



Merry Christmas

The Daily Star

SPECIAL

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The message of Christmas and the dignity of man

REV. MARTIN ADHIKARY

CHRISTMAS points us to the unique love and grace of God for his creation. In doing so it also points to the two distinct natures of Christ: his divinity and humanity. We celebrate the historic birth of Jesus Christ as a human person who reveals God's unfolding and outreaching love and grace for His creation with special reference to mankind, the crown of creation. God, the Creator communicates his divine love exactly the way man can understand and know. God came to man as a man, not as an angel or any other being.

As a consequence of the Fall man has alienated himself from God. God sent his son to the world to reconcile mankind to him. To discuss the subject clearly we need to ask the question "What is man?" This question has perhaps been one of the few most centrally important questions since the dawn of civilisation. This has given birth to many 'doctrines of man', many anthropologies throughout the ages and in different world-views and faiths. Socrates, one of the many ancient wise men has been commonly known as one whose lifelong desire was to know his self. Various thinkers have tried to answer the question variously. The Hebrew sage pleaded with God, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You have made him little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet." (Psalm 8:4-6). This Biblical perspective can be a step to consider the question of the dignity of man in the light of the Biblical account of creation of man. The Bible has clear assertions about human beings, which lay the foundation of basic human rights and human dignity.

If we consider the accounts concerning God's creation of all that there is in Genesis 1-3 we see that Man's creation is the pinnacle or the climax of divine creative activities. God created man after creating every other thing by uttering his all-powerful word. The human race had its origin by immediate creation of God, and man is the grand consummation of all creation. God used the "formulae" "Let there be..." ex nihilo. But when he created man he involved his Trinitarian existence by saying "Let us create man in our image, after our likeness". God took



special care in the creation of man. God formed the body of man of those elements necessary for man's body and which were created long before man (Genesis 1: 1). What was special in man's creation was a form of life, which only God and man possess (Genesis 2:7). So man was created in God's image and likeness. This image of God in man implies that man can think of God and even have communion with God. Man is the 'imago Dei', God's image bearer in the sense that he has been endowed with the attribute of holiness, love and righteousness and justice and as such he is supposed to reflect God's moral qualities. It is not only man's spiritual and moral integrity that is indicated by man's creation in the image of God. Man is altogether distinct and unique from the rest of the creation in his totality of existence. Man's being reflects and mirrors his creator. All men are created this way.

The word 'Incarnation', like the word 'Trinity', is not found in the Bible. Yet both these words have a great deal to do with the Christian faith simultaneously. They are intrinsically related to each other in the personhood of Christ. The doctrine of Trinity states that God is one being, yet he exists in eternity in three distinct Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Each of them are distinct

from the other two, yet is in eternal union with them. None of them are confounded, or confused with another. They are each a distinct centre of consciousness, a distinct form of personal existence, nevertheless sharing among themselves the exact and the same divine nature in their coeternal existence. The three persons are one being. The divine essence is not divided among the persons. It is fully and equally shared by all the three persons and as such each of them is fully and truly God. It is God the Son who became incarnated in the person of Jesus. The word 'Incarnation' comes from the Latin words "in," meaning "in," and "carnis," meaning "flesh". In Christian theology this concept is used to mean that God the Son assumed human body in his grace. Christ the eternal Son of God took human form. It's the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus. He who was eternally God took human flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God with all his moral as well as metaphysical attributes and qualities. The two distinct natures of divinity and humanity are united and residing simultaneously in one person. The Chalcedonian Creed of the early Church puts it: Christ is "to be acknowledged in the two natures...concurring in one Person

and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ...". It's a great mystery to be accepted only in faith.

Christians believe in a God who exists and relates to his creation in three persons. God has created mankind in his own image. In the creation of man we find the creative art of God being involved in the special act. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ as a human person. This very fact reflects God's practical and articulate love for dignity of man. The question of man's glory and dignity is inextricably linked up in our mind with the human appearance of Christ. The incarnation of God the Son of the Holy Trinity is something that clearly points us to duly consider this question of dignity of man. Universal human rights are based on this. It has therefore, to be a faith, a creed. Human life, just as other forms of life, is a gift from God. So it is inviolable. The sanctity of human life is so obvious that to kill life was forbidden in the Bible. Homicide is universally condemned in all faiths. The Biblical teaching is a challenge in all our situation of injustice and oppression of man by man. One other important aspect of human life is that man is the steward and the

viceroy of God's creation. Man is God's representative in having rule and dominion over the rest of creation. From the Genesis account of creation of man we can discern that God placed man into a threefold relationship: 1. Between man and God; 2. Between man and his fellowman; and 3. Between man and nature. This dominion is not to be for gratifying his selfish ego and greed. Man has this mandate to care for creation in a compassionate way so that there is no violence and destruction of creation so that all creation witnesses an internal harmony, balance and unity for mutual growth and fulfilment towards God's praise. In the life of Jesus this trilateral relationship with God, with mankind and with nature was absolutely right and impeccable.

