Christian-Muslim Relations in Pakistan

Mahan Mirza, Yale University

The following lecture was given in Professor Jane Smiths’ “Essentials of Christian-Muslim Relations” class in the summer of 2002.

Introduction: The Need for Historical Perspective

It has been wisely said that if you don’t know where you have been, then you don’t know where you are; and if you don’t know where you are, then it is not possible to know where you’re going. Finally, if you don’t know where you’re going, then you will never know when you get there! This is specifically relevant to the population of Pakistan, a diverse group of people that have been lumped together on the basis of a religious ideology that has yet to establish itself as a stable and viable system of life. For example, in 1835 Lord Macaulay stated that,

[T]he British needed to create an elite group of Indians who would be like the British in their tastes, morals and intellect and who would in turn help rule the natives on behalf of the white man. [3]

Lord Macaulay was then a member of the Supreme Council of India and was responsible for carrying out sweeping educational reforms. The questions that such a statement elicits are many, and one can imagine a complex set of problems that would arise as a consequence of such a policy. Sadly, these consequences are before our eyes as we look at the situation in Pakistan today.

One often tends to look at the realities of the Muslim world today in some sort of historical vacuum. Today, I would like to challenge us to make an effort to go beyond looking at the history of the “other” in such a vacuum, and to be a little bit more self critical, with the full understanding that we are very much active participants in the shaping of this history and, therefore, share responsibility for some of the contemporary horrors that it is making us confront. I had hoped to begin my talk with some detail about the history of the expansion of Islam and its development, particularly in the Indian sub-continent. Unfortunately, I am not going to able to do that, both because of time constraints and because of my own lack of knowledge of any depth of my own history (Lord Macaulay succeeded!).

I am therefore limiting myself to the more recent history of the past several hundred years or so. I feel that at least this much contextualization is necessary, for without that it is impossible to understand in any mature and honest way the myriad of impulses that shape life and opinions in Pakistan – impulses that have a direct bearing on the place of minorities, particularly Christians, for the purposes of our discussion.

I am both delighted and honored to be here today, both as a student of Professor Jane Smith and as an affiliate of this institution. One doesn’t have to look very closely at world events to realize that Muslims are in a great deal of trouble today, and for those of us concerned with the general welfare of peoples as communities of believers, as I am, it is good to have friends.

I propose to discuss the topic of Christian-Muslim Relations in Pakistan under three distinct headings:

1. The intellectual challenge of modernity and Muslim responses in India.
2. The impulses of the Pakistan Movement.
3. The concerns of minorities (especially Christians) in Pakistan in the intellectual, religious and political environment of today.

Modernity and Muslim Responses

It is said in Muslim theology that one day for God is like a thousand years on earth. According to the Qur’an,
He governs all that exists, from the celestial space to the earth; and then these (affairs) ascend unto him in a day the length of which is like a thousand years of your reckoning. (Qur'an 32:5)

On the basis of this verse, it was deemed by some during the time of the Moghal emperor Akbar the Great, as the first millennium of Islam was drawing to a close and the second was beginning, that the days of Islam were over. Islam had lived its life, Akbar reasoned, and it was time for a new religion. He then solicited some leading Muslim scholars in order to concoct a new religion, called “Deen-i-Ilaahi,” which was a hodgepodge of the religions of India, for all peoples. Because Islam in India, at least in its ‘religious’ if not its ‘political’ aspects, had spread through the teachings of great mystic or ‘Sufi’ shaykhs, the leap was not altogether great. Mysticism has a tendency to focus on inner experience and can tend to compromise the rules and regulations that are to govern a believer’s life.

