

Christian Persecution in Pakistan
An Examination of Life in the Midst of Violence

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Abstract

As a nation founded on religious freedom, it is the duty of the United States to recognize those who stand up for these beliefs across the world in solidarity. International persecution of Christians has dramatically increased due to the spread of radical Islam throughout the world, particularly in South Asia. By means of active, violent persecution as well as more passive forms of aggression, daily life for Pakistani Christians is both challenging and dangerous. While there is no easy solution to this issue, it is essential to continue advocating for those facing persecution and punish the oppressors. The American church and the global Christian population must speak out to denounce such practices, not only for safety purposes, but to defend the individual's inalienable right to religious freedoms.

Christian Persecution in Pakistan:

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In the effort to ensure human rights, it is essential to view threats to the community on an international scale rather than focusing in too closely on domestic issues. While widely disregarded by most North American media outlets, international religious freedoms have come under great attack in recent years (Newman, 2014). In addition to the Middle East and North Africa, one region that is particularly notorious for violating the public's religious freedoms is South Asia, including the country of Pakistan. Due to the intense violence and subtle forms of discrimination occurring on a daily basis, the international community must rise up to defend Christians suffering from religious persecution in Pakistan ("Pakistan," n.d.). The issue of international religious persecution is not a political issue. Nor is it even a religious issue. It is an issue that strikes at the essence of humanity and must be defended for the sake of all other inalienable freedoms.

Overview of Christian Persecution

Though there is little attention given to religious persecution in the media, in the United States it appears as if even less attention is focused on Christian persecution (Ibrahim, 2014). Due to an unhealthy combination of indifference and lack of understanding, the American public is in a state of blissful ignorance regarding an issue that should hit close to home for many (Finch, 2013). Instead of ignoring the issues that can no longer be denied, it is important to approach the issue of international Christian persecution both critically and objectively. As a foundationally religious nation, it is essential that the United States defend the rights that it once fought to protect. On January 16, 1786, the Virginia legislature passed Jefferson's Ordinance of Religious Freedom,

which served as a template for the Constitution in its guarantee of religious liberties (“American,” n.d.). Religious freedom served as a crucial motivator in the fight for American independence and it would be a travesty to simply ignore what the forefathers died to protect. Therefore, it is the duty of American Christians to speak out against the persecution of its people regardless of their location. Whether it appears in subtler manners such as academic discrimination or more blatant acts such as the destruction of churches, religious persecution can take shape in many forms.

Types of Persecution

While religious persecution is often thought of in the traditional sense of blatant violence, it can occur in a variety of forms. Though the threat of violence is still quite real, more subversive forms of persecution such as employment discrimination and the suppression of Christian ministries are slowly creeping into various governments, including that of Pakistan. Only by federally allowing for greater religious freedom can these forms of subtle and outright persecution begin to decrease.

Discriminatory Persecution

Though not the most egregious type of persecution, discriminatory persecution is certainly the most pervasive and widespread form of religious intolerance. By infiltrating government operations, swaying public opinion through the media, and legally denying minorities access to basic needs, extremists gradually push Christians to the outskirts of society.

Institutional discrimination. Institutional discrimination is a widespread issue for Christians in Pakistan because it is such a vague, unidentifiable problem that affects many aspects of daily life. Institutional discrimination may be defined as “the adverse

treatment of and impact on members of minority groups due to explicit and implicit rules that regulate behavior,” enforced by institutions such as schools or government (Bayer, n.d.). This subtle form of persecution often results in economic or occupational advantages or disadvantages distributed to members of on particular group rather than another (Bayer). A common example of institutional discrimination in Pakistan is the biased treatment of Christians by police forces (Allen, 2013). Though violent attacks on Christians by Islamic radicals are quite common in Pakistan, they often go unregistered and unenforced by security forces and the perpetrators receive no punishment (Allen). Even if the police are not personally prejudiced against Christians, they are often too intimidated by the Islamic extremists and fear for their own lives too much to help the victims and, therefore, idly stand by as the attacks are carried out (Allen). Furthermore, due to fear of retaliation, charges are often not brought against religious extremist attackers. For example, in 2006, twenty Christian Pakistani boys were freed from a group of Islamic extremists who intended to profit from them through human trafficking (“Types,” 2014). Despite the great deal of evidence that led authorities to one of the leaders of the group, police decided to cease pursuing the case because they knew him to be the head of an extremist Islam group (“Types”). Unfortunately, this type of occurrence is not uncommon in Pakistan and one’s faith is often the true determinant of whether or not they will receive justice regardless of what the law may say.

