

Evangelical Review of Theology

A Global Forum

Volume 42 • Number 1 • January 2018

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WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

Theological Commission

Published by



Religious Extremism and Christian Response in Pakistan

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One of the most painful issues that have touched the global conscience in the twenty-first century is the unimaginable scale of religious extremism. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, extremist acts that are (or appear to be) religiously motivated have seemingly become a daily event.

In financial terms, the fight against terrorism and extremism has eclipsed the cost of the two world wars combined. It has been estimated that by 2020, the war on terror will have cost the US \$5 trillion.¹

The toll of casualties from religious extremism around the world cannot be reliably estimated, but the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe and America have all been targeted. One Vatican official has estimated that 100,000 Christians a year are dying for their faith.² And the carnage is not limited to

Christians; for example, some victims of Islamic extremism are Muslims.

I. Defining Extremism

Just what is extremism? The definition depends on who is defining the term. One controversial US military briefing classified evangelical Christians alongside Al-Qaida and the Muslim Brotherhood as extremists, on the basis that an organization is extremist if its goals 'are inconsistent with the Army's goals'.³

Merriam-Webster defines extremism as 'belief in and support for ideas that are very far from what most people consider correct or reasonable'.⁴ But I would tend to agree with Charles Liebman's argument that extremism

1 Mark Thompson, 'The \$5 Trillion War on Terror', *Time*, 29 June 2011, <http://nation.time.com/2011/06/29/the-5-trillion-war-on-terror/>.

2 Tara Brady, '100,000 Christians Are Killed Every Year for Their Faith', *Daily Mail*, 28 May 2013, [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2332338/100-000-Christians-](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2332338/100-000-Christians-killed-year-faith-says-Vatican-archbishop-Monsignor-Silvano-Maria-Tomasi-Iran-shuts-countrys-biggest-Pentecostal-church-arrests-pastor-mid-service.html)

[killed-year-faith-says-Vatican-archbishop-Monsignor-Silvano-Maria-Tomasi-Iran-shuts-countrys-biggest-Pentecostal-church-arrests-pastor-mid-service.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2332338/100-000-Christians-killed-year-faith-says-Vatican-archbishop-Monsignor-Silvano-Maria-Tomasi-Iran-shuts-countrys-biggest-Pentecostal-church-arrests-pastor-mid-service.html).

3 Janet Parshall, 'How Do You Define an "Extremist"?' *Christian Post*, April 15, 2013, www.christianpost.com/news/how-do-you-define-an-extremist-93956/.

4 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2015), www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/extremism.

is a religious norm and that religious moderation, not extremism, needs explanation.⁵

Liebman points out that religious extremism could be defined as either a process or an institution. He quite helpfully identifies three dimensions of religious extremism, which include the imposition or expansion of religious laws, a harsh attitude towards those who do not accept extremist norms, and the rejection of cultural forms and values considered not indigenous to the religious tradition.⁶

Total commitment to a religious tradition, by itself, is not normally a threat to society. In fact, it is an essential component of Christian faith. However, religious extremism in its dangerous form occurs when a group or institution holds that a particular religious tradition is divine truth for all humanity *and tries to impose it, whether peacefully or violently, on all who do not agree with their norm.*

Such extremists view all cultural or religious values that do not conform to their version of religious truth as openly hostile to their goals and thus justify removing these non-conforming elements from society, even if by violence.

In Pakistan, religious extremism exists at individual, group and institutional levels and is undergirded by an orthodox interpretation of Sunni Islam. It has evolved over the last sixty years and continues to do so. As for the Christian minority's responses, they have varied considerably, from retaliatory violence to Christ-like grace.

In this paper I will discuss the history and theological underpinnings of both extremist activity and Christian responses.

II. Religious Extremism against Christians in Pakistan

Pakistani Christians have suffered a great disappointment, even a betrayal, from their compatriot Muslims. Promised by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the father of the Pakistani nation, that freedom of religion and the equality of all citizens before the law would be preserved,⁷ Christian politicians played a crucial role in the decision to make western Punjab state part of Pakistan rather than India.⁸

Jinnah was a Shia Muslim, the minority Muslim denomination in Pakistan.⁹ The Pakistani government has officially tried to conceal his Shia affiliation, and Shias have suffered greatly from Sunni extremism, as have the Ahmadis, another Muslim sect that was declared non-Muslim by an act of parliament in 1974.

Along with this intra-faith strife between Muslims, Christians, Hindus,

⁷ Ammar Shahbazi, 'Was Jinnah's Promise to the Minorities Honoured?' *The News* (Pakistan), 25 December 2012; Khaled Ahmed, 'The Fractured Image of Muhammad Ali Jinnah', *Himal*, October 1999, <http://old.himal-mag.com/himal-feed/53/2413-the-fractured-image-of-muhammad-ali-jinnah.html>.

⁸ Munir-ul-Anjum, 'The Role of Christians in the Freedom Movement of Pakistan: An Appraisal', *Pakistan Journal of Social Studies* 32, no. 2 (2012): 437–43.

