

Religious Extremism and Christian Response in the Context of Pakistan

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This essay explores the nature of religious extremism in Pakistan and how a tiny Christians minority respond to the violence committed against them

Introduction

Perhaps one of the most painful issues that have touched the global conscience in the twenty first century is the unimaginable scale of religious extremism. Since 9/11 hardly a day goes by when a religiously motivated, or what looks like religiously motivated, act of extremism is not committed. In terms of financial spending fight against terrorism and extremism has eclipsed the two world wars put together. It is estimated that by 2020 war on terror would have cost \$ 5, trillion to USA alone. Mark Thompson notes from the study conducted by US based war academics, ‘The study says an “extremely conservative” death toll is 225,000, with 365,000 wounded’.¹ Apart from this, death toll and injuries resulted from religious extremism around the world cannot be correctly counted. From the Middle East to Africa, Europe, America and Asia extremism is claiming hundreds of thousands of innocent lives. The Vatican official are reported to have claimed that an estimated 100,000 Christians are being killed annually for their faith.² Peoples of other faiths are also suffering; even Muslims are suffering greatly from Muslim extremists. This raises a natural question, what is religious extremism?

Defining extremism

One of the obvious difficulty one faces is what is meant by extremism? After looking at different definitions and articles, it becomes clear that it largely depends on who defines it and why someone defines it. Janet Parshall, protest againsts US Reserves’ briefing on extremism in which, along with Al-Qaida, and Muslim brotherhood they, labelled Evangelical Christians as extremists simply because in their view: ‘extremist

¹ Mark Thompson. 2011. *The \$ 5 Trillion War on Terror*. Time. <http://nation.time.com/2011/06/29/the-5-trillion-war-on-terror/>. Accessed 22/06/2015 21:35

² Tara Brady. 2013. 100, 000 Christians are killed every year for their faith. Daily Mail. 28 May, 2013. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2332338/100-000-Christians-killed-year-faith-says-Vatican-archbishop-Monsignor-Silvano-Maria-Tomasi-Iran-shuts-countrys-biggest-Pentecostal-church-arrests-pastor-mid-service.html>. Accessed: 06/07/2015 11:51

organizations' goals are inconsistent with the Army's goals'.³ Merriam Webster defines extremism as 'belief in and support for ideas that are very far from what most people consider correct or reasonable, the quality or state of being extreme, advocacy of extreme measures or views: radicalism'.⁴ Dictionary.Com defines it like this: 'a tendency or disposition to go to extremes or an instance of going to extremes, especially in political matters: leftist extremism; the extremism of the Nazis'.⁵ From these definitions, it would imply that religious extremism consists of religious beliefs which majority would consider far from being correct or reasonable. However, a question arises, in the context of Pakistan, is it a correct definition? I tend to agree with Charles Liebman who argues that extremism is a religious norm and that it is religious moderation that needs explanation, not extremism.⁶ Liebman points out that religious extremism could either be defined as a process or an institution. He quite helpfully identifies three dimensions of religious extremism, which include expansion [and imposition] of religious laws, [harsh] attitude towards those who do not accept extremist norms, and rejection of cultural forms and values that are not considered as indigenous to the religious tradition.⁷

Keeping in view the above discussion, religious extremism may be defined as a whole-hearted commitment to a religious tradition that a group or an institution holds as the Divine truth for all humanity and tries to impose, peacefully or violently on those who do not agree with their norm. In so doing they consider all cultural or religious values that do not conform to their version of religious truth as hostile to their goals, thus removing of such non-conformist elements is deemed necessary which results in religiously motivated acts of extreme violence.

In the case of religious extremism in Pakistan, I will argue that it exists both on individuals, groups and institutional level and is undergirded by the orthodox

³ Janet Parshall. 2013. *How do you define an Extremist?* CP Opinion. <http://www.christianpost.com/news/how-do-you-define-an-extremist-93956/>. Accessed 22/06/2015 22:06

⁴ Merriam Webster. 2015. *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/extremism>. Accessed: 23/06/2015 10:03

⁵ Dictionary.Com. 2015. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/extremism>. Accessed: 23/06/2015 10:13

⁶ Charles S. Liebman. 1983. *Extremism as a Religious Norm*. Journal for the scientific Study of Religion, 1983, 22 (1), 75-86. Pdf. <http://users.clas.ufl.edu/kenwald/pos6292/liebman.pdf>. Accessed: 24/06/2015 12:15

⁷ Liebman 1983. 75-86

understanding of Sunni Islam. And at both levels it has evolved over the last 60 years and continues to grow with the passage of time. When it comes to Christian response to Islamic extremism in Pakistan, it has been far from a unified response; there are glaring examples of Christ-like response to the responses, which have nothing to do with Christ and Christianity.

An overview of the religious extremism against Christians in Pakistan

Pakistani Christians have suffered a great disappointment or even what Patrick Sookdeo has called ‘a betrayal’⁸ from their compatriot Muslims. On the promise of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the father of the nation, for the equality of all citizens before the law and for freedom of religion,⁹ Christian politicians played a crucial role for the state of Punjab to decide in favour of the anticipated country: Pakistan.¹⁰ Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan was a Shi‘ia, who changed his sect from Isma‘ili Shi‘ia to Twelver Shi‘ia (*Asna Ashari*) but remained in the minority Muslim denomination.¹¹ The state of Pakistan has officially tried to hide his Shi‘ia affiliation and Shi‘ias are one of the most effected community from Sunni extremism. Another Muslim sect: Ahmadees, who were declared non-Muslim by the act of parliament under Bhutto’s government, have also suffered tremendously from Sunni extremism. While this is intra-religious or sectarian problem, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Zoroastrians, have all suffered from Muslim extremists. As a consequence of religious extremism, Pakistan’s population that consisted of 60% Muslims and 40% other religious minorities in 1947; but within 66 years minorities have been reduced from 40% to less than 4%.¹² My discussion below is

⁸ Patrick Sookdeo is international director of Britain based Barnabas Fund. He is a former Muslim convert to Christianity and author of many books on Islam. He is deeply involved in helping the persecuted churches, especially in Islamic countries. He wrote his PhD thesis entitled ‘A People betrayed’ in which he explored the history of sufferings of Christians in Pakistan.

⁹ Ammar Shahbazi. *Was Jinnah’s Promise to the Minorities honoured? The News* (December 25, 2012). <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-4-150305-Was-Jinnah%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%99s-promise-to-the-minorities-honoured>. Accessed: 26/06/2014 17:54.

Khaled Ahmed. *The Fractured Image of Muhammad Ali Jinnah*. (1999): <http://old.himalmag.com/himal-feed/53/2413-the-fractured-image-of-muhammad-ali-jinnah.html>. Accessed: 26/06/2014 21:13.

¹⁰ Munir-ul-Anjum. *The Role of Christians in the Freedom Movement of Pakistan: An Appraisal*. Pakistan Journal of Social Studies (PJSS). Vol. 32, No. 2. (2012), 437-443.

