Mending Ecclesiastical Divisions: Restoring a Fractured Church and Pakistani Marginalized Community

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INTRODUCTION

The church in Pakistan has ecclesial divisions and can be described as fractured and fragmented unable to play a role in a marginalized society. This study contends that the marginalized community is not treated well because the focus has remained on sociological concerns such as persecution, poverty, caste, gender complexities, and so on, rather than discovering the root cause, which is disunity—denominationalism and congregationalism in this context (more will be discussed in the subsequent pages). In other words, the focus has remained more on improving the contextual realities rather than resolving the ecclesiastical divisions (Catholic church, Church of Pakistan, and churches in Pakistan). The Church of Pakistan and churches in Pakistan are two different entities, (the Church of Pakistan consists of eight dioceses and four denominations namely Anglican, Methodists, Lutherans, and Scottish Presbyterians. churches in Pakistan are mostly independent entities consisting of Pentecostals, home-based churches, and other denominations. While the Catholic Church is a separate entity).

Nonetheless, the goal of writing this piece is not to imply that the previous solutions (these papers are discussed in the subsequent pages) on social issues such as persecution, gender complexities, and so on are incapable of resolving the existing problems. Rather, this piece proposes to seek to end ecclesiastical disunity as the first step forward to facing contextual challenges. In other words, this study discovers that the root cause of not being able to resolve marginalization from a Pakistani perspective is disunity within and between churches. It further claims the divisions within and between churches highly impact her public life. So, it proposes that unity within and between churches ought to be a first step forward to facing the present challenges. As a result, an attempt is made in this phenomenon to critically assess and evaluate various studies based on ecclesial unity by asking the following questions. How does the Church’s unity impact the social lives of communities? Do we have any criteria for evaluating current conflicts within and between churches in a biblical-historical context in order to resolve the current tension in Pakistani churches? Is this credible enough to bring about change in our societies?

In this respect, the first and foremost task of writing this paper is not based on presenting the historical existence of the Pakistani Christian community in Pakistan nor highlighting the roles of Christian leaders during or after independence (though these roles are important), as much has already been discussed (See, for example, Nazir-Ali 2018, Singha 2019). Rather, the entire task will be approached in light of the biblical-historical context to work on the detected problem of disunity to overcome the current challenges. Second, in this regard, the entire shift of this marginalized situation in Pakistan will be presented to clarify that the current crisis for the Christian community in Pakistan is an opportunity to become ‘One’. Finally, the entire task is to develop a theology based on its Praxis to fight against the unjust system, open the eyes of the blind, and save the dying marginalized community from the hands of powerful oppressors.

The above-mentioned three-dimensional framework would help this paper to serve and respond. The ‘serve and respond’ are the two different approaches that would be presented to improve the current situation in
Pakistan.

AN OVERVIEW OF PAKISTANI CHRISTIANS: SOCIOLOGICAL SITUATION

Pakistan is the second-largest Muslim country and the fifth-largest populace in Asia with about 204 million with various ethnic groups (Gannon 2018). It became an independent state in 1947. The majority of people who reside here are Muslims. As a result of Dalit conversions, the majority of Pakistan’s Christians, particularly those in Punjab, live in villages. (Singha 2019:229-258). The existence of the Pakistani Church as a result of the Modern Missionary Movement of the 18th and 19th centuries was based on the commitment to social action (Sultan 2020). Though, Muhammad Ali Jinnah the founder of Pakistan made an important statement during this time: "You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste, or creed, which has nothing to do with the business of the State"(DailyTimes, 2020). However, after some amendments to the law, the present situation is that Christians in Pakistan are locked between their religious faith and Islamic extremism (Pio and Syed 2016). The British Pakistani Christian Association (BPCA) declares Christians in Pakistan are considered inferior and treated as second-class citizens (Immigration and Refugees Board of Canada 2013). Also, Open Door stated Pakistan is the fifth most persecuted country of Christians in the entire world (ICC 2019). Additionally, thousands of people in Punjab are living in fear due to the current tragic hostility (Chaudhry 2020). Unfortunately, in such a situation, the Pakistani Church is unable to demonstrate its commitment to showing solidarity with the poor. Apart from this struggle, Maysood Kamil (2012) claimed a decade ago that there are no developed theologies presented to respond to the horrifying situation in this context (147) is the most challenging for theologians and church leaders today. According to Kamil, on the one hand, the socioeconomic, political, and religious struggles of the marginalized community have been disregarded by the mainline churches. On the other hand, Christian institutes have played almost no role to wrestle with the current issues (147). Like Kamil, Ruth Bhajan (2018) contested the similar that the colonial legacy has captured the mentality of many seminaries wherein English books have filled the libraries and Urdu literature is scarce (1-8). Sadly, the majority of scholars prefer to write in English, and their contribution to Urdu literature is underdeveloped. This is the reason there is also a lack of contextual approach as well as the ability to translate any theological term into the native language to have a deeper understanding of it to contextualize in this context. As a result, the importance of contextual theology is at stake. In this regard, the entire situation requires a new paradigm shift to resolve the existing issue. Before proceeding, it is critical to evaluate the previous literature in this regard.

