The Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Christian Response and the Nationalist Threat

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Introduction

The historical beginnings of the people of Sri Lanka¹, derive from the movements of peoples and the transmission of cultural and religious influences that were common to the whole of India and were closely related to developments in South India. The origins of the Sinhalese and Tamils as two distinct ethnic groups could be traced to about the 8th to 12th centuries AD. During the subsequent period there is little evidence of ethnic conflict until the modern era — since caste rather than language or religion was the main determinant of identity. However, the development of distinct Tamil and Sinhalese identities, encompassing several sub-identities — the former concentrated in the northeast of the island and the latter in the southwest — was facilitated by the breakdown of Ceylon's famous hydraulic civilisation in the 13th century AD. Mosquito–ridden jungle took-over the once fertile central region of Ceylon, forming something of a physical barrier between the northeast and the southwest. The colonial period — 1505 to 1948 — saw some significant developments that bear on the conflict: i) The introduction of Western culture and Christianity among Tamils and Sinhalese, changing their culture and religion radically into a cosmopolitan one, ii) The introduction of indentured South Indian Tamil labour from India into the predominantly Sinhalese central hills from about 1830 AD onwards² and iii) The administrative unification of the country into Ceylon.

Following independence, the Ceylon Tamils — the Tamils of the North who had had their independent kingdom prior to the colonial era and the Tamils of the East who were ruled by largely independent chieftains (Vanniar) owing allegiance to the Kandyang king — found themselves a minority in a unitary Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was called then (and up to 1972). The disfranchisement of the plantation Tamils (officially classed as Indian Tamils irrespective of nationality), the official language policy that made Sinhalese the only official language, preferential university admissions and employment policies that favoured the Sinhalese, the settlement of Sinhalese in areas seen by Tamils as their homelands, among others³, made Tamils insecure and seek an increasing say in their own affairs by returning parliamentary candidates who stood for a federal system of government. Such calls for devolution were met with increased state repression and in turn greater Tamil militancy. The conflict has degenerated into killings and counter killings. The Tamil speaking Muslims who are seen by many Tamils as "disloyal" to the "Tamil cause" (owing to Muslim reservations about Tamil nationalism as evidenced by their voting patterns) have been treated as badly by the Tamils as the Tamils by the Sinhalese. The Muslims have been ordered out of the North and, in the East, even massacred⁴ by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam, the LTTE, a militant Tamil group that has claimed to be the sole representative of the Tamils and eliminated any vestige of an alternative Tamil leadership⁵. The LTTE is headed by Velupillai Pirabaharan.

A radical Sinhalese based left movement, the Janatha Vimukthi Perumana, the JVP, successively crippled the country through terrorist threats in the late 1980s and was contained by the government only by using the military to murder any suspect youth. The estimates of Sinhalese youths massacred, range from 20,000 to 60,000. This has brought about an understanding among Sinhalese of what the Tamils face under military rule and has made them much more sympathetic to Tamil wishes for autonomy. The cost of the war — economic and human — is another factor that has progressively softened the Sinhalese position towards Tamil demands. These have induced them to offer more and more of what is asked by many Tamils in terms of devolution. This


² Although the Tamils of the North-East formed 18% of the total population of Ceylon in the census of 1824, this number had declined drastically by 1901 due to significantly higher death-rates in the northern and eastern dry-zone. In the census of 1946, the plantation Tamil population formed 12% of the Ceylonese population while the Tamils of native origin formed 11%. The rest of the population consisted of Muslims (6%, and Tamil speaking) and Sinhalese (69%).

³ That these were unjust is no longer disputed by the Sinhalese as evidenced in many newspaper articles, for instance see the article on the Military Scene in the Sunday Times, 25 Feb. 1996. Also see the "Throne Speech" by J. R. Jayawardene's new government in 1977 and pre-election statements by the present People's Alliance.


process culminated in the election of the People's Alliance (PA) headed by Chandrika Kumaratunga and with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) as its principal component on November 9, 1994. However, nationalist elements among the Sinhalese have delayed the delivery of promises made by the more peaceable sections. At the present time (May 1996), the LTTE is unable to assert enough control to declare Ealam, a separate Tamil nation, nor does the state have the capacity to rout the LTTE completely.

A socio-economic factor bearing on the ethnic conflict is that, by-and-large, those Tamils who have taken to arms have come from the lower rungs of society in terms of caste as well as financial power. The LTTE is predominated by those of the autonomous Karaiyah or fishing–caste, ritually below the Vellalah. The agricultural Vellalah, although a Sudra in terms of Vedic Hinduism, is at the apex of Jaffna Hindu society and dominates life there. Although many Vellalahs joined the LTTE in the immediate aftermath of the 1983 riots, Vellalah membership in the fighting cadre is now much diminished, their numbers having been subject to attrition through disillusionment and death. Now, while some Vellalahs might be seen fighting for the LTTE, very many have used their better placed economic levers, when they can, to leave the country or at least send their children of military age to the Sinhalese south from where they cannot be conscripted by the LTTE. Thus the ethnic conflict also masks the social revolution that is taking place beneath the surface. An example is the LTTE’s fines on those who use even ordinary terms in Tamil conversation with etymological roots in the caste system, such as “a paraiyah dog” (පළුතුරු) for a mongrel. This revolution, however, has its limits. While the LTTE seems to be sensitive to caste impositions by the Vellalah, its sympathies for those below the Karaiyah in the caste-structure are open to question because of the brutal and public killings of rival militants who were mainly from the lowest castes. Further, the Vellalah establishment has tended to play the game of using its position to legitimise the LTTE while the LTTE returns the favour by non-interference in the affairs of the Jaffna hierarchy and even obliging them with exit permits for their children — permits required for preventing Tamils from fleeing LTTE rule. As a result, those castes at the very bottom of society end up even worse off, often being those whose murder and conscription are legitimised by the establishment. The social revolution referred to, will therefore not go very far except that the ritual gap between the Karaiyah and the Vellalah will close somewhat, leaving the depressed castes unaffected. As we shall see, this aspect of caste bears on the Christian reaction when the Christian leadership, usually Vellalah, plays the role of legitimising the LTTE in exchange for a free hand.

The Christians of Sri Lanka

The Christians of Sri Lanka are in a unique position as mediators since they straddle both communities and share many common institutions. They number 8% of the Sri Lankan population of 17,900,000 and although largely Roman Catholic, the 0.6% Protestants in the population exchange, his own children were allowed to move south. Many churchmen are also party to this game. According to the US State Department (1995 Annual Report on Human Rights Practices, Washington, DC, March, 1996), “It [the LTTE], levies a large ‘exit tax’ on persons wishing to travel to areas under government control, requiring the travelers to leave all their property in escrow.”

Keesing’s Record of World Events, Vol. 41, Annual Reference Supplement, p. R81, 1995. Hindus are 15% and Muslims 8%. The remainder, 69%, are Buddhist. These are estimates.

The most reliable figures, however, are old and from the last census in 1981 (Census of Population and Housing, Sri Lanka, 1981, Dept. of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Plan Implementation, Colombo). This gives the following figures which I have transcribed into percentages out of the total population then of 14.850 million: Sinhalese 73.97%, Tamils 18.09% (12.59 Ceylon Tamils and 5.50% Hillcountry Tamils), Buddhists 69.30%, Hindus 15.45%, Muslims 7.39% (7.1% Moor, 0.29% Malay), and Christian 7.48% (6.79% Roman Catholic and 0.69% Protestant).

From these figures, using the facts that in Sri Lanka all Buddhists are Sinhalese, and all Hindus are Tamil, I have arrived at the figures of 2.54% for those who are Tamil and Christian and 4.67% for those who are Sinhalese and Christian. On this basis, if the Tamil and Sinhalese Christian figures are added, we obtain 7.21% for those who are Christian and either Sinhalese or Tamil. The figure given for Christians in the census, 7.48% (6.79% Roman Catholic and 0.69% Protestants) is therefore consistent, since some Burghers are also Christian, confirming the assumptions of this computation. From these calculations therefore, among Christians, 33.95% are Tamil and 62.43% are Sinhalese.

Consisting of the Church of Ceylon, the Methodist Church, JDCSI, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the Presbyterian Church, the Baptist Church, the Salvation Army, the charismatic churches like AOG and CPM
wield considerable influence and authority, which fact has been bemoaned by nationalist Sinhalese and conversions to Christianity have been opposed by Buddhists, as being undertaken by unethical means. Sections of the Buddhists have therefore, on this argument, proposed laws to regulate religious activity.

The cross-communal and international influence of the Church Catholic, and the high level of education and influence of her members, have made many look to her for leadership, especially among the Tamils. It has been an opportunity for Christian witness and leadership. And, as remarked by Arnold Toynbee, the response to challenge, in this case the challenge of the conflict, determines the nature of growth. The challenge before the Church and the opportunity to respond, have come with further associated challenges and further opportunities for response. The responses of the different constituent churches of the Church Catholic have been different. Most notably the presence of Tamils and Sinhalese within her folds, has made the Church subject to tribal splits; and her influence and integrity have made partisans seek to use her voice to partisan ends. Despite a commitment to ecumenism, issues of power and influence, as well as modes of governance, have divided the church, making the member churches act somewhat independently and therefore there is no one Christian response/reaction by the Church Catholic. As such the different churches will be treated differently in this article.

The Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church is by far the biggest church in Sri Lanka, having the loyalties of nearly 90% of Sinhalese and Tamil Christians there. Because Portuguese control of Ceylon was confined to the maritime provinces, Tamil and Sinhalese Roman Catholics are predominantly of the fishing caste (Tamil–Karaiyah; Sinhalese–Karawa), although not uniquely so. The RC Church has several dioceses, three of which, Jaffna, Mannar and Trincomalee–Batticaloa, are predominantly Tamil and has the Catholic Bishops' Conference as a common forum. Caste is an accepted institution in the RC church among the Tamils, with some delicate silence. The Tamil bishops have tended to come from the Vellalah communities. In arranging marriages, priests often use caste as a basis for matching, and separate Roman Catholic cemeteries for the depressed castes are not unknown. Thus, as in the rest of Tamil society, the Vellalah plays a dominant role. Despite the caste hierarchy within the church, the ideal of every family offering a child to the church, be it as a nun or as a priest, has made the RC church highly integrated into its congregations. Thus the church has been most effective in service, especially in looking after refugees during the ethnic conflict. The devolved form of church governance with the church divided into various orders, has also been a factor in allowing the clerics to be involved in service.

In the early years after independence, the Church tended to work openly against the left-wing parties. She once operated a large network of schools that were taken over in 1960 by the new centre-left government with the deliberate intent of clipping the influence of the Roman Catholic church that she had so freely wielded. The subsequent failed coup-d'état by predominantly Roman Catholic officers has made the Church cautious in challenging the government. Among the Sinhalese there has been a tendency to equate Sinhalese with Buddhist making Sinhalese Roman Catholics adopt Buddhist calendrical rites and customs, thus playing down their Christian identity, and accept Buddhism as the dominant religion. It has also been documented how...
Sinhalenese Roman Catholics have felt their Sinhalese identity overpowering their Christian identity in attacking Tamil Roman Catholics in the 1983 violence against Tamils. These phenomena also have something to do with Vatican II (1962–65) which eroded the cohesive Latin identity of the church's membership, and the attendant growth of indigenous Sinhalenese and Tamil identities.