¹¹ Khalid Ahmed. 2010. *Was Jinnah a Shia or Sunni?* The Friday Times. December 24-30, 2010 - Vol. XXII, No. 45. <http://www.thefridaytimes.com/24122010/page27.shtml>. Accessed: 24/06/2015 15:44

¹² Ucanews.com Reporter. June 25, 2012. *Pakistan’s Minority Population is shrinking*. <http://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistans-minority-population-is-shrinking/53801>

particularly concerned with extremism against Christians but is largely applicable to other religious minorities as well.

Kinds of extremism

I am conscious of the fact that the theme of this year's Forum is 'Religious extremism and Christian response,' therefore, discussing various forms of extremism may not be considered appropriate, but I contend and hope that friends from Muslim countries will agree with me, that religion not only influences but dominates all aspects of existence in Muslim majority nations. Life is not compartmentalized into political, religious, social and cultural domains but is understood as a whole, which is founded, informed, and undergirded by Islam. However, for the sake of clarity and better understanding the process of extremism, following distinction may be helpful.

Intellectual Extremism

Intellectual extremism is the least discussed form of extremism. However, intellectual extremism is the most dangerous form of extremism as it provides bases for and legitimises other forms of extremism. Muslim intellectuals, traditionally known as the Imams, on the basis of their understanding of the Qur'an, hadith and practices of the four caliphs, formulated the rules of engagement for Muslims with non-Muslim citizens of an Islamic state. Sunni Muslim states follow one of the four schools of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), known as Hanifite's, Hanbalites, Malikites, and Shaf'ites. Pakistan is a majority Sunni (80-85%) state and largely follows Hanfi School of law. One of the most influential Muslim intellectual of twentieth century was a Pakistani of Hanfi leanings; Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979). It is widely recognized that Mawdudi influenced both Hasan al-Bana, the founder of *Akhwan al-Muslimun* (Muslim brotherhood) and his disciple Sayyed Qutb of Egypt as well as Ayatollah Khomeini.

Mawdudi's ideology was based on his basic understanding that the predicament of Muslims lie in their forsaking of their faith and thus Muslims of his time were no better than non-Muslims. In his book '*Let us be Muslims*,' he noted that Muslims were no better than *kafirs* in their neglect and disobedience of Allah. Thus he called Muslims to become true Muslims. He set out to reform Muslims and bring every aspect of their lives to be shaped by Islam. His political ideology included violent Jihad through which the power must be ceased from the non-Muslims as well as from the so-called Muslims. He argued that Islam wishes to overthrow the kingdoms of the world and to establish

the kingdom of God. His ideological Islamic state has no boundaries. Thus global jihad is needed to establish pan-Islamic state, because Allah claims the whole earth and not just parts of it. Mawdudi argued that all other religious duties are geared towards preparing Muslims for jihad. He wrote:

Briefly speaking, it would be enough to state that the real objective of Islam is to remove the lordship of man over man and to establish the kingdom of God on Earth. To stake one's life and everything else to achieve this purpose is called Jihad' while Salah, fasting, Hajj and Zakat are all meant as a preparation for this task.

Rafi Aamer, reflecting on Mawdudi's contribution to extremism quotes from his book *al-Jihad fil-Islam*:

Islam wishes to do away with all states and governments which are opposed to the ideology and program of Islam. The purpose of Islam is to set up a state on the basis of this ideology and program, regardless of which nation assumes the role of standard-bearer of Islam, and *regardless of the rule of which nation is undermined in the process of the establishment of an ideological Islamic state*. Islam requires the earth — *not just a portion, but the entire planet* — not because the sovereignty over the earth should be wrested from one nation or group of nations and vested in any one particular nation, but because the whole of mankind should benefit from Islam, and its ideology and welfare program. It is to serve this end that Islam seeks to press into service all the forces which can bring about such a revolution. The term which covers the use of all these forces is 'Jihad'.¹³

As Islam desires to take over the whole world including religious, philosophical, economic, social, cultural and political worlds, Mawdudi understood that Islam advances only by the power of the sword. Ami Isseroff notes from Mawdudi's *Al-Jihad fil-Islam* how he extolled the virtues of violent jihad:

The Messenger of Allah invited the Arabs to accept Islam for 13 years. He used every possible means of persuasion, gave them incontrovertible arguments and proofs, showed them miracles and put before them his life as an example of piety and morality. In short, he used every possible means of communication, but his people refused to accept Islam. When every method of persuasion had failed, the Prophet took to the sword. That sword removed evil mischief, the impurities of evil and the filth of the soul. The sword did something more--it removed their blindness so that they could see the light of truth, and also cured them of their arrogance; arrogance which prevents people from accepting the truth, stiff necks and proud heads bowed with humility. As in Arabia and other countries, Islam's expansion was so fast that within a century a quarter of the world accepted it. This conversion took place because the sword of Islam tore away the veils which had covered men's hearts.¹⁴

Mawdudi's Jamat-e-Islami (JI) played an extremely important part in providing ideological and organizational structure to Afghan Jihad against former Soviet Union.

¹³ Rafi Aamer. *Cartoon Crises*. http://familyofheart.com/DOC/FOS/Comments_AR02.htm. Accessed at 29/06/2015 14:53

¹⁴ Ami Isseroff. 2008. Abul Ala Maududi. Encyclopedia of the Middle East. <http://mideastweb.org/Middle-East-Encyclopedia/abul-ala-maududi.htm>. 29/06/2015 15:27

Ayman al-Zawahiri, founder of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and deputy of Al-Qaidia's chief, Osam Bin Laden, and present head of Al-Qaidia was a follower of Sayed Qutb.

Ji exercised her highest religious and political influence during the regime of dictator General Zia al-Haq (1978-1988) who most vigorously pursued the policy of Islamization of Pakistan. Zia dissolved the national and provincial assemblies and set up national and provincial Majlis-e-Shooras. Islamic banking, provincial and federal Sharia' courts were set up and Hadd laws were enforced. Blasphemy and related laws were given new vigour and interpretation. These laws have given constant rise to the persecution of Christians. Non-Muslims were excluded from holding key posts and mainstream politics, and thus from national life. Over 10,000 men from Ji were appointed at key positions to implement Zia's programme of Islamization, which in fact was Mawdudi's Ideology of Islamic state. Islamization of education led to the introduction of new curricula, which promoted the extreme version of Islam. Study of Islamics was made compulsory. Books on Islamics were overtly anti Christianity. Christian students had to study Islamics. Most of the time in their classrooms they suffered humiliation from their teachers and fellow students. Educational curricula are understood to be one of the biggest sources of extremism in Pakistan. A report of the study of relation between education and extremism noted, " Curriculum and textbooks include hate material and "encourage prejudice, bigotry and discrimination" toward women, religious minorities, and other nations, especially India."¹⁵ Pervez Hoodbhoy an avid critic of Pakistan's education system wrote in *Foreign Affairs*: "Pakistani schools-- and not just madrassas--are churning out fiery zealots, fuelled with a passion for jihad and martyrdom."¹⁶ Not only Mawdudi but hundreds of other Muslim intellectuals and Imams have contributed to provide intellectual basis for the religious extremism.

