

**Report of the**

**Living Letters Team Visit to Pakistan**

**24 November – 1 December, 2008**



**World Council  
of Churches**



**International Ecumenical  
Peace Convocation**  
Kingston | Jamaica | 2011



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## Introduction

Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana  
Director, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, WCC

A Living Letters team that included members of churches from Armenia, Netherlands, Pakistan and USA traveled to visit the churches in Pakistan from November 24 to December 1, 2008. The team comprised the following:

- Prof. Dr. Charles Amjad-Ali, Church of Pakistan, Pakistan/USA
- Rev. Michael Barseghyan, Armenian Apostolic Church (Mother See of Etchmiadzin)
- Ms Monisha Smith, Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Rev. Aart Verburg, Protestant Church in Netherlands

And the following WCC staff:

- Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana, Alliance of Baptists, USA/Sri Lanka
- Mr Henrik Hansson, Church of Sweden

Living Letters Teams, a part of the work of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) of the WCC are organized as a symbol of solidarity of churches throughout the world, and with the intention of strengthening the work of the churches for reconciliation and peace. The visits are intended also to prepare churches for their participation in the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) which will take place in 2011.

This visit, based in the city of Lahore included the team's participation in the Synod meeting of the Church of Pakistan, a dinner meeting with its Bishops, meetings with women and youth, and a meeting with the National Council of Churches of Pakistan which also included an opportunity to meet with a group from the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) working on issues of migration. The team visited a madrassa, an extremely poor Christian community of brick-kiln workers and met with representatives of several civil society institutions. The team also travelled to Rawalpindi to visit the Christian Study Center, and to Islamabad where they met colleagues of Church World Service and the Islamic University of Islamabad. They also traveled to the Wagah border with India to witness the military ceremony at the daily closing of the border.

The team expresses its sincere thanks to its hosts, the Church of Pakistan and the National Council of Churches of Pakistan for their kind hospitality. A special word of thanks is due to Bishop Samuel Azariah who coordinated the visit and to the many friends and colleagues in Church of Pakistan for the numerous ways in which they helped.

This report is based on several articles written by the members of the team, that are both descriptive of the team's work and analytical of the political and religious tensions that the people of Pakistan are facing. In the first article, Aart Verburg and Shanta Premawardhana outline the meetings the team held and their dominant theme, human rights in Pakistan. Professor Charles Amjad-Ali's article provides an historical analysis of relations between Christians and Muslims in Pakistan. Rev. Michael Barseghyan writes about the people he met and the deep faith that they hold even in the face of adversity, specifically highlighting the faith of the extremely poor brick-kiln workers. Henrik Hansson adds his reflection on the team's experiences with the young people. Aart Verburg also offers a helpful review of the recent documents that the WCC has produced on Pakistan. This report concludes with a summary of recommendations from the team.

More information on the visit can be found at the DOV website:  
<http://www.overcomingviolence.org/peace-convocation/living-letters-visits/pakistan.html>

## Human Rights in Pakistan: A Consistent Theme in Our Meetings

Rev. Aart Verburg, M.Th.  
Principal, Hendrik Kraemer Institute, Utrecht, The Netherlands, and  
Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana

*Nothing will happen if we blame the dark;  
we have to light up the lamp that is given to us.*

-- Rev. Nelson Charles (Raiwind Diocese, Church of Pakistan)

### Introduction

The human rights situation in Pakistan is of a very deep concern for Christians in Pakistan. In particular the Blasphemy Laws which have targeted Christian and other religious minorities, and the Hudood Ordinances which implemented as part of the Shariah have which have targeted women have also been cynically used against the minorities. Lack of proper legal systems in villages and tribal areas coupled with extremist religious views and intolerant attitudes create severe difficulties for Christians. Over the years the WCC paid serious attention to this topic.

The goal of the Living Letters delegation is to listen to the stories of the people. The members of the delegation were not human rights specialists although one of them, Dr. Charles Amjad-Ali who is from Pakistan, has been an active member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan right from its inception, and the chief patron of CLAAS (Centre for Legal Aid Assistance & Settlement).<sup>1</sup> He has been involved in human rights activities in Pakistan for many years and has a vast network in this field, both in Pakistan and abroad.

In several meetings the issue was explicitly on the agenda, in other meetings we understood from the stories people shared with us not only how seriously their basic human rights were violated or denied but also how laws are being abused to suppress minorities (ethnic and religious) in Pakistan. We were provided with documentation from several human rights organisations of religious and secular orientation, containing an impressive array of detailed information about the different categories of human rights violations in Pakistan.

### Human Rights as a theme in the meetings

#### 1. Caritas

On Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> November we met with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church at Caritas in Lahore for a briefing on the situation concerning the Blasphemy laws. Blasphemy law is part of the Pakistan Penal Code (sections 295 B, 295 C, 298 A, B and C). After the amendment in 1985 and its further exacerbation in 1991, this law now states that any person guilty of defiling the name of the Prophet Mohammed is liable to suffer the death penalty. Trial courts are reluctant to release the defendants on bail or acquit the blasphemer for fear of violence from religious extremist groups. Most blasphemy cases are ultimately dismissed at the appellate level; however, the accused often remains in jail for years awaiting a final verdict, and if someone has been brandished as blasphemous, he or she is in fact declared an outlaw. The law is mainly used against Ahmedis and Christians.

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<sup>1</sup> CLAAS, Annual report 2007

“Any complaint of blasphemy received by the police immediately leads to the arrest of the accused and registration of an FIR (First Information Report). Hence, many cases tend to be borne out of a wish to settle personal scores – by the accuser against the accused – and have only added to the discrimination prevalent in society against the minorities. In many instances, the motivation for the accusation has more to do with bigotry, selfish gain, prejudice and professional rivalry.”<sup>2</sup>

During the meeting at Caritas Mr. N. Shakir, a lawyer from Lahore briefed us about several important traits of the Pakistani society. Although Pakistan started as a state with a strong wish for independent judiciary within a democratic system, it has had several military dictatorships, each introducing its own military rules. Pakistan is currently trying to get rid of one of them. The elections in 2008 suggested democracy but in fact kept the feudal powers and bureaucrats in position. The ideology of a security state, religious militancy and feudalism obstruct the establishment of the rule of law. The main problem is that there is no democracy and no legal structures that provide security. As long as the society is divided along lines of religious and social/feudal factions, the building of a strong nation-state will not be possible. Only a strong coalition of religious and secular parties could bring about a stronger nation-state.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Shakir’s only hope for the future is good education. An ecumenical platform which co-operates closely with secular parties should pursue this strong nation-state and unite the voices of the people. Organising people at grassroots level is very difficult. Muslim people in local situations simply claim that they are right because they are the majority. This discrimination is routinely expressed in the field of employment, and against women who are routinely denied admission to education, political positions and are subject to sexual discrimination, abduction, forced marriage and, consequently, forced conversion from Christianity to Islam.

Motivating Christians for social action concerning human rights is not easy. Certain evangelical denominations tend to deal with the frustration of Christians by glorifying persecutions as a sign of being a true believer who will be rewarded later on. The director of Caritas stressed that no progress can be made without organising local communities. Caritas calls these organizations ‘Social Harmony (peace) Committees’. Father Munawar, a priest from the Karachi Diocese stated clearly that the Pakistani Christians and the Pakistani people have to change. “If we continue to feel, to think and to behave as victims we will never generate the power for change. We ourselves have to change!” he said.