⁹ Khalid Ahmed, 'Was Jinnah a Shia or Sunni?' *Friday Times*, 24–30 December 2010, www.thefridaytimes.com/24122010/page27.shtml.

⁵ Charles S. Liebman, 'Extremism as a Religious Norm'. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 22, no. 1 (1983): 75–86.

⁶ Liebman, 'Extremism'.

Sikhs and Zoroastrians have all suffered at the hands of Muslim extremists. As a result, the portion of non-Muslims in Pakistan's population has shrunk from 40 percent in 1947 to 4 percent today.¹⁰

III. Types of Extremism

In Muslim nations, religion dominates all aspects of existence. Life is not compartmentalized into political, religious, social and cultural domains but is understood as a single whole that is undergirded by Islam. Nevertheless, I believe that the following distinctions are helpful in sorting out the various types of Muslim 'extremism'.

1. Intellectual Extremism

Intellectual extremism is the least discussed form of Muslim extremism, but it is also the most dangerous type because it provides a basis for and legitimizes other forms of extremism.

Muslim intellectuals, traditionally known as imams, have formulated—based on their understanding of the Qur'an, Hadith and practices of the four caliphs—the rules of engagement for Muslims with non-Muslim citizens in an Islamic state. Sunni Muslim states follow one of the four schools of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). Pakistan, which is 80 to 85 percent Sunni, largely follows the Hanfi school.

One of the most influential Muslim intellectuals of the twentieth century was a Pakistani of Hanfi leanings, Abul

Ala Mawdudi (1903–1979). Mawdudi influenced Hasan al-Bana, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood; his disciple, Sayyid Qutb of Egypt; and Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran.

Mawdudi's ideology contended that the predicaments faced by Muslims in his day resulted from forsaking their faith and that Muslims of his time were no better than non-Muslims in terms of their neglect and disobedience of Allah. He called Muslims to become true to their faith by letting Islam shape every aspect of their lives.

Mawdudi's political ideology included violent jihad as a means of seizing power from non-Muslims as well as from so-called Muslims. He argued that Islam wishes to overthrow the kingdoms of the world and to establish the kingdom of God. His ideological Islamic state has no boundaries. Thus global jihad is needed to establish a pan-Islamic state, because Allah claims the whole earth and not just parts of it.

Mawdudi argued that all other religious duties are geared towards preparing Muslims for jihad:

Briefly speaking, it would be enough to state that the real objective of Islam is to remove the lordship of man over man and to establish the kingdom of God on Earth. To stake one's life and everything else to achieve this purpose is called jihad while Salah, fasting, Hajj and Zakat are all meant as a preparation for this task.¹¹

¹⁰ 'Pakistan's Minority Population Is Shrinking', *UCA News*, 25 June 2012, www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-minority-population-is-shrinking/53801.

¹¹ Abul Ala Mawdudi, 'Let Us Be Muslims', quoted in Ami Isseroff, 'Abul Ala Mawdudi', *Encyclopedia of the Middle East*, 20 December 2008, <http://mideastweb.org/Middle-East-Encyclopedia/abul-ala-mawdudi.htm>.

In another book, Mawdudi wrote:

Islam wishes to do away with all states and governments which are opposed to the ideology and program of Islam. The purpose of Islam is to set up a state on the basis of this ideology and program, regardless of which nation assumes the role of standard-bearer of Islam, and regardless of the rule of which nation is undermined in the process of the establishment of an ideological Islamic state. Islam requires the earth—not just a portion, but the entire planet—not because the sovereignty over the earth should be wrested from one nation or group of nations and vested in any one particular nation, but because the whole of mankind should benefit from Islam, and its ideology and welfare program. It is to serve this end that Islam seeks to press into service all the forces which can bring about such a revolution. The term which covers the use of all these forces is 'jihad'.¹²

Mawdudi understood Islam as seeking to take over the whole world, including its religious, philosophical, economic, social, cultural and political spheres, and as advancing only by the power of the sword. Ami Isseroff explains how he extolled the virtues of violent jihad:

The Messenger of Allah invited the Arabs to accept Islam for 13 years. He used every possible means of

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

Mawdudi's political organization, Jamat-e-Islami (JI), played an extremely important role in providing ideological and organizational structure to the Afghan jihad against the former Soviet Union. He also helped to shape the thinking of Sayyid Qutb, of whom Ayman al-Zawahiri, founder of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and current head of Al-Qaida, was a follower.

Ji exercised its greatest religious and political influence during the regime of dictator, General Zia al-Haq (1978–1988), who most vigorously pursued the Islamization of Pakistan. Zia dissolved the national and provin-

¹² Quoted in Rafi Aamer, 'Cartoon Crises', http://familyofheart.com/DOC/FOS/Comments_AR02.htm. 'Maulana Maududi', as Aamer refers to him, is another name for the same person.

¹³ Isseroff, 'Abul Ala Maududi'.

cial assemblies and set up national and provincial *majlis-e-shuras*, or parliamentary councils. Islamic banking and courts consistent with Sharia law were also created.

