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An Interview with Basil Fernando on Aspects of Culture in Sri Lanka

Le Roy Robinson

Basil Fernando is a lawyer and a poet.

He was born in October 1944 at Palliyawatte, a village in Hendala, Wattala, Sri Lanka.

As a young boy he attended the village primary school. He attended high school at St. Anthony's, Wattala, and St. Benedict's College, Kotahena.

In 1972 he graduated from the Faculty of Law, the University of Ceylon, Colombo.

Until December 1981 he was a teacher of English as a second language in the Sub-Department of English at Sri Jayawardenapura University, Nugegoda.

In 1982 he began practicing as an attorney.

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This is the second part of an interview the first part of which appeared in Tonan Ajia Kenkyu Nenpo, No. 27, December 20, 1985.

ROBINSON: One of your poems is called "Remembering Mother". The title is very much like Munidasa Cumaratunga's poem's "Remembering Father". Both are poems of admiration. If you don't mind, could we summarize "Remembering Mother", which is rather long?

FERNANDO: The poem is about an unsophisticated woman who had great determination. Her parents had died early, so she had to go to
work when she was very young. When her sister died too and left a small baby, she was forced into marriage to take care of the baby and had to work as a washerwoman. She did other people’s laundry. She had to give up her dream of becoming a teacher. She had seven children of her own. Three of them died young. Her marriage, as the poem says, was ”a permanent state of suffering and shock”. But nothing prevented her from educating her oldest son.

ROBINSON: You?

FERNANDO: No, my brother. Her husband said education ”was not for the poor/To have such ambitions”, but she did not give in. Then her husband fell ill, leaving her to do ”all the physical labor……to maintain the family……to educate the children……to treat the sick”. Every morning ”dashing clothes on stone”, then doing the kitchen work while reciting poetry. I’ve already quoted her favorite lines: ”Wadi sene debaritai. Tada hulang wessatai”. Too much familiarity is prelude to a fight. Strong wind is prelude to a rain. Her advice was sought by neighbors. Even the wives of the rich people whose laundry she washed respected her and admired her courage.

ROBINSON: At the end of the poem you say about yourself:

”And I who carried
The cloth bundles with you
Am carrying your spirit within me
Your pride
And the determination
Never to bow down”.

FERNANDO: Yes, let’s talk about the poem itself. This poem is obviously about my mother, but let me point out that when the poem says her marriage was a state of suffering and shock it also says her marriage was no exception. Most village marriages were like hers in the
unhappy circumstances of those days.

And let me say one more thing. As is obvious too, this is a poem of admiration. But as the object of admiration I have chosen someone Sri Lankan society, which is still very caste conscious, would not admire very much—a washerwoman.

This poem demonstrates what I try to do in most of my writings: to demonstrate the beauty of what existing social consciousness considers "low"—and the ugliness of what it considers beautiful.

ROBINSON: Who reads poetry written in English in Sri Lanka?

FERNANDO: Anyone who can read English reads a poem in English when he runs across it. Of course, people educated some time back, in colonial public schools, they wouldn’t consider anything poetry unless it was written by Milton or Wordsworth or Keats. Actually, those whose education has been mainly in English are the most backward group among our poetry readers.

ROBINSON: You seem to be down on English education here.

FERNANDO: Do you know Qadri Ismail?


FERNANDO: He is the product of English education here. He has an independent mind, though. He has written a series of articles in Lanka Guardian about the university English faculties here, very critical of the sort of education imported as courses in English literature, the sort of education that kills all creativity.

But look at the contribution of Sinhala faculties here to literature and in fact to the arts in general. They have raised the literary consciousness of the entire country.
ROBINSON: Speaking about your poetry or should I say about you? At the beginning of "The Nun" in *Evelyn, My First Friend* you say "The other day/As I played my sitar····" Do you play the sitar? Are you also a musician?

FERNANDO: No, I'm not a musician. One time when I was under mental stress and had to rethink everything anew, I retired into my room at the university and spent most of the time practicing the sitar, coming out only for very essential things. Later, once again I was thrown into public life and had to give the sitar up. So I am not a musician. But I see a direct relation between poetry and music and also poetry and song. In terms of modern circumstances, poetry will have to find its way into the hearts and minds of people by developing a relationship with song, without sacrificing the struggle for meaning which song can afford to forget, for purposes of its own, poetry's own purposes.