Two ladies working for the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), headed by Father Emmanuel Y. Mani, told us stories about the abuse of the Blasphemy laws. As an example they told the story of a pretty young girl who appeared to be very bright. Her teacher convinced her to convert to Islam in order to marry him. She then would have a brighter future, talented as she is, he said.

In the annual reports of several human rights organisations one finds detailed information on all reported cases. The *Human Rights Monitor 2008* reports that in 2007 at least 59 persons were charged under Blasphemy law. As an illustration we quote: “Four Christian students of a Nursing School had to discontinue their studies and the Christian Principal of the Nursing School lost her position after being suspected of their involvement in crossing out Quranic verses posted on a notice board at Islamabad on May 17th.”<sup>4</sup> Or the next one: “Authorities and the court failed to take note that the house of Younis Masih, a

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<sup>2</sup> *Human Rights Monitor 2008*, National Commission for Justice & Peace (NCJP), Pakistan Catholic Bishops’ Conference

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Descent into Chaos* by Ahmed Rashid, London 2008

<sup>4</sup> *Human Rights Monitor*, p.41

blasphemy accused, was forcibly occupied by a group of Muslims linked to the complainant.”<sup>5</sup> This report also tells how the Pakistani government succeeded in defending the Blasphemy laws against severe critics from the European Union.<sup>6</sup>

The Hudood laws cover problems such as theft, drunkenness, adultery, rape and bearing false witness.<sup>7</sup> The *Human Rights Monitor 2008* mentions this Hudood law in a chapter about discriminatory laws. Together with the Shariat Act (1991) which made Sharia the “Supreme Law” of the country, a law on religious taxes, the law on evidence, this Hudood law discriminates against religious minorities who are treated according to Islamic law even though they are not Muslims. To make it worse, non-Muslims are often in a weaker position when it comes to application of punishment than Muslims themselves. Denying rights to non-Muslims stresses the lack of law security even more. The Human Rights Monitor contains a list of Muslim, Christian and Ahmedi victims of these discriminatory laws.

The annual Report of CLAAS also gives detailed information on cases connected to the several topics covered by Hudood Law. One of them is the case of Iqbal Bibi vs Gulzar Khan. Iqbal Bibi and her husband Shaukat Masih are Christians who live in a remote village. They lease some land for farming. Their neighbour Gulzar Khan is a feudal lord who wants to buy the farming ground from Iqbal and Shaukat. Since they are not the owners they cannot sell the ground. Gulzar tries to force them to leave the land using appalling methods, for example: Gulzar abducts the daughter of Iqbal and Shaukat and marries her to one of his Muslim peasants. Their other children are occasionally beaten up by Gulzar's men, their donkey cart is burned down and in February 2007 the house of Iqbal and Shaukat was torched. They escaped this attack and looked for help to CLAAS because they had no financial means to take legal action.<sup>8</sup> This story reminds us of the biblical story about king Ahab and his neighbour Naboth (I Kings 21).

When the delegation visited a brick kiln we actually found there a feudal society which made it easy to picture a story like mentioned above. Reading those case stories and thinking of the people in the brick kiln made the delegation feel frustrated about the harsh conditions for poor people, even more when they belong to minorities. At the same time we admired their dedication to the Christian faith, their hospitality and their appreciation of our visit as a sign of solidarity.

We understood how hard it must be to not give into a victim mentality and get organised to fight discrimination and intolerance.

## 2. Triennial Meeting of the Church of Pakistan Synod

On the afternoon of Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup>, the delegation attended the opening of the triennial meeting of the Church of Pakistan (CoP) Synod. The Moderator, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Alexander J. Malik, in his address to the synod spoke about challenges and opportunities for the Church of Pakistan.

His address was mainly about the human rights situation in Pakistan. He referred to *Quaid-e-Azam*, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan and his view on the place which minorities were to have in Pakistan. Jinnah had a thorough understanding of what it meant to be in a minority position because before the partition he belonged to the Muslim minority in predominantly Hindu India. The address of the moderator was mainly a

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<sup>5</sup> *Human Rights Monitor*, p.41

<sup>6</sup> *Human Rights Monitor*, p.47

<sup>7</sup> *Annual Report CLAAS*, p.67

<sup>8</sup> *Annual Report CLAAS*, p.136

contribution to the ongoing debate about the identity of Pakistan as a nation-state and what the founding fathers had in mind when Pakistan was conceived. The moderator referred to Blasphemy law, Shariah courts, Hudood law, the Separate Electorate system (minorities could only vote for candidates of their own community for a few reserved seats in the Provincial and National Assemblies) and other Islamic legislation as ‘drifting away from the Quaid’s vision’. He also warned of the danger of further ‘talibanisation’ of the Pakistan society.

It is interesting that Bishop Malik chose this topic for his final address as moderator to the Church of Pakistan (CoP) Synod. It shows that the CoP considers itself to be a relevant and patriotic player on the national stage. However it was not clear how he envisioned the role of the CoP in the struggle for improving the human rights situation. There was neither a call for a strong ecumenical initiative, nor a clear statement on co-operation with other religious or non-governmental organisations to strengthen the role of civil society in Pakistan.

The next day the Living Letters delegation met with youth from the churches belonging to the National Council of Churches in Pakistan (NCCP). Human Rights and the position of minorities were not mentioned as a prevalent concern for them. However they mentioned a strong wish to be able to get employed by the government. Leading positions in government circles could become a good venue for more influence on a positive development concerning human rights.

### 3. Dinner with the Bishops of the Church of Pakistan

That evening the delegation had dinner with the bishops of the CoP. Bishop Munawar Rumalshah, Bishop of Peshawar asked us what was hoped to be the outcome of the delegation visit. He then raised the issue of unemployment in the Peshawar region. He said that the main concern of the church was the availability of jobs.

In an interview in *The News* (August 7, 2005) he had explained the effect is of this non-availability of jobs for members of his community. “As a result the struggle for survival has let our community members down. If you close the tap of economic survival on us, then there is no need of physically killing us. So all this talk of protection is meaningless, unless something is done about the economic welfare of the Christian community,” the Bishop said.<sup>9</sup> He continued: “I know that jobs are generally scarce in our country. What I am worried about is discrimination in providing them. If the qualification for getting the job is neither contacts nor religion and merits alone hold, then I am not worried because our community is educated. But I have seen that discrimination is done on the basis of religion while providing jobs. This reality scares me and makes me lose all hope.”

### 4. Meeting with clergypersons from various churches and denominations

This meeting took place on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November. Although human rights were not explicitly on the agenda it helped the delegation to understand the context of the daily struggle of priests and pastors and their parishioners. The autobiographical elements in their sharing, the reflections on the themes coming up from every day life and the way they try to live up to the challenges within the given social and cultural situation deepened our understanding of the human rights issues. At the same time we were encouraged by the power of their faith in facing the various challenges.