As a result of sin man has marred the image of God in him. Man did not retain God's image and likeness. When God placed our first parents in Eden he set before them one simple restriction, not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But man in his pride and greed disobeyed God and immediately the fellowship with the Creator became severed. This resulted in man's spiritual death and also in his physical death eventually. There was enmity and God has come to restore the alienated creation to himself through his incarnation in Christ.

"Christ is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1: 15).

At his birth the angels sang to the poor and marginalised shepherds the song of peace and joy for all people: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased" (Luke 2:14). So the eternal message of Christmas in the incarnation of Jesus, the loving concern for abundant life for all people living in justice, freedom and peace in turn points us to the dignity of human life. Christ came to the world to point to man his divine origin and destiny. But there is a great difference in theory and practice. As days pass by, human societies are tarnished by the blatant disregard for human rights in almost every place in one form or the other. Jesus came to give dignity to man: to restore dignity to man as created by God. He came to show God's love and unmerited grace so that man may turn to God and learn to change his rebellious attitude to God, selfish attitude to his fellowmen, and his inconsideration towards nature to an attitude of love and respect. This requires a total turning to God, first of all.

Jesus emptied himself of his divine glory for a while when he was on the earth. In his miraculous incarnation and in his service he denied himself of all that were his rights i.e. his divine glory. He cared for the total needs of the neglected, the stigmatised and the marginalised people of the society. He is the supreme model for selfless service and humility. In his divine power Jesus miraculously healed the sick, fed the hungry, brought back to normal life the demon-possessed, calmed the storm, restored the neglected and despised into community, raised the dead, and eventually conquered death in his own person. Even when he walked this planet he retained his dominion over nature. None of us can imitate Jesus in all these. But we can have and grow within the attitude to God, to other people, specially people in their needs, in upholding the dignity of man and protecting human rights. The life and the gospel of Jesus is transforming. It is also challenging. It is not simply some good advices, but life relating to life. Let Christmas once more challenge us to sincerely try to live the life that will manifest man's dignity and give glory to God—the Creator and Sustainer of all life, all people. May the joy, and also the call of Christmas be real to us.



Open all doors to Bethlehem

SUNITA D' COSTA

Little Star peeped out of the sky
And looked below to greet Mother Earth.
"Good Evening!" it almost cried
When a puff of hot air smacked its eye.

"Fire, fire!" It shrieked in fear.
"The world is ablaze, the end is near.
Palestine, Israel are all in pain.
They're crucifying Christ all over again!"

It is a winter sky over AlQasa
It is a winter sky over Jerusalem
It is a winter sky over Christ's homeland
It is a doomsday sky over civilization.

"Peacemakers of the human race," said Little Star
"Stop fooling the world with you earthly tricks.
If you really care to stop the war,
Open all doors to Bethlehem. Merry Christmas!"

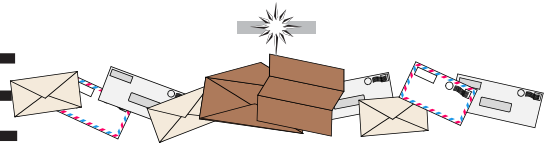
When Christmas comes

MIRIAM ROY (JUI)

Smiles are much brighter
As people meet
Sounds of gay laughter
Full every street
When Christmas comes.

There's warmth in each heart
This time of the year
And everyone shaving
Kindness and cheer
When Christmas comes.
There's the wonderful feeling
In the air
People are kinder
And show they care
When Christmas comes.

TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Notice

Due to unavoidable circumstances, the Letter Page is squeezed to half today. We regret the inconvenience caused to our readers. However, our next full-page letters will be published on Friday as

Army men disciplined!

I was glad to learn that departmental action has been taken against a number of army personnel for various offences during the ongoing army drive (December 23). I thought that the Government has at last taken notice of the increasing death in custody. But I was wrong. It has no relation with these deaths but the actions have been taken "for wrongdoing, overdoing and negligence of duty!"