Societal discrimination. Another form of subtle persecution that is causing increased struggles for Pakistani Christians is societal discrimination. In its simplest terms, societal discrimination may be understood as the unofficial prejudice that places minorities into a position of inferiority (Zheng, n.d.). In Pakistan, Christians compose less

than three percent of the general population which translates to them and other non-Muslims being viewed as a lowly status compared to the Muslim population (Lacey-Bordeaux & Saima, 2013). Unfortunately, this negative attitude towards Christians and other minorities influences the way people think and gradually trickles into various aspects of society such as the media. Therefore, as the media releases prejudiced reports against Christians, which rarely tell the complete truth, it creates an anti-Christian sentiment which leads to a greater number of attacks (Habeeb, 2013). While bias in the media may appear harmless at face value, it creates a vicious cycle that only leads to greater persecution and violence. Societal discrimination also tries to shift the blame away from the guilty party as quickly as possible. For example, when Christians are violently attacked, the media often presents the story in a way that declares their practices of faith as security threats or criminal acts when, in reality, they were doing nothing illegal (Habeeb). By negatively influencing the attitude of a nation, societal discrimination lends a hand toward the already increasing persecution against Christians in Pakistan.

Employment discrimination. Employment discrimination is a growing problem that Christian Pakistanis face on a regular basis. Regardless of possible credentials, Christians are often denied jobs based solely on their religion. According to *Christian Today*, due to employment discrimination, Christians are often forced into low-paying, menial positions such as “being a janitor, a brick-maker, or working in sewage” (“Employment,” 2006). Unfortunately, since these jobs are for the lower class, they generally do not provide even basic health amenities, making life in the Christian-dominated slums even more difficult (Wooding & Khan, n.d.). Furthermore, for the rare

few that manage to escalate in the rigid social ranks of Pakistan, they are commonly looked down upon by society for their former occupations. They also often face discrimination and harsh criticism within the workplace for both their poor background and their faith (“Employment”). In addition to the societal influences that make employment difficult for Christians in Pakistan, there are also certain government positions that deny Christians through legal ramifications. For example, according to the constitution of Pakistan, non-Muslims are not allowed the opportunity to hold governmental positions such as “Speaker of the National Assembly (Lower House of Parliament), Chief of Army Staff, Prime Minister [or] President” (“Employment”). This creates a vicious cycle because those in power only further the mentality of superiority over religious minorities. Unfortunately, employment discrimination through legal means is only a small fraction of the legal persecution that Christians in Pakistan face.

Legal discrimination. There are countless forms of legal persecution that affect the everyday lives of Christians in Pakistan. While it may appear as a more subtle form of attack, it can be equally devastating to victims. One of the clearest examples of legal discrimination in Pakistan is the enforcement of blasphemy laws (Habib, 2014). Vigilante Islamic extremists have a reputation of entrapping religious minorities into blasphemy and then bringing legal charges against them, sometimes even to the point of the death penalty (Bhatti, 2014). Though technically the law applies to all Pakistanis, it is evident that this law is used to actively discriminate against Christian minorities. During the 1980s, General Mohammed Zia-ul Haq modified the former blasphemy law to single out Islam as the sole religion that could not be slighted in addition to other changes, including the allowance of the death penalty for this charge (Bhatti). President of RescueChristians,

Keith Davies, has stated that they have recorded a sharp increase in the number of blasphemy cases against Christians within the past three years (Bhatti). Worse still, Pakistan is only one of approximately thirty countries with these types of discriminatory blasphemy laws (Bhatti). Judging from these laws alone, it is evident that the state has the potential to discriminate against religious minorities as much as the general public.

