



LEGACY INSTITUTE

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Sri Lanka

March 27, 2001

Dear Friends,

I promised you I would finish my 2-part letter to you by telling you about what I found in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is a very beautiful island nation situated like a teardrop at the bottom of India. Trying to describe the beauty of the island is like trying to describe paradise. It has everything one could imagine a tropical island paradise should have – beautiful beaches, tropical forests, sweeping mountain vistas and many exotic fruits and vegetables. Ancient bards describing Sri Lanka called it “Serendip” where we get the word “serendipity.” You would think that, with so much going for it, the island would be renowned as a place of peace and happiness. But the reality of Sri Lanka is much different.

For over a half century, since it’s independence from the British Empire, Sri Lanka has seen unending racial and religious strife and bloodshed. And no end is in sight. The island is made up of several races. The majority are the Buddhist Singhalese. Then there are two kinds of Hindu Tamil groups residing on the island. One group are the indigenous Tamil who live mostly in the North and East. The second group are the Tamil that the British brought in to work the tea plantations. They live mostly in the mountains of the central area. There are also Muslim fishermen and traders and Christian Burghers who are a mixture of the Anglo and Singhalese peoples. What we end up with is a patchwork-quilt of races and religions, all living together on a small island. These people COULD get along and, at one time before independence, did get along. But politics intervened. The result has been unending warfare, vendetta, terror and economic ruin.

The first time I visited Sri Lanka was in 1984. I worked for Ambassador Foundation and traveled to the island with Professor Sawat Yingyuad, my Thai teacher and good friend and colleague. Mr. Sawat had studied in Sri Lanka as a Buddhist monk and spoke the language fluently. He knew the monks and leaders of the country personally and traveling with him provided me with a fantastic opportunity to quickly learn the “behind-the-scenes” story of Sri Lanka.

Later that year, I accompanied Herbert W. Armstrong on his visit to Sri Lanka to meet with President Junius Jayawardene, a renowned statesman in Asia. President Jayawardene explained to us some of the background about the strife between the Tamils

and Sinhalese, which was heating up at that time because of the terrorist activities of the “Tamil Tigers.” Here is a general overview.

Under the British, the Tamils were recruited to be petty officials and government administrators under their English overlords. Then the British left Sri Lanka. Many problems ensued. Here is only one of them, but a very important one. Before independence, the official national language was English. After independence, Sinhalese politicians decided to make Sinhala the official language. By doing this, they immediately made Tamils second-class citizens. Instead of passing legislation that would engender unity, politicians used the ethnic and religious differences to strengthen their political base. The result is what we see today. Sri Lanka is a nation divided against itself, and there is NO solution in sight.

President Jayawardene asked us to help with the language problem. Because English was no longer emphasized in the classroom, Sri Lanka was at a disadvantage in international relations and trade. They were steadily falling behind. The President asked us to help. The result was the founding of Waterfield Institute in the town of Nuwara Eliya high in the central mountains. Nuwara Eliya was the summer town of the British during their rule. It is situated on some of the most scenic real estate on earth. The reason it was chosen as a place to start a school was because many of the poorest people in Sri Lanka live near there; the Tamil tea-planters.

It was a wonderful project with millennial ideals in a millennial setting. Ambassador Foundation funded the program. Ambassador College sent 7 students to teach English language-related subjects, such as computers, English composition and public speaking, to underprivileged young men and women who had passed their O levels (high school). Tuition was free to 70 students per year. An old house on Waterfield Drive was found to house the school. It was sorely in need of repair, but the AC kids dug in with scrub brush and paint, slept in sleeping bags, and soon had the building sparkling. Students were chosen on ability and the student body was made up of Buddhists, Tamils, Christians and Muslims. It was decided that the school would be run according to Ambassador College standards and principles.

I was cautioned by one church official that we should not institute Ambassador College standards for these poor students. Why? Because, he said, the students would not be able to live up to them and would drop out. We rejected his idea. The result was that in the 10 years that Waterfield existed, NO STUDENT EVER DROPPED OUT! They saw this as an opportunity of a lifetime and rose up to meet those standards. This should be a lesson for all of our institutions of learning. No student EVER gains by lowering standards. Students are the real losers when standards and expectations are lowered.