A THEOLOGICAL JOURNEY IN QUEST: ACADEMIC THEOLOGY AND CHURCH CIRCLES

This theological discourse is divided into two parts. Both academic theology and the Church circles have their agendas for improving the current situation.

From the academic side, there are various responses in this field that have interacted with the current situation to develop theologies. On the one hand, the whole situation is historically approached by various theologians in Pakistan denouncing the revisions made to the Pakistani constitution that downgraded the Christian community to the status of non-citizens (Amjad-Ali 2012:63-73). This study further claimed Shariah laws are made falsely against Christians that have made Christians’ lives a living misery (63-73). On the other hand, it critically assessed the present Christian leaders’ role that is miserable in dealing with the current situation and their adoption of the post-Constantine strategy, a Western influence to convert the entire world to Christendom (Amjad-Ali11See further, Amjad-Ali, Charles (2015). There are several other pieces (From Dislocation to Dislocation: The Experience of the Christian Community in Pakistan.” International Review of Modern Sociology. vol. 41, no. 1, 2015. Anjad Ali, Charles (2011). Mission among Muslims: Christian Mission. Lalsangkima Pachuan, Knud Jorgensen (Eds.). Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic World: Christian Mission among Other Faiths, Woodstock Road. Oxford OX2 6HR. UK). written from the same perspective. Apart from this, other studies demonstrated the role of contextual theology and the roles of Christian institutes in developing a theology are of utmost importance and could respond to the current situation (see, for example, Kamil 2012). Regrettably, some have praised themselves based on being key
players in improving sociological conditions (Carey 2012:160-168). A few have proposed abstract answers to such a drastic situation. And concluded that the spirit of love and forgiveness is the way to overcome such challenges—through the sacrificial spirit being remained faithful to Christ’s mission—embracing this situation with joy amid such suffering (Kamil 2015: 366-369). Others presented Asian contextual realities in discussing Asia Bibi’s case, a Christian woman in Pakistan who was wrongfully accused at the grassroots level. Thus, condemning such persecution, and encouraging Christians, this piece contested that the community must overcome their fears and step outside of their comfort zones to boldly testify to Christ by loving, accepting, and embracing the persecuted community—just as Jesus demonstrated His love to the Samaritan woman through dialogue to defeat the long-standing hatred (Sadiq 2018:363-371).

Similarly, few studies have critically examined the current school textbooks curriculum arguing that these books do not depict the role of Christian leaders in Muslim society. According to one of the studies, sociological conditions are the core issue of existing problems (Singha 2019). Similar to the former claim, one more study proposed that the function of technology in bringing peace and unity to Pakistan cannot be confined to bringing individuals into the faith, but rather to mature Christians at the grassroots level (Nazir-Ali 2019). In another research, the whole challenge was presented, showing solidarity with the poor, and uplifting the marginalized community and displaced people (Sultan 2020).

Apart from the above, on the other hand, many church leaders (church circles) have tended to focus on such challenges in such a way that God is uninterested in the dire situation and smiles over the marginalized community, still from the End Times, He will come to judge the evil and the dead (Yousaf 2006). This is true from an eschatological standpoint; that God is coming to judge the evil and the dead; however, it makes the community hopeless about the current situation by assuming that living in this situation is God’s only response to this condition.