¹⁵ Jayshree Bajoria. 2009. *Pakistan's Education system and links to extremism*. Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/pakistans-education-system-links-extremism/p20364>. Accessed: 30/06/15 15:4

¹⁶ Jayshree Bajoria.

Constitutional and legal extremism

On the promise of Mr. Jinnah for the equality of all citizens before the law and for freedom of religion,¹⁷ Christian politicians played a crucial role for the state of Punjab to decide in favour of the anticipated country: Pakistan.¹⁸ The 1956 constitution of Pakistan was secular and guaranteed the freedom of profession and propagation of faith to all the citizens of Pakistan.¹⁹ Pakistan was originally called Democratic Republic of Pakistan.

However, the amendments in the constitution in 1962 determined that Islam should be the religion of the State and Pakistan should be called: “Islamic Republic of Pakistan.”²⁰ The 1973 constitution was overtly Islamic and determined the scope and freedom of the Legislative Assembly. It requires the Islamization of the existing laws deemed antithetical to Islam and legislation could be done only in accordance with the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. No legislation could be passed which might be deemed repugnant to Islam. This constitution also barred non-Muslims from becoming head of the state or government.²¹ It has been correctly observed: “Although the constitution includes adequate accommodation for Pakistan’s religious minorities, in practice non-Sunni Muslims face religious discrimination in both public and private spheres”.²²

The first serious attack on the freedom of religion, in relation to the minorities, was launched through the amendment of the 1973 constitution. Zia’s amendments even amended the Objectives Resolution and silently took away the word “freely”, central to the clause guarding the freedom of religion for minorities. Before the amendment it read, minorities would be able “freely to profess and practice their religion”. Realizing the seriousness of this amendment Christians protested, but their voice was smothered. The amendment was then challenged in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The Supreme Court’s decision was a judicial blow that killed the hope of minorities to enjoy the freedom of faith in Pakistan. Sookhdeo states: “A land mark decision in the Supreme Court in 1993 ruled that the fundamental rights guaranteed in the constitution were limited by whether they conformed to the injunctions of Islam as contained in the Qur’an and the Sunnah”.²³ Thus Supreme Court’s decision judicially reduced Christians to second-class citizens and strengthened constitutional extremism.

¹⁷ Ammar Shahbazi. *Was Jinnah’s Promise to the Minorities honoured? The News* (December 25, 2012). <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-4-150305-Was-Jinnah%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%99s-promise-to-the-minorities-honoured>. Accessed: 26/06/2014 17:54.

Khaled Ahmed. *The Fractured Image of Muhammad Ali Jinnah*. (1999): <http://old.himalmag.com/himal-feed/53/2413-the-fractured-image-of-muhammad-ali-jinnah.html>. Accessed: 26/06/2014 21:13.

¹⁸ Munir-ul-Anjum. *The Role of Christians in the Freedom Movement of Pakistan: An Appraisal*. Pakistan Journal of Social Studies (PJSS). Vol. 32, No. 2. (2012), 437-443.

¹⁹ Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs.. *Religious Freedom in Pakistan*. Berkleycenter.goergetown.edu/essys/religious-freedom-in-pakistan. (2014), Accessed: 20/06/2014 10:34

²⁰ Stephen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 58

²¹ Stephen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 58

²² Stephen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 58

²³ Sookhdeo, Patrick. *A People Betrayed*. (Fearn: Christian Focus and Isaac, 2002),102.

The adoption of the Objectives Resolution by the Constituent Assembly in 1949 provided the solid basis for the Islamization of Pakistan and severely restricted the freedom of religion for non-Muslims by resolving that “the future constitution of Pakistan should be based on the Islamic principles of freedom, social justice and equity”.²⁴ Zia tried to legitimise his coup by his promise to turn Pakistan into a purer Islamic state as envisioned in the Objectives Resolution. He implemented a number of Islamic Sharia laws: set up Federal Sharia Court parallel to the Supreme Court. He introduced Islamic banking, restricted headship of the governmental institutions for the practicing and confessing Muslims only, replaced Sunday with Friday as holiday which made it difficult for Christians to attend churches on Sunday. More than anything else, he implemented anti-blasphemy laws which contradict all the established and ratified covenants and conventions of international human rights of which Pakistan itself is a signatory. Zia’s policy of Islamization and his unrestricted use of religion for his own political agenda, and his open alliance with Jamat-e-Islami contributed towards the victimization of minorities. Anti-blasphemy laws have been constantly used by the members of majority people as well as the state for victimizing and restricting the freedom of faith of non-Muslims.

Pakistan’s legal extremism is most vividly demonstrated through its anti-blasphemy laws, which prescribe life imprisonment for desecrating the Qur’an and mandatory death sentence for insulting Muhammad. Many Christians have been falsely accused of blasphemy, arrested, imprisoned or killed. Sawan Masih accused of committing blasphemy, which became a pretext for burning and looting of the Joseph Colony, has been given the death sentence. Sawan pleaded for his innocence throughout his yearlong trial.²⁵ In May 1998, Bishop John Joseph committed suicide in front of the court in Sahiwal that had passed a death sentence for young Ayub Masih; falsely accused of blasphemy²⁶. Earlier in 1993, Rahmat Masih, Manzoor Masih, and Salamat Masih (only 14 years old) were accused of blasphemy. They were attacked after a court hearing. Manzoor was killed while others were injured. The lower court handed down death sentence to both Rahmat and Salamat. But the High Court bench comprising of Justice Arif Iqbal Bhatti and Chaudhary Khurshid Ahmad acquitted the accused since they were illiterate and did not know how to write Arabic. Following the decision religious parties, led by the Milli Yakjhti Council (Council for national unity of purpose) called for a nation-wide strike against the acquittal of the accused. Justice Arif Iqbal was later murdered in his chamber. The assassin confessed, “He killed the judge because he was on the bench that acquitted two Christian men, Salamat and Rehmat Masih in a blasphemy case”²⁷. In July 2010, two brothers, pastor Rashid Emmanuel and Sajid Emmanuel were also shot dead as they were being brought by the police to appear

²⁴ Sookhdeo, *A people Betrayed*, 28

²⁵ BBC News. *Sawan Masih: Pakistani Christian gets death penalty for blasphemy*. (BBC News, 28 March 2014), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-26781731>. Accessed: 11/09/14 19:37

²⁶ Oven, Bennett-Jones. *BBC News-Dispatches*. (May 7, 1998), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/88890.stm: Accessed: 11/09/14 19:54

