

# SANTA CROCE

PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY OF THE HOLY CROSS FOUNDATION



## FROM CIVIL WAR TO SUICIDE BOMBINGS A PRIEST OFFERS THE PEACE OF CHRIST IN SRI LANKA



After 11 years as a priest in Sri Lanka, Fr. Rocksan's bishop asked him to receive more training in order to become a professor at their local seminary. Fr. Rocksan is studying for a doctorate in moral theology at *Santa Croce* in Rome. [photo 1 in Rome. Photo 2 in Sri Lanka with parents].

Fr. Rocksan witnessed more violence last year than most of us see in a lifetime. But he also lived through the 26-year civil war in Sri Lanka that ended just 10 years ago. To the horror of Christians around the world, the most recent violence occurred last April on Easter Sunday when Islamic suicide bombers killed 253 people.

Nearly 200 of the victims that day were killed in or outside two Catholic churches: The Shrine of St. Anthony and St. Sebastian's Church.

Ironically, the civil war in Sri Lanka did not directly involve Muslims or Christians. The struggle was primarily between the ethnic majority Sinhala Buddhists (70.3% of the population) and the second largest group, Hindu Tamils (12.6%), who wanted to create an independent Hindu state. Muslims comprise only about 9.7% followed by Catholics (6.1%) and other Christians (1.3%).

Regardless of the ethnicities of the warring parties, the collateral effects of war are universal: all Sri

Lankans experienced many years of violence and death, with between 80,000 to 100,000 lives lost over



On Easter Sunday, April 2019, a suicide bomber killed nearly 100 people at the Shrine of St. Anthony in Sri Lanka.

*continued*

the twenty-six-year period. By 2012 there were still around 370,000 people displaced by the destruction, fragmenting communities, and many having lost both land and livelihood. Fr. Rocksan had to work day and night to care for the wounded and build a foundation of peace through the gospel of the Prince of Peace.

Fr. Rocksan grew up in a strong Catholic family. His father is a simple fisherman and his mother and grandmother attached great importance to religious education. He and his six brothers would have needed a very good reason to miss the family's daily Rosary. And his faith, while also well academically formed, blossomed out of the poverty and misery in which he grew up. It has been said that war steals the soul of a nation. And in this war-torn country, healthy family and moral values are hard to come by. But the living testimony of his parents' humility, modesty, and service to each other taught him the indispensable importance of the role of the family. And he credits this gift of his childhood as the reason for why he is now the spiritual father of many, helping to bring healing to families that have been so torn apart.



Fr. Rocksan oversees the building of a new church.

Another extremely troublesome challenge is how, to Sri Lankans, poverty seems a constant threat, especially since tourism (a major industry in Sri Lanka) is less than half of what it was before the Easter attacks. And abject poverty only aggravates regional and societal instability.

As if all this weren't enough, the government seems uninterested in advancing religious liberty. Their Supreme Court ruled last year against a Catholic organization, definitively declaring that proselytism is not protected by the Sri Lankan constitution (though ostensibly individual, private freedom of religion remains protected).

This hostility to the Church in Sri Lanka brings to mind the recent canonization of that great titan of the Church, Saint John Henry Newman, and his prophetic words: "Is there not a vigorous and united movement in all countries to cast down the Church of Christ from power and place? Is there not a feverish and ever-busy endeavor to get rid of religion in public transaction? [...] an attempt to supersede religion altogether



During his first 11 years as a priest, Fr. Rocksan was entrusted with three parishes before his bishop sent him to *Santa Croce* for further studies.

[...] to confine it to our inward feelings, and thus [...] in fact, to destroy religion?"

And so Fr. Rocksan's bishop sent him to Rome to "walk and move among the saints; to learn from them so that God might prepare him for what is still to come." The 1.3 million Catholics in Sri Lanka have had an especially rough few decades and are in desperate need of priests that God has prepared to meet the increasing demands of the local church.

And Sri Lanka is not alone. More than ever, we need priests and leaders like Fr. Rocksan in every country, especially our own. With so much uncertainty today, and with the upcoming reminder of the greatest gift this world has ever known, the Christmas gift—Jesus of Nazareth—our Foundation remains focused on the much needed spiritual and educational formation of priests, of *Alter Christi*, perhaps the most appropriate Christmas gift. With your prayers and generous financial support, we will bombard this world with priests striving on the pathway to holiness who will reshape and rebuild their cultures from the literal or metaphorical ashes.



In 1972 the island called British Ceylon became a republic within the Commonwealth, and its name was changed to Sri Lanka. Located about 19 miles south east of the southern coast of India, it has a population of about 21.2 million people.

