

First Light

The Eternal "Alleluia"

Luis Espinal was a filmmaker and missionary in Bolivia in the 1970s. He opposed the dictatorship of Garcia Meza and advocated for human rights. A paramilitary organization kidnapped him and murdered him in March 1980. Here are his words, just a few days before his death.

"There are Christians who have hysterical reactions, as if the world would have slipped out of God's hands. They act violently as if they were risking everything. But we believe in history; the world is not a roll of the dice going toward chaos. A new world has begun to happen since Christ has risen...

Jesus Christ, we rejoice in your definitive triumph... with our bodies still in the breach and our souls in tension, we cry out our first "Hurrah!" till eternity unfolds itself. Your sorrow now has passed. Your enemies have failed. You are a definitive smile for humankind.

What matters the wait now for us? We accept the struggle and the death; because you, our love, will not die! We march behind you, on the road to the future. You are with us and you are our immortality! Take away the sadness from our faces. We are not in a game of chance... You have the last word!

Beyond the crushing of our bones, now has begun the eternal "alleluia!" From the thousand openings of our wounded bodies and souls there arises now a triumphal song! So, teach us to give voice to your new life throughout all the world. Because you dry the tears from the eyes of the oppressed forever... and death will disappear..."

Three things stick out to me. First, "We believe in history; the world is not a roll of the dice going towards chaos." God is still in control. We are still in his hands. Second, "We accept our struggle and the death, because you, our love, will not die." God's ultimate enemy, death, has already been defeated, and so he does not look on our moment with anxiety, but anticipation of ultimate triumph. Third, "now has begun the eternal 'alleluia!'" Even in the valley of the shadow, there are still glimpses of heaven breaking into earth. We must find those bright spots, the places where the door of a dark room cracks upon to welcome beams of light.

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Revelation 7:9-17

[9] After this, I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. [10] And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." [11] All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, [12] saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen!" [13] Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes---who are they, and where did they come from?" [14] I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. [15] Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. [16] 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. [17] For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water .' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes .'

- ----- Phil Brookman