²⁷ Dawn.com. *High-profile blasphemy cases in the last 63 years*. (Dawn.com ,December 8, 2010). <http://www.dawn.com/news/589587/high-profile-blasphemy-cases-in-the-last-63-years>. Accessed: 12/09/14 13:13

before the judge²⁸. Frank Crimi sums up Muslim mobs' blood-thirst for the blood of those accused of blasphemy:

Perhaps part of Pakistan's enchantment with its blasphemy laws stems from the fact that many Pakistani Muslims believe killing a blasphemous person earns a heavenly reward, a holy perk that may help explain why at least 30 Christians accused of blasphemy since 2009 have been killed by mobs of Islamist vigilantes.²⁹

A Christian couple, Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausar have recently been sentenced to death for allegedly committing blasphemy.³⁰ As regards Asia Bibi, mother of five who has been jailed since 2009 and has been condemned to death, her appeal against her punishment has been postponed five times consecutively.³¹ Another startling case which caught attention of the Pakistani nation as well as that of the international community was the accusation of blasphemy against a fourteen years old Rimsha Masih who was suffering from Down's Syndrome. Some Muslim clerics have even declared that Bible is a blasphemous book; as immoral acts of certain prophets are recorded in it, which they assert, are deeply offensive to Muslims. They have demanded that the Supreme Court of Pakistan should ban the Bible in Pakistan. Anuragh Kumar noted: "A leader of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Samiul Haq) or JUI-S party on Tuesday demanded that the Supreme Court of Pakistan ban the Bible, saying "blasphemous" portions had been "added to the Bible," Pakistan's newspaper, *The News International* reported".³ This attempt to ask the apex court to ban the Bible in Pakistan could have extremely serious consequences for the freedom of faith in Pakistan. It is well recognised internationally that the situation of minorities in Pakistan is very serious. Jaweed Kaleen describes the struggle of minorities for survival. He quotes: "A Pew Research Center report named Pakistan, which is 96% Muslim, one of the most hostile nations for religious minorities. Pew placed the country among the top five overall for restrictions

²⁸ BBC News South Asia. *Pakistan City tense after "blaspheming" Christians shot dead.* (BBC News South Asia. 20 July 2010), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10696762>. Accessed: 12/09/14 13:37

Fareed, Khan. *On trial for blasphemy, two Christian brothers murdered in Pakistan.* (AsiaNews.it: 07/19/2010.), <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/On-trial-for-blasphemy,-two-Christian-brothers-murdered-in-Faisalabad-18977.html>. Accessed: 12/09/14 13:41

²⁹ Frank, Crimi. *To Jail a Down's Syndrome Girl.* (Front Page Magazine, August 23, 2012.) <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2012/frank-crimi/to-jail-a-downs-syndrome-girl/>. Accessed: 14/09/2014 17:28

³⁰ BBC News South Asia. *Pakistani couple get death sentences for blasphemy.* (BBC News South Asia.5 April 2014), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-26901433>. Accessed: 12/09/14 14:22

³¹ Christian Today. *Asia Bibi Appeal postponed for a fifth time.* (Christian Today. 27 May 2014) http://www.christiantoday.com/article/asia_bibi_appeal_postponed_for_a_fifth_time/37701.htm. Accessed: 12/09/14 14:30

³² Anuragh, Kumar. *Now Bible faces blasphemy charges in Pakistan.* (Christian Post. June 3, 2011), <http://www.christianpost.com/news/now-bible-faces-blasphemy-charges-in-pakistan-50789/>. Accessed: 14/09/2014 18:12

ATIKA, RAHMAN. *JUI-S URGES SC TO BAN BIBLE WITHIN 30 DAYS.* (THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JUNE 9, 2011) <http://tribune.com.pk/story/185452/jui-s-urges-sc-to-ban-bible-threatens-consequences/>. Accessed: 14/09/2014 21:01

on religion, singling out its anti-blasphemy statues”.³³ Keeping the serious condition of the minorities in Pakistan a US panel urged the US government to add Pakistan to a blacklist of violators of religious freedom. In its annual report this commission said Pakistan “represents the worst situation in the world of religious freedom, among the countries that are not already on the US blacklist and that the conditions in the past year hit an all-time low”.³⁴ Mark Kellner also noted: “Pakistan is a world leader in oppressing religious minorities, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom declared in a report on Wednesday”.³⁵

Social extremism

Since the introduction of the anti-blasphemy and other Islamic laws, freedom to express and propagate one’s faith has been severely limited. Not only do minorities not have freedom of faith in the true sense of the word, they have been actively persecuted for their faith and wherever possible forced to convert to Islam. On February 6, 1997, a mob of 30,000 to 35,000, led by the extremist and militant Muslims attacked a Christian village called Shanti Nagar³⁶ (village of peace) and looted and reduced it to ashes. In October 2001, Muslim extremists armed with AK-47 assault rifles attacked Christian worshipers in St. Dominic Church Bahawalpur. Sixteen Christians and a policeman were killed and hundreds other were injured. In March 2002, the Protestant International Church Islamabad was attacked with grenades. Five people died and nearly fifty were injured.³⁷ I had preached the previous Sunday in that very Church. In August 2002, a Church in the Christian Hospital Taxila was attacked with grenades; 3 nurses died and 23 others were injured.³⁸ In the same month Murree Christian School came under fire from the extremists and 6 Christians were killed.³⁹

False accusations of desecrating the Qur’ān or insulting the Prophet of Islam against the persons belonging to minorities, especially against Christians, have had a devastating impact on them. In 2005, Yusus Masih a Christian exchanged some hot

³³ Jaweed, Kaleem.. *Religious Minorities in Pakistan struggle but survive amid increasing persecution*. (HUFF POST. (Religion) June 20, 2014), www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/10/religious-minorities-pakistan_n_4734016.html. Accessed: 20/06/2014 11:44

³⁴ AFP. *US Panel Urges Action on Pakistan religious freedom*. *Dawn.Com*. (AFP. April, 30, 2014), www.dawn.com/news/1103293. Accessed: 15/09/14 13:38

³⁵ Mark, A. Kellner. *Pakistan tops new list of religious freedom abusers, panel says*. (Desert News, May 1, 2014.). <http://national.deseretnews.com/article/1395/pakistan-tops-new-list-of-religious-freedom-abusers-pane-l-says.html>. Accessed: 15/09/14 13:47

³⁶ Naseem George and Aftab Alexander. 1997. *Pakistan: Mob attacks on Shanti Nagar*. *Human Rights Solidarity*: <http://www.hrsolidarity.net/mainfile.php/1997vol07no01/237/>. Accessed: 11/09/14 17:17.

