

**MUSLIMS & CHRISTIANS IN PAKISTAN:  
AN EXEMPLARY INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

*By: Muhammad Shahid Habib*

***Introduction:***

*In a multi-religious set up, there has developed inter-faith dialogue, to promote peace and harmony among different nations. And it has become a need of every state to promote it. Pakistan, a Muslim state, has 4% of its population non-Muslim whose freedom and rights are truly guarded. The study aims to investigate how the Christians here are living peacefully and freely. It would also be observed what has contributed to the development of Muslim-Christian dialogue as well as what disturbs it. The steps taken by the government in this regard and the role of Church towards national development will also be discussed in what follows. The study follows a critical analysis of Muslim-Christian dialogue in the Pakistani context.*

***Statement of the Problem:***

*In Pakistan, Christians have been enjoying full freedom and all of their rights are safeguarded by the state. The study searches for the elements of interfaith harmony between Muslims and Christians in Pakistan along with the problems hindering it.*

***Significance of the Study:***

*The study carries a lot of significance for the promotion of interfaith dialogue in Pakistan. It would highlight the areas of collaboration and the problems there in for which Muslims and Christians can sort some way out both at state level and at individual level.*

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### *1) Background of Church and Dialogue in Pakistan:*

Pakistan emerged on the world map, on August 14, 1947. The Muslim leaders achieved this state for the Muslims so that they could freely lead their lives according to the teachings of Islam. Pakistan being a Muslim state has 96% of its population as Muslims and 4% as non-Muslims. Out of the 4%, Christians from 2% and the rest are 2% are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Ahmadis. Pakistan is a developing country. Most of its population is rural. The people of all the religions enjoy full freedom to practice their values and traditions. Here we are concerned with the Christians and the Church in Pakistan.

The emergence of Christianity in Sub-Continent dates back to 1581 with the missionaries from the West. The Catholic Church in Pakistan has now grown to 1084782 Catholics administratively structured into seven independent units with one foreigner and six sons of the soil at its helm and 146 diocesan priests to support them in the work of God.<sup>1</sup>

Catholic Church started its active participation in different fields in Sub-Continent in 1889. Its first centers were established in Sialkot and Lahore. They worked hard for the propagation of the mission and also made efforts to upgrade the standard of living through education, medicine and other facilities for the people. The areas or the population to which the Church centered its attention was the backward areas. People who were poor were facilitated in different ways and converted to Christianity. This is the reason that most of the Christians in Pakistan live in the rural areas.<sup>2</sup>

At present, the Catholic Church has six Diocese, namely Karachi, Hyderabad, Multan, Lahore, Faisalabad and Rawalpindi. There are about 3-4 million Christians in Pakistan. The Church is very small in number in comparison

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to the Muslim community. However, it is blooming and very promising. There have been a reasonable number of local vocations for the priesthood and sisterhood. There are some other small religious groups of priests and sisters who are administering the spiritual needs of the church. Christians are at the active service of the country in all fields of life.

*a. Pakistani Government and Christians:*

The government of Pakistan has been quite serious and favorable regarding the minorities. Though Pakistan is an Islamic state, the non-Muslims are not to be discriminated on the basis of religion, creed or caste. This was assured by the founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. According to the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1956, 1962 and 1973, it is the moral, religious, political and constitutional obligation of the government of Pakistan that the rights and privileges of the minorities are properly safeguarded. Further, they have full opportunity of self-development and advancement.

Until now Christians as a minority community have been receiving a lot of services from the government of Pakistan. There is full religious freedom for Christians to conduct religious services in their own institutions. They are free to prepare and publish their literature as well. Their special programs on Christmas and Easter are broadcasted on Radio Pakistan and telecasted on Pakistan Television. The minority officers are nominated in each district. The minority students are granted special scholarships. Similarly, the government encourages the cultural activities of the minorities by awarding the prominent artists, poets and writers. The film censor board has also got a minority representative to take care of the interests of the minorities. The Majlis-e-Shoora committee has also got members of minorities. The government encourages Christians for education

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programmes in the country.<sup>3</sup>

A very amazing understanding between the government of Pakistan and the Christians can be observed when in February 1981, The Pope John Paul II visited Pakistan. The Holy Mass was celebrated in National Stadium, Karachi. The government of Pakistan made special arrangements for the Christians to come to Karachi for the unique celebration. The whole visit of the Pope was directly telecasted and broadcasted on TV and the Radio respectively. There was extensive newspaper coverage throughout the country.

