

## **MERCY CALLS FOR SERVICE**

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“The only Gujarati Children’s Magazine of International Standard” is the claim of a well-known magazine for children: “Sahaj Balanand” published by Gurjar Sahitya Prakashan, Ahmedabad. Its Editor Yashwant Mehta is an agnostic. So I was very much surprised to see in it a Cross drawn clearly within a maze! For, Cross is recognized symbol of Christian Religion.

On one side of the maze there is a picture of a child. On the other side there is a very poor-looking man. The words below the maze say:

“Our small child’s name is Wilson. Once he saw a poor man. Then he wanted badly to help the poor man. But the road between them is complicated. You please help Wilson to take the shortest route.”

The picture of a Cross, the name Wilson and sentiments or desire to help – they are all very much Christian. They clearly indicate the editor’s sentiments of good will towards to Christian Religion. For, the idea of helping a poor person is very much Christian in accordance with the teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus during his public life not only went out of his way to help the poor and the needy but he also taught his followers to do the same.

Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry declared his life-mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed” (Lk 4:18). Then, again in his very famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: “Happy are those who know they are spirituality poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them” (Mt 5:3).

Inspired by his own example and his teaching, beginning with the first followers, the Christians down the centuries were always involved themselves consistently in serving the poor and the needy.

Paul who was a persecutor of the first followers in the first century became to be an ardent apostles speaking and spreading Jesus’ message in the whole of Roman Empire. He writes to the First Christians at Rome in his letter to Romans: “Just now, however, I am going to Jerusalem in the service of God’s people there. For the churches in Macedonia and Achaia have freely decided to give an offering to

help the poor among God's people in Jerusalem. That decision was their own; but, as a matter of fact, they have an obligation to help them. Since the Jews shared their spiritual blessings with the Gentiles, the Gentiles ought to use their material blessings to help the Jews" (Rom 15:25-27).

If the practice of serving the poor and needy is removed from Christian living then the subsequent Christianity will no longer be the Christian Religion established by Jesus.

Inspired by the example of Christian Religion in helping the poor and the needy, the people of other faiths and of no faiths do serve the people in need. From this point of view we can say that the influence of Christianity has spread in the whole world. All the same, the Christian Religion is not just an institution of social service.

God's mercy is acknowledged in the service of the poor. We say that God is merciful. God is very compassionate. Through the words of Prophet Hosea (6:6), Jesus says in St. Mathew's Gospel: "Go and find out what is meant by the scripture that says: 'It is kindness that I want, not animal sacrifices,' I have not come to call respectable people, but outcasts" (Mt 9:13).

In the Bible there are many instances of proclaiming God's mercy and compassion. In the first book of Kings, King David says: "I am in a desperate situation! But I don't want to be punished by men. Let the Lord himself be the one to punish me, because he is merciful." (1 Chronicles 21:13). In the New Testament acknowledging God's mercy Mother Mary sings: "His name is holy; from one generation to another he shows mercy to those who honour him" (Lk 1:50).

Every Christian, each follower of Christ, knows that he/she has received the mercy from God; or God has been compassionate and merciful towards him/her. It is inspired by this mercy and experienced by his compassion a Christian involved himself/herself in the service of others. So helping the poor is not just social service for a Christian. In the social service two things are specially acknowledged: first there is the acknowledgment that the person himself/herself received and experienced God's mercy and second, there is the acceptance that he/she is a medium to extending God's mercy to people who are in need.

Only those who do not understand the mercy and compassion of God will see the Christian services as a mere social works or as means to attract and mislead the simple people to religious conversion to Christianity! They see the Christian

services to the poor as is a bribe to lead the poor to conversion! Nothing could be far from the truth. Can God be bribed?

Such people are ignorant of the fact and belief that the Christians see like Jesus Christ that every person is created in God's own image. So the poor, the Dalit, the sick, the disabled, the abandoned – all and each one is precious in God's sight. Hence every person deserves the love and respect of all other people. So every human being is accepted and acknowledged as a respectful human person. But a person, who seeks self gain in everything, is not able to see and accept the other as equal to himself/herself. So such a person is not able to give love and respect to others as a human persons.

On the other hand a Christian sees his service to the poor and needy as service rendered to Christ himself. Selfless human service is a merciful service offered to Jesus himself. For, Jesus has said in the Last Judgment: "I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it for me!" (Mt 25:40). So the so called social works are for the Christians is actual service of mercy, service of compassion. It is the spirit of God's mercy and of compassion which inspired Wilson to help a needy person. It is very human, very Christian.

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