



FR. JEGARAJ RAYAN, SDB
1925 - 1988

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It was on 29 August 1988 that Fr. Jegaraj Rayan, apparently in good health, took his motor cycle and rode all the way to Madras from Polur, where he was Parish Priest. This visit was to see his ailing and aged mother, who was staying with his younger brother in Anna Nagar, Madras. He did not in the least think that that was his last visit to his mother and to the members of his family.

On that particular day the whole family had gathered round his mother. There was a family meal and great rejoicing. After wishing everyone good-bye – not knowing it was the last, he started his motor cycle to get back to his parish. Just then he complained about a severe pain in his chest. He was taken into the house for rest. As the pain in the chest continued and became severe, he was rushed to a clinic nearby. The doctor tried to revive his failing heart but after some moments declared that he was no more and that his death was due to acute left ventriculum failure.

The body was brought to St. Francis Xavier's Church, Madras, his home parish. Many Salesian Priests and Brothers, Salesian Sisters and hundreds of parishioners, children from the schools, particularly from St. Gabriel's Higher Secondary School, where he had worked as Headmaster and later as Rector, paid him their last homage. The solemn funeral mass presided over by Fr. Vincent Durairaj, the Salesian Provincial, was attended by a big gathering of all his dear ones, Salesian Priests, Brothers, Sisters, parishioners and school children. The body was taken in procession and buried in St. Roque's Cemetery. Everyone felt great sorrow at his sudden death.

When the news of his death and burial reached all the confreres of the Province, one senior confrere remarked, "Father Jegaraj Rayan was an asset to the Province. It is a pity the Lord has taken him away so early in life".

FR. C. A. BOUT, S.D.B., who was the Headmaster remarks: I realize that Fr. Jegaraj Rayan was a good organizer and capable of achieving his aim, if given a fair chance. As Assistant he was cooperative and dependable. He had a lot of good will but was not always understood because his zeal sometimes overtook his prudence".

FR. JOHN MED, S.D.B., (A former Salesian Provincial): The first time I was with him was in Broadway, St. Gabriel's High School. He was one of the group of aspirants in that House where Fr. Carreno dreamed to gather some Aspirants before finding for them a permanent school. Some of the boys were going to St. Gabriel's Tamil Medium School, others to St. Mary's English Medium School, others to Good Pastor Press and others for training in trades. Jegaraj was simple and gentle and was our great help as he knew Madras well. I knew that he was not always at ease as the group was not ideal but he took it well and persevered. Later on I found him in Tirupattur and all took him for a good and balanced boy as he was. There was no difficulty in promoting him on the way to religious and priestly life.

For some time I did not have much communication with him but later in life he proved himself to be a steady worker with a gentle disposition. He loved his Tamil Nadu and the people liked him. May God give him his peace.

His desire to serve youth more effectively made him go through a series of courses of study. Privately he completed B.A., B.Ed., M.A., M.Ed., and qualified himself to be Headmaster of a Higher Secondary School. He was appointed Vice-Rector, Prefect of Studies and Headmaster in the Aspirantate of Don Bosco, Tirupattur. In 1979 he came to Madras as Headmaster of St. Gabriel's Higher Secondary School and, the year after, was made the Rector of the Refuge Complex.

Towards the end of his life he was Parish Priest of Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine, Perambur and Sacred Heart Church, Polur.

Tirupattur, he joined Loyola College in Madras for I.sc. studies while remaining an aspirant in the Provincial House of the Refuge. After his two years study in Loyola College, he began the Novitiate in Kotagiri on 15th May 1947 during which he received the clerical habit on 20 July 1947 from the hands of His Grace, Dr. Louis Mathias, S.D.B., Archbishop of Madras. On May 24, 1948 he was received into the Salesian Congregation with his first triennial vows.

Due to some reason, the Studentate of Philosophy was closed down for one year. The students were sent for their practical Training. Bro. Jegaraj Rayan who was newly professed was sent to Bombay for B. Sc. studies which he could not complete. He later finished his Philosophical studies and practical training and started his theological studies at Mawlai in 1955. His priestly ordination took place on 28 July at Mawlai - the ordaining Bishop being Mgr. Stephen Ferrando, S.D.B.

His fellow novices and students recall: He was a hardworking student and a good religious - given to deep study and serious about his religious duty; he was often seen at personal prayer. His superiors admired him for his spirit of manual labour which was his pastime together with music, particularly sacred Music. "All these preparations are for my apostolate with boys", he used to say.

Priestly Ministry

The first few years of his priestly ministry were spent in the Bishop's House, Vellore, as Secretary to the Bishop. Msgr. Lazar S.D.B., who was the Vicar General, had the following to say about Fr. Jegaraj Rayan: "He was a very jovial and hard working person, trying to make progress in life".

As a Salesian he loved to be with boys and teach them all that they needed to be good children of God and good citizens of the country. This zeal to work for youth was evident when he was appointed Asst. Parish priest of Lourdes Shrine, Perambur and Asst. Headmaster of Don Bosco High School, Perambur, in 1972.

Fr. Jegaraj Rayan was born on 2 October, 1925 in Palayamkottai in a very good and practising Catholic Family. His father Stanislaus Rayan and his mother Ponnammal Fernando were ardent and staunch Catholics. They respected the Catholic Priesthood so much that they encouraged their first child Jegaraj to become a Salesian Priest. A word about Stanislaus Rayan. He was a businessman in the city of Madras. Doing business seemed only a hobby for him. He spent most of his time in the Salesian Parish Church of the Refuge, Broadway. He attended Holy Mass and received Communion daily. He was the choirmaster and organist of the Parish Church. In the evening a large number of children and young men gathered around him to learn Religion and religious hymns. His choir was one of the best in Madras. He did this service to the Salesian Parish of the Refuge and to the Church till his last days on earth.

Reminiscences of his Boyhood

Little Jegaraj grew under the holy influence of his father and mother. He was baptised five days after his birth on October 7th, 1925 - not a common practice in Tamil Nadu - in St. Francis Xavier's Church, Palayamkottai. The family came over to Madras and settled in George Town. They were daily visitors of the Salesian Parish of the Refuge. The vocation of little Jegaraj grew in this Salesian atmosphere. He came to know many senior Salesians of the Province of South India. The Salesian House of the Refuge was also the then Provincial House. As such he came in contact with many Salesians and nurtured his vocation to the Salesian priesthood. His elementary school studies in St. Francis Xavier's Anglo-Indian High School run by the Salesian Sisters and his High School studies in St. Mary's Anglo-Indian High School run by the Salesian Fathers rounded off his early formation to the Salesian Priesthood.

Salesian Vocation

His desire to become a Priest in the Salesian Congregation, guided by Salesian Fathers like Fr. Seeber, brought him to the Aspirantate in Tirupattur on 6 December 1944. After one year in

All through his Salesian life he was attached to Don Bosco and his method of education. This attachment was shown by his joviality and his hard work for the education of the boys under his care. His endearing word "Raja" used by him often when he spoke to his younger Salesians and boys still rings in the hearts of many.

May Christ the King whose name Jegaraj bears receive him in His glory.

Fr. Jegaraj Rayan is no more with us. In life he loved us. In death let us cherish his memory, for his was indeed a life lived happily for God and for youth

Yours affectionately in
Don Bosco,

FR. STEPHEN BERNARD, SDB.

NECROLOGY:

Born at Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu on 02.10.1925.

Professed on 24.05.1948.

Ordained a Priest on 28.07.1959.

Called to eternal bliss on 29.08.1988.