Interestingly, there is also a tradition, or hadith, of the Prophet that indicates that every one hundred years there will arise from the ummah, or religious community of the Muslims, a person who will renew the faith — called a mujaddid. In the face of the challenge of Akbar’s “Deen-i-Ilaahi” there arose a person who is remembered as “mujaddid al-fith,” or the renewer of the millennium. His name was Ahmad Sirhindi, and he is said to have begun the process of reviving the importance of the sunnah of the Prophet. Others followed, such as Shah Wali Allah and his progeny. Shah Wali Allah is sometimes called the father of modern Muslim thought, especially in the subcontinent. He is the first to have translated the Qur’an into Persian. As a result, the grip of a select group of people over religious teachings began to diminish. Furthermore, he insisted on moving out of the confines of taqlid, or blind following of religion, as had become the norm, in favor of more independent thinking (ijtihad). He was followed by great people such as Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi, and later by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Mahmood Hassan, Muhammad Iqbal, Mawlana Ilyas, Abul Kalam Azad, and Abul Ala Mawdudi. Many of these people are founders of movements such as the Tablighi Jamaat and the Jamaat-i-Islami, or institutions such as the Anglo Mohamaden Oriental College and Deoband. For this reason, it has been justifiably said that, “the intellectual and spiritual center of gravity shifted from the Arab world to the Indian subcontinent in the second millennium of Islam.”

Now, let us remember that this “Islamic revival” was taking place in a very complex environment. Firstly, it was in the face of a rising European or Western civilization with a ‘modern’ set of values. It was taking place at the same time that a liberal and Western educated elite was consciously being produced to run the country. It was also taking place during the turmoil of the first and second world wars, the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, and, ultimately, the development of nationalism and movements to de-colonize much of the Muslim world from European occupation.

It has been rightly surmised that the West, even more than a political and economic challenge to the Muslim world, should have been thought of as an intellectual challenge. Israr Ahmad, a contemporary activist-thinker, identifies three major intellectual responses that Muslims have made to this Western onslaught in the Indian subcontinent. The first can be dubbed “the seven sleepers” response. This was, in essence, less a response than a retreat. In the face of Western thought, the traditional class of ulama decided to ignore everything that was happening around them and stick to their centuries old curriculum of Islamic studies in religious institutions. These folks had nothing to do with science, the English language, or the problems that the European “Enlightenment” posed to religious thought. The second response can be called the “modernist” response. This response was one of an apology, in which an attempt was made to mold Islam according to the basic features of Western thought and ideas. The third response has been the “revivalist” response. According to revivalists, Islam provides a complete way of life, just as the West claimed to offer. Islam has its own system of politics, economics, and social values. True, perhaps these distinctions are clearer as we read back into history than they could have been at the time they were emerging, as is probably the case with most historical phenomena. Yet, if we combine these three Muslim responses with a fourth — namely the products of the vision of Macaulay — we have an interesting recipe for movement that brought into being the state of Pakistan.

The Pakistan Movement

The Pakistan Movement took shape in the early part of the twentieth century. Although the vision of Pakistan was first given by Muhammad Iqbal in 1930 during his famous address at Allahabad, it was clear long before then that there was a Hindu-Muslim disharmony that could not be ignored forever. Muslims had been rulers over a large part of the sub-continent for about 800 years. In the words of the Queen of Sheba, which have been recorded in the Qur’an, whenever kings enter a country they corrupt it, and turn the noblest of its people into the most abject. (Qur’an 27:34)
After the war of independence (remembered also as the war of mutiny, depending on whose history you read), in which Muslims and Hindus fought side-by-side against the British, the two major indigenous groups in India continued to struggle together for a free and ‘united’ homeland, as opposed to the divided India that exists today. Gradually, the Muslims felt marginalized in the new arrangement. With a conscious adoption of the democratic way of politics, the former rulers of India found themselves at a decisive disadvantage; after ruling for 800 years, they had become a minority.

Ultimately, the “two nation theory” emerged, which stated that Muslims and Hindus could not live together because they had different ways of life. Thus, a movement for a separate nation called Pakistan took shape, focusing on “Islam” as the basis for Muslim unity. Unlike other nationalisms that have emerged in other places of the world in the struggle for freedom, such as Turkic, Arab, and Malay nationalism, etc., the Muslims of India were of different ethnicities, languages and cultures, united only by the slogan of Islam.

A look at this struggle from a closer perspective reveals some very interesting things. The most active elements for the freedom struggle were the intellectuals who had been reared in the colonizer’s intellectual traditions, most notably the founding father of Pakistan – Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The revivalists, particularly Abul Ala Mawdudi’s group, remained neutral. They keenly identified that the struggle was not in the highest principles of Islamic teachings, which is not nationalistic but “idealistic.” The classical scholars, too, were divided, some joining the Pakistan struggle, others favoring a united India. The leadership, however, remained largely secular in outlook and practice, at the same time appealing to popular Islamic sentiments as a way to rally the people.