**An Attempt to Evaluate Academic and Church Theology from the Pakistani Perspective**

The studies above show that the issues from the past many years have been seen through two different lenses. On the one hand, to improve the entire situation from the socio-economic, religious, cultural, and political perspectives (academic theology), and on the other hand, to do nothing in this grave situation (church circles). It can be noticed also that several scholars have highlighted the core issue of disunity—congregationalism, and denominationalism, however, none of them have initiated the entire task from this specific framework of hatred and disrespect between and within the Pakistani churches. Moreover, in doing such discourse, unfortunately, many splits within academics are more aimed at resolving theological tensions rather than ecclesial divisions, (see, for example, the article of Malik, Alexander J. (1993). *Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context*. R. S. Surgirtharajah (Edt.). *Asian Faces of Jesus*, Faith and Cultures Series, Maryknoll, NY, 10545: USA. Orbis Books).

The starting point here is that ecclesial unity needs to settle before moving further by removing the seeds of hatred within and outside the churches. In this regard, Swarup Bar statement is important who declares that:

In Christian unity, relationality in terms of building relationships of trust, confidence, and friendship in each other [within, between and outside churches] are crucial towards any further visible unity. And the best way to achieve it is to agree to work together in the particular society where we live, engaging in concrete struggles and issues (Swarup Bar 2020:214).

As a result, the current studies do not provide any constructive dimension to improve the tension within, between, and outside of the churches in Pakistan. Therefore, in light of the aforementioned, the new theological discourse would be developed by looking at ecclesiastical unity above all else to improve the entire situation. And this ecclesiastical unity is based on the ecumenical perspective which simply means the unity of Christian churches closely related to Jesus’ prayer for the Church in John 17 and the ecumenical council in the book of Acts—a biblical mandate for the well-being of [the church life] and the world to bring them to Jesus Christ (Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen 2021:223-224). So, keeping the entire view at concern this study would further proceed to a biblical-historical shift to reimagine the Church today.
THE STORY IS NOT NEW: THE BIBLICAL-HISTORICAL CONTEXT TO RE-IMAGINE TODAY’S CHURCH

The Bible replete numerous examples that are relevant to seek today’s situation in the light of the scriptures. And in this regard, on the one hand, it is noteworthy to mention that the Hebrew prophets repeatedly look back to the ancient stories to reinterpret them for new circumstances especially the narrative of Exodus. Similarly, the emerging church looks at the biblical stories for reimagining them in a new way as these are the latest phases of the old story. In this case, reframing biblical stories in light of the current situation provides new insights for the emerging church to overcome challenges in light of the old story (Drane 2008:95). On the other hand, this new lens of looking at the Word of God makes more sense to understand the salvation plan of God in the postmodern world (Kara J. Lyons-Pardue and Jason Sturdevant 2018:128). For instance, the book of Genesis is a clearer demonstration of such a unified truth wherein Triune God made man unto His image. Wesley Vander Lugt calls this "one ousia existing as three hypostases" (2016:120). Furthermore, Genesis chapter 12 is vital in recognizing God’s desire through Abram’s election in His salvation plan for other nations. Like Lugt, Kärkkäinen also argues that this divine election does not mean particularity alone but rather reaching other nations. He further emphasizes that reaching other nations is a mandate of the Old Testament to bring other people to God (2021:11). Like Kärkkäinen, Aiah Dorkuh and Foday-Khabenje also notice the same model of the Old Testament emphasizing that the Bible shows the importance of unity in diversity. They further claim that the history of Israel is God’s story as revealed through His one nation and one covenant people. God’s redemption and call to His people began with Abraham and has continued to this day. So, this act of unity is the foundation of God’s people in the Old Testament (2016:35). Moreover, it is also important to note that it relates to Church’s unity with responsibility. The Church needs unity in every aspect of ministry, operation, service, and practice (Koontz and Alexis-Baker 2014: 242,258).

