

The Son of Man came to serve, not to be served

Jesus exhorted his disciples with these words: "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." (Mark 10:42-43). This is how Jesus highlighted the issue of servant-leadership.

REVEREND MARTIN ADHIKARY

CHRISTMAS, the festival of all Christian festivals is back one more time! I, myself, celebrated it as many as 56 times! But how much of the true significance of this special occasion I have internalised and put into practice is perhaps a different question! We celebrate the birth of the Messiah with joy and gladness in our hearts. We decorate our houses, our bodies and our church buildings, eat and feast, and exchange traditional greetings and clichés. Also, we fulfill our liturgies and try to understand the inner meaning of the Christ-event manifested by all those externalities.

Let us remind ourselves of the purpose behind the coming of Christ to the world. The purpose is to be deciphered from Jesus' own words recorded in the various Gospels. One such utterance of Jesus is: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45). His mission was to release people who were captives of sin and its diverse consequences. He accomplished his mission as he served both God and man with love and humility. This was possible because he was the incarnation of God's love and grace. He was born as a human being. There was no place for him in the inn at the time

of his birth.

He did not even claim for himself the title of Son of God. He called himself more than forty times as "Son of Man" ("ben Adam" in Hebrew, which literally means "son of Adam." "Adam" means soil/clay/dust. It also means Man or "son of human-kind") although he knew that he was the Son of God. His utterances like "foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Mtt. 8:20), and many others, reveal the deep truth about his coming to the world. He came to serve. He served with genuine selfless love and in humility.

The very fact of the incarnation of God in human flesh and form was the beginning of his humiliation that culminated in his death on the cross. And this service is primarily two-fold: he came to die as a ransom for the sins of the world. He died the death of a slave, on the cross. His was an unjust death. He was sinless, but he bore our sins so that we would be acquitted, and with faith and trust in him we receive forgiveness for our sins and are saved on the basis of what he has done for us. He also fulfilled the prophecies in the Old Testament by performing miracles, as the evangelist Matthew records by quoting Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases." (Mtt. 8:17, Isaiah

53:4).

He served people with critical needs in their, physical, mental, social and spiritual lives. However, all these of his ministries and services reflect back to the fact that he is our Saviour from all kinds of bondages that sin results in; he has the authority over our lives as he is God incarnate. Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God, the kingdom or rule of God in human affairs, would be rather different from the rule of this world and its worldly rulers. "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mtt. 5:20). He insisted on the transformation of people's lives and values by divine power. That would be radically different from the values of this world.

Jesus's divine mission was to transform our mundane thoughts, and behaviour into humility and sacrificial love. If we have this attitude and belief, we will be able to serve others. The objective of this is to reconcile and build peace among ourselves and the greater community of peoples. Jesus came to this world so that sinful and alienated man could get reconciled with God and with himself. This was the primary motive behind the coming of Christ as a human being with our

human feelings and emotions, apart from our sinful nature and the practical experience of sin. Paul reflected this in his Epistle to the Corinthian Christians when he said: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

The rule of God in human lives is what Christ preached in word and deed. We need to understand the fact that in him the divine came as the mundane, God became man, the Wisdom and Word of God took the form of human flesh, the unlimited appeared in the limited, the eternal in the ephemeral material. All this was possible for God because He is love and His Son Jesus is His exact icon or replica. This required loving kindness on God's part and the humility of Christ so that the really transforming service of a sin-sick world could be possible.

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We find in the book of Isaiah (Chapters 40-45) -- an Old Testament book which is directly quoted at least 62 times in the New Testament -- four famous Servant

Songs which refer to Christ, who would save his people from all bondages and bring them to the light of day out of the dark days of captivity and slavery. As God's anointed, Jesus fulfilled this role of the Messiah for the spiritual bondages of sin of Mankind. A true leader must have a sense of commitment and service to the people whom s/he leads.