³⁷ LaTonya Taylor. 2002. *Bloody Sunday*. *Christianity today*. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/marchweb-only/3-25-33.0.html>. Accessed: 11/09/14 17:01

³⁸ The Telegraph. 09 Aug, 2002. *Nurses Killed in an Attack on Christian Hospital*. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1403992/Nurses-killed-in-attack-on-Christian-hospital.html>. Accessed: 11/09/14 18:17

³⁹ David Rhode. 6 August 2002. *Gunman Kills 6 in a Christian School in Pakistan*. *New York Time* (Archives). <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/06/world/gunmen-kill-6-at-a-christian-school-in-pakistan.html>. Accessed: 11/09/2014 18:29

words with a Muslim Kalu, who threatened him with dire consequences. He later accused Yusuf of desecrating the Qur'an. Nearly 1500 extremist Muslims attacked Christians and burnt three Churches, a school and dozens of houses.⁴⁰ In 2009, nearly 100 Christian houses were looted and then torched in the village Bahmani Wala, district Kasur; the same thing happened in Korian, a village near Gojra. But the most devastating attack was carried out on Christian Colony Gojra where 60 homes were torched and 8 Christians were burnt alive.⁴¹ In March 2013, more than 100 Christian houses and a number of Churches were turned into ashes in Joseph Colony, Lahore. However, two suicide bombers carried out the most horrific attack on September 23, 2013, at All Saints Church Peshawar. 98 persons, including women and children, died and hundreds of others were seriously injured. Christians in Peshawar had been receiving threats from the extremist and terrorist Muslims to convert to Islam or face the consequences. Some of the extremist jihadi groups also started demanding *jizya* from minorities. The latest act of horrific violence against Christians that has shocked the world took place on November 5, 2014. A poor Christian couple Shahbaz Masih and his pregnant wife were brutally killed by a mob and then thrown into the brick kiln and reduced to ashes on the false accusation of desecrating the Qur'an.⁴² There is a marked escalation of violence against Christians by Muslim mobs. On the popular level, a general understanding prevails among the Muslims that Pakistan is for them and minorities have no place in it. Pakistan and Islam are considered synonymous. Therefore, if religious minorities want to live in Pakistan they should convert to Islam. Lipton observes, "Parties and groups with religious affiliations target minority groups".⁴³ Public outrages against minorities, briefly mentioned earlier, have been unprecedented. Lashker-e-Jhangvi, a band extremist and militant organization were reportedly responsible for the destruction of Churches, schools and Christian homes in Sangla Hill and Christian Colony Gojra. In all these destructive incidents governments have shunned to punish the perpetrators of violence against minorities. Lipton writes, "The government failed to intervene in cases of societal violence directed at minority religious groups. The lack of an adequate government response contributed to an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence and intimidation committed against minorities".⁴⁴

Religious extremism

The above-mentioned forms of extremism are important to recognize the scope of extremism suffered by Christians from different kinds of extremists. However, all of

⁴⁰ Declan, Walsh. *Attack leave churches gutted and religious minorities living in fear*. (The Guardian, 28 November 2005), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/nov/28/pakistan.declanwalsh>. Accessed: 11/09/14 18:49

⁴¹ Asad, Kharal. *Looking back: Not a single person convicted for Gojra riots*. (The Express Tribune, Mach 10, 2013.), <http://tribune.com.pk/story/518585/looking-back-not-a-single-person-convicted-for-gojra-riots/>. Accessed: 11/09/14 19:05

⁴² Shahzeb, Jillani. *Pakistan Christian Community living in fear after mob killing*. (BBC News, 8 November, 2014). Accessed: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-29956115>. 08/12/2014 21:21

⁴³ Lipton, *Religious freedom in Asia*, 39

⁴⁴ Lipton, *Religious freedom in Asia*, 39

these forms of extremism are inspired by the prima facie and plain reading of the primary sources of Islam and most conservative interpretations given by scholars like Mawdudi. It is true that there are a number of verses in the Qur'an that speak quite highly of Christians. Christians are called *ahl al-Kitab* (people of the Book) and thus are equal to Muslims; they are also believers like Muslims who will not have to fear in the day of judgement (2:62; 5:69). Muslims are also advised that they will find nearest in love to them those who are called Christians (5:82). However the overwhelming passages of the Qur'an condemn Christians. Surah 2:120 alerts Muslims: 'Never will the Jews nor the Christians be pleased with you till you follow their religion'. Mere presence of Christians among Muslims is considered a threat to their faith. The Qur'an warns Muslims: 'And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers' (3:85). The Qur'an apparently forbids Muslims from socializing with Christians:

'O you who believe! Take not as your helpers or friends⁴⁵ those outside your religion since they will not fail to do their best to corrupt you. They desire to harm you severely. Hatred has already appeared from their mouths, but what their breasts conceal is far worse. Indeed We have made plain to you the verses if you understand' (3:118).

On the basis of such verses strict Muslims avoid befriending Christians. They are afraid that Christians may corrupt their beliefs and Islamic ways of life. Therefore, extremist groups even try to eradicate this would be source of corruption from Islamic societies. The command not to befriend Jews and Christians is given with such force and clarity that those Muslims who seek such friendship are considered non-Muslims:

O you who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians as friends; they are but friends to one another. And if any amongst you takes them as friends, then surely he is one of them. Verily, Allah guides not those people who are the wrongdoers (5:51).

Bukhari records a hadith that say, "O you who believe! Take not my enemies And your enemies as friends offering them (Your) love even though they have disbelieved in that

⁴⁵ Some Muslims are embarrassed by verse 5:51 and have gone to elaborate lengths to modify its intent by interpreting the word 'friend' as "guardian" or "protector" - which are just two of several legitimate translations of the Arabic word. According to these apologists, the verse is referring to a Muslim's allegiance to a non-Muslim government (which is not all that comforting either). However, the word *awliyaa* is used in verse 5:51 instead of other words that would be more direct if the meaning were "protector" - such as *hamin*. In fact, the politically correct translations that do use the word "protector" turn right around and use the word "friend" in other places for the same Arabic word - such as in verse 10:62. In fact, it is verse 10:62 which proves that the word *awliyaa* truly means "friend" in the Quran and not "guardian" because it refers to associates of Allah (translated "friends of Allah"). If the word meant "guardian" then it would mean that Allah has guardians, which is blasphemy. <http://www.thereigionofpeace.com/Quran/009-friends-with-christians-jews.htm>. Accessed: 01/07/2015 16:36

Truth (i.e. Allah, Prophet Muhammad and this Quran) which has come to you." There are hosts of other hadiths that forbid Muslims from befriending non-believers. The most revered Muslim scholars like Ibn Kathir, Ibn Taymiyah, Ahmad Sarhindi, and others also say the same.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Christian beliefs in the Trinity and Divinity of Christ are described as *kufir* (unbelief 5:17; 4:44-59) and *shirk* (association with God of the non-god). Those who believe in the Trinity and divinity of Christ are called disbelievers and assigned to hell (5:73). Finally Muslims are plainly commanded to fight against those, including the people of the book who do not submit as Muslims, and bring them to submission to pay *jizya* and suffer humiliation:

Fight against those who (1) believe not in Allah, (2) nor in the Last Day, (3) nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger (4) and those who acknowledge not Islam as the religion of truth among the people of the Scripture, until they pay the Jizyah [religious tax] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued (9:29).