Under Zia's rule, blasphemy and related laws were given new vigour and interpretation, resulting in frequent persecution of Christians. Non-Muslims were excluded from holding key posts or participating in mainstream politics. Over 10,000 men from JI were appointed to key positions to implement Zia's program of Islamization, which in fact was Mawdudi's conception of an Islamic state.

The Islamization of education in Pakistan led to the introduction of new curricula that promoted an extreme version of Islam. The study of Islamics became compulsory, even for Christian students; the books used were overtly anti-Christian.

Educational curricula are one of the leading sources of extremism in Pakistan. As one report stated, 'Curriculum and textbooks include hate material and encourage prejudice, bigotry and discrimination toward women, religious minorities, and other nations, especially India.'¹⁴

Pervez Hoodbhoy, an avid critic of Pakistan's education system, wrote in *Foreign Affairs* in 2004; 'Pakistani schools—and not just madrassas [i.e. explicitly Islamic teaching centres]—are churning out fiery zealots, fuelled with a passion for jihad and

martyrdom.'¹⁵ Mawdudi and hundreds of other Muslim intellectuals and imams have provided an intellectual basis for religious extremism.

2. Constitutional and legal extremism

Pakistan's 1956 constitution was secular and guaranteed the freedom of profession and propagation of faith to all its citizens. In fact, the country was originally called the Democratic Republic of Pakistan.

However, constitutional amendments adopted in 1962 determined that Islam should be the state religion.¹⁶ The 1973 constitution was overtly Islamic and determined the scope and freedom of the Legislative Assembly. It required the Islamization of existing laws deemed antithetical to Islam, stating that legislation must be in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the orally transmitted record of Muhammad's teachings). It also barred non-Muslims from becoming heads of the government.¹⁷

As Stephen Cohen observed in *The Idea of Pakistan*, 'Although the constitution includes adequate accommodation for Pakistan's religious minorities, in practice non-Sunni Muslims face religious discrimination in both public

¹⁴ Jayshree Bajoria, 'Pakistan's Education System and Links to Extremism', Council on Foreign Relations, 7 October 2009, www.cfr.org/pakistan/pakistan-education-system-links-extremism/p20364.

¹⁵ Pervez Hoodbhoy, 'Can Pakistan Work? A Country in Search of Itself', *Foreign Affairs*, November–December 2004, , <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2004-11-01/can-pakistan-work-country-search-itself>, quoted in Bajoria, 'Pakistan's Education System'.

¹⁶ Stephen Philip Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2006), 58.

¹⁷ Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 58.

and private spheres.’¹⁸

Zia’s subsequent amendments quietly removed the word ‘freely’ from the clause promising that minorities would be able ‘freely to profess and practise their religion’. Christian protests against the change were ignored, and an appeal to Pakistan’s Supreme Court was also unsuccessful.

These events judicially reduced Christians to second-class citizens and strengthened constitutional extremism. However, the trend had begun just two years after Pakistan’s independence when the Objectives Resolution, adopted by the nation’s Constituent Assembly in 1949, stated that ‘the future constitution of Pakistan should be based on the Islamic principles of freedom, social justice and equity.’¹⁹

Zia tried to legitimize his 1978 coup by promising to turn Pakistan into a purer Islamic state as envisioned in the Objectives Resolution. He implemented a number of Islamic Sharia laws and set up a federal Sharia Court parallel to the Supreme Court. Zia introduced Islamic banking, restricted leadership of governmental institutions to practising Muslims, and declared Friday a holiday rather than Sunday, making it difficult for Christians to attend church.

Moreover, Zia implemented anti-blasphemy laws that contradicted all the established and ratified covenants and conventions of international human rights to which Pakistan is a signatory. Zia’s policy of Islamization, his unrestricted use of religion for his own

political agenda, and his open alliance with Jamat-e-Islami contributed to the victimization of minorities.

Pakistan’s anti-blasphemy laws, which have been constantly used to restrict non-Muslims’ freedom of religion, are the most vivid example of the country’s legal extremism. These laws prescribe life imprisonment for desecrating the Qur’an and a mandatory death sentence for insulting Muhammad.

Many Christians have been falsely accused of blasphemy, arrested, imprisoned or killed. Sawan Masih was given a death sentence for his alleged blasphemy, which became a pretext for the 2013 burning and looting of the Joseph Colony, a Christian neighbourhood in Lahore.²⁰

In 1993, three Christians were accused of blasphemy. They were attacked after a court hearing, and one of them was killed. The lower court handed down death sentences to the other two, but a higher court acquitted them since they were illiterate and did not know how to write Arabic. Following the decision, Islamic religious parties decried the acquittal and called for a nationwide strike. One of the justices was later murdered in his chamber, and the assassin confessed that he acted because of the judge’s acquittal of the accused blasphemers.²¹

Frank Crimi summed up Muslim

¹⁸ Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 58.

¹⁹ Patrick Sookhdeo, *A People Betrayed: The Impact of Islamization on the Christian Community in Pakistan* (Ross-Shire, Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2002), 28.

²⁰ BBC News, ‘Sawan Masih: Pakistani Christian Gets Death Penalty for Blasphemy’, 28 March 2014, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-26781731.