The authorities concerned claim that there is a continuous monitoring of the way the joint drive is being carried out. Then how come they miss to monitor and investigate such an important and grave matter—38 death in custody!

It's been quite some time now that the joint drive has been going on. And we cannot but admit that there has been significant improvement in the law and order situation. But that doesn't give the army, the government or anyone the right to violate human rights. From the very beginning, the Government has

been denying the army's relationship with these deaths. But our demand is very just and relevant. We want a proper investigation regarding these deaths. It doesn't matter whether they were notorious criminals or not. No one deserves to die this way. Be it an innocent person or a vicious criminal.

Monirul Alam Talukder
Chittagong

"Court case against army major"

The Government's decision to bring in the army to improve law and order situation was a bold move and it did produce good results. However, the army, like any other section of the populace in any nation cannot be totally devoid of rogue elements.

Now that an aggrieved party is seeking justice in accordance with law of the land, the army and the Government must ensure that justice is done and is seen to be done by not interfering in the judicial process. Should there be any

impression of interference by the army and/or the Government or any miscarriage of justice, then the Government and the army's image would be seriously hampered.

Ahmed Khaled
New Zealand

Pricilla released

It's a good news that the detained interpreter Pricilla Raj has at last been released. I don't want to go into the argument about why she has been released five days later even though there was a High Court order to release her. I know no body will be able to give us a satisfactory explanation regarding this delay.

We live in a country where the ruling party people can do anything without being accountable to anyone. But denying High Court order. It is indeed unprecedented.

Now that Pricilla Raj has been released, it's now Saleem Samad's turn. And he has also been granted bail on December 23. Hope that unlike Pricilla his release won't be on time.

Each and every political party whom we voted to power has treated us in the most undemocratic manner. We are indeed an unfortunate nation.

Shamsul Alam

Sylhet

Though it's baffling to us why Pricilla Raj was taken into custody in the first place, we're relieved to know that she has been released.

Pricilla has claimed that she has been given electric shock and has also been tortured mentally and physically. We want to know about these things in detail. *The Daily Star* should and must do a follow-up report on her, not just quote BBC. Our Government and our country's image depend on it.

Faria Rahaman
New Eskaton, Dhaka

Doctors on strike

Intern doctors, both at Dhaka and Sylhet Medical College, are on indefinite strike. Although the reasons of the strikes in these two medical colleges are different, the misery the ill-fated patients have to face due to this strike are very similar.

These types of strikes have now become a regular feature in our public hospitals. These medical colleges were built with public exchequer. If these colleges are public property then why would the patients be deprived of receiving treatment at the most urgent moment? People, who come to the

emergency units, are on the verge of life and death. So, instead of thinking about the patient, why the attendant should be concerned about the interest of the doctors? There should be no excuse on the behalf of a doctor for not attending a patient at the emergency unit. A doctor must perform his duty against all odds. If he refuses to do so, as is very common in our country, he should be made to, if needed, by enacting new law—at least in public medical colleges. In extreme cases, certificates of the unruly doctors may be seized in order to remind him that a doctor cannot and must not play with the life of a patient.

Md. Mynul Mamun
Dhaka

Fuel less electricity generator

A few days ago, an interesting debate was going on in the Letters Page regarding a local scientist claiming to have invented 'fuel less electricity generator'. A number of people including university professor sent their letter explaining the impossibility of inventing such machine. The debate was really interesting and lively and attracted the attention of many readers.

Now I would like to request *The Daily Star* to do a report on whether Mr Nazmul Huda has really been able to invent this perpetual machine, whether it works or whether those who argued about the impossibility of this machine were right in their argument.

AKM Khairuzaman
Banani, Dhaka

Noise pollution

Samia Sultana (December 11) has rightly pointed out that noise pollution, in recent days, has made our life miserable. In public places like restaurants, buses, trains, markets

free of illegal money and muscle-men. We wish her all the success.

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we talk amongst ourselves very loudly forgetting about the presence of others and whether they are being disturbed. Our common tendency is to give top priority to our own interest and hence noise pollution increases.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to visit Japan. We, a group of youth from different countries, were making a journey from Tokyo to Kobe by a bullet train. Out of joy we were singing and chatting at our loudest. Our Japanese guide warned us that we should keep it down. Her logic was that other train passengers especially the ones who were sleeping might feel disturbed. I wish we had similar civic sense among us, the Bangladeshis.