"The Nun", by the way, recalls my first love, which was sadly doomed to failure.

ROBINSON: What else did you write during that time of stress?

FERNANDO: That time was painful, but it was fruitful, and I wrote a great deal. Almost all the poems in my Sinhala collection were written during that time.

And a small group of young people gathered around me on hearing about my interest in music, and we produced a show. A mime and song show. *Sagini Sagara*. That's "Sea of Poverty" in English. The mimes suited the themes of the songs so as to bring out the meanings more sharply. The first performance was in 1979.

ROBINSON: "Sea of Poverty" is an unusual title for a musical.

FERNANDO: The essential theme was the deepening of poverty in Sri Lanka, and everything that show foretold came true. Our poverty is
now worse than ever. And the loss of most of our democratic rights.

ROBINSON: Do you remember any of the songs?

FERNANDO: I remember — I'll translate — one of the songs that became popular:

"Someone is singing a song, with difficulty at a distance.

Little daughter's hands are cold.

There's no doctor nearby to get some medicine.

Sad songs crowd in my brain".

ROBINSON: To ask another biographical question, in your poem "We Had a Dispute" the narrator says "I had already been in a novitiate". Did you actually study to be a Jesuit?

FERNANDO: No, not a Jesuit. I belonged to the religious order known as Christian Brothers, popularly the De La Salle Brothers. I spent close to ten years with them.

ROBINSON: But the poem says "And lost faith".

FERNANDO: Yes. You see I had the opportunity of knowing organized Christianity in Sri Lanka in a very intimate way, and I can say emphatically that Christianity in Sri Lanka is deeply corrupt. It is incapable of standing for what is good. It is a silent partner of evil.

My father, who goes to Mass every day even now in his eighties, opposed my joining a religious order. What he seemed to say in his own way was: "Don't get too close to religion. If you do, you'll lose faith". Now I realize his wisdom.

ROBINSON: Please explain this a little.

FERNANDO: In our country religion was caught up in the total process of colonialism and turned out to be a psychological assistant to the colonialists. The role of religion was too crush the will of the people for independence. The role of religion was to make the colonial exploitation sound sweet and appear nice.
Analyzing how this was done and how religion here plays this same role today is a tremendous task. Sometimes I feel like giving up everything and sitting down to that task. On a small scale I have tried to bring this into my writings.

ROBINSON: Then, in "We Had a Dispute" is Brother Nicholas meant to be representative? The narrator says Brother Nicholas was evil because he never liked to see the poor coming up. "He helped the poor/But disliked/A tailor's son becoming a doctor./'That's not done', he said".

FERNANDO: Yes, he is meant to be representative. He represents what most priests and religious are in this country. They want the objects of their charity to remain in the same situation in life. All of them are class biased. As to why that is so, the only explanation is that they are spiritual bastards.

ROBINSON: Aren't there any exceptions to this rule of yours?

FERNANDO: Of course, there are exceptions. I'm talking about organized Christianity in general. For example, there's the Christian Workers Fellowship. They publish the Christian Worker, in my view the most liberal journal published in Sri Lanka. There are fine individuals, Christian priests, brothers, nuns, laymen.

ROBINSON: To get back to you, how is Koluwa Malaya, the title of your collection of poems in Sinhala, translated into English?

FERNANDO: Koluwa Malaya means "Young Fellow Died".

ROBINSON: I've read your translation of "A Report" from that collection, a poem about the rumor of the fall of a government. Are the poems in Koluwa Malaya political?

FERNANDO: Most of the poems reflect the changes in the consciousness of the people, their sorrow, their frustration, their hopes. Most of the poems are reflections on the brutal suppression of the
Youth Rebellion of 1971: that was the beginning of a period of suppression of all democratic rights, by various degrees, by all sorts of means.

ROBINSON: I have seen the memorial on Galle Road to this rebellion; that is, to the young men who rebelled. I've also read A. C. Alles's account, *Insurgency 1971*, and Ediriweera Sarachchandra's novel about it, *Curfew and a Full Moon*. Would you like to comment on the novel?

FERNANDO: As a matter of fact I would. *Curfew* was one of the first literary responses to the 1971 insurgency. I remember reading it eagerly. You know the story: the difficulty of a professor to understand his students who have decided to rise in rebellion, and the state suppression of these students. I remember the discussion some of us had about this book within a few months of its publication. We were rather disappointed. Particularly, at the professor's aloofness. The reason for our disappointment may be that insurgency was something close to the people of my age group, and we felt we had no difficulty in understanding it.