When Pakistan was ultimately founded on August 14, 1947, the revivalists and some traditionalists threw in their chips in favor of the new homeland for Muslims. It was formed with the slogan, Pakistan ka matlab kya, la ilaha ila Allah, meaning, “What is the meaning of Pakistan? There is no God but Allah!” (The cry rhymes in Urdu). It was even said by some of the former groups who were working for a united India that “there can be a difference of opinion in where and when a mosque is to be established, but once it is made, then it is the duty of all to strengthen and protect it.”

Now the founding parties, the secular modernists, had to deliver the goods – an Islamic state. They had rallied the people in the name of Islam and now they had to establish Islamic laws. The religious elements were quick to capitalize on the euphoria over Muslim nationalism and tried to convert it into enthusiasm for ‘true’ and ‘pristine’ Islam. The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World suggests the dilemma that the country would face in this quote from the founding father in his August 15 address.

In the speech which Jinnah had just made to the Assembly, he had emphasized that in the state of Pakistan religion was to be a private matter. Within a year popular protests had forced the leaders to change track. The precise role which Islam should play in public life has since been a major feature of political discourse.

The landmark event that took place shortly after the founding of Pakistan was the approval of the Objectives Resolution. All of the various religious factions, including the Shi’ites, were united in the approval of this resolution. The points in the resolution were designed to govern any constitution that would be written. Briefly put, these points were that (1) sovereignty belongs to God, not the people, and (2) no law shall be framed that is repugnant to the Qur’an and Sunnah.

All this history has led optimistic Islamists to believe that the future of Islamic revival is destined to commence from this part of the world. Since its formation, Pakistan has had several different constitutions, three wars and the repetitive institution of martial law by the army. Twice, the same prime ministers have returned to power after being sacked for corruption. Such has been the tumultuous saga of this young and idealistic nation. All of this is relevant, in fact essential, in appreciating the kind of environment faced by religious minorities in Pakistan.

Before moving to the current state of minorities, another landmark event must be mentioned. This is the coup d'état of Ziaul Haq, his eleven years in power from 1977-88, and the more or less concurrent war in Afghanistan with the Soviet Union. This was a period in which a process of so-called Islamization took place in Pakistan, including the introduction of the shari’a courts and blasphemy law. Also, it was a period in which the ‘seven sleepers’ were awakened by – you guessed it – Uncle Sam, and rallied for Jihad against the invading Russians. When this agenda was wrapped up, the Americans conveniently left, leaving a ravaged nation, with well-trained “mujahideen” in search of lost causes. There was no shortage of causes. They went to Kashmir, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Checheniya, and, as
we see now, the chickens came home to roost in America as well. Needless to say, they are all over the place in Pakistan.

The Situation Today and the Concerns of Minorities

Minorities in Pakistan comprise four percent or less of the population, most of them being Christians and Hindus. There are many prominent Christian institutions in Pakistan. My mother attended St. Lawrence’s convent in Karachi, which was run by nuns. My cousins have attended St. Joseph’s convent, and friends went to school in the convent of Jesus and Mary in Peshawar. My mother still remembers the prayer they said in the mornings, and many poor people being converted to Christianity.

A description of the Christian community comes from the pen of Dr. Robert Bütler, a Jesuit who served in Pakistan from 1961-86:

A minority of about 1.5% of the total population, they [the Christians] do not seem to count for anything from the point of view of intellectual confrontation. Nine-tenths or more of them indeed are a downtrodden class of sweepers, servants, farm or industrial workers, and what is more are looked down upon with feelings of caste superiority. Un-Islamic as they may be, these feelings are a hard fact and, although not exactly structured as in Hinduism, are probably an inheritance from age-long intercourse with the Hindus. As for the remaining middle-class Christians, they belong mostly to the community of the Goans, and Anglo-Indians with a sprinkling of Punjabis, often Protestants, in some cases pre-Partition converts from Islam. For the last few years they have shown a sharp trend towards emigration. Engaged as many of them are in business or social relations with the Muslims, they either are Westernized and as such not considered different from the foreign Christians, or do not have a sufficient Pakistani cultural background to strike a Christian note of their own. This basic weakness of the local Christians thus results in their almost complete absence from a role of valid partnership in discussion with the Muslims at the intellectual level. In the latters’ view Christianity is thus solely represented by the West. [vi]

As for the circumstances faced by minorities, I think it is best to hear from them directly, rather than give myself the right to speak on their behalf. For this, I have consulted some articles from the Journal Al-Mushir, which is published by the Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi Pakistan. In this part of my presentation, I will focus on two papers from Al-Mushir.