This generally creates an environment of intolerance. Muslims generally assume that they and their religion is superior to Christians, and low socio-political condition of Christians also helps religious fanatics to take extreme steps against them and commit violence with impunity. In the North, extremist groups have been harassing Christians to convert, leave or be killed.

Religious *ghairat*⁴⁷ (honour/jealousy/zealotry) reeks havoc against minorities. Religious zealots incite hatred in the name of Islam. Calls are given from mosques that so and so has desecrated the Qur'an or has blasphemed against the prophet of Islam. Then hordes of *ghayur* (very jealous) Muslims, without ever trying to know the truth, attack Christian colonies, Churches and institutions. They do not shun to loot, arson, pillage and kill. Some extremist groups like Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan send suicide bombers and other trained killers to destroy churches and kill Christians. The most recent attack was in two Churches in Youhanabad, near Lahore. Suicide bombers were

⁴⁶ WikiIslam. *Qur'an, Hadith and Scholars: Friendship with non-Muslims*. http://wikiislam.net/wiki/Qur%27an,_Hadith_and_Scholars:Friendship_with_Non-Muslims#Ibn_Kathir. Accessed: 01/07/2015 18:09

⁴⁷ *Dini ghairat* or *mazahbi gharirat*, is a powerful and explosive concept. *Ghairat* is a peculiar concept while involves shame, jealousy and honour at the same time. In religious terms it irrational type of reaction to protect the sacredness, holiness or honour of religious persons, places, books and other artifacts, which are considered to be holy. Muslims react violently against anything or any person that is deemed to be insulting or bringing shame on Islam and Muslim community. Hundreds of people have been killed for this very reason. From the socio-cultural aspect, many women are killed throughout Pakistan in the name of *ghairat* each year.

sent to Roman Catholic and Anglican churches on March 15th.⁴⁸ Twenty Christians were killed and hundreds were injured. Following that, a 14 years old boy Nauman was burned in a broad day light by two motorcyclists only because he confessed to be a Christian.⁴⁹ On May 24th, on the accusation that a Christian has desecrated torn pages of the Qur'an, Christian colony in Gulshan-e-Ravi was attacked.⁵⁰ This list can go on and on. The important thing to remember is that religious extremism is rampant. It manifests itself in social, intellectual, legal and constitutional forms. Christians are constitutionally reduced to second class citizens, Pakistan Penal Code's religious clauses 295, A, B, and C have proved to be legal mouse traps. A wide spread religiously motivated socio-political discrimination exists throughout Pakistan which culminates in religiously motivated violent attacks by Muslim mobs and trained Extremist Muslim on Christians. Contrary to all hopes, religious extremism continues to escalate. Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali observed recently: "There is such a lot that the Christian community does in Pakistan, in spite of the terrible persecution and discrimination that it suffers. All of these are sitting ducks for any kind of terrorist to do whatever they like."⁵¹ In a desperate appeal, Nazir-Ali asked Army protection for churches and Christian institutions.

Christian Responses

Living in the state of fear

Faced with this appalling situation, how do Pakistani Christians respond? There is no easy answer to this question because there is no unified response by Christians. Since

⁴⁸ CTS. *Crucial Time for Christians in Pakistan after Churches Attacked*. <http://christiantruespirit.com/?p=89>. Accessed: 02/07/2015 10:10

⁴⁹ Independent Catholic News. April 13, 2015. Pakistan: 13 year old boy set on fire for being Christian. <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=27193>. Accessed: 02/07/2015 10:22

⁵⁰ Wilson Chaudhary. May 25, 2015. *Lahore Christians face further attack after man accused of blasphemy*. http://www.britishpakistanichristians.co.uk/blog/tag/Gulshan_Ravi/. Accessed: 02/07/2015 10:20

⁵¹ Ruth Gledhill. 18 March 2015. Michael Nazir-Ali: *Christians in Pakistan are 'sitting ducks' for terrorist attack*. In, Christian Today. <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/michael.nazir.ali.christians.in.pakistan.are.sitting.ducks.for.terrorist.attacks/50239.htm>. Accessed: 02/07/2015 12:54

the Iranian Revolution and ensuing unspeakable sufferings of Christians in this neighbouring country, I have been afraid that Christians may face similar situation in Pakistan. The likelihood of such a repetition could not be ruled out since main inspiration for Iranian Revolution was a Pakistani religio-political ideologue; Dawdudi. In Mawdudi's political ideology non-Muslims may be tolerated but have no role to play. As a matter of fact Mawdudi envisioned and wanted to see Pakistan as the second Madina.⁵²

Soon after the creation of Pakistan Christians began to feel insecure. A renowned Christian scholar, lawyer, and politician, Joshua Fazl-ud-din noted, 'As a matter of fact, right from the beginning, minor officials had been harassing in Pakistan and openly asking them to leave Pakistan, which they characterized as a homeland exclusively for Muslims'.⁵³ Consequently, "Loyalty of the non-Muslims to the state of Pakistan is doubted even by the moderate Muslims".⁵⁴ Twenty-five years ago a survey found that 80% of Christians felt they were second-class citizens in Pakistan.⁵⁵ With the ever-rising tide of persecution, Christians generally do not see any future in Pakistan. They are living in constant state of fear. This seems to be the only unified response/reaction to Muslim religious extremism. Self-preservation, security of Christians and Church institutions and survival are main concerns of Pakistani Christians.

Mass-migration

Theodore Gabriel observes:

The sporadic violent incidents against Churches and Christians, the Blasphemy Law and even Islamisation of Pakistan have filled the Christians with a sense of foreboding and despondency. It is even so in the case of such a socially and economically struggling community as the Christians. They tend to see Islam as a steamroller force and to panic. This might give rise to a ghetto mentality. Justice Cornelius writing in the *Christin Voice* in 1953 warns against 'A general feeling of despair, a widespread lack of confidence and a common readiness to anticipate the worse'.⁵⁶

Theodore was writing in 2007; major incidents of violence against Christians and a marked escalation in blasphemy cases have taken place since then. National newspapers

⁵² David Emmaneul Singh. 200. *Integrative Political Ideology Of Mawlana Mawdudi and Islamisation of the Muslim Masses in the Indian Subcontinent*. South Asia Journal of South Asian Studies. Vol.XXXIII, no.1 (2000), pp. 129-148

⁵³ Joshua, Fazl-ud-din. *The Future of Christians in Pakistan*. Lahore: Punjabi Darbar Publishing House, 1949), 68.

⁵⁴ Theodore, Gabriel. *Christian Citizens of An Islamic State*, 37.