### ***b. Services of Church in Relation to Pakistan:***

Attitude of the Church can be better seen in the words of the Pope John Paul II that he said at his short stay in Pakistan. He stated:

*"The Church, without forgetting that her primary mission is a spiritual one, always seeks to collaborate with individual nations and people of goodwill in promoting the dignity and advancement of the human person. She carries out the endeavors by various means, such as schools and programs of education, and through charitable and social institutions. In this regard, it is gratifying to see how the Catholic Church and the government of Pakistan have worked together here in harmony for the benefit of so many. I pray for the continued success of these endeavors."*<sup>4</sup>

According to the church, the people who believe in one God must unite themselves strongly. All should share the common concerns such as spiritual dimension, freedom and dignity of everybody, true justice and lasting peace. The church supports dialogue with Islam to have mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims. The church of Pakistan is truly Pakistani in its origin. Its social, religious, moral and economic goals are the same as of the majority community.

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*c. Beginning of Dialogue in Pakistan:*

Christians had established many commissions and study centers for inter-religious dialogue. Their primary concern was to bring the people of other religions closer to them in any way as a part of their mission. According to the words of Fr. James Channan<sup>5</sup>:

“There is a need to help our people realize that a dialogue with Muslims is must in Pakistan. There is no future for the Church in Pakistan without dialogue”.<sup>6</sup>

In these efforts, they had remained successful in Pakistan. This situation led the Muslims to have such centers where they could interact with Christians and express before them what Islam really is.

There have been many national as well as international organizations both of Muslims and Christians working for the promotion of inter-religious dialogue in Pakistan. Some of the organizations are United Religious Initiative, Pontifical Council for Inter-Faith Dialogue, World Conference on Religion and Peace, Federation of Asian Bishop Conferences, World Muslim Congress, World Council of Churches, Rabita Commission Pakistan, Christian Peace Trust, Universal Inter-Faith Peace Mission and Pakistan Association of Inter-Religious Dialogue. So far, these have proved quite fruitful as they have been working not only to create friendly relations with the people of other religions but also within one's own religious community.

Pope John Paul VI established the Secretariat for Non-Christians on 19th May 1964. This secretariat was renamed the Pontifical Council for inter-religious Dialogue. On October 22, 1974 a commission for Islam was formed, composed of a group of specialists and consultants. For this purpose, Pakistan Episcopal

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Conference established the National Commission for Christian-Muslim Relations in April 1984.<sup>7</sup>

The Commission promotes dialogue, better relations, understanding, co-operation and respect between the followers of Islam and Christianity. These objectives are achieved through meetings, workshops, courses, seminars, publications and services.

Pakistan Association for Inter-Religious Dialogue (PAIRD) was started in August 1984 by Dr. Riffat Hasan, Now Professor of religious studies at a university in America. The association is now run by Mr. Muizzuddin Qazi Javed and Fr. James Channan. The aim of PAIRD is to achieve and promote a better understanding of the values of different religions, particularly Christianity and Islam. The organization also organizes meetings in places outside and in Lahore.

### **2) Kinds of Dialogue in Pakistan:**

#### **a. John O'Brien and Dialogue:**

According to John O'Brien,<sup>8</sup> Christians and Muslims have been living in Pakistan with complete understanding. Being citizens of the same country, they live in harmony and work collectively for the betterment of the people irrespective of their religion. There is a dialogue of life, dialogue on daily sharings, dialogue regarding prayer etc.

#### **1. Dialogue of life can be carried out on four principle basis.**

- a.* Firstly as a commitment to a shared struggle for justice. It has strengthened the relations of Muslims and Christians.
  - b.* Secondly, Muslims and Christians come closer to each other at their work. They get together as colleagues and have inter-faith dialogue. This kind of dialogue occurs between the equals, starting at the professional
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level and moving to the dialogue of life. Both come close to each other at hospitals and educational institutes. In a Muslim environment, sometimes Christians have to remain silent as they are bound to follow the prevailing system in any institute. They are bound to listen to the recitation of the Holy Quran in gatherings. In schools and colleges; they are to recite the prayer and so on. Unemployment is also an important cause for their stay at such places.

- c. Thirdly, dialogue may arise out of a common commitment to prayer. The Muslims in Pakistan are deeply interested in their prayers and have a keen sense of its importance. The Muslims and the Christians are sometimes also seen praying together. Muslims ask Christians to pray for their sick. In some cases, it seems there is a real meeting of hearts, a joint journey towards one God.
- d. Fourthly, the dialogue of life follows from the ordinary involvements of daily life. Being the humans, there are several levels at which Muslims and Christians can meet. The reality of life is to facilitate meaning, motivation and transformation in the struggle of daily life. The religious harmony with others is to get out of the idea that one's own religious system is complete and faultless. So such encounter needs an enriched and expanded humanity.<sup>9</sup>

