the Bethany movement, started in 1919, became an instrument for communion with the Catholic Church in 1930.

## 2.2. Bethany Ashram and Reunion Event

Mar Ivanios conceived his vision of a religious community which would be a leaven of renewal in the Church and would contribute to the re-union of the St. Thomas Christians. The growth of his conviction of Church unity was mainly centred around Bethany Ashram. Mar Ivanios began to spread his views on Church unity through his speeches and writings. The famous five letters that he wrote to various dignitaries of the Church and State in India are still remaining as a source of inspiration for inviting the divided Christians to take action for unity and reunion.<sup>207</sup> Various conferences, talks and discussions with groups of laities also brought awareness to the need of unity and Reunion of all the Churches.<sup>208</sup> Mar Ivanios was already in correspondence with Rome.<sup>209</sup> Despite his busy preparation for reunion he found time to mobilize his religious community for catholic communion. He was so enthusiastic in his attempt to convince them of the need of reunion that he spent much of his time trying to accomplish the same through preaching and dialogues. The members of the community were enlightened and encouraged, and they supported each other through studies, reflections and

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<sup>206</sup> Cyril Baselios, Foreword to *Malankara Sannyasa Jeevithasahayi*, written by Mar Ivanios, trans. Samuel Thaikkoottathil, ed. Antony Valiyavilayil (Trivandrum: Cause of Canonization of Mar Ivanios, 2006), 7.

<sup>207</sup> Mar Ivanios wrote letters to five prominent personalities about the need of communion with the Catholic Church prior to his reunion. Those persons are: Mathulla Mappilai, the manager of the leading newspaper of that time (‘Malayala Manorama’), and one of his best friends and a great benefactor of the Malankara Orthodox Church; Varkey Vaidyan, who was one of the well-wisher of orthodox of the Church ; Miss Brook Smith, who came from England to Kerala, Thiruvalla for taking charge of the office as the principal of the high school started by Mar Ivanios; Vattasseril Dionisius, the then Metropolitan of the Malankara Orthodox Church; and Baselios Catholicos, who was the then Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Church. The main content of the letters was the immediate need of the reunion with the Catholic Church. Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 411-425.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 426-434.

<sup>209</sup> In 1926 the Synod of the Malankara Church, held at Parumala, asked Mar Ivanios to commence negotiations with the Holy See of Rome for the communion. However, at first, he started a correspondence with Aphrem Rehmani, who was the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, regarding the readiness to join the Catholic Church through him and he replied and accepted the proposal. But later Mar Ivanios decided to begin the correspondence with Rome directly. Mar Ivanios had sent two memorandums to Rome with regard to the reunion with the Catholic Church. Rome responded to the requests positively and asked Mar Ivanios many questions concerning faith and Church administration. Besides that, Mar Ivanios had written four letters to Msgr. Edward Mooni, Apostolate Delegate of Rome in India. Finally, Rome approved the request and sent a letter of consent through the Apostolic Delegate of India. Cf. Kanjiramukalil, *Documents of Reunion*, 93-152.

prayers all of which helped to deepen their personal conviction of the need of Church unity. As his determination for reunion became more and more solid, he decided to convene a meeting of all the benefactors of Bethany and to create a new trust for the administration of the properties.<sup>210</sup>

The General Chapter of the community was held on 19 August 1930 to take a decision about the joining of Bethany members to the Catholic Church and the imminent departure from Bethany Ashram, Perunadu. After the chapter, in consultation with his suffragan Mar Theophilos, Mar Ivanios officially informed the Bethany monks of their departure from Perunadu on the following day.<sup>211</sup> He gave everyone full freedom of choice – either to follow him or to remain in the Bethany Ashram Perunadu. However, some of the members rebelled against the decision and conveyed their dissatisfaction in leaving the Perunadu Bethany Ashram.<sup>212</sup> On 20 August 1930 the Bethany Metropolitan and Mar Theophilos, along with those of the members who decided to follow them, left the Bethany mountain carrying only the most necessary things and their personal belongings.<sup>213</sup> Finally, Rome sent her approval and recognition for Mar Ivanios to join the Catholic Church. Thus, on 20 September 1930, five people from the Malankara Church came into communion with the Catholic Church by making their profession of faith before Bishop Benziger OCD of Kollam who was delegated by Pope Pius XI. The five were Mar Ivanios and his suffragan Mar Theophilos with the representatives of their followers, namely Fr. John OIC, Deacon Seraphion and Mr. Kilileth Chacko.<sup>214</sup> This historic event of five members joining the Catholic Church put into motion a new movement in the Indian Catholic Church. The new faction, the Syro Malankara Catholic Church, later developed as an individual Church because of the unending and tireless missionary works of the Bethany monks. Thus, Bethany became the cradle of the reunion movement that would eventually evolve into the Malankara Catholic Church.

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<sup>210</sup> On 1930 February 20, Mar Ivanios convoked a meeting and formulated a Trust to govern the properties of Bethany since Bethany was found as an independent entity within the Malankara Church. During that meeting Mar Ivanios delivered an extensive speech regarding the foundation of Bethany and its growth, and his decision to join the Catholic Church. Cf. Thavalathil, *Bethany Governing Body Reports*, 13-54.

<sup>211</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil *The Chronicles*, 134.

<sup>212</sup> There were members who didn't accept the proposal of reunion. Their leader was Fr. Alexios who later became a Bishop and would be in charge of the Bethany Ashram Perunadu. Cf. Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 446-448.

<sup>213</sup> Along with Mar Ivanios and Mar Theophilos 20 monks left Ashram from Bethany to join the Catholic Church on that day of departure. The Bishops and monks arrived at a place called Vennikulam where they stayed in a school building. A Jacobite gentleman of the place offered them a house, to which the monks shifted and transformed it into an Ashram which came to be called Pullad, Bethany Ashram. Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles of Bethany Ashram*, 135-144.

<sup>214</sup> The Bethany monks entered into full communion with the Catholic Church in the Roman Catholic Bishop's chapel at Thankassery, Kollam. Rome entrusted the task of receiving Mar Ivanios and his followers to the Catholic Church to the Latin Bishop of Kollam in the presence of Mar James Kalassery Bishop of Changanassery, Mar Alexander Choolaparambil Bishop of Kottayam, and Msgr. Lawrence Pereria the Bishop elect of Kottar. The reason for entrusting the Bishop of Kollam that task was due to the fact that the Bethany monastery was situated in the territory of the Kollam. On the next day, Mar Ivanios celebrated the first Holy Eucharist as a Catholic Bishop at the Bishop's chapel in Kollam. Afterwards the parents and other close relatives of Mar Ivanios were received into the Catholic communion. Later on, other Bethany monks and all the Bethany sisters were received into catholic communion. Cf. Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 99-104.

### 3. MISSIONARY AND EVANGELIZATION ACTIVITIES 1930- 1966

On 13 February 1932, through his apostolic letter ‘*Magnum Nobis*’ Pope Pius XI erected two dioceses – Trivandrum and Thiruvalla respectively for the Malankara Catholic Church. Mar Ivanios became the bishop of Trivandrum and Mar Theophilos the bishop of Thiruvalla. Later, on 11 June 1932, the Malankara Catholic hierarchy was erected by Pope Pius XI through the apostolic constitution ‘*Cristo Pastorum Principi*’.<sup>215</sup> The recognition of the apostolic identity of the Syro Malankara Church and the subsequent restoration of its hierarchy by the Holy See reawakened the pristine zeal for mission and evangelization. Under the guidance of the Bishops the Bethany monks made a wonderful progress in every field and became more and more conscious of their missionary responsibility to the new born Church. Therefore, a purposeful commitment to the mandate of Christ “to preach the Gospel to the whole world” (Mk 16:15) was the supreme norm and guiding principle for all members of the Bethany Ashram in the new apostolate among non-Christians. It was very challenging to the new Church to continue activities especially in missionary endeavours and evangelization. The Bethany monks were ready to sacrifice their life for missionary works to take the need of the Church in initial stage. They had to work hard to fill the gap between the scarcity of the diocesan priests and the ever-increasing number of mission centres in the dioceses.<sup>216</sup> In the beginning of the Reunion movement Bethany monks were in the forefront and primarily worked among the non-Christians.<sup>217</sup>

“Vatican II says "Missions" is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ. These undertakings are brought to completion by missionary activity and are mostly exercised in certain territories recognized by the Holy See. The proper purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization, and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where it has not yet taken root.”<sup>218</sup>

It is this evangelizing activity as mission *ad gentes* – the founding of Christian communities and the developing of Churches to their full maturity — that the Bethany monks did from 1932 onward. Mission primarily meant for them the sending of messengers of the Gospel to non-Christians and by its very nature this was mission *Ad Gentes*. In order to be a proper mission, missionaries had to preach the Gospel to the non-Christians. In their eyes, there was no evangelization without proclaiming Jesus Christ to the people who did not yet know Christ. The Bethany monks started their missions and gathered together the people of God and established many Churches.

<sup>215</sup> The hierarchy was to consist of a Metropolitan and an auxiliary bishop, the Archbishop Metropolitan and an auxiliary bishop of Thiruvalla. The ruling hierarchs of the newly erected dioceses were granted all the rights and privileges attached to the Canon Law and the legitimate customs of Syro Antiochene Church and mission jurisdiction over its faithful and place. Cf. Paul Pallath, *Important Documents concerning the Catholic Church in India* (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 2004), 264-270.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios: Apostle of Church Unity*, 137.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles of Bethany Ashram*, 148.

<sup>218</sup> “Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*.” In *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London – Washington, DC: Seed and Ward, 1990), §6.

The Bethany monks started to preach the Gospel among Hindu Dalits especially among the Cheramar, *Pulayar and Kuravar* (1930-1933).<sup>219</sup> A non-Christian group in Pullad near Thiruvalla received baptism under the leadership of Fr. Joshua OIC and became Christian; later on it became a strong Malankara Catholic community.<sup>220</sup> After the Pullad mission the Bethany monks started a new mission centre at Othara among the pulaya people. They also spread the word of God in Parumala, Chennithala, Sooranadu, Venmony, Mannar, Vanachira and Vennikulam among the *dalit* people. In Vennikulam, again under the leadership of Fr. Koshy with the help of *Upadesi*<sup>221</sup> Varghese, many Cheramar people converted to Christianity.<sup>222</sup> They gained a new cultural and religious identity. Thus, the new religious awakening provided the Dalits a new religious consciousness and an identity that they nurtured, once it was stirred up by their conversion to Christ. The Christian approach of the Bethany monks pioneered a fundamental factor for social change. They enabled the people to opt for a meaningful egalitarian society. In addition to these efforts, the personal lives of missionaries influenced the awakening Christian consciousness of the inclusion of the poor and depressed classes of people and provided them with an identity and dignity. The Bethany missionaries realized that the people needed organized Church centres and community living. The creation of Christian communities in villages was the solution that Bethany monks came up with to tackle this issue. The method introduced by the Bethany monks later continued as ecclesiastical districts of the Malankara Catholic Church.

When Mar Ivanios deliberately planned to establish the centre of the Malankara Catholic Church in Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala, with hardly any Malankara Catholic population there, the Bethany Monks also shifted to southern Kerala for missionary work. Two Bethany monks relocated their residence to a rented house in Trivandrum to begin more missionary works as per the guidance of Mar Ivanios who was visiting Pope Pius XI in Rome (1932 April 12-July 2). In the beginning 1932, they were very afraid of the many adverse circumstances, challenges and lack of support from anywhere. However, they courageously began their evangelization around the outskirts of Trivandrum. During that time, itself, the members who had completed novitiate were sent to the Carmelite Third Order Seminary for priestly training and Fr John was sent to the Carmelite Ashram for the formation training program of Novices.<sup>223</sup> When Mar Ivanios returned from Europe October 1932, he appointed

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<sup>219</sup> Historically the major non-Christian communities in Kerala are Hindus and Muslims. Among the Hindus there are 420 castes in which some groups are considered high caste and others considered as low caste people eg. Pulayar, Cheramar, kuravar, Ezhavar etc. The lower-class people are considered to be outside of class hierarchy and they were poor and deprived of education, social and economic status. The lower-class people were held to be untouchables and even have been lately called *Harijans* (son of God) by Gandhiji. They were also known as *Dalits* and they were marginalized from the society. Many backward class people were converted to Christianity as an impact of missionary activities, both Catholics and Protestant, and their standard of life was uplifted in various ways. Cf. Robert L. Hardgrave Jr., "Caste in Kerala: A preface to the Elections," *Economic & Political Weekly* 16/ 47(1964): 1841-1847. [https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/1964\\_16/47/caste\\_in\\_keralaa\\_preface\\_to\\_the\\_elections.pdf](https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/1964_16/47/caste_in_keralaa_preface_to_the_elections.pdf) [accessed October 26, 2018]. In the Malankara Catholic Church there is a large group of Dalit Christians. Many came from LMS (London Missionary society), CMS (Church Missionary Society) and the non-Christian communities.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles of Bethany Ashram*, 148.

<sup>221</sup> *Upadesi* is a lay person working and assisting along with priests for evangelization and in Church community.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 151.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 158.

Fr. Joshua as the Chancellor of Trivandrum Malankara diocese as well as the secretary to the Arch Bishop and Dn. Koshy became the first procurator of the diocese. Thus, Bethany monks served and nurtured the new born Malankara Catholic Church in its childhood days.<sup>224</sup>

In May 1933, a new Bethany Ashram was blessed at Nalnachira in Trivandrum, which became the centre of the missionary enterprises of the Bethany monks in Southern Kerala.<sup>225</sup> Due to the evangelization work people from many backward classes like *Pulayar*, *Kuravar* etc. got converted to Christianity and the Bethany Ashram chapel was their Church building for public worship during the early years.<sup>226</sup> The Bethany monks tried hard to elevate the poverty of the people by producing food and dairy items.<sup>227</sup> The same monks worked among several of the non-Christian communities in and around Trivandrum under the leadership of Fr. Koshy in places like Vattiyurkkavu, Manalayam, Munnamoodu, Anchamada, Manchampara, Karakulam, Irumba, Aruvikkara, Nedumangadu, Arasuparambu, Mundela, Kulappada and Paruthikuzhy. Thirty new mission centres were opened, and many people joined the Church because of the selfless toil and dedication of the Bethany monks<sup>228</sup>. The number of the Malankara Catholics began growing day by day indicating that the Word of God had begun to germinate and flourish in proper time and place. The Bethany monks preferred to influence and change society through strong Church communities, living and acting as the salt and the light of the larger society. This in turn produced independent indigenous Malankara Christian Churches and a fervent evangelization continued to be vibrant in southern Kerala.

### 3.1. Mission and Evangelization Among the Nadar Community<sup>229</sup>

The Bethanian mission work gradually moved to the southern part of Trivandrum diocese, especially among the Nadar community. The mission was started in 1934 (Kanjiramkulam Mission)<sup>230</sup> and continued till 1940. Later in 1961, the Bethany monks were entrusted the full pastoral care of that region.<sup>231</sup> As a result of the ardent missionary works of Fr. Abraham, Fr. John and Fr. Younan, the Bethany monks established many mission centres among the Nadar Christian communities. Pambukala, Poovar, Vellalumbu, Chowara, Mulloor, Venniyoor, Balarampooram, Irathavoor, Vandannoor, Thozhukkal, Kedangavila, Kannaravila and Maroothhor were some of them.<sup>232</sup> The Kanjiramkulam mission focused on the integral development of backward class people. The Bethany monks, along with the Franciscan

<sup>224</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 160.

<sup>225</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 160.

<sup>226</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 161.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 161.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 209.

<sup>229</sup> The Nadar community is a separate caste community predominant in Trivandrum and Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, protestant missionaries engaged in remarkable missionary activities among them. During the early years of Malankara Catholic Church made a combined effort to bring into Catholic fold the Nadar Community. As a result, the Malankara Church grew very rapidly in the southern parts of Travancore state. Together with the Syrian Christians, the Nadar community forms an integral part of the Malankara Church. Cf. Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 143-144.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 209.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 215.

<sup>232</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 215.



missionary brothers,<sup>233</sup> worked among the Dalit communities of Kazhakoottam, Balarampuram, Neyyattikara, Parassala, Kaliyikkavila, Kattakada, Nedumangadu and Kirathoor and Ambilikonam missions.<sup>234</sup> The Bethany monks were active in catechesis, educational, social, medical and humanitarian apostolate extending a helping hand in every possible way. Hundreds of people came to know Jesus Christ and the Good news and got baptized through the mission centres and evangelization. Taking into consideration the need of the people and the place, various methods were followed to carry on the mission *ad gentes*. Gradually they established contact with the people of the area and developed various ministries to serve the people and communicate the message of Jesus Christ. The progress that the community had made in every aspect of life, could be attributed to the personal influence of the Bethany missionaries.