Suppression of mission activity. While it may be legal in most countries to maintain one's own personal beliefs, in many of these countries it is a crime to try to share these beliefs with others. When Christians are in the minority, missionaries or local pastors are often accused of proselytizing to the majority religions and can face serious repercussions. According to Asia News, twelve armed extremists raided Grace Ministry Church of Pakistan and injured two in 2012 based upon rumors that they were trying to evangelize to local Muslims ("Faisalabad," 2012). While these allegations of proselytizing were never confirmed, the church has been attacked on several occasions within the past few years and the pastor has received numerous death threats on him and his family (Khokar, 2012). Even if it is not clearly and legally established that one is actually attempting to evangelize, retaliation by extremist groups will often go overlooked by authorities who are unconcerned by the Christians' complaints. Rather than pursuing the attackers, Pakistani police forces focused their attention on looking further into the charges of proselytizing and have since arrested two believers from the church ("Faisalabad"). According to the pastor of Grace Ministry Church, these terror attacks have been partially financed by nearby Muslim groups and even some Christian groups who did not have as great of a ministry base (Khokar). These types of non-proselytizing laws are very common in Islamic countries in which foreign religions are

viewed as a threat, such as Pakistan. Consequences of openly evangelizing can range from fines to imprisonment to blatant violent retaliation from extremist groups or authorities (“Types,” n.d.). It is essential that the government opens up the discussion for religious debate – minorities included – in order to protect the freedoms of all.

Forced conversion from Christianity. In addition to the prevention of Christian conversion, many nations dominated by Islam, such as Pakistan, are well-known for forcing conversion away from Christianity as well. According to Dr. Ramesh Kumar Vankwani, chief patron of the Pakistan Hindu Council, roughly one thousand Christian and Hindu girls, about seven hundred of which are Christian, are abducted and converted to Islam through forced marriages yearly (Yusufzai, 2014). These forced conversions are most often achieved by means of violence and intimidation. According to the Movement for Solidarity and Peace, Christian women in Pakistan are often kidnapped and subjected to acts such as sexual violence, human trafficking or other forms of abuse until they comply with their abductors’ orders (“Pakistani,” 2014). Therefore, these girls will then testify in favor of their attackers in court out of fear for their own life and those of their loved ones (“Pakistani”). Furthermore, the estimate of seven hundred is likely very conservative compared to the true number of forced conversions because many families and victims that are a part of religious minorities are unable or too fearful to file official complaints (Yusufzai). On the occasion that the families do file formal complaints, the victims’ abductors file counter-claims supposedly from the victims that falsely admit that the conversions were voluntary and request that the families stop harassing them (Yusufzai). Unfortunately, the line between forced and willful conversion is not always very clear in Pakistan – a state in which Christians are viewed as the lowest rank of

society. When reasons for conversion such as fear of future violence or escape from discrimination arise, it is difficult to decipher between the two. Only through lessened religious restrictions will Pakistani Christians be able to feel security in their freedom from forced conversions.

Blatant Maltreatment

Despite the increasing focus on social justice across the world, violence against religious minorities continues to rise (Newman). Whether targeting individuals or communities as a whole, religious extremists have become bolder in their tactics against Christians, employing methods such as bombings and sexual violence in order to send a message of intimidation to anyone willing to listen.

Community oppression. While Christian persecution certainly affects individuals on a personal level, it often affects the local community as a whole as well. Sometimes these attacks are completely unwarranted while other times the actions of one member of the community lead to an attack on the whole in retaliation. While extreme examples include incidents in which the majority attempts to “cleanse” an entire population of minority Christians, community oppression often manifests itself in the form of attacks on a town or village (Swift, 2014). Pakistani Christian Parvez Masih was falsely accused of blasphemy against Muhammad and forced into hiding after his acquittal in 2006 (Khan, n.d.). These charges came about when, in 2001, a group of Muslim students was coerced into accusing Masih of blaspheming by an extreme Islamic organization (Khan). After attacking various members of Masih's immediate and extended family, an extremist Muslim group opened fire on the school of which he was the headmaster (Khan). Despite the fact that Masih was falsely accused and his family

and school were not involved in the case in the slightest, they were all greatly impacted by the attacks.