**John O'Brien** has also discussed dialogue in different forms in Pakistan. Regarding this, he says that Muslims and Christians go for shared struggle for many achievements. They come closer to each other at work places, educational institutes, hospitals, etc. They are also seen together for prayers. Besides, in the matters of daily life, they meet to facilitate each other. All this has led the Muslims and Christians to religious harmony. They have developed respect for

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each other. John O'Brien discussing dialogue has on the contrary also highlighted some areas that could not be accepted by Christians. These are the issues that have created difference between Muslims and Christians. In an Islamic state, Christians are bound to study some part of Holy Quran at school. The punishment for blasphemous remarks about the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) is death. This has negatively affected inter-religious dialogue. Similarly, non-Muslims could be witnesses of any incident in the court of law. But they could not be equal to the Muslims. In short, the government of Pakistan has tried to implement the Islamic law in the country. If it is so, then people of other religions are bound to follow Islamic system of life. John O'Brien has pointed out this important aspect that has made Christians remain silent and they suffer at certain places. To him, there should be a secular system in Pakistan that would favor all the communities. If Islamic system is implemented it would have negative effects on promoting dialogue. Christians in that case would have to become quite passive and remain silent. They cannot have freedom to express themselves.

### **b. Jon Slomp and Dialogue:**

Jon Slomp<sup>10</sup> defines Dialogue that it is a meeting or conversation between two or more persons or groups on a certain issue reaching some fruitful conclusions. Dialogue, regarding religion has got a very significant place as the people of different religions share their views on certain issues and urge to create some sort of harmony and mutual understanding while living collectively in a society. There are experiences like "dialogical attitude" or "dialogical openness". These direct our attention to more than intellectual discussion and refer to different aspects of human life.

In Pakistan, it is considered that all the human beings are born free and



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have equal rights and freedom. In this regard, there is no distinction on the basis of religion, caste, sex, language etc. Everybody has got freedom to follow any religion. For that, there is no distinction made between Christians and Muslims. They both have got complete equality in every respect. Most of the population of Pakistan is rural where they need only food, clothing and shelter to lead their lives. Majority of the Christians live in villages.

In such an Islamic state Christians and Muslims are found engaged in the activity of dialogue. There is dialogue of words that takes place between the experts of the two religions on religious issues. This is to share and deepen the understanding of each other's faith and religious heritage. There have been established some institutes established both by Muslims as well as by Christians in different cities of Pakistan. The leading figures from both sides engage in discussions to look into the problems of mankind and to reach some positive solutions.

Another form of dialogue is "dialogue of deeds". It includes joint ventures of Christians and Muslims in Pakistan. They are not common here. There are some reasons for it i.e. low socio-economic position of Christians and the way of meeting of the Muslims with them. The Muslims avoid a friendly attitude towards the Christians. Dialogue of deeds takes place when the action is directed to people's welfare and liberation.

The dialogue of religious experience mostly takes place on a personal level; the people share religious experience, prayer etc. Such dialogue has not got much scope in Pakistan. Nevertheless, there is some dialogue of religious experience, when Christians and Muslims share their personal experiences of prayer, meditation, fasting etc. at different occasions.

The most significant and the easiest kind of dialogue is the dialogue of life. Many Christians in Pakistan are poor and share their life's burden with the poor Muslims living with them. The Muslims also have the same attitude. These

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relations are disturbed when there is any international event. In Pakistan, Christian institutes, churches etc. are attacked or burnt. When Babri Mosque in India was destroyed by Hindus, Muslims in Pakistan damaged and burnt temples and churches. However, regarding dialogue of life, people in Pakistan are found sharing one another's joys, sorrows, having neighborly relations etc.<sup>11</sup>

John Slomp says, "It is through dialogue that Christians and Muslims have developed quite friendly relations. Though Pakistan was founded in the name of Islam it was emphasized that the state must be governed according to the teachings of Islam. But it is to be noted that in Pakistan all the people have got freedom. All are born free and have no distinction on the basis of sex, creed, religion etc. Christians and Muslims are found engaged in different activities. In past, non-Muslims paid *Jizya* and became *Dhimmis* (the protected people). They could enjoy freedom in all fields. But in modern age, there is no such a system. The government has declared the non-Muslims as free people and they can live according to their will.

### **c. Dr. De Souza and Dialogue:**

Dr. De Souza<sup>12</sup> says that Christians and Muslims have been living together in Pakistan since 1947. There is a dialogue of life between them in many fields. They are neighbors, co-workers, classmates, colleagues etc. and have mutual respect and harmony. This dialogue has been at the common level and had no deeper roots. It can be seen as a form of co-existence.