Among the questions we raised and discussed were:

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in ‘*Human Rights monitor 2006*’, NCJP Lahore, 2006 p.7,8

- How does theology help you in supporting your parishioners?
- How do you deal with issues of freedom of religion?
- How do you personally deal with the big economical differences in your country?
- How do you deal with issues of social classification such as feudalism, caste etc.?
- What about the political participation or non-participation of parishioners in the general elections after the restoration of the joint electorate (August 2002)?
- How do you deal with not just interfaith but intra-faith relations (including conflicts between different churches)
- How do you deal on a local level with Blasphemy law, Hudood laws and other discriminatory laws?
- How do you deal with problems that arise when western countries do something to create tensions in Pakistan, such as the cartoon controversy?
- How do you develop a critical thinking when there are other denominations that tend to depoliticize or support an a-critical type of thinking

In this respect the role of Islam in Pakistan is very important. Where and how could people of different religions create firm coalitions in order to defend human rights and fight for law security in a strong nation-state? The pastors at this meeting were convinced that the kind of open sharing we had would not be possible in the company of Muslim leaders.

It was significant that in the meeting with Muslim leaders that afternoon, the issue of human rights was not raised as such. Still a lot of effort is needed to reduce mutual suspicion and fear, to deconstruct false images about the other at both sides of the demarcation lines and to grow mutual trust.

##### 5. Meeting with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

Mr. I.A. Rahman and his colleagues received us in the office of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) on November 28<sup>th</sup>. The annual report on 2007 says in the introduction: 'From the point of view of the people's entitlements, their needs as well as their rights, 2007 proved to be one of the worst years in Pakistan's history, if not the worst'.<sup>10</sup> The HRCP annual report refers to the attempt to remove the Chief Justice (High Court), the detention of the leaders of the lawyers' movement for independence of the judiciary, the emergency rule and the sharp increase of suicide bombings in Pakistan culminating in the murder on Benazir Bhutto on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2007. The report has detailed information on many cases of human rights violations in the different categories.

Mr. Rahman indicated a few positive developments in the human rights situation in Pakistan. The ambiance has changed. There is freedom of movement and the death penalty has only been given twice in religion related cases. The rate of death penalties in general is low for 2008. We should remember however that life imprisonment could be considered as even worse than death penalty. Circumstances in jail are tough in Pakistan. Despite the positive developments mentioned by Mr. Rahman, the living conditions in Pakistan are not easy. The impoverishment of the people is undeniable. The degree of suffering has increased for the weaker ones in the society which is very much stratified according to class, religion, gender and employment. These days the HRCP pays more attention to issues of domestic violence and employment conditions for women.

Concerning the judiciary system: more laws have been made by dictators than – as it should be – by legal representatives of the people. The military or police state has dismantled

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<sup>10</sup> *State of Human Rights in 2007*, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Lahore 2008, p 1



the local judicial system. The general concern of the HRCP is that they cannot find the people required to address these issues. Religious leaders seem to not share the concerns of the HRCP. We should keep in mind that the country is at war. There were around 500,000 displaced persons in the Northern territories at the time. The proliferation of legal and illegal arms is another dangerous development. Human rights activists find it hard to mobilize qualified people for the sake of a more just society. Students and urban youth seem to be ignorant about the human rights situation.

At the HRCP we were also briefed by Mr. Munawar, a representative of the Ahmedis, about the position of his religious minority in Pakistan. His personal story is an illustration of what is written in the HRCP annual report: 'Ahmedis continued to be attacked for their faith and were discriminated against by the State and society. They were not allowed to participate in the electoral process in the same way as other citizens and minorities.<sup>11</sup> Like other minorities, the Ahmedi community is further marginalized by Blasphemy law as it remained a tool that served the purpose of militants to harass and intimidate the people for their own ends. The Ahmedi community has little recourse in law to protect itself.

## 6. Meeting with Women's Groups

Several speakers in the meeting with women's groups addressed the question of the oppression of women in Pakistani society. We learned that:

- 30% of the work force is women, meaning that not as many women that should be working are working
- when you consider the informal workforce, that figure goes up to 67%, meaning that more women are engaged in manual labor than men
- the literacy rate for women is 23%, but in some areas its as low as 1%

Education is key to the revolution said Veeda Javaid, Executive Director of the Presbyterian Education Board of Pakistan. Educating a girl is educating a mother, and educating a mother is educating a nation, she said.

Hina Able continued to address the question of girls' education. According to the Federal Bureau of Statistics in 2007, 14.8% of girls get a primary education, and 4% get a secondary education. What happens to the remaining 10% who dropped out, she asked. Less than 1% of girls are able to get a higher education, she said. In some areas such as NWFP and Baluchistan landlords oppose the opening of schools, she said, because educating women threatens them. If they are educated, who will they use as domestic servants, she asked.

The church's work in education has greatly enhanced women's role in society, she added. Kinnard College and Foreman Christian College are great examples in this regard. But many women have grown up with out a proper childhood, and therefore adult literacy and coaching programmes are essential. In addition, educating men is essential, it will liberate their minds, she said.

Col. Marguerite Ward of the Salvation Army spoke on violence against women, prevalent in both Christian and Muslim families. If someone speaks to you about domestic violence, believe them, she said, because it takes great courage for someone to say that their home is in a violent situation. It is likely that it has taken a long time for this person to get to that place of being able to talk about it. She counsels women to get out of abusive situations and to stop thinking that since they are Christians they must bear the violence.

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<sup>11</sup> See note 10, p.96

Ayra Indrayas, member of the Women Action Forum spoke about 16 days of activism on violence against women which was taking place in several parts of the country at the time. Pakistan has 160 million people, she said, and of these 5% are religious minorities. Hindus and Christians are the dominant minorities. They are also largely poor people. Women who are religious minorities and poor are therefore are in triple jeopardy, she said. Forced marriages are often followed by conversions, and this phenomenon is not confined to rural areas. Many Christian women who work as domestics are also subject to such forced conversions.

She called for ecumenical and interreligious structures that provide networking possibilities. We don't have effective mechanism to address these concerns because we are so poorly networked, she said.

Shunila Ruth, addressing questions of legal rights said that the Christian Divorce Act provides support groups for divorce in such cases involving adultery, incest, bigamy, etc. The law is unjust towards Christian women, she said. She also described the work of Talitha Kumi welfare center, which seeks to address the needs of women through, legal aid, a health program, economic empowerment and educational awareness. The Women's Legal Center was started with WCC seed money of about \$1500 she said.

#### 7. Other meetings

One evening the delegation had dinner at the office of the National Council of Churches of Pakistan (NCCP). There we met with participants of a seminar on migration issues in Asia, convened by the CCA and hosted by the NCCP.

The meeting with the people of the Centre for Legal Aid Assistance & Settlement (CLAAS) on Saturday, November 29<sup>th</sup> was short. Their report gives a good impression of the work they do in terms of collecting data concerning violations of human rights and lobbying both nationally and internationally. CLAAS has strong connections with Churches and Christian organisations. The attitude to Muslims and Muslim organisations seemed to be rather negative.

The meeting at the International Islamic University in Islamabad gave us insight in how this university is involved in developing the implementation of Shariah Law in Pakistan. The dean of the University had called graduate students and faculty to greet the WCC delegation. Over the decades, since Samartha's time, the WCC has been trusted partner in interreligious dialogue, he said.

The Christian Study Centre (CSC) in Rawalpindi and Church World Service (CWS) have programmes to advocate for human rights from their respective positions. The CSC connects those issues to interfaith dialogue and co-operation. CWS approaches human rights issues from the angle of community organisation and awareness building with the people.