As a consequence, the RC Church has tended to be shy of taking bold positions and does not wield influence commensurate with her membership. The Catholic Bishops' Conference issues periodic statements for peace, which although well-intended, have invariably split the Church along ethnic lines. For example, when the Pope issued a statement on the government's bombing of St. Peter's Church in Navaly in the Tamil North, the Church came under intense and unfair criticism for being one-sided. Bishop Malcolm Ranjith, Secretary General of Catholic Bishops' Conference, found himself in the embarrassing position of having to prove the Church's neutrality, pointing out that the Holy Father had also sent a message on the killing of Sinhalenese in Kalarawa. As a result of such passivity, the Church has been accused by Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, a prominent Sinhalenese left-wing Roman Catholic priest, of colluding with the government in power in 1982 in extending the life of the parliament and, thereby according to him, precipitating the attack on Tamils in 1983. However, the Church has shown some political activism in opposing the opening of a hotel complex in Iranavila, in taking a public position specifying the steps for peace and in coming out in favour of devolution of powers for the Tamil areas as a step towards a solution.

The period immediately after the 1983 riots against Tamils in the South, saw the first open split within the RC Church. Tamil seminary students in the South felt it was too dangerous for them to study in national seminaries and insisted on a Tamil seminary for Tamil candidates for the clergy. They were successful in having this conceded when the seminary in Colombuthurai in the North was established. This period also saw the church getting involved with the 'suffering masses.' The vast majority of refugee camps in the north were run by the various orders of the church, the then Vicar General of Jaffna playing a big role in refugee work. Since priests lived among the people, even they were massacred by the state during army rampages among Tamil civilians and equally, priests became suspects when their parishioners got involved in the militancy.

The early years after the 1983 riots saw a motley group of militants running the north with no one in absolute control. Many Roman Catholic Tamil youth had also joined the militancy, urged on by priests from the pulpit such as at Pandateruppu, asking the congregation to give a son to the LTTE just like God gave us His only son. However, as the LTTE established absolute authority in the North, there began to emerge a tendency within the RC Church for those advocating an LTTE position to rise into prominence and issue statements of a nationalist nature, while more senior clergymen, including bishops, were sidelined and reduced to abject silence. This makes it very difficult for their positions and feelings to be determined, except vaguely through reports such as of a bishop who did not leave Jaffna in

Buddhists started tearing down the church walls, the Church decided not to contest the matter out of fear that thuggery would be used against her (see Cross Points, Vol. 3, No. 1, September 1992). After backing down when faced with Buddhist intransigence, the parish painted it as a Christian response, in the interests of maintaining peace and harmony.

24 That the Roman Catholic Church has dissociated herself from a book by him (Mary and Human Liberation) shows that he is not fully representative of the church. (Sunday Island, 11 Sept. 1995)
26 T. Balasuriya, 1995, p. 30
November 1995 as ordered by the LTTE.\(^{32}\) Another reason for the silence of the church leadership in the North is that they live and operate under LTTE authority and need their goodwill for such things as running institutions without interference, obtaining exit-permits to leave LTTE-held areas, and their favours for crossing the Jaffna lagoon on their way to Colombo in special LTTE speed-boats.\(^ {33}\) Occasional signs of independence by individuals\(^ {34}\) and organisations such as Pax Christi\(^ {35}\) through its concern for human rights, soon petered out into a fearful silence.

Two nationalist clergymen who have emerged, sideling the more senior leadership, as spokesmen of the Roman Catholic Church, are the Rev. Dr. A. J. V. Chandrakanthan, and Fr. S. J. Emmanuel. As with many Tamil activists, their evolution into propagandists for the LTTE cause is a gradual one. Such activists get involved initially because they are moved by the state's atrocities against ordinary civilians, atrocities that include the torture of suspects, the bombing of civilians and the rampages of the army. Their activism begins by issuing statements to the press publicising the state's iniquities so as to prevent them. Gradually, however, since the state is pitted against the LTTE, their activism evolves into LTTE propaganda. In effect, their original cause of speaking up for the civilians, gives way to the secondary cause of embarrassing the government and in turn, becomes one of arguing for the LTTE. For instance, when the LTTE

\(^{32}\) University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), *The Exodus*, Special Report 6, Oct./Nov. 1995. The bishop, however, was check-mated when he left the government occupied area on a pastoral visit to those who had been displaced and was not allowed to return. According to Keesing's Record of World Events (Vol. 41, No. 12, pp. 40867-8, Dec. 1995), the Tamils were refused permission by the LTTE to return, saying the government intended to "enslave the Tamil people."

\(^{33}\) Based on eye-witness accounts, high ranking clergymen of all mainline churches use LTTE speed-boats for the crossing while lesser folk pay for much slower and less safe boats.

\(^{34}\) Manogaran was a university student member of Pax Christi, active in conducting Bible studies and prayer meetings among the poor. He tended to comment on the injustices he saw and was consequently arrested by the LTTE in 1991 and has not been seen since (Rajan Hoole, "Christians and Peace: The Role of the Church," *Social Justice*, Vol. 29, No. 5, pp. 17-19, May, 1995). In such cases, when priests have asked bishops to enquire from the LTTE about the arrested persons' well being, the bishops have tended to ask priests to leave such matters alone (Rajan Hoole, "Christians and Peace: Some Questions for the Church," *Social Justice*, Vol. 29, No. 7, pp. 17-19, July, 1995).


36 I was personally part of a delegation of the New York-based Ilankai Thamil Sangam in 1983, when an official made a statement to a New York legislator that tens of thousands of Tamils had been killed in the 1983 riots whereas, according to Mr. A. Amirthalingam, the then leader of the Tamil party, the TULF, in a speech before the association in Nanuet, New York, a little earlier, 2000 or so had been killed. I was in a position of having to contradict a delegation of which I was part or becoming party to the lie. Later when I told this officer that, besides the ethics of it, such statements would hurt us in the long run when the legislator learns of the truth from other sources, his reply was that it is when the numbers are big that we can get some action towards stopping the state's atrocities. The same association has now been reduced to the sorry spectacle where, entrapped by its own lies, it defends or denies every atrocity by the LTTE -- see its quarterly publication, Tamil Voice, especially a piece by a subsequent president, Wakeley Paul, from a prominent Tamil Christian family, who claims that it is their role to live as "rich and comfortable expatriates in America and Europe" and support the LTTE cause, while it is for others to fight and die in Sri Lanka (Sept. 1990). While denying LTTE atrocities and insisting on comfort in America, Tamil Voice argues during Paul’s presidency (Summer 1993, p. xi) “All niceties of democratic discussion .... would have been suicidal... Ruthless measures and even enforced sacrifices were considered necessary. ... [If] not for the suicidal dedication of the LTTE ... however ruthless and undemocratic its methods, the possibility of a Tamil Nation ... would have been extinguished.”

The preponderance of Tamil Christians in the upper echelons of the overseas Tamil nationalist propaganda machinery – J. Rajaratnam and [ex-] Fr. Thomas Amalathas of New York, Karunyan Arulanantham and John Balachandra of California, Professor J. Eliezer and Ana Pararajasingam of Australia , Fr. Xavier of Toronto, and Jeyam Thamotharam of London, to name just a few – is remarkable and would make a study by
The Rev. Chandrakanthan is an academic at Jaffna University where he is the president of the University Teacher's Association whose principal task is to issue statements condemning the government or in favor of the LTTE, and thereby distribute them immediately to the LTTE to be forwarded abroad for its use. Their statements have been highly contested. The Rev. Chandrakanthan's evolution as an activist follows the process of entrapment by ones own propaganda as described above. Even though he is a member of the Executive Committee of the Oxford-based International Association for the Study of Forced Migration, all he can say of the forced eviction of Muslims from Jaffna by the LTTE is this: "Those Moslems who live in predominantly Tamil areas had to leave to Moslem villages for safety. But an unfortunate situation developed in the North where in those areas which were under the control of the LTTE, the Moslems were requested by the LTTE to leave the Northern province stating that their security is in danger..." Fr. Chandrakanthan had turned an incident where the LTTE gave 48 hours' notice to Muslims (only 2 hours in Jaffna town, but much longer in Mannar as several RC clergy tried to talk to the LTTE and stop the expulsion) to hand over their valuables and leave or face death, to one where the LTTE was solicitous of the welfare of the Muslims!

The other nationalist who is called upon to issue statements even more frequently, Fr. Emmanuel, is no less a person than the Vicar General of the Jaffna Diocese, a member of the Society of Jesus and the Rector of St. Francis Xavier Seminary at Columbuthurai referred to earlier. He too is one who began with great sympathy for the oppressed and in time was entrapped by his own propaganda. There are reports from the period before he became an LTTE propagandist, that he was highly agitated when rival Tamil militants were butchered by the LTTE and confided to his friends of his great discomfort with the event. Again, in 1990 when Muslims were expelled from Jaffna, Fr. Emmanuel was travelling from Colombo to Jaffna and had witnessed the hapless Muslims in Vavuniya. Highly moved by their plight, he had written a private letter to his friend, the editor of the Tamil Times in London, who published. Fr. Emmanuel's letter. His is perhaps the best example of a well-meaning Tamil, full of compassion, who is entrapped step after step by his liberties with the truth.

Fr. Emmanuel has been described as "one of the ablest minds produced by the Catholic [sic] Church in Shri [sic] Lanka." In a booklet ironically co-published and distributed by the RC Church's Centre for Society and Religion in the predominantly Sinhalese south, he berates the RC Church thus: "Though imported and shaped by foreign missionaries under a colonial government, she [the Church] still enjoyed the strategy and potential to build up a new united nation of Shri Lanka. But unfortunately her minority complex, passivity and apolitical stance vis-a-vis the post independence ethnic injustices, discriminations and racial riots almost amounted to indifference that helped extremist political elements to have their way..." (p. 1) and describes the LTTE as the "guardian and spokesman of the Tamil population" (p. 3). Indeed, he has defended LTTE suicide bombers and equated them to Christian martyrs. In a statement charged with ethnic epithet and presuming to speak on behalf of the Tamils, he has said that Tamils would prefer "death to being creepers and leeches around an arrogant people." In his apparent unmitigated anger at the Sinhalese, he at once blames the Bishops' Conference about celebrating the papal visit while the Tamils were suffering, and "the Buddhist clergy and extremists in the South" for opposing the pontiff's visit. These two spokesmen have been loudly silent on Tamil atrocities, especially against the Muslims. Indeed, as we have already noted, Fr. Chandrakanthan has cast the plunder and expulsion of Muslims as a solicitous and kind act by the LTTE.

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38 Island, 6 July, 1995
42 By the Rt. Rev. D. J. Ambalavanar in the preface to S. J. Emmanuel ("The Church, Politics and War in Shri Lanka (Theologising Contextually Amidst a War)," Jaffna: Centre for Better Society and Colombo: Centre for Society and Religion, n.d. (Preface date 1994)), in which Emmanuel returns the compliment by calling Ambalavanar "a courageous spokesman here and abroad for the just cause of the Tamils."
43 S. J. Emmanuel, n.d.
45 Emmanuel (n.d.), p. 41. Actually Tamil Roman Catholics were very glad of the papal visit and wanted to leave the Tamil areas for Colombo and were deterred only by their inability to get passes from the LTTE and the army's concerns for security. See several news reports, Jan. 1995. It is reported that 250,000 people, a half of Sri Lanka's Christian population, attended the event (Keesing's Record of World Events, Vol. 41, Annual Reference Supplement, p. R81, 1995.).
That the Reverend Fathers Chandranakthan and Emmanuel are able to give an unbalanced picture on behalf of the RC Church while Tamil and Sinhalese bishops are silent and even distribute their diatribes against them, speaks for their patience as elders. It also shows the bishops' embarrassment at being thought of as being anti-Tamil in contradicting them, and consequently, their failure as leaders. Most distressing is Emmanuel's call to the Sinhalese Christian leadership to identify with Sinhalese ideals of liberation the way the Tamil leadership has. Were they to do so, they would write only of Tamil atrocities, not allow just war. Thus it would appear that the larger RC Church is hostage to and silenced by a very small Tamil nationalist group of priests who are able to manipulate the church's belief in Christian patience and charity, and fear of having unseemly bickering or being seen as anti-minority. The larger RC Church therefore sticks to issuing well-meaning and innocuous, but non-controversial and less effective statements periodically, asking the government for the alleviation of civilian suffering by opening up the Jaffna lagoon to civilian traffic, deploring attacks by the government on civilians, decrying violence and calling people to prayer.