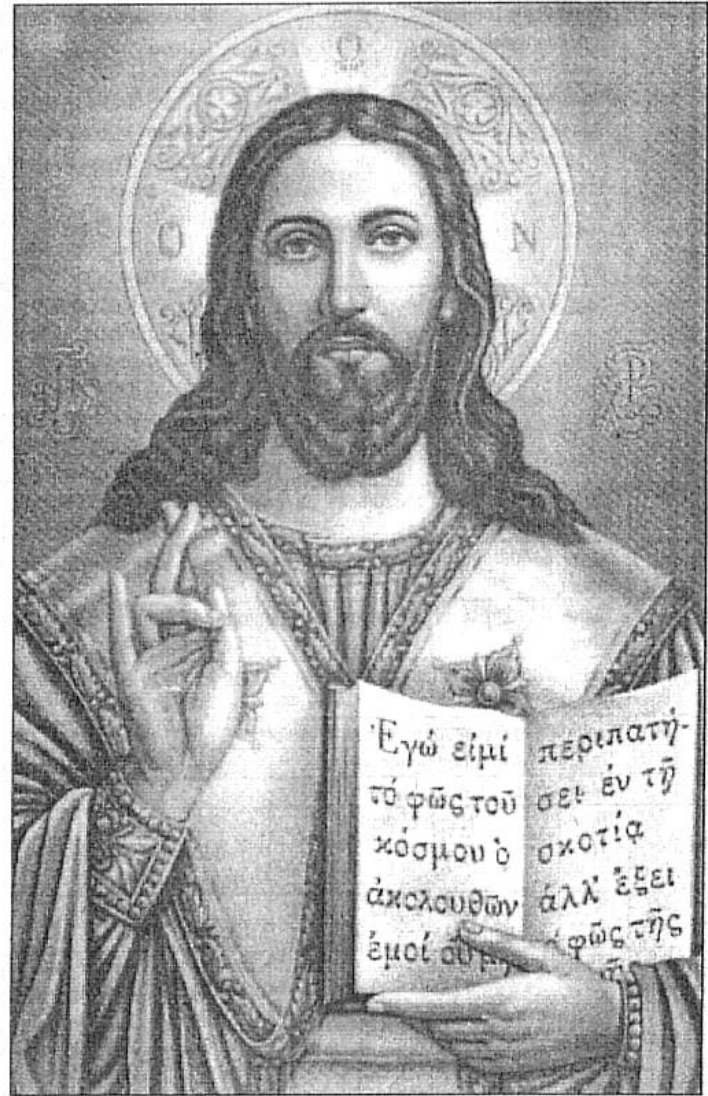
Unfortunately, as things are, most of our leaders, wherever they might be, are not governed by this value. They rather want to be served and to boss over people, and to direct and control others to serve their whims and interests. That's why democratic values and principles are not nursed in our society. When people are in high positions they forget the pledges that they made before their elections. The history of the various countries and our own, of course, is replete with examples of this. Leaders with genuine patriotism and love for the good of people are rare. That's why we are deluded and our hopes are frustrated by our leaders.

In Bangladesh we are very much enthusiastic about our next general election, and a great deal of work is being done by our government towards the holding of this elections. Let us earnestly hope that we will be able to elect people who will be true leaders, with the mind and heart of good leadership for service to the people of this country. We hope and pray that we will be able to have people who will truly represent the hopes, wishes and aspirations of the teeming millions of men and women, and will facilitate their lives in their journey towards

a society living in peace and progress. We hope for leaders, who will promote and advocate for justice and peace, human rights, reconciliation and transparency in administration. We now long for people with integrity and wisdom to be our leaders, to guide us to rightly use our resource and expertise for the benefit of the people.

This has always been our national vision and dream. But we failed because our leaders failed in national commitments, as they bossed over us more than even they thought they could serve us! Any organisation or institution rises or falls with its leader. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, which was a colony of, and subjugated by, the haughty and tyrannical Roman Empire. Luke records that at that time Emperor Augustus Caesar decreed that all the people of "all the empire" ("terrarium orbis imperium" as the phrase is in Latin) were to register their names. This census was motivated by the purpose of the ruler for taxation, and for maintaining the vast army of the empire.

The God-incarnate Jesus Christ was born that time to serve us like a slave. He came as the little babe to helpless and poverty-stricken parents in a stable. During his last meal that he took with his disciples he washed their feet! He deserves our attention and our love. Let us all fervently pray and hope that we will be guided by the spirit of love, consideration for others, and the sacred and godly values that Christ taught us. To the Muslims,



Christ is one of the four greatest prophets, to the Hindus and Buddhists he is an avatar, and to the Christians he is the Saviour. Let Christmas challenge us all and enlighten us in our thoughts and deeds for the lasting positive change that we need personally as

well as corporately. Consider the Vedic prayer: "O Lord, lead us from falsehood to truth, to light from darkness and from death to life." Let the light of Christ shine on us. Merry Christmas to all readers!

Reverend Martin Adhikary is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

Christmas is a time for hope

The verses from the Psalm quoted above reassure us that new visions to address these challenges will emerge (the Lord gives sight to the blind); we are reassured that those who have been disempowered, impoverished, dehumanised, will regain their dignity (those who are bowed down will be raised); and we are reminded that the Lord loves the just.