²¹ ‘High-Profile Blasphemy Cases in the Last 63 Years’, *Dawn*, 8 December 2010, www.dawn.com/news/589587/high-profile-blasphemy-cases-in-the-last-63-years.

mobs' thirst for the blood of those accused of blasphemy:

Perhaps part of Pakistan's enchantment with its blasphemy laws stems from the fact that many Pakistani Muslims believe killing a blasphemous person earns a heavenly reward, a holy perk that may help explain why at least 30 Christians accused of blasphemy since 2009 have been killed by mobs of Islamist vigilantes.²²

Crimi's article highlighted a startling case that caught the world's attention, in which an eleven-year-old girl suffering from Down's syndrome was jailed and accused of blasphemy.

Some Muslim clerics have declared that the Bible is a blasphemous book, because immoral acts of certain prophets are recorded in it, which they assert are deeply offensive to Muslims. They have even demanded that the Supreme Court of Pakistan should ban the Bible in Pakistan.²³

The plight of minorities in Pakistan has been widely recognized. 'A Pew Research Center report named Pakistan ... one of the most hostile nations for religious minorities. Pew placed the country among the top five overall for

restrictions on religion, singling out its anti-blasphemy statutes.'²⁴ Similarly, in 2014 a US panel called for adding Pakistan to a blacklist of violators of religious freedom, stating that the country 'represents the worst situation in the world of religious freedom among the countries that are not already on the US blacklist and that the conditions in the past year hit an all-time low'.²⁵

3. Social extremism

In many instances, Muslim mobs have picked up where the government left off. For example, on 6 February 1997, a mob of 30,000 to 35,000 attacked a Christian village called Shanti Nagar (Village of Peace), looted it and reduced it to ashes.

In October 2001, Muslim extremists armed with AK-47 assault rifles attacked Christian worshipers in St. Dominic Church, Bahawalpur. Sixteen Christians and a policeman were killed and hundreds of others were injured.

In March 2002, the Protestant International Church of Islamabad was attacked with grenades. Five people died and nearly fifty were injured.²⁶ I had preached the previous Sunday in that very church.

²² Frank Crimi, 'To Jail a Down's Syndrome Girl', *Front Page*, 23 August 2012, www.frontpagemag.com/2012/frank-crimi/to-jail-a-downs-syndrome-girl/.

²³ Kumar Anuragh, 'Now Bible Faces Blasphemy Charges in Pakistan', *Christian Post*, 3 June 2011, www.christianpost.com/news/now-bible-faces-blasphemy-charges-in-pakistan-50789/; Rahman Atkia, 'JUI-S Urges SC To Ban Bible within 30 Days', *Express Tribune*, 9 June 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/185452/jui-s-urges-sc-to-ban-bible-threatens-consequences/>.

²⁴ Kaleem Jaweed, 'Religious Minorities in Pakistan Struggle but Survive amid Increasing Persecution', *Huffington Post*, 20 June 2014, www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/10/religious-minorities-pakistan_n_4734016.html.

²⁵ Agence France-Presse, 'US Panel Urges Action on Pakistan Religious Freedom', 30 April 2014.

²⁶ LaTonya Taylor, 'Bloody Sunday', *Christianity Today*, 25 March 2002, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/marchweb-only/3-25-33.0.html.

In August 2002, a church in the Christian hospital at Taxila was attacked with grenades; three nurses died and twenty-three others were injured.²⁷ In the same month, Murree Christian School came under fire from extremists and six Christians were killed.²⁸

In 2009, nearly a hundred Christian houses were looted and then torched in the village of Bahmani Wala; the same thing happened in Korian, a village near Gojra; and in the Christian Colony of Gojra, sixty homes were torched and eight Christians were burned.²⁹

In March 2013, more than 150 Christian homes and two churches were burned in Joseph Colony, Lahore. Two suicide bombers then carried out a horrific attack on 23 September 2013, at All Saints Church in Peshawar, killing 98 and seriously injuring hundreds of others. Christians in Peshawar had been receiving threats from extremist Muslims to convert to Islam or face the consequences.

On 5 November 2014, a poor Christian couple and his pregnant wife were brutally killed by a mob and their bodies were then burned over a false accu-

sation of desecrating the Qur'an.³⁰

At the popular level, a general understanding prevails among Muslims that Pakistan is for them and minorities have no place in it. Pakistan and Islam are considered synonymous. Therefore, if religious minorities want to live in Pakistan they should convert to Islam.

In all these destructive incidents, governments have declined to punish the perpetrators of violence. One religious freedom advocate wrote, 'The lack of an adequate government response contributed to an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence and intimidation committed against minorities.'³¹

4. Religious extremism

All the extremist actions described above are inspired by a *prima facie* and plain reading of the primary sources of Islam and the conservative interpretations given by scholars like Mawdudi.

A number of verses in the Qur'an speak quite highly of Christians. Christians are called *ahl al-Kitab* (people of the Book) and thus viewed as equal to Muslims; they are described as believers like Muslims who will not have to fear in the day of judgement (2:62; 5:69). Muslims are also advised that they will find Christians nearest to them in terms of displaying love (5:82).

