
APOLOGETIC EVANGELICAL CONTEXTUAL CHRISTOLOGY: A Pragmatic Approach in the Islamic Context

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Submitted: 25 November 2023 Revision: 22 October 2024 Published: 31 December 2024

Abstract

The conflict over Jesus Christ, the 'Son of God,' is not new. Thousands of years ago, the disciples faced similar trials; however, the challenge to solve this tension was not based on debates or natural theology, but rather to show the works of Christ. The researcher has argued that various studies on Christology have already been done, however, the Pakistani perspective demands the fullness of Christ in a quite unique way to reimagine Him in the context of socio-economic, political, and religious challenges. On the one hand, though the traditional way of doing Christology highly emphasized the personhood of Christ explaining Him from the eschatological perspective (though it is important), however, on the other hand, it makes Christ a pacifist Jesus who has no concern for the current issues. As a result, this kind of Christological articulation does not explain Christ's presence in our struggles today. This piece further demonstrated that the context is not above Christ in discovering who He is in the midst of such a grave situation, but rather contextual realities provide the Pakistani Punjabi Church an opportunity to demonstrate the works of Christ. Furthermore, this study also argued that the real struggle is not being a minority in this context, but rather being marginalized (economically, politically, and religiously) is the real challenge. This study further argued that the core issue is the ecclesiastical responsibility to overcome all the issues in this context. As a result, 'Apologetic Evangelical Contextual Christology' has proposed seeing Christ in all His fullness in the Islamic Context.

Keywords: Christ; ecclesiastical; mission; minority; marginalized; Christology; pacifist

INTRODUCTION

The restlessness between the representatives of 'pluralism'¹ and 'particularity'² can be felt in every part of the world. As a post-modern society is also on the run to set its standards based on 'Cultural relativism'³ and claiming it to be an ethical-