1. With the passage of time, both Muslims and Christians have been getting closer to each other on humanitarian basis. The social, political and economic activities are carried out together for the welfare of the people and the state. This has been going on throughout the whole of Pakistan.

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2. Finally, the proper form of dialogue is that when the scholars of the two religions meet and discuss the religious matters. This dialogue is limited to selective people. There has been a growing interest in various parts of the country in this form of dialogue.<sup>9</sup>

The above-mentioned forms of dialogues really are found in Pakistan. Dr. De Souza has analyzed briefly how in an Islamic state, Christians are enjoying equal rights. In the social setup of the country, life runs with no difference among the people regarding religion. A spirit of service and caring is found in the society. There are also certain organizations which are working for the betterment of relations among different religions. Scholars of Islam and Christianity meet to share their views about different issues.

### **d. Christian Study Center:**

Christian Study Center was established in 1967 at Rawalpindi (Pakistan). It was firmly rooted in the ecumenical tradition and vision of the church. The center was to go for study and research in Christianity, Islam and their relations. The center urged to study the local cultures, to undertake research and to stimulate Christian involvement in nation building. Christians approached the Muslims in varied forms at different times. The over-all approaches can be classified into following categories.

### **I: Era of Dialogue of Minds: (1967 – 1985):**

When Christian study center was established, the very first challenge before it was to bring the Christians close to the Muslims. As Christians, remained away from Muslims, so the center devoted itself to develop a positive attitude towards Islam and Muslims. For this, protestant as well as Catholic Church went side by side. The relevant literature was also published abundantly. During this time, the basic approach towards Muslim-Christian relations remained

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ambiguous. It was a question why to have a dialogue and on what basis? The center struggled hard to create awareness and a positive understanding about Islam. These efforts proved fruitful and some Muslim and Christian scholars have been sympathetically looking into the co-relation. During this era, the center had stimulated academic and intellectual discussion among Muslims and Christians. So this was an era of dialogue of minds.

### **II: Era of Dialogue of Life (1985 – 1995):**

This was a very important age as the Muslims and Christians had come closer to each other. They started looking into each other's religion with a positive mind. In this period, the focus was shifted from "Library/Ivory Town Research" to "People Centered Research". It aimed to assist Christian Church in developing understanding with other religions. It undertook and encouraged theological, academic and people-oriented research. Further, participatory studies were also developed to encourage dialogue. The role of Christians in the nation building of Pakistan was also the form of study.

The leader of the center during this period was Dr. Charles Amjad Ali whose scholarly work got a lot of significance. He had classified the existing approaches to dialogue in the following ways.

- a.* In its earliest manifestation, the concern for the study of other religions began as an aid to polemics.
- b.* The second manifestation is a gentler version of the first. Here dialogue was used as a cloak for opportunities for conversion.
- c.* In this approach, the other religions were treated as preparation evangelical.
- d.* Combination of various approaches which all made an appeal to common transcendence. A genuine metaphysical concern for such things as "Same god by different names", "common humanity and common human goal", etc.

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Dialogue is a process of discourse in which the communities involved go through their own to research study to reach some understanding of certain social and political problems. During 1985-1995, the Christians study center, Rawalpindi, enjoyed the highly appreciated life as it fruitfully worked for the betterment of Christian-Muslim relations. Gradually this continued and led the people to the dialogue of hearts.

### **III: Era of Dialogue of Hearts: (1995):**

After successful efforts made in dialogue of life and minds, the center devoted itself to the dialogue of hearts. Here the challenge is to make room in the hearts of the people as to be respectful to one another's religion. The disrespectful attitude for other religion is the basic hindrance between Christian-Muslim relations not only in Pakistan but also in the whole world. Christians had discriminatory attitude about Islam and their Prophet. Similarly the Muslims also hurt Christians physically, emotionally and psychologically. But the need here was to forget all about past and living in the same society with mutual respect and understanding was to be developed. The faith of each human being should be respected. Everyone was to be treated as human being. The intolerant attitude needs to be abolished by providing alternate and positive models.<sup>13</sup>

Christian Study Center established in Rawalpindi, Pakistan has also worked very seriously for bringing the Muslims and Christians closer to each other. The Center remained quite successful in developing friendly attitude towards the Muslims. After that, they started looking into each other's religions with a positive mind. The CSC was appreciated for its fruitful services for the betterment of Muslim-Christian relations in Pakistan. These gradual activities at last led the people to the dialogue of hearts. The Center emphasized to forget the past and develop a loving attitude. Instead of turning away, it was strongly

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recommended to study each other's religion with positive approach. Tolerance, the only spirit for unity got developed with the passage of time. Besides dialogue, CSC aimed at interpreting Islam. In this regard Christianity Research was carried out to foster understanding and facilitate communication. The Center also taught the Christians how to work for nation building.

