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A Plea for Passion and Hard Work: An interview with Dr S. Ignacimuthu, SJ

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Abstract: AUC is happy to know that Prof Dr Savarimuthu Ignacimuthu is identified as one of the top 1% scientists in the world in the field of Biology based on citations of your publications by Professors of Stanford University, USA in their publication dated 16-10-2020 in PLOS BIOLOGY. So this interview on the need for research, passion for intellectual work within a religious (Jesuit) framework is taken by the editor, AUC. A brief biodata of Dr Savarimuthu is also included as part of this article.

Keywords: S. Ignacimuthu, Passion for Research, Intellectual Apostolate, Ignacimuthu as One of the Best Scientists

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Asian Journal of Religious Studies (AUC): Dear Dr Ignacimuthu, Congratulations! We are happy to know that you are identified as one of the top 1% scientists in the world in the field of Biology based on citations of your publications by Professors of Stanford University, USA in their publication dated 16-10-2020 in PLOS BIOLOGY. Can you say something more about it?

Dr S. Ignacimuthu (SI): *Thank you very much for your words of appreciation. May God be praised.*

On and off, scientists from different parts of the world try to assess the effectiveness of their research and its impact on other scientists by calculating the citations of their publications by others. This is normally done by some scientists in collaboration with some publishers who monitor the citation index. There are three groups which do this, SCOPUS, WEB OF SCIENCE and GOOGLE SCHOLAR. Out of these the professors from Stanford University took data from SCOPUS and have calculated the impact of millions of scientists who have published even one paper in various fields of science. My case falls into the Biology field. In that, they have assessed the impact of my publications from 1985 to 2019. In this group, I stand at 872nd position out of 1,30,000 (less than 1%) scientists in the world. I have been consistently placed within 1,000 positions for the last 20 years.

AUC: You have carried on various administrative responsibilities like Principal of two important colleges, Director of research Institutes, and VC of two universities. What are some of the lessons that you learnt as an able and effective administrator?

SI: *The most important principle I followed was the delegation of duties. I was ready to trust people and give them the power and responsibility to carry out the assigned work. This helped me to find more time for research. Another principle I followed was being with them in times of*

difficulties and owning the responsibility for any mistake. This is very important to be successful in leadership. What lessons did I learn? Cooperation leads to success.

AUC: You have excelled in research. You have contributed 800 research articles and 80 books. That's an incredible achievement. How do you feel about it?

SI: Certainly very joyful. It is a gift from God to use all our talents. I knew many people were benefitting from my writing of books. Some of them have been used as textbooks all over India and abroad. I always tried to use all available time for intellectual pursuit.

AUC: Where and how do you find hope and fulfilment in your academic life? How do you overcome the challenges and difficulties that you face?

SI: First and foremost I find them in God. I place all my trust in God and let things happen. From my childhood, I have had a very special devotion and attachment to the person of Jesus and Mother Mary. This has carried me through. With regard to how I learnt to face the challenges and difficulties, I never used to get discouraged. I always believed that if one door closed, another will open. I never took any failure or difficulty to my heart.

AUC: In all your talks and interactions, you have been stressing on the need for rigorous and dedicated research for the well-being of humanity. You have helped more than 100 candidates to get their doctorates! Can you please share with us how satisfied you are with your research?

SI: My greatest satisfaction comes only in giving. As I was able to give my help to so many students and staff who worked with me, I used to feel I was doing the right thing to build human talents. We always chose problems which were socially relevant and which needed our intervention. This is

also related to what Jesus has told us 'what you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me'.

AUC: At all times you have been insisting on passion and hard work? Can you please elaborate on these traits of a researcher especially for the younger generation?

***SI:** Passion is very important for anyone who wants to attain a certain level of perfection. Just take the example of the innumerable number of sportspersons and other achievers in other fields as well. With regard to research and intellectual pursuit, a strong desire to contribute something is very important. Only this will push us on steadily to move forward in spite of obstacles and difficulties. Along with passion, hard work is also very essential, since there is no substitute for hard work. Only persistent and enduring hard work will bring the desired results.*

AUC: Your work and research have always been motivated by the divine experience you have. How do you situate your academic work in your religious life and Jesuit way of life?

***SI:** All of us have the basic foundational experience of the Divine from our upbringing and our formation. As a Jesuit, we are very well trained to be contemplatives in action. We also have learned to integrate our spirituality of seeing God in all things and all things in God.*

In this way, we can be fully religious and fully human. Those of us who work in academic institutions have the opportunity to take care of our religious duties both in the morning and in the evenings. The whole day is available for us to take care of our academic matters. Learning to integrate these in a systematic and profound way helps us to take care of this.

AUC: What do you say to those who tend to “ridicule” science and its search for truth and fairness?

SI: Well, science is one dimension through which God reveals himself. If we believe nature is God's gift to us, then finding new things in nature and proclaiming them is also one aspect of revealing God to others.

AUC: For the sake of lay men and women can you elaborate on the significance of the insect species (*Jacthrips ignacimuthui*) and natural molecule (*Ignaciomycin*) named after you?

