

THE SRI LANKA BOMBINGS

Three misconceptions created by Christian media

By Mike Burnard

From Reuters: “Nine explosions on Easter Sunday killed at least 253 people and wounded 500 more at churches, hotels and other locations in the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo, and two other cities. The overwhelming majority of victims are Sri Lankan, but local authorities say 39 foreign tourists are among the dead.

“Sri Lankan officials revised the death toll down by about 100 on Thursday, blaming the difficulty in identifying body parts at bomb scenes for the earlier inaccurate number. The new official figure was 253, down from an earlier 359, Deputy Defence Minister Ruwan Wijewardene said. He blamed inaccurate data provided by morgues for the discrepancy.

“On Tuesday, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the co-ordinated attacks in Sri Lanka in a video that showed eight men, all but one with their faces covered, standing under a black Islamic State flag. The man whose face could be seen in the video has been identified as Mohamed Zahran, a preacher from the east of Sri Lanka known for his militant views and Facebook posts, who officials believe was the mastermind of the attack. A picture has emerged of a group of nine well-educated, homegrown Islamist suicide bombers, including a woman, who carried out the attacks.”

The fact that most of the casualties were Christians obviously drew the attention of the Christian world and especially the Christian media, which looked at the incident through different ‘lenses’ than those of the secular media. Sadly, posts on social media soon pointed to “inconsistency” in news reports, and many embraced a victim mentality that personalised the attacks and turned compassion into self-pity.

Here are three misconceptions circulated by Christians in the wake of the attacks, and clarifications about the truth:

1. Misconception: The world didn’t report the Sri Lanka attacks with the same intensity as the mosque attacks in New Zealand

Truth: The Sri Lanka bomb attacks were reported widely on every main news source across the globe.



Christians should be careful not to embrace a victim mentality after every attack on a church. Many posts on social media were quick to compare the bomb blasts in Sri Lanka with the attacks on the mosques in New Zealand and immediately assumed that Christians would be discriminated against by not giving the same amount of coverage.

Yet Christians should equally mourn the deaths of believers and non-believers alike, anywhere in the world. Our concern should be about all injustice, not only injustice relating to our ‘own’ people. Expressing discontent that people are not showing enough concern for the loss of fellow believers runs the risk of creating a dualistic world divided between “them” (non-believers) and “us” (Christians). Christ never drew any attention to His own sufferings with a victim mentality focused on how He suffered unjustly.

It is true that the Church has a responsibility to care about fellow believers who suffer, regardless of what the rest of the world does. 1 Corinthians 12:26 says that if one member of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. But we should not expect the same care from those who do not share a Christ-consciousness, and we should not be offended by that. As Christians, we should rejoice that the true heart of Christianity is revealed when leaders of Christians nations display compassion towards Muslims being killed in 'Christian' nations. The challenge is not to have selective compassion when it comes to Christians being killed, but to seek justice for all.

What is true is that little response came from the Muslim world. The Muslim Council of Sri Lanka said it mourned the loss of innocent people in the blasts by extremists who seek to divide religious and ethnic groups, and the All Ceylon Jammiyyathul Ulama (a body of Muslim clerics) said targeting Christian places of worship cannot be accepted. But voices from Middle Eastern leaders were, in general, non-existent.

2. Misconception: Political leaders intentionally neglected to mention "Christians" and only referred to "Easter worshippers"



Truth: This is a manipulation of information to make a political point. It is true that the word "Christian" was omitted in many responses, but the implication of Christianity was never in question.

The main culprits, according to some sources, were former president Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, but President Donald Trump was also criticised for recognising the victims without noting that they were Christians. According to social media, Mr Obama condemned the attacks "on tourists and Easter worshippers in Sri Lanka as an attack on humanity". The rest of his tweet, however, said the following: "On a day devoted to love, redemption, and renewal, we pray for the victims and stand with the people of Sri Lanka." There can be no doubt that "Easter" and "redemption" are associated with Christianity, and all three leaders were unquestionably referring to Christians.

Other leaders who also used strong messages of support but omitted the word Christian include:

- French President Emmanuel Macron: "We are deeply saddened by the terrorist attacks against churches and hotels in Sri Lanka..."
- UK Prime Minister Theresa May: "The acts of violence against churches and hotels in Sri Lanka are truly appalling, and my deepest sympathies go out to all of those affected at this tragic time."
- German Chancellor Angela Merkel: "... It is shocking that people who gathered to celebrate Easter together were consciously targeted in this malicious attack..."

There were, however, those who did refer to Christians:

- "Canada strongly condemns the heinous attacks on Christians at churches and hotels," wrote Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.
- Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that Australians' hearts "go out to those Christians... slaughtered today in this horrific terrorist attack."

Christians should guard against demonising people who do not speak the language we want to hear. To most people, "Easter worshippers", "churches", "believers" and "Sunday worshippers" all refer to "Christians". People might not use the word "Christian", but in their understanding, they fully imply it.

Sadly, the incident was abused by right-wing leaders in Europe to make a political point. The *Washington Post* reported the following: "My thoughts are once again with the persecuted Christians around the world," Marine Le Pen, president of France's far-right National Rally party, wrote in a tweet on Monday. Those who died were 'targeted for their faith,' she added. Le Pen, like some other European far-right leaders, had initially offered only vague condolences to victims of the bombings on Sunday. However, after Sri Lankan officials blamed a local Muslim

militant group, National Thowheed Jamaath, for the attack on Monday, European far-right groups and activists began to describe the attacks in specifically religious terms.

“Regional branches and sites associated with Germany’s far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party framed the Sri Lankan bloodshed as an attack ‘against us Christians,’ even though the party officially claims to be open to members of all religions, including Jews and Muslims.”

3. Misconception: The suicide bombers were “animals” and uneducated people, gullible to radicalisation

According to Aljazeera: *“The Archbishop of Colombo, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, called on Sri Lanka’s government to ‘mercilessly’ punish those responsible ‘because only animals can behave like that’.”*

Truth: The attackers were well-educated people.

In the days since the attacks, officials have released new information about the nine alleged perpetrators. According to the *New York Times*: *“The suicide bombers who struck churches and hotels were all well-educated, middle-class Sri Lankans, officials said on Wednesday. Some had been educated overseas, including one who was an undergraduate at a university in Britain and went to graduate school in Australia. The officials said nine bombers blew themselves up — eight men and one woman — including the man described as the leader of the homegrown, militant Islamist group said to have carried out the attack.”* Two of them were a married couple, and they were all Sri Lankan.

CONCLUSION



The Bible Society of Egypt¹, after an attack on a bus filled with Christians travelling to a monastery in Minya, recounted the testimony of a woman who lost 11 family members:

One of the many visitors to these victims, wishing to convey support, solidarity and condolences, was a government minister. During the visit, the women told the minister, “Don’t worry about me, I am worried about you! I am worried about where you will go after you die!” The minister was taken aback, and those around him

apologised, suggesting that this woman was overly distraught. But she would not allow her message to be discounted. “No! I am in my right mind. I’ve lost 11 members of my family and I have nothing else to lose! But I am at peace knowing they are in Heaven. But what about you? Have you read the Bible?” And she urged him to read the Bible and consider his destiny.

What a joy to have certainty about eternity. This we are promised in Scripture² and by Christ Himself³. As Christians, our first concern should never be how we are represented in the media and about how much pity people have for us, but rather about the souls of those who died without the knowledge of Christ.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/04/21/sri-lanka-bomb-attacks-sports-stars-world-leaders-express-horror/>
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¹ <http://bibles4egypt.com/>

² Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

³ John 3:15 “...that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.”