

Msgr. George Velliparambil A Pioneer & A Veteran Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ

I have known Fr. George Velliparambil for the last 40 years since I joined the Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) in 1977. A fellow Jesuit Fr. Francis MacFarland then the Secretary of CBCI Commission for Social Communications took me into confidence with a few letters marked 'for your own eyes only.' He did not want to be in the lime light but as a visionary he saw the need of revitalizing the ICPA which was then inactive.

ICPA was started with the initiative of another fellow Jesuit of Patna Province Fr. John Barrett in 1963 with its first meeting held at Delhi in August 1964. Fr. Barrett called the very first meeting of 8 editors like Fr. E. D'Souza of New Leader, Fr. Benny Agiar of The Examiner, Fr. George Velliparambil Managing Editor of Kerala Times, Fr. Horace Rozario, SJ of The Calcutta Herald, Fr. Mark Valdar of Rackno, Mangalore, Fr. E. D'Souza was the first ICPA President and Fr. John Barret was its Secretary for many years. While the ICPA Presidents changed from time to time, Fr. Barrett as the Secretary continued to be the soul or the backbone of ICPA. While ICPA saw much ups and downs Fr. George Valliparambil was one who continued with it through thick and thin.

When Barret left India the ICPA fell into disrupt. But when ICPA was revived the 4 veterans who lent a hand, so to say, were Fr. Horace Rozario, SJ of The Calcutta Herald, Fr. Benny Agiar of the Examiner, Mumbai and Fr. George Valliparambil of Kerala Times daily. When ICPA was revived the Catholic Editors extended its membership to writers and journalists in 1978. Fr. Horace Rozario was elected as the President and Mr. Dominic Azavedo as the Secretary. Subsequently Fr. John Vallamattom and Fr. George Valliparambil also led ICPA as its elected Presidents. ICPA was registered as a Charitable Trust while Fr. George Velliparambil was its President and he lent his Kerala Times, Banerjee Road, Kochi office address as the official registered address of ICPA.

George was born as the 3rd child of Perio and Mary couple in Velliparambil family at Cheranellur in Ernakulum. After graduating from Madras University George joined the Mangalapuzha Pontifical Seminary for his priestly studies. He was ordained a priest of Verapoly Diocese in 1961. Fr. George started his priestly ministry as Assistant Vicar in St. Francis Assisi Cathedral. He also taught for a short while in St. Joseph's Pontifical Seminary.

Then, recognizing his literary talents and journalistic skills the then Bishop of Verapoly Diocese appointed him to work in Kerala Times daily in 1962. Within a short time of 3 years George was appointed as the Managing Editor of Kerala Times on March 31st 1965.

According to reports and obituary write ups on the death of Fr. George Velliparambil who died on May 15, he was on the forefront of modernization of Malayalam language and journalism style of reporting and writing. While editing Kerala Times as its Managing Editor, Fr. George revived 'Satya Nadam' one of the oldest periodicals in Malayalam.

As an Editor with social conscience Fr. George voiced the problems of the poor fisher folks

living on the sea coasts and championed their cause. While being Managing Editor of Kerala Times for three decades Fr. George studied and researched on various topics of interest to him. He shared his findings through speaking in public forums and in his writings “Professionalize or perish” was Fr. George’s call to the print media.

As a frequent visitor to his office I am enriched by his sharing and his books. He has written books on the History of Kerala News Paper (Kerala Patracharithram), History of Satya Nadam, and Christian Heritage of Kerala. His news paper columns published on Sunday supplements of Kerala Times have been collected and published. I treasure his signed gift of his collected articles entitled “Aadarsha Chintakal” (Ideal Thoughts).

Fr. George Velliparambil was also active and rendered his services in various press media organizations in Kerala, in India and in International level. At all India level he was elected first as the General Secretary of ICPA in 1983 and then he was the President of ICPA from 1992-95. At International level he was a member of the South Asian Catholic Press Association (SACPA) and of the International Catholic Union of the Press (UCIP) and participated in their meetings and the world Congress.

Fr. George’s popularity was manifested in the huge number of people who flocked to his family home at Cheranellur to pay homage to him as well as in the crowd gathered in Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church at Cheranellur, where the Holy Mass and funeral rites were held. Archbishop Joseph Kalathilparambil led the concelebrated Holy Mass together with Bishop Dr. Joseph Karikasery of Kotapuram Diocese, Bishop Dr. Peter Parappulil of Jhansi and Mar Jose Putanveetil the Auxiliary Bishop of Ernakulum. There were also nearly a 100 priests with Mass vestment and a few like me only in cassocks. Sisters and his well wishers filled the church and the church compound.

ICPA paid homage to its former President by laying wreaths by the Vice President Mr. Ignatius Gonsalves and the Secretary Mr. Jose Vincent. The Treasurer Jayan Nagapuzha and Executive Body Member Sebastian Kallarackal attended the funeral service together with this writer.

In the current socio-religio-political situation a question Msgr. George Velliparambil asked is very relevant. In his message published in ICPA Golden Jubilee Souvenir the former President of ICPA Fr. George posed the question. Today every journalist in India should ask the same question to himself/herself: where does the very profession of journalists stand? Fr. George a pioneer and veteran of the print media have left an indelible mark in the Catholic Press in India as a whole and the news paper world in Kerala in particular.

Changed On: 16-06-2017
Next Change: 01-07-2017
Copyright Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ – 2017