As for the rebels themselves, they were the first generation of the poor that had access to university education, and they discovered that "the system" in which they had to live was against them and the poor in general. The labor parties were partners of the government then, so the students had to rebel on their own, and they did.

Much of their thinking may have been naive, especially about the state machinery, but this was the beginning of a new period in which young people refused to listen to the "blah blah" of the post—independence leaders. They tested their own thinking— with their own blood.

There is a poem by Ashley Halpe more or less in the
same line as Curfew. The Dream. He speaks of a dream in which he sees himself among the insurgents. For those of my age group and background, insurgency was no dream. We lost some of our friends. We saw blood. So you see we could not much appreciate the novel or the poem or other works like them.

ROBINSON: Can we go back to your poem "I Try to Rise"? I'd like to ask you again about "The savage indifference all around/Is designed to/Demolish the spirit".

FERNANDO: I mean the spirit, trying to rise, to assert its hopes, its desire to live, is met by the external world, which is so indifferent—a social ethos that is cynical, believes in nothing, hopes for nothing, and is even directly hostile to any reminder of anything that goes beyond the mere matter of survival.

This was the social ethos built by the so-called "just society" ideology, the ideology of an alienated social class during the period of colonialism. A social class now trying to suppress, even take revenge against, the vast mass of people hoping to rise, by poisoning their spirit.

In short, the assertion of the fundamental and ultimate value of human life is denied by a particular social class that is obsolete and irrelevant.

What tries to rise is the impulse to live, in a background of those who celebrate death and decay.

ROBINSON: Let me ask you another kind of question. Who are your favorite journalists in Sri Lanka?

FERNANDO: By way of answering this question, let me say something about journalism in general in this part of the world, "Third World", poor. When we come to the question of journalism here we have to take a look at the issue of freedom of expression. You should know
that despite constitutional guarantees of free speech, ours is a highly controlled society. The means of such control are subtle.

First, there is self—imposed censorship. When the press censorship was lifted here, after the recent ethnic troubles here, all the newspapers in the island reported they had been asked to censor themselves. And they have been doing that diligently. It may safely be said that in the '70s and '80s the press has considered it prudent not to exercise its freedom. This shows how much the press is part of the status quo. Then there are threats to journalists.

ROBINSON: What kind of threats?

FERNANDO: This happens in various ways. There are all sorts of stories how this happens. Most of the time a direct threat is administered against "the erring journalist" by some person holding a high position, officially or unofficially, in the newspaper establishment.

ROBINSON: What is the purpose of this self-censorship? the threats?

FERNANDO: There is a deliberate press policy to confuse people. One veteran lawyer—he's dead now—was once asked to state his view of advocacy. He stated: "Admit nothing. Deny everything. Confuse the court". Some judge is supposed to have said that is exactly what he, the lawyer, did. Most newspapers here follow a deliberate policy of confusing the people, keeping the people ignorant.

ROBINSON: But don't local publications publish contrary views?

FERNANDO: People who are not employed as journalists here have learned that on any important matter if they write to the press what they really think and feel it will not be published.

Let me tell you about my recent experiences. Do you know the Lanka Guardian?

ROBINSON: A liberal journal. Edited by Mervyn de Silva.
FERNANDO: It gives the appearance of being liberal, very liberal. But that is so long as one does not write one's independent views about any matter of importance.

I sent my poem "Just Society"—it later won a New Ceylon Writing award—I quoted from it just before—I first sent it to the Guardian. It did not appear. I did not even receive an acknowledgement.

More recently an article appeared in the Guardian with the title "Another Look at Stalin". About the innovative contribution of Stalin described, absurdly, as a "homegrown" Bolshevik. I wrote a reply with the title "Another Look at Reggie Siriwardena". That was the author of that article. He's a symbol of the intellectual impotence of a generation brought up by liberals during colonial times who despite their public denials had a deep psychological aversion to their own country and its people. That reply did not appear either and there wasn't even an acknowledgement.

You've read my story, "Wonderful World of Grandpass Mendis".

ROBINSON: About the "pull" of gangsters in Sri Lanka society.