The case study of the Israelites is one of the majors to reimagine the Church today. In the story of Exodus Israelites were going through similar trials and yearned to be free of their captivity. It is notable to reimagine the agony and pain in the Exodus narrative that was similar to today’s Pakistani Church. The Israelites, like the Pakistani Church, were more focused on the economic, religious, and political challenges, while God was up to something to show them that He has a compassionate heart, that hears His people’s outcry (Exo 3:7) amidst any miserable situation. Thus, in this case, amid this most troubling time, the experience of suffering provided the Israelites a unique opportunity to become ‘One Voice’. Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman call this discourse of Exodus story, ”a call to national unity in the face of constant threats from great empires” (2002:69). Though, on the one hand, the Israelites were concerned about Pharoah’s reaction, who did not want them to approach God to get out of this situation. As a result, on the other hand, the Israelites living in this desperate situation had lost the meaning of freedom, embracing such a state as the only hope for them.

Similarly, the New Testament, like the Old Testament helps us to reimagine past events to critically reflect on our current situation. During Jesus’ time, the Israelites were Roman captives and lived in poor conditions. Likely today, on the one hand, the Israelites also sought God approaching their miserable social conditions. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the split among the sects of Jews sought God differently. The Pharisees were more concerned with tradition and orthodoxy in their teachings and practice, while the Sadducees were secular in their doctrines strongly associating themselves with the dominant political structures (Swindoll 2020:56). Thus, both sects had doctrinal disagreements and each one of them was considered superior to the other (56). Besides that, the disciples of Jesus Christ were likely trapped in a similar situation, who monopolized Jesus overlooking the impact of Jesus’ life in the lives of others (Lk. 9:46,49). As a result, the Church during Jesus’ time was similarly fractured (the goal of relating the Pharisees to the Pakistani Church is not to resemble the Pharisees and the Pakistani Church, but rather the similarity in causes of such fractures), focusing more on improving social conditions, having doctrinal disagreements, desiring for higher positions, monopolizing Jesus, and so on (Mat. 18). The existing problem in the Pakistani Church is similar, the Church is divided on attaining higher positions, postulating we are the best, and monopolizing Jesus or the Holy Spirit, (this conflict can be seen in many churches locally and worldwide because few churches believe they are more civilized than other churches (this is similar to the Corinth church in Paul’s
time). Civilized in terms of their liturgy and worship style. Other postulates strictly adhere to the Apostles’ traditions and teachings. Lastly, most independent churches, on the other hand, are fighting for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, etc. Some have strong reservations about others’ doctrinal statements, etc. In the Pakistani context, the core issue that exists in the form of ‘denominationalism’ (one church(s) supersedes another) and ‘congregationalism’ (one member(s) supersedes another) is likewise to Jesus’ time).

It is a sad reality that many scholars, including Kamil (2012:154), Amjad-Ali (2015:12), and Bhajan (2018:7) have brought attention to the problem of division in the Pakistani church but have not developed the full picture in this regard. As a result, of this disunity, it has not gone far enough to overcome such marginalization. It is lamentable that it is considered one of the challenges rather than a major challenge in the previously written pieces. Regrettably, this is the reason the present Pakistani academic theology and churches are not able to improve the social context. In this regard, it is crucial to note, Wolfhart Pannenberg’s statement from this perspective:

If Christians succeed in solving the problems of their own pluralism [disunity], they may be able to produce a model combining pluralism and the widest moral unity which will also be valid for political life (Pannenberg 1977:38).

Thus, this situation needs a new paradigm shift wherein the whole situation needs ecclesiastical unity before anything else. And this is not new in this context the entire situation is identical to the old situation. The core responsibility of the Church is to exist for others not dominating [neither disrespecting nor for the personal agendas or fights] but helping and serving (Bonhoeffer 1997:382). In other words, the Church should be taken as a privileged place to resolve this issue of disunity above anything. The believers need to take this responsibility seriously. Most importantly, Jesus never neglected these wounds of disunity but rather invited people to be part of His kingdom wherein restoration and reconciliation must take place (Mat. 18:18-20) and the Church could demonstrate the reign of the Lord from every aspect. Like Bonhoeffer, the task of the Church, according to Bosch is intertwined with God’s historical plan for the redemption of the universe (2011:53). In this respect, Bosch argues that divisions in the church ruin her internal life and refute the grounding in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, thus the task of this unified body is a transformation where human relations are being transformed (2011:170). Bosch further describes Jesus’ ministry as an inclusive mission, one that welcomes everybody and breaks down barriers between people (2011:28-29). Referring to the Byzantine orthodoxy of the church, he appreciates the unity of the church-in-mission that gave credibility to her in the context of a divided society, thus viewing this unity, the polytheistic world understood that God is One and sovereign (2011:217). In other words, the mission of church unity to demonstrate the reign of the Lord was visible to the world’s eyes.