In another case of community oppression, an entire community was targeted in response to rumors surrounding an unidentified Christian. In this case, a mob of Muslim extremists raided a Catholic compound in Sangla Hill, Pakistan due to rumors about a Christian who supposedly desecrated the Quran (Walsh, 2005). Between 1,500 to 2,500 men swarmed the community, torching any churches, schools and homes in their path (Walsh). Though the government condemned these actions, the violence occurred for many hours and they appeared helpless in trying to prevent or intervene (Walsh). During this attack, not only were countless buildings burned, resulting in immeasurable financial damage, but many individuals were injured as well (“Types,” n.d.). It is important to note that all of this destruction occurred on account of one individual's unproven allegations of blasphemy. Chaos and destruction will continue for the Christian communities in Pakistan unless the federal government takes swift action to allow for greater religious freedom and punish those who commit such heinous acts of violence.

Violence. Arguably the most egregious, and unfortunately most prevalent, forms of persecution in Pakistan is violence against Christians. The tactics are widely varied, ranging from shooting rampages to physical assaults to suicide bombings; however, the motive is always the same. In March of 2013, shortly after the arrest of a Christian man on blasphemy charges, over one hundred homes were burned in a Christian community in the city of Lahore (“Dozens,” 2013). In August of 2009, six Christians were murdered in massive riots in Gojra after an individual allegedly damaged pages of a Quran (Kharal, 2013). In October of 2001, sixteen Christians were killed when Islamic radicals stormed a

church in Bahawalpur in a shooting rampage against the congregation (Mohsin, 2013). The gunmen even went so far as to murder the Muslim police officer who was stationed outside to protect the church (Mohsin). As clearly evidenced, the violence against Christians in Pakistan is senseless and unrelenting. There are countless more examples that could be given, but it is more important to acknowledge the need for change, rather than only the tragedies themselves. It is essential to first have a better grasp of the social dynamics that allow for these atrocities, in order to address this issue head-on. Only by acknowledging and understanding the culture can one hope to effect change within this tumultuous country.

Threat Against Women

In the country of Pakistan, the Islamic culture pushes women towards the lowest ranking part of the societal hierarchy (Friedland, 2014). Unfortunately, this means that women who practice Christianity have a double stigma working against them. While gender-influenced religious discrimination can affect a woman's daily life, such as her ability to obtain a job or participate politically, it can also pose a lethal threat by means of abduction or sexual abuse.

Sexual Abuse

One of the harsh realities that Christian women must face is that they have a much greater likelihood of facing sexual abuse than virtually any other demographic in Pakistan. Rape against Christian women in Pakistan occurs for a wide variety of reasons. These may range from family rivalries, rejected marriage proposals and, most notably, religious reasons (Ghosh, 2013). In the same way that an attacker may demolish a church due to religious motivators, extremists often target women due to their vulnerability and

low-risk factor of repercussions. As tragic as the crime itself is, sexual abuse often leads to even more damaging consequences. Young women and even girls are often forced to marry their rapists in order to protect their families' "honor" by constricting the sexual abuse within a marital context (Ghosh). Furthermore, many of these victims of sexual abuse are driven towards committing suicide due to the stigma surrounding rape victims in Pakistan. Even worse still, many of these individuals are encouraged and even aided in their suicide attempts by their own family members (Ghosh). Young Christian girls, as well as Hindu girls, are particularly vulnerable to attack as well as abduction and forced conversions (Ghosh). Unfortunately, the method of converting these girls to Islam is inseparably linked to sexual abuse.