### 3.2. The Acceleration of Reunion Movement and Ecumenical Activities

After the communion with the Catholic Church, the Syro Malankara Church focused on the reunion of the separated sister Christian communities to the Catholic Church. Many faithful from the Orthodox Church joined the Malankara Catholic Church and many churches were established under the leadership of the Bethany monks, especially in Kallupara, Puramattam, Thiruvalla, Vadasserikkara, Parumala and Cheppadu.<sup>235</sup> As the mission works developed, Bethany Ashram decided to start a new ashram at Kattanam in Alappuzha district in 1947 and hundreds of people got reunited with the Catholic Church.<sup>236</sup> Charumood, Kurathikadu, Vanachira, Edappon, Komalloor, and Vallikunnam mission stations were also started.<sup>237</sup> Mar Ivanios initiated a high school at Kattanam for education and entrusted it to the Bethany monks. Bethany Ashram constructed a boarding school in order to help students stay and study at the school.<sup>238</sup> Responding to the urgent needs of the Church in general and the urgency of the missions, the members of Bethany Ashram rendered valuable service in other remote regions and isolated places too. The pastoral work of the Bethany monks extended to northern Kerala under the leadership of Fr. Michael Manjanamkuzhy. In order to broaden the pastoral works in the district of Pathanamthitta, an ashram was established in Kumbazha in the year 1962. Parishes were started in Kumbazha, Poomkavu, Valachoozhin, and Vadakkupuram as a result of this. Two more ashrams were established in Ancheril and Vengola.

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<sup>233</sup> From the beginning of the Reunion movement, the Syro Malabar Catholic Church rendered its support and service to the Malankara Church by providing personnel and means. Many of the Syro Malabar priests worked in the Malankara parishes and mission stations. After the Reunion Movement, the priests from CMI (Carmelites of Mary Immaculate) engaged in parish work in the Malankara Catholic Church. They guided the Bethany fathers and sisters during early periods, trained catechists, helped in spreading the reunion ideals among the people and converted the non-Christians. The Congregation of the Missionary Brothers of Francis of Assisi (CMSF) also started working for mission and evangelization during reunion movement onwards along with the Bethany monks. Cf. Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 134-139.

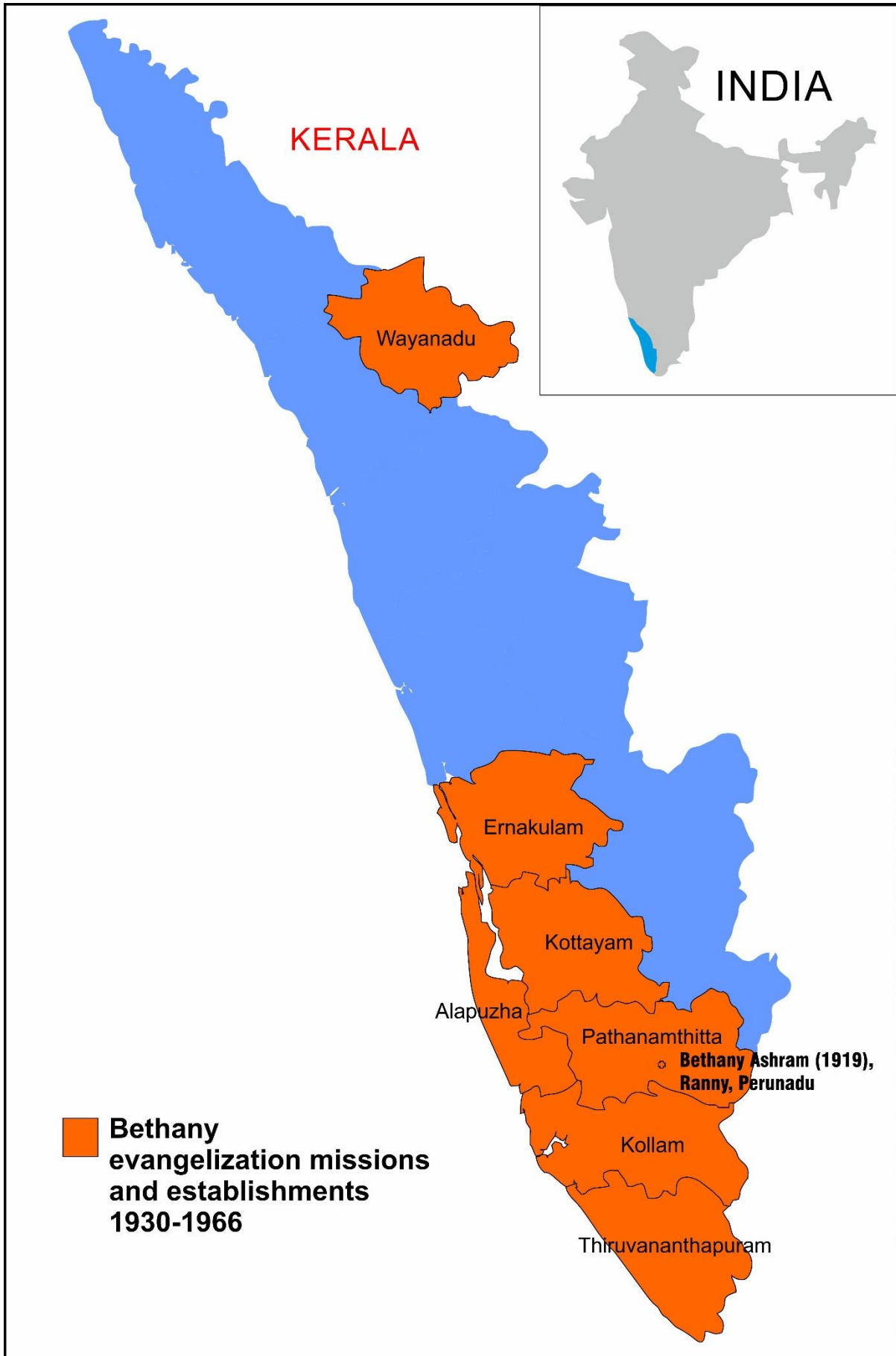
<sup>234</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 210.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 148.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 188.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 188.

<sup>238</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 189.



Sharing the missionary responsibility of the Malankara Church, Bethany Ashram lives and appreciates its ecclesial identity and remains faithful to the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary heritage of the Malankara Syrian traditions wherever it is engaged in collective missionary apostolate. Fidelity to the ecclesial identity and traditions of the Malankara Church is the hallmark of the Bethany mission. The missionary responsibility of the Syro Malankara Church thus gets concrete shape and expression in and through the Bethany Ashram.

### **3.3. The Establishment of the Pune Bethany Ashram and the Opening of Mission outside Kerala**

The history of the Bethany Ashram at Pune goes back to the mid-1950's. Until then the Bethany Monks had received their priestly formation at the seminaries in Candy (Sri Lanka), Thiruchirappally (Tamil Nadu) and Aluva (Kerala). Due to the foresight of Cardinal Eugène Tisserant (1884-1972), the then Secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, the formation process of the Bethany monks was boosted up. At his insistence and financial support, during his visit to the Malankara Church in December 1953, the decision was made to establish the Centre of priestly formation in Pune. The formation house at Pune brought all the members of the congregation who were in priestly formation under one roof. The Bethany Ashram at Pune, right from the beginning, functioned as an integral part of the Pontifical Athenaeum, the fore-runner of the present day Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth (JDV).<sup>239</sup> A new land was bought in 1955 and a new Bethany Ashram was constructed under the leadership of Fr. Gabriel. Ever since then, the ashram has taken on the responsibility to look after the pastoral needs of the Malankara Catholic faithful in and around Pune and Mumbai. It was the starting point of the Syro Malankara foundations of the Malankara communities outside Kerala.

### **3.4. Towards A Pontifical Congregation<sup>240</sup>**

The history of the Bethany congregation shows the different stages that it has gone through in its growth. After the reunion movement, members were demanded to work for the development of the Malankara Church in different regions and environments which resulted in the loss of the religious community character to a great extent. A group of Bethany monks, who stayed in Nalanchira, engaged in the missionary activities of the Trivandrum Diocese. At the request of Mar Theophilos, the Bishop of Thiruvalla, a few members went to the Thiruvalla diocese for their missionary work. Both these groups remained as separate diocesan congregations in the Malankara Catholic Church. The members were disheartened to see their unity thus disrupted. They did not want to remain as two independent groups in

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<sup>239</sup> Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth (JDV) is the name given to Pontifical Athenaeum. The papal seminary was founded by Pope Leo XII in 1893 at Kandy Sri Lanka and entrusted its administration to the Society of Jesus. In 1940 the Congregation for Catholic Education approved its statutes for the Faculties of Philosophy and Theology and recognized it as an autonomous institution. In 1955 the Papal Seminary - and, with it, the Papal Athenaeum - was transferred from Sri Lanka to Pune, in the State of Maharashtra, India. The seminarians from all over India are studying there - both from dioceses and religious congregation. Cf. Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, "History of JDV" <http://jdv.edu.in/> [accessed October 26, 2018]

<sup>240</sup> Cf. Jacob Perumpral, "Bethany Religious Congregation in Universal Church Communion, in Platinum Jubilee of Bethany Religious Congregation (1919-1994), ed. Santhosh Madathil (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 1995), 31-37.

one congregation. They requested the diocesan leaders to unify the congregation as one body for the sake of development and administration. Their requests and prayers bore fruits as the congregation was raised to the status of an Interdiocesan Congregation on 12 September 1948. Fr. John Kuzhinappurath was elected as the Superior General of the Congregation. The St. Thomas Mission House at Chengannor became the first Generalate House of the congregation.

When Fr. John resigned, Fr. Joshua became the Superior general. In 1949 the members of the Bethany congregation prepared a draft of the Holy Rule and submitted it to the Bishops for approval. The approved Holy Rule was given to the congregation. However, the members rejected it and resigned all from the administration. The Bishops appointed Rev. Fr Francis TOCD as the Canonical Visitor and Superior General of the congregation. In 1953, the Oriental Congregation appointed Msgr. Augusto Lombardi as the Apostolic Visitor of the Congregation. He made a comprehensive study of the Bethany community and appointed Fr. Peter Kozhimannil as the new Superior General and shifted the Generalate House to Nalanchira, Trivandrum. On 15 July 1953, Mar Ivanios Metropolitan, the founder of the Bethany congregation, passed away and Mar Gregorios, from Bethany Ashram, became the new Arch Bishop of the Malankara Church. On 26 June 1959, Rome appointed Rev. Fr Victor OCD as the Chairman to the General Chapter and Fr. Joshua was elected as the new superior General. In 1965, Fr. Jacob became the Superior General and requested the Malankara Bishops to recommend the congregation to Rome for Pontifical status. During the Second Vatican Council, Archbishop Benedict Mar Gregorios of Trivandrum and Bishop Athanasios of Thiruvalla, who both participated in the council, got the approval of the Congregation from Rome. On 14 April 1966, the Bethany Congregation was raised to the Pontifical Status.

#### 4. MISSIONARY AND EVANGELIZATION ACTIVITIES 1967-2000

The renewal brought by the Vatican Council II generated stupendous repercussions in every facet of the Catholic Church. The religious life and congregations underwent many substantial changes due to the call for the renewal and recommitment towards mission and life existence. Vatican II says that

“the adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time. All institutes should share in the life of the Church, adapting as their own and implementing in accordance with their own characteristics the Church's undertakings and aims in matters biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social.”<sup>241</sup>

Thus, following the directions on the renewal of religious Life, the Bethany Ashram called for a revival of its mission spirit reading the signs of the time and in accordance with the need of the Church. A conference was held at the Bethany Ashram in Kattanam on the topic “Renewal of Religious Life and Re-organization” from April 4, 1967 to April 7, 1967. The

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<sup>241</sup> “Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*.” In *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner ( London – Washington, DC: Seed and Ward, 1990), §2.

conference was inaugurated by Archbishop Benedict Mar Gregorios, who had actively participated in all the sessions of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>242</sup> An extraordinary General Chapter was convened in March 1968 to discuss what further steps need to be taken in order to be in accordance with the guidelines of Vatican II. The Chapter decided to renew the Holy Rule of the congregation in keeping with the spirit of Vatican II.<sup>243</sup> Moreover, a new mission policy was also put forth on the basis of which it was decided to start new mission centres and ashrams for evangelization particularly for the growth of the Malankara Church.

#### **4.1. Pastoral Care for the Malankara Catholic Church**

The Bethany Ashram has taken constant responsibility for the growth and development of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church by sending its members and starting new ashrams all over India. The Bethany Ashram, being in the pastoral front of the Syro Malankara Church, rendered its services and resources to many communities prior to the erection of Malankara Catholic dioceses in those places. Thus, the Bethany Monks have been actively engaged in all the dioceses and exarchates of the Syro Malankara Church. During the General Chapter of 1968, a decision was made to begin a new Mission House at the fast-rising mission field of Nedumangad and its out skirts.<sup>244</sup> The missionaries were faced with a population that was poor, oppressed and deprived of the basic necessities of life. The mission of Nedumangad, in general, is village oriented and non-formal. The missionary method in those days was characterized by means of personal encounters through house visits and organizing prayer meetings and implementing many social welfare programs for the community. In the same year, a new Bethany Ashram was started at Mukkampala in Tamil Nadu to explore new mission possibilities there. An estate was also purchased at Mukkmapala for the financial stability of the congregation.<sup>245</sup> The monks explored new mission fields to establish Malankara parishes. In this context, a new mission was started in Thekkumala, Ranny by Fr. Vincent in 1975.<sup>246</sup>

Another remarkable pastoral activity expansion was when the third diocese of the Syro Malankara Church was erected in 1978 at Sultan Bathery. The then Superior General of the Bethany congregation, Fr. Cyril, (later Cyril Baselios Catholicos) became the first Bishop of Bathery. He entrusted a new mission district – South Canara – in the state of Karnataka to the Bethany congregation in 1979 for pastoral care. With the arrival of the pioneer missionaries, the mission work was set in motion. The first ashram was established at Noojibalthila, a remote village in south Canara. Two more new ashrams were founded at Kadaba and Nellyyadi. The missionaries were fully involved in the building up of various church communities and established several churches. Moreover, they started various educational institutes, colleges, schools, an Industrial Training Centre, a Homeopathic Health Centre and several other social projects aiming at the development of local people. Another Bethany Mission House was opened in 1999 at Mangalapuram to look after the Malankara faithful

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 261.

<sup>243</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 264.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 265.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 267.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. Abraham Prasad, "Modern History," in *Platinum Jubilee of Bethany Religious Congregation (1919-1994)*, Santhosh Madathil ed. (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 1995), 38-40.

there. The tireless efforts of the Bethany missionaries in Karnataka were brought to fruition when the diocese of Puttur was erected there.<sup>247</sup>

A new Bethany Ashram was opened in 1987 at Kallar, which lies in the Western Ghats of Kerala State. Various missions and parishes were opened in the hill stations of the Thiruvalla diocese. A new mission House was founded at Kalayapuram in 1989, in the district of Kollam in the Archdiocese of Trivandrum.<sup>248</sup> In 1990 another Ashram was started at Bathery in the diocese of Sultan Bathery.<sup>249</sup> Realizing the need for evangelization, in 1994 Bethany Mission House was inaugurated in Pinkulam in the Archdiocese of Trivandrum which rejuvenated the evangelization the southern parts of the Malankara Church. In addition to these initiatives, the Bethany monks also started many other mission centres and parishes of the Malankara Catholic Church across India and outside India. The spiritual development of the faithful was the primary concern of the missionaries in consistence with the ecclesial traditions of the Malankara Church. Many people were converted to Christianity and others were reunited with the Malankara Church through the committed pastoral care of the monks.

#### 4.2. Pastoral Care Among the Migrants.

One of the most striking phenomena of the contemporary world is the worldwide migration. Given the ease of transportation, millions of people are persistently on the move. Migration is a historical phenomenon. Human beings have migrated throughout all of history, and they will probably continue forever. The fact that people migrate from one place to another is simply an economic aspect of globalization.<sup>250</sup>

“Migrants are generally classified into two groups. First, they are as either temporary migrants, those who move briefly to visit, study, or work in another country, for example, international students, scholars and contract workers or permanent migrants, those who leave one’s country or region permanently to relocate or settle in another.”<sup>251</sup>

The people, especially in the southern part of the Asian continent, are products of successive expatriation in history, which caused migratory waves of people in different ways. The phenomenon of migration in India has its own specialties in the socio-economic scenario. After the independence of India from British rule in 1947, thousands of people moved into various cities across the country, from rural areas to urban sectors for a better standard of living, in search of job opportunities, business and marketing, higher education and similar

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<sup>247</sup> Cf. John Palavilayil, “Bethany and South Canara Mission,” in *Platinum Jubilee of Bethany Religious Congregation (1919-1994)*, Santhosh Madathil ed. (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 1995), 119-122.

<sup>248</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 253.

<sup>249</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 259.