Therefore, considering the foregoing, the entire framework offers us a unique opportunity to delve deeply into the context of ecclesial unity to be strategic while keeping the core issue of ‘disunity’ before our eyes to resolve the tension between and within churches in Pakistan that are facing marginalization. This invites the Pakistani church to the new hermeneutic key to view everything as a mission as Bosch affirms:

We do need a more radical and comprehensive hermeneutic of the mission. In attempting to do this we may perhaps move close to viewing everything as a mission, but this is a risk we will have to take. The mission [for Pakistani churches] is a multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation [between and within churches], liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualization, and much more (Bosch 2011:524).

ECCLESIASTICAL UNITY: RESTORING A FRACTURED CHURCH (FIRST STEP FORWARD)

This section comes first as a ‘serving’ part to heal the fractured body of the community. One of the gurus of Asian theologies, Kosuke Koyama argues responding to the theological structures of denominationalism in the Asiatic context that denominationalism [congregationalism] is deadly and demonic. It monopolizes Christ theologically (1999:195). Koyama proceeds further to affirm that for Paul the divisions in the churches were not acceptable at all, thus for him it was a matter of life and death of the Christian church (1999:193). Sadly,
the splits within and between the Pakistani churches have already mistreated the body of Christ. While the divisions between and within churches have various drastic effects on this world. On the first hand, disunity makes the body of Christ weary and disappointed. On the other hand, it tolerates injustice at the local and global levels.

In Paul’s writings, oneness is unquestionably unique and fundamental. On the one hand, the call of Ephesians 4 is to live up to the way God has called us to be. On the other hand, the understanding is very ‘missional’ as it belongs to the Lord, not our own. Being ‘Missional’ means that the theology of gifts of the Spirits enables the members of the church to discover their particular ministries (Hardy 2022:178). And ‘servational’ as it belongs to serving the whole body of Christ in love. This refers to serving every member of the community with great humility and love, regardless of differences in denominations and roles in the church. In other words, missional and servational go together and there is no mission if there are divisions. And there could be no serving if there are disputes. However, the ecumenical unity restoring the unity of the churches faces two major challenges: on the one hand, a lack of willingness to embrace other Christian communities. On the other hand, the non-pursuit of restoring divided unity (Gene L. Green et al., 2018: 24). Sadly, local divides in almost every church in Pakistan have already weakened the body of Christ. Nonetheless, this can be only healed by being missional, recognizing the gifts of each other, and servational, serving one another in love so that the body of Christ becomes stronger from every aspect by taking care of every part of Christ’s body. It is important to notice that being a prisoner of Christ, Paul beseeched the believers to continue to do God’s work by remaining united and serving one another. So that we will no longer be babies, but rather fully aware of every trick to grow up in Christ. Thus, on the one hand, unity breeds strength; while on the other hand, disunity causes divisions and harms the body of Christ (Eph. 4:13,15, 17- 20). However, ”the Church in its essence is a community that is united with Christ in the midst of tension” (Green et al., 2018:120). It is important to remember the Word of Jesus for the united Church:

Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again, I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst (Mat.18:18-20, NASB).

Unfortunately, this vital truth of ‘gathering’ has always been misunderstood in the churches. It has only been taken in a sense of a local gathering of believers in one place. Thus, this congregationalism misunderstanding of gathering has neglected the importance of the denominational strength of the whole Church family despite the differences in locations, time, and groups.