“From Dialogue of Minds to Dialogue of Hearts” [vi]

In his useful article with this title, Dominic Moghal, currently head of the Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi, talks a little about the history of the Christian Study Circle and its three stages of evolution. The Committee for the Study of Religion and the National Council of Churches saw the vision for the Center early in 1951. This was a period when the word “dialogue” was undergoing change and redefinition within the Christian environment, under a movement that began last century that called for a new relationship between the church and the Third World. With this in mind, the Christian Study Center was established in 1967, and the first period of dialogue within Pakistan began, the so-called “dialogue of the mind.” This was a period in which the Study Center was seeking self-definition, dominated by a foreign presence in the staff, searching for an indigenous Pakistani identity, and working with the different denominations for advancing the vision of dialogue, not for conversion but for mutual understanding and respect. It was an all male staff. Because the center was run by mostly expatriate staff, it was dubbed, “the American Center”! The period lasted from 1967-1985.

In 1985, with the arrival of Dr. Charles and Christine Amjad Ali, there was, according to Moghal, significant headway in the right direction. This second era of dialogue he calls the “dialogue of life,” because it brings the process to the ground realities of the dialoguing communities. The Center had a revised purpose and a new understanding of dialogue. It courageously moved beyond traditional watered-down approaches towards more bold and realistic ones. The following quote from Dr. Amjad Ali is worth highlighting:

The kind of dialogue that I think we need to develop, and indeed that our encounter with Islam forces us to develop, is somewhat different from all these. Briefly, I understand dialogue as a process of discourse in which the communities involved go through their own respective logos to come up to some common understanding of certain social and political problems. In the achievement of this common understanding, this very logos through which one proceeded into the dialogue in the first place itself undergoes changes. If this definition of dialogue is accepted then the opposite of dialogue is not monologue but metalogue, which means achieving a transcendent reason through escaping or overcoming the prejudices of one’s own logos. Because of the enlightenment heritage of our theology, when we have
Major Issues Confronting Religious Minorities in Pakistan, especially Christians

In another article co-authored by Dominic Moghal and Jennifer Jag Jivan, the following issues are highlighted as major concerns for minorities in Pakistan. I will just mention them here briefly to give you an idea of the multitude of issues that confront minorities in Pakistan. Bear in mind that the common person in general in Pakistan has little to look forward to in life, so the situation for minorities must be much more painful.

The first is the issue of a separate electorate. Since its inception the nation has been divided into two camps of voters, Muslim and non-Muslim. Non-Muslims have separate seats and can be elected only to this certain number of seats. Moghol and Jivan argue that this requirement has cut Christians and minorities off from mainstream politics and has turned them into second-class citizens. It has damaged their sense of belonging as full citizens of Pakistan. Although the minority population is spread out all over the country, it tends to be concentrated in certain areas, making the remote areas under-represented or all not represented at all.

The second issue is the controversial blasphemy law. According to this law, someone who is convicted of making derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) may be sentenced to life in prison or even to death. The problems of bribery and corruption and the passions of an illiterate society preclude the opportunities for a fair trial even for the poor Muslim masses, let alone poor minorities who have no way of protecting themselves from false or impulsive accusations.

The third concern is that of legal rights. In normative interpretations of Islamic law, non-Muslims cannot give any testimony in cases involving hadd (common law with divinely defined punishment). The law also requires two women witnesses to equal the testimony of one man (for Muslims and non-Muslims alike). In the law of qisas (retaliation), non-Muslim testimony is accepted only if the accused is also a non-Muslim. These laws, although part of an interpretation of Islamic law, can be interpreted to be counter to the norms of human rights and pluralism that are being advocated the world over.

The fourth concern is that of conversion, which raises a number of issues. When minor children convert to Islam, for example, it is possible, as was ruled in one magisterial decision, that they can be taken from the custody of their Christian parents and placed in Muslim families.