Abduction and Conversion

Due to their minority beliefs, young Christian girls are often kidnapped and forced into technical conversion against their will. According to the Asian Human Rights Commission, "the method of choice to convert the girls who are abducted is to have them marry within the Muslim community" (Ghosh, 2013). In a survey conducted by the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, nearly two thousand women from in Pakistan of minority religions were, "forcibly converted to Islam through rape, torture and kidnappings" in 2011 alone (Ghosh). The number is steadily increasing as women across Pakistan are suppressed even further than they have been in previous years. The United States Commission for International Religious Freedom reported that Pakistani Christian women are one of the most socio-economically marginalized parts of society, eighty percent of who live in abject poverty ("Pakistani," 2014). This socioeconomic disadvantage makes Christian women even more susceptible to human trafficking and

physical abuse, thereby, increasing the probability of falling on the social ladder even further. Unfortunately, this trend is only on the rise as Christian women are much more easily exploited due to the pervasive impunity and corruption within the Pakistani government.

Role of Terrorism

Terrorism plays a significant role in the persecution of Christians in Pakistan. Many of the most vicious attacks against churches and Christian families are carried out by extreme Islamic terror groups in order to incite fear and send political messages to traditionally Christian nations such as the United States. Worse still, these terror groups are often affiliated and even sponsored by the Pakistani government who shares a similar ideology with many of these groups.

State-Sponsored Terrorism

Much of the reason that Pakistan is not making very much progress in the path towards greater religious freedom is that their government is so closely tied to those who are committing acts of violence and persecution. It is widely recognized that the region in Pakistan that borders the Afghanistan is seen as a “haven for terrorists” (Harris, 2014). While the general population in Pakistan may not be completely aware of the relationship between the state and local terrorist groups, it threatens their safety on a regular basis. These covert relationships offer domestic and international extremist groups protection from legal threats that they may face in other countries or in the international community. In addition to Pakistan’s own domestic terrorist organizations, terrorist groups from surrounding countries often find safety within the borders of Pakistan as well (Harris). As cited on CBC News, Alexis Palvich, press secretary to Canada’s Immigration and

Citizenship Minister, stated that not only do foreign terrorist groups continue to function within Pakistani borders but, “they also enjoy official, albeit covert, sanction and support from some within Pakistan’s state apparatus” (Harris). Even if Pakistan openly denounces supporting violent extremist organizations, their words are quickly undermined by these relationships. State support for violent terrorist groups will only deepen the divide between the majority and minority religions.

Pakistani Taliban

One of the most influential and devastating terrorist organizations in Pakistan is the Pakistani Taliban. This group which operates primarily along the tribal region of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan has been the cause of numerous attacks against innocent Christian civilians (Brumfield, 2012). Contrary to popular belief, the Pakistani Taliban is not the same Taliban that the United States has been involved with in Afghanistan, though the similarity in name is certainly worth noting (Brumfield). This group, which was originally called the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, shares close relations and similar ideology with its Afghan counterpart (Brumfield). According to the Council on Foreign Relations, when the Pakistani army started fighting against domestic militant groups along the Afghanistan border, militant “supporters of the Afghan Taliban in the tribal areas transitioned into a mainstream Taliban force of their own” (Brumfield). Therefore, the main purpose of the Pakistani Taliban is to overthrow the current government of Pakistan by means of terror attacks; however, many innocent civilians often fall victim to their callous attacks (Brumfield). Furthermore, the Christian population within Pakistan is often persecuted by these violent groups for ideological reasons.

Similarly to many Islamic extremist terror groups, the primary means of attack is conducted via bombings. In September of 2013, the Pakistani Taliban conducted a suicide bombing at a church which killed eighty-one people during the Sunday school service (Lacey-Bordeaux & Saima, 2013). This attack occurred at the Protestant All Saints Church of Pakistan in the violent city of Peshawar located in northern Pakistan (Lacey-Bordeaux & Saima). In addition to the egregious death toll, the bombing also left 120 civilians injured, ten of whom were in critical condition (Lacey-Bordeaux & Saima). Following shortly after the attack, the Bishop of Peshawar, Rev. Humphrey S. Peters, expressed his condemnation of the Pakistani government for not protecting the religious minorities (Lacey-Bordeaux & Saima). Many terrorist groups such as the Pakistani Taliban target Christian churches, not only for religious reasons, but also because they serve as political symbols of their American enemy. For example, in the case of All Saints Church, spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, Ahmed Marwat, claimed that the attack was a response to the American use of drone strikes in the tribal regions of Pakistan and vowed that they would not stop until the drone strikes ceased (Lacey-Bordeaux & Saima). Even if the churches are not politically aligned with the policies or practices of the current American administration, they often get associated with the United States solely due to the fact that they are traditionally considered a Christian nation. Therefore, while the Pakistani Taliban is a politically-driven radical group, their ideologies unfortunately manifest themselves in the form of religious persecution against the minorities.