### **4) Government of Pakistan and Dialogue:**

#### **a. Ex. President of Pakistan Zia-ul-Haq and Pope John Paul II:**

The government of Pakistan has also showed a positive promoting approach in Christian-Muslim dialogue. In this respect, we can recall an example of 1981 when the Pope John Paul II on his visit to the far East countries stopped over in Karachi for three hours and celebrated the Holy Mass in the National Stadium with the Pakistani Church. The government made special arrangements for the Christians to come to Karachi for this unique occasion from all over the country by planes and trains. The whole visit of the Holy Father was directly telecasted on television and broadcasted on radio Pakistan. There was also the newspaper coverage throughout the country.

In the words of Fr. James: "The Church's attitude can be better seen under the light of the address of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II to the president of Pakistan Zia-ul-Haq on 16<sup>th</sup> of February 1981 in Karachi, where the Holy Father stayed for three hours during his pastoral visit to the far-East. In his message to the president of Pakistan, the Father said:

*"The church, without forgetting that her primary mission is a spiritual one, always seeks to collaborate with individual nations and people of Good will in promoting the dignity and advancement of the human person. She carries out these endeavors by various means, such as schools and programs of education, and through charitable and social institutions. In this regard, it is gratifying to see how the Catholic Church and the government of Pakistan have worked*

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*together here in harmony for the benefit of so many. I pray for the continued success of these endeavors".<sup>14</sup>*

### **b. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Dialogue:**

The year of 1997 is very important in the history of Pakistan when the then Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif invited more than one thousand Christians from across the country to the Christmas dinner on 22<sup>nd</sup> December and saluted the active participation of the Christian community in the development of Pakistan.

This first enormous program in the history of Pakistan was given much more coverage on T.V, Radio and on print media.

It's usual, every year on the occasion of the Christmas, to convey special messages of the president, the premier and of the minister for religious and minorities affairs on media.

Raja Zafar-ul-Haq, the Minister of Religious and Minorities Affairs, of the Nawaz Sharif government, was greatly in favor of the Muslim-Christian's good relations. He announced to form a commission for Inter-faith dialogue that will consist of four members. There will be four Christians in this commission and they will be in a position to bring about peace and tolerance among people of different faiths in Pakistan. For this purpose, he attended the inter-religious conferences and seminars. In November 1994, he represented Pakistan in "World Conference on Religion and Peace" arranged in Rome and Riva Del Garda, with a delegation from Pakistan.<sup>15</sup>

### **c. Dialogue and Ex. President Pervaiz Musharraf:**

President Pervaiz Musharraf addressed the "Inter-Faith Conference for Peace" on Tuesday, 14<sup>th</sup> September 2005 in New York. He expressed sorrowfully that the religions that should have promoted peace, tolerance and understanding, are

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today active against each other. Islam has not been represented truly in the West.

President Musharraf laid great stress on the need for having a comprehensive policy to develop co-operation and understanding among different religions and civilizations. The policy must consider political, social, economic and religious aspects.<sup>16</sup>

### **e. Ministry of Religious Affairs and Dialogue:**

The federal minister of religious affairs Ejaz-ul-Haq stated that the government of Pakistan has been trying seriously to promote dialogue between Islam and other religions so that an atmosphere of peace can be developed. Ejaz-ul-Haq highlighted that for world peace, president's initiative for inter-faith dialogue is an important event of the century. It has given the nations a way to bright future. Ejaz-ul-Haq further stated that dialogue first of all dialogue got its origin from Qur'an which guides to dialogue with Ahl Al-Kitab (People of the Book). Today, there is a need to follow these Qur'anic teachings and Muslim scholars should start dialogue with revealed religions. He said that president Musharraf had fulfilled this requirement by starting dialogue with other religions. This has made it possible to have peace at international level. He said that today Muslims need peace because their energies which are being wasted on conflicts, should work for constructive purposes. Ejaz-ul-Haq said that the president's speech has also given the Muslims a new policy, and it is hoped that president's tradition of dialogue will grow and dialogue will flourish in public. This will be an easy and effective way to reduce distances among different religions.<sup>17</sup>



**f. Ministry of Religious Affairs & Interfaith Harmony:**

**State Minister of Pakistan Pir Muhammad Amin-UI-Hasnat-Shah**

In the election 2013, PML (N) has raised as the strongest political party throughout the country. Right from the beginning of its rule, besides all other departments, PML(N) has duly considered the need and significance of interfaith harmony. The government has provided the platform of the *Ministry of State for Religious Affairs*

*and Interfaith Harmony* which invites the followers of all religions to play their due role in national development and integrity. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has significantly been given under the supervision of Pir Muhammad Amin-UI-Hasnat-Shah-<sup>18</sup>State Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony. Immediately after taking the charge of his office in June, 2013, His prime concern has been the promotion of peace discouraging sectarianism at every level. Regarding this, he promptly invited through his office all the minorities in Pakistan to develop integrity, harmony and peace nationwide. The letter thus reads: It delights me to congratulate PML (N) at the efforts to guard the rights of all believers especially the minorities. May it always be a successful mission truly serving the national interest.