However, the overwhelming major-

²⁷ 'Nurses Killed in an Attack on Christian Hospital', *The Telegraph*, 9 August 2002, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1403992/Nurses-killed-in-attack-on-Christian-hospital.html.

²⁸ David Rhode, 'Gunman Kills 6 in a Christian School in Pakistan', *New York Times*, 6 August 2002, www.nytimes.com/2002/08/06/world/gunmen-kill-6-at-a-christian-school-in-pakistan.html.

²⁹ Kharal Asad, 'Looking Back: Not a Single Person Convicted for Gojra Riots', *Express Tribune*, 10 March 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/518585/looking-back-not-a-single-person-convicted-for-gojra-riots/>.

³⁰ Jillani Shahzab, 'Pakistan Christian Community Living in Fear after Mob Killing', BBC News, 8 November 2014, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-29956115.

³¹ Edward P. Lipton, *Religious Freedom in Asia* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2002), 39.

ity of relevant passages in the Qur'an condemn Christians. Sura 2:120 alerts Muslims; 'Never will the Jews nor the Christians be pleased with you till you follow their religion'.

The mere presence of Christians among Muslims is considered a threat to their faith. The Qur'an warns, 'And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers' (3:85).

The Qur'an apparently forbids Muslims from socializing with Christians:

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

On the basis of such verses, strict Muslims avoid befriending Christians. They are afraid that Christians may corrupt their beliefs and Islamic ways of life. Therefore, extremist groups try to eradicate this would-be source of corruption from Islamic societies.

The command not to befriend Jews and Christians is given with such force and clarity that those Muslims who seek such friendship are considered non-Muslims:

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

(5:51).³²

Many hadiths (sayings accepted as inspired) in Islam forbid Muslims from befriending non-believers. Revered Muslim scholars like Ibn Kathir, Ibn Taymiyah, Ahmad Sarhindi and others have taken this view.³³

On the other hand, Christian beliefs in the Trinity and the divinity of Christ are described as *kufr* (unbelief; 4:44–59, 5:17) and *shirk* (association of God with things that are not God). Those who accept these falsehoods are called unbelievers and assigned to hell (5:73).

Finally, Muslims are plainly commanded to fight against those, including the 'people of the book', who do not submit as Muslims, and to bring them to submission, payment of *jizya* (reli-

³² Some Muslims are embarrassed by verse 5:51 and have gone to elaborate lengths to modify its intent by interpreting the word 'friend' as 'guardian' or 'protector', which are just two of several legitimate translations of the Arabic word. According to these apologists, the verse is referring to a Muslim's allegiance to a non-Muslim government (which is not all that comforting either). However, the word *awliyaa* is used in verse 5:51 instead of other words that would be more appropriate if the meaning were 'protector', such as *hamin*. In fact, the politically correct translations that do use the word 'protector' translate the same word as 'friend' in other places, such as verse 10:62. This latter verse proves that the word *awliyaa* truly means 'friend' in the Qur'an and not 'guardian' because it refers to associates of Allah. If the word means 'guardian' there, then it would mean that Allah has guardians, which is blasphemy.

³³ WikiIslam, 'Qur'an, Hadith and Scholars: Friendship with Non-Muslims', wikiislam.net/wiki/Qur%27an,_Hadith_and_Scholars:Friendship_with_Non-Muslims#Ibn_Kathir, accessed 1 July 2015.

gious tax), and humiliation:

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

These messages create an environment of intolerance. Muslims generally assume that they and their religion are superior to Christians, and the low socio-political condition of Christians in Pakistan makes it easier for religious fanatics to take extreme steps against them and commit violence with impunity. In the northern part of the country, extremist groups have been harassing Christians to convert, leave or be killed.

Religious *ghairat* (an Islamic concept that encompasses honour, jealousy and zealotry)³⁴ wreaks havoc against minorities. Religious zealots incite hatred in the name of Islam. Calls are given from mosques that a certain person has desecrated the Qur'an or has blasphemed against the prophet of Islam. In response, hordes

of Muslims attack Christian colonies, churches and institutions, not hesitating to loot, arson, pillage and kill.

Some extremist groups, such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, send suicide bombers and other trained killers to destroy churches and kill Christians. For example, suicide bombers attacked Roman Catholic and Anglican churches in Youhanabad, near Lahore, on 15 March 2015.³⁵ Twenty Christians were killed and hundreds were injured.

A thirteen-year-old boy was set on fire in broad daylight by two motorcyclists because he confessed to being a Christian.³⁶ On 24 May 2015, after an accusation that a Christian had desecrated pages of the Qur'an, a Christian colony in Gulshan-e-Ravi was attacked.³⁷

Religious extremism is rampant and manifests itself in social, intellectual, legal and constitutional forms. Christians are constitutionally reduced to the status of second-class citizens, and the Pakistan Penal Code's religious clauses have proved to be legal mouse-traps. Widespread, religiously motivated discrimination exists throughout Pakistan and culminates in violent attacks by Muslim mobs and trained extremists.