⁵⁵ Mr. Pat (Patrick J. Roelle, SR). *Christians Under Siege*. (Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2009), 50

⁵⁶ Theodore, Gabriel. *Christian Citizens OF An Islamic State: The Pakistan Experience*. (England: Ashgate. 2007),14.

have widely reported the mass migration of Pakistani Christians who are seeking asylum in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Malaysia, waiting for their turn in UN camps.⁵ Nazir Bhatti, who has long been advocating for Christians through his paper *Pakistan Christian Post*, in his letter to the Secretary General of UN claims that 90% Pakistani Christians favour refugee status from the UN.⁵⁸ This claim might seem a bit of an exaggeration. However, it is true that Christians neither feel safe nor have equal rights as citizens of Pakistan. Therefore anyone who can and especially middle class of Pakistani Christian is migrating from Pakistan.

Agitation and protests

Constant sufferings from the hands of extremists and denial of justice from the courts (for all the atrocities committed against Christians, no one has been convicted or punished by the courts) have driven Christians to take to the streets in the hope that authorities and international community may take notice of their plight. This has become a common cultural norm to register protest and force government to take some action. In May 1998, Bishop John Joseph took an extreme step and committed suicide in front of the court in Sahiwal that gave death sentence to young Ayub Masih, falsely accused of committing blasphemy.⁵⁹ This sparked further protests, which were manhandled by police and Muslim gangsters. Hundreds of Christians were severely beaten, arrested and put in jails. Even government hospitals refused to treat injured protesters. After twin suicide bombers killed 20 worshippers in Youhanabad on March 15, 2015, Christian seized two terrorists and burnt them. Then they took to streets. Government authorities dubbed this as the worst form of terrorism since they had burned to Muslim terrorists. Hundreds of Christian were arrested, beaten and harassed. A large number of residents of Youhanabad have fled and have not return till today.

⁵⁷ Rabis Ali. *Packing their Bags: Christians moving to Thailand to escape violence, insecurity*. (*The Express Tribune*, 15 July, 2014.). <http://tribune.com.pk/story/735724/packing-their-bags-christians-moving-to-thailand-to-escape-violence-insecurity/>. Accessed: 17/09/2014 17:15
Deccan Chronicle, *Pakistani Christians moving to foreign countries out of fear*. (Deccan Chronicle. 15 July 2014). <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/140715/world-neighbours/article/pakistani-christians-moving-foreign-countries-out-fear>. Accessed: 17/09/2014 17:23

⁵⁸ Nazir, S. Bhatti. *90% Pakistani Christian Favour Refugee status from UN after rising violence*. (Pakistan Christian Post, 2008). <http://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/vieweditorial.php?editorialid=112>. Accessed: 17/09/2014 18:48

⁵⁹ Oven, Bennett-Jones.. *BBC News-Dispatches*. (May 7, 1998), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/88890.stm: Accessed: 11/09/14 19:54

Living in Ghettoes

An overwhelming majority of Christians is living in a state of fear, insecurity and mistrust. Social, political, constitutional and religious hostility coupled with the extreme socio-economic and political weakness seems to have turned Christians into a ghetto community. Nearly half a century of growing persecution and constant betrayal from the very beginning, have seriously affected Christian-Muslim relations. In his recent article Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali writes:

These laws [blasphemy laws] have not just muzzled freedom of belief and of speech but they have made Christians and other non-Muslims perpetually fearful about being targets of the next accusation. It has created a ghetto mentality amongst them and further removed them from the ambit of public life. The removal of the moratorium on the death penalty, ostensibly to deal with terrorism, raises the real prospect of someone now being executed for blasphemy. This would be a tragic development indeed.⁶⁰

Messianic response

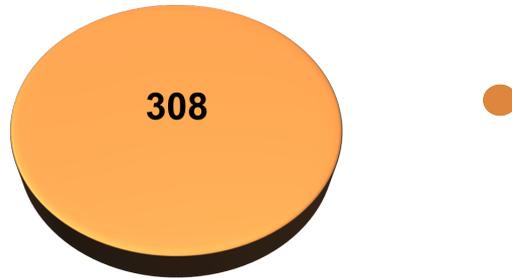
One thing that puts Christianity in a stark contrast is its message of forgiveness. Islam as a religion and native culture justifies taking revenge. Tribal, sectarian, and family feuds have taken thousands of lives as vicious circle of taking revenge continues to grow. However, New Testament teaches not to take revenge as taking revenge and judgement belong to God (Roman 12:19). Christ's unimaginable suffering and his prayer for forgiveness for those who crucified him has always inspired Pakistani Christians to follow their saviour and forgive the perpetrators of violence against them. Beginning with the massacre of 15 worshippers in October 2001 in Bahawalpur Church, where thousands of Muslims were attending funeral, pastors and bishops announced that they forgive the killers.⁶¹ The worst carnage of Christian worshippers took place in All Saints Church in Peshawar on 22 of September 2013. Two suicide bombers killed 98 and injured around 200. Response from the bereaved families was amazing. A

⁶⁰ Michael Nazir-Ali. 2015. *Persecution of Pakistan's Christians by fanatical Islam is a betrayal of Jinnah and founding fathers*. In, International Business Times, June 12, 2015. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/persecution-pakistans-christians-by-fanatical-islam-betrayal-jinnah-founding-fathers-1505766>. Accessed: 02/07/2015 18:06

⁶¹ Beth. 2001. *Pakistani Christians Bury Massacre Victims, Forgive Killers*. Famvin. <http://famvin.org/en/2001/10/29/pakistani-christians-bury-massacre-victims-forgive-killers/>. Accessed: 03/07/2015 10:12

veteran S. Korean missionary and a close friend of mine did a thorough research after this most heinous attack against innocent Christians. He interviewed 337 persons and asked about their response to the killers. This is what he found:

Forgiveness out of 337 persons



-I believe God will do all the judgment. So, I entrust God for HIS judgment and I forgive them.

-They don't know what they are doing. Even the beast doesn't do this. I already forgive them and I pray to God to show them His mercy so that they would repent and be restored back to good human beings.

-I forgive them and pray for them that they would know how precious life of a human is

-Jesus Christ shed his blood to forgive such a sinner as I am.... Human's blood is so sinful and filthy which is nothing compared to the precious blood of Jesus... why can't I forgive them?

-I forgive. But, I wish and pray for them to repent, begin to love other people and stop killing.⁶²

This song of forgiveness continues to be sung by the choirs of wounded souls, under the direction of the Crucified for the last 2015 years. Pakistani Christians are proud to add their voice in Jesus' Choir of the Cross.