#### 8. Good news

We conclude with a sign of hope. In its report State of Human Rights in 2007 the HRCP mentioned that prisoners in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail staged a hunger strike in protest against new regulations prohibiting collective prayers or free movement in jail (February).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *State of Human Rights in 2007*, Lahore 2008 p 72

“Whereas the Muslim prisoners had all the facilities of praying in their mosque, the Christian prisoners were prevented from going to their church and the church was allegedly shut down.”<sup>13</sup> However the *Daily Times* of January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009 as quoted on the web log of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) mentioned that the Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi is likely to open a church to its over 250 Christian prisoners. The action taken by the prisoners had been apparently successful. The jail authorities donated the land and local Christian community donated money to build the church on the premises of the jail. We are grateful for those brothers and sisters who succeeded in lighting up a lamp as a sign of hope (cf. Matthew 25:36).

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13 *State of Human Rights in 2007*, Lahore 2008 p 97

## **Islamization of Pakistan: The Question of Identity and the Growing Dislocation of Religious Minorities Since 1947**

by

Charles Amjad-Ali, Ph.D., Th.D.,

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Prof. of Justice and Christian Community and the Director of Islamic Studies, Luther Seminary St. Paul, MN, USA

Pakistan is the first modern nation state (created in 1947) with a clear religious identity. It was ostensibly created for the Muslim minorities of India. This was a new pattern in state formation and was followed shortly thereafter by Israel, in 1949. The Muslims had been the ruling elites in the Indian subcontinent for well over 700 years prior to British colonialism in the context of overwhelming Hindu majority. This rule ranged from being highly accepting of the plurality of religious communities in India (cf. Akbar and his *Deen-e-Ilahi*) to being excessively repressive (cf. Aurangzeb and his "Islamization" policies). By the 1930s, as the Indian Independence movement gained momentum, it became clear to the Muslim elites that they would hold few, if any, high elected offices in the post-independence Indian state, given what they saw as the tyranny of the overwhelming Hindu majority. Therefore they agitated for a separate Muslim state of their own. Thus as the Independence movement came to fruition, British India was divided into Pakistan and India, the former being made up of contiguous majority Muslim states/provinces in Western and Eastern India. Pakistan itself was created as a bifurcated country with East and West Pakistan separated by about a thousand miles of hostile India in between the two parts of the country. This was clearly not a viable long-term solution and after a number of agitations and disturbances Bangladesh finally became an independent state in 1971. The decision for this partition of India into India and Pakistan was a typical British stopgap measure as it impetuously hurried to leave India after about 200 years of controlling involvement in India, including the role of the East India Company (1757–1858) and direct British crown rule (1858–1947).

The Indian part of the subcontinent was never happy with this decision, but the Pakistani part felt that the Partition recognized the strong Muslim identity of the citizens of Pakistan. During the negotiations that started in the 1930s, the orthodox, conservative, and newly emerging fundamentalist Islamic movements, which were characterized by Wahabi Puritanism and textual fundamentalism, were all against the formation of Pakistan. For them, if a state was created in the name of Islam for the Muslim population of India as a recognition of their ethnic identity, then Islam was being reduced to a nation-state rather than a pan-ethnic, pan-national *ummah* (community) with Khilafat as its political order. This was seen fundamentally as a product of a western nationalism and based on ethnicity rather than on religion as the central ideology. After all, *ethnos* was the basis of the western understanding of nation states. Further, this nationalism, and its concurrent democratic ideals, were seen primarily as products of liberal bourgeois democratic republicanism with no basis in Islam. Such a critique of nationalism and the emphasis on Islamic polity as different, was dominant in the early period of independence. While it was a doctrinally accurate perception, it was also based on an understanding of Islam, which had more or less ossified itself into seeing the limits of all hermeneutics as being tied to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and to the ideal community as being restricted to the first three generations of Islam.

Contrary to these groups, the people who struggled for the foundation of Pakistan were much more familiar with western political and philosophical ideas and ideals than with the Islamic sources on these issues. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, founder of the nation, studied in London and was called to the bar at Lincoln's Inn. Besides not being an Orthodox Sunni Muslim, as a Bohra Ismaili, he came from a community deemed sectarian even by Shia' standards. He married a Zoroastrian woman, whose only child did not even come to Pakistan in 1947 and continues to live in Mumbai as a Zoroastrian. Sir Mohammad Iqbal, who was the

first person to present the idea of Pakistan, was educated at Cambridge, Lincoln Inn, and gained a doctorate in philosophy from Munich, Germany. Though a Sunni, he had written a highly critical text on the need for reform and reconstruction in Islamic thought,<sup>14</sup> and an epic poem complaining to God on the state of Muslims at the time.<sup>15</sup> Sir Mohammad Zafarullah Khan, the first foreign minister of Pakistan and the President of the International Court of Justice, was educated at King's College London and Lincoln's Inn. He was an Ahmadi, a people who are now classified as non-Muslims and suffer greatly in contemporary Pakistan for their faith. These examples can be multiplied. Suffice it to say that the "Muslims" who founded Pakistan saw neither *ijtihad* (the analogical reasoning on matters not covered by the Qur'an and Sunnah) nor the use of reason as a closed book, after the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Neither did they revert to the ideals of the first three generations of the Islamic community as a paradigmatic ossification, nor did they reject all knowledge outside of a particular reading of Islam. These men were part of those called "Islamic modernists," who never envisioned, even when they gave lip service to Islam for the sake of republican democratization policies, the kind of Islam that is dominant in Pakistan today.

The conservative Islamic identity in Pakistan, if it can be dated at all, begins to emerge during the drafting of the new constitution of Pakistan. It is no wonder that the first constitution took nine years to write and ultimately pleased none of the major players. One of the issues that emerged early in this discussion was the role of the religious minorities. The Founder had promised equal and open citizenship to all, irrespective of religion, and had stated that religion was not the concern of the state:

"You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the State... We are starting in the days where there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State.... Now I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State."<sup>16</sup>

The first real undoing of all this early promise was the adoption of the Objectives Resolution on March 12, 1949 which played immediately into the hands of the more conservative Muslim leadership, and this situation was further exacerbated when they created the Ahmadi Crisis of the early 1950s. These conservative Muslim groups finally had their way when the country was named the "Islamic Republic of Pakistan" for the first time in the Constitution of 1956. This was clearly a utilitarian and cynical shift in the position of the conservative Islamic groups. They were first against the formation of Pakistan on Islamic grounds, but once Pakistan came into existence, without any input from them and even after their active resistance, they decided to make Pakistan an ideal Muslim state on the basis of an ossified interpretation of the early Islamic state without seeing the sheer paradox of this

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<sup>14</sup> See his famous, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. First published in 1930 (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Ashraf Publishers 1999).

<sup>15</sup> See, his famous Urdu poem *Shikwa* (English "Complaint"), the poem was later published in his collected work entitled *Qulliat-e-Iqbal*. *Shikwa* exalts the Islamic legacy and its major civilizing role in history, and then bemoans the fate of Muslims everywhere, and squarely confronts the dilemmas of Islam in modern times. *Shikwa* is in the form of a lament to Allah for having let the Muslims down.

<sup>16</sup> See, Mohammad Ali Jinnah's address to the Constituent Assembly as the first President on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 1947.

position. The irony is that their kind of Islam now provides the grammar, and is stated as the *raison d'être* of Pakistan. So the Islamic influence has progressively grown, Pakistan today sits in the international arena as the hotbed for the generation of Islamic fundamentalism, Jihadists, "terrorists," such as al-Qaida, Taliban or whatever new nomenclature is given to them or a small group takes for itself.