SI: The significance is only related to honouring a person by giving name. Since these are new to science, the staff and students who found these with my assistance decided to name them after me. In science, we are allowed to do this when some new things are found.

AUC: What is your message for young scholastics/ seminarians or sisters who will be priests and religious leaders tomorrow?

SI: Being authentic is very important for us. It is the identity card for our dedicated work. Having strong motivation to excel in any field we may choose to be in is another asset we need to have. Being united with God all the time will be of great strength. Setting goals and pursuing them with vigor is also needed.

AUC: In spite of all these great achievements, we all find you very simple and humble. How is this/

SI: This is God's gift for me. I always reminded myself that It is God who has given me all these talents and it is he who has given all the opportunities, etc. So this keeps me always to remember that all these things happen not based on my talents and efforts but due to God's love for me.

AUC: Any other message you would like to give.

SI: Set priorities right and be prepared to sacrifice many things in order to fulfil your priorities. Let the intentions be pure. Do everything as if everything depends on you and leave everything as if everything depends on God.

Thank you very much for sharing your valuable insights with the readers of AUC: Asian Journal of Religious Studies.

Rev. Fr Dr S. Ignacimuthu, S.J: Brief Biodata

Rev. Fr Dr S. Ignacimuthu, S.J. is a Jesuit priest belonging to an international religious congregation, Society of Jesus. He was born on 9th September 1948 in Sindalacherry, Theni district. He did his initial schooling in the village. He studied in St. Mary's Madurai and St. Joseph's College, Trichy for high school and predegree. He studied his B.Sc. Botany at Loyola College, Chennai in 1969-1972 and secured Distinction and University Second Rank. He completed his M.Sc. Botany at St. Joseph's College, Trichy from 1976-1978 securing University First Rank and Gold Medal. He completed his M.Phil in 1982 and Ph.D. in 1985 in the field of Genetics from the University of Delhi with outstanding merit and his D.Sc. in the field of Plant Biotechnology from the University of Madras in 2001. He is one of the very few scientists to acquire this degree.

He began his teaching career in 1980 at St. Joseph's College, Trichy and continued to be there till 1992 serving also as director of hostels and vice principal. In 1992 he was Principal of St. Xavier's College, Palayamkottai. In 1993 he was Assistant Director of Entomology Research Institute, Loyola College, Chennai. In 1996, he became the Director, Entomology Research Institute, Loyola College, Chennai. In 1997 he became the principal of Loyola College, Chennai. In October 2000 he was appointed Vice Chancellor of Bharathiar University, Coimbatore. In June 2002, he was appointed Vice Chancellor of University of Madras, Chennai. He was the Director of Entomology Research Institute, Loyola College, Chennai for nearly 20 years and presently he is the Director of Xavier Research Foundation, St Xavier's College, Palayamkottai.

As principal and vice-chancellor he made a mark in administration and academic reforms like introducing teacher evaluation by students, establishing poor students' scholarships, introducing choice based credit system, introducing Semester System with credits, compulsory social service scheme and transparency system of handing over the photocopy of all the answer sheets to the students.

Apart from being an able and good administrator, he is known all over the world as a good scientist. He has published more than 800 research papers and 80 books. His articles have been cited more than 23,000 times by other

scientists. Due to his great contribution to research and publications, Loyola was ranked 2nd best college in the country with a score of 100 out of 100 for research and publications by MHRD, New Delhi. Some of his books on Biotechnology, Bioinformatics, Bioethics and Environment are used as textbooks in Universities and Colleges. His books ‘Basic Good manners’, ‘Values for Life’, ‘Being Happy and Successful’, ‘Skills and Qualities for Effective Life’, ‘Shining in Life’ and ‘Tips to Study Well’ (English and Tamil) are used as textbooks for value education and personality development in many universities and colleges.

His Tamil book on environmental awareness got the best book award from Tamil Nadu Government in 1995. He was awarded Tamil Nadu Scientist for Life Sciences (2000) by Tamil Nadu Government. He was also given Kamarajar Award for research on Environmental Management by Government of Tamil Nadu in 2009. The Royal Entomological Society, London awarded FRES (Fellow of Royal Entomological Society) for his outstanding contribution in Entomology. He is also a fellow of National Academy of Agricultural Sciences, New Delhi. He is Emeritus Scientist of UGC, CSIR and ICMR, New Delhi

He has carried out already more than 40 major research projects funded by government agencies. He has helped more than 100 students to get their doctoral degrees. He has many patents. PONNEEM an ecofriendly biopesticide was developed by him. One insect species is named after him: *Jacthrips ignacimuthui*. One natural molecule is named after him: *Ignaciomycin*. He developed Xavier Herbal Hand Sanitizer to fight against pathogens including Covid-19. He has also visited many countries such as USA, Japan, Germany, Switzerland, Australia and Saudi Arabia as visiting scientist. American Biographical Institute, USA and international Biographical centre, England have identified him as one of the good scientists in the world. He is identified as one of the top 1% scientists in the world in the field of Biology based on citations of his publications by Professors of Stanford University, USA in their publication dated 16-10-2020 in PLOS BIOLOGY. ORCID: 0000-0002-8467-789X

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