Please help us especially during this year-end season of giving so that we will be able to respond with a “yes” to all those discerning a vocation. Help us keep these men from having to return home mid-program. 🙏



Sri Lanka has among the highest extreme poverty rates among countries in the region. Rice and fish are the main staples of their diet.



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Your gift will help shape the future of the Church to ensure that the future leaders are properly formed to keep their focus on Christ and service to the Faithful.



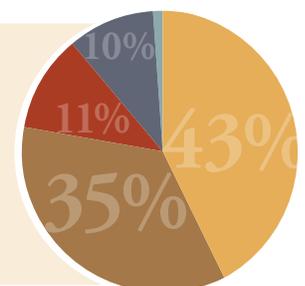
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- Americas
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# HEART SPEAKS TO HEART

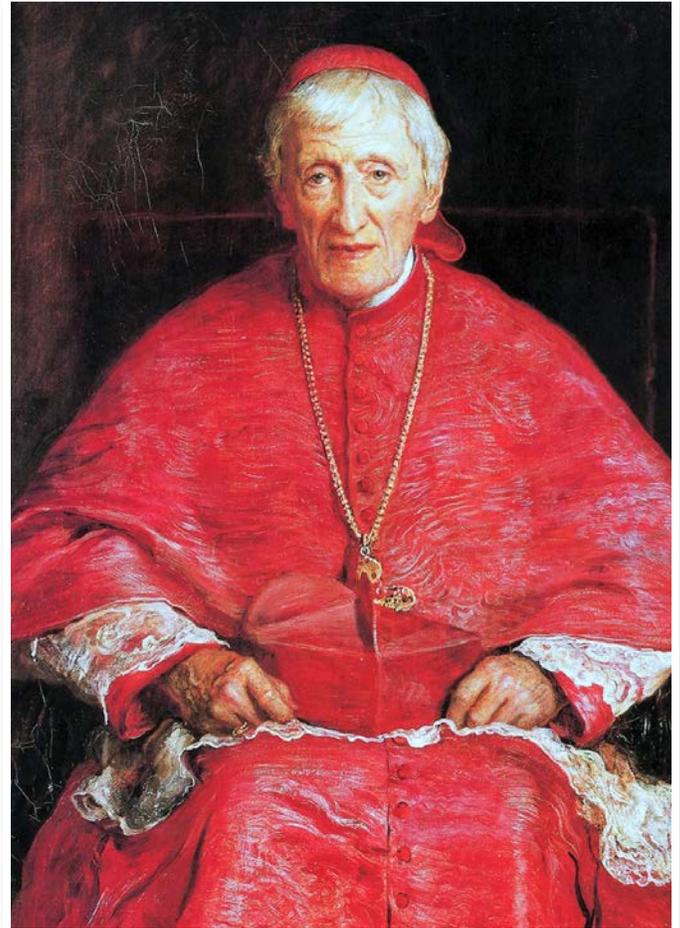
## ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN AND PRIESTLY VOCATION

John Henry Newman, the famous nineteenth-century convert, theologian, and poet was canonized last month in Rome with approximately 50,000 attending the celebratory Mass in St. Peter's Square. As influential as his theological writings were and continue to be, it was his pastoral heart that led to his sainthood. Personal holiness was undoubtedly on the minds of those attending the Mass, including many students from *Santa Croce*, asking this new saint for his blessing and intercession for their own vocations.

St. John Henry Newman understood the primary importance of being obedient to the call of Christ. When Newman was made a Cardinal, he chose for his motto *cor ad cor loquitur*, a phrase from the writings of St. Francis de Sales meaning "heart speaks to heart." It is a reference to the personal relationship between God and man achieved through prayer. Thus, its primary emphasis was that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the heart of God, speaking to our hearts and leading us to holiness. Secondly, it evokes the love and kindness required in our personal interactions to lead others to a relationship with Christ.

When God called Newman from the Anglican Church to Catholicism and the Catholic priesthood, it came at a great cost. He lost the prestige of being a member of the Church of England and he lost many friends. Even his own sister refused to speak to him from that time forward. In addition to his great intellectual contributions, Newman worked tirelessly with the poor and was a champion of Christian education and formation, founding of a Catholic university as well as two Catholic schools for boys.

Thus, our newest English-speaking saint is a fitting model for the professors and students at *Santa Croce* to emulate. He combines the importance of a strong intellect molded through an equally disciplined heart and spirit. This is the type of formation which our Foundation helps to make



Portrait of St. John Henry Newman by artist John Everett Millais.

possible through your generosity. Who knows? In another 100 years, we may be celebrating the life of another priest who was attending St. John Henry Newman's canonization in October; a man whose path to sainthood was influenced by his experience at *Santa Croce*. ☪



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