This Islamization of the society, culture, polity, economics, and the overall *geist* of the nation grew in fits and starts between 1956-1977. However in 1977 things changed radically with the martial law of Gen. Zia-ul-Haq and at this point Islam begins to dominate the state. Here the need of Zia to justify his regime on other than democratic grounds, coincided with the needs of the US and Saudi Arabia to refute both the Irani revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, both in 1979. There was already earlier versions of this confluence in the refutation of socialism. So the Islamization process was not just an endogenously produced element but was fully aided, abetted, and even engendered exogenously by the US and Saudi Arabia as well.

What we see today in Pakistan is a very interesting admixture of things. On the one hand, there are orthodox and traditional Islamic conservative groups, which are represented by scholarly and educated ulemas, represented largely by the Jamait-e-Ulemma-i-Pakistan (JUP), with its roots in the Bareilvi tradition and Jamait-e-Ulemma-i-Islam (JUI) with its roots in the Deobandi tradition. Then there is the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) which has now become part of this orthodox group though initially it was not accepted as such by these orthodox traditionalists. This group now represents the orthodoxy and feels very threatened and vulnerable to the new groups that have been generated largely in the aftermath of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Pakistan acted as the main conduit, training and ideological formation ground for those fighting against the Soviets, who called themselves Mujahideen (Islamic freedom fighters), and were fully acknowledged and acclaimed as such by the West, but who were always called terrorists by the USSR.

When the USSR pulled out of Afghanistan in March 1988, it left a huge vacuum of power which was filled by various warlords with their own respective spheres of influence. These people operated out of what the British had created as the badlands of their politics. These were tribal warlords, who had been given a certain level of autonomy as long as they had a loose suzerainty loyalty to the British; this policy was followed by the Pakistani government after 1947, who created first the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and then the Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA), both were attached to the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP). Both these areas lay in the corridor between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and represented much more of conservative Pakhtoon cultural identity than those in what is now Pakistan. This identity gave them cohesion, though they had a strong, if shallow, veneer of Islam. These warlords were not willing now to listen and be part of Pakistan's sphere of influence.

The Taleban were therefore originally generated in Pakistan under the tutelage of JUI, along with the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI). They provided a cohesive, highly regulated, well-disciplined, although thoroughly oppressive, power structure. In the initial years, the people of Afghanistan broadly welcomed them, eventually, however, though they imposed their particular brand of Islamic Puritanism on Afghanistan vis-à-vis women, alcohol, music, television and movies, etc. Their stated goal was to enforce the tradition (the *Sunnah*) of the Prophet on clothing, beards, etc., as well as to purify society of all its "pre-Islamic" (*Jahilliya*) elements/traditions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, socialism, communism, etc. Though ethnically the Talebans are largely Pakhtoon, they are categorical in emphasizing Islam as the main causality for their action rather than their ethnic and tribal identities. They are therefore able to accommodate and work with other Muslims without finding the ethnic paradox limiting. They are particularly closely allied with some of the Muslim groups in Southern Punjab (border area between Punjab and Sind) and the Saraiki

area (another displaced area lying on the borders of Sind, Punjab, Baluchistan, and NWFP) where most of these fundamentalist groups are also thriving. Islam has provided these people a deeper identity than finding themselves dislocated on the borders of the structures of power, economy, social formation and institution.

The problem that the early conservative Muslims faced vis-à-vis the minorities in Pakistan was first a necessity to classify them as *dhimmi* (or *zimmis* in Pakistan), according to the Islamic law, i.e., people of other faiths dwelling in an Islamic state and who become the responsibility (*dhimma* or *zimma*) of the state. The other major issue was whether to allow them to propagate their faith. The latter restriction applied largely to the Christians and later to the Ahmadis, and these two have therefore been special victims of conservative Islam in both its manifestations.

There were other models besides the *dhimmi* model, which these conservatives could have applied on the minorities in Pakistan. As a matter of fact, these other models have more authenticity because they occurred during the lifetime of the Prophet (*Sunnah* and *Hadith*). The *first* model can be drawn from the Constitution of Medina (622 AD), which the Prophet set up when he was invited to arbitrate the long-term tribal blood feud which was going on in Medina. He came in with his community clearly as a minority and wrote a constitution in which the Muslim minority was to be protected, looked after, and catered to, not because it was powerful but because it was a vulnerable minority to these Medinese non-Muslims (thus as *dhimma*). The *second* of these models can be drawn from the Treaty of Najran (631 AD), which the Prophet enacted during his lifetime in which there is no case of Christians or other minorities being *dhimmi*. Besides the awesome fact that this delegation worshipped and perhaps offered mass in the mosque of the prophet, they made a contract in which the Muslims would protect the Christians of Najran against outside attackers to protect their faith practice. In lieu of this protection the Islamic state would receive certain specified compensation; this treaty was renewed by the First Caliph Abu Bakr. The *dhimmi* model of interaction between Islam and minorities was enacted during the period of Islamic conquest, which most effectively happened under the Second Caliph Umar. It dealt largely with minorities as a vanquished group, i.e., areas captured by Muslims which were controlled by people of other faiths than Islam prior to this conquest. The question this expanding Islam faced was, what to do with the non-Muslim population of these captured areas, especially those who refuse to become Muslims. It is in this context that the “doctrine” of *Dhimmi* emerges.

The Christians of Pakistan were neither people with whom a Najrani type agreement was made, nor were they captured people whom Islamic forces had taken over, i.e. *dhimmi*. Rather, one day they were an equal part of British India alongside the Muslims, and the next, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1947, they were a minority in a Muslim Pakistanis, ostensibly equal citizens but soon relegated to a less than equal position. There was no constitution in place, there was no agreement in place and there was no conquest involved, as a matter of fact what was contracted for them was in the speech of the founder given above. That is why the continuing struggle for the constitution of Pakistan and its various versions were so critical for defining the nature of the state and the role of minorities in it. Over the course of 1947 to the present, especially during Gen. Zia-ul-Haq’s military dictatorship of 1977-1988, the Islamic identity and character has emerged as central for the state of Pakistan and dominates it today, which is very threatening for the minorities and totally violated the first contract established by the founder of Pakistan. What is paradoxically interesting, however, is the fact that even during the most Islamic times in the country, namely 1977-88, while the minorities were being treated as non-citizens and were subjected to all kinds of oppression, their right to “profess, practice, and propagate [their] religion” and “to establish, maintain and manage

[their] religious institutions” was not taken out of the constitution and is still legally fully in place.<sup>17</sup>

It is apparent that each time the Islamic identity is emphasized in the larger political and policy discourse, it threatens the minorities’ existence deeply; the more Muslim Pakistan becomes the less secure is the status of the minorities in it. This is particularly the case with the Christians, because this minority community has three distinct characteristics which are seen as threatening to Muslims themselves:

1. It is a religion which is seen as a western religion, thus all Christians are a fifth column of the west dwelling inside the Islamic domain of Pakistan and therefore their loyalty is always suspect.
2. After the Muslims, some members of the Christians community are most visibly middle class in the Pakistan mélange of different religious communities. Though numerically equal or perhaps even larger than Christians, a vast majority of Hindus come from economically, socially, educationally very depressed and backward classes. This is not the case with many Christians, so they are threatening because they are also people of influence and have been associated for a long time with high class socio-economic, educational and cultural institutions: they run schools and hospitals which are seen as a platform for proselytizing. Their property, intellectual and cultural influence is always seen as a threat, so they must be stopped.
3. Because they belong to the religion of the West, anything that is done to them gets “overblown,” “over-articulated, and/or “over publicized.”