Anglican Bishop, Michael Nazir-Ali,

³⁴ *Ghairat* is a peculiar concept that involves shame, jealousy and honour at the same time. In religious terms, it is an irrational type of reaction intended to protect the sacredness, holiness or honour of religious persons, places, books and other artifacts that are considered to be holy. Muslims react violently against anything or any person deemed to be insulting or bringing shame on Islam or the Muslim community. Hundreds of people, including many women throughout Pakistan, have been killed in the name of *ghairat*.

³⁵ 'Crucial Time for Christians in Pakistan after the Churches Attacked in Youhanabad Lahore', *Christians' True Spirit*, 31 March 2015, <http://christiantruespirit.com/?p=89>.

³⁶ 'Pakistan: 13 Year Old Boy Set on Fire for Being Christian', *Independent Catholic News*, 13 April 2015, www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=27193.

³⁷ Wilson Chaudhary, 'Lahore Christians Face Further Attack after Man Accused of Blasphemy', 25 May 2015, www.britishpakistani-christians.co.uk/blog/tag/Gulshan_Ravi/.

observed in 2015: 'There is such a lot that the Christian community does in Pakistan, in spite of the terrible persecution and discrimination that it suffers. All of these [Christians] are sitting ducks for any kind of terrorist to do whatever they like.'³⁸ In a desperate appeal, Nazir-Ali asked for the Pakistani army to protect churches and Christian institutions.

IV. Christian Responses

1. Living in a state of fear

Ever since the Iranian revolution and the unspeakable suffering that Christians in that country endured, I have feared that a similar situation could arise in Pakistan. The possibility certainly cannot be ruled out, especially since one main inspiration of the Iranian revolution was a Pakistani religious-political ideologue, Mawdudi.³⁹

Pakistani Christians have responded to this appalling situation in many different ways, among which fear is perhaps the most common. Soon after the creation of Pakistan, Christians began to feel insecure. A renowned Christian scholar, lawyer, and politician, Joshua Fazl-ud-din, noted; 'As a matter of fact, right from the beginning, minor

officials had been harassing Christians in Pakistan and openly asking them to leave Pakistan, which they characterized as a homeland exclusively for Muslims.'⁴⁰

Consequently, 'loyalty of the non-Muslims to the state of Pakistan is doubted even by the moderate Muslims'.⁴¹

Twenty-five years ago, a survey found that 80 percent of Christians felt they were treated as second-class citizens in Pakistan.⁴² With the ever-rising tide of persecution, Christians do not see any future for themselves in the country. Self-preservation, security of Christians and church institutions, and simple survival are their main concerns.

2. Mass migration

National newspapers have widely reported the mass migration of Pakistani Christians who are seeking asylum in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Malaysia, waiting for their turn to be examined in UN camps.⁴³ Nazir Bhatti, who has long

38 Ruth Gledhill, 'Michael Nazir-Ali: Christians in Pakistan Are "Sitting Ducks" for Terrorist Attack', *Christian Today*, 18 March 2015, www.christiantoday.com/article/michael-nazir.ali.christians.in.pakistan.are.sitting.ducks.for.terrorist.attacks/50239.htm.

39 David Emmanuel Singh, 'Integrative Political Ideology of Mawlana Mawdudi and Islamisation of the Muslim Masses in the Indian Subcontinent', *Journal of South Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2000): 129-48.

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

41 Theodore Gabriel, *Christian Citizens of an Islamic State: The Pakistani Experience* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 37.

42 Patrick J. Roelle, *Christians under Siege* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009), 50.

43 Rabis Ali, 'Packing Their Bags: Christians Moving to Thailand to Escape Violence, Insecurity', *Express Tribune*, 15 July 2014, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/735724/packing-their-bags-christians-moving-to-thailand-to-escape-violence-insecurity/>; 'Pakistani Christians Moving to Foreign Countries out of Fear', *Decan Chronicle*, 15 July 2014, <http://www.decanchronicle.com/140715/world-neighbours/article/pakistani-christians-moving-foreign->

been advocating for Christians through his paper, *Pakistan Christian Post*, claimed in a letter to the UN Secretary General that 90 percent of Pakistani Christians favoured receiving refugee status.⁴⁴

This claim might be somewhat exaggerated, but Christians do not feel safe nor do they have equal rights as citizens of Pakistan. Therefore, those who are able, especially middle-class Pakistani Christians, are emigrating.

3. Agitation and protests

Constant suffering at the hands of extremists and denial of justice in the courts (among all the atrocities committed against Christians, no one has been convicted or punished by the courts) have driven some Christians to take to the streets in the hope that authorities and the international community may take notice of their plight, forcing the government to take some action.

In May 1998, Bishop John Joseph took an extreme step and committed suicide in front of the court in Sahiwal that had given a death sentence to young Ayub Masih, falsely accused of committing blasphemy.⁴⁵ This sparked further protests from demonstrators who were manhandled by police and Muslim gangsters. Hundreds of Christians were severely beaten, arrested

and put in jail. Even government hospitals refused to treat injured protesters.