BARTHOLOMEW SHAHA

RECENTLY, I was at a school celebration for Christmas. All students studying in that major school in town, from Kindergarten to Class XII, were present, and so were many of their parents and friends. The indoor basketball court converted to a hall was full. The audio system was impressive and the decorations artistic, with colourful lights, myriads of angels and other dazzling ornaments on a huge Christmas tree. There was a life-size statue of Father Christmas with his long white beard and traditional red robe. There was a grand piano, and behind it seated were children with their violins, cellos, drums and many other instruments.

The Principal of the school began the program promptly, with the youngest children singing the first couple of numbers: "Jingle Bells" and "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Then began the dances by the older children, as a DVD played modernised pop

versions of Christmas carols. There were recognitions, awards, food from all corners of the world, and the whole atmosphere was of joyous celebration!

During those moments, I felt I was in another world -- far removed from our day-to-day realities. In fact, for a large part of the time there, I felt I was back at school again, and was reminded of my childhood days celebrating Christmas in my school in Chittagong, Bangladesh.

Indeed, Christmas is a joyful season that comes every year to renew and refresh us. It is a season that has great depth and meaning coming from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, which we often tend to forget these days amidst the barrage of "Happy Holiday" greetings. One wonders how the core word "Christmas" just vanished.

The season also seems to begin earlier each year, for it involves big business! Thus, already in early November, we start hearing in the PA systems of malls and department stores: "I'm dreaming of a

white Christmas" or "Silent Night, Holy Night." People start shopping for Christmas presents for their parents, children, relatives and friends.

Indeed, Christmas is a time to think of the "others" -- those near and dear ones, those whom we love and cherish. It is a time to mend relationships that have become soured, and to re-unite and renew friendship again. But, Christmas is also a time to reflect on the deeper issues and concerns of life, of our world and the destiny of the human race. It is a time to celebrate and to build community, as Jesus Christ did during his life on earth.

In several places of the Holy Bible we find the story of Jesus Christ's birth. It is a moving story, for Jesus was born in a simple manger as there was no place in the inn. He was born a humble person, in poverty and deprivation, and all his life he sought to respond to the needs of people. Thus, to the hungry he provided food (including spiritual food), to the marginalised

and outcasts of society he gave the good news of justice and peace. In fact, it is he who said: "I came to give life, and give it abundantly" (John 10, 10).

Every year Christians around the world prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ by observing four weeks of prayer and reflection. A wreath of evergreen leaves is made with four candles standing on it, and every Sunday a new candle is lit to remind them of the coming of Jesus Christ. This preparatory period is known as "Advent." During Advent, Christians pray for purity of heart in order to receive Christ properly. They pray for a wholesome community where everyone respects each other and accepts one another as brothers and sisters.

For this year's Third Sunday of Advent, a beautiful Psalm (146) has been chosen by the Church, which appealed to me very much. It reads: The Lord God keeps faith forever, Secures justice for the oppressed, Gives food to the hungry, The Lord sets captives free.

The Lord gives sight to the blind; The Lord raises up those who are bowed down The Lord loves the just; The Lord protects strangers. The fatherless and the widow he

sustains, But the way of the wicked he thwarts.

The Lord shall reign forever... Amidst the present crises in our world, the conflicts and wars, the widespread poverty, the destruction of the environment and the disintegration of societies, these verses from the Psalms give strength and food for the faithful's spiritual journey. The words narrate what we so anxiously seek these days: justice for the oppressed, food for the hungry, and freedom for those in various forms of bondage.

The past year has seen quite a few positive signs of hope globally, and a growing consciousness on the need to protect the environment and strengthen the response to crucial diseases such as HIV and AIDS. However, in general, the situation in most parts of the world remains the same, and in some places they have even become worse.

The verses from the Psalm quoted above reassure us that new visions to address these challenges will emerge (the Lord gives sight to the blind); we are reassured that those who have been disempowered, impoverished, dehumanised, will regain their dignity (those who are bowed down will be raised); and we are reminded



that the Lord loves the just.

Christmas is a time to recall the reason for Jesus Christ's coming on this earth. It is a time for the Christian community to reflect on how they have worked during the past year in practicing the values

for which Jesus came and offered his life, particularly in building a community of service and caring, and establishing a society characterised by justice, love and peace. Christmas, indeed, is a time to hope for change for the better as

individuals and communities renew their commitment to work for the realisation of a just and peaceful world.

