

## EASTER VICTORY

I wrapped up my personal Easter vigil early this morning wondering if I would have a Salvadoran Easter message to send out, something with which to be a witness, something with which to give testimony, to this land of martyrs, μάρτυρ, witnesses, this land of "The Saviour."

By Easter morning, thoughts of a Salvadoran message had morphed into a global message.

I never imagined that my Easter ponderings would be immersed in Sri Lanka. I went to sleep with the tragic news of a few fatal victims of six bomb attacks in Sri Lanka, a land dear to my heart, concerned about how Easter morning statistics on this side of the planet might shock us even more grievously.

I spent the autumn of 1990 in Sri Lanka, documenting joint CIDA / CLWR projects, awaiting permission from the ELCIC to return to El Salvador after my expulsion a year earlier. Sri Lanka was also at war--in the midst of two wars, in fact. One was the Tamil minority fighting a separatist war against the majority Sinhalese. The other was the youth protesting untenable conditions and uncertain futures for students. I, as a foreigner, was not considered suspect in either, though I was forbidden from travelling in the northern and eastern, Tamil-held zones, including Batticaloa.

Despite these wars, Sri Lanka offered me one of the most reign-of-God-on-earth immersions I have had the opportunity to experience. I lived in a Lasallian centre offering training in trades to the divergent youth living in this Colombo neighbourhood, described as a slum. These youth were a blend of Christian (Roman Catholic), Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist. Together, in spite of language barriers (the English-speaking Sri Lankans were mostly older, educated during the colonial, pre-independence era), we wandered and learned together, from each other, visiting each others' homes and places of worship--Muslim mosques, Hindu kovils, Buddhist temples, and Christian churches and cathedrals. On a more theoretical, doctrinal, level, I took a course from a Lasallian professor on world religions at the adjoining seminary.

While I sensed no racism or tensions among these diverse youth, I was a little uncomfortable with the vestiges of colonialism in our living quarters. Run by a 60-something Australian woman (who from previous contacts in her home country was a little wary about a Lutheran joining them for a few months), was quite comfortable with being attended by servants. I joked with one such servant who had become a good friend. He served us (the Australian, a Sri Lankan priest, and myself) our meals. I warned him that some meal, I was going to pull up another chair and invite him to join us for dinner. He was aghast, pleading with me not to do such a fool-hardy thing. I graciously, though reluctantly, resisted my urge and complied.

Sri Lankans have easily become good friends in other settings--Canada, Norway, El Salvador.

In spite of such horror of these past hours,

Sri Lankan bombers do not have the last word.

Through Easter morning, my mind drifted to other continents, other reign-of-God / reign-of-Satan scenarios.

I remembered that day in 1985, unsuspectingly visiting La Plaza de Armas in the centre of Lima, Peru. What went from a sparse gathering of scattered visitors rather quickly became an inescapable crowd, for I wasn't sure what reason. Squished together so as to make falling impossible, I was very conscious of towering head and shoulders above the Peruvians surrounding me (a truly novel experience for me), as well as of all the machine guns trained on us from the surrounding rooftops (thus "Plaza de Armas?!"). Eventually, my piqued curiosity was satisfied. An obvious hero of the people appeared on a balcony not far from me to address the enthusiastic crowd. About all I understood of his speech was "leche." This was all I needed to get the gist.

This week, April, 2019, Alan García, after a couple periods as president of Peru, has been in the news yet again, at the other end of his questioned journey leading the people of Peru.

And yet . . . suicide does not have the last word.

A more prolonged demise is the case of Zimbabwe, another country dear to my heart. I spent the summer of 1983 in this land under the awesome aura of its new liberation leader Robert Mugabe. He had led his people out of the apartheid-like era of Rhodesia / Ian Smith. We joined the homecoming exiles for a summer of demobilization and resettlement. They were somewhat suspicious about white people, unsure about allowing us to play with their children, but after picking enough cotton together, they warmed to our evident solidarity. At numerous bi-annual global AIDS conferences since then, I have caught up with Zimbabwe through Zimbabwean delegates, lamenting the downward slide of their nation's trajectory, but maintaining with them their never-waning hopefulness for their nation, their people.

Yet . . . political decay does not have the last word.

Recently, the world's attention was jerked mercilessly toward New Zealand. Among the many images which come back to me from that special land, I will offer two. While I have visited parliamentary sessions in several countries, my hours in New Zealand's parliament were those which impressed me most. There was such an aura of civility, respect, and wisdom. New Zealand has perhaps the highest percentage of First Nations parliamentarians, in their case Maori. Their Maori language was used extensively. The other image was of my bus driver, from Auckland to Wellington. In a nearly-empty bus, one passenger took a seat the driver had reserved for his own stuff, just behind and above him. This passenger coughed and hacked down on the driver throughout the 13-hour journey. The driver never once complained. He didn't even seem upset. At the end of the journey, he asked where I was staying, and drove me an extra 20 minutes to my hostel, not accepting a tip. New Zealand is not a land to be bombed, but honoured.

And yet . . . massacres do not have the last word.

Canada always rates highly on global lists for this and that. And yet . . . During a previous government, one of the nation's largest corporations was practically gifted into private, but politically influential, hands, squandering billions of taxpayer dollars, betraying Canadians. This enterprise then allegedly went wallowing in global corruption. defaming itself and all of us.

And yet . . . corruption does not have the final word.

I don't need to comment on all that is plaguing this land of El Salvador, this land of "The Saviour."

And yet . . . intractable levels of social violence, political and business corruption, environmental degradation . . . do not have the last word.

Yes, Jesus died for me.

Yes, Jesus died for all of us.

And yes, Jesus died for all of the above.

Jesus was crucified by all of the above . . . and much more.

Yes, Jesus rose from death for me.

Yes, Jesus rose from death for all of us.

And yes, Jesus rose from death, rose from the grave, for all of the above . . . and much more.

Jesus rose from all of the above,

victorious over death . . .

victorious over bombs . . .

victorious over suicide . . .

victorious over decay . . .

victorious over massacres . . .

victorious over corruption . . .

victorious over social violence . . .

victorious over environmental degradation . . .

VICTORIOUS.

Jesus is risen.

Jesus is risen indeed.

Ever-hopeful, ever-believing,

Brian Rude

"In Mission with El Salvador" / "En Mision con El Salvador"

Synod of Alberta and the Territories, ELCICanada