Therefore the Christians remain under the closest scrutiny of these fundamentalist groups. The state is either not powerful enough or unwilling to protect these minorities in general, and the Christian minority in particular, against these conservative elements. Any protection provided to these Christians is immediately classified as being based on the dictates of the West, and particularly at the behest of the hateful United States.

Any protection provided to these Christians is immediately classified as being based on the dictates of the West, and particularly at the behest of the hateful United States. Thus when foreign donors overtly come in support of the Christians and push the state and the government to protect them specifically, the Christians become more the target of these groups rather than less. We must push for larger and more general policies of democracy, transparent and accountable governance, and for extending the rights regimes in the country, protecting especially the rights of the most vulnerable groups like women, labor, minorities, brick kiln workers, etc., and only in this context bring about the issue of Christians. If support comes only in the name of Christians, which is our instinct even though not sufficient theologically and/or ethically, it becomes counter-productive for the state, rather than for the Jihadi groups who are the main culprits here.

What is particularly fascinating on today is that the traditional conservative and orthodox groups of yore are now equally threatened by the newer groups of fanatical jihadists. Under the contemporary circumstances, the appeal of the previous conservative elements is beginning to fade among the very people who were their mainstay but who are now being recruited in great numbers by the jihadists. Not only have the traditional groups lost great numbers of their workers and thus also the capacity to generate capital, which in itself is a threat to long term survival of their institutional structures, they are also deeply threatened if

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<sup>17</sup> The Constitution of Pakistan even in its latest version of 2007 states the following in Article 20:

**“20. Freedom to profess religion and to manage religious institutions.**

Subject to law, public order and morality:-

- (a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practise and propagate his religion; and
- (b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions.”



they raise any questions about the theological, spiritual, and religious validity of these contemporary fanatical jihadists. So the mainline conservative groups find themselves between the *Scylla* of aligning themselves with the state which they hated and following its statist policies, and the *Charybdis* of confronting, undermining, and subverting the new fanatical Jihadists who are challenging their right to continue to be the bearers of the Islamic mantle. The Jihadists see these traditional conservative Muslims as part of the state which has sold out the Islamic world and is the “kowtowing, leashed lapdog of the west,” because of the options they have taken in the war on terror. On the other hand the traditional conservative Muslims want to come across to the west as the moderate voice of Islam which hates radicalism, violence, terrorism, etc., in order to find succor and perhaps be on the winning side when final chips are down.

Their access to that part of the west is through the Churches. So they are willing to sit and talk with the Christians as they did with us including inviting us to their universities and be a part of their discussion groups. So they show cordial hospitality and friendship in the belief that they need to talk with Christian community in order to find a negotiator for building peace between the west and the Islamic world. However, despite their need, there still lies a deep-seated condescension towards the Pakistani Christians because a large majority come from what the Hindus classified as the unclean and untouchable classes (*dalit*). The prejudice of untouchability of the caste-based Hindu ethos remains a very strong operational residue in Indian and Pakistani Islam. It is applied particularly towards Christians, not only because of their origins, but rather because a large number among them are sweepers, etc., and belong to this untouchable class even today. So the very conservative Muslims who want to follow the puritanical rules of Islam and want to live out their lives in imitation of Muhammad, at this point become Hindu and will neither eat nor drink with even the biggest Christian leaders because they are impure. They cover this up by arguing that because Christians eat *haram* (forbidden and not pure) things like pigs, etc., they cannot share the same table. However, in fact the majority of Christians in Pakistan actually follow strict Jewish dietary laws based on the Old Testament (*vis-à-vis* what meat they eat and how the animal is butchered) and thus they are exactly like the Muslims and in fact find fault in the dietary practices of the western Christian.

So there is a fundamental paradox in Pakistani society *vis-à-vis* Christian-Muslim relations on cultural, social, and communitarian grounds. On the one hand, the Christians are all seen as being *dalits*, even more precisely *churas* (sweeper, a term applied pejoratively to the Christians as a real put down), and therefore totally irrelevant and of no consequence whatsoever. On the other hand, whenever something goes wrong between Islam and the West, the first people to feel the full brunt of reactions directly in some cases, but obliquely in every case, are the Christians who face the threat of mob violence against which the state is either unwilling or unable to protect them. On the Christian side, however, there is at times a hyperbolic and exaggerated assessment both in perception and in reporting on these acts. What happens as an intermittent reality becomes an ever-present sword of Damocles and the vociferous argument about the Islamic character of Pakistan does not help matters at all. But all these factors are then used by the Christian leadership as an excuse not to evolve, move forward, dream dreams, and seek out visions, of how, under these circumstances, the Christian community can and should survive both in its presence and witness. Thus the majority of the Christian leadership and people when talked to, feel the need to get out of the country and go to the West which is their “faith home.”

The biggest problem is that the state does not show the spine or the willingness to fight for a full blown democracy and extension of rights which will be the only way to secure religious freedoms as well as protection for religious minorities and their rights. The state should go all out for educational policies from grassroots to undergraduate levels, including teachers training, to extend the concepts of democracy and rights into the very core of the society. It should ensure the *madrassas* have a curriculum which reflects the virtue of good

citizenship and the virtue of being a good Muslim as a way to opening the society for the full participation of all. All the major institutions of the state such as the army, the bureaucracy, the civil servants, the police, etc., must undergo continuing education and formation with democracy and rights as the core value. The more this takes place and the more these issues become the soul of the society and the grammar of Pakistan, the more the most vulnerable elements of the society will be protected and secured. For, if everyone's rights are central and protected, the minorities' rights will also be automatically protected.

The intermittent lip service for the rights of the minorities, especially Christian minorities, acts only as a makeup to cover the huge non-democratic, non-participatory warts of Pakistan. Thus whenever this makeup begins to wear off, the warts manifest themselves in ever new pathologies, repressions and tyranny. The minorities, being the most vulnerable, are therefore also the most victimized under these circumstances. When I was the director of the Christian Study Centre from 1985-96, I did a lot of digging and research into the persecution of the minorities, and the establishment and growth of Islamisation in Pakistan. What became clear is that it takes a very small number of reprobates to start the ball rolling. Some of these people are authentically motivated by their religion, though it is equally clear that they do some very poor hermeneutic and have an ossified understanding of the moral, ethical and the good in the contemporary polis. Such people can be found in all religions and what is surprising is the growth in their number, commitment and rigidity. But then we also have those who ultimately have no real belief system but use religion cynically for their own ends, they use religious sophistry to convince the ordinary people that their cause is an authentic Islamic cause.

It must be remembered that where there is true respect for democracy and rights, the minorities get a special privileged status and privileged protections as a continuing affirmative action. Therefore all the minorities should struggle, and continue to struggle very hard, for democracy and rights for all Pakistanis, rather than seeming or appearing to do it in a solipsistic manner only for themselves with every new discrimination, victimization, and repression.