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Mahbub bhai: The gentlest radical



AFSAN CHOWDHURY

MAHBUB bhai, the gentlest and most gentlemanly of radicals that many of us ever met has passed on. The photograph of his dead face awakens us to memories of the warmth and love he had for so many. Perhaps the last of the aristocrat revolutionaries is no more, leaving behind not so much his literary creations as the entire example of a life that he led with determination, style and flair that few could match. We hope that

Jowshan apa, his cherished and fellow traveler in life and work, will find the strength to carry on without him.

Mahbub bhai was rooted in the earth of his native Chittagong and was one of the centers of the leading lights of that city, and it was common to see them at his home. But his mental rhythm also came from a youth spent in Kolkata and its revolutionary promises posed by Marxist politics. Like many of his generation, communism was not an ideological, but a moral, choice. It was the stamp of having a conscience, and that Mahbub bhai would give all -- his life and wealth -- to the party was, to him, not a matter of sacrifice but a privilege. It was possible for sons of the earth like him, on whom the leftist sun shone to do so. It was such silent heroism on which the anti-colonial struggle was constructed, then and later after 1947.

Yet, he was left asunder from the party one day, and this ache never left him. But he was not ripped away from the sense of history, culture and language that made the man he became, towering above

his peers through his short stature and smiling demeanour never betraying the steel inside. Having forsaken his family wealth when he had it all, he returned much later to making a living, proving that commerce was natural to him; even as he aggressively ran publications, edited broadsheets, wrote, agitated and organised.

Sadness at the death of idealism

Jowshan (Ara Rahman) apa would sometimes talk about the hard days, those difficult years as he built his ventures over the years without yielding to his instincts for literature and patriotism. In the end, he became a person who, in many eyes, became greater than that ferocious raging poem describing the fervour of 1952 than any other poem written, then or now.

"I was actually confined to bed because of chicken pox and someone came and told me about the firing in Dhaka. I was so angry. That's how the poem was born." In a way, the overwhelming historicity of that literary success has dimmed

the quality of his large and articulate oeuvre. He wrote in the time honoured tradition of the poet and essayist as an activist, treading a middle path between aesthetics and homage to the spirit of the multitude he believed in.

"Afsan, what's going on? Are they going to discard everything?" he had exclaimed once to me as the socialist world collapsed. It was an agonised cry of a man who saw almost all the pillars of socialism on which their dreams were made crumble in the face of what he thought was revisionism, whether of the Soviet Russian or Chinese variety. It was not an orthodox man's cry for the loss of command and control over destinies of others but an idealist's anguish. Anguish that the kind of politics which claimed that the rights of the poor, the primary obligation of the state, the centre of all understanding, were being whittled away. I wonder how he felt when he saw the number of millionaires rise at greater speed in the erstwhile socialist world than in the West.

In their Uttara home, there would be a constant gathering of social,

cultural and artistic luminaries. Jowshan apa and Mahbub bhai had built a lovely home, which was decorated with a sense of style and artistry rarely matched in Dhaka. When they entertained, one always whiffed a redolence of "sharafa," that fading sense of aristocracy, generosity and style, always understated yet in the end musical and rich in texture. It was in many ways a ceremony of the passing of a world of which he was part of and in some sense presided over.

All things must pass and we will not grieve his departure, for it was a life full led. Instead, we shall mourn our own lessening for as long as someone like him had remained, a link to that magnificent world of "possibility and promise" was there. He represented a time when crafting a better history was possible. It wasn't to be, and all we now have is an old sepia photograph of his life and the songs of his memories.

Farewell Mahbub bhai. You lived well; you were the better one amongst us, young and old.

Afsan Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

As time passes

MIRIAM ROY JUI

As time passes, wounds will heal, memories blur and kisses seal.

As time passes, Life unfolds, future clear though fate untold.

As time passes, tear strains dry, we grow old innocence dies

As time passes, For life we fight things change we gain more right

As time passes trust decays faith falters though a bond remain.

As time passes, roses bloom and then they die -- well, they are doomed.

As time passes, we learn the truth

fooling ourselves is of no use.

As time passes, peace we gain, life is a blessing our experience tells.

As time passes all our dreams dry until at last we close our eyes.

As time passes, Christmas comes bringing God's love. Faith reflects the true meaning of the season.

A Prayer

SUNITA D'COSTA

A few weeks back when hell was let loose The ghosts of destruction blew out every fuse They howled and they scowled the dismal night through And battered our dear land black and blue.

Her wound is still raw for everyone to see Come world come, end her tragedy Help her be strong, beautiful and in bliss And win her smile for a true Christmas.