<sup>250</sup> Hans-Joachim Sander, “Migration as a Sign of Times and a Precarious Locus Theologicus Alienus,” in *Migration as a Sign of the Times: Towards a Theology of Migration*, ed. Judith Gruber and Sigrid Rettenbacher ed. (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill and Rodopi, 2015), 35.

<sup>251</sup> Gemma Tulid Cruz, *Towards a Theology of a Migration: Social Justice and Religious experience* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

other amenities and so on. The development projects of the independent India caused large scale displacement of citizens to new and upcoming industrial and economic cities.<sup>252</sup>

Many Malankara Catholics migrated to several major cities of India and their pastoral care was attended to by the priests of the Syro Malabar and Latin Churches. However, the establishment of the Bethany Ashram on 24 October 1955 in Pune, was a turning point of a new mission among the Malankara Catholics outside its canonical territories.<sup>253</sup> The monks of Bethany Ashram brought together the Malankara Catholic migrants around Pune and took care of their pastoral, liturgical and spiritual needs. In 1960 the faithful of both Malankara and Malabar Catholic Churches in Pune began an organization called 'Kerala Catholic Association' (KCA) for the social and ecclesial growth.<sup>254</sup> Under this organization the faithful formed small groups in different places of Pune and slowly became vigorous Malankara communities with the supervision and committed leadership of the Bethany Monks. In 1983, the then Bishop of Pune appointed Fr. Antony Valiyavilayil as the chaplain for the Malankara people. Many personal parishes were erected in places like Vishrantwadi, Warje Malwadi, Khadki, Bhosari, Kalewadi, Chinchwad, Dehu Road etc.<sup>255</sup>

Another major city in India is Mumbai which can be rightly called the financial capital of India. Thousands of people had migrated (and still continue to migrate) to Mumbai for better employment opportunities. The priests from the Pune Ashram were also supporting them in their pastoral needs. In 1974 the Malankara faithful started an organization named as 'the Malankara Catholic Association' (MCA) and brought together the scattered Malankara faithful under one umbrella.<sup>256</sup> However, it became more organized and structured on account of the endeavors of Fr. Possenti. In 1982 a new centre for Bethany Monks was started at Andheri and the priests systematized personal parishes and new mission centres around Mumbai. When parishes were established in several regions, additional monks reached Mumbai to serve the growing Malankara Church. They started two more Ashrams in Sakinaka and Thane. Malankara parishes and communities were founded in Ullas Nagar, Thane, Vikroli, Borivali, Vasai, Boisar, BARC unit, Kharghar, Dombivali, Malad, Sakinaka etc. Moreover, due to the tireless efforts of the Bethany monks, Malankara parish communities rose up in many cities, such as Nagpur, Nasik, Aurangabad etc. in Maharashtra.<sup>257</sup>

In 1991 a new Ashram was inaugurated in Calcutta, the place where the first seeds of starting a religious congregation gripped Mar Ivanios. The ashram catered to the needs of the Malankara people there.<sup>258</sup> The Bethany Ashram, which was founded in 1992, in the steel city of India – Bhilai, in the State of Chattisgarh, North India, helped to organize Malankara

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<sup>252</sup> Ram B. Bhagat, "Changing Patterns of Internal Migration in India," in *Contemporary Demographic Transformations in China, India and Indonesia*, ed. Christophe Z. Guilmoto and Gavin W. Jones (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 239-252.

<sup>253</sup> John Berchmans, "Malankara Catholic Church: Extra Territorial Regions in India on the Episcopal Highway," in *Mar Barnabas Investiture Souvenir*, ed. John Berchmans (Delhi: MCCETRI, 2007), 30.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 278.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 280.

<sup>256</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 294.

<sup>257</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 294-304.

<sup>258</sup> Cf. Jose Mariadas, "Calcutta Mission," in *Platinum Jubilee of Bethany Religious Congregation (1919-1994)*, ed. Santhosh Madathil (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 1995), 125-126.

faithful. An Industrial Training Institute was also started as a part of the missionary venture and welfare of the youth of villages around the place.<sup>259</sup> In 1995, Bethany monks went to the twin cities of Hyderabad-Secunderabad and established churches there. There were many Malankara faithful who had relocated to this area permanently for their livelihood. As part of the missionary work and in order to be socially committed -, a new ashram was founded, together with an orphanage, a home for the destitute, a school and a printing press for the marginalized and the poor in the society.<sup>260</sup>

In 1997 a priest from Bethany Ashram, Fr. John Berchmans was appointed as the Coordinator to protect, guide and promote the Malankara Catholic communities outside the jurisdiction of the existing Malankara Catholic dioceses. His gifted and enthusiastic missionary works and pastoral vision, helped a lot in organizing the communities. They grew very swiftly under the designation ‘MCCETRI’- (Malankara Catholic Church: Extra Territorial Regions in India). It was a long-expected day with plenty of hopes for a bright future when Bishop Jacob Mar Barnabas was appointed as the Apostolic Visitor by Pope Benedict XVI in February 2007. Later in 2015 Rome erected one diocese in Gurgaon-Delhi and an exarchate in Khadki-Pune for further mission works and evangelization. This could be perceived as the fruitful result of the untiring accomplishments of Bethany Ashram.<sup>261</sup>

The contributions of the Bethany monks were not only limited to parish-oriented programs, but also extended to focus on the spiritual, liturgical, cultural, and social growth of the society in and around the parish territories. This fostered the Malankara Catholic Church to become the fastest growing Church in India. They translated liturgical texts into Hindi, the national language of India.<sup>262</sup> It was indeed a great contribution towards the generation born and brought up in the migrant situation. They were given practice in the liturgy through the translated and transliterated texts. The migrants were given adequate catechetical formation as catechetical texts for all ages were prepared and published by the Bethany Ashram. Through giving efficient leadership to various organizations like the ‘Malankara Catholic Children’s League’, ‘Malankara Catholic Youth Movement’, ‘Malankara Catholic Association for Laity’, ‘*Matrusamajam*’ (Mothers’ Association) etc. and by conducting youth conventions for the young and bible camps for children, the Bethany monks strengthened the ecclesial and pastoral dimensions of the Malankara Catholic migrants. The ministry promoted catechesis and advanced the coordination of different mission stations dispersed around various states of India through communication and through the publishing of the registered magazine, named *Vishal Malankara Voice*. Apart from this, a private bulletin, *Malankara Darpan*, was also published from the Calcutta Bethany Ashram.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Cf. Samuel Mathew, “Bhilai Mission,” in *Platinum Jubilee of Bethany Religious Congregation (1919-1994)*, ed. Santhosh Madathil ed. (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 1995), 123-124.

<sup>260</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 289.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. The Syro Malankara Catholic Church “Eparchy of St. John Chrysostom, Gurgaon,” <http://www.catholicate.net/eparchies/eparchy-of-st-john-chrysostom-gurgaon/21> [accessed 30 October 2018]

<sup>262</sup> Cf. Lawrence Thuruthiyil, trans. *The Order of the Holy Qurbano of the Malankara Catholic Church* (Trivandrum: The Malankara Academy, 1986).

<sup>263</sup> Abraham M. Pattiyani, “A Glimpse of the MCC-ETRI,” in *Mar Barnabas Investiture Souvenir*, ed. John Berchmans (Delhi: MCCETRI, 2007), 43.



Apart from the internal migration within India, the Malankara Catholics also migrated to different parts of the world like Europe, Middle East, United States of America and Canada. The first Malankara Mission in the U.S. was started in Chicago, Illinois. Fr. Jerome was appointed as the first chaplain and he organized various Malankara communities and provided pastoral care for them. Likewise, Malankara communities were also organized in many parts of Europe under the leadership of Bethany priests who were studying there. Thus, the Bethany monks became the pioneers of Malankara mission in the diaspora.<sup>264</sup>

“Today, migrants are also strongly described as missionary on account of the dynamism they bring to the faith communities of their destination countries.”<sup>265</sup> The migrants, as they leave their home countries after their struggle to make a living in their mother land, find themselves caught between two countries. Within that experience their focus upon their religious experience, faith and ecclesial tradition is remarkable:

“Immigrant religious communities are consciously contributing to the renewal of Christianity all over globe. In our contemporary world, there is hardly any major city is that is not multireligious and multicultural largely because of the constant migration of diverse nationalities and religions. When people move, they take their religious identity with them, and in cultural contexts, religious affiliation has become one of the variable ways of coping with deracination.”<sup>266</sup>

The migrant Malankara parishes in the diaspora are the centres where the faith of the migrant population finds its concrete expressions. Around the globe, the migrant communities are strong witnesses to Christianity in the twenty first century largely defined by the religious paradigms and a new spiritual Zeitgeist. The missionary activities of the Bethany monks have significantly contributed to the growth and development of Malankara Catholic Church in the diaspora.

### 4.3. Educational Activities

The Bethany mission has always placed importance on the education of society for total liberation and transformation, as envisioned by Mar Ivanios : “He strongly believed that only education will raise the community from low standard of behaviour and culture.”<sup>267</sup> He perceived that education was one of the best means to give Christian witness to the children and to form them for the betterment of the Church and society. Bethany moved to the education apostolate, started many schools as an offshoot of its mission and evangelization for the upliftment of society based on the integral development of human beings. The Church’s vision on education is fully elaborated in its Decree on Education:

“The Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ and at the same time do

<sup>264</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 314.

<sup>265</sup> Cruz, *Towards a Theology of a Migration* 90.

<sup>266</sup> Elias K. Bongmba and Akintunde E. Akinade, “Dislodging and Reformation: Expanding Christianity in Africa and in the Diaspora,” in *Christianities in Migration: The Global Perspective*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 68.

<sup>267</sup> Narimattathil, Mar Ivanios 250.

all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human.”<sup>268</sup> (GE3)

The Bethany Ashram plunged into education ministry by opening several schools: in Kottayam in 1975<sup>269</sup>, in Pathanamthitta on 11 February 1978, near Chunnakara in Allapuzha district in 1979,<sup>270</sup> and in a remote village at Ranny among the poor people that same year.<sup>271</sup>

Two years later, in 1981, a new school was inaugurated at Noojibathila in South Canara District of Karnataka where the people were suffering from a lack of educational facilities.<sup>272</sup> In 1984 Bethany Industrial Training Centre (ITC) was started in Nedumangad to create job opportunities for the unemployed youth of that region.<sup>273</sup> ‘Jnanodaya English School’ was founded at Nellyyadi, Karnataka in 1987 and later a Boarding and ITC were also started for the youth and the children. In 1988 the Bethany College and the Bethany Students Centre were opened in Trivandrum for youngsters in the city to embark on higher education. ‘Nirmal Bethany School’ was established in 1992 at Kalewadi, Pune. In July 1994, a new school was inaugurated at Kalayapuram, Kollam District in the Archdiocese of Trivandrum.<sup>274</sup> In 1994 the Bethany Industrial Training Centre was opened at Bhilai, Chhattisgarh state to train and provide skilled labourers to the Steel Plant, combining it with the creation of employment opportunities.<sup>275</sup>

The education mission of Bethany is aimed at the integral development of the person through quality education, by fostering spiritual and moral values. Hence, education becomes a means of liberation from all things by which human beings are oppressed. This liberation of the human being is the goal of evangelization and mission. Therefore, evangelization and education are not two separate activities but two dimensions of the unique mission of the Bethany Ashram.

#### 4.4. Bethany Social Service Endeavors

The social apostolate of Bethany Ashram has deep concern towards the society, which in turn impels Bethany to make it an integral part of its mission and evangelization. When we look into the life of Christ and the mission of Christ, we find that he never preached unless and until he made the people comfortable, especially by feeding the hungry. So, it is no wonder that evangelization and social development are not two separate elements. Vatican II says social development is the constituent element of our mission. It further states that the mission of the Church would not be complete if it did not take into account the unceasing interplay of the Gospel with the human concrete life, both personal and social. That means that the Church is not willing to restrict her mission only to the religious field and disassociate herself from the human’s temporal problems. The Church has the duty to proclaim the liberation of

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<sup>268</sup>“Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*.” In *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London – Washington, DC: Seed and Ward, 1990), §3.

<sup>269</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 250.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 251.

<sup>271</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 244.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 273.

<sup>273</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 238.

<sup>274</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 254.

<sup>275</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 256.

millions of human beings who suffer to uphold the human dignity.<sup>276</sup> (GS 27-31) From the beginning of its establishment, the Bethany Ashram started various humanitarian activities for the less privileged and marginalized people in order to promote favourable social conditions and human resource development. The pioneering missionaries of Bethany did not ignore the socio-economic needs of the people while meeting their spiritual needs: their method of approach was rooted on *Sneha marga* (the way of Love).

The Bethany Mission Board was formed in Thiruvalla in 1968 to to foster evangelization and social service. This helped to facilitate and organize various social service projects in a systematic way and by structured action plans.<sup>277</sup> A Health Centre was inaugurated at Nalanchira in 1968 for the wellbeing of the people. Later on, it became a hospital for Nature Cure and Yoga Centre of holistic medicine.<sup>278</sup> Another primary health centre was also opened at Poonkavu, a remote village in Pathanamthitta district, Kerala. In 1978 and 1994 a Boys Home was started at Vengola as well as at Chirackal to take care of the orphans and the unprivileged children to ensure that they got quality education and social security.<sup>279</sup> Another remarkable endeavour for the poor and the deprived sections of the society was 'Trppadam'<sup>280</sup>, a social welfare organization founded under the leadership of Fr. Gabriel at Nedumangad. It consists of a home for destitute men and women and a welfare centre which runs many cottage industrial programs for rural development. He conducted many interreligious prayer meetings and gatherings in the centre.<sup>281</sup> When we go back to the sixties and seventies of the former century, the socio-economic situation of the majority of the people was deplorable and regions were quite underdeveloped. Fr. Gabriel practically visited almost all of the villages that come under the different parishes. The great developmental activities that one sees now in and around this area were initiated by Bethany monks. A destitute rehabilitation centre was started at Pulayanarkotta, Trivandrum in 1980 as part of healing ministry to engage with the plight of some of the most unfortunate, the most ignored and most undervalued members of society. A Bethany social service society was registered in 1991 to help expedite social and humanitarian projects. The 'Bethany Human Resource Development Centre' (BHRD) was founded in 1998 at Pazhakutty to organize rural development projects for the village people and main thrust was given to the liberation of poor, marginalized and women. With the support of various funding agencies from Kerala

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<sup>276</sup> "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*." In *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, (London – Washington, DC: Seed and Ward, 1990), §27-31.

<sup>277</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 267.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 268.

<sup>279</sup> Cf. Puthuparambil, *The Chronicles*, 274.

<sup>280</sup>The word 'Trppadam' means the Holy feet of God, The Indian way of showing respect to the elders and teachers and guru is touching their feet. The phrase "at the feet and to the feet" stands for trust and protection. There is no place safer than the Holy feet of God. Therefore, Fr. Gabriel loved to call his Ashram Trppadam and he enjoyed being at the feet of God. He cannot give a place safer than that of the feet of God to the homeless and the destitute. Cf. James Mamootil, "Trppadam-Embodiment of the Profound Vision of Fr. Gabriel," in *Trppadam: The Role of Religious in Serving Humanity*, ed. James Puthuparampil (Pune: BVP Publications, 2007), 39-42.

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Varheghe Vijayanand, "Fr. Gabriel OIC, A Great Visionary of Bethany," in *Trppadam: The Role of Religious in Serving Humanity*, ed. James Puthuparampil (Pune: BVP Publications, 2007), 43-49.

and from abroad, BHRD renders financial support for the education of youth, housing projects and medical treatment aid to the poor and the needy.<sup>282</sup>

The aim of the Bethany social service is to bring about the integral development of the people irrespective of race, caste or creed and to share the love and Gospel values with the people. Integral development is the development of the total wellbeing of the individuals, including the social, religious, economic, educational, cultural, mental, and other aspects of their lives. Some of the tangible apostolic endeavors include schools and higher education institutes, orphanages and old age homes, social welfare programs of rural development, community health programs, centres for the mentally challenged, tribal orientation programs, hospital chaplaincy, prison ministry etc.