## **Strong Faith of Christians in Pakistan**

Rev. Michael Barseghyan

Deacon in the Armenian Orthodox Church (Holy See of Etchimidzin)

“Are there Christians in Pakistan” maybe this is a question, which often rises and gets the answer “Yes”. There are about 3 million Christians in Pakistan. It is incredible, but in Islamic Republic, there is a strong Christian Community. For Christians, especially in Pakistan, it is not easy to live with Muslims, who treat them as guests from West. It is hard to live in their own country as strangers. They have to struggle, to fight, to keep their faith every day, every hour, every minute.

After all these, there may appear a logical question “Why are they still Christians”. There is a simple response for this question, “They love Jesus, and they feel the presence of Christ in their own life”. In Pakistan, we saw people who lived in poverty, but who were rich spiritually. It is not only for Christians, but for Muslims too, because, we also saw very faithful people particularly among Muslim leaders. Christians here have to face with a Muslim fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, etc., but in spite of all dangers, they are powerful in their love for Jesus.

During our stay in that country, we visited a village near Lahore. People there do not have any bearable conditions to live. They live with domestic animals in the same rooms. Unfortunately, most of Christians there are very poor; they belong to the lowest class of society in Pakistan. Unbelievable, but the inhabitants of that same village met us with smile, with warm hospitality, children sang some English and Pakistani songs. They do not always have something to eat, but they made some cakes, tea for the guests. They survive in those intolerable circumstances. These people do not receive any support from the Pakistani Government; they are disregarded by all the Governmental organizations, and are not considered the part of population of Pakistan. Nobody pays any attention to these poor Christians. They have their own world with God. They hardly make both ends meet but they built a Church to glorify God by their own finance, they organized donations and built a God’s House. They do not want to live better, but they want to worship God in the best way they can.

The elders of one of the village families were working in the brick kiln factory. Though it was Sunday, they had to work, because Muslims’ holiday is on Friday, not on Sunday. We went there with our hosts by our car. It was quite far from the village. It is incredible, but every morning at 5 pm, they walk there. We visited them in winter, December, the weather was nice there, but in summer, they say it becomes hot like in hell.

Almost every day there is discrimination, persecution and violence against Christian, but nobody thinks to turn back from his Christian faith, His Christ and become a Muslim.

**They are not victims, but victors.**

## **Challenges for Young Christians in Pakistan in the 21st Century**

Henrik Hansson

Youth, and here we define youth as young adults, i.e. people in their late teens and upwards, in Pakistan share many challenges and difficulties with many other young people across the globe.

Now, while the vast majority of the youth we met and had a conversation with do share the not always positive experience of being a religious minority they did indeed belong to the middle class. That is, they have relatively good access to societal institutions such as education and health care which the majority of the Christian population does not have.

This can be considered one of the biggest lacks of this visit; we got little first hand exposure to how the lion's share of the Christian youth live their life. Thus, here we only elucidate the problems faced primarily by youth that are relatively well off.

### **Looking for a future abroad**

Due to discrimination and the instability of the country it was frequently repeated for us that moving abroad to fulfill ones dream is a very real possibility. However, we could also note a denominational difference here: while most Roman Catholic youth we talked to were decisive that they should stay supporting their community and work to improve the situation within the country the Protestant youth were more likely to express wishes to move abroad. Could a greater sense of community they get from the Roman Catholic Church in Pakistan at least partially explain this?

In addition to this, we were told by church official familiar with the situation, youth on the country side, especially in the north and east also face much physical insecurity due to the war like conditions in some areas. Of course, this will make most people even more eager to look for refuge outside the country.

### **Outward connections**

Even though the youth we met were frequently asked what they are doing in their spare time we did not really received a satisfying answer. It is clear that most youth have extensive contacts with believers of other faiths, primarily through the educational system but also sometimes as neighbors. However, these contacts did not seem to extend outside scheduled time. We concluded that this suggests that many youth in the Christian community do not voluntarily engage in relations with other groups and societal institutions. We also wondered if it also meant that some institutions also refrained from including Christians.

This isolation is also likely to further internalize the image being excluded from society into a self sustaining process further enhancing the problem.

## Relevant Publications by the WCC

Rev. Aart Verburg, M.Th.

To understand the importance of the human rights issue we need some background information about the context of the Pakistani people. Traumatic experiences in the – still recent – past very much determine how people experience deprivation of their human rights and human dignity.

In an article published in *Echoes*, Bishop Samuel Azariah who co-ordinated the visit of the Living Letters delegation, pictured the context of traumatic experiences of the Pakistani people. He mentioned the Partition of India and Pakistan (1947) and the massacre which followed. He wrote: “Religious hatred was whipped to frenzy by extremist forces on both sides, leaving wounds and scars that have yet to heal.” In the period general Zia-ul-Haq ruled the country “Nizam-e-Mustafa, the rule of the Prophet, was introduced. In the name of Islamising the social and judicial system discriminatory practices and policies against women and religious minorities were introduced, harsh and brutal punishments, including stoning to death and lashes for adultery, cutting of hands for theft, public lashing for drinking and a mandatory death sentence for blasphemy.”<sup>18</sup>

Another traumatic experience for religious minorities in Pakistan has been the system of separate electorates for the religious minorities during the periods of military rule. Clement John wrote about this in a travel report to the WCC: ‘According to this System, religious minorities could only vote for candidates of their own community for a few reserved seats in the Provincial and National Assemblies. They could not vote for Muslim candidates in general elections. The System based on the Islamic concept of "Zimmis" (second class citizens) segregated and discriminated against the religious minorities. It effectively cut them off from the mainstream of national life. The Churches, Christians and progressive Muslim organisations like the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan had waged a long struggle against this System that came to be known as "electoral apartheid"’.<sup>19</sup>

The World Council of Churches has repeatedly sent letters to the government of Pakistan calling for the repeal of the Blasphemy laws and the release of persons who were arrested based on allegations of blasphemy or protesting against these laws. The appeals reminded the government of both the Constitution of Pakistan and the words of the founding father of Pakistan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah. The WCC letter states:

“These developments are in violation of Article 36 of the Constitution of Pakistan that guarantees the legitimate rights and interests of the minorities. Despite the assurances given to religious minorities by Quaid-e-Azam, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, that "minorities are a sacred trust of Pakistan", their security is not protected and they continue to be victimised at the hands of unscrupulous sections of society. We have thus appealed to the Government of Pakistan to take immediate steps to repeal Section 295 C of the Pakistan Penal Code.”<sup>20</sup>

The WCC in 2003 also reported about the situation in Pakistan to the UNCHR.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Rt. Rev. Samuel Azariah, “The violence of religious intolerance” *Echoes* (Justice, Peace and Creation newsletter) 2000, <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/echoes/echoes-18-06.html>

<sup>19</sup> Clement John, “September 11th, it’s Implications for Pakistan and Afghanistan,” A Travel Report, 5 February 2002. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/analysis19.html>

<sup>20</sup> “World Council of Churches calls on Pakistan government to release Blasphemy Law protestors,” 15 January 2001, <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/press/01/01pu.html>

<sup>21</sup> “Pakistan: blasphemy laws ‘a source of victimization and persecution of minorities’” 14 April 2003, <http://www2.wcc-coe.org/pressreleasesen.nsf/index/pu-03-15.html>

In 2004 the WCC wrote a statement to the UNCHR about human rights and religious freedom. The situation in Pakistan was presented as one of the examples and pictured very clearly: ‘The government while paying lip service about its concern for the religious minority has done little to promote an environment of tolerance, understanding and pluralism in Pakistan society. It has failed to take any steps to control the projection of hate speech in the media, school curriculum and from religious platforms. This has resulted in attacks and killing of Christians, particularly in the rural areas. Forcible conversion of Christians, particularly young girls, is also on the rise’.<sup>22</sup> The WCC does not only refer to the position of Christians in Pakistan. They also mention other religious minorities like Hindus and especially the Ahmedis.