As a result, gathering in various locations, times and groups has a broader ecumenical impact on Christianity, and in this case, reciting Creeds has provided church(s) locally and globally to recognize the importance of being called for one purpose for which Jesus prayed (Jn. 17). It also helps the church to understand what it means to be called One Body of Christ, wherein if one part of the body suffers, the entire body suffers, and the role of every organ is to strengthen other parts and their dependence on one another (1 Cor. 12,14). Unfortunately, the Church of Pakistan and other churches in Pakistan have ignored the role of being a body of Christ—a member of the wider community. Being an embodiment of Christ, every denomination and congregation need to recognize, appreciate, respect, and value each other’s role in the Pakistani Church to fulfill this prophetic call of our Lord (Matt. 18:18). Otherwise, the true treasure of heaven will remain close upon the prayers of the Pakistani Church. It is also important to remember that the weeds of hatred and ecclesiastical politics in congregations and denominations shut the door of heaven to its prayers, as the fractured body leads to denominationalism and congregationalism (Zech. 7:8-14). And the calling and purpose of being missional and servational lose their meaning in this aspect.

Even so, without mending the fractured state of Christ’s body, global Christianity cannot achieve sociological goals—improve financial factors, liberate oppressed people, and so on. In other

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[33] Here World Christianity does not refer to the European forms and patterns of Christianity. Rather it refers to areas that are facing extreme poverty, persecution, and drastic challenges. See further, Lamin Sanneh (2004). *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West*. Published by Eerdmans Publishing Company. William B. 22.
words, simply growing in the understanding of the Gospel’s call to social action is not enough, rather it is important to mend the fractured church that created a wall within the church(s) and between church(s) which the Resurrected Christ has demolished long ago by crucifying on the cross. And this would begin, on the one hand, to repent over our past fights, doctrinal differences, disrespectful attitudes within the congregation and towards other denomination church family, monopolizing Jesus theologically (even in some churches monopolizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit), and so on. In order for heaven to open up the real treasure for them so that the Lord’s promise could be fulfilled in the life of the Pakistani Church (Mat.16:18; 18:18). On the other hand, every church ought to humbly present theological insights not for seeking its own good, but rather for its neighbor (1 Cor. 10:24). It is important to remember that:

The church is a gift of God to the world for its transformation towards the kingdom of God. Its mission is to bring new life and announce the loving presence of God in our world. We must participate in God’s mission in unity, overcoming the divisions and tensions that exist among us, so that the world may believe and all may be one (Jn. 17:21) (TTL §10).

Thus, the wake-up call is the Church (Catholic, Church of Pakistan, and churches in Pakistan) ought to come together in recognizing, appreciating, respecting, and valuing the role of every member of the body of Christ. And to accomplish this prospect, servant-leadership is of utmost importance, regardless of any denomination having a Christ-like attitude to serve one another with compassionate humility combined with courageous honesty to heal the fractured body of the Pakistani Church. As a result, the entire Church ought to be equipped by praying and appointing people to perform various tasks so that social challenges could be faced boldly. Otherwise, in facing the current challenges there would be no distinction between a social activist (not in a negative sense, but rather as someone who intends to do things without putting the Gospel ahead of doing tasks) and a social servant (who humbly presents theological insights and demonstrate it through actions prioritizing the Gospel above anything).

MISSION FROM THE MARGINS: UNITY MATTERS TO SAVE THE DYING COMMUNITY

Here the role of theology does not remain merely upon unity but rather goes beyond to ‘respond’ to the contextual realities. It is worthy to mention here any theology that does not meet the needs of a society is a ‘bogus theology’ because it does not deal with the worldly issues people are facing today (Stott 2006:24). Moreover, it is prophetic by nature that provides tools to people to act in the word—within and outside the church (Kim 2008:xii). All above, the living theology does not lie in teachings alone (doctrines), but rather its Praxis is equally important. In other words, theology and mission go together and are inseparable, but rather two sides of the same coin. And this is the time wherein the dichotomy of church theology and academic theology ought to remove its ambiguities in this subject. And this is the place (Pakistani Church) where the mended body of Christ would respond to the grave challenges of the marginalized community.