The Church of Ceylon (Anglican)

The Church of Ceylon, as the successor to the Church of England, was once the established church. In this role, after yielding her considerable influence over the colonial government, especially following independence, she had tended to play safe and preserve her position and influence. Divided into two dioceses, Colombo and Kurunagala, Colombo has been the more influential, although a previous bishop of Kurunagala, the Rt. Rev. Lakshman Wickremasinghe had many Tamil admirers because of his outspokenness in political matters. Except for his brief tenure, the Diocese of Colombo has dominated the Anglican Church.

One of the church's first overt attempts to influence an election was in 1970, when the pro-business United National Party (UNP) government was under threat of being turned out by the United Left Front Alliance (ULF), consisting of the centrist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and some Marxist parties. In a thinly veiled reference to the ULF, the then Anglican bishop's statement asking the people not to vote for socialism of any kind was headlined in the Daily News just a few days before the election in May 1970. Nonetheless, the UNP was turned out by the electorate. The ULF government immediately upon assuming office claimed that the UNP had bankrupted the country and started the politically charged "The-Save-the-Country-Fund." The hapless bishop's hasty attempt to be one with the new establishment was signified by his command to all the parishes to give the following week's collection to the fund.

This incident illustrates both the Anglican Bishop's clout as well as the church's desire to be on the side of those who are in power. Characteristically since then, the church has used her clout in urging peace, propounding solutions, and yet, not pushing hard enough to offend the state. Never since have those in authority been challenged so.

The Anglican Church has only 5 Tamil parishes with full-time priests in the north (in and around Jaffna Town and Vavuniya) under the Diocese of Colombo, besides parishes in the towns of Badulla, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, etc., as specified in the compact on the division of the mission field among the Protestant missionary societies. Under this partitioning of the field, the Anglicans got the townships. There are also some Tamil congregations under the Diocese of Kurunagala. The Sinhalese congregations, however, are more numerous, and despite the low Tamil numbers, the church through the election of a Tamil bishop some time back, has demonstrated her cohesiveness. Tamils have felt slighted occasionally by such things as the blessing of Sinhalese troops by a previous bishop and the Sinhalese

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47 Emmanuel's book is surprisingly full of errors for an author who is a seminary rector and S. J. To give a small sampling, he says i) the Tamil armed struggle began in 1983 (p. 7) ii) the Tamils and Sinhalese are descended from the North and South of India, respectively; and that Tamils and Sinhalese were brought together only under the British (p. 5) iii) Buddhism was brought to Sri Lanka by Mahinda and Sangamitta, children of Asoka, at which time a fifth of the population were Tamils as though there was a census at the time (p. 5) iv) The Dutch Reformed "and other Protestant churches" came to Sri Lanka during the Dutch period (p. 6) and v) The Tamil parties always sat in the opposition (p. 9). That it was published at all, shows that the church is reluctant to say no to him.

51 Ceylon Daily News, 14 July, 1995
53 As a member of Christ Church, Jaffna, I have seen the correspondence in 1970 in discussions with the then vicar. The Christ Church parish did not contribute.
54 See also footnote 20 on the Church backing down when the Buddhists encroached on church property.
55 There are also parishes without enough members to support a priest in scattered towns such as Pallai, Thaniottrru, etc., where services might be held for Easter and Christmas by a visiting priest. The congregations of Kokkuvil and Urumpirai around Jaffna town have regular services conducted by visiting priests.
56 D. Kanagasabai Wilson, The Christian Church in Sri Lanka: Her Problems and Her Influence, Colombo: The Study Centre for Religion and Society, 1975
57 The occasion was the Army Day service in late 1986. Other Christian leaders, such as the Methodist
architecture used for the cathedral in Colombo. In general however, intercommunal relations have been most amicable.

The present bishop, the Rt. Rev. Kenneth Fernando, has been the most activistic in the ethnic conflict. His experience evinces both the power of the episcopate and also the dangers of power. On the positive side, as we shall see below in the matter of the crossing of the Jaffna Lagoon, he took the church on a new course in stark departure from the accommodative instincts the Anglican church was accustomed to, in seeming defiance of the government. In an attempt at promoting greater understanding he personally attended a conference in London that had been arranged to focus on Tamil refugees, and chaired the plenary session there — something that most Sinhalese church leaders would not have risked, since many Tamil activists overseas are in league with the LTTE. In a demonstration of the bishop's spirit of love, it is perhaps relevant to mention the personal testimony of an Anglican parish priest from Jaffna. He had just been expelled from Jaffna by the LTTE in November/December 1995 and had seen LTTE men moving into his home to loot even before he had reached the gates of the vicarage. Subsequently when he met the bishop in Colombo, the bishop, according to him, wept.

Bishop Fernando assumed office shortly after the war between the government and the LTTE had resumed in June 1990 and subsequently had reached a stalemate. The situation was one where the Tamils of the peninsula were under LTTE control, unable to go south without exit permits and even if they were lucky enough to get the permit, they had to cross the Jaffna lagoon which had been declared illegal by the government. However, the government expected government employees to use the lagoon for coming to Colombo and therefore, while allowing most traffic, would occasionally kill civilians caught crossing by firing on their boats, as though to make a point. In such a situation Bishop Fernando announced a pastoral visit to his flock in the north. Despite warnings by the Joint Operations Command of the armed forces telling him not to make the illegal crossing he braved it and met his flock. In Jaffna, besides meeting his flock, he also met V. Pirabaharan, the LTTE leader, along with the JDCSI Bishop in Jaffna at the time, D. J. Ambalavanar, and the Roman Catholic Bishop of Jaffna Savundranayagam. At the meeting he asked Pirabaharan to give up his demand for Ealam, the separate state he has been demanding. Pirabaharan agreed provided a "substantial alternative is granted" and to good measure, even released some policemen whom he had captured. There was euphoria although no one asked what a substantial alternative was or what the Tamil people wanted. The Ceylon Daily News in an editorial praised the bishop saying "Bishop Kenneth's courage and commitment deserves [sic] the thanks of the nation." The Sunday Times had a colour picture of a smiling bishop, Pirabaharan and his spokesman Anton Balasingam. In an interview in the same newspaper, the bishop described Pirabaharan as "quick thinking, very decisive and with human qualities — perhaps technically true since human qualities are many. But the context of the comment surely must have wounded the families of the many who had been killed by him. In a sop, the bishop also added "There is an air of dissent in the peninsula" and that human rights and democracy had to be restored once peace is restored as though to suggest that human rights can be suspended in times of war. This visit was followed by another, this time at Pirabaharan's invitation as his guest. Then when President Kumaratunge asked him to go again, he did so again as her representative. At the end of it all, hostilities resumed when the cease-fire, as attested by international observers, was broken by Pirabaharan. It turned out that the LTTE had used the cease-fire and negotiations to rearm itself. Tragically, when the prelate first

Chairman and RC Bishop also took part. The service included the singing of "Onward Christian Soldiers" and was televised. The army is almost entirely Sinhalese.

In ordinary times such things might be normal and inoffensive. But given the bitterness of the war, the rampages of the army in the midst of civilians and the disfranchisement of the Tamils into powerlessness, these things assume greater significance and loom large.

It is the personal experience of this writer that any Tamil wishing to do anything for his people, must increasingly do it under the umbrella of the LTTE whose control of overseas Tamil activity is tight because overseas Tamils are generally the most nationalist and militant when it comes to Sri Lankan politics, perhaps matched only by the nationalism of overseas Sinhalese. The needs of expatriate Tamils (to feel connected to a place and people they have abandoned, and to take racial pride in the imagined heroism of their people when they themselves are disfranchised in the West) are completely at variance with the needs of Tamils in Sri Lanka (to keep life and limb together, to find the next meal and to bring up children as best as they can in difficult conditions). Thus, overseas Tamils would easily - even militantly - say that the fighting for Ealam cannot be stopped after so much has been sacrificed - when it is not they who fight nor they who sacrifice.
called for a cease-fire, the Sri Lankan authorities had dismissed it as "a facade to gain time until weapons arrived." The bishop who had staked his reputation by urging people to talk peace to the LTTE, it is said in Church circles, found his telephone calls to the president not being returned. The biggest blow, after all this was done with good intentions, was when the self-styled "Tamil Church," in an obvious reference to Bishop Fernando wrote of the church "in and around Colombo among elitist Christians" and their "understanding of mediation as merely shutting between warring factions."  

In hindsight now, having watched the whole process unfold and peter out, the incident showed the dangers of well-intentioned and loving but naive activism without understanding ground realities. A brutal regime had been legitimised with nothing gained. The power and prestige of the episcopate had been wielded with good intentions, but had accomplished little. The church had acted as if peace is a cease-fire and as though democratic rights are only for peace times and can be set aside for the sake of a cease-fire. And worst of all, in dealing with powerful persons, the church felt free to bend the truth so as to say something nice for the moment about Pirabaharan. Even in the matter of the conference in London, a conference that was touted as academic, when the proceedings came out, it turned out that, despite the stated attempts of the editors to include a wide cross-section of opinion, parts of papers not complimentary to the LTTE, had some of the uncomplimentary sections excised and worse, neutral expressions by authors such as "militant group" for the LTTE, had been recast as "freedom fighters." Thus, in the event, the conference had been a forum within the control of the LTTE, albeit without the consent of all the organisers, and the bishop's help, as well as that of other eminent Ceylonese who had accepted free tickets to London to read papers, had been secured in giving the conference and its propagandist proceedings a measure of respectability.

The challenge before the church is to learn from this experience, how she should deal with inimical forces in power that must be dealt with, and yet dealt with without giving such forces legitimacy. The Anglican Church now confines her activities to statements through the NCC. Perhaps among all the churches, the Anglican Church in the North is in the most serious difficulties. After the forced exodus of the people from the North and their return subsequent to the recapture of Jaffna by government forces in May 1996, she finds that out of the 4 full-time priests, only 1 is prepared to return to Jaffna and be with the people, while the others are in Colombo trying to migrate to the West, and at least one is said to be leaving the priesthood. Thus, having had few social programmes compared to the other churches before the tragedy of the exodus from Jaffna, the Church is now isolated from the people of the North as never before.

The Methodist Church  
The Methodists by culture and station in life are not unlike the Anglicans. Under the division of the mission field, they became particularly active among the Tamils in Point Pedro, some of the islands around the peninsula, Jaffna Town, Mannar and Batticaloa. The Methodists have elected Tamils as Presidents and despite occasional complaints like in the Anglican church against a few church leaders perceived as communal, inter-ethnic relations have been excellent. However they are weakened by the fact that their president serves a five-year term, rather than up to retirement, like the Anglican bishop. As such they lack the advantage of the continuous and forceful leadership that is possible with the Anglicans. They therefore tend to work with the other churches through the NCC and have tended to be pastoral in their attitudes rather than vigorously activist. Their refugee camps and homes in the North-East are noted for their service to the community.  
The high point of the Methodist Church was in 1983 after thousands of Tamils had been killed in the riots in 1983. Her then president, the Rev. Somasiri Perera, said publicly that he was ashamed to be a Sinhalese because of what had happened. At the same time, the then incumbent at the church's most influential parish, Colpetty Methodist Church,
the Rev. Duleep Fernando, at great risk to his life went about Colombo looking after Tamil refugees and is remembered for this by many Tamils with great affection. The Rev. Somasiri Perera was one of the first leaders to visit the north after hostilities resumed between the LTTE and the government in June 1990. The pastoral letter by the present president, the Rev. Duleep Fernando, to be read from pulpits over Christmas in 1995, urging their membership to not have parties and send the savings to Tamil refugees, and his subsequent visit to church-run refugee camps in the north, are examples of this attitude.