The fifth major concern has to do with education. Students in grade school must take Islamic studies as a mandatory subject. While at an earlier time non-Muslim students were allowed to elect exams in their own traditions, this option
was withdrawn in 1962. Certain biases in the syllabus hamper the growth of a pluralistic society. According to the article, "the curriculum seems to

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The British needed to create an elite group of Indians who would be like the British in their tastes, morals and intellect and who would in turn help rule the natives on behalf of the white man. [1]

Lord Macaulay was then a member of the Supreme Council of India and was responsible for carrying out sweeping educational reforms. The questions that such a statement elicits are many, and one can imagine a complex set of problems that would arise as a consequence of such a policy. Sadly, these consequences are before our eyes as we look at the situation in Pakistan today.

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Now, let us remember that this “Islamic revival” was taking place in a very complex environment. Firstly, it was in the face of a rising European or Western civilization with a modern set of values. It was taking place at the same time that a liberal and Western educated elite was consciously being produced to run the country. It was also taking place during the turmoil of the first and second world wars, the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, and, ultimately, the development of nationalism and movements to de-colonize much of the Muslim world from European occupation.

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The Pakistan Movement

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A look at this struggle from a closer perspective reveals some very interesting things. The most active elements for the freedom struggle were the intellectuals who had been reared in the colonizer’s intellectual traditions, most notably the founding father of Pakistan – Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The revivalists, particularly Abul Ala Mawdudi’s group, remained neutral. They keenly identified that the struggle was not in the highest principles of Islamic teachings, which is not nationalistic but “idealist.” The classical scholars, too, were divided, some joining the Pakistan struggle, others favoring a united India. The leadership, however, remained largely secular in outlook and practice, at the same time appealing to popular Islamic sentiments as a way to rally the people.

When Pakistan was ultimately founded on August 14, 1947, the revivalists and some traditionalists threw in their chips in favor of the new homeland for Muslims. It was formed with the slogan, Pakistan ka matlab kya, la ilaha illa Allah, meaning, “What is the meaning of Pakistan? There is no God but Allah!” (The cry rhymes in Urdu). It was even said by some of the former groups who were working for a united India that “there can be a difference of opinion in where and when a mosque is to be established, but once it is made, then it is the duty of all to strengthen and protect it.”

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A description of the Christian community comes from the pen of Dr. Robert Bütler, a Jesuit who served in Pakistan from 1961-86:

A minority of about 1.5% of the total population, they [the Christians] do not seem to count for anything from the point of view of intellectual confrontation. Nine-tenths or more of them indeed are a downtrodden class of sweepers, servants, farm or industrial workers, and what is more are looked down upon with feelings of caste superiority. Un-Islamic as they may be, these feelings are a hard fact and, although not exactly structured as in Hinduism, are probably an inheritance from age-long intercourse with the Hindus. As for the remaining middle-class Christians, they belong mostly to the community of the Goans, and Anglo-Indians with a sprinkling of Punjabis, often Protestants, in some cases pre-Partition converts from Islam. For the last few years they have shown a sharp trend towards emigration. Engaged as many of them are in business or social relations with the Muslims, they either are Westernized and as such not considered different from the foreign Christians, or do not have a sufficient Pakistani cultural background to strike a Christian note of their own. This basic weakness of the local Christians thus results in their almost complete absence from a role of valid partnership in discussion with the Muslims at the intellectual level. In the latter's view Christianity is thus solely represented by the West.

As for the circumstances faced by minorities, I think it is best to hear from them directly, rather than give myself the right to speak on their behalf. For this, I have consulted some articles from the Journal Al-Mushir, which is published by the Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi Pakistan. In this part of my presentation, I will focus on two papers from Al-Mushir.

“From Dialogue of Minds to Dialogue of Hearts”

In his useful article with this title, Dominic Moghal, currently head of the Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi, talks a little about the history of the Christian Study Circle and its three stages of evolution. The Committee for the Study of Religion and the National Council of Churches saw the vision for the Center early in 1951. This was a period when the word “dialogue” was undergoing change and redefinition within the Christian environment, under a movement that began last century that called for a new relationship between the church and the Third World. With this in mind, the Christian Study Center was established in 1967, and the first period of dialogue within Pakistan began, the so-called “dialogue of the mind.” This was a period in which the Study Center was seeking self-definition, dominated by a foreign presence in the staff, searching for an indigenous Pakistani identity, and working with the different denominations for advancing the vision of dialogue, not for conversion but for mutual understanding and respect. It was an all male staff. Because the center was run by mostly expatriate staff, it was dubbed, “the American Center”!