*The founder of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, had right from the day first of creation of Pakistan, unequivocally declared a policy of equality, freedom and security for all communities living in Pakistan irrespective of their religion, profession or ethnic origin. The famous Quaid's Speech on 11th August, 1947, in first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan will also serve as a milestone to evaluate our own performance in terms of targeted achievements and thrust of priority areas for the minorities to serve them better during the coming years.*

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The very essence of every religion is to develop a peaceful society ensuring tolerance, equality and respect for rights of the people-the minorities in Pakistan enjoy their rights equally and peacefully and they are fully committed to make Pakistan an example of interfaith harmony for international community. This is in the same spirit of the first Islamic State of Madina and the vision of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah-the founder of Pakistan. The Ministry is fully devoted to promote tolerance and peace in multi-religious and multi-cultural society of Pakistan. It is an admitted fact that national development is not possible without the contribution of minorities. The government is fully committed to provide equal opportunities to all without any discrimination. I am sure that the efforts will result in harmonious relations with all the believers proving Pakistan a peaceful homeland for all.

### **5- Difficulties and problems for dialogue in Pakistan:**

It is a fact that Pakistani Muslims hardly played a role in dialogue whenever and wherever it was organized. There are some misunderstandings regarding dialogue in Pakistan. There is a huge gap between the followers of Islam and others. No proper interaction is found among the people. The followers of every religion have their own ideologies, which obstruct them from mixing with others. Many critics have viewed the situation from different angles. They have highlighted some problems, which create difficulties in carrying out dialogue in Pakistan. In the following discussion, we will discuss these views one by one.

Jan Slomp in an article “problems and possibilities for dialogue in Pakistan” has narrated a brief history of dialogue. He has discussed at length why dialogue does not thrive in Pakistan. To him, there are certain reasons for that.

First of all, the Christian community was not ready for that as it carries with it the Hindu background. Secondly the Muslims had never accepted the non-

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Muslims in Pakistan as equal partners. There had always been difference in that. Another reason may be that the Christian church had no people for dialogue at academic level. The well-trained ones unusually migrate to Europe or are too busy with their own work to go for extra activities. The arrogance of majority and ghetto mentality of minority is also a hurdle in dialogue.

1. Beside these problems, Jan Slomp has pointed out some other reasons for the failure of dialogue in Pakistan. To him there are deeper religious and political reasons embedded in the Islamic culture. To Muslims, the final book, The Holy Quran has settled all the issues. To revise them would mean that Muslims have doubts in final revelation. In other words, dialogue is dangerous for their faith. The Pakistani scene provides a gloomy picture of conflict among the Muslims themselves. There have been made some fruitless efforts in this regard. Beside this, in Pakistan, people view the Christian mission as enemy of Islam.<sup>19</sup>

To conclude Jan Slomp's viewpoint, it can be stated that dialogue was difficult to take place because of Muslims' arrogance, as they are a majority. Christian Church had no academic personalities for Dialogue. Christians are also not prepared for dialogue because of their Hindu background. Dialogue is also difficult because of deeper religious and political reasons. All these problems can be overcome only when misunderstandings are removed and there is religious liberty for every sect.

In the editorial of "Focus" the situation of dialogue is discussed in detail. In the same writing, there are highlighted difficulties and results of dialogue in Pakistan.

Both Muslims and Christians face difficulties. The Muslims think that there may be a hidden agenda behind dialogue. The most notable notion is that this is a mean to convert the others. The government's determination to implement Islamic Laws makes the Christians worry about themselves. Thus they hesitate for

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dialogue and consider themselves as second-class citizen. Most of the Christians struggle to survive and cannot spare time for dialogue. They often blame Muslims for their problems.