The Church of South India

The Jaffna Diocese of Church of South India, the only diocese of the CSI in Sri Lanka, is unique in that it is the only denomination in Sri Lanka consisting only of Tamil members. It is the successor to the American Ceylon Mission's Congregationalist churches. When the South Indian Union took place, the American Congregationalists there, with whom the Jaffna Congregationalists were in close communion, found themselves naturally moving into the new united church with episcopal ordination and governance— which then would have precluded them from continuing in communion with their Jaffna counterparts, unless the latter too accepted the Apostolic priesthood. Thus it was that the Jaffna Congregationalists were inducted into the anomalous Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India, the JDCSI, with their Bishop in Jaffna, to distinguish him from the Roman Catholic Bishop of Jaffna. The Church, until recent years has been confined to the northern peninsula, a tiny part of the lands claimed as Tamil homelands.

Being a peninsular Tamil church without the benefit of the wider perspectives of a multicultural membership enjoyed by other churches and for reasons having to do with the personality of her first bishop as we shall see below, the church from her early years saw herself in opposition to the rest of Sri Lanka, was defensive in her outlook and the least subject to change. At the same time, the formation of the diocese, its centralised episcopate and its influence as the one Church with an all-Tamil membership and the only Tamil Protestant Bishop, have given the church immense power and prestige and opportunities. These opportunities have also come with challenges.

The personalities and long tenures of the first two bishops of the church have left their indelible mark on the church. The first bishop of the JDCSI was the Rt. Rev. S. Kulandran, a man of immense intellect and scholarship, best known internationally for his work on Hindu Bhakti and the role of grace in it. He was by inclination the Congregationalist he had been before the union and did not wield the powers of his office to force change. As a result of the attendant simplicity of life-style of his, and his punctilious refusal to use his office to further the careers of his children (in a period when it was common for JDCSI officials to use the church to gain admission for their children to Vellore Medical College and other prestigious CSI institutions in India), he was a very much respected and highly regarded leader. Through this respect he had and his role as an intellectual, he has influenced the church immensely, especially through his writings to which we shall make reference.

Caste, identified more with Tamils than with the Sinhalese, is an area where the JDCSI has evolved differently, and bears on the ethnic conflict. In the early years of Christianity in Sri Lanka, all the Protestant denominations were militantly against the pernicious institution of caste. We know from records that the earliest inmates at Uduvil Girls' College were from the lower castes and poor (some were from such poor homes that they had been handed over to the missions by their parents). Others from the descriptions in old records were clearly of Koviahs and Pandaram origin. That the students were, in terms of caste, a mixed bag is clear from i) objections of Vellalah parents to their child's eating with the other children in the boarding, and ii) the school's having to look after the student

79 There are two reasons for this. First, the British had hostilities with the Americans, with their sympathies for the French, when the American missionaries came to South Asia. Therefore, after first expelling them from Calcutta, the British allowed them to operate only in peninsular Jaffna from where they could be watched (Charles R. A. Hoole, Modern Sannyasins: Protestant Missionary Contribution to Ceylon Tamil Culture, Bern: Peter Lang AG, 1995). Second, there was the agreement among the early missions in Sri Lanka to "partition the field," referred to, above. Under this agreement, the American Ceylon Mission was confined to the peninsula with the exception of Jaffna town and Point Pedro. (D. Kanagasabai Wilson, 1975).

80 Sir James Emerson Tennent, Christianity in Ceylon, London: John Murray, 1850; p. 160. The Rev. Dr. D. T. Niles was one of the few persons to speak with pride in his sermon about the first Niles's wife who was given by her poor mother to a missionary lady. In another case, a girl who sheltered at the mission house during a storm took bread and bananas from the missionary. The parents thereupon felt the girl was polluted and unfit for marriage and asked the missionary to look after her. See p. 118 of Mary and Margaret Leitch, Seven years in Ceylon: Stories of Missionary Life, New York: American Tract Society, 1890 (Reprint by Navrang, New Delhi, 1993).
81 The Koviahs are household cooks ritually equal to the Vellalahs and probably the descendants of Sinhalese agriculturists captured in war. The Pandarams are temple cooks.
until a Christian marriage could be arranged for the student. But this Christian abhorrence of caste was not to last too long in the American Ceylon Mission. Because Christian wives were considered important in upholding Christianity in the newly Christian homes, the missions' boarding schools for girls were considered important in supplying Christian brides. In 1826 the American Ceylon Mission took the controversial decision “that they would admit only girls of good caste ‘who have some property; such girls as would make suitable companions for the boys’ in [the seminary at] Batticotta. The idea was to cultivate a group of Christians drawn from the highest echelons of society who would lead the Christian community. Thus the church began to be identified strongly with the Vellalahs, although many Koviah-caste families, ritually equal but socially inferior, are also mixed into this Vellalah identity.

As a result of the consequent Vellalah identity and Vellalah domination of the church attendant upon the policy change vis-a-vis caste, non-Vellalahs who felt themselves called to the clergy were not accepted for ordination by Bishop Kulandran. Many non-Vellalahs of JDCSI background now serve as priests in the Anglican and Methodist churches and have risen to the highest church offices.

The JDCSI might well have evolved for the better under normal circumstances if not for the ethnic conflict. Since the Sinhalese Christians were pushing for ridding society of caste — a Hindu institution present equally among the Buddhists in a distinctively weaker form as their historical baggage from their Hindu past — it was seen by the JDCSI with her nationalist and peninsular mindset, as a matter of interference in Tamil affairs. Their reaction was little different from the Apartheid regime’s response to demands for change — asking for time for gradual change, blaming unrest on outside foment, and apologies based on the Bible. Thus when the Anglican bishop, the Rt. Rev. Harold de Soysa wrote "about the failure of Christianity to intervene in the matter of the Temple entry of Harijans,” Bishop Kulandran responded appealing for understanding that they in Jaffna "are the helpless victims of the Colombo press,” and showing the parallels to the Jewish prohibition on Gentiles against entry into the inner court of the temple. The JDCSI leadership’s attitude is further revealed upon the proposal in South India of E. V. Ramasamy Naicker (leader of the Dravida Kalagam) to start an agitation to admit all persons into the innermost sanctuary of Hindu Temples and the plan by M. Karunanandhanithi (Dravida Munnetra Kalagam) to hold examinations to qualify priests to officiate in temples. Feeling moved enough on the caste issue in far-away India, the church's newspaper wrote "The innermost shrine of a Hindu Temple houses the sacred symbol of the Deity and can at most accommodate only two or three at a time; and these two or three, if they are not priests, will not know what to do, if they are allowed to get in. ... So Mr. Naicker and Mr. Karunanithy, you may be good people but stop this nonsense.” Not only was the ban of low-caste temple entry justified, it was also held that the low-caste, even after passing examinations on the subject, would not know what to do in the inner sanctuary!

Just as caste prejudices were reinforced through public justifications as a result of the ethnic conflict, racist sentiments also came to be expressed in public. Responding to a piece in the Sun newspaper by Dr. Bryan de Kretser, a Dutch Burgher, Bishop Kulandran wrote: "I do not think that the Sinhalese race which came into Ceylon some centuries before the birth of Christ needs to be defended by a Dutchman whose ancestors came in the 17th Century. And it is certainly strange that Dr. Kretser should advocate the further strengthening of the Sinhalese cause when more than 75% of his own race has flitted off to Australia..." Over the years, the centralised episcopate and the one-bishop with strong caste-, nationalist- and ethnic-prejudices, resulted in a church permeated with his attitudes. State repression and reactive and imprudent responses like this increasingly resulted in a falling apart from the rest of the church in Sri Lanka, culminating in accusations against and dismissal of the rest of the Protestant churches, laced with sarcasm: "The National Christian Council of Ceylon is well known for its sympathetic nature: it is specially sympathetic to the viewpoint of the Government. This line has been pushed by succeeding bishops and "has been accepted by the World Council of Churches," the WCC, which therefore now funds the JDCSI directly rather than through the NCC by way of which funds to all other churches are funnelled. The JDCSI, however, continues as a member of the NCC and enjoys the full privileges of such membership.

82 So great must have been the attendant financial burden that the decision was taken that, according to M. H. Harrison (Udawal: 1824-1924, Tellippalai: ACM Press, 1925, p. 12) "the girls must be induced to accept the first eligible offer of marriage."
83 Schwartz of Travancore: “The conversion of one woman is of more importance than of six men.” (Harrison, 1925, p. 4).
84 Harrison, 1925, p. 12: The issue of property arose because the girls were married off by the mission with a dowry of 50 Rix Dollars.
85 He has defended it in personal conversation saying the parishes are not yet ready. There have been a very few exceptions in allowing the ordination of those joining the Ashram, an eastern monastic-like order with little parish work to speak of except among some depressed class members.
90 According to a highly placed southern church source.
The JDCSI with the only Protestant Tamil bishop therefore gets immense funds for her social programmes through the WCC as well as through the JDCSI's original contacts in the American Ceylon Mission and other places. This has seen a tremendous opportunity for the JDCSI to expand her influence and mission and with it have come challenges. The second bishop of the JDCSI, the Rt. Rev. D. J. Ambalavanar, was as much an administrator as the Rt. Rev. Kulandran was a scholar. Bishop Ambalavanar raised the status of the episcopate by wielding authority in a visible manner and used the funds available to create what has been — jocularly though with a good measure of truth — called CSI Inc., with the bishop as CEO. It has been remarked that "[the] Jaffna Diocese grew and deepened its faith during this tragic war." A big factor in the JDCSI's access to money has been Bishop Ambalavanar's ability to write the "convincing project proposals" that Western agencies are comfortable with. It is said that the church had access to so much money that she turned down offers of funding for want of administrative personnel. The Ambalavanar era saw the JDCSI opening many new parish churches and projects such as farms for the poor, cottage industries, homes for the destitute and nurseries, among others. When government hospitals shut down because of the war, the JDCSI's hospitals' premises were used to house Jaffna Hospital. Testimonies abound of how the church was helping those who were displaced by the government. The expansion also involved religious conversions, besides the opening of business institutions. With the expanded influence, the JDCSI saw herself "as the leader of the Tamil Protestants of Sri Lanka." Expatiate Tamils with their innate nationalism, have praised the JDCSI for being "the only Church which understands the problems of the Tamils," thus dismissing the many Sinhalese Christians whom they have worked with for Tamil rights. This expanded influence of the JDCSI posed new challenges in three principal areas:

i) Operating massive projects in LTTE controlled territory, the church had to seek a modus vivendi with the LTTE. Unfortunately, the modes of accommodation have been questionable in a Christian context, as with the Roman Catholic church in Tamil areas. While the church has been highly supportive of those suffering at the hands of the government, she may be described as much more than callously indifferent to those who have suffered at Tamil hands. When groups rivaling the LTTE were massacred in May 1986 on the alleged grounds that they were all criminals, the church provided the rationale by claiming that in killing criminals the crime rate had been reduced. Coming after the expulsion of Muslims and dissidents from Jaffna and the massacre of rival militants, the then bishop granted an interview to the LTTE paper Kalathil where he seemed to legitimise the regime: "Those who do not support the Tigers have left the land. Those who remain largely support the Tigers ..." As with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) operating in LTTE territory, it has been alleged that the JDCSI too has paid the militants a part of her funds so as to have a free hand. Goods such as computers were allegedly smuggled for the LTTE claiming such items to be for church use. Even as children of the poor were conscripted and the Tamil speaking Muslims expelled from Jaffna, the JDCSI shirilly charged the Sinhalese state with atrocities against Tamils and most brazenly attempted to boost the reputation of the LTTE in international forums. And in a seeming quid pro quo, the children of leading churchmen (along with the children of other elite) were given exit passes to study in India and other places. Indeed, others' children were even urged to give their lives to the saintly movement for freedom. In time, the LTTE "Minister" in charge of education. During his consecration in May 1993. Those in attendance included Christians, Hindu old boys of Jaffna College (where the new bishop had been principal), and others. Those on the stage included the new bishop’s predecessor in office, the Manager of St. John's College, the premier Anglican boys' school in the north, and the LTTE "Minister" in charge of education. During his welcoming address, the manager of St. John's urged students to study hard; and if they did not, he said, it was better for them to join the saintly movement (இல்லையுடைய மக்கள்) for liberation and give up their lives than to hang around street corners. Ironically the church-paper, The Morning Star, ran an editorial (2 June, 1995)