Very often we find that loudspeakers and microphones are being played at the fullest volume on the occasion of birth or death anniversary of our two important leaders— Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman. The supporters of these two leaders make our life hell on these days by playing loudspeakers and mike at the fullest volume not caring a bit about the general people.

We have already been successful in reducing air pollution by banning two-stroke autorickshaws. We should try to decrease noise pollution as well.

Md. Ashequl Islam
IBA, University of Dhaka

"We should face the reality"

I thank Nasim Islam for the response to my letter concerning the difficulties some Bangladeshis have facing reality. It is indeed too easy for foreigners to say such things. We need to understand the feelings of some people in poor countries who feel that the friendship of more rich and powerful nations cannot be trusted. As the writer says, some of these nations have behaved very badly in the past and, I would add, some of them are not too nice in the present either! How can such friendship with Bangladesh be genuine? Dare she admit to them that she cannot be absolutely sure that she does not have pockets of terrorism in her midst, despite her best efforts? How can the 'little boys' in a world of 'big boys' avoid thinking that the only

way to keep other nations respecting them is to be extremely touchy about their 'image'?

Many bigger countries with a bad record have done their best to face the uncomfortable realities of their own past, have repented of them and are doing their best to behave differently although I am perfectly aware that our record is still far from perfect. I was brought up by a generation determined that never again should the British be called 'snobs!' Please note also that we tend to be those countries whose dirty linen is regularly washed in public i.e. we are used to being criticised and 'taking' it!

Some Bangladeshi students who go overseas to study cannot believe the openness with which their professors conduct discussions with their students. The professor may have strong views on a subject or even have written a book on it - but the student is free to disagree.

This is mature debate of the type that is common in the free world. It is also the type that one usually finds on the Letters Page of this newspaper - and I am honoured to be allowed to participate in it.

Angela Robinson
Dhaka

"Censorship"

This is in reply to the letter (December 23) by AZM Abdul Ali regarding censorship on the weekly Economist for the week November 30-December 6.

It is certainly true that last week's Economist magazine was censored. But this isn't the first time either. The last time was due to a harmless picture in an article about video art. I know what was censored the last time because I wrote to the Economist and they were kind enough to mail me that offensive page.

I hope you and the other readers of the Economist will take this opportunity to write to the Editor as well as complaining to the magazine. Even if we have to accept the Government censoring harmless journals, we can at least push *The Daily Star* to publicise this censorship.

Azad
Dhaka

"Why are our writer's and journalists still in prison?"

I have just read your commentary "Why are our writers and journalists still in Prison" (December 23). It is timely and well-written one. All the points you have mentioned are valid and justified. You have asked many "WHYS" to the government. But don't you know the answer Mr. Editor?

The way this government is trying to stop the progressive voices has crossed all past limits. It is my view that you could be branded as an anti-state element if you talk about War of Liberation, respect great heroes of our Liberation War, talk about Bengali culture. You are a *rashtrdrohi* if you oppose fundamentalists, believe in free press, care about human rights and rule of law.

I am not surprised about it when Jammat is a power-partner. At the same time there is no doubt that AL has failed miserably to fulfill its responsibility and commitment.

Is it the same Bangladesh for which three million people sacrificed their life?

Kamal Hassan, Kulshi, Chittagong

I have come to the conclusion that this Government has no respect or regards for human values. They are largely devoid of any conscience. By these arrests, it has also amply displayed its lack of political wisdom and foresight. The policy, the ruling party

is pursuing is not only suicidal but also aimed at isolating itself from the mainstream.

By these arrests and many more of the kind this Government is simply working towards marginalising its popularity and image drastically reducing its number of supporters day after day. To this day the Government has not been able to establish a single charge brought against any of the arrested individuals. Besides the public is yet to know or have any clear idea of the nature of the charges. At times I wonder if the authorities themselves have a clear idea, mandate or any specific objective behind these arrests.

About the entire episode about dealing with the journalists and media I do not know where to begin. It is sufficient to say that the ruling party and the Government have dealt with the matter most unprofessionally. Politics aside, the national media has gone out of its way in helping this Government in its ever rising uphill tasks of holding out and negating the external media's onslaught on the secular image of Bangladesh. No modern day Government can function effectively without a substantial support and recognition by the media. I have this feeling that the national media has continually been receiving an extremely "raw deal" from this Government time after time.



Say 'No' to oppression