FERNANDO: I sent it to a certain newspaper. Anyone here who read the story would have known that it was true to life. More than a month after sending it, I got a reply. The editor's note said he was thankful for my story but he regretted his inability to publish it.

ROBINSON: You just said the Guardian gives only the appearance of being liberal. What do you mean?

FERNANDO: There are liberal sounding writings in Sri Lanka that are in fact very dishonest and reactionary. That is a game quite a lot of

people here indulge in. Once a British intellectual expressed his surprise at the number of left sounding words used in the editorials of most right—wing newspapers in Sri Lanka. Our right—wing newspapers often publish articles complimentary of Karl Marx, Lenin, et al. Yet how much of what is happening day to day is revealed to the people?

Now I want to comment on Mervyn de Silva. He is a product of Lake House. Do you know Lake House?

ROBINSON: The publishers of Dinamina and Silumina; the newspapers with the biggest circulation in Sri Lanka.

FERNANDO: Among the newspaper establishment, Lake House is the most reactionary institution and has been for the whole of our post—independence period. That’s common knowledge here.

Much of the philosophy of what is known as the ”free economy” here these days is the pet ideas of Lake House— even when Mervyn de Silva was there, holding high posts.

ROBINSON: What do you mean by ”reactionary”?

FERNANDO: In the ’50s and ’60s and ’70s Lake House had one single goal— to destroy the labor movement in Sri Lanka that used to be so strong. Lake House ultimately achieved that goal.

Today’s ethnic problem would not have taken its present form if the labor movement had retained its strength.

The very people who have contributed to the ethnic crisis today have committees for ethnic harmony!

That sort of liberalism, the use of left terms, or all sorts of pseudo—intellectual terminology, is only a cover for greater reactionary measures.

That’s how I see the aims of the journalism of Mervyn de Silva.
It's one thing to talk sentimentally about unity. Quite another to build or promote the forces that could bring about that unity.

In my view, resuscitation of the organized labor movement is the cornerstone to a realistic solution to today's so-called "ethnic conflict".

ROBINSON: To go back to journalism, under the conditions that you describe many journalists must be frustrated here.

FERNANDO: In Sri Lanka journalists are most genuine not when they write but when they are drunk. Then they have a lot to say. And they say it rather forcefully.

ROBINSON: What kind of salaries do journalists get in Sri Lanka?

FERNANDO: Their pay is low. The journalists here are not paid much at all. This ensures that in a poor country like Sri Lanka very few really talented people will be attracted to such jobs. In the past it may have been different. But today it will be a rare person——of course, there are exceptions, I don't deny that——who wants to take the risk of so many obstacles in defense of professional integrity for such low remuneration.

ROBINSON: Why did you say "ensures"?

FERNANDO: I believe low pay is a matter of policy. Such low pay can prevent the growth and consolidation of truly independent journalism in Sri Lanka. To have things covered up——that is what the upper classes want. And that's exactly what the newspaper establishment does. I don't think there will be much change in the immediate future.

ROBINSON: Then, in Sri Lanka who does say what he or she thinks openly?

FERNANDO: People in Sri Lanka fear to speak the truth they know.
Especially these days. There have been a few, very few, who tried to break away from the deadly silence. One was former Chief Justice Neville Samarakoon. He was the most popular Chief Justice in Sri Lanka after independence in 1948. For a moment there was a daring attempt to speak the truth. He spoke out on the need for an independent judiciary. Of course, it was not the whole truth, the excuse being that he held office, high office. So the people waited for his retirement to listen to the better part of what he had to say. But in retirement he has preferred to be silent.

ROBINSON: Is this general reluctance to speak out something new in the history of Sri Lanka?

FERNANDO: Oh, we got used to this type of silence during the colonial times. That was because all the colonial rulers, including the British, who claimed to be liberal in their homeland, used the most brutal force for the slightest thing here. People knew this. A sort of psychology developed in the people that put them on guard.

ROBINSON: What kind of brutal force are you talking about?

FERNANDO: Well, massacre for one. Severe massacres became part of the experience of this country. During the rule of the Portuguese and the Dutch and the British there were instances of large scale human slaughter. For the purpose of achieving some aim of the colonizers. During the time of the British rule, all they did when such brutalities were exposed in England was to call such and such a Governor home and give him some other appointment.