#### 4.5. Mission through Media and Preaching Ministry

The modern world is the world of media and communication. The media has tremendous power to influence the world by informing, entertaining and educating. The Church has always understood the importance of the use of media in evangelization. *Inter Mirifica* – the Second Vatican Council decree on the use of media - emphasized that “these media, if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind, since they greatly contribute to men's entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>283</sup> (IM2)

IM stresses that the Church should take measures to employ the means of social media to announce the good news of salvation. Taking the tremendous potential and possibilities of the media into consideration, Bethany Ashram has utilized it as an adjunct to the service of all the ministries, as well as for the effective communication of the good news. The monks were always engaged in writing spiritual books and translating liturgical texts into vernacular languages for the faithful in the Church. ‘Bethany Publications’ was started in 1980 to publish books various books related to liturgical, spiritual, literature, moral, homiletics, catechetical and historical fields for the society and the Church.<sup>284</sup> Henceforth the publication regularly publishes and distributes numerous books related to various topics. In many places like Thiruvalla, Trivandrum and Bathery, Bethany has opened Bethany Book Centres for the effective distribution of books. A new venture called ‘Bethany Communications’ was started to promote and propagate liturgical music. Cassettes and CD’s of musical albums for various occasions were distributed through this enterprise.<sup>285</sup>

Another remarkable contribution of the Bethany monks for mission and evangelization is through preaching the Word of God. Since the establishment of Ashram, Bethany monks have been actively engaged with the Good News by direct unmediated preaching through conducting Bible conventions, retreats and recollections, seminars etc. in churches and mission centres for spiritual renewal. Moreover, Bethany Ashram has opened two retreat

<sup>282</sup> Cf. George Thomas, “Bethany Social Service Projects,” in *Platinum Jubilee of Bethany Religious Congregation (1919-1994)*, ed. Santhosh Madathil (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 1995), 141-148.

<sup>283</sup> “Decree on the Media of Social Communication, *Inter Mirifica*.” In *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London – Washington, DC: Seed and Ward, 1990), §2.

<sup>284</sup> Cf. Mathai Kadavil, “Bethany in Media and Communication,” in *Platinum Jubilee of Bethany Religious Congregation (1919-1994)*, ed. Santhosh Madathil (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 1995), 159-163.

<sup>285</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 360-363.

centres in Meenangady as well as in Kallar. For facilitating the preaching ministry more effectively the Bethany Congregation formed a Bethany Gospel Ministry Team called 'Bethany Suvishesha Sangham' in 1992 to begin a unique way of retreats and preaching based on oriental liturgical tradition and Indian methods.<sup>286</sup>

#### **4.6. Towards A Provincial Administrative System**

As the vocations to priesthood and religious life have been increasing in Bethany Ashram, the members were challenged to take up new responsibilities of new missions. The growth of Bethany was organized by a single administrative system under the Superior General. The first proposal for a province system as a need of the hour came up in the General Chapter convened in 1980. Henceforth profound discussions were held in various General Chapters on the topic and suggestions were sent to the Oriental Congregation. Finally, in 2000 Rome accepted the suggestions and proposals and the Congregation was divided into two provinces namely Navajeevan Province and Navajyothy Province respectively. After the erection of the two provinces, there was huge leap in the mission and evangelization activities which extended all over India and abroad.<sup>287</sup>

#### **5. MISSIONARY AND EVANGELIZATION ACTIVITIES 2000-2012<sup>288</sup>**

After the establishment of the Provinces, Bethany Ashram has widened its horizons of mission to various places by founding various Ashrams and mission houses across India and abroad. The main thrust was given to the evangelization of India by endorsing the growth of the Malankara Church and by supporting the Universal Church in her missionary enterprises. New Ashrams and Mission Houses were started by both the provinces in Angamoozhy, Kottavattam, Nilamboor, Adimali etc. in Kerala; Vencode in Tamil Nadu; Ludhiyana in Punjab; and Surat in Gujarat to look after the pastoral care of the Malankara Catholic faithful in India as well as abroad. The hierarchy of the Malankara Catholic Church entrusted Bethany to organize the pastoral need of the gulf migrants and in 2003 Fr Jerome was appointed as the coordinator of the Malankara Mission in the Gulf Regions. Thus, the Malankara Catholic Church extended her ecclesial services to migrants through the Bethany Monks.

Focusing on the education mission of the congregation, the provinces laid the foundations of many schools in places like Pathanamthitta, Nalanchira, Vencode, Hyderabad and Surat which complimented the existing educational institutions. In this period Bethany Ashram was able to start many higher educational endeavours like the Bethany Navajeevan Physiotherapy College at Trivandrum, the Bethany College of Nursing at Bhilai, the Bethany College of Teacher Education at Vencode, the Girideepam Institute of Advanced Learning at Kottayam, the Sapientia Bethany First Grade College at Nellyyadi and the Girideepam Business School at Kottayam as means of transformation of the society through high quality education.

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<sup>286</sup> Cf. Philip Vysyaneth, "Bethany Suvishesha Sangham", in *Platinum Jubilee of Bethany Religious Congregation (1919-1994)*, ed. Santhosh Madathil (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 1995), 117-118.

<sup>287</sup> Cf. Madathil, *Yesterdays of Bethany*, 346- 349.

<sup>288</sup> Bethany Ashram, *Directory 2015: Order of the Imitation of Christ* (Kottayam: Bethany Ashram Generalate, 2015), 17-20; 41 -44.

The Bethany social service mission accomplished and carried out a planned service for the development of poor people. The Provinces undertook an organized way of social service projects and implemented for larger sections which would include both the young and the old, men and women, Christians and non-Christians in a common effort to improve their growth and provide support. Orphanages were started in Vencode, Hyderabad, Ranni as well as a boys' home for Tribal children in Bathery. An institution, named the Jeevan Jyothy Special School, was opened at Mardala, Karnataka for providing special and quality education to the mentally challenged children through services of physiotherapy, speech therapy, and special education techniques. As the number of abandoned elders and parents is increasing alarmingly, Bethany took the situation seriously and delved into the issue as yet another facet of her social commitment. Old Age homes were established in Thiruvalla, Kottor, Meenangady as well as in Hyderabad. The Bethany social service continued its social empowerment more strenuously by founding various institutions for disadvantaged children and distressed men and women.

### 5.1. Mission Endeavors in Africa

The door of the Bethany mission was opened to meet the needs of the Universal Church. Abune Musie Ghebregiorghis OFMCap, Bishop of the Emdibir diocese in Ethiopia invited the Bethany monks to initiate a mission in East Africa. After long discussions and situational studies, the XVIII General Chapter decided to open its first house in the oriental Catholic diocese of Emdibir. The first Bethany Ashram in the African continent was erected on 20 September 2009 and blessed on 23 September of the same year. It is the first instance of an Oriental Individual Church helping another Oriental Church by sending her priests to a different country as missionaries.<sup>289</sup> Ethiopian Christianity consists predominantly of the Orthodox Church; however, faithful belonging to the Latin Catholic Church and the native Oriental Ethiopian Catholic Church are also present.<sup>290</sup> There are many similarities between the historical events of the growth and the developments of the Ethiopian Christian Church as well as that of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church. Bethany missionaries were primarily invited there to live out a monastic life rather than engaging in charitable works.<sup>291</sup> The Ethiopian Church is basically a monastic oriented church. Bethany monks lived as ascetics

<sup>289</sup> Cf. Jose Kuruvila, "Bethany in the Vineyard of the Lord", *Bethany Sabdham* 110 (2017): 8-14.

<sup>290</sup> According to the traditions the origin of Christianity in Ethiopia traces back to the Apostolic period (Acts of the Apostles, 8:26-40). However, only by the fourth century Christianity became an official religion of Ethiopia or Church of Axum. From the beginning the Ethiopian Church patronaged the Coptic Church of Alexandria and remained almost sixteen centuries with its own cultural, ecclesial and liturgical identity. When the Portuguese colonized Ethiopia, the Emperor Susenyos received the Catholic faith and Catholicism became the state religion in 1622. But when the people opposed to the constant Latinization, the Catholic missionaries were expelled for the next 200 years. In 1889 when the Emperor Menlik II came into power, the missionary activities resumed and they were expanded during the Italian occupation from 1935 to 1941. This caused the founding of Latin Church Jurisdictions. In 1961 Rome erected a metropolitan see consisting of four dioceses under the jurisdiction of the Oriental Congregation. However, there are also five Latin Vicariates and two apostolic prefectures, none of them raised to the rank of diocese. Cf. Sergew Habele Selassie, "*The Establishment of the Ethiopian Church*, (December 2003)," <http://ethiopianorthodox.org/english/ethiopian/prechristian.html> [accessed November 10, 2018] and Ronald G. Roberson, "*The Ethiopian Catholic Church* (March 2015)," <http://www.cnewa.org/default.aspx?ID=64&pagetypeID=9&sitecode=hq&pageno=1> [accessed November 2018]

<sup>291</sup> Cf. Jose Mariadas, "The Missiology of Mar Ivanios: In the Context of the Ethiopian Mission", *Bethany Sabdham* 110 (2017): 39-44.

there, following the vision of the founder by practicing true monastic spirituality and empowered the people around them. The region in which the Bethany monks were present was very underdeveloped and suffered from poverty, unemployment, inadequate education, malnutrition and so on: “Bethany Ashram is meant to become a model of inspiration for the reform of religious life in Ethiopia in the right direction whereby authenticity of Charism and authenticity of local traditions are ensured.”<sup>292</sup> Their missionary commitment discerned challenges in day to day opportunities. They converted challenges into creative opportunities for building up of local communities of believers: they discerned challenges in the needs of the people, especially the neglected ones. They actively implemented many social welfare programs for the poor and needy. The leadership of the pioneers, characterized by the founding of professional schools, boys’ homes, dairy farms, and by introducing alternative agricultural methods, water shedding, special tuition and support for school going children and the formation of a prayer group, led to visible changes in village communities. The Bishop who invited the Bethany Monks states that:

“The Bethany fathers within a short period of time were able to bring radical change in the area. They turned an arid land into a fertile ground that yields now banana fruit, tapioca, potatoes, wheat and different kinds of vegetables soon to be imitated by the local farmers.”<sup>293</sup>

They brought a radical change to the lives of the very economically and socially poor people by addressing their basic needs. Later on, the Bethany Ashram expanded its mission and evangelization works to another diocese, Nekemte. Thus, the mission of the Bethany Ashram acquired an unique dimension within the Universal Church.

## 5.2. Reverse Mission in Europe

Bethany Ashram has been actively participating in the universal mission in various ways, especially in reverse mission. Historically missionaries from the West were sent to different parts of the world for evangelization and to bring people to Christianity. However, by the later half of the twentieth century this process has declined and native clergy moved to serve Western Churches. This shift is called reverse mission:

“Reverse mission refers to the sending of missionaries to Europe and North America by churches and Christians from the non-Western world, particularly Africa, Asia, Latin American which were at the receiving end of Catholic and protestant missions as mission fields from the sixteenth to the later twentieth century.”<sup>294</sup>

Reverse Mission is more specifically considered as an alternative approach to the historical and traditional understanding of mission.<sup>295</sup> The Bethany monks were sent to Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and as well to North America to serve the local Churches as the need

<sup>292</sup> Musie Ghebregiorghis, “Evangelizing Mission of the Malankara Catholic Church in India,” *Bethany Sabdham* 110 (2017): 21-30.

<sup>293</sup> Ghebregiorghis, “Evangelizing Mission,” 21-30.

<sup>294</sup> Eric Morier Genoud, *Reverse Mission: A Critical Approach for a Problematic Subject* (Leiden, Boston, MA: Brill, 2018), 170.

<sup>295</sup> Cf. Faye Y. Abram, John A. Slosar and Rose Walls, “Reverse Mission: A Model for International Social Work Education and Transformative Intra-National Practice,” *International Social Work* 48 (2018): 161-176.

for the Universal Church involved in reverse mission.<sup>296</sup> The Bethany monks are actively working in various dioceses of European countries and dynamically supporting their pastoral needs.

### **Conclusion**

In this Chapter we analyzed the mission activities of the Bethany Ashram from the time of its inception. Bethany, as a missionary movement, has inherited this missionary passion from its very beginning. Bethany has always been in the forefront of mission and leadership, even from 1919 to 1930, a period in which it was still part of the Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, Bethany characterized itself within the Orthodox Church as an independent autonomous religious congregation that under the leadership of its own Bishops gave pastoral care to its own churches and was able to start the evangelization among the non-Christians as a result of its autonomy. From 1930 to 1966, Bethany can be described as a dedicated religious group who lived as the poor did and worked for them through various social welfare programs. The founder and almost all members of the congregation reunited with the Catholic Church. Consequently, the Malankara Catholic Hierarchy was established and Bethany became an instrument for the new Church within the Universal Catholic Church. Bethany and the Malankara Catholic Church were considered synonymous and the members of Bethany were totally engaged in the mission work and reunion activities. They became a sole agent of the reunion movement. Bethany focused on the expansion of the Malankara Church by establishing parish communities and reached many non-Christians (“Gentile Mission”) through evangelization during the period 1966-2000. When Bethany was raised to Pontifical Status it was indeed a great recognition of its mission in the Universal Church. The door of Bethany was opened to a wider horizon. As a result, Bethany, by forming small Malankara communities in different parts of India for the people in diaspora, became instrumental to begin new missions outside Kerala. More over Bethany meticulously implemented social and humanitarian projects by establishing schools, colleges, orphanages, community development programs, and continued evangelization through media and preaching. In the period 2000 - 2012, Bethany was bifurcated into two provinces and its mission activities expanded to broader prospects on national and international level.

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<sup>296</sup> Bethany Ashram, *Directory 2015: Oder of the Imitation of Christ* (Kottayam: Bethany Ashram Generalate, 2015), 28-30; 52 -54.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ELEMENTS OF BETHANY MISSION

#### Introduction

The idea of mission and missionary practices underwent great changes down the centuries according to the Church teachings. The Conciliar and post-conciliar perspectives opened new ways of reflection on missiology and challenged its praxis. However, the traditional concepts were not altogether abandoned; they continued, by responding to the signs of the time and trying to respond to it accordingly. This is well expressed by Amalados:

“The Church itself is seen as mission, so that mission becomes a process that is present everywhere and at all times. There has also been a broadening of the task of mission. At the root of this broadening is, of course a new way of looking at culture, at other religions, and at the poor.”<sup>297</sup>

With such an emphasis, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the missionary activities acquired a new momentum. Against such a background, the viability of the mission of Bethany Ashram depends on its ability to respond to the needs and signs of the present times. Bethany must recourse to an organic approach rooted in its Catholic, oriental, West Syrian and Indian traditions. This will enable the congregation to live the authentic charism of the Bethany and uphold its distinct missionary vocation in the Universal Church and contribute to its richness. The primary focus of this chapter is the missionary dynamism within the Bethany mission and how new understandings of mission are (to be) understood by the Bethany mission in relation to its charism.

#### 1. THE CHARISM AND VISION ON MISSION

Charism is the core and soul of a religious community. It provides it with a definite purpose and inspiration and at the same time animates its action for which a religious congregation is founded. Benedict XVI reminds: “Charisms are special gifts of the Holy Spirit which are bestowed on individuals for the good of others, the needs of the world, and in particular for the building up of the Church.”<sup>298</sup> Charism is the special gift given by the Holy Spirit to build up the kingdom of God and renew the body of Christ:

“They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charisms.”<sup>299</sup> (CCC 800)

The charism of each religious community is different from another. It incorporates its history, traditions, its Holy Rule, its spirituality and apostolate and thus defines a religious

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<sup>297</sup> Michael Amalados, “The Changes of Mission of Today,” in *Trends in Mission: Toward the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium*, ed. William Jenkinson and Helene O’Sullivan (New York, NY: Orbis, 1991), 360.

<sup>298</sup> Benedict XVI, “Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (June 2005),” [http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium\\_ccc/documents/archive\\_2005\\_compendium-ccc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html).

[accessed November 12, 2018] 160.

<sup>299</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), §800.

communities identity. Religious communities constantly deliberate about the founding charism to figure out how to put their heritage in the best way into action in the contemporary situation and to address its missionary responsibilities. The charism of the Order of the Imitation of Christ (Bethany Ashram) is: “following Jesus Christ in his life of prayer and action, realized in oriental monastic tradition and Indian sannyasa and aimed at the evangelization of India through the renewal of the Malankara Church.”<sup>300</sup>

The imitation of Christ is aimed at in an undivided journey of the life of prayer and action realized in oriental monastic and Indian tradition. According to the *Holy Rule of the Order of the Imitation of Christ* (HROIC) there are three dimensions that are to be followed by each member of the Bethany Ashram:

- i. *The imitation of Jesus Christ in his life of prayer* which is intended give a sense of constant union with God through meditation, with special emphasis on the Word of God, active participation in the liturgical life and other spiritual activities<sup>301</sup>. A monk is called to follow prayer life in the best manner possible, both as a community and individually and it is the goal and source of all apostolic activities.<sup>302</sup>
- ii. *The Imitation of Jesus Christ in his life of action* is to follow his footsteps, who was by proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God on earth and led the people to the Father, saved us from sin and sufferings and made us partakers in his divine life. Our active life consists of apostolic works that is orientated towards the proclamation of the Gospel.<sup>303</sup>

The Holy Rule of Bethany Ashram makes use of the terminology ‘Apostolic Activities’ for the mission activities as relevant to the ecclesial context. The religious community with its focus on imitating Jesus Christ in his life of prayer and action, as envisioned by Mar Ivanios, actualizes its mission through apostolic activities. The missionary mandate of Jesus is the motive of all apostolic activities: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son, and of the Holy spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; I am with you always, to the close of age.” (Mt 28: 19-20)

The members of the congregation, in a very special way, are obliged to participate in the missionary work of the Church, in accordance with its charism, moved by the missionary spirit and by being faithful to the spirit of religious life.<sup>304</sup>

The important missionary activities of the congregation that attest to the charism, are the following:<sup>305</sup>

- 1) *Preaching the Gospel, conducting retreats, teaching catechism and giving spiritual instructions for the renewal of the Church:* The aim of these activities is to equip the faithful to participate in ecclesial life meaningfully. It was through these various actions that the founder Mar Ivanios brought about the renewal of the Malankara

<sup>300</sup> *Holy Rule of the Order of the Imitation of Christ (HROIC)*, (Kottayam; Bethany Ashram Generalate, 2000) 1.