After twin suicide bombers killed 20 worshippers in Youhanabad on 15 March 2015, Christian seized two terrorists and burned them (see section 8 below). In response, hundreds of Christians were arrested, beaten and harassed. A large number of residents of Youhanabad have fled and have still not returned. Many protesters are still in prisons and are reportedly being pressured to convert if they want to get out of jail.

4. Living in ghettos

Social, political, constitutional and religious hostility coupled with extreme socio-economic and political weakness seems to have turned Christians into a ghetto community. Nearly half a century of growing persecution and constant betrayal from the country's very beginning have seriously affected Christian-Muslim relations. Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali wrote:

These [blasphemy] laws have not just muzzled freedom of belief and of speech but they have made Christians and other non-Muslims perpetually fearful about being targets of the next accusation. It has created a ghetto mentality amongst them and further removed them from the ambit of public life. The removal of the moratorium on the death penalty, ostensibly to deal with terrorism, raises the real prospect of someone now being executed for blasphemy. This would be a tragic development indeed.⁴⁶

countries-out-fear.

⁴⁴ Nazir S. Bhatti, '90% Pakistani Christian [sic] Favour Refugee Status from UN after Rising Violence', *Pakistan Christian Post* (2008), www.pakistanchristianpost.com/vieweditorial.php?editorialid=112.

⁴⁵ Owen Bennett-Jones, 'Despatches: Karachi', BBC News, 7 May 1998, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south-asia/88890.stm>.

⁴⁶ Michael Nazir-Ali, 'Persecution of Pa-

5. A messianic response

One thing that distinguishes Christianity clearly from other faiths is its message of forgiveness. Islam, as a religion and native culture, justifies taking revenge. Tribal, sectarian and family feuds have taken thousands of lives as the vicious spiral of revenge continues to grow. However, the New Testament teaches Christians not to take revenge, as judgement belongs to God (Rom 12:19).

Christ's unimaginable suffering and his prayer for forgiveness for those who crucified him have always inspired Pakistani Christians to follow their Saviour and forgive the perpetrators of violence against them. After the massacre of 15 worshippers in October 2001 in Bahawalpur Church, where thousands of Muslims were attending a funeral, pastors and bishops announced that they forgave the killers.⁴⁷

After the 2013 suicide bombing of All Saints Church in Peshawar, the response by the bereaved families was amazing. A veteran South Korean missionary and personal friend interviewed 337 Christians regarding their reaction to the killers and their surviving fellow perpetrators, finding that 91.4 percent were willing to grant forgiveness. Following are some typical comments:

kistan's Christians by Fanatical Islam Is a Betrayal of Jinnah and Founding Fathers', *International Business Times*, 12 June 2015, www.ibtimes.co.uk/persecution-pakistans-christians-by-fanatical-islam-betrayal-jinnah-founding-fathers-1505766.

⁴⁷ 'Beth', 'Pakistani Christians Bury Massacre Victims, Forgive Killers', *Famvin*, 29 October 2001, <http://famvin.org/en/2001/10/29/pakistani-christians-bury-massacre-victims-forgive-killers/>.

'I believe God will do all the judging. So I trust God for his judgement and I forgive them.'

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

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

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

'I forgive. But I wish and pray for them to repent, begin to love other people and stop killing.'⁴⁸

This song of forgiveness has been sung by choirs of wounded souls, under the direction of the Crucified, for the last two thousand years. Pakistani Christians are proud to add their voice to Jesus' choir of the cross.

6. Audacious tenacity of faith

One of the most unexpected and stunning responses by ordinary Christians in the face of tremendous suffering has been to remain firmly grounded in their commitment to and faith in Christ.

After horrible carnage in many of the churches, Christian leaders were afraid that their congregations might desert. However, the response has

⁴⁸ Matthew Jeong, 'Report to the Diocese of Peshawar and All Donor Friends about Our Visit to Victims of the Bomb Blasts on 22 April 2014' (unpublished, quoted with permission).

been exactly the opposite. Pakistani churches are filled with people of all ages.

The believers recognize that their persecution actually testifies to the truthfulness of Christ's teachings: 'You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved' (Mt 10:22). 'Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me' (Mt 24:9).

These Christians take seriously the challenge to remain faithful until death and the promise of the crown of life (Rev 2:10). Thus, they demonstrate a remarkable tenacity of faith in the face of intense persecution emanating from religious extremism.

7. Intellectual response

Although forgiving one's enemies, even when they don't seek forgiveness, is a unique and powerful Christian virtue and Pakistani Christians have demonstrated it quite regularly, it does not necessarily inspire love for them in the enemies' hearts, nor does it create peace. Christians need to engage Muslims at socio-political and religious-cultural levels to create mutual understanding and an environment for peaceful, respectful and accommodative co-existence.

This requires a comprehensive dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Unfortunately, Muslims in Pakistan do not feel such a need.

Bishop Nazir-Ali contends that Muslims and Christians have 'grave responsibility for maintaining peace' through dialogue and cooperation, and that committed and genuine dialogue

naturally requires critical evaluation of other faiths by Christians and allows others to critically evaluate Christian faith.⁴⁹ He further asserts that the catholicity of the church demands its participation in dialogue with and mission to the rest of the world.