Lashkar-e-Omar

Though it does not yet have a very deep history, Lashkar-e-Omar, also known as LeO, is quickly making its name known throughout Pakistan through its tirade of violence. This extremist group was initially formed when multiple Islamic figures were arrested after President Pervez-Musharraf publically announced that he would work towards disassembling the intricate system of terrorist networks that had taken root in Pakistan (Prakash, 2011). Their name, which literally translates to “The Army of Omar,” is unclear in etymology. Differing reports point to either Mullah Mohammed Omar, chief of the Taliban, or Syed Ahmed Omar Sheikh, a Jaish-e-Moohammed terrorist known for his part in the abduction and killing of American journalist Daniel Pearl (Prakash). Similar to the Pakistani Taliban, LeO is founded on the ideology of extreme Islamic fundamentalism as well as totalitarian thought, and shares close ties with al Qaeda (Prakash). Though this organization began as a disorganized group of terrorists, within recent years it has become more cohesive as a single unit and gained much more influence (Prakash). Due to the fact that this group tends to attack primarily Americans for ideological and religious motives, they often turn to churches as a main target for their attacks.

Lashkar-e-Omar was relatively unheard of until a particular church attack in the early 2000’s. On October 28, 2001, six unidentified members of LeO entered a church in Punjab killing a policeman as well as seventeen Christians (Prakash, 2011). The gunmen openly fired at the church, seeking to amass as many victims as possible, including five children and many others who walked away from the attack with injuries (Prakash). This ambush took place in Model Town, Bahawalpur and was the first of many attacks that signaled to the international community that this was a group that was not meant to be

overlooked (Prakash). Shortly after the attack, in November of 2001, Lashkar-e-Omar came out and openly claimed responsibility for the attack without showing any fear of retaliation or punishment from local authorities (Prakash). This is the time period when the international community first took notice of this deadly group; yet, the American public is still far less aware of this threat than they should be. They continue to attack Americans, specifically Christian Americans, without repercussion and the trend will only worsen with time unless international condemnation is increased. As of now, they have little motivation to stop their attacks, given the lack of domestic pressure; therefore, the United States should play a role in speaking out against attacks upon their own who are suffering for their faith overseas.

Role of Islam

Though there may be diversity among the motives for the various terrorist groups of Pakistan, one element that binds the majority of them together is the foundation of Islam. This tightly held religious motivator is gaining influence and causing individuals to act very hostilely toward those with dissenting opinions. Only by recognizing and acknowledging the primary cause of aggression will it be possible to reduce the violence against Christian minorities in Pakistan.

Islam in the Government

In Islamic culture, the separation of church and state that is commonplace in the West does not exist. Rather, government and religion are inseparably linked in Islam-dominated regions. Therefore, according to traditional Muslim thought, Islamic nations should be governed by means of theocracy – which in this framework is the understanding that “God himself is the monarch, reigning on earth through subordinates”

(“Endless,” n.d.). Unfortunately, theocracy often leads to corruption because religious minorities are treated poorly on account of their faith, eventually resulting in violence. There is no way to rule justly in the context of theocracy because of inevitable conflicting interests between the governing and the governed. Legally, theocracy may be defined as, “a form of government which defers not to civil development of law, but to an interpretation of the will of a God as set out in religious scripture and authorities” (“Theocracy,” n.d.). Due to the fact that rulers within a theocratic context believe in a higher authority calling them to rule, they generally believe that any opinions that contradict with those in power are either destructive or untrue (Clarkson, 1997). Therefore, there is rarely any freedom of expression, which often escalates into the unequal treatment and discrimination against religious minorities (Clarkson). Democracy and theocracy simply cannot exist simultaneously. Since the will of the deity is regarded higher than that of the general public, voices of the people often go unheard and minorities fall victim to even greater persecution.