<sup>301</sup> Cf. *HROIC*, 2.

<sup>302</sup> Cf. *HROIC*, 66.

<sup>303</sup> Cf. *HROIC*, 2.

<sup>304</sup> Cf. *HROIC*, 74.

<sup>305</sup> There are eight apostolic activities (mission activities) given in HROIC (see 73-76).

Church. It is the expectation of the hierarchy and the faithful of our Church today that the Bethanians continue to give such a leadership.

- 2) *Ecumenical activities and Inter-Religious Dialogue:* This mission focuses on the dream that one day all those who believe in Jesus Christ will be united in his love. Moreover, this is an essential character of Bethanian Spirituality. This apostolic activity is also relevant historically given the fact that Bethany was the cradle of the reunion movement. Hence Bethanians have a responsibility to bring about unity among the Churches of the west Syrian tradition<sup>306</sup> in India. This mission strives to achieve the process of inculturation and dialogue with all people of good will, primarily, in India.
- 3) *Take up mission and parish activities according to the needs of the Malankara Church.* Since the Malankara Catholic Church is born into the bosom of Bethany and was nurtured by it, the congregation is particularly committed to its growth and keeps on contributing to the life and needs of the Malankara Church wherever it is needed.
- 4) *Missionary activities aimed at the evangelization of India:* The evangelization of India was the great vision of Mar Ivanios. Keeping his dream alive, the members are absorbed into the religious and cultural values of India.
- 5) *Apostolic activities undertaken according to the need of the Universal Church.* Along with the commitment to a particular Church, the congregation takes efforts to contribute to the Universal Church of Christ. So, the congregation is always responsive to the demands of the Universal Church when called up on to do so or assigned.
- 6) *Social apostolate:* The social apostolate of the congregation is oriented towards the integral development of human personality. It is an effort to promote the dignity of the human person and to safeguard the values of the kingdom of God like justice, freedom, love, equality and peace with prophetic earnestness.
- 7) *Apostolate through communication and media:* The mission through media emphasizes on the use of modern means of communication for evangelization, educating the people and preparing them for accepting the values of the kingdom of God.
- 8) *Educational activities:* The apostolate of education co-operates with the existing system of education to promote qualitative improvements in the methods of education, and thus tries to be an effective instrument in changing the society in a positive manner. By engaging in this mission activity, the congregation helps the young people in making sound moral judgement based on a well-informed conscience.

iii. *The imitation of Christ realized in oriental monastic traditions and Indian sannyasa.*  
The oriental monastic tradition gives priority to the inner attentiveness to God as the

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<sup>306</sup> West Syrian liturgical tradition is also known as Antiochene liturgical rite. Malankara Catholic liturgical tradition is west Syrian or Antiochene rite. After the division among the St. Thomas Christians, Mar Gregorios, an Antiochian Bishop, arrived in the Malankara Church and subsequently introduced the Antiochene rite here. Syro Malabar Catholics in India are using East Syrian liturgy or Chaldean rite. There are different non-Catholic oriental Churches which follow the west Syrian liturgy (Cf. Cyril Baselios, *The Syro Malankara Church*, 99-111).

‘one thing necessary’ (Lk 10,42). The inner attentiveness to God calls to a lifestyle of the radical living of the Gospel values in an atmosphere of joyful ascetism, conversion of heart, flight from the world, silence, fasting and long vigil that are nourished by *lectio divina*, unceasing prayer and ceaseless celebration of the divine liturgy. Such a lifestyle generates creativity and enthusiasm for charitable services and apostolic endeavors.<sup>307</sup> The Indian *sannyasa* has to imbibe the inner spirit and life style of Indian spiritual tradition, which is orientated to a union with God. The simple life of Jesus who lived always united with the eternal Father in prayer and went about doing good to all, is imitated with the detachment and simplicity of Indian asceticism. The essential nature of this spirituality and religious life is to attempt to attain union with God. The members are called to live an ideal life as a witness for the proclamation of Gospel in India.<sup>308</sup>

Bethany Ashram has a profound postulation on the missionary consciousness evolved in its origin as articulated during its growth and development:

“It was primarily the missionary consciousness of the founder Mar Ivanios that generated in him an insatiable desire to spread the Gospel, that great light of the faith kindled by St. Thomas the Apostle, throughout India. The founding of the monastic communities in the Malankara Church by Mar Ivanios was ultimately the consequence of this zealous vision.”<sup>309</sup>

The goal of the mission of Bethany Ashram is to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, to live fruitfully and disseminate the spirituality of Bethany and the rich Malankara liturgical traditions, to propagate and promote the missionary vision of the founder Mar Ivanios and to develop a missionary consciousness among Bethany monks.<sup>310</sup> The fundamental basis of the mission of Bethany Ashram revolves around the charism which is aimed at the evangelization of India through a spiritual renewal of the Malankara Church.<sup>311</sup>

Pope Francis invites consecrated people to examine their fidelity to the mission entrusted to them through their charism. He asks:

“Are they suitable for carrying out today, in society and the Church, those same ministries and works? Do we have the same passion for our people, are we close to them to the point of sharing in their joys and sorrows, thus truly understanding their needs and helping to respond to them?”<sup>312</sup>

The charism of the congregation must inspire the members and keep them animated. At the same time, the charism should also be constantly enriched and adapted without losing its unique characteristics. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the congregation to make use of its charism for the service of the Church as well as to work coming of Christ’s kingdom in its

<sup>307</sup> Cf. HROIC, 2.

<sup>308</sup> Cf. HROIC, 2.

<sup>309</sup> HROIC, 2.

<sup>310</sup> Cf. Bethany Nava Jeevan Province, *Bethany Mission Manual* (Thiruvananthapuram: Nava Jeevan Publication, 2017), 3.

<sup>311</sup> Cf. HROIC, 2.

<sup>312</sup> Pope Francis, “To All Consecrated People” Apostolic Letter On The Year Of Consecrated Life, (November 2014).” [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_lettera-ap\\_20141121\\_lettera-consacra.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacra.html) [accessed 12 November 2018] §2.

fullness.<sup>313</sup> The mission of Bethany Ashram and its charism must be renewed in relation to praxis for its growth and development.

## 2. DISTINCT FEATURES OF BETHANY MISSION AND EVANGELIZATION.

Mar Ivanios believed to be called by God, in his loving providence, and initiated a spiritual movement that originated from his intense God experience. It was started not as an institution but primarily as a movement emerged in a community of zealous monks, a mission flowing from within and leading to the building up and renewal of the Malankara Church in the wider context of the kingdom of God. The building up and renewal of the Church envisaged that the original charism of the congregation must take into account the concrete context where the kingdom of God is to be established.<sup>314</sup> Taking stock of the original history of the mission work in this congregation down through the last 100 years, especially the life and spirit of the first members, more specifically of Mar Ivanios, illustrate that the Bethany vision of Mission should have three essential dimensions that lead to one goal: The Imitation of Christ.<sup>315</sup> These three essential dimensions are:

- 1) Constant union with God through *contemplation* by imitating Christ's life of prayer.
- 2) Authentic *actions* to people and society by imitating Christ's life of action.
- 3) Committed *ecclesial* service to the Church of Christ.

These triple dimensions demand triple paths that one would call contemplative, active and ecclesial lives and thereby contribute towards the proclamation of the kingdom of God and the total transformation of human beings and society.<sup>316</sup> The primary task of mission is to build up the human community as God's people. In this process of a total transformation, the three dimensions are intimately inter-connected and Holy Spirit is the powerful guide and the effective agent of transformation. This is the essence of mission. The triple roots of the Bethany charism namely, the biblical<sup>317</sup>, the oriental, and the Indian, should be understood in a wider context. Thus, the Bethany mission has very distinct character and shares in a unique responsibility in the universal and ecclesial context.

### 2.1. The Contemplative Dimension

The charism of the congregation calls for a profound contemplative life, a way of meditation on the Word of God to attain union with God, for a deeper experience and life of discipleship according to the word of God.<sup>318</sup> Meditating on the Word of God is,

“the means by which God imparts his grace to us. It is the instrument through which the Holy Spirit effects our union with Christ. That is to say, it is the way in which Christ comes to us. For this reason, Scripture stands at the center of the Christian's

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<sup>313</sup>Cf. *HROIC*, 2.

<sup>314</sup> Cf. Bethany Ashram, *Customs and Practices: Order of the Imitation of Christ* (Kottayam: Bethany Generalate, 2003), 1-3.

<sup>315</sup> Cf. *HROIC*, 1-3.

<sup>316</sup> Cf. *HROIC*, 73-80.

<sup>317</sup> Bethany in the Gospel is a name which indicates the nature and charism of the congregation, which gives utmost priority to prayer and activities. It was a house which intimately loved Jesus Christ and which was specifically loved by him as well. Lazar was a friend of Jesus and a witness to Resurrection; Mary was symbol of prayer life (contemplation), Martha, a model of service and apostolic activities (action). Cf. *HROIC*, No.6.

<sup>318</sup> *HROIC*, 1-3.

life, thereby making Scripture meditation formative. This has three practical implications.”<sup>319</sup>

The practical implications are: preparation, carriage and behavior in which behavior refers to practice, that is what we are responding in a practical way to what the Scripture teaches.<sup>320</sup> Mar Ivanios, primarily as a man of God, radiated radiating humanity which had its source in the inner energy deriving from his becoming one with the Word through his daily prayer and meditation. The life and mission of the founder and the members were shaped by their profound God-experience and needs of the people. In responding to these needs, they became powerful heralds of the same Word. The lives of Bethany monks and the long history of the congregation bear witness to the important role that contemplation played in its different area of missionary activities. The contemplative dimension can be found in the imitation of Christ’s prayer life, the radical living of the Gospel, the sharing of the same Word experience with fellow human beings and an openness to a variety of works of mission.

The Church always upholds the contemplative dimension of mission. The contemplative dimension remains to be the source of inspiration for mission and the prayer and life of Jesus serve as the models for continued commitment towards the society.<sup>321</sup> (PC 8) Only a contemplative can be a healthy missionary, a rich channel of the Spirit and rooted in love of God: only a missionary, rooted in place, with his or her feet on the dusty road, sharing in the brokenness of human kind, understands the need for the contemplation. Root and fruit are mutually related.<sup>322</sup> Therefore,

“to be a missionary today, therefore, consists first of all in contemplating Jesus and seeking to make one’s own his criteria, his attitudes, his words. The central inspiration of life of a missionary must be derived fundamentally from the radical relationship with the Jesus Christ in order to be configured to him and sent by him.”<sup>323</sup>

The imitation of Christ in his prayer life is an inspiration for this contemplative experiential dimension that is inevitable aspect of the daily life of Bethany Ashram.

The contemplation dimension occupies a significant place in Indian ascetism. Since Bethany Ashram is rooted in Indian monastic tradition in its depth, only an evangelization anchored in God-experience can be in tune with the spiritual heritage of India. The prophetic spirit of Bethany coupled with Indian monastic spirituality naturally has be rooted in the contemplative life of prayer and mission. The role of contemplation in mission is all the more urgent today with the new perspectives of the mission in the Church with different facets.

## 2.2. The Active Dimension

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<sup>319</sup> J. Stephen Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word: Scripture Meditation in the Piety of George Swinnock,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5/1(2012): 35-55.

<sup>320</sup> Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 54.

<sup>321</sup> Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 8.

<sup>322</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, 8.

<sup>323</sup> Maria Clara Luchetti Binger, “Contemplation and Service,” in *A Century of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 191.

The active dimension of the Bethany mission is embedded in the imitation of Christ's proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.<sup>324</sup> This 'prophetic action', a religious community, no matter what form it takes, must always be keen to follow:<sup>325</sup>

“For because religious are ‘professional followers of Jesus in his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God, it is their effectiveness in promoting the Kingdom that will be the ultimate criteria of their ‘action’.”<sup>326</sup>

It is a call to continue the mission of Jesus through an active life more closely. Today, this life of contemplative action is expressed in a wide variety of ways. For the Bethany Ashram mission means to bring good news into every stratum of humanity in order to transform the humanity from within and to make it anew.<sup>327</sup> So, Bethany Ashram undertakes diverse apostolic activities towards human liberation and to the promotion of the integral development of the society. There are profound links between mission and human development. This interconnectedness between mission and human promotion is very much evident in the life and deeds of Mar Ivanios, the founder. His zealous dedication to the mission expressed itself in his constant concern for the people, in serving the society by responding to the pressing needs of the people. Throughout the years the 'active' dimension has been articulated in various forms in this vein. The meaning of active dimension of mission reminds that mere proclamation is not enough for evangelization. Therefore,

“the missionary ought to not speak from the outside like a professor. The missionary is called to be a witness and because of this must be immersed in the depths of the social fabric, going to the poor, suffering their bitterness and difficulties, in order to have a minimum of credibility in trying to show Jesus as the way. The missionary will be at the crossroads of life, there where social relations are built that model a society.”<sup>328</sup>

However, this dimension of 'action' is undergoes change based on the post-conciliar documents and the studies in missiology.

### **2.3. The Ecclesial Dimension**

The charism of Bethany Ashram is fundamentally ecclesial. Pope Francis exhorts all religious institutes “to translate the Gospel into a particular way of life, to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and to respond creatively to the needs of the Church.”<sup>329</sup> There is a profound link between charism, the Church and evangelization. Since religious life is essentially ecclesial, evangelizing for the Church is the need of the times. The Bethany community was born for the spiritual renewal of the Church and evangelization of India. The examination of the founding vocation of Bethany Ashram decisively discloses how a contemplative life so providentially gave way into a contemplative-active life-style and became the genesis of the Malankara Catholic Church. The history of Bethany Ashram and

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<sup>324</sup> Cf. HROIC, 1.

<sup>325</sup> Cf. George M Soares-Prabhu, “Prophetic Dimension of Religious Life,” in *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action: Collected Writings of George M Soares Prabhu*, vol. 3, ed. Sacria Kuthirakkattel, (Pune: Janan-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2003), 219.

<sup>326</sup> Soares-Prabhu, “Prophetic Dimension of Religious Life,” 220.

<sup>327</sup> Cf. Bethany Nava Jeevan Province, *Bethany Mission Manual*, 3.

<sup>328</sup> Binger, “Contemplation and Service,” 191.

<sup>329</sup> Pope Francis, “To All Consecrated People,” §1

the history of the Malankara Catholic Church is identical. The history of the Church in Kerala and of the Malankara Church in particular, unfolds how Bethany Ashram responded positively to the concerns of the Church, and how the preservation and development of the identity of Syro-Malankara Church are important ingredients of the Bethany charism.<sup>330</sup> The definitive role played by the members in the reunion movement and pioneering mission works taken up in all diocese, the prompt response given to pastoral care among migrants, etc., are clear expressions of the ecclesial dimension. Right from the beginning (and even still today), the ecclesial dimension of the Bethany mission vision got (gets) deepened and bloomed (blooms) commendably. The new avenues of this Universal Church commitment open up so well down through the years. From North India to Africa, Europe and USA. Though originally primary commitment had been the spiritual renewal and evangelization of India, it emphasizes that the sensitivity to the concerns of the Universal Church cannot be ignored.<sup>331</sup> Since the Malankara Catholic Church is an oriental Church and bridge between other non-Catholic Churches, Bethany Ashram has great responsivity towards ecumenism and unity of the Churches.<sup>332</sup> The ecclesial dimension of mission of the Bethany charism shapes a healthy ecclesiology of communion and makes future contributions towards creative dialogues resulting in the realization of the true kingdom of God. The ecclesial dimension of the Bethany mission elicits a prophetic spirit with new understandings of mission in the present age for mission and evangelization in the widest sense.