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91 Chief Executive Officer.
94 Jebanesan, n.d., p. iii.
95 The Morning Star, 3 March, 1995, quoting the statement by Dr. Karunyran Arulanantham of California.
97 At several seminars organized by the church, including one at the Centre for the Study of Society and Religion, Chunnakam in 1987, addressed by a lay official. The Morning Star in an editorial titled "The Merry Month of May," implied that the militant cause had not been weakened by the massacre and that the people stood shoulder to shoulder with the LTTE even after it.
98 Kalathil, 10 July, 1992 (translation from Tamil).
99 Relating to the payment of funds, there was reportedly correspondence including affidavits between the President of the Methodist Church and the Bishop of the JDCSI in the early 1990s on the issue of church expansion in the Batticaloa district. The funds were allegedly used to make the LTTE look the other way.
100 Based on the testimony of a JDCSI priest in May 1996
101 This call was issued at the public open-air meeting at Vattukkotai welcoming the Rt. Rev. S. Jebanesan after his consecration in May 1993. Those in attendance included Christians, Hindu old boys of Jaffna College (where the new bishop had been principal), and others. Those on the stage included the new bishop’s predecessor in office, the Manager of St. John’s College, the premier Anglican boys’ school in the north, and the LTTE "Minister" in charge of education. During his welcoming address, the manager of St. John’s urged students to study hard; and if they did not, he said, it was better for them to join the saintly movement (இல்லையுடைய மக்கள்) for liberation and give up their lives than to hang around street corners. Ironically the church-paper, The Morning Star, ran an editorial (2 June, 1995)
the church came to propagate actively the LTTE's propaganda in an unquestioning way. For instance, when St. Peter's Church in Navalay was bombed by the Sri Lankan airforce in July, 1995, the present bishop was taken across the Jaffna lagoon in a special speed boat by the LTTE from where he proceeded to Colombo where he issued the statement to Reuters and the BBC Tamil Service that he had personally seen the flattened church, reduced to rubble. These statements were then transmitted by the LTTE's agents on the internet and through faxes. Thereafter it emerged that the church was intact with some pockmarks and that the airforce had indeed bombed the church compound killing 121 civilians, but not destroying the church. This was then naturally followed by teasing and tantalizing questions in the press with pictures of the intact church, asking if the bishop would correct his statement and that the newspaper was awaiting a fax from the bishop. The loss in prestige to the church was immense. Such liberties commonly taken with the truth within the Tamil nationalist community had eroded trust even among Tamil nationalists and the bishop in a concurrent and related incident, seemed unwilling to take Tamil nationalist Christians in California with whom he worked at their word. The church's ability

titled "Children and the Church," condemning i) far-away American Churches for having Negro children living below the poverty line, ii) California's proposition 187 withdrawing social benefits from undocumented workers and iii) the sale of assault weapons in the US!

102 Sunday Times, 23 July, 1995
103 Ceylon Daily News, 29 July, 1995
104 Based on the testimony of those who listened to it.
105 See the internet news transmitted by the newsgroup Circle from Colorado State University.
107 This was a more disastrous rerun of the Thurkai Amman Kovil bombing of Aug. 1992 when 20 or so Tamil civilians were killed by the government. The JDCSI forwarded a message, according to NCC sources, claiming that 150 were killed. The NCC, more trusting of the JDCSI's judgment at the time, sent this across to Geneva from where the number of 150 was propagated by the WCC's Ecumenical Press Service. It is understood that the NCC is now much more cautious in forwarding reports from the JDCSI.
110 In this incident, occurring round the same time, a container of medical supplies worth several million rupees had been negotiated by expatriate Tamil Christians in the US and sent for use in the JDCSI's hospitals. However, the ship with the container left the US on April 13, 1995 and while it was in transit, hostilities between the LTTE and the government resumed on April 19. The ship arrived on 27 May, 1995. Sri Lankan customs authorities, not known to be very helpful or unobstructive, asked that the JDCSI register herself as a non-governmental organisation for the container to be released. The JDCSI, because of the new difficulties of transport, according to their own statement (Observer, 28 Aug. 1995), did not pay the Rs. 150,000. This explanation is not convincing because the sum of Rs. 150,000 required for release by the customs is paltry in relation to the cost of the goods and shipping costs. The JDCSI had seemingly lost interest in the consignment, and, according to JDCSI sources, many letters from customs officials to the Colombo office of the church went unrequited. By unfortunate coincidence, the same time also saw communal tensions being heightened by the terrorist bombing near the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation on 7 August, 1995 (Ceylon Daily News, 8 Aug. 1995). In the midst of this tension, the bishop left Colombo for Jaffna. The involvement of some who collect funds for the LTTE in packing the container in the US also had something to do with the bishop's decision not to claim the container. According to unofficial JDCSI sources, the bishop came to learn that the LTTE fund raisers had, after the drugs and hospital supplies had been packed by church workers in Palmdale, CA, added some parcels for the TRO, a Tamil refugee organisation widely known to be under LTTE control. The bishop seemingly was simply unwilling to take their word on the additions to the container. Trust within the Tamil community was broken.

The integrity of the church having been compromised by the Navalay Church matter, Sinhalese nationalists were able to exploit the situation by slandering the bishop saying in the Tamil telecast of the state-run Rupavahini that Bishop Jebanesan had run away upon the container of goods for the LTTE being discovered and, in a finessed tie-up to the Navalay incident, that he was hiding in the Navalay church. The Sinhalese and English telecasts had a different version implicating the JDCSI's presbyter in their Colombo parish.

After remaining unclaimed for 3 months, under the regulation that a container unclaimed for more than 21 days can be confiscated, it was taken and given to the Sri Lankan military (Ceylon Daily News, 23 August, 1995). The LTTE propaganda machinery of expatriate Tamil nationalists simply stated that the government had confiscated the shipment and handed it over to the army (The Tamil Voice, Summer and Fall 1995, Livingston, NJ).

The incident is also instructive of the distinctive needs of the politically active expatriate Tamil Christians (distinguished from the many apolitical Tamil expatriate Christians) who had shipped the container from the US without first getting clearance from the Ministry of Health as repeatedly advised by their church contacts in Colombo. The latter's experience included being accused by the military of being LTTE agents. A previous Head of the Colombo office of the
to influence informed opinion among the Sinhalese remains sorely damaged. The focus had shifted from the murder of 121 civilians to the church's commitment to the truth. It is this writer's view that Bishop Jebanesan, having heard of the killings from those whom he trusted, was highly worked up into a state of distress and sincerely believed that he had seen the flattened church. His statement may therefore be attributed to his being a poor and unreliable witness rather than to anything sinister. Be that as it may, the incident underscores the church's willingness to accept LTTE propaganda uncritically and to thereby become its tool. As with the Roman Catholic Tamil leadership, it has been an evolving process of sympathising with the Tamils suffering at the hands of government, becoming activists to expose the government, telling little lies in that process to defend the LTTE without whom they felt the Tamil people would be open to a massive onslaught by the government, and in time moving to a position of being entrapped by their own lies and having to tell bigger and bigger lies to defend their earlier lies and maintain their credibility. Perhaps Bishop Jebanesan's position as a new bishop offers a way out of the trap. Indeed, the example of firm character set by some of the position as a new bishop offers a way out of the trap. The example of firm character set by some of the realising that the problem is not terrorist supplies that were being received.

ii. Another challenge posed to the JDCSI by the increased possibilities for mission, lies in the attendant opportunities for corruption—financial and sexual. The typical JDCSI priest, once poor and using public transport or a bicycle, is today more often than not seen driving a "project van," and has huge sums by Sri Lankan standards passing through his hands. Once doing everything in the parish himself, now he often has secretaries paid for from project funds and employees under him. While the matter will bear more investigation, preferably by the JDCSI herself, three of an array of instances will be given to illustrate the nature of the problem. The first concerns a priest in charge of a project, Gnansangari, the brother of a well-known Member of Parliament and a Hindu, began fasting to death in front of a YMCA, alleging misuse of funds by the priest in collusion with the LTTE. Subsequently while he was fasting, he was shot dead by a boy identified as a member of the LTTE and the man's widow accused the priest of complicity. The church never enquired into the widow's complaint and subsequently posted the priest to a more prominent position because of his ability to raise and manage funds. Second, a married priest with high managerial skills was in charge of a JDCSI home where he allegedly had an affair with the woman in charge of the inmates and subsequently took her to Colombo for an abortion. A complaint was lodged with the JDCSI bishop. Because the priest's services were integral to the project, the woman was punished, rather than the priest or both, through a transfer to another job under the JDCSI away from the priest. And third, a priest in charge of a project embezzled some funds. The church was more interested in recovering the funds than in punishment, to preserve the donor's confidence in the JDCSI's management of funds. The priest was simply asked to look again at the accounts, and the quick-witted priest replaced the money and was allowed to continue and quietly leave the country. Considering that one of the ways by which the Christian church made early inroads in Jaffna was by making the claim that Christian priests

111 To avoid charges of poor scholarship, slander, or carrying tales and because of the seriousness of the issues raised here, the facts contained here have been carefully checked with several JDCSI sources, some at the highest levels. The issue is not who the priests are, rather it is the measures that a Christian institution ought to take in preserving its integrity. These matters are widely known in Jaffna.

112 I have confirmed that the widow's complaint was known to JDCSI authorities.

113 This is not a case in isolation. There is another case that I came across in Jaffna where an early-teen-age girl refugee in a parsonage was allegedly made pregnant by the priest and brought to a native medical practitioner for an abortion in Nallur.
were upright men while no one would trust his daughter or wife with a Hindu priest, it would be tragic if the JDCSI reduced her priests to mere functionaries who are there to do the pooja, rather than be the upright Christian leaders they have been.

iii. The expansion of the JDCSI has also meant that she has moved into new territories originally demarcated for other churches, in the old concordat on the division of the mission field referred to earlier. The JDCSI's establishment of parishes and projects in Jaffna town and the Vanni have split Christian amity so severely with the Anglicans that the head of the Anglican Jaffna archdeaconate, The Late Ven. Donald Canagaratnam, perhaps the best known Protestant scholar in Sri Lanka, and the bishop of the JDCSI, were not on speaking terms. Similarly, when the JDCSI moved into Batticaloa, there were major problems with the Methodists. These issues have been somewhat addressed by a rewriting of the concordat in a way that it means little so that the JDCSI's work outside her traditional areas has been "legalised." However, she still faces challenges in addressing her soured relations with the other churches. The effects of the questionable ethics of conversions, although contained in competing with Christian denominations, would surely be more difficult to address with other religions. These ethics appear to have driven the JDCSI towards asserting institutional and financial power rather than spiritual power. Rather than exerting a reformist influence on society, the church appears increasingly to rely on using groups like the LTTE — even to the extent of making contact with crime.