David Baker was chosen to be principal of the school because of his many years participating in Ambassador Foundation projects. He had been in Thailand, Jordan and was already teaching at another AF project in Sri Lanka. We used to joke with him that he never would graduate Ambassador College because he was always on a project in some far-flung place on the earth!

Many students graduated from Waterfield and went on to higher education or the workforce. For several years because of the conflict tearing the nation, it was the only institution of higher learning open as the universities were closed.

During the time the Ambassador students taught at Waterfield, they saw the results of many atrocities of the race war. Sometimes they would pass burnt-out shops and homes or the burnt bodies of young men killed by marauding death squads. These death squads would roam the countryside looking for military aged young men. If they were Tamil, many times they were executed by pouring gasoline on them and lighting it. One young Tamil man was stopped one night by a death squad who planned to kill him. When he told them he was a Waterfield student, they let him go. Such was the reputation of Waterfield Institute.

Now let's race forward to the present time and my visit in early February. What did I find?

Waterfield Institute is no more. But the effects of that institution and what it stood for still exist. I visited Nuwara Eliya and talked to several former men and women graduates of Waterfield. They were truly excited to meet someone from the past that reminded them of their experiences at the school. Several young men said it had been the most important part of their lives. They were sad that Waterfield no longer existed. They told me that they stay in touch with as many former students as they can. They said that ALL have jobs! This is a fantastic statement by any standards because of the economic state of the country. Over 500 young men and women graduated from Waterfield over the course of 10 years. For all to have employment makes a powerful statement for the value of these past Ambassador Foundation projects and the long term effects such projects have made in the lives of young people. And I have heard people say that the AF projects were a waste of time and time money!

But what about the status of the Church of God in Sri Lanka? I visited with several families whom I had known from the past. The state of the Church is a far cry from what it used to be. At one time we had over 100 members in the Church in Sri Lanka. They were a vibrant and growing congregation. The TV program was aired over Sri Lanka TV and requests for the magazine and literature were coming in at an increasing rate. But the same pattern we have seen in other parts of the world has been repeated in Sri Lanka. Church brethren are scattered, and for the most part, abandoned. Some few have held on to the Truth they were given. Others, sadly, have given up. Some gather in small groups to keep the Sabbath. Others have joined local non-Sabbatarian congregations. Many have just gotten lost in the cracks. There are no leaders to rally the people and no local Feast of Tabernacles to attend. Sadly, Satan has worked overtime.

Fellow-laborers in the fields of God, we must not let our brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka fall by the wayside. They are just as much a part of the Body of Christ as you or I. I left Sri Lanka encouraged that there is still a remnant. But deeply saddened by the course of events because I knew this Church group when they were one united, positive force bound together by a common goal and purpose. The Church in Sri Lanka was made up of former Buddhists, Tamils, Burghers, etc. But all were of the same family, the Children of God. We cannot abandon them. Our collective prayers must be that the Almighty God who hears the cries of His Saints will remember the lost sheep in Sri Lanka and

reach out to take them in His Hands to reconfirm in them the faith once delivered. There is a remnant left. It is up to us to remember them daily in our prayers and petition Our Father to strengthen and deliver them in their plight. If we all collectively send up our prayers to the Heavenly Throne, God will hear and act.

Well, that is about all I have to report. My heart goes out to the people of Sri Lanka. They are caught up in an unending cycle of death and destruction. The Tamil separatists in the North are determined to divide the country. And the Sinhalese majority is determined not to let it happen. America learned the hard way that civil war brings a long and costly penalty. More American blood was shed in the civil war than all the other wars put together. In Sri Lanka, war escalates and peace is only a dream. The lesson should not be lost to all of us who are part of separate fellowships in the Church of God. We must find ways to cooperate with one another and lay aside those things that keep us apart. The world's ways are not the ways of God. God tells us to, "come out of her my people, that you be not partakers of her sins." We are being tested. Are we headed for unity in the Body, or will we see even more divisions and strife? God is watching.

May all of you have a spiritually reviving Passover and Unleavened Bread. Gloria and I are headed for Kachinland to keep the Feast with the Kachin brethren and those who are coming from the China border. Pray that God gives us a safe and uneventful journey.

In service to The King of Glory,



Leon Sexton

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