### 3. MISSION IN POST CONCILIAR APPROACH

The theology of the mission according to the Second Vatican Council, in its nutshell is found in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic constitution of the Church. This is further developed in detail in the Decree *Ad Gentes* and also expressed in other decrees as well. *Ad Gentes*, the decree of Vatican II on mission, states:

“Mission is the term usually given to those undertakings by which the heralds of Gospel are sent by the Church and go forth in to the world to carry out the task of preaching and plating the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ... The special purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization and the plating of Church among those peoples and groups where she has not yet taken root.”<sup>333</sup>

The Council explicates mission in simple terms of evangelization and Church implantation, and its theological foundation is divine in relation to mission activity<sup>334</sup>. But at the same time, it facilitated a new way of thinking on the mission of the Church and broadened the understanding of evangelization (AG5). *Ad Gentes* marked an important step in the missionary consciousness of the Catholic Church. The greatest contribution is the rediscovery of the missionary nature of the Church (AG2) and the strong emphasis that it has been “sent

<sup>330</sup> Sylvester Kanjiramukalil, *Ecclesial identity of Syro Malankara Catholic Church* (Kottayam: Bethany Publications 1995), 165.

<sup>331</sup> Cf. Jose Mariadas, *Vision of Bethany's Mission in Modern Scenario*, 1 (2014): 1-12.

<sup>332</sup> Cf. Kanjiramukalil, *Ecclesial Identity*, 85-86.

<sup>333</sup> *Ad Gentes*, §6.

<sup>334</sup> Cf. Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology* (New York, NY: Orbis, 2006), 5.



to the nations to be the *universal sacrament of salvation*". (AG1) There were also different approaches towards mission from different schools of thought. For the German Münster School of missiology, conversion was the goal of mission and plantation and formation of Church was associated with the Louvain School of missiology followed by the theory of adaptation.<sup>335</sup> However, the various dimensions of mission and Church activities along with conciliar documents have provided broader meaning and descriptions in post conciliar documents especially in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio*.

In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) of 1975, Paul VI used the term 'evangelization' rather than mission in a border sense.<sup>336</sup> It teaches:

"evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change.... both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs."<sup>337</sup>

The aim of evangelization, therefore, is to effect this interior transformation. In a word, the Church evangelizes when, solely in virtue of that news which she proclaims, she renews the human race and all the activities in which they are engaged and finally, their lives and the whole environment which surrounds them. EN assert that there should take place an evangelization of the culture and an inculturation of the Gospel. (EN20) It further underlines the need of the Christian witness both as community and as individuals to be "a silent proclamation of Good News". (EN21) It states that Evangelization should also be committed to human advancement and liberation:

"Evangelization involves an explicit message... about the rights and duties of every human being, family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development- a message especially energetic today about liberation."<sup>338</sup>

This is for the first time the word 'liberation' appears in an official Catholic document and because of this, EN is considered as the 'Magna Carta' for the rebirth of interpretation of mission.<sup>339</sup>

The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) was issued by Pope John Paul II on 8 December 1990, to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mission decree of *Ad Gentes* and the fifteenth anniversary of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.<sup>340</sup> *Redemptoris Missio* focuses precisely on the missionary activity of the Church rather than the broader concept of evangelization. According to John Paul II, "Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. The Church cannot elude Christ's explicit mandate, nor deprive men and women of the 'Good News'

<sup>335</sup> Cf. Francis Anekwe Oborji, "Catholic theology of Mission 1910-2010," in *A Century of Catholic Mission*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 133-154.

<sup>336</sup> Cf. Roger p. Schroeder, "Catholic Teaching on Mission after Vatican II: 1975-2007," in *A Century of Catholic Mission*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 113.

<sup>337</sup> Paul VI, Pope. "*Evangelii Nuntiandi*," (1976 Jan 31): 5-76. ET in *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982), §18.

<sup>338</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §29.

<sup>339</sup> Cf. Schroeder, *Catholic Teaching*, 115.

<sup>340</sup> Cf. Schroeder, *Catholic Teaching*, 115.

about their being loved and saved by God”<sup>341</sup>. He defines mission as “a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways”<sup>342</sup>. The encyclical distinguishes three concrete situations: Mission *ad Gentes*, Pastoral activity, Re-evangelization or new evangelization.

- i. Mission *Ad gentes*: There is a situation in which Christ and his Gospel are not known or in which a mature Christian community is lacking. It is an effort of direct evangelization where the Church has not rooted and whose culture has not yet been influenced by the Gospel. (RM34)
- ii. Pastoral activity: There is need for sufficient pastoral care for the Christian communities where adequate and solid ecclesial structures exist. It is a process of giving suitable pastoral attention to deepen the faith of the community. (RM33)
- iii. Reevangelization or New Evangelization: There is an intermediate situation of countries and communities of Christian roots who have lost a living sense of faith. In this situation what is urgently needed is a new evangelization. (RM33)

Furthermore, the encyclical expanded the understanding of mission in terms of wider horizons. RM says that the first form of evangelization is life witness. The first form of witness is the very life of the mission of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community and proclamation is the constant priority of the mission. (RM 42-44) This can further lead to baptism, conversion and the formation of local Churches. (RM 46- 49) The encyclical affirms that inculturation enriches the Church in a variety of ways, especially in liturgy and theology. What is needed is an incarnating of the Gospel in people’s culture. The Church is described as the sign and promoter of human values. Peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood, concern for poor and needy, dignity of human person and human rights, works of charity and role women in the Church are foci of attention given by the document. The encyclical highlighted inter-religious dialogue as the part of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Dialogue can lead to mutual enrichment and to mutual advancement on the road of religious enquiry and experience (RM 52-60): “RM was the first papal encyclical to include such dialogue as the part of the Church’s evangelizing mission.”<sup>343</sup> Thus, *Redemptoris Missio* extended the understanding of mission, that the Church is missionary in the post conciliar period.

According to Dries Vanysacker:

“There is a paradigm shifts of Catholic theology of Mission coming from conversion of the individual souls, to conversion of the people from outside the visible Church, to Church plantation, to adaptation, to inculturation, to indigenization, to contextualization, to interreligious dialogue, to ecumenism, to *missio Dei*, to human promotion, and to witness the Word of God, and the evolution of specialized missionaries “ad gentes” to new evangelizing and to the missionary task of proclaiming and witnessing of every disciple by baptism, failed one further decisive step.”<sup>344</sup>

<sup>341</sup> John Paul II. “*Redemptoris Missio*” (1990 Dec 7), english translation in *Redemptoris Missio*: Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1990), §44.

<sup>342</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, §41.

<sup>343</sup> Schroeder, *Catholic Teaching*, 117.

<sup>344</sup> Dries Vanysacker, “Paradigm Shifts in the Evolution of the Catholic Theology of Mission,” *Encounter: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Reflections of Faith and Life* 8/1 (2017): 16 – 50.

The Church had retained the idea of territoriality or boundary as a major element of mission from a western perspective of mission with Rome as the center, until the arrival of Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation – *Evangelii Gaudium* in 2013. The exhortation admits that the new evangelization calls for a personal involvement and it is the responsibility of all baptized to be the agents of evangelization. Every Christian is a missionary and is called to be “missionary disciples”<sup>345</sup>. This kind of renewed approach to evangelization and mission brings joy to the world as it allows everyone to appropriate faith and to communicate it and get rooted in the soil of all cultures. In other words, it bypasses the focus on the territorial understanding of mission; “it is a mission from anywhere to everywhere and in every continent and indeed by the entire people of God wherever they are”<sup>346</sup>. The paradigm shifts in the understanding of mission calls for a renewal of mission understanding in all local Churches, people as well as religious institutes.

#### 4. VARYING IMAGES OF CONTEMPLATIVE DIMENSION

As an encounter, mission is a meeting with a particular place heritage and culture. India is a land of multiple religious traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and so on. A contemplative spirit is indeed the most necessary requisite for understanding anything of the religious and spiritual message of India, and also for establishing any real and fruitful relation with deeply spiritual religions like Hinduism.<sup>347</sup> A contemplative spirit arises from the ascetic traditions of the Hindu religion. Moreover, an oriental monastic tradition is also conducive to a contemplative dimension. Since Bethany Ashram shares both the Indian and the oriental features of religious life, the rejuvenation of the Ashram movement can contribute more effectively towards a better dialogue with religion and culture of India.

##### 4.1. Revival of the Ashram Movement

A particular religious movement can be better understood in the concrete historical and social context it has originated and developed. The Christian Ashram movement was the product of a new religious consciousness in a specific religious and ecclesial context.<sup>348</sup> All the Christian Ashrams were began by charismatic personalities as an expression of their spiritual search and for the experience of a different way of life.

“In other words, they gave shape to the call for change and presented a model of a new form of Christian organization which attempted to integrate traditional Christianity and traditional Hinduism and to construct new patterns of social relationships.”<sup>349</sup>

In the Indian heritage, everything is viewed with a spiritual perspective. Ashram is the place where the seeker wakes up to this inner divine depth of reality. Hence, it is more than a static

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<sup>345</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, “*Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation* (November 2013),” [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) [accessed 12 November] §119-121.

<sup>346</sup> Vanyacker, “Paradigm Shifts”, 50.

<sup>347</sup> Cf. Abhishiktananda, *The Church in India: An Essay in Christian Self-Criticism* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1971), 41.

<sup>348</sup> Cf. Helen Ralston, *Christian Ashrams: A New Religious Movement in Contemporary India* (Leiwiston and Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), 9-11.

<sup>349</sup> Ralston, *Christian Ashrams*, 13.

place. Ashram is rather a movement.<sup>350</sup> Ashram is the place where one encounters the Divine within and all around oneself.<sup>351</sup> The basic thrust in all Ashrams is to offer a contemplative atmosphere conducive to intense spiritual and intellectual seeking, an all-embracing simplicity of life style coming from authentic renunciation, a compassionate attitude towards all, and in harmony living with nature. Bethany Ashram as envisioned by Mar Ivanios is a movement within the Church based on its contemplative nature in tune with Hindu ascetic traditions for the evangelization of India.

Ashram played different roles varying from centers of hospitality to being the heart of spiritual treasure. As centers of spiritual direction, Ashrams have a special role in the life of the Church and society. People come for retreat and spiritual guidance to the Ashrams. Through their intense contemplative pursuits and ascetic practices, the members emanate spiritual vibrations as a part of their healing ministry. From ancient times onwards, Ashrams were considered as power houses of spiritual renewal and by pursuit after ultimate questions of life. Bethany Ashram was the power house of the Malankara Catholic Church and expressed it so creatively in various ecclesial, social and economic lives of the people in a concrete context. Unlike the western monasteries, both in Indian and in Christian asceticism, one can see a corresponding movement of concern for the world, of the rediscovery within God and of the service of one's fellow men out of love for God.<sup>352</sup> The Indian Ashrams are basically contemplative, and their contemplative nature opened to the welfare of the society and to the people for a holistic development of humanity. It is a meeting place of Indian ascetic nature and Christian monastic life where there is the possibility for a genuine dialogue to take place. The mission of Bethany Ashram is to continue its movement and revive its contemplative identity in dynamic ways not to remain as a static agent limited to the institutional structures.

#### **4.2. Mission as Inculturation in a Pluralistic Context**

The term 'inculturation' has achieved a prominent place in mission theology and is affiliated as a means of evangelization.<sup>353</sup> Nevertheless, historically the reality of inculturation has existed in the Church since the beginning of Christianity. Once the question of the admission of the gentiles into the Church was settled by the Apostles, the Church began to spread in to the gentile world (Acts 15) and adopted various forms throughout the centuries with the close

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<sup>350</sup> Cf. Vandana Mataji, "The Christian Ashram Movement Today," in *Christian Ashrams: A Movement with a Future* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 76-80.

<sup>351</sup> There are diverse types of Ashrams. The word 'Ashram' implies a special Indian approach and way of living in accordance with the Indian spiritual tradition. Some Ashrams keep a particular way of living however oriented toward social activities, while some other Ashrams will be almost exclusively devoted to contemplative life and spiritual training according to the most traditional pattern of Ashrams. These are places of meeting and encounter between Christianity and Hinduism, precisely because the inmates of Ashram are already in their external and even more in their internal life the living point of fusion between both traditions. Hindus will find Christianity being lived in a way really congenial to Hindu spiritual longings. On the other hand, the places in which Christians will be able to be acquainted with the richness of Hindu traditions are assumed and integrated into the richness of the Church in its all possible aspects: liturgical, ascetical, and theological be like. Cf. Abhishiktananda, *The Church in India*, 52-59. Bethany Ashram blended these two types of the Ashram vision when it was established.

<sup>352</sup> Cf. Bede Griffiths, *Christian Ashram: Essays towards A Hindu- Christian Dialogue* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 10-12.

<sup>353</sup> Cf. Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology* (New York, NY: Orbis, 2006), 17.

encounter with other cultures. Therefore, inculturation is not something entirely new in the life and history of the Church.<sup>354</sup> But a transformation of its understanding occurred in Vatican II and the post conciliar teachings. In *Ad Gentes* inculturation is considered as the very context of the missionary activity of the Church and the effect of missionary activity on cultures (AG22). *Gaudium et Spes* promoted the Church's openness to the plurality of cultures (GS2), the affirmation of the vital relationship between cultures and messages of salvation, and the awareness of the Church's mission to enter in to communion with different cultures.<sup>355</sup> The council accepted the plurality of cultures and emphasized that together with the gospel, culture is an essential and constitutive element for understanding of faith.<sup>356</sup> The subsequent documents on mission also highlighted the necessity of inculturation for the life and evangelization of the Church.

The encyclical of John Paul II *Redemptoris Missio* on missionary activity describes inculturation as:

“it is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation means ‘the intimate transformation of the authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures’. The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church's reflection and practice... through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different culture and at the same time introduces peoples together with their cultures, in to her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is and a more effective instrument of mission.”<sup>357</sup>

The broadened understandings on inculturation brought in different terms like ‘adaptation’ ‘indigenization’, ‘localization’. Those terms together with ‘inculturation’ have been projected to show the meaning and process involved in integrating the gospel and the culture in a particular context. In the present scenario the term ‘contextualization’ is used as synonymous to a wider understanding of ‘inculturation’<sup>358</sup>. However, in a world which becomes more mutually interconnected and globalized the understanding of ‘inculturation’ is further enhanced as “inter-culturation”<sup>359</sup>.

The theological basis of inculturation is rooted in the incarnation. Because:

“the basic argument is that just as Jesus Christ, the word of God, became incarnate in a human culture, in the Jewish milieu, the gospel of Jesus Christ should be allowed to be inculturated in the local culture and context.”<sup>360</sup>

<sup>354</sup> Cf. Oborji, *Concepts of Mission*, 18.

<sup>355</sup> Cf. Manuel Vallipalam. “Inculturation in India: A Theological Analysis of Inculturation in Relation to the Theology of the Local Churches and Its Application to the Church in India in the Areas of Liturgy, Theology and Evangelization” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Theology, KU Leuven, 1995),48.

<sup>356</sup> Cf. Jose M.de Mesa, “Mission and Inculturation,” *A Century of Catholic Mission*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013) 226.

<sup>357</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, §52.

<sup>358</sup> Mesa, “Mission and Inculturation,” 230.

<sup>359</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*,452.

<sup>360</sup> Oborji, *Concepts of Mission* ,19.

So, it has two aspects: the presence of the process of integration of the gospel and culture in every culture and the universal dimension of Christian mission. Therefore:

“inculturation is the in-depth re-appropriation and re-expression, as well as fresh rethinking and reformulation of the gospel in each human culture in a manner that is dialogically affirming and prophetic. It affects the persons in a fundamental way because people are inextricably cultural. As a participation in the very action of God as the life-giving Word becoming flesh, inculturation makes the *Missio Dei* Visible and palpable in cultural terms and is, therefore a constitute dimension of mission.”<sup>361</sup>

The gospel in relation to culture has twofold tasks: it must find embodiment in a culture to become a local Church; it must also try to transform the culture of the people with the gospel values among whom it is made present by this local Church.<sup>362</sup> To inculturate is, therefore, to build up an authentic, living local Church.

#### 4.2.1. The Syro Malankara Church and Cultural Encounter in India

Inculturation is one of the main elements of evangelization on which the Church in India in general and the Syro Malankara Church in particular has to focus in its missionary activity. The eastern Churches were well in advance than the western Church in this question of adaptation or inculturation, both in the field of liturgy and in the field of evangelization.<sup>363</sup> This is the case with the Syro Malankara Church in India that followed the traditions of the St. Thomas Christian legacy in the life and the culture of the local people. They were a people perfectly integrated to their cultural context and had a life style similar to that of indigenous among whom they were living for centuries. They followed many of the local practices related to birth, marriage, funeral, dress, food, construction of the houses, construction of the Churches, festivals etc.<sup>364</sup> Moreover, during the beginning of the missionary expansion the missionaries of the Malankara Church integrated many customs and traditions of the local people. But this does not mean that there is no scope for more cultural adaptation in the Syro Malankara Church. As the Church received the canonical authority for mission all over India, learning from the past, the Syro Malankara Church should follow a more open approach to the cultures of India. The Church in the mission should make earnest efforts to assimilate the local culture in its lifestyle and worship. It shall never be the importing of one culture from part of the India to another part.