It means that dialogue has been obstructed because of misunderstanding about its very nature. Both Muslims and Christians are afraid of being converted. Christians are worried about their survival so they cannot go for dialogue.<sup>20</sup> These are the views from Christian scholars. As far as Muslims are concerned, they resist dialogue as a part of Christian Mission. To them, dialogue is a platform where the Christians try to explain their own problems and superiority, hence trying to convert the people. Some of the examples to clarify this view can be stated as under:

Pope John Paul II in Rome on 26<sup>th</sup> November, 1995 addressing the international commission of Franciscan Priests which consisted of representatives from Europe, East Asia, Middle East and Africa, said about the relationship with the Muslim Community that “I am glad to see the recent participation of Franciscan community in inter-religious dialogue with a new spirit because this dialogue is an important part of the church mission for the universalization of Christianity”.<sup>21</sup>

In the first Pakistan conference for Christian education that was held in **Multan** it was said, “Christian minorities could not survive without meaningful inter-religious dialogue in Pakistan. So it should be the duty of Christian teachings that the Christian children and adults should be prepared for the inter-religious dialogue”.<sup>22</sup>

A conference was held in Pakistan with the name of “Asian Journey 1997” by Pastoral Institute, Multan. It continued from 20<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> January, 1997. The participants were from ten countries of Asia, Europe and Australia. The participants of the conference were given the chance to visit Pakistan and see the

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people and know the present situation themselves for two days. After that, these participants gathered in Pastoral Institute Multan and had a sitting for a goal and had a commentary and social analysis according to their experiment and observation.

The conference decided keeping in view their observations that for the Muslim-Christian relationship it is necessary to have more concentration on the Christian preachers towards their education, especially, the Christians should be encouraged for their treatment towards Muslim neighbors and have a positive voice towards Islam and they should have a critical view towards distinctive governmental policies. The participants of the conference had in their mind that “there is no difference between the inter-religious dialogue and Bible”. It is the two in one.<sup>23</sup>

For these reasons some Muslim scholars think that dialogue is a secret agenda of Christians through which they are achieving their aims. As Dr. Khalid Alavi,<sup>24</sup> says about the inter-religious dialogue, "it is the new tactic which is used to confuse the Muslims in inter-religious dialogue. In diplomatic language it is called “engagement”. According to this, a relationship is maintained with the opposition to know their planning, their intentions and psychology and set their own line of setting. According to this, the opposition has no way out”.<sup>25</sup> From the last three centuries, Christians shaped themselves in a colonialism whose target was Islam, Muslims and the Muslim world. Church started the dialogue to engage the Muslims and through this they are achieving their different aims. On the one hand, Muslim-Christian relationship is popularized in Muslim societies while on the other hand, they are clearing the way for Christianity through this, and different sects of Christians are holding a dialogue with Muslims. Further explaining the dialogue, Dr. Khalid Alavi says that the church has an advantage that it is an organized religious institute while in Islamic world except the Shi'a; there is no organized religious group. Saudi Arabia and Libya have maintained

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some organizations that are working under their government and representatives of their government but the Islamic world does not have any organized system. So with whom and for what the dialogue should be and what result we can gain through this. No one knows about this.<sup>26</sup>

Churches choose the Muslim members of their own choice; they are called in for the dialogue and issue their policy statement. In such activities of the dialogue the churches and European States' policies are prepared and enforced. The topics of the dialogue are those which the European countries set to pressurize the Muslim societies, such as freedom of women, human rights, non-Muslim minorities, Islamic states secularization and enforcement of Shariah. In these dialogue meetings, the behavior of the Christian participant is aggressive and instructive while the Muslims behavior is defensive and apologetic.<sup>27</sup>

Qazi Muiz-ud-Din, who is among the founders of the inter-religious dialogue association of Pakistan (Lahore) and served for ten years as its president and was much active in the inter-religious dialogue, said about these dialogues that Vatican promotes the agenda of Christians and European secular powers who have some aim in front of them in these dialogues. He further said that he himself arranged many conferences and in these gathering he judged them thoroughly. He reached the conclusion that the dialogue is the part of Christian mission and in Pakistan only those churches and Christians are working for their cause and receive funds from foreign countries. He could only say to these people not to make a hole in the boat in which they are traveling.<sup>28</sup>

Khalid Jameel, the director of the department of publications of Karachi University said "we should not have dialogue with these Christians because the western powers are supporting them, and they are well organized in their political, economic and defensive systems.

***"The dialogue should be based on equality. The dialogue is useless if we do not reach up to their level of growth, advancement and Development".<sup>29</sup>***

**6) Conditions and Purposes of Dialogue in Pakistan:**

The most important thing to keep in mind is that dialogue should never be used as a tool for conversion or as a means for evangelization. This not only prevents dialogue from happening but also causes the participants to approach each other mistrustfully.<sup>30</sup> As Christians struggle hard to promote their mission, the Muslims too want to preach the message of Islam to all mankind. But the important point is that none of them should try to force the others to accept their respective religion. Another condition for dialogue is that the participants should accept each other as they are. Both Muslims and Christians should be aware of similarities and differences.<sup>31</sup> They must be respectful to each other. During dialogue, the parties should learn more about each other. This would guide them to mutual understanding. This is the only way for dialogue.