Nazir-Ali argues that if the church, in John Knox's words, is an 'ever-widening sphere and ever-deepening reconciliation ... then the church must always be in dialogue with the community, with the people of other faiths and with all those of goodwill.'⁵⁰

Nazir-Ali refers to four types of dialogues: the dialogue of life, the dialogue of deeds, the dialogue of specialists and the dialogue of the interior life. Regarding the third kind, he writes, 'People, sometimes, do not give enough value to the dialogue of specialists. In some cases this *has* been sterile: where it has been overly concerned with classical issues and there has been a danger in some respect of a merely antiquarian interest.'⁵¹

Although dialogue of life and deeds is unavoidable (and, to some extent, desirable) on a daily basis, it lacks intentionality and Christian moorings. As for the dialogue of specialists, Christians suffer from the lack of such specialists who can engage with Muslim scholars. Christian leadership training institutions are largely responsible for such a dearth. None of the major theological institutions teaches courses on

⁴⁹ Michael Nazir-Ali, *The Unique and Universal Christ* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 2012), 86–87.

⁵⁰ Michael Nazir-Ali, *Mission and Dialogue: Proclaiming the Gospel Afresh in Every Age* (London: SPCK, 1995), 72.

⁵¹ Nazir-Ali, *Mission and Dialogue*, 82.

Islam or Christian-Muslim relations.

Sadly, Christians have no voice and no influence in Pakistan, constitutionally, politically, socially or intellectually. They constantly look towards the Western world to save them from their appalling and life-threatening situation. However, in many cases, this hope for help from the West proves counter-productive.

8. Acting like the extremists

Peaceful protest is not only justified but also necessary to challenge unjust authorities and injustices (Jn 18:22). However, anger at Muslim extremists has caused some Christians to become extremists as well. Reacting to the violence committed against them, Christian demonstrators have sometimes turned violent and destroyed public property.

The most shocking incident took place right after the twin suicide attacks in Youhanabad on March 15, 2015. Reportedly, police arrested two Muslim suspects at the scene. Angry Christians snatched them from the police, killed them and set them on fire. As the fire engulfed them, Christians shouted 'Hallelujah' and '*Khudawand Yasu Masih ki Jai*' (praise God and victory to the Lord Jesus Christ), apparently as a parallel to Muslim chanting of 'Allahu Akbar' (God is great). Chaudhary Nisar Khan, the interior minister, quickly condemned the Christian reaction as the 'worst act of terrorism'.⁵²

From time to time, certain Christian leaders have threatened to set up mili-

tant organizations to defend Christians against Muslim militant groups. This is a very sad and totally un-Christian response.

V. Following the True Extremist

Instead of being influenced by Muslim religious extremism, Christians ought to respond with a different kind of extremism: they should whole-heartedly follow the True Extremist, Jesus Christ.

Christ could be considered an extremist in two ways: what he actually taught and did, and what people thought about him. Jesus' opponents, as they understood his teachings and his claims about himself, viewed him as an extremist so dangerous that they must eliminate him. At his first preaching in Nazareth, his audience tried to kill him by throwing him from the top of the mountain (Lk 4:28–30).

When Christ claimed that he and God, whom he called his father, were one, the Jews called him a blasphemer and tried to stone him (Jn 10:30–33). At one point, even his disciples thought his teachings were too extreme, to the extent that many of his followers left him and never came back (Jn 6:60–66). Jesus' cleansing of the Temple was certainly interpreted as the act of an extremist, after which the Temple authorities determined to kill him (Mk 11:15–18).

Christ was the True Extremist in ways that his opponents could not grasp. His taking on humanity and becoming one of us, being born as a vulnerable baby, and offering himself as a sacrifice to save humanity and honour his Father were extreme acts. His teaching to 'love your enemies and

⁵² Ali Khan, 'Mob Lynching Is "Worst Kind of Terrorism", Says Nisar', *Dawn*, 18 March 2015, www.dawn.com/news/1170157.

pray for those who persecute you' (Mt 5:44) goes beyond our normal mental and ethical boundaries. And Christ's instruction that his would-be disciples must deny themselves and carry their cross daily is an extreme demand.

Thus, in my view, the most appropriate Christian response to religious extremism is Christian extremism, or perhaps messianic extremism. Christian moderation ultimately leads to the betrayal of Christ. It is somewhat similar to Peter's walking at a distance behind Christ after his betrayal. Soon he denied that he even knew Christ, rather than confessing that he was one of Jesus' closest disciples.

Our response to religious extremism should entail not only an extreme com-

mitment to Christ but also living out a call to extreme, radical discipleship. Only messianic extremism can counter religious extremism. Only extreme love can overcome extreme hatred. Only carrying the cross can deliver us from the fear of death and assure us of the victory that Christ has already won over the powers of destruction, including destructive religious extremism.

Only by losing our lives for Christ and the gospel can we find life (Mt 10:39; Mk 9:34–35; Lk 9:23–25). This is the way of the cross, of the crucified and resurrected Lord, and of all his true disciples and apostles. May the Triune God help us to respond to religious extremism in this most appropriate way.