The JDCSI thus is at a critical juncture. That priests, being men like all of us, fail is not in dispute and every church has had her share of failing priests and unfortunately will continue to have. The issues at hand, however, are these. Given the state of flux in which the JDCSI has to operate, can she provide the institutional mechanism to deter priestly failings and where they occur, provide a Christian mechanism for the restoration of grace without making it appear that the church does not care when these things occur? Can the Church, in dealing with the LTTE as it necessarily must, keep her Christian character? With the new opportunities for growth, can the JDCSI, and indeed the other churches, manage their growth without trampling upon others? As the largest Protestant grouping in the North, her potential for social and religious mission is great. At the same time, confidence in the church in the south has been vitiated and therefore her ability to be a bridge and peacemaker between the Sinhalese and the Tamils needs to be addressed.

The JDCSI is only newly into her third bishop, the Rt. Rev. S. Jebanesan, a priestly man more in the mould of a scholar than anything worldly. Unfortunately, Bishop Jebanesan is in a position of enforced continuity, with his predecessor, Bishop Ambalavanar, still in Jaffna and working for the church, certainly with the good intention of sharing his immense experience with his successor. As a result, however, very many decision-makers within the JDCSI still consider Bishop Ambalavanar as "the power behind the throne," and give greater weight to him and whether their decisions would meet with his approval, than to the new bishop. Incidents such as inviting Bishop Jebanesan to a public meeting with LTTE big-wigs also on the stage (see footnote 101), would tend to enforce continuity, thereby robbing Bishop Jebanesan of the opportunity to take the church in a direction he thinks is proper. It is a challenge before the new bishop and his response will determine the future of the JDCSI.

The Charismatic and Nonconformist Churches

The charismatic churches, principally the Assemblies of God (AOG), the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission (CPM) and some other evangelical nonconformist churches (including parachurches like Youth for Christ) have largely been disengaged from politics, believing that personal holiness is what they are called upon to work for. An example is the Hospital Christian Fellowship that ignores politics on the assumption that those in power were ordained by God and do the best they can in the given circumstances, running free clinics and hospitals, in addition to doing their religious work. The earliest direct but unwitting involvement was in September 1987, when 4 AOG men (2 clergy, 2 lay) were shot dead at Uduvil by the LTTE who were lying in ambush for an Ealam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF) leader and had mistaken their van for that of the ENDLF. In keeping with their non-involvement, the incident did not provoke any protest from the AOG.

Although apolitical as described, the charismatic churches have been in indirect confrontation with the LTTE over recruits. On the rare occasion when a CPM or AOG child ran away to join the LTTE, the church has embarked on constant prayer in their parishes. In cases where they have got the child back, they have attributed it to God's

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115 The JDCSI had bought land in a village with 13 Anglican families and offered the elder Rs. 3000 a month, rather a high sum in the 1980s, to be a contractor for building a day-care centre. In time, the families switched to the JDCSI. (Bishop Ambalavanar has, on the other hand, castigated smaller churches for reaping where others have sown). When Fr. Canagaratnam wrote to Bishop Ambalavanar, the latter's secretary informed the former that it was not appropriate for a bishop to deal with an archdeacon. The Bishop of Colombo then had to take up the matter, but no discussion of the principles involved occurred and the status quo came to be accepted by all.

The two offices - Anglican Archdeacon and JDCSI Bishop - are now filled by new persons and therefore there is hope for reconciliation.

According to southern church sources

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response\textsuperscript{118}. Members of these charismatic churches also tend to attribute all events to godly intervention. Consider when the LTTE leader Thileepan who had refused water to the LTTE’s prisoners, died without water during a fast; when the LTTE leader Kittu — who had burnt rival militants at junctions in public after dousing them with petrol — died in a blaze aboard a ship after a confrontation with the Indian government,\textsuperscript{119} and when the Tamils of Jaffna (some of whom had approved of the LTTE eviction of the Muslims of Jaffna and the subsequent auctioning of their goods) had to evacuate under LTTE orders in November 1995 and had to go to Kilinochchi where they had to buy their own looted household goods at LTTE auctions.\textsuperscript{120} In all these cases, some charismatic Christians have tended to attribute the sequence of events to divine retribution. With a superstitious bent of mind, such thoughts can be unnerving — such claims can leave even the hardened militant who believed that it is simple coincidence, wondering if it is indeed not God’s wrath.

The general integrity of the charismatics in Jaffna, however, has given them a reputation as people who cannot be pushed around and as folk who would vigorously follow their conscience where it leads them. Thus it was that when many Christians decided not to quit Jaffna in November 1995, the LTTE determined that the CPM should be the first to be got out, if they were to be successful. As a result, besides assaulting some CPM elders, the carrot of 10 lorries was also provided to help them transport their possessions, if they agreed to go.\textsuperscript{121} Showing the same attitude of respect to the CPM, when a CPM church was burnt down about six years ago by local Hindus angry at their efforts at converting Hindus, the LTTE, in their role as the only judiciary in Jaffna, had the church reconstructed.

Although living together in Jaffna with the LTTE, the charismatic churches have remained politically uncompromised unlike the mainline churches. However, many of these churches believe that financial well-being is a blessing from God to the faithful and therefore, by extension, if one is not rich it is a sign that one is not faithful to God.\textsuperscript{122} An unfortunate consequence has been the tendency of some ministers to accumulate property and thereby prove their faithfulness and privileged access to God. Attendant also is the extended conclusion that the Tamil people suffer because they have done something very ungodly.\textsuperscript{123} As a result, some of the well-to-do ministers in Colombo have done little about the ethnic conflict.

While largely apolitical, there is a noticeable new development in political involvement. A group of evangelical churches were involved in three days of fasting and prayer in Vavuniya during 4-6 March, 1996, for peace. In a major departure from past practice, prayers also included the request to be rid of the evil that had taken over the north.\textsuperscript{124} A group of evangelical Christians also recently formed a Christian political party, the United Christian Congress. All member churches of the National Christian Council have dissociated themselves from the party.\textsuperscript{125} At the time of writing, the party has been refused recognition by the Election Commission and does not appear to have any serious following among Christians. Another group, the Evangelical Alliance, had earlier made a statement over President Premadasa’s murder, praising his commitment to the poor although he was personally at the head of the state when many tens of thousands of poor Sinhalese were slaughtered by the army, not to mention the numerous Tamils.\textsuperscript{126} Other statements from them condemning the sufferings of those out of power are not readily evident. Whether this new interest in politics will be sustained, remains to be seen.

Some nonconformist churches have tried to rediscover church discipline along early Christian lines as a federation of local autonomous churches under elected elders. An important segment of the population that joined these churches (e.g., the Grace churches in the Mannar and Trincomalee Districts) consists of ex-militants reacting to a regimented social as well as religious life. Tracing their roots from the Puritan movement in 17th century England, they keenly and regularly study and meditate upon the Bible, seeking Biblical guidance to resolving contemporary problems.

**The National Christian Council (NCC)**

The National Christian Council consists of the Anglicans, the Methodists, the JDCSI, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Baptist Church and the Salvation

\textsuperscript{118} Based on personal accounts from CPM and AOG members.


\textsuperscript{120} Testimony of a southern church head who had visited Christian refugees in Kilinochchi, based on what his flock had told him. According to the same cleric, all of them wish to return to their homes under government control and have been refused permission by the LTTE. That the refugees wish to return and are not allowed is also confirmed by the US State Department (1995 Annual Report on Human Rights Practices, Washington, DC, March, 1996). Thus the churches have the responsibility of caring for their members (and others) under these trying conditions. This is a notable area of church success.

\textsuperscript{121} University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), The Exodus, Special Report 6, Oct./Nov. 1995. In fuel scarce Jaffna, such an offer is indeed a big carrot.

\textsuperscript{122} Based on sermons in and discussions with some members of evangelical churches.

\textsuperscript{123} A claim made by an evangelical priest in a personal conversation with this writer.

\textsuperscript{124} Report by a pastor who had been at the meeting.

\textsuperscript{125} NCC press-release dated 15 Feb. 1996 and signed by the General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Rienzie Perera.

\textsuperscript{126} Keesing’s Record of World Events, Vol. 39, No. 5, pp. 39467-8, May 1993. For their statement, see Cross Points, Vol. 3, No. 4, June 1993
Army. They issue statements periodically on the ethnic conflict and have advocated positions on occasion.

The executive officers of the NCC have a predictable and distinguishable mindset. Almost without exception they would be from the English-speaking elite from premier Christian schools. They would be theologically liberal. Many of them would have been associated with the Student Christian Movement (SCM) which would have started the filtering process, early in school or, as more likely, at university, weeding out the less sophisticated in picking people for NCC (or affiliated) trips abroad. To go up further in the circuit, one must be politically correct: pro-liberation, anti-imperialist, and ecumenical. With time, this profile has changed slightly, although few of the players have. Now that socialism is somewhat discredited, the old socialists speak of feminism and environmentalism — homosexuality is still too dangerous to take up in Sri Lanka — and rarely mention imperialism as they once were wont to do. Accomplishments in English have deteriorated in Sri Lanka, so the pyramid has an even smaller base now, with the NCC increasingly drawing people from cosmopolitan Colombo, Kandy and places, with hardly any from Jaffna as was once possible. Since the denominations get on reasonably well now, ecumenism is increasingly in terms of accepting the "many-splendoured" truth in other religions, meaning that salvation is not uniquely through Christ.

With the ethnic conflict and the interest of western churches in helping, the keyword is development. Money has been poured into church circles as with the JDCSI. The same problems that have plagued the JDCSI as a result of having money, also plague the NCC with an unfortunate additional consequence. The NCC, with its ideology of ecumenism, has embarked on projects that involve Buddhist monks. Thus when there is a dispute over funds, the accusations and counter-accusations over missing money involve Buddhists and undo the very purpose of involving Buddhists in joint projects.

That to be inducted into and to be able to work comfortably with this group one must have all their ideological and theological baggage, means that these organizations under the WCC umbrella are undemocratic. An example is the recent Dance of Siva in the Anglican Cathedral in Colombo during a Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) meeting in 1995. Those in attendance, representing the main Protestant Christian body, were so upset that there were intense protests including a threatened fast to death by a priest. The matter was resolved only after a service of reconciliation was held, the bishop promised publicly that it would never occur again, and a priest on the organising committee (who was, for unclear reasons, held to blame for a committee decision subscribed to by several senior churchmen) left the country. A Hindu wrote to the press expressing hurt that a dance sacred to Hindus had been profaned by being performed for perfunctory reasons in a Christian church. Another example of the NCC's out-of-touch status concerns the NCC leadership's idea to have "a mass inter-faith prayer and meditation meeting with a view to harnessing religious forces." Yet another example of their way-out theology and weird concept of environmentalism is the discovery of "Cosmic Spirituality," which is said to offer hope to the world. According to the WCC's Ecumenical Press Service, this so-called cosmic-spirituality "rooted in African and Asian traditions and cultures makes people partners with the environment and awakens them to their symbiotic relationship with one another and the earth." This cosmic spirituality was something that would make no sense to most church-going Christians in Sri Lanka. Nor is it clear how cosmic spirituality is different from ordinary old spirituality. It was seemingly a nationalist attempt to prove the ancient wisdom of Asia and was dutifully and patronisingly published by the WCC.

127 A senior SCM-er priest of the old guard, not as sophisticated as the newer members, even very recently held forth that arguments of coconut oil being bad for ones cholesterol are an imperialist plot to derail the Sri Lankan economy and promote soy bean oil from America.