Sharia One of the greatest legal influences in countries dominated by Islam, such as Pakistan, is known as “sharia.” Sharia, which means “path” in Arabic, guides virtually every aspect of a Muslim’s life ranging from relationships to legal dealings to religious practices (Johnson & Sergie, 2014). Sharia law is primarily drawn from the Quran, the primary religious text of Islam, and the Sunna, “the sayings, practices and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed” (Johnson & Sergie). These laws and guidelines are used to personally govern one’s actions in every aspect of life. However, even more dangerous than that is when sharia is federally used to govern an entire nation. This controversial form of theocracy is a threat due to its justification for cruel and unusual punishments

such as stonings and forced amputations as well as its blatant maltreatment of women, children and minorities compared to the rest of society (Johnson & Sergie). The application of sharia law elevates the Muslim man above anyone else and gives him the authority to enforce this extreme law however he may see fit. Therefore, there is little way to justify the possibility of a democratic society that is governed by sharia. There cannot be equal representation in a society where certain groups are inherently regarded more highly than others. In a country where the law itself permits violence towards religious minorities, it will be no time at all before the public begins to take the law into its own hands as well.

Call for Violence

Though Islam is commonly referred to as the religion of peace, it is anything but. While there are certainly moderate, peaceful Muslims, radical groups are quickly gaining more influence in this increasingly violent religion. Unfortunately, one of the main goals of Islam, especially within the more extreme sects, calls followers wage war with those in religious opposition in order to establish Islamic rule across the nations (Gartenstein-Ross & Magen, 2014). These verses are directed against anyone who is not of the Muslim faith, the “infidel,” and most harshly against those who were once followers of Islam but have since turned from the religion – the heretic (Miller, n.d.). Verses of the Quran that encourage violence are often graphically violent as well, calling upon actions such as forced amputations and decapitations in order to further the cause of Islam and destroy the infidel (“Violence,” n.d.). Islamic extremists believe that they will incur the wrath of Allah unless they carry out these violent commands.

While other religious texts, such as the Bible or Torah, contain many verses of violence as well, there are clear differences between those and the Quran. For example, the Old Testament contains many passages that call for violence against a certain person or tribe, usually for purposes such as ridding a people group of sin. However, it is important to recognize that these acts of violence are strictly contained within their historical contexts (Smart & Provan, 2011). In other words, it is not a general call for violence that continues into the present. Conversely, the verses of violence portrayed in the Quran are not bound by a historical context and are much more open-ended than the verses of the Bible or Torah (Miller). Furthermore, Islam, in contrast to Christianity, justifies and endorses the use of violence as a means of spreading the religion rather than solely as a means of punishment (Miller). Islamic scholars of today have a tendency of tailoring toward the moral preferences of moderate Muslims as they skim over the passages that demand unnecessary and extreme violence. However, when examining these verses, it is clear that Islam allows for greater violence against minorities than most other religions.

Spread of Islam

Without urgent action it will be virtually impossible to slow the spread of Islam in Pakistan and the rest of South Asia. According to the CIA World Factbook, Muslims comprise 96.4% of the population of Pakistan, 85 – 90% being Sunnis and 10 – 15% being Shiites (“The World,” n.d.). This translates to a population of roughly 189,112,100 people solely within the country of Pakistan adhering to the religion of Islam (“The World”). It is evident that over the years Islam has strongly taken roots in Pakistan, now even being referred to as the “homeland” for Muslims in South Asia (“Islam,” n.d.). This

path towards near total Islamization became clearly apparent during the 1970's and has shown no signs to slowing ("Islam"). Islamic leaders wish that the process of Islamization would go even faster than its current rate, but are slowed down by the influence of the division between Sunnis and Shiites ("Sunnis," 2014). However, since 2001, Islam has made significant advancement by intersecting with and latching onto "tribal, regional and class grievances against the Pakistani state" ("Islam"). By linking political and religious messages, Islam has gained tremendous momentum throughout the region of South Asia. Both legal and religious actions are required in order to alleviate some of the devastating effects that radical Islam has had on the Christian community of Pakistan.