Thus, on the one hand, the entire task to overcome the challenges, ought to be done by withholding the promise of our Lord Jesus Christ:

[T]he gates of Hades will not overpower it... and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (Mat.16:18b,19b, NASB).

This promise would be the confirmation for the Pakistani Church that amidst extreme challenges nothing could harm her, and she would overcome any severe persecution by being an embodiment of Christ. So, being a unified body of Christ whatever she prayed for, God would listen to them and rescue them from the hands of powerful oppressors.

On the other hand:

This missiological praxis is only possible working together as a Christ existing community from the below, shouting the proclamation of the Lord, and holding on to the promise of the Lord that He is with us till the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20) and his resurrected power can change the hearts of our persecutors (Hakim 2020:96).
It is important to remember here that to deal with the contextual realities of any particular context the Bible helps to formulate our understanding to a greater extent. Again, the biblical-historical context is important to portray this powerful reality, as the marginalized community after Pentecost was healed in every way—economically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and so on. And the believers were equipped to demonstrate the Lord’s reign by selling their properties, ensuring that no one in the land remained impoverished (Deu. 15:4,7,11; Acts 2, 6). And this changed the whole sociological condition of society. Being Jesus’ disciples, they had a powerful influence over society, their boldness and knowledge astounded the surrounding community and people realized they were living with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

In this case, to make the past event a living reality, the Pakistani Church ought to uplift the marginalized community as this is the responsibility of the Church to provide food to the oppressed community (Mat. 25:35-40). And this is the time to improve the socio-economic challenges to uplift the marginalized community. The statement of World Council of Churches (WCC) is important to view:

Mission from the margins seeks to counteract injustices in life, church, and mission. It seeks to be an alternative missional movement against the perception that mission can only be done by the powerful to the powerless, by the rich to the poor, or by the privileged to the marginalized. Such approaches can contribute to oppression and marginalization. (TTL §38).

The task ought to go beyond that measure to uplift the other communities to fulfill this prophetic declaration that no one remains poor in the Pakistani state. Ultimately, these healing services of the Church ought to provide her a unique opportunity to change the hearts of their Muslim brother and sister who are rude and aggressive to the Christian community because they perceive the community’s existence as a Western agent who has self-centered goals and desires. See, for example, Habib, Muhammad Shahid (2017). Muslim-Christian Dialogue from Pakistani Perspective: Evaluation of the Contribution of Christian Study Center . Lap Lambert Academic Publication. Meanwhile, the community ought to respond to systemic oppression to change the socio-religious and political condition of the most deprived community which is dying at the hands of powerful oppressors. As the Church’s mission to liberate people ought not to be limited to Christians alone, many Hindus, Sikhs, and the Bhai community are also subjected to oppression. Therefore, in this respect, the Church ought to imitate the role of Christ to respond to the unjust system by being a body of Christ. The whole Praxis of the community ought to be co-liberator and co-sufferer, a partaker of Christ’s mission to fulfill the agenda of the Lord (Lk. 4:18-19).

CONCLUSION

Theology serves in the best way possible to empower the community personally and communally. It ‘serves and responds’ not at a place that has a particular history, language, and culture. Rather, it has ecumenical implications though developed in a particular context despite diverse cultures and practices that require ongoing engagement with Christian scripture (Kim 2008:xii).

This piece argues once the disunity—denominational and congregational conflicts resolve the rest of the issues related to any marginalization in this phenomenon would not remain difficult even at the national level. As a result, this piece recommends that ecclesial unity comes first before anything to resolve the marginalization. This paper goes beyond that measure, as the task of the Church is to serve and respond to the challenges of the wider community rather than the Christian community alone. So that the flow of such theological insights and Praxis would be continuously seen by every member of the Church—embodied in Christ for the sake of mercy and goodness that shall prevail in Pakistan.

This paper further contends that living theology does not require sitting in a chair with a cup of tea or coffee to recommend theological convictions, but rather constant engagement with the scriptures for bridging the gap between mere biblical conviction on ecclesiology and its Praxis to overcome the challenges the community is facing today. And making it a living does not confine to lectures or writing papers alone, rather it becomes a living reality.

REFERENCES