In 1985, with the arrival of Dr. Charles and Christine Amjad Ali, there was, according to Moghal, significant headway in the right direction. This second era of dialogue he calls the “dialogue of life,” because it brings the process to the ground realities of the dialoguing communities. The Center had a revised purpose and a new understanding of dialogue. It courageously moved beyond traditional watered-down approaches towards more bold and realistic ones. The following quote from Dr. Amjad Ali is worth highlighting:

The kind of dialogue that I think we need to develop, and indeed that our encounter with Islam forces us to develop, is somewhat different from all these. Briefly, I understand dialogue as a process of discourse in which the communities involved go through their own respective logos to come up to some common understanding of certain social and political problems. In the achievement of this common understanding, this very logos through which one proceeded into the dialogue in the first place itself undergoes changes. If this definition of dialogue is accepted then the opposite of dialogue is not monologue but metalogue, which means achieving a transcendent reason through escaping or overcoming the prejudices of one’s own logos. Because of the enlightenment heritage of our theology, when we have entered into dialogue with people of other faith we have ended up with a metalogical position, i.e. either looking for easy commonalities or looking for a way beyond the particularities of the dialogical partners. In both cases the logos of dialogical partners which constitutes their particularity and identity is negated. Thus, in our dialogue we
end up also negating the centrality of their particular logos as that which provides meaning and significance for a people, including Christians. This period of dialogue lasted until 1995, when the third era which fostered what was called the “dialogue of hearts” began.

This period came with a conscious understanding that the partners in dialogue on both sides are mainly secular or non-religious members of the two communities. The lack of “believers” in the dialogue has been termed a major hindrance in the process. Another problem that Moghal identifies is the fact that Pakistani Muslims in general identify all Christians with the West, in the same way that Americans often associate all Muslims with Arabs and the conflicts in the Middle East. Moghal raises critical questions about the Christian identity in Asia. “Do Asian Christians have the same view of Islam as conceived by the West?” He says that Christians living in Asia have also suffered at the hands of the West the same way that Muslims have suffered. The realities of colonization, new-colonization and now globalization are as much an attack on Christians as they are on Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. Moghal concludes, in light of this discussion, I would like to conclude that if the Churches are sincere about genuine Christian-Muslim relations, they have to work very hard in creating those visible symbols which will show the world that Christianity and Christendom are not synonymous. In fact they are contradictory and therefore any political and economic agenda of the West is not a Christian agenda at all. The question arises then. What is the Christian agenda?

From this it is clear that Christian Muslim relations in Pakistan cannot at be studied in isolation, but are very much connected to international affairs and politics.

Major Issues Confronting Religious Minorities in Pakistan, especially Christians

In another article co-authored by Dominic Moghal and Jennifer Jag Jivan, the following issues are highlighted as major concerns for minorities in Pakistan. I will just mention them here briefly to give you an idea of the multitude of issues that confront minorities in Pakistan. Bear in mind that the common person in general in Pakistan has little to look forward to in life, so the situation for minorities must be much more painful.

The first is the issue of a separate electorate. Since its inception the nation has been divided into two camps of voters, Muslim and non-Muslim. Non-Muslims have separate seats and can be elected only to this certain number of seats. Moghul and Jivan argue that this requirement has cut Christians and minorities off from mainstream politics and has turned them into second-class citizens. It has damaged their sense of belonging as full citizens of Pakistan. Although the minority population is spread out all over the country, it tends to be concentrated in certain areas, making the remote areas under-represented or all not represented at all.

The second issue is the controversial blasphemy law. According to this law, someone who is convicted of making derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) may be sentenced to life in prison or even to death. The problems of bribery and corruption and the passions of an illiterate society preclude the opportunities for a fair trial even for the poor Muslim masses, let alone poor minorities who have no way of protecting themselves from false or impulsive accusations.

The third concern is that of legal rights. In normative interpretations of Islamic law, non-Muslims cannot give any testimony in cases involving hadd (common law with divinely defined punishment). The law also requires two women witnesses to equal the testimony of one man (for Muslims and non-Muslims alike). In the law of qisas (retaliation), non-Muslim testimony is accepted only if the accused is also a non-Muslim. These laws, although part of an interpretation of Islamic law, can be interpreted to be counter to the norms of human rights and pluralism that are being advocated the world over.