Hope for Pakistan

Though the current situation is certainly grim, there are many ways to alleviate the suffering of Christian minorities, condemn the persecutors, and reach out to lost. By striking a careful balance between political action and religious support, Christians in Pakistan will hopefully find relief from the constant stress and fear caused by the unrelenting religious persecution.

Political Action

While there are certainly many factors that determine the United States' involvement in human rights issues that take place within the borders of other countries, there are still many ways to get involved to decrease these travesties. In a massive step towards the international condemnation of Pakistan's religious freedom violations, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom designated Pakistan as a Tier 1 Country of Particular Concern in its 2014 Annual Report ("USCIRF," 2014). This

is the highest level of condemnation that this organization, which is a sector of the State Department, can designate and it is given to countries whose actions are deemed “systematic, ongoing, and egregious (“USCIRF”).” Pakistan is one of only sixteen countries in the world that meet this high standard of discrimination and violence (“USCIRF”). This signifies that the United States is blatantly condemning Pakistan for their actions which can have an effect on various international relations. This type of denunciation usually halts or at least slows economic relationships as well as alerts other allied nations to take notice, thereby, creating a snowball effect against the country committing human rights violations. While this is by no means a solution to the problems in Pakistan, it is a great leap forward in the efforts of bringing attention to the atrocities being committed. Unless there is more awareness, violence will continue without repercussion.

Another legal method that may be used in order to further the plight of Christians in Pakistan is the petition. While a list of names alone on a petition will not always effect change, it is the interactions surrounding the petition that can leave a lasting impact. The Guardian reports that petitions that engage supporters, entice new ones and draw publicity are much more likely to be successful than those that do not (Lowery, 2013). The unlimited access to information that the Internet has provided has allowed for those with little government background to raise their voices about issues they are passionate about, but previously has no control over (Lowery). Whether producing a small handwritten petition or a massive one generated by a large organization, every name makes a difference in relieving the suffering of those affected by persecution. Furthermore, it is much easier to spread awareness about these important issues in this

age of technology. By making use of social media, it is much easier to bring attention to the injustices perpetrated by the Pakistani government and foreign Islamic radicals. It is evident that the first step towards eliminating persecution is raising awareness for those suffering.

Religious Action

If there is to be a decrease in persecution of Christians in Pakistan, there must be a greater willingness for Christians to devote their lives to ministry. According to International Christian Concern's Regional Manager to South Asia, William Stark, Pakistanis are very relationally driven and their trust must be built over a lengthy period of time, as opposed to other cultures that are more trusting of foreigners (W. Stark, personal communication, May 24, 2014). One of the most effective means of developing these types of relationships is through indigenous missions. Organizations such as Christian Aid support native missionaries who provide disaster relief, distribute religious literature and education those living in poverty by creating Christian schools ("Pakistan," n.d.). Education and literature distribution are some of the most efficient forms of outreach, especially in locations where ministry must be more covert ("Pakistan"). However, it is important to note there are still risks and that all of these acts of ministry are done under the threat of their own lives and the lives of their loved ones. Locals are typically unlikely to trust foreigners, especially regarding issues as serious as their religious beliefs. Rather, if they observe people they know and trust advocating for the cause of Christianity, they are more likely to take interest and reconsider their own extreme beliefs. In spite of all of the risks, it is still a worthwhile cause to reach out to those in Pakistan – even the persecutors.

Conclusion

In the ongoing plight to prevent human rights violations, one issue that stands at the forefront is religious persecution. Due to the ongoing discriminatory persecution and blatant maltreatment of minorities, the international community should invest more resources in aiding Christians facing religious persecution in Pakistan. Regardless of the perspective of the American media, religious persecution is a pervasive issue that affects virtually all societies. Only by bringing international attention to the injustices in Pakistan and taking an approach that involves both legal and religious action, will the Christian community in Pakistan finally come to a state of peace. The persecuted have been neglected for far too long and it is time to stand up for the defenseless and raise a voice for the voiceless.

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