128 It is worth noting that it is the same older English-speaking university-educated group that gave legitimacy to the switch to Sinhalese and Tamil away from English. The same group, however, still continues to hold beneath its contempt those younger folk who cannot speak fluent English because they were trained in their mother tongue. Ironically this elite group had, in effect, ensured that those with their English skills remained few and their own class privileges were thereby preserved and confined to the new generation from their own homes — with the schools' ability to train the youth in English vitiated, only their own children had the ability to learn English through their parents.


130 As happened in a project in south Sri Lanka. Unlike with the JDCSI, however, a committee of enquiry has been formed, as confirmed in March 1996 by Anglican Church authorities. The challenge before the NCC is, when the culprits are identified, which will prevail: the Christian resolve for probity or the NCC old boys' network?

131 This is a very Anglican expression. Those who think the Siva dance was wrong, think of the service as being for reconciliation with God and those who think it was fine, think of it as being for reconciliation between those who disagree. In the best Anglican tradition, the same words are used to craft a unity of words, but not substance!

132 Cross Points, Vol. 3, No. 1, September 1992


134 Ecumenical Press Service, Reference 92.08.84 of 1-20 August, 1992.
The key leaders in the WCC/CCA/NCC/SCM circuit generally feel that, with their enlightened theology and ideology, they have a vantage view of the truth and the others are to be managed and lead. In judging the extent to which NCC officials represent the worshippers, the testimony of a one-time official is instructive. Writing on his call to the Christian ministry, he says he was reluctant because he did not like what he saw in the Church, but that he changed his mind and joined the church only after getting the advice: "Join the Church that is, for the sake of the church that ought to be." The officials of the NCC therefore function by pushing their private agenda as far as possible without creating an uproar from the churches they represent, consisting of, in their minds, uninformed primitives.

To be sure, the NCC has two types. The activist leader with out-of-touch ideals who is there to vent his energies in accomplishing his private goals, and the more typical church member who normally takes no interest in the NCC and expresses himself only when the activists do bizarre things. In understanding the NCC leadership then, their ideology and role as true representatives of church-going Christians must be borne in mind. Indeed their undemocratic nature makes their pleas on behalf of democracy suspect. They work with liberal mentors from other churches in the West. In fact all their ideas are ideas that first gained currency and vogueness in the West and were then recycled in Sri Lanka because it was fashionable with their mentors. This state of being an intellectual colony, the complete lack of originality and the attendant poverty of ideas, make their commitment to decolonisation weak. Thus, in line with the vocabulary of the western liberal mentors who periodically come to Sri Lanka, those Sri Lankans in the NCC projects always "empower," but never "uplift," and they "facilitate," but never "help" those whom they work for (or, to use their verbiage, "work with"). Their Western liberal mentors with their experience against Western governments in combatting racism, are intrinsically not trusting of government and therefore have backed, rightly, liberation movements in the Third World. Unfortunately and ironically, in so doing they have passed on the frame of mind that every self-styled liberation group is good, and in encouraging decolonisation, they have unwittingly given substance to nationalist sentiments in the Third World. Thus we have had a resolution canvassed for at the WCC Conference in Australia in 1991 demanding that

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the LTTE be recognised as the sole-representative of the Tamils by Bob Scott\textsuperscript{138}, a New Zealand clergyman on the WCC staff in Geneva who has been to Sri Lanka, presumably to "facilitate" the solution of problems and "empower" the people. His resolution evinces the penchant for glorifying any liberation movement with little understanding of what happens on the ground. While at heart the intention was to promote the rights of Tamils, it betrayed the imperialist arrogance of specifying whom the Tamil people should choose as their leader. It is an overflow of the WCC's undemocratic structure and isolation from worshipping Christians.

As a result of the NCC's being out of touch with the worshipping members of the component churches, it has been unable to attract the evangelical churches to join. Although invitations have been issued to the CPM and the RC Church to join the NCC\textsuperscript{139}, they have not been accepted. The NCCer is unable to understand why some Christians may not wish to be identified with an organisation that will say on their behalf that which they can never agree with; especially that Christ is not the only mediator through whom salvation is had.

However, since the NCC mindset is against racism and for minorities, the staffers slog on and some good does arise out of it. They have come out most usefully in favour of the proposal to devolve powers to Tamils as a means of solving the problem, and condemned the LTTE massacre of Muslims,\textsuperscript{140} the use of children in war\textsuperscript{141} and government atrocities against Tamils\textsuperscript{142}. In an important defense of the Tamils who are being treated by the state with suspicion in general, the NCC has said that the "people of the North are by no means all militants."\textsuperscript{143} However, after issuing statement after statement, what the NCC would say had become predictable and with no palpable effect. According to NCC-staffers, they have become very disheartened. Recently therefore, for whatever it is worth, a priest from the Anglican Church has been released to work full-time at the NCC on promoting peace and he in turn has made visits to the north, pushed various peace proposals and written of peace, tying up the removal of injustice as part of it.\textsuperscript{144} He too faces the same difficulty in tending to legitimise and humanise the LTTE in dealing with it\textsuperscript{145}.

For those who work positively within the NCC, the challenge is in converting high ideals like the removal of injustice into reality in dealing with those who perpetuate injustice. Everyone would agree with simple statements that injustice ought to be removed. Issuing statements to that effect, the church has always found easy to do. The sticky part is in identifying those who perpetuate injustice and telling them so in such a manner as to induce them to change. This, as we have seen, the church has always had difficulties with overcoming these difficulties, then, is their challenge.

The Threat of Nationalism

With nationalism and decolonisation, there has been a tendency to make the mistaken identification Sinhalese = Buddhist\textsuperscript{146} and Tamil = Hindu\textsuperscript{147}. As such Christian numbers in Sri Lanka have collapsed in percentage terms, the most nationalist minded moving away from the catholicity of Christianity\textsuperscript{148} to the narrow identity of nationalism. Two of the most notable examples are those of Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike and Junius Richard Jayewardene,\textsuperscript{149} both prominent Anglicans with obvious Anglophile names who became Buddhists and rose to head the Sri Lankan government. In percentage terms, the drop in

\textsuperscript{138} Confirmed by an NCC official.

\textsuperscript{139} Cross Points, vol. 6, Nos. 1-5, Sept. 1995. See the outgoing NCC chairman's address at the NCC's annual general meeting on Aug. 6. In reflection of the out-of-touch state and the imported political correctness vocabulary of the NCC, the article refers to the chairman as chair, although nearly all the constituent churches of the NCC insist that the clerical orders be confined to men.

\textsuperscript{140} NCC statement of 20 October 1992 on the "dastardly massacre."

\textsuperscript{141} The Rev. Somasiri Perera, Head of the Commission on Justice and Peace of the NCC has expressed indignation at the use of children as soldiers (Ecumenical Press Service, Ref. 90.12.58 of March 1990). This is also elaborated upon in Cross Points, Vol. 4, Nos. 1&2, Sept./Dec. 1993 by Tyrol Ferdinands and in Cross Points, Vol. 5, No. 4-4, December 1995 by the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna).

\textsuperscript{142} NCC press release of 6 December 1993 expressing indignation at the bombing of the Navaly church

\textsuperscript{143} Release of 20 March, 1992 by Tyrol Ferdinands, Information Officer, Commission on Justice and Peace, NCC.


\textsuperscript{145} For instance see his statements in the previous reference: "... we talked to Anton Balasingham and Yogi [of the LTTE leadership]. They were extremely cordial, when we walked into their camp we were not even searched." It appears to be designed to convey the impression that they are nice and reasonable people despite the numerous people they have killed or whose killings they are associated with.

\textsuperscript{146} Gananath Obeyesekere, 1975.


Christian numbers is instructive of the acuteness of the phenomenon: 9.1% in the 1946 census just before independence, 9.0% in 1953, 8.3% in 1963, 7.7% in 1971 and 7.48% in 1981\textsuperscript{150}. We shall see in this section how, because of this phenomenon of nationalism, Christians themselves have tended to play down their unique Christian identity and take on an increasingly xenophobic one. As a result, important Christian values like the forgiveness of one's enemies, and love as something given freely and abundantly, so necessary as ingredients in a solution to the civil war, tend to get buried.

How? In this milieu of turning to ones ancestral religions, mores and ways of life, and the increased polarisation of the Tamil and Sinhalese communities, those who have remained Christian in label but have succumbed to the pressured demands of partisan ethnic identities have been the very same ones to make concessions and compromise. On the Roman Catholic side, the two nationalist priests discussed earlier have led the effort playing down the importance of Christianity. Fr. Emmanuel has written "There are still among us 'Elitist catholics [sic] who consider their christian [sic] belief as an absolute and exclusivist heritage.' ... We are called to renounce this supercilious stance in the new world of religions, cultures and ideologies. Unless and until we give up such a narrow vision, and the false superiority and accept a realistic vision, we cannot assume our true identity and our specific role, along with other religions of Asia and in the total plan of God.\textsuperscript{151}" And Fr. Chandrakenthan has said\textsuperscript{152} that discouraging inter-religious marriages is part of our unhappy past\textsuperscript{153} and that "the task of evangelization is not to Christianize Sri Lanka, but to Sri Lankanize the Christian faith." Thus it is natural for these nationalists to speak of the Tamil Church and the Sinhalese Church,\textsuperscript{154} violating the catholicity of the Roman church.

With the JDCSI, the other nationalist church, although theoretically orthodox\textsuperscript{155}, we have seen how nationalist pressures forced her to compromise on the matter of caste — as if it is a Tamil institution that had to be defended against Sinhalese criticism. As a result, the ability of the church to lead and provoke thought among the depressed castes is now nonexistent.

The same nationalist pressure to move from that which is Christian and Catholic (universal) to that which is "ours," felt by those who are involved in the Sinhalese–Tamil conflict, is also seen in another group of Christians in a surprising and yet not too unexpected way. It is in those who through their leftist leanings have taken an anti-Western and therefore anti-colonial stance. It is surprising in that they are "liberals," using the term with all its limitations, and one would not associate liberals with nationalism or xenophobia; liberals who from socialism, subsequent to its demise, have moved into "liberal causes" like fighting racism and, especially after the collapse of the Rhodesian and Apartheid regimes, feminism, environmentalism, the "ism" of sexual orientation, and other sundry pursuits. And yet it is not unexpected in that the anti-colonial ethic of the liberal, with all that is to its credit, has strong undertones of nationalism and xenophobia\textsuperscript{156}.