As an individual Church, the Malankara Church has a great responsibility to carry out the task of inculturation. According to Paul VI, evangelization as a world-wide concern is the responsibility of the whole or the universal Church and is not an individual act (EN60). However, the pope adds that this universal Church is closely involved in the particular Churches which comprise this or that particular human race, speaking this or that particular language. Each Church will have its own cultural heritage, its own expressions, its own human foundations, and these features will give a certain unity to each (EN62).

<sup>361</sup> Mesa, “Mission and Inculturation,” 224.

<sup>362</sup> Cf. Amalados, *Trends in Mission*, 366.

<sup>363</sup> Cf. Xavier Kochuparampil, *Evangelization in India: A Theological Analysis of the Missionary Role of the Syro Malabar Church in the Light of the Vatican II and Post Conciliar Documents* (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1993), 473.

<sup>364</sup> Cf. Aerthayil, *The Spiritual Heritage*, 41-49.

John Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* in 1990 further reiterates what former papal documents have said about inculturation. According to RM, the local Churches have to carry out the task of inculturation in the areas of evangelization, worship, theology and charitable works, and such endeavors of the local Churches will enrich the universal Church (RM 52). In order that the expression of the Christian experience of the ecclesial communities be original, attempt is to be made to express more in an indigenous manner by integrating local the cultural elements without sacrificing the Christian identity. The particular Churches of the same region are encouraged to work in communion with each other and with the whole Church in this process of inculturation. The particular Churches will be capable of translating the treasure of faith in to a legitimate variety of expressions in their own context. (RM 53)

As said above, the Syro Malankara Church is in a better position to make further encounter with the Indian cultures. It should not be limited to the particular areas of Church life. Therefore:

“Inculturation has to cover the total reality of the Church. It should refer to the formation of the local community of Christians and training of the clergy and religious; their life style; incarnate gospel in to the concrete situation; family society, economic, and political systems etc; art architecture, sculpture, painting, decoration, music, dance, drama etc; theology, spirituality, preaching, catechesis, worship and service.”<sup>365</sup>

Inculturation is to be extended to all aspects of Church life. For achieving this goal, the Syro Malankara Church has to commit itself to the social and cultural traditions of each place where evangelization is taking place. Missionaries have to see inculturation as a life style, adopting a manner of living solidarity with the people. However, the inculturation cannot be imposed from above; it must be a process of growth from below. The role of missionaries is not to initiate and to enforce, but rather to direct and to coordinate according to the culture and the situation.

However, Amalados criticizes that after two thousand years, Christians have not yet learned the art of encountering an elite culture. Where they are a minority as in India, they lead a double existence: at the religious institutional level they relate to the foreign culture; at the socio-cultural level, either they relate to the culture of the people around them, or try to integrate foreign cultural elements, thus living as foreigners in their own country.<sup>366</sup> In his speech after the Episcopal Ordination, Mar Ivanios observed that “after Christianity has been rooted in Malankara it still remains foreign; so the urgent need of the Church is the inculturation of Christianity.”<sup>367</sup> Very often in India the Christian Churches are branded as foreign modes of behavior and life style of the members of the Church. The role of the missionaries in the process of inculturation is significant and the task of Bethany Ashram is very much acknowledged in this area of evangelization in India.

#### 4.2.2. Ashrams as Centers of Inculturation

<sup>365</sup> Kochuparampil, *Evangelization in India*, 481.

<sup>366</sup> Cf. Amalados, “The challenges of Mission Today,” 366.

<sup>367</sup> Inchakkalody, *Mar Ivanios*, 183.

In the field of inculturation, Bethany Ashram needs to grow with its own tradition and responsibility to a great extent in the Malankara Catholic Church. The main accusation against Christians in India is that they are considered as foreign in outlook by their own people. In this context the role of Bethany Ashram in the process of inculturation is enormous. It has been widely felt that the Church in India has not really become truly an Indian Church. The paradigms of the Church's theology and spirituality, the symbols of its art and rituals, the forms of its administration and services centers are all to a great extent foreign still. In this context Bethany Ashram can play a vital role by living a life according to the contemplative and rich cultural heritage of India, since it is a meeting place of both cultures. Today people are increasingly less bothered about the difference between religions, rites, rituals of religions and more concerned about interior dimension, a religion of inwardness.<sup>368</sup> A slow shift towards spirituality rather than religion. Ashrams are surely the place where people can come to learn this 'contemplative' prayer, as the Church calls it.

The introduction of vernacular liturgy and practices accelerated the mission work of the Malankara Catholic Church in the early years. The main challenge of Bethany Ashram is to adopt the language of local people and incorporate it in the liturgy of the Malankara Church. Both the process of evangelization and inculturation have to go hand in hand. The Gospel must be communicated to the people through a medium which is best accessible to them. The liturgy has to be celebrated with the local cultural elements. West Syrian liturgy has a very rich contemplative tradition. As India is a country, famous for yoga, meditation and contemplative experiences, the members of Bethany Ashram can imbibe this tradition in Ashrams and integrate it into the spiritual life of the Indian Church. So, an important task of the Bethany mission will be the formation of an ecclesial community which is really Indian in all aspects.

### 4.3. Mission as a Dialogue with Other Religions

Dialogue with religions has been identified as a progressive dimension of mission and one of the serious challenges the Church would face in the twenty-first century in a global pluralistic context.<sup>369</sup> Dialogue is necessary; it is the only option in today's multi religious and globalized world due to several factors including renaissance of worldwide religions and spread of secularism: "Dialogue is today the norm and necessary manner of every form of christian mission because Christian mission is participation in the mission of God, and God's being and action is dialogical."<sup>370</sup> The traditional understanding of the Church that "outside the Church there is no salvation" was replaced by the possibility of salvation for all people of good will (LG 16) by the Second Vatican council. It recognizes in other religious traditions "a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men"<sup>371</sup> (NA 2), and also the presence of the Holy spirit who "in a manner known only to God, offers to every man the possibility of being

<sup>368</sup> Cf. Vandana Mataji, "Finding our Roots before we take Wing," in *Christian Ashram: A Movement with a Future*, ed. Vandana Mataji (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 9.

<sup>369</sup> Cf. Oborji, *Concepts of Mission*, 21

<sup>370</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A theology of Mission for Today*, (New York, NY: Orbis, 2005), 378.

<sup>371</sup> "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*." In *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, (London – Washington, DC: Seed and Ward, 1990) §2.



associated with this paschal mystery”<sup>372</sup> (GS 22). This paradigm shift urged an attitude of dialogue and is expressed in all post conciliar documents as well. In *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II acknowledged inter religious mission as part of the Church’s evangelizing mission. The dialogue is understood as a method and means of mutual enrichment and knowledge, and as one of the expressions of mission.<sup>373</sup> There are four forms of interreligious dialogue than can be practiced in any pluralistic context. The first one is ‘dialogue of life’ which invites everyone to enter into the daily lives of one another, with the intention to get to know each other, sharing of oneself, one’s life and one’s experiences with others of different faiths. The second one is ‘dialogue of action’ which promotes interfaith corporation towards justice, peace, social, political and religious harmony. The third one is about ‘dialogue of theological exchange’ which can be done by experts or officials of different faith on various theological topics. The fourth kind is ‘dialogue of religious experience’ which is accessible to common people by participating and by exchange of spirituality, forms of prayer for mutual enrichment.<sup>374</sup> Dialogue prepares the way for evangelization gradually and any form of dialogue is an attempt towards mutual understanding, sharing and enrichment at different levels of human life and particularly in contacts with different religious experiences.

Historically, St. Thomas Christians who lived among the non-Christians preserved and lived their faith. Thus, through their life of witness they tried to diffuse the gospel message among the Hindu brethren. They did not use any type of coercion or inducement to make them Christians. Mar Ivanios also had the same vision on mission in which he advocated the Bethany monks that they should never use any sort of compulsion over people to become Christian.<sup>375</sup> Such a missionary position of the Thomas Christians and Mar Ivanios is confirmed by the Vatican II document *Ad Gentes* which clearly teaches that: “The Church strictly forbids that anyone should be forced to accept the faith or be induced or enticed by unworthy devices” (AG13). The mission of Bethany Ashrams is to continue the legacy as well as to string along with profound challenge especially in Indian situation. In a multi-religious context like India, there are many different obstacles for a fruitful interreligious encounter today such as, prejudice, secularism, fundamentalism, communalism and the political situation.<sup>376</sup> However, Ashrams are the best platform for promoting a profitable interreligious encounter.

#### 4.3.1. Ashrams: Places for Promoting Inter Religious Dialogue

Ashrams are the privileged places of dialogue with people of different religious traditions.<sup>377</sup> Ashrams facilitate different forms of dialogue as they are open to the people of different religions, cultivate an atmosphere of contemplation, take up the initiate of dialogue of action and offer the people a place for dialogue of religious experience. As an institution or establishment that has interreligious dialogue at the socio cultural, intellectual or religious

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<sup>372</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, §22.

<sup>373</sup> Cf. Edmund Chia, “Mission as Inter-Religious Dialogue”, in *A Century of Catholic Mission*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 220-221.

<sup>374</sup> Cf. Bevans, *Constants in Context*, 383-384.

<sup>375</sup> Cf. Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 128.

<sup>376</sup> Cf. Michel Amaladoss, *Making All Things New: Dialogue, Pluralism & Evangelization in Asia*, (New York, NY: Orbis, 1990), 16.

<sup>377</sup> Cf. Abhishiktananda, *The Church in India*, 46-64.

level as one of its major aims, the Ashram can be seen as a center for dialogue and theological exchange. Whilst organized dialogue has its own place in the present set up, a personal contact with the religious leaders of other religions can be carried out more effectively and more amicably in the context of an Ashram.<sup>378</sup>

In this sense Bethany Ashram can make a significant contribution to the promotion interreligious dialogue and fellowship. Genuine interreligious experiences take place at the level of sharing spiritual experiences in the context of a living-together, where people of different faith are invited to share. The 'dialogue of life' includes the contemplative atmosphere, closeness to common people, harmony with nature, simplicity of life, sharing of the food habits, generous hospitality and above all the genuine openness to Divine.<sup>379</sup> Ashram can play a vital role in the formation of an Indian Christian theology, spirituality, liturgy as well as in opening the Church at a deeper level to other religions. The influence of the Ashrams may not be felt in a direct and manifest way, but in an indirect manner the Ashrams can significantly contribute to the creation of a Church that is Indian. The task of Bethany Ashram is to construct a theology and spirituality on the basis of Indian and eastern spirituality to enter in to a genuine dialogue with people different faith and promote authentic dialogue in all forms.

## 5. VARIOUS MEANS OF ACTIVE DIMENSION

The active dimension of mission aims to express God's actions in this world for the realization of the Kingdom of God. The entire action gets its face and form in numerous ways according to the context in which it is actualized. The primary task of evangelization is bringing Good News to all and testifying to the Word of God. Thus, the Word of God enters in to the world and transforms the human community. The Good News announced by the Word of God cannot be isolated from the good news of human development. The works on the behalf of justice, peace and liberation are constitutive parts of the active dimension of mission and all efforts towards humanization as the integral part of mission.

### 5.1. Mission as Witness and Proclamation.

There is an intrinsic link between witnessing and proclamation in evangelization.<sup>380</sup> The witnessing dimension of mission is inevitable in the contemporary world, where authentic witnesses are always recognized and preferred. Pope Paul VI affirms that "the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian Life."<sup>381</sup> In the context of present quest for authenticity, an unquestionable witness of life becomes, more than ever, prominent condition for mission because to be authentic one should practice what they preach. According to the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*: "The witnessing of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission. The first form of witness is the very life of the

<sup>378</sup> Cf. Iswar Prasad, "Inter Religious Dialogue and Ashrams," in *Christian Ashram: A Movement with a Future*, ed. Vandana Mataji (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 43-49.

<sup>379</sup> Cf. Paul Puthanangady ed., *The Church in India: after the All India Seminar, 1969, An Evaluation of the life and Ministry of the Catholic Church* (Bangalore: National Committee, 2000), 149-152.

<sup>380</sup> Cf. Roger P. Schroeder, *What is the Mission of the Church: A Guide for Catholics* (New York, NY: Orbis, 2008), 113.

<sup>381</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §41.

missionary, of the family and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living.”<sup>382</sup>

Life witness as a method of mission is a quite imperative tool where explicit proclamation and other manifested forms of mission are not possible for various reasons. The People in the present situation put more trust in the witnessing aspect than in teachers, more in experience than in teachings, and more in life and action than in theories.<sup>383</sup> Witness to the love of God is manifested in the love of the neighbor and in all the activities of the Church. The encyclical adds that the evangelical witness includes concern for the people, charity towards poor, the weak and those who suffer... commitment to peace, justice, human rights and human promotion is also witness to the Gospel. (RM 42)

Witness as mission takes place at various levels. First of all, it happens with *individuals* in their faith lives. At this level, people with their individual efforts, including saints as well as ordinary baptized Christians in their day-to-day life, at work in places and in neighborhoods, live a life of witness. Secondly witness transpires ‘*on the communal level*’ as a community especially at parochial or diocesan level. Thirdly, witness carried out on another dimension in and through *universal and institutional* dimensions. The institutional witness is given through Church run institutions such as schools, hospitals, orphanages and social service centers. However, sometimes the Church failed in the life of witnessing through sexual scandals and issues related universally. Against such failures, it is a powerful witness to show solidarity with victims and willingness to confess its faults has a universal dimension of witness. The fourth level happens in the *common witness* to Jesus by all christian Churches and denominations. Common witness calls for collaboration and cooperation in the proclamation of the Gospel in order to present an undivided Church in the world through ecumenical endeavors.<sup>384</sup>

All heralds of the gospel, and in particular the consecrated people, can play an important role in evangelization through the witness of their life. They have to become witnesses of the holiness of life to which they are being called and set apart. Their life of prayer, penance and silence is a powerful means of evangelization. Therefore, the consecrated people are to become aware of the presence of the Lord in them and express this presence in their activities. This is what is meant by Christian witnessing and this demands the men and women of interior prayer life to become real witnesses. Consequently, the sharing of the spiritual experience and bearing witness in life are essential for evangelization.<sup>385</sup>

Witness and proclamation are complimentary to each other. The Church teaches that the proclamation of the Gospel is the permanent priority of the mission (RM 44). In 1991 the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue elucidated proclamation as:

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<sup>382</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, §42

<sup>383</sup> Cf. Jonathan Y. Tan, “Mission as Witness and Proclamation,” in *A Century of Catholic Mission*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 179.

<sup>384</sup> Cf. Schroeder, *What is the Mission of the Church*, 113-115.

<sup>385</sup> Cf. Felix Wilfred, *The Emergent Church in a New India*, (Trivandrum: Jayamatha Training Institute Press, 1988), 7.

“*Proclamation* is the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church. This proclamation can be solemn and public, as for instance on the day of Pentecost or a simple private conversation. It leads naturally to catechesis which aims at deepening this faith. Proclamation is the foundation, center, and summit of evangelization.”<sup>386</sup>

To a missionary, the Church look up to for explicit proclamation of the Gospel. The foundation of evangelization lies in the Word of God and the content of the proclamation is Christ who was crucified, died and risen (RM 44). A missionary, as the agent in proclamation of the “the word of God has the power and grace to call people to conversion and a new life”<sup>387</sup>. However, missionaries are not the only agents of evangelization because evangelization is the responsibility of all the baptized and all Christians are called to be “missionary disciples”. And in this general responsibility, consecrated people are expected to prepare other Christians to go to the outskirts to preach the gospel. (EG 120)

## 5.2. Mission as Liberation, Peace and Justice

“Justice, Peace, and Liberation can be derived as constitutive principles of mission from Scripture and the tradition of the Church.”<sup>388</sup> Liberation has a double meaning: primarily, the Church engages in mission of announcing the salvation and redemption; along with this, it cannot ignore the other aspect of mission towards the promotion of humanity, peace and justice.<sup>389</sup> Pope Francis emphasizes that there is always a link between evangelization and human advancement in the Gospel.<sup>390</sup> (EG 178) John Paul II also explains that for the Church as follows:

“human beings are the principal agent of development, not money or technology. Through the gospel message, the Church offers a force for liberation which promotes development precisely because it leads to conversion of heart and of ways of thinking, fosters the recognition of each person's dignity, encourages solidarity, commitment and service of one's neighbor, and gives everyone a place in God's plan, which is the building of his kingdom of peace and justice.”<sup>391</sup> (RM 58-59)

The mission of the Church in any context is to act in ways to promote new life to people, especially the poor and marginalized.<sup>392</sup> Historically the Church has always made it a point to involve in society to bring liberation and transformation. The contemporary world gives raises innumerable challenges affecting different areas of human life like, social, political, economic, cultural and ecological. The alarming increase of unemployment and hunger,

<sup>386</sup> Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, “*Dialogue and Proclamation* (May 1991) [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interrelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_19051991\\_dialogue-and-proclamatio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interrelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html) (accessed October 3 2018) §10.