An audacious tenacity of faith

One of the most unexpected and stunning responses by ordinary Christians in the face of tremendous sufferings have been to remain firmly grounded in their commitment to and faith in Christ. After horrible carnages in many of the churches, church leaders were afraid that churches might be deserted. However, Christian response has been exactly the opposite. Pakistani churches are filled with people of all ages. Their persecution actually testifies to the truthfulness of the teachings of Christ: 'You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved' (Matt

⁶² Matthew Jeong, 2014. *Report to The Diocese of Peshawar and all donor friends about our visit to victims of the Bomb Blasts On 22 April 2014.* (unpublished, quoted with permission).

10:22), and ‘Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me’ (Matt 24:9). They take the challenge and promise of Christ to remain faithful till death and receive the crown of life seriously (Rev. 2:10). Thus Pakistani Christians continue to demonstrate a remarkable tenacity of faith in the face of intense persecution emanating from religious extremism.

Intellectual response

While forgiving the enemies, even when they don’t seek forgiveness, is a unique and powerful Christian virtue and Pakistani Christians have demonstrated it pretty regularly; it does not necessarily inspire love for them in enemies’ hearts, neither it creates peace. Christians need to engage Muslims at socio-political and religio-cultural levels to create mutual understanding and an environment for peaceful, respectful and accommodative co-existence. This requires a comprehensive dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Unfortunately, Muslims in Pakistan do not feel such a need. Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali contends that Muslims and Christians have ‘grave responsibility for maintaining peace’.⁶³ It requires dialogue and cooperation. Nazir-Ali argues that committed and genuine dialogue naturally requires critical evaluation of other faiths by Christians and allows others to critically evaluate Christian faith.⁶⁴ In another place he asserts that catholicity of the church demands its dialogue and mission to the rest of the world. He argues that if Church, in John Knox’s words is ‘ever-widening sphere and ever-deepening reconciliation’ ... then the Church must always be in dialogue with the community, with the people of other faiths and with all those of goodwill.⁶⁵ Nazir-Ali refers to four types of dialogues discussed by Eric Sharpe and similar four types by the Vatican, that divided dialogue into the dialogue of life, the dialogue of deeds, the dialogue of specialists, and the dialogue of the interior life. Regarding the third kind he writes, ‘People, sometimes, don not give enough value to the dialogue of specialists. In some cases this *has* been sterile: where it has been overly concerned with classical issues and there has been a danger in some respect of a merely antiquarian interest.’⁶⁶

⁶³ Michael Nazir-Ali. 2012. *The Unique And Universal Christ*. Paternoster: UK, p.86

⁶⁴ Michael Nazir-Ali. 2012, p.87

⁶⁵ Michael Nazir-Ali. 1995. *Mission and Dialogue: Proclaiming The Gospel Afresh In Every Age*. London: SPCK, p. 72

⁶⁶ Michael Nazir-Ali. 1995, p. 82

While dialogue of life and deeds is unavoidable (to some extent even preferable) and takes place, almost involuntarily on daily bases; it lacks intentionality and Christian moorings. When it comes to the dialogue of specialists, Christians suffer from lack of such specialists who can engage Muslim scholars. Christian leadership training institutions are largely responsible for such a dearth. None of the major theological institutions teaches courses on Islam or Christian-Muslim relations. Sadly, constitutionally, politically, socially and intellectually, Christians have no voice and no influence. They constantly look towards the western world to save them from these appalling and life threatening situations. However, in many cases it proves counter-productive.

Following the extremists

Peaceful protest is not only justified but also necessary to challenge the unjust authorities and injustices (John 18:22). Extremist Islam and Muslim extremists, to some extent, have influenced some Christians to become extremists. Reacting to violence committed against Christians, at certain places, Christian demonstrators have turned violent and destroyed public property. The most shocking incident took place right after the twin suicide attacks in Youhanabad on March 15, 2015. Reportedly, police arrested two Muslim suspects from the scene. Angry Christians snatched them from the police, killed and set them on fire. As the fire engulfed them Christians shouted: *Halailuya and Khudawand Yasu Masih ki Jai* (praise God and victory to the Lord Jesus Christ). This appears like an attempt to match Muslim chanting of Allahu Akbar.⁶⁷ Chaudhary Nisar Khan, interior minister quickly condemned Christian reaction as the worst act of terrorism.⁶⁸ From time to time certain Christian leaders have threatened to set up militant organizations to defend Christians against Muslim militant groups. This is of course very sad and totally unchristian response.

⁶⁷ ARY (TV live) News, March 15, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OlpIdrBhW0>.

⁶⁸ Ali Khan. March 18, 2015 Chaudhary Nisar. *Mob lynching is 'worst kind of terrorism', says Nisar*. Dawn. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1170157>. Accessed: 05/07/15 19:35

Following the Extremist

Contrary to being influenced by Muslim religious extremism, however, Christians ought to respond with a different kind of extremism – to whole-heartedly follow the Extremist One: Jesus Christ. Christ could be considered extremist in two ways: (i) what he taught and what he did and, (ii) and what people thought about him. To put it in reverse order, Jesus' opponents, as they understood his teachings and his claims about himself, took him to be an extremist dangerous enough that they must eliminate him. At his first preaching in Nazareth, his audience tried to kill him by throwing him from the top of the mountain (Luke 4:28-30). When Christ claimed that He and God, whom he called his father, were one; Jews called him blasphemous and tried to stone him (John 10:30-33). At certain point even his disciples thought his teachings were too extreme, to the point, that many of his disciples left him and never came back (John 6:60-66). His cleansing of the Temple was certainly understood by the Temple authorities the act of an extremist after which they determined to kill him (Mark 11:15-18).

Understanding of the Jewish opponents of Christ might have been clouded by many different factors; however, Christ was not only an extremist, rather the Extremist. His taking on humanity and becoming one of us, being born as a vulnerable baby, and offering himself as the sacrifice to save both humanity and honour of his Father were extreme acts. His teaching 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' goes beyond our mental and ethical extremities (Matthew 5:44). His call and demand to his would be disciples to deny their very *self* and carry their cross daily is an extreme demand. Thus in my view, the most appropriate Christian response to religious extremism is Christian extremism or perhaps Messianic extremism. Christian moderation ultimately leads to the betrayal of Christ. It is somewhat similar to Peter's walking at a distance behind Christ after his betrayal. Soon, he denied that even he knew him, let alone to have confessed that he was one of his closest disciples. In other words our response to religious extremism should be not only our extreme commitment to Christ but also living out our call to extreme/radical discipleship. Only Messianic extremism can counter religious extremism. Only extreme love can overcome extreme hatred. Only carrying the cross can deliver us from the fear of death and assure us of victory that Christ has already won over the powers of extreme destruction, including the power of destructive religious extremism. Only by losing ones life for Christ and the

Gospel one finds his life (Mt 10:39; Mk 9:34,35; Lk 9:23-25). This is the way of the Cross, the way of the Crucified and Resurrected Lord, and all his true disciples and apostles. Only following the Extremist One with extreme commitment could be called an appropriate Christian response to religious extremism. May the Triune God help us to respond to religious extremism in the most appropriate way.