As discussed earlier, this is the profile of the typical NCC leader. Thus we have a prominent NCC-er and head-of-church who issued a leaflet urging Christians to turn to calendrical rites in the name of returning to our own culture, ignoring the Hindu and Buddhist issues of karma and kala, inherent to the concept of auspicious times. In his haste to appear nationalist and anti-colonial and to be unlike all those other bigoted Christians, he has issued a poorly informed article\textsuperscript{157} in which he has trivialised all the accomplishments of the Christian church. In that piece he, without basis, i) states that the churches under British rule "had absolutely no understanding of ... the need to stand up for social justice\textsuperscript{158},"

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{150} G. P. V. Somaratna, Christianity in Sri Lanka, 1948–1987: Struggle for Survival, in \textit{Indian Church History Review}, Vol. XXII, No. 2, pp. 132-149, Dec. 1988. The trend can be seen from the 1891 census when the percentage of Christians was at the peak of 10.68% (G. P. V. Somaratna, Demographic Decline of Christianity in Sri Lanka After Independence," \textit{Aquinas Journal} (Colombo), Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 100-116, June 1988). Some of the drop is also due to the lower birth rates of the more educated Christians and emigration. As a result of many upper-middle class Tamil Christians leaving after the riots of 1983, we may expect an even larger drop to have occurred since, especially among Protestants, but would need to await the next census for objective information.
  \item \textsuperscript{151} "Inter-religious Dialogue at a Turning Point," pp. 89-90 in S. Jebanesan (Compiler), n.d.
  \item \textsuperscript{152} "Proclaiming the Gospel in a Pluralistic Society: A Re-Examination of Evangelization in Sri Lanka," pp. 70, 79, in S. Jebanesan (n.d.)
  \item \textsuperscript{153} Was this a reference to an incident in the mid-1980s where an RC priest refused to marry an RC parishioner to a Hindu? When the LTTE insisted that he marry them, the priest locked-up the church in defiance and made the key disappear. Subsequently, the couple and priest were taken into the church through an opening that was made in the tiles and the priest forced to comply.
  \item \textsuperscript{154} Emmanuel, n.d., pp. 31, 36, etc.
  \item \textsuperscript{155} This theological orthodoxy remains to be worked into the practice of the church
  \item \textsuperscript{156} We have already noted that many Christian liberals of the NCC-type were at the head of the xenophobic movement that crippled English fluency in Sri Lanka.
  \item \textsuperscript{158} Whereas the missionaries were very keen to uplift the low caste, slaves and women and spread popular education, the two issues they saw as the most important in terms of social justice at the time (see K. Wilson, 1975).
\end{itemize}
ii) blames the churches for creating "a small English speaking elite.\(^{159}\)

iii) accuses the church of creating "sexist differences in education.\(^{160}\)

iv) holds that "traditionally our villages have had coeducational schools.\(^{161}\)

v) avers that the church hankered after "the fleshpots of a past colonial era.\(^{162}\)

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159 Whereas, the Christian missions started vernacular schools and often taught in the vernacular. Before the churches came few could read or write, and by our times we had become the most literate country in South Asia. The elitism of the English speakers came from their employability in the colonial service and had little to do with religion; for there are numerous Buddhist and Hindu English speaking elite as well, usually holding high government office in Colombo.

160 Whereas when the first American missionary came to Jaffna, he reported that there were only 2 women who could read, both of them prostitutes. According to the missionary Mr. Meijs, writing in 1816, he could find only 2-3 girls in Jaffna (one in Alavetty, the second in Udupitty and the third whom he never saw) who could read and write. Parents refused to send a female child to school saying that learning to read "spoiled her modesty, endangered her chastity and rendered her insubordinate to the other sex" [Harrison, 1925; p. 4]. Sir James Emerson Tennent (1850; p. 156) tells us that the few who could read were Devadasis (temple prostitutes whose modesty and chastity would not have been of concern to the temple managers) who had been taught to read and write so as to enable them to transcribe temple music. It took long and patient efforts by the missions to have female education accepted. Among the Sinhalese too, this seems to have been the case. See next footnote, as well as W. A. de Silva, "The Ancient System of Teaching Sinhalese," JRAS (CB), No. 71, 1918, where, in describing education in the seventeenth century, the pupils always appear to be male.

161 In fact, among Tamils there was no school at all for women–see previous note. As for the Sinhalese, Wilhelm Geiger says based on readings of ancient Sinhalese chronicles in his Culture of Ceylon in Mediaeval Times, (Edited by Heinz Bechert, Otto Harrassowitz, Weisbaden, 1960): "It is certain that public schools did not exist in mediaeval Ceylon ... the higher literary education was reserved to the priesthood..."

162 Many missionaries came from upper class Protestant families in the west and lived under conditions far below what they were used to. For instance, take Miss Muriel Hutchins, BA (Oxon) First Class Honours, who came to Sri Lanka, lived in poverty and died only in December 1995 in Kilinochchi. One merely needs to take a look at Appendix A of J. W. Balding, One Hundred Years in Ceylon, or The Centenary Volume on the Church Missionary Society in Ceylon, 1818–1918, Madras: Diocesan Press, 1922, which gives a list of CMS missionaries in Ceylon, many of whom have impressive degrees appended after their names. John Scudder, said to have been the first medical missionary in the world, gave up a lucrative practice in the US to come to Ceylon.

163 Whom did the church speak for when laws against child labor were introduced, when slaves were freed in Sri Lanka, etc.? See Kanagasabai Wilson's book for more on this.

164 It is common for nationalists as a matter of political correctness, even when writing in English, to use the Sinhalese word Sinhala in place of the naturalised English word Sinhalese. However, in writing in Sinhalese, they would use the naturalised Sinhalese word Ingirisi in place of the English word English. That is, according to them, the Sinhalese language has the right to naturalise words, whereas English does not. It is part of their west-bashing past-time.

165 Did the church not promote culture when those like Caldwell wrote the treatise on Tamil grammar, when the missions introduced prose writing, searched out and translated many lost books of Hinduism, and promoted learning in general? See S. R. H. Hoole, 1992, referred to above. In fact, Dr. Green after whom Green Memorial Hospital in Manipur is named, is said to have founded the first medical school in Asia, and taught medicine in Tamil, a feat still not matched by even Jaffna University up to this day!

The church's contribution to Sinhalese culture also appears to be enormous. We have Robert Spence Hardy's monumental works on Buddhism and Sinhalese culture (Eastern Monarchism, London 1850; Manual of Buddhism, London 1852; The Sacred Books of the Buddhists Compared with History and Science, Colombo, 1863), as well as Daniel John Gogerly's works on Buddhism (On Buddhism , JRAS (CB), vol. 1, 1845, pp. 6-24 and pp. 78-97; Singhalese Wada, a translation, JRAS (CB) Vol. 1, 1846, pp. 84-90); Arthur Stanley Bishop, Ceylon Buddhism: Being the collected Writings of Daniel John Gogerly, Colombo: Wesley Press, (two volumes),1908. And then we even have contributions to grammar by James Chater (A Grammar of the Singhalese Language, Colombo: Wesley Press, 1815). It would be remiss not to mention Theodore Perera, a Methodist, whose books on Sinhalese grammar were used in schools until very recently.

166 It is simply observed that the NCC will recruit only those who are fluent in English to man its high offices. Indeed, keeping up the game, one must adopt an attitude consistent with ecumenism as defined by "old-
With a blind zeal for nationalism, many Christian teachings are abandoned. For Bishop Fernando says, "those of us who say arrogantly that salvation is through Christ alone will tend to say that this land is only for the Sinhalese or for the Buddhists alone because it is the same mind set."

He further argues that "truth is a many splendoured thing." In effect, Christianity is reduced to one more religion in the neo-Hindu scheme advocated by Ramakrishna and Gandhi: all religions are true. It is therefore not surprising to see another NCC'er making the same case reducing the claim to the uniqueness of salvation through Christ: the Rev. Somasiri Perera has stated that the purpose of ecumenism is for all churches to get together as a first step, which is then to be followed by all religions getting together. It is in the trivialisation of Christian values and accomplishments under the pressures of nationalism, that the Christian Church faces her greatest danger.

Conclusions

We have seen that all mainline churches have been infected with nationalism to varying degrees and that the disease of nationalism has been made all the more acute by the ongoing ethnic war. The war has brought on new opportunities to the churches and with the opportunities, new challenges. By and large, the churches, especially the leadership of the JDCSI and the Roman Catholic Church in Jaffna, seem to be showing the most signs in failing these challenges as they struggle against them. Even as they have given respectability to the LTTE by claiming that it represents the Tamil people, the fact that an exit pass system is required to prevent "a substantial section of the Northern boys" at the NCC to be sent on the many trips abroad. Priests who do not speak "Public School" English are rarely given a posting in Colombo by the Anglican church, and possibly other churches too. The women who get to go abroad on NCC/WCC/CCA/SCM trips are from well-to-do English speaking homes well-connected to the church. According to the testimony of a long-standing Sidesman at the Anglican parish of St. Michael's, Polwatte, one needs to be above a certain income level to take the collection in the middle aisle, while the Sidesmen of lower income are true "sidesmen" taking the collection at the sides. Misuse of project funds under the NCC is never reported in public so as not to rock the boat. The values that Bishop Fernando says were promoted by the old church (and of which little evidence exists) are alive and well in at least the Anglican church today. It would appear that this is the only charge of the bishop's that has some truth. The bishop would be wiser to rectify these inadequacies of the church now under his control than to make imagined charges.


168 In a talk before the Sri Lanka Association of Theologians in October 1995 at the Scots Kirk, Galle Face, Colombo.
human collectives of every sort." Perhaps the churches need to recognise this and operate without holdings, as the early apostles did. And indeed, we would do well to revisit Christian thinking in the churches' dealings with Nazi Germany and how they tried to address the complexities of dealing with an evil state, while being effective. With their experience and vision, perhaps, we in Sri Lanka would fare better.

There is every indication now that in the North the mainline churches confront a problem of credibility. With the exception of sections of the Church that were suppressed, forced to remain silent or perhaps martyred (such as Manogaran of Pax Christi) under the LTTE's regime, the larger sections of the Church are seen as having been compromised. The Church's notion of the 'oppressed' was so conveniently narrow that the children and families of particularly the poorer sections who joined the legitimate Tamil liberation struggle (either in the wrong group or in the LTTE but with more edifying values) and suffered at the hands of the LTTE, were largely disowned by the Church. In the Spring of 1995 the LTTE, to the wide but passive disapproval of the people, had broken off talks with the People's Alliance government and had returned to war. Its concerted attempts to recruit children could hardly be described as anything other than conscription. Open defiance from parents and students had surfaced for the first time. Ignoring all this, the JDCSI's Morning Star published an editorial comparing the Tamils among the Sinhalese with the Israelites in Egypt, claiming that when God is creating a new nation, no one could stand against it!

On 30th October 1995, the LTTE, as we have noted, ordered the people, both residents and refugees from the fighting in outlying areas, to leave Jaffna. For hundreds of thousands of people, the forced exodus was traumatic — losing their homes, their belongings (mostly looted by the LTTE) and their identity, only to be forced into an anonymous mass of frightened refugees who clogged the road out of Jaffna for days in an attempt to flee. The order to flee was one that they did not dare defy. The LTTE leader claimed in a radio broadcast that the voluntary and miraculous exodus was a clear expression by the people that they did not want to live under a Sinhalese government. But as the real truth began to surface, it was unpalatable to the Tamil nationalist elite in Colombo and overseas. At this point, to the satisfaction of this group, a clumsy justification was issued by the Roman Catholic Church's Vicar General, Emmanuel, in the form of an article in the Weekend Express (16th March, 1996), saying "A warning given to flee away from danger and help given in orderly and safe removal of certain belongings from Jaffna, should not be mischievously construed as forcing the people to flight at gun point. The attempt of a few hundred thousand people with their belongings rushing to go through the one and only exit bridge at Navatkuli was almost like the biblical camel attempting to go through the eye of a needle. But thanks to the street discipline maintained by the LTTE Police Force, it went through." Yet, following the Sri Lankan Army's completing its takeover in May 1996 and the massive return of the people who had fled Jaffna, the truth can no longer be hidden. Routine defiance of the LTTE and its recruiters is now rife in areas under LTTE control. Clearly, the Church is not one with the people and appears to have lost its way with the people, and indeed with God.

On the question of the German Church after the last war, Thielicke had this to say on why there was no significant renewal after the war and on the failure of the Church to find the right message: "Instead of preaching repentance and salvation we had the proclamation of a collective guilt and a hysteria of self-accusation which was in need of psychological justification, and this lead to a hardening of men's hearts. Despite the times, from many pulpits we heard only conventional pallid sermons which did not reach men's hearts and left them cold. We seemed to be denied prophetic awakening ..." Perhaps there is a lesson in this for the Church in Sri Lanka.

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b) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, (Contains a foreword by G. K. A. Bell, the Bishop of Chichester and a preface by Reinhold Niebuhr), New York: Macmillan Co., 1949.

174 The quotation is taken from a rebroadcast of the article by Assoc. Prof. Sornnarajah of the Faculty of Law, National University of Singapore, on the Internet Newsgroup Circle from Colorado State University.

175 Thielicke, 1967.