The people here learned instinctively as it were that despite the external facade of European civility these gentlemen had come here to plunder and loot and for that purpose were willing to use violence against all who stood in their way. When such a social practice is repeated for more than four hundred years daily, imagine the ef
fect it would have on the psychology of the people. It is such psychological habits that are revived today by the "intellectual pariahs" that rule.

ROBINSON: Intellectual pariahs?

FERNANDO: I'm quoting from Ananda Coomaraswamy again. Do you know him?

ROBINSON: The Sri Lanka Tamil art expert? I should say art expert and philosopher. Many years ago I looked into his *The Living Thoughts of Buddha*. What did he mean by intellectual pariahs?

FERNANDO: He was talking about the spread of English education here, and he said a single generation of English education would be sufficient to create a peculiar being here, a kind of intellectual pariah, a person who belongs neither to the East nor the West, neither to the past nor the future. He called them "spiritual bastards".

ROBINSON: My impression is that Coomaraswamy desired harmony between East and West.

FERNANDO: Yes, but his concept of the amalgam of East and West implies that one is deeply rooted in one's own soil, that one is able to assimilate all aspects of another culture while remaining true to one's own.

ROBINSON: Since the subject of English has come up, I'll ask you a question about that: Do you think the English language is or could be a means of easing tensions among the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka?

FERNANDO: Some people here may have suggested that idea to you, but I want to state very emphatically that I do not consider the English language a means of easing tensions among ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.

As I've said, during the colonial period our native languages here were suppressed. But in the past few decades Sinhala
and Tamil have asserted themselves. This is one of the most positive aspects of Sri Lanka life and culture today.

ROBINSON: The writers I’ve had contact with in Sri Lanka do not know each other’s native languages. So is there a serious ”communication gap” between ordinary Sinhalese and Tamils here?

FERNANDO: There is no communications gap between the two groups that can be filled by a third language. It may sound paradoxical to you, but the ethnic tensions of today have no linguistic roots at all. We communicate with each other far better than at any other time in our history, though these tensions are more acute today than ever before. The situation in Sri Lanka is very complex. Look for the roots of these tensions elsewhere than in any fundamental misunderstanding between the two groups.

ROBINSON: A couple of people have said that they thought that when English was an official language in Sri Lanka people got along better.

FERNANDO: Well, the fact is that when the English language was the only official language in Sri Lanka it merely hardened the feelings of the majority in both groups.

As I’ve been trying to tell you, there was a third group, disloyal to both groups. They attained a privileged position against their own people. This group suffered due to the resurgence of Tamil and Sinhala. The resurgence in native languages is part of a total movement — the struggle for independence.

Today, when ethnic tensions are high, this group, once privileged, wants to push the English language forward — backward — to its former position. This is the way this group wants to make use of the grave crisis of the nation to their own advantage.

The English language is just another language that is
used in Sri Lanka. It will have to co-exist with the two major languages. In this co-existence it may make a special contribution to literature.

As for the unity of the nation, that is still another historical question. Both language groups, Sinhala and Tamil, could contribute to an answer. Unity would be meaningful to the extent they are both independent and not alienated and suppressed. Sinhalese and Tamils will have to concede that ethnic tensions, as we have been calling them, are very little ethnic, and that we have to solve some common problems before our unity is strengthened. Both groups are suffering from a common bondage. In understanding this and resolving this our unity will become real.

Mere hand shakes and "good morning" won't make us free. So long as we are not free, we will not be united.

ROBINSON: Let me change the subject again, back to literature.

Who are your favorite literary critics in Sri Lanka?

FERNANDO: I would unhesitatingly say M. I. Kuruwilla is the best critic of writing in English in Sri Lanka. He is also a poet. Until last year he was the senior lecturer in English literature at Aquinas College, so he didn't need to adjust himself to university pressures and fashions. The university academics have not yet freed themselves from colonial traditions. Kuruwilla has a very deep understanding of Malayalam literature. You should read Kuruwilla's *Studies in World Literature*. And he is thoroughly Asian, not half British and the other half only the Lord knows what, like the people who belong to the Lyn Ludowyk legacy you've probably heard so much about.

ROBINSON: Several people have mentioned Professor Ludowyk as the central figure in the Dramatic Society at Peradeniya University in the 1930s and 1940s. Shelagh Goonawardene was one of his students, and
she has referred to his "genius" as a teacher and his "instinctive creative knowledge" as a stage director. She was impressed by his liberalism, his humanism and cosmopolitanism.