The controversial issues cannot hold the dialogue to continue. The participants should avoid controversy as much as possible. If Christians and Muslims look for the conflicts between them, they are many. Sorry to say, these do not lead them to dialogue. It means that Muslims and Christians should meet to discuss the issues helpful for the betterment of mankind and for the establishment of a peaceful society.<sup>32</sup>

There are certain common points such as God's will and dignity of human beings. These can only make them come closer to each other.

Beside these conditions, the participants of dialogue should be clear what dialogue is. It is not a debate. Dialogue is a means to learn i.e. change and grow in perception and understanding of reality.<sup>33</sup> S. W. Ariarajah points out that *'dialogue by nature is a two-way traffic; those who insist and behave as though they are the only ones on the road are bound to meet with accidents and the purpose of dialogue will be lost'*.<sup>34</sup>

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These are some of the basic conditions for dialogue. If both the sides follow these, then dialogue can be fruitful. Besides, Muslims and Christians should also overcome ignorance, bias and misunderstandings. Each community of faith should be encouraged to have an open mind towards other faith. It should also get knowledge about it. The religions must be taught in the right ways. Both quantity and quality must be so that the learner can easily get true picture of that religion. For the Muslims, it is necessary to train the people in all fields of western knowledge. The Christians have highly qualified people who enter into dialogue. They have many Islamologists who are experts in the matters of Islam.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, Muslims have not only been far away from all religions, but have no single real Muslim christianologist. To have dialogue in its true sense, it is necessary to train the people, as communication necessarily needs to know how and what to communicate.

In the end, it is also to be pointed out that Christians should agree on the salvation of people of other faiths. Only in that way, they can bring the people closer to one another. Otherwise, the gap can never be filled. To conclude, it is to be highlighted that dialogue can only be possible if the participants are open minded. They should not try to convert each other. Both Muslims and Christians should learn about each other's religion as much as possible. They should remain respectful to each other. The controversial issues must be avoided in dialogical discussions. Muslims should train their scholars in all fields of knowledge. The importance of any particular religion for its followers must be accepted. Only these conditions can lead to a fruitful dialogue.

### **Conclusion:**

To sum up the developing Islamic Republic of Pakistan gives full religious freedom to the non-Muslims also. Since 1889, the Catholic Church has been at



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work for its missionary activities. It focused on backward areas providing the population with basic necessities of life underneath Christianizing the essentially. The government of Pakistan safeguards all of their rights and they have full opportunity of self-development. The visit of the Pope John Paul II to Pakistan in 1981 and its media coverage is evidence in this regard. The Church has also positive attitude towards the state and it contribution all the good to Pakistan. It has also fruitfully worked for interfaith dialogue here. Both Muslim and Christian theologians here established organizations for the promotion of interfaith dialogue in Pakistan. This is carried out in different forms like shared jobs, shared struggle for justice and joint involvements of daily life. Here all are considered born free with equal rights. There is a dialogue of words, of deeds, and of life. A spirit of service and sharing is found among Muslims and Christians. The Christian Study Centers in Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi and Multan are freely at work as a consequence of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Pakistan. However, this dialogue is still facing a lot of problems at academic as well as public level which can be solved only through sincere commitments. The most desired condition for dialogue is that the participants should accept each other as they are and both the Muslims and the Christians should be aware of similarities and differences.

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  5. Note: Father James Channan OP. became a priest in 1980. He belongs to Dominican group. He got higher education from Pakistan, Italy and America. He remained as advisor of Pope John Paul II for ten years. He served as first Pakistani Vice-Provincial of Dominical Vice-Province for four years. He also remained regional secretary of Federation of Asian Bishop Conferences. He also worked as executive secretary of National Commission for Christian-Muslim Relations for 17 years. Nowadays, he is the general secretary of the commission and Asian Co-coordinator of URI (United Religious Initiative). Father James has pioneered many articles regarding Muslim-Christian dialogue and Christian Minority in Pakistan. These have been published in many national and International magazines. He is also author of a book "Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan". Besides, he arranged several national and International seminars and represented Pakistan. He presented many papers in these seminars. Father James is the person who has been struggling had to promote dialogue in Pakistan. Nowadays, he is the director of the Pastoral Institute at Multan.
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  8. Note: Johan, O'Brien, was born in Ireland and studied science, Education and Theology. He worked as a teacher in Sierra Leone, as a community activist in inner city Dublin and has lectured in Theology in many countries, He first came to Pakistan as a missionary in 1977 where he continues to live and work among marginalized minorities. His books include Theology and the option for the poor

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