In 2006 the WCC drew attention to the situation of the judges, sacked by the government of president General Musharraf. “Rule of law is absent in the country. The legal justice system is paralyzed due to the lack of independence of the judiciary and dismissal of the chief justice and other judges. The country-wide judicial crisis has caused a major setback and paralysis of governance, which has in turn affected all areas of life. Arbitrary arrests, detentions and ill-treatment of lawyers; keeping judges and lawyers in continuous detention; and the use of force against protesting lawyers exemplify the fact that the present government has not been committed to resolving the judicial crisis.” The same statement mentions a positive development of co-operation of churches and faith communities in responding to the deteriorating situation of human rights in Pakistan. It also calls upon faith communities and other civil society organizations to respond to the challenges posed by forces which destroy God’s gift of life. There is not a strong call for co-operation between faith communities and other civil society organizations but at least it is suggested that they should do so.<sup>23</sup>

In February 2008 the central committee of the World Council of Churches issued a “Statement on the Crisis in Pakistan” In it, among others the WCC makes the following affirmations:

- expresses its solidarity with the suffering people of Pakistan, especially all those who are bereaved on the loss of their family members;
- expresses its deep concern at the deteriorating situation which destroys peace and security and increases conflicts and violence in Pakistani society;
- expresses its condolences to the Bhutto family and the people of Pakistan on the assassination of Mrs. Benazir Bhutto (end 2007);
- welcomes the election recently concluded in Pakistan and encourages the strengthening and developing of democratic processes in the country;
- calls for restoration of democracy, civil rights and rule of law in Pakistan, and urges the government of Pakistan to release all political prisoners and human rights activists.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Written statement submitted by the Commission of Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches: Civil and political rights including the question of religious intolerance” to the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) 60TH Session March/April, 2004

<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/humrts-unchr2004-submission11.html>

<sup>23</sup> “Joint written statement at the UN Commission on Human Rights’ 62nd Session, Item 10: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 13 March-21 April, 2006

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/international-affairs/human-rights-and-impunity/the-right-to-education-in-pakistan.html>

<sup>24</sup> “Statement on the Crisis in Pakistan,” a statement by Central Committee of the WCC, February 2008:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2008/reports-and-documents/public-issues/statement-on-the-crisis-in-pakistan.html>

In May 2008 a team of the WCC program for accompaniment of Churches in situations of conflict visited Pakistan. From meetings with secular leaders (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, professors and other representatives of civil society) we learned how deeply the disease of intolerance infected the Pakistani society. Christians, clergy and lay people reported on how easy it is to accuse Christians of blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed or the holy Koran. Particularly in rural areas mob-justice seems to prevail over law-enforcement and justice. There were stories about rape, abduction of women, forced marriages and prostitution as the only choice after a divorce.

In the field of education the most disturbing elements were: the curriculum for religious education as prescribed by the government leaving no space for Christian religious education whereas Christian children have to read books talking about we, the Pakistani people, are a Muslim people. Sometimes Christian children are discriminated at state schools. The report of the exploratory visit team proved to be very useful as a preparation for the Living Letters delegation's visit in November 2008.

As a temporary conclusion we can say that the WCC has paid a great deal of attention to the difficult situation of Christians and other minorities in Pakistan concerning basic human rights. The WCC has taken many initiatives to lobby on behalf of Pakistani Christians. In the deteriorating situation over the last decade the WCC has encouraged its member churches and Christians to pray for and show solidarity with the churches in Pakistan.

### **Post Script:**

At its meeting in August/September 2009, the Central Committee of the WCC issued another "Statement on the misuse of the Blasphemy Law and the security of religious minorities in Pakistan."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "Statement on the misuse of the Blasphemy Law and the security of religious minorities in Pakistan"  
<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2009/reports-and-documents/report-on-public-issues/statement-on-the-misuse-of-the-blasphemy-law-and-the-security-of-religious-minorities-in-pakistan.html>

## Recommendations and Conclusion

Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana

At the end of the visit, the delegation offered the following remarks and recommendations.

The Living Letters delegation having seen the tremendous struggles that Christians of Pakistan were engaged in strongly affirmed that their faith is the hope of the church. They suggested that the churches of the WCC intentionally recognize the “precious gift” of the church in Pakistan, its perseverance in faith, through struggles and challenges.

It recommends that the ecumenical community

a. learn from the church in Pakistan

- about being a Christian minority
- about being Christian in the context of Islam
- about building coalitions with other minority religions

b. find ways to express solidarity with the church in Pakistan by

- asking the church of Pakistan about how they want other churches to be engaged in solidarity
- finding ways to publicize the situation in Pakistan among the churches

c. engage in well-informed prayer by

- facilitating communication between churches in Pakistan and other churches around the world.
- providing resources for churches to learn about the geo-political context of Pakistan

The delegation understands that the problems facing the church of Pakistan are multi-faceted and multi-layered and that these do not have easy solutions. It recognizes, however, that if one item is to be highlighted, it is that in Pakistan there has been a steady shrinkage of “democratic space.” This situation leads to the difficulties that NGOs, civil society organizations, religious communities and people’s movements face in pressing for the strengthening of human rights in the legal system, the just enforcement of laws, the political engagement of people, and religious freedom. Even though attempts to increase democratic space will lead to resistance because it will reduce the capacity of the political, military and feudal establishments to control people, the team stresses that this is an important priority in ongoing work of accompanying the churches of Pakistan.

The delegation noticed with some dismay that Christians and Churches do not cooperate more closely with each other or with other civil society organisations on the question of human rights. The delegation urges that a firm concerted ecumenical effort be initiated that has the capacity to be a stronger ally in the co-operation with secular organisations working on the improvement of the human rights situation.

The delegation noted that the predominant approach that the churches both in Pakistan and in the ecumenical community tend to use is a downstream approach, which emphasizes the responsibility of state or international organisations such as the UNCHR, trusting that by appealing for implementation of the law, followed by monitoring and eventually law enforcement, human rights can be achieved. There is also an upstream approach, which starts by acknowledging the people’s own efforts to protect their basic human dignity, and organizes those people movements in order to maximize their power. This



approach offers them a new opportunity to face challenges in their daily lives to find protection against all abuse of power and to acquire the fundamental freedoms and basic entitlements that follow from respect for everyone's basic human dignity. The team believes that the human rights situation in Pakistan needs both approaches, but since the downstream approach has been already developed that it should now focus on developing an upstream approach.

The delegation is encouraged that the programme of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation's initiative on Accompanying Churches in Situations of Conflict has identified Pakistan among the countries in which it will engage, and hopes that this accompaniment begun by the Living Letters delegation can be continued in Pakistan through that programme.

The delegation is enormously grateful to the Christians of Pakistan whose faith in the face of grave adversity is a source of great encouragement. They express an enormous sense of gratitude to God for grace beyond measure that they experienced in the lives of Pakistani Christians, and offers the following prayer together with St. Paul who wrote the same to the church in Corinth:

*He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us..... Through the testing of this ministry you will glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

(2 Corinthians 9:10-11, 13)