

Faithful Unto Death

Someone has said, 'A beautiful soul cannot be forgotten.' This is true of Ms Crescy John who passed away peacefully on the morning of September 4, 2019 in Pune at the age of 87. Many would have heard about her but a few really would have known her for what she was.

Ms. Crescy John, born at Calicut in Kerala, accepted the call to join the Secular Institute (Khristsevikas) which was in the process of being formed and made her way to Rome on January 1, 1961 where she along with other young ladies joined a three year course in Theology at Regina Mundi and later a year of Spiritual Formation in Germany. She also did some studies in Hinduism. She was especially fond of the Bhagavad Gita. After the period of formation this group of Indians made their first commitment on September 16, 1964 and returned to India on January 15, 1965 to start their mission in Raipur, Madhya Pradesh under the guidance of the then Apostolic Administrator, Msgr. John Weidner SAC, where the Pallottines had their mission. Ms Crescy John was appointed the first President of the Khristsevikas and held this office for another four terms at different times. She also contributed to the formation of members.



Crescy, with her God given talents gave her best to the beginnings and growth of the Institute. She would seek advice from experts on various questions, and also from the group itself, always making sure the Institute was on the right path. She along with another first member, Ms Joyce Almeida, prepared the Constitution for the Institute.

She was involved in various types of Apostolate both in Madhya Pradesh and Mumbai. In 1971, during the Bangladesh War she worked in the Refugee Camps along with other groups.

Crescy contributed to the foundation of the Indian Conference of Secular Institutes as well as Asian Conference of Secular Institutes. Fr. E. Zeitler SVD, the then Director of National Vocation Service Centre (NVSC), Pune was concerned that Secular Institutes (SI's) be made known in India. He started a desk for Secular Institutes at NVSC. In 1972 Ms. Crescy John who was working at the desk for SI's was sent to Rome by Fr. E. Zeitler SVD to attend an International meeting on Secular Institutes. In Rome she met with Dr. Tresalti of Christ the King Secular Institute regarding SI's in India. In 1973, when Ms. Antoniette Furtado, a member of Schoenstatt Secular Institute, was working at the SI desk at NVSC, a meeting was organized at Madras for making SI's known. Fr. E. Zeitler SVD and Fr. J. Neuner S.J., who were promoters of SI's, played a very important role in this matter. Dr. Tresalti from Rome was invited to this meeting. It was at this meeting that a proposal was made to start an Asian Conference of SI's. This proposal became a reality in 1975 when a permanent body of Asian Federation of SI's was established after the first meeting in Bangkok. Presently the Indian Conference of Secular Institutes (ICSI) and Asian Conference of Secular Institutes (ACSI) have a membership of about

34 and 82 Institutes respectively. Ms Crescy John participated in the meetings, sometimes as a resource person. In her condolence message, a SI member wrote, 'Crescy's invaluable contribution to the ACSI is her legacy to SI's which will be a torch to light the way for many generations to come.'

Always wanting to be a learner, Crescy did her Masters in Feminist Theology at Maryknoll School of Theology in New York, U.S.A. Often she was invited to participate in Conferences in different countries and was in demand for talks or seminars for women and others by both Catholic and other Church leaders. Crescy was one of the few women to have addressed the bishops at the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) meeting at Bangkok. Being in the resource team for BCCs she organized seminars on the same. Her talks on the Bible, particularly 'Women in the Bible' were very much appreciated by all.

Working for the Empowerment of women was one of her involvements and it grew as she saw the sufferings of women all over India and elsewhere. Her studies in Feminist Theology helped her to go deeper in this, from a religious and spiritual point of view. She spoke with passion on the need for justice and equality for women.

In Mumbai Crescy worked in the women's group, 'SathyaShodak', was on the board of Trustees of 'Asha Deep Association,' an organization which works for the upliftment of women and children and was associated with other organizations like 'Streevani.' She was actively involved in Ecumenical Association of the third World Theologians (EATWOT) and Women Theologians' group.

As a Khristsevika, Crescy spent most of her years in Mumbai. She was soft and gentle in her dealings. Her kind and helpful nature led her to reach out to many people in need. She would often say, 'When we die God will judge us on how we reached out to the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, etc.' Being a friendly person she had a wide circle of friends from all religious backgrounds. Simplicity, patience and humility were her hallmarks. She always believed in keeping a low profile.

Ms Crescy was an inspiring woman who tried to live her secular calling through the charism of St. Vincent Pallotti, the founder of the Union of the Catholic Apostolate, known as Pallottines of which the Khristsevikas are a part. She lived her consecrated life to the full and was what she was, because she was a person of faith and prayer, always depending on God. Her love for the Word of God and contemplative prayer sustained her. Her inner will power helped her to face and endure many difficult and challenging situations in her life.

Over the past year, when her strength was failing, she was always cheerful, hopeful, and positive, silently going through the discomforts of life with a smile. A true witness, Crescy believed in, '**Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev. 2, 10).**

Crispina D'Costa
Khristsevika