The fourth concern is that of conversion, which raises a number of issues. When minor children convert to Islam, for example, it is possible, as was ruled in one magisterial decision, that they can be taken from the custody of their Christian parents and placed in Muslim families.

The fifth major concern has to do with education. Students in grade school must take Islamic studies as a mandatory subject. While at an earlier time non-Muslim students were allowed to elect exams in their own traditions, this option was withdrawn in 1962. Certain biases in the syllabus hamper the growth of a pluralistic society. According to the article, “the curriculum seems to encourage Islamization of non-Muslims.” It continues,
Be it remembered that in 1985 a Federal Cabinet Committee which consisted of all minority representatives along with the Federal and Provincial Government members came to a consensus and suggested that matric students i.e., of classes IX and X be examined in their own religions, whereas intermediate students should be examined in common moral values and in the rights and obligations of minorities in an Islamic state, while graduate students be examined in the History of Religions. However, it is a strange fact that despite the approval of all the four provinces by early June of 1985 itself, the Federal Government to date has yet to implement this consensus made by all the minorities and the approval of all the four provinces\[xiii\].

Further concerns are for the equitable and fair distribution of zakat, establishing a just quota system for employment, protection of church and mission property, crimes against women, and the need of land for burial.

**Conclusion**

Pakistan is an experiment. It is also a nuclear power, which continues to attract the interest of major players in the global arena. Revivalists or so-called Islamists believe that Pakistan’s creation and history make it destined to be the place where a true and modern Islam will be revived. Secular modern leaders trained in Western institutions, however, strongly disagree. They believe that Pakistan must struggle to detach itself from this legacy, despite it being the reason for its creation in the first place, in an attempt to march ahead with the family of a progressive modern world at a macro level.

One can see how difficult it is to be a minority citizen in a Third World country that is an experiment for establishing Islam in the modern world of conspiracies, terrorism, and the struggle for global domination of resources. It certainly presents an interesting study indeed. Where does the dialogue go from here, as Christians strive to detach themselves from the “Christian” West that they too consider to be far short of any possible ideal? Let’s see how Dominic Moghal answers his own question:

What is the Christian agenda? This leads me to my second point. The Church in Asia has to rediscover its prophetic role among the suffering Humanity of Asia. As statistics show, the vast 53% of the people in Asia are Muslims. Therefore, the Church has to work out a plan of action where the Muslim majority of Asia is not threatened by the “mission” agenda of the Church but rather sees the Church as a Prophet who confirms life in the face of death. The same has to come from the Muslim brothers and sisters. As we look at the devastating realities of Asia today let us join hands by engaging in a Dialogue of Heart, i.e. mutual respect for each other’s religion and affirm life in the face of death in Asia. The harmful challenge of globalization is forcing believers of all religions to raise their voice for justice, peace and integrity of creation.\[xiv\]

With this spirit of hope, let us conclude on a positive note by commenting on an article by Ralph Brainbatti about Justice Cornelius. Cornelius, a devout Catholic, served on Pakistan’s supreme court from 1951-1969, and was chief justice from 1960-1968. The article is based on the first chapter of an entire book written about him. I will close by giving this excerpt from the abstract, which seems to me to strike a positive note and give some hope for the future:

Cornelius developed a profound admiration for Islam that deepened towards the end of his life…he synthesized Christian and Islamic values through the medium of natural law. This synthesis is a case study in the compatibility of Islam and Christianity developed not on theological grounds but within the context of jurisprudence. It negates the contention that Islam and the West are necessarily at odds and that their interaction will result in a ‘clash of civilizations.’\[xv\]

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[\[iv\]] See Qur’an


[\[viii\]] Article, p. 19-20.

[\[ix\]] Ibid, p. 20.

[\[x\]] Ibid, p. 22.


[\[xii\]] Ibid, p. 73.

[\[xiii\]] Ibid, p. 83.

[\[xiv\]] Ibid, p. 83.

[\[xv\]] Moghal, Dialogue of Hearts, p. 22.

[\[xvi\]] Braibanti, p. 117.