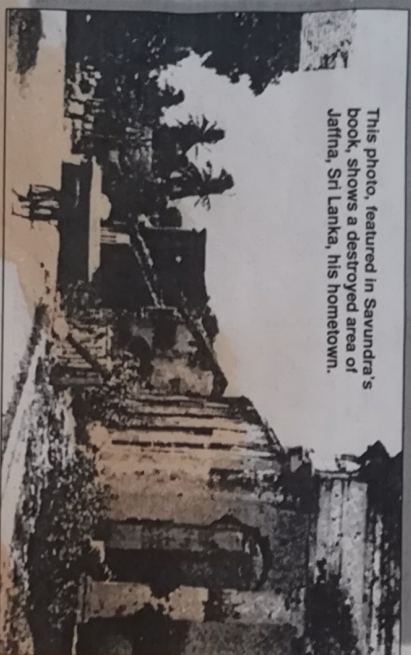


A plea for peace



This photo, featured in Savundra's book, shows a destroyed area of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, his hometown.



Continued from page 1

more than religion. Language, culture and ethnicity are also major factors, Savundra said.

"Tamils feel their rights are not recognized," he said. Without the four critical "pillars" of language, land, economy and education, the Tamil culture will collapse, he said. Savundra, who is a Tamil, said Christians are by far the minority in his country. Christians can be found in both the Tamil and Sinhala groups, he said.

Savundra was working at a church in Jaffna when Sri Lankan forces began to recapture the town. He and his family fled for Tamil militants. The "Exodus" began, forcing 700,000 Tamil people to leave their homeland.

The priest stayed behind to help the most vulnerable, about 150 bed-ridden elderly residents of a Jaffna nursing home. The nursing home was bombed several times, and Savundra's life was threatened. Three times he narrowly escaped with his life.

"I really wanted to stay with the people who were suffering," he said.

Savundra kept a journal of his war experiences, and it has now been published as a book entitled "A War Diary From Jaffna." It has been published in English and his native language.

In his book, Savundra takes no political sides. Instead, he describes the plight of those most affected by the war and the forced exodus, and chronicles their sufferings.

The northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka were also under economic embargo, so there were no telephones or electricity, and food and medicine were scarce.

About 80,000 Sri Lankans have died so far in the 16-year conflict--in a nation of just 25,000 square miles--about the size of West Virginia.

In his book, Savundra appeals to the humanity of the leaders of his country, as well as to those countries supplying arms to Sri Lanka, to stop the war.

"It would have been ideal to have settled the political issue of the country amicably without firing a shot and destroying not even a human life for political reason," Savundra writes. "After all, the problem that we have is not a military, but a political one."

In the appendix entitled "Pleading for Peace," Savundra continues. "The killing of people is abhorrent whether it is Tamil, Sinhalese or Muslim. The ethnic issue in the island state of Sri Lanka has taken away the precious lives of close to 80,000 people."

He calls upon the government to stop the fighting.

"It is time to plead for peace for the suffering people of our country," he writes. "Let us

become Samaritans at this time and do our best to alleviate the sufferings of our neighbor."

Savundra will remain in Pine River until late August. He plans to teach at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul this fall. After that he is planning to travel to Africa or New Guinea to minister to the poor.

Savundra, who has been a priest for 25 years, hopes to return to his homeland, but does not know if he will be allowed because of the controversy his book has generated.

Savundra will be available to sign his book on Saturday, June 13 after the 5 pm Mass at Our Lady of Lourdes.

Surviving a war

Nov. 13, 1995

The night was rather dark. At 8:45 pm artillery shells began to fly... They began to explode on the vicinity of the seminary. About eight of them came one after the other. We were helpless. A crippled lady, who took shelter in the seminary, was shifted into the chapel for safety, under the concrete flat. At that time God was our bunker.

After each explosion of the shells, scattered debris would be flying over our heads. We were still alive. The noise of the shells was as merciless as the impact of the explosions.

-Dr. Edwin Savundra from "A War Diary From Jaffna"

Dr. Edwin Savundra, a Sri Lankan priest currently staying in Pine River, has written a book about his dramatic experiences during his homeland's civil war.

photos by
Kesh Muneke



'I plead for peace'

The purpose of publishing this war diary is to bring to the attention of the world the enormity of the suffering of a large segment of people in the war-torn part of the island state of Sri Lanka.

I am not a politician, nor am I a rebel. But, as a humanist, I am really moved by the enormity of the sufferings of our innocent people in this land. I spent most of my time in Jaffna and I lived through the ordeal of the war. It was a great experience. I came face to face with the reality of death in the persons who had been brutally wounded and killed at the time of the military offensives on Jaffna.

The protracted war in this country has brought about untold sufferings to our people and it continues to make people suffer, besides impoverishing the already poor country with a huge deficit for military operations.

As a humanist, I appeal to all concerned to halt the war on the grounds of the enormity of the suffering that our people undergo. For the reason of halting the sufferings, I not for any other reason, I plead for peace.

May this cry be heard by all who need to hear!

-Dr. Edwin Savundra from "A War Diary From Jaffna"

Dr. Edwin Savundra

to hold

book

signing

June 14

A WAR DIARY
FROM
JAFFNA



Savundra's book cover.