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Living as Hidden Christ: A Homage to Fr Cherian Nereveetil (1971-2021)

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Abstract: Fr Cherian Nereveetil was a Papalite and editor of *Sathyadeepam*. He died recently at the young age of 49. He has touched numerous people and has been an inspiration for many. His committed work, passionate love especially for the poor and larger vision for the good of the country and of the Church will motivate many young people to dedicate their whole lives to God. He has lived his life fully, with joy, gratitude and dedication. Truly he has been a hidden Christ, living, love and suffering with us and thus bringing us solace and consolation! This article is a homage to his life of commitment and devotion.

Keywords: Cherian Nereveetil, Ernakulam-Angamaly Diocese, Papal Seminary, Sathyadeepam.

Fr Cherian Nereveetil (49), a Papalite and former chief editor of *Sathyadeepam* a Catholic weekly run by Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese, passed away in Kochi at 2 P.M. on Thursday, May 27,

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2021. He was undergoing treatment following an accident on May 13. He suffered severe head injury and was admitted to the ICU of a private hospital in Kochi (TNN, 2021).

According to the hospital sources, Fr Nereveettil suffered a heart attack and his health condition worsened leading to his death. The Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese Archbishop, Mar Antony Kariyil, had visited him at the hospital on Wednesday, May 26, 2021 (Staff Reporter, 2021). The funeral rites were held at Mary Queen Church in Kalamassery at 4 pm on Friday, May 28, 2021.

The Person of Fr Cherian

He was born at Edappally in June 1971. In 1997, he got ordained priest by Bishop Mar Jacob Manantheodath on January 1, 1997, after his theological studies at Jnana Deepa, Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Pune. He was also part of the Jesus Youth International Council as its spiritual leader for nearly 17 years. From 2015-2019, he had served as the chief editor of *Sathyadeepam*.

"Fr Nereveettil was a symbol of Christ himself. He always had a smile on his face and was very gracious. It is a real loss for us," said Fr Mathew Kilukan, spokesperson of the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese (TNN, 2021).

In 2013, Fr Nereveettil donated his kidney to a plus one student Rincy, a resident of Thoppumpady in Ernakulam. Fr Benny Maramparampil, a senior priest belonging to the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese, said that Fr Nereveettil was against gaining popularity as a kidney donor.

His Inspiration

He has been quite popular in social media and praises have been outpouring soon after his demise. The *Mangalam* newspaper, a prestigious Malayalam paper gave a one full page report on him, on June 6, 2021 "The Christ who lived in hiding." One blogger wrote in his Facebook, "When Christ decided to come to earth and live in hiding, he found Fr Cherian." Another woman wrote: "Knowing naturally that his body is not his, but God's, he donated part of his body without making much noise about it."

Fr Joyce Kaithakottil, who has obtained a Doctorate in Biblical Theology, Gregorian University, Rome, claims that Fr Cherian was inspired by his

theology studies at Papal Seminary, Pune. “Cherian loved me like his own brother and used to call me ‘*Chetta*’ [elder brother],” said Fr Joyce. If Cherian has been an inspiration for many, it is because of the Jesuit fathers at Papal Seminary. This Seminary, which was administered by the Society of Jesus, was called, “The Home of love.” According to Fr Joyce, some of the priests in Papal Seminary and its sister Institute, Jnana Deepa, have influenced him much (Sebastian, 2021). One of them is Fr Lionel Mascarenhas, SJ, who gave a new direction to Papal Seminary formation soon after Vatican II. According to Fr Joyce, this priest who used to walk with a sling bag, used to clean his own room daily and who used to clean the bathroom of the staff members every week has tremendously impacted Fr. Cherian, who was translating Lionel’s simple life style to his own life. Another person who impacted Fr Cherian was Fr Clausen, SJ, who would go every day in the evening to a colony with a simple cloth bag. Fr Cherian got his inspiration to live and work with the poor from this humble priest. Fr Cherian got the inspiration for a Christ-centered theology and for the interpretations of the Gospels for the poor and marginalized definitely from the famous third world theologian, Fr. George Soares-Prabhu, SJ. Fr Joyce notes that Fr Cherian’s life is a witness to the fact that he has succeeded in imitating Christ and making his own life a sacrifice (Sebastian, 2021).

Worthy of the Divine

Fr. Paul Thelakat, Editor of *Light of Truth*, lived under the same roof and worked together with Fr Cherian from 2015-2019. He was the editor of *Sathyadeepam* and Thelakat the editor of *Light of Truth, the English version*. “We thought, discussed, debated, consulted and prayed together and brought out the two Catholic periodicals. All through these years I read him as brother priest and observed he had an identity of his own. He had a childlike attitude to things and events like Oskar of Gunther Grass who refused to grow and join the elders and their culture. I have not heard from his cubicle sounds of scolding, quarrelling or shouting. He had a soft and silent tongue touched by a strange fire from above. He wrote the editorials for the paper, but never wrote a signed article. Writing is his secondary consideration, the main thing—practical life. He primarily was writer of his own book of life. Fr. Cherian preferred to proclaim the divine gospel in word and deed, and to cleave to this true, eternal faith right up until death. Thinking perhaps was for him learning the art of dying. He

was writing in flesh and blood his edition of the Bible, which is simply the highest form of writing.” Fr Thelakat affirms that Bible is the supreme task of writing.

Fr Thelakat adds: “He lived in orality, believed in the grammar of human speech, which bore the underwritten assumption of God’s presence. The covenant between word and world constitutes one of the very genuine renewals of the Spirit in history. The Word’s presence in the word was obvious for him. As the spiritual guide of the international Jesus Youth Movement he always preserved the possibility of relationship between the Self and the Other in the midst of the cacophony of differences. He presented freedom as the best access we have to the otherness. The power of music, the breath of the emotion of faith before the God of Jesus Youth Movement was for him greater than that of reason or logic, which transcend languages. The translation of music into meaning carries with it what somatic and spiritual cognizance we can have of the core mystery that we are.”

He had also difficulties, acknowledged Fr Thekalat. “But his ability to withdraw into anonymity was awesome. He could transcend, transcendence no longer hangs over man; he becomes, strangely, its privileged bearer. He could easily forget himself and join hand with others and walk the talk. He is our pride and challenge to appear worthy of the divine.”

Conclusion

Fr Cherian has touched numerous people and has been an inspiration for many. His committed work, passionate love especially for the poor and larger vision for the good of the country and of the Church will motivate many young people to dedicate their whole lives to God. He has lived his life fully, with

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joy, gratitude and dedication. Truly he has been a hidden Christ, living, love and suffering with us and thus bringing us solace and consolation! May he continue to inspire us to live dedicated, self-less and joyful lives for Christ and His brothers and sisters!

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