FERNANDO: Yes, Ludowyk was a British liberal. He spent the better part of his active life in Sri Lanka. As you obviously know he was the head of the English Faculty at Peradeniya for a long time.

Ludowyk meant well for this country. May his soul rest in peace. He died recently in retirement.

But despite his good intentions he could not understand the meaning of the total liberation of Sri Lanka from its colonial past — psychological, emotional, spiritual, intellectual — that was the basic urge of the common people of this country, though they were silent most of the time. Especially then.

ROBINSON: But the students of Professor Ludowyk were — are? — just a small minority in Sri Lanka, weren't they?

FERNANDO: The leaders of the labor movement, who were more or less the undisputed leaders of the intellectual life of the country at that time, had that same sort of mental framework. So did almost all the members of the "learned professions", doctors, lawyers, economists, those involved in the academic life of this country.

Lyn Ludowyk's students are still around. Like Reggie Siriwardena. Others. But they are no longer the dominant factor in the intellectual life of this country. Incidentally, in his *Guardian* article Qadri Ismail says Ludowyk gave his students nothing original but only watered down versions of F. L. Leavis and his students found British literature irrelevant to life in Sri Lanka.

ROBINSON: At the time of the big influence of the University Dramatic Society, which did mostly dramas in English, what was happening in the Sinhala theatre? For example, Dr. Ediriweera Sarachchandra,
whom you've already said a little about, is apparently the most important modern Sinhala dramatist. Would you comment on his place in theatre history?

FERNANDO: I would like to discuss Dr. Sarachchandra in relation to his total contribution as an intellectual involved in many aspects of art and social life in Sri Lanka. We must place him in his generation. They made their contribution to the intellectual life of this country in the decades immediately following independence in 1948.

I'm going to repeat myself. The intellectuals of that time may be broadly classed into two groups, in terms of their outlook. The Lyn Ludowyk type—English-oriented—was in the majority. On the other hand, Dr. Sarachchandra and a few others went in a different direction.

The main burden they took upon themselves was to revive the people's language, Sinhala. (Among Tamils, too, there was a parallel movement.) Thus, getting the people to speak after centuries of silence.

I want to emphasize that anyone who fails to understand this has no chance of understanding the real dynamics behind the social life of this country in recent decades—and in the years to come.

In my view, the greatest contribution of Dr. Sarachchandra was to sharpen the Sinhala language in a manner that any sophisticated idea could be expressed through it and contributing a means by which the majority of the people could express themselves effectively and were thereby able to face the little minority who at one time had all the power. Our Sinhala theatre is very sophisticated now.

ROBINSON: Speaking of sophistication but changing the subject for the last time for now, the cover of Evelyn, My First Friend has a
somewhat modernistic line drawing by Ananda Kumara Jayasuriya. Who is he?

FERNANDO: Jayasuriya is involved in hoteliering and advertising as a stylist and graphic designer. He has a special affinity for line drawings and Oriental art.

ROBINSON: I should have said a modernistic line drawing on an Oriental theme.

FERNANDO: The drawing shows the mother and the two children in the title poem, "Evelyn, My First Friend", that he liked very much for some reason.

ROBINSON: It's a sad poem—the death of a child, your first friend.

FERNANDO: The sadness is also in the resignation shown in the life of the mother, symbolic of the fatalist attitudes of most of the poor people, caught between the object of their love, their children, and sad events before which they are powerless.

ROBINSON: Where did Jayasuriya go to school? What is his reputation here? How old is he, by the way?

FERNANDO: He was born in 1954. In Hendala. He's a self-taught artist and sculptor. He's participated in and won awards in exhibitions and competitions not only in Sri Lanka but also abroad. He held his first one-man show when he was 20 at the Gallerie Syvil. A prestigious private gallery in Colombo. He's also had one-man shows in Bonn, Stuttgart, and other cities in the Federal Republic of Germany.

ROBINSON: Your Evelyn, My First Friend is dedicated to Henk Scharam. Who is he?

FERNANDO: He was a Dutch priest who worked in Sri Lanka. One of the finest minds I've ever come across. He once remarked, "Hierarchy is the greatest barrier to the Church" in Sri Lanka. Incidentally, I
quoted this remark in a Church Synod in 1968 or so, in the presence of all the Bishops. Then someone proposed that the quotation should be deleted. It was.