<sup>387</sup> Schroeder, *What is the Mission of the Church*, 115.

<sup>388</sup> Paulo Suess, “The Constitutive Nature of Justice, Peace and Liberation for Mission,” in *A Century of Catholic Mission*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 196.

<sup>389</sup> Cf. Oborji, *Concepts of Mission*, 23.

<sup>390</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, §178.

<sup>391</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, §58-59.

<sup>392</sup> Cf. Kenneth R. Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: New Directions for Church in Mission*, (California, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2010), 24.

human right violations and injustice, transnational migration, unequal distribution of income and wealth, ruthless exploitation of labour, bribe and corruption, institutionalized violence and war, mismanagement of media, terrorism and religious fundamentalism, and destruction of the nature and ecology need a special liberative attention and immediate intervention from the part of the Church.<sup>393</sup>

## 6. DIFFERING FACETS OF ECCLESIAL DIMENSION

The ecclesial dimension relies on all the evangelization efforts within the Church as well as the encounter with other ecclesial and social realities. The identity of every ecclesial community is formed in the background of its particular historical heritage. The renewal and relational aspects are two exceptional responsibility of Syro Malankara Catholic Church. It is the constant revival within the Church and a relationship of unity and reconciliation with other Churches and realities.

### 6.1. Mission as New Evangelization and Pastoral Care.

The New Evangelization is a reaffirmation of the Church's mission particularly to traditional Christian countries to whom the gospel is received but faith lacks and failing to give genuine witness to authentic christian life (RM 33):

“The goal of new evangelization is the reappropriation of the Gospel in those cultural contexts which have known Christ, accepted him and then rejected him. It seeks the (re)conversion of those peoples who have ceased to practice their faith while continuing to live in a culture which in large part has absorbed gospel principles and values.”<sup>394</sup>

It starts with a conversion of hearts and a renewal of their vocation as a Christian. It is a process of rediscovering the original faith life, to regain what is lost, embrace an active faith life replacing the wavering one. It is an opportunity to all the people including bishops, priests, religious and laity to reinvent the commitment towards faith life. This New Evangelization must mean both continuity and change, continuity with authentic tradition of the ecclesial community and change to meet the challenges of a new context.<sup>395</sup> “The new evangelization must be new in zeal, new in methods, and new in expressions.”<sup>396</sup> In its reality New Evangelization is an emergent requirement not only to the cultures where faith lacks but also to the Church communities where decadence in ardent faith occurs due to various reasons. Therefore, the Church has to discern the changes in ecclesial, cultural, and social spheres and will have to propose adequate methods reinvigorate the zeal in the Christian witnessing.

The Syro Malankara Catholic Church considers New Evangelization primarily as a movement and a way of living. Therefore, New Evangelization demands spiritual renewal

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<sup>393</sup> Cf. Suess, “The Constitutive Nature,” 197-205.

<sup>394</sup> Daniel Ang, “The New Evangelization, and the New Ecclesial Movements: Reflections on an Emerging Scene,” *Compass Kensington* 46/2 (2012): 6-12.

<sup>395</sup> Cf. Rudolf C Heredia, “Renewal and Revival: A New Evangelization for a New India,” in *New Evangelization: Asian Perspectives*, ed. Joy Thomas and Victor Sagayam Zackarias (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2012), 117-145.

<sup>396</sup> Oborji, *Concepts of Mission*, 13.

and empowerment of the believing community which necessitates a new exodus and a new Pentecost in our times, in the context of local Churches.<sup>397</sup> This spirit of New Evangelization, namely a new exodus and a new Pentecost had started in the Malankara Church by the establishment of Bethany Ashram, through the life and activities of Bethany monks. However, it is the responsibility of Bethany Ashram to continue the renewal and the revival of the same spirit of a new exodus and a new Pentecost in the present situation. It is the responsibility to impart and arouse a new missionary zeal and impetus on renewal of the Malankara Catholic Church especially in the context of present day challenges as per the charism of the congregation. The efforts should primarily include the efforts towards the spiritual renovation, providing of adequate pastoral care, the reunion of separated brethren and the evangelization of India.

## 6.2. Mission as Ecumenism and Reconciliation

One of the emerging dimensions of mission is identified as the ecumenical dialogue with its new perspectives and challenges.<sup>398</sup> No Christian Churches can keep apart from this movement because ecumenism is essentially connected with the mission that the Lord has entrusted to the Church.<sup>399</sup> According to the Second Vatican Council, the ecumenism means “the initiatives and activities planned and Undertaken, according to the various needs of the Church and as opportunities offer, to promote Christian unity.”<sup>400</sup> (UR 4) The goal of ecumenism is the unity of all Churches. However, the division among the Christians affects the credibility of the gospel message and often missionaries are confronted with criticism, complaints and are accused of the counter witness.<sup>401</sup> (EG 244-246) “The work of Christians in society to bring healing and reconciliation is dependent for its credibility on the christian community itself being able to achieve reconciliation in its own inner life.”<sup>402</sup> So there is a need for a serious commitment towards ecumenism. It is therefore, a pursuit for cooperation and integration, for integrity and unity, for reconciliation and healing by dialogue.

More often ecumenism is misunderstood as a proselytism. Ecumenism is not gathering people into your fold; rather it aims at a mutual encounter between authentic and legitimate traditions that had suffered throughout the centuries and integration of various christian communities that need a healing.<sup>403</sup> The Syro Malankara Church has played a vital role in area of ecumenism and restoration of peace and unity among the divided Christians communities in Kerala. The reunion movement and efforts of Bethany Ashram for ecumenical endeavors that preceded it have contributed to the mission of the universal Church in general and to the Malankara Church in particular. However, the mission of reconciliation and full communion is an integral part of evangelization in the Indian context.

<sup>397</sup> Cf. Baselios Cleemis, “Syro Malankara Catholic Church and New Evangelization: Challenges and Prospects,” in *New Evangelization: Asian Perspectives*, ed. Joy Thomas and Victor Sagayam Zackarias (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2012), 231.

<sup>398</sup> Cf. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 46-467.

<sup>399</sup> Cf. Cyril Baselios, *Ecumenism in Emerging Trends in Malankara Catholic Theology: Vision and Contributions of Cyril Mar Baselios*, ed. Issac Thottunkal, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Rome: Mar Thoma Yogam, 1996), 191.

<sup>400</sup> “Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*.” In *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London – Washington, DC: Seed and Ward, 1990), §4.

<sup>401</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, §244-246.

<sup>402</sup> Kirk J Andrew, *Mission under Scrutiny: Confronting Contemporary Challenges* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 127.

<sup>403</sup> Cf. Baselios, *Ecumenism*, 195.

Bethany Ashram has a special vocation for ecumenical dialogue and reconciliation which includes engaging with the members of different non-Catholic oriental Churches in building bridges of peace and unity.

The mission as reconciliation cannot be limited to the ecclesial context alone rather it has a wider relevance in the present-day scenario of war and violence, racism, violence against women children, sexual abuse in the Church, exploitation of earth, greater social polarization invites a mission of healing and forgiveness.<sup>404</sup> It has both vertical and horizontal dimensions in which God's activities express vertical dimension and our response to Gods call is expressed in efforts to stop injustice, violence and pain and to operate as the ministers of reconciliation.<sup>405</sup> Hence, the active participation in mission of reconciliation is an urgent task that Bethany Ashram should promptly respond to.

### **Conclusion**

We analyzed the various dimensions of the Bethany Mission according to the Charism of the congregation. The dynamic relationship between contemplative, active and ecclesial characteristics which are indeed interrelated and complimentary are expressed in the various missionary efforts. Contemplative dimension is inherent in the active dimension and vice versa. Action without contemplation will end up as social activism. The contemporary challenge of all ecclesial activities is the integration of contemplation and action. The catholic missiology and practices placed on the doctrinal traditions, teachings of the Church (papal or episcopal) and deeply rooted in the Scripture. The number of documents issued by the magisterium over the years from *Ad Gentes*, through Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* are now culminated in Pope Francis's *Evangelii Gaudium*. All these have in a consistent and progressive manner explicated different aspects of mission. The new trends expanded understanding of mission including dialogue, inculturation, ecumenism, witness, reconciliation and so on. The paradigm shifts in the understanding of mission poses new challenges to the traditional practices and mission is no more understood in terms of territorial axis but is approached with a universal orientation. The study helped us to trace out the major elements of Bethany mission in relation to its Charism and against the post-conciliar approaches.

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<sup>404</sup> Cf. Robert J. Schreiter, "Reconciliation as a Model of Mission," in *A Century of Catholic Mission*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 233- 238.

<sup>405</sup> Schreiter, "Reconciliation as a Model of Mission," 235.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The primary goal of our study was to initiate a comprehensive vision of mission history of Bethany Ashram. Our research was divided into three parts. We started our investigation with a study of the pre-historical context of the Syro-Malankara Church and the progression of the missionary vision of Mar Ivanios. In the second part we analyzed the establishment of Bethany Ashram in the Orthodox Church by Mar Ivanios. We made a descriptive study on the historical evolution of Bethany Ashram and its missionary dynamism. Our study shows that the history of the Ashram and its mission can be mainly divided into four stages. First, immediately after the foundation mission in the Orthodox Church. Second, the Reunion Movement and mission for the growth and development of Malankara Church. Third, mission after becoming a pontifical congregation, expansion of pastoral care among the migrants and integral approach towards evangelization. Fourth, towards a provincial administrative system till today and participation in the universal mission. In the final part, we evaluated the mission and charism of Bethany Ashram in comparison with the new understandings of mission expressed in the post-conciliar documents.

We have analyzed the historical and ecclesial background of Indian Church and the role of Mar Ivanios in establishing the Syro Malankara Catholic Church. At the same time, we have examined the various factors which shaped the missionary vision of Mar Ivanios especially the influence of Edinburg World Missionary Conference in 1910. It was a landmark in the history of mission and can be traced back as the origin of Ecumenical Movements. Our investigation into the life of Mar Ivanios reveals that he had a unique missiology which he implemented in all the aspects of Church life prior to the conciliar thoughts. Our study shows that the foundation of Bethany in 1919 an epoch in the history of the Church in India. Bethany Ashram was started as a religious movement in the Orthodox Church and brought a renaissance in all fields of church life. After reunion movement Bethany Ashram responded positively to the missionary efforts of the Malankara Catholic Church especially in Mission *Ad gentes*, establishing church communities, pastoral care among migrants, educational activities, media and communication, various social service projects for the poor and marginalized in the society. The mission history of Bethany Ashram is interwoven with history of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church. The studies prove that Vatican II generated a new missionary attitude which expanded the activities of Bethany Ashram and helped it to flourish in various places by establishing new Ashrams. Mission regained a vigor once more due to the participation in the mission of another Oriental Church and reverse Mission. It surveyed Bethany Mission as it was practiced and evolved over its hundred years of pilgrimage in fulfilling *Missio Dei* and the significant changes and shifts over a period of time.

Although there were tremendous progress, there were also certain crises after the reunion movement. The members were dispersed in several communities under different leaderships. It took a long time to reorganize the congregation which diminished the mission activities and expansion over a period of time. The early missionaries were ardently committed to their unique responsibility of Mission *Ad gentes* and evangelization to be carried out as the primary task of their vocation. However, over the years, the primary obligation had been replaced by institutional interests and the expansion of organized establishments which



curtailed the missionary zeal to a great extent. The historical pursuit of Bethany ashram and the original Charism of the founder was ignored by many members. The dynamic nature of the mission was substituted by building more social institutions and schools without recognizing its primary purpose and mission. Moreover, the missionary activities were limited to pastoral care of the migrant Malankara Catholic faithful. But in recent times, initiatives have been commenced for the revival of its mission spirit which is evident by the sending of missionaries to north India and even to Africa. A reintroduction of Bethany movement is ineluctable for modern renaissance of mission. A Church without Ashrams or monasteries are like a paralyzed body which would never be an active Church in vibrating the spiritual and mission to the whole world. The third millennium challenges a new understanding of mission and a recommitment in praxis.

The Christianity in essence is mission because the Church is missionary by its very nature. Mission is *Missio Dei*, the mission of the Father, the mission of the Son, and the mission of the Holy Spirit. The Church is a community of 'missionary disciples' who are sent to the world. Mission was understood in the past, even today by many as salvation of the souls and establishment of the Church around the world. In the context of new understanding and appreciation of plurality of religions and cultures, we have to rethink the very concept of mission. In theological reflections and pastoral praxis, the starting point must be the mission of Jesus. The mission of Jesus was the proclamation and realization of the Kingdom of God by his words and deeds, and by his own personal life and witness. Jesus demanded from everybody a real 'conversion of heart'. The biblical understanding should be the foundation of all mission activities. Mission is not the expansion of Church everywhere but the renewal of humanity anywhere. Since the renewal of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), many things have changed within the Catholic Church. However, all the recent documents of the Catholic Church which discussed the diverse paths of mission focus on proclaiming, witnessing and serving for the kingdom of God. The mission is single but a complex reality. This one mission and its goal are reached through different ways. Mission as witness, proclamation, liberation, justice, reconciliation, involvement of liberative struggles of humanity and nature, dialogue with other religions and secular world, evangelization of cultures and inculturation, ecumenical dialogue with Christian communities, works of humanization and human promotion are the different paths of mission or evangelization. Mission is not aimed at any territory but rather at a wider affirmation of non-territorial understanding. There is no center or periphery or eastern or western and mission and Church are inseparable. There is a paradigm shift in the understanding mission to evangelization and it is a multi-faceted concept. All these are constitutive parts of evangelization and not merely a preparation for the proclamation of the Gospel. Whatever the Church perpetrate for the dissemination of the Gospel is evangelization.

In our research we concluded that the missionary dynamism of Bethany is rooted in its charism and expressed in contemplative, active and ecclesial dimensions. The three dimensions are mutually inclusive; nevertheless, they have distinct functions. Since Bethany Ashram originated as an indigenous congregation and inherited the ascetic traditions of India and inspired by the eastern monasticism, there is an inherent demand for an authentic dialogue with other religions from its part. The contemplative nature and inculturated life of Bethany Ashram alone can take up evangelization of dialogue in the current scenario of

political and social turbulence against Christians as foreigners. Bethany Ashram is authentically Indian; hence it is better positioned to engage actively in the evangelization in India. Mission is always witness (*martyria*) to the Gospel in a synthesis approach of prayer and action in tune with cultural values of India. The inculturation mission is not meant to adopt external paraphernalia or syncretism of religious symbolisms rather to be extended to all domains of Church life. The active dimension of mission needs much more attention of explicit proclamation of the Word to the whole world where it is yet unknown and authentic witness should be the primary concern. Evangelization is the proclamation of Gospel and liberation to the whole of human being in his/her spiritual, physical, psychological, social, political, economic and cultural spheres. Human promotion and development should not be limited to certain areas of life but is to be extended to all arenas of life – justice, peace, unemployment, alleviation of poverty, ecological protection, conflicts and oppression, abuse of humanness, systematic education facilities, health care systems etc. Missionary activity or evangelization is not isolated act, but it is an ecclesial act. Bethany Ashram is founded to achieve spiritual rejuvenation and to facilitate revival in various forms of Church activities. The ecclesial dimension of mission should promote a constant re-evangelization or new evangelization. This process is inevitable in the Syro Malankara Catholic Church and Bethany Ashram holds the primary duty by preserving the oriental traditions and identity. Moreover, it should not neglect to provide adequate pastoral care to the faithful in the diaspora as per the directions of the Syro Malankara hierarchy. The emphasis should be given for the collaboration and cooperation with diocesan Bishops and priests in all matters of missionary work and Bethany Ashram should not consider itself as an independent entity in all attempts of missionary activities anywhere in the world. It is the duty of Bethany Ashram to work for Church unity and it can act as a mediator between other non-Catholic oriental Churches. Church unity is an essential component for the witnessing dimension of mission in India. So, we proposed and emphasized the elements of Bethany mission which would be based on the charism and expressed in the conciliar and post conciliar teachings of the Church.

### **Scope for further research**

The research helped us to discover the roots of Bethany mission and challenges to continue it with the vision of the founder and charism of the congregation. However, the future of Bethany mission should be interpreted and explicated with the new insights of mission theology. It is hoped that further research and dialogue with regards to new trends in mission theology and a descriptive study of mission history both is necessary for an enhanced missionary effectiveness and greater understanding of mission theology. There is also a scope for further comparative study between various sub-disciplines of mission and interdisciplinary approach with social science. As Bethany ashram is celebrating the centenary of its foundation (1919-2019), it is the right moment to uphold Bethany identity and uniqueness with a renewed commitment and rejuvenated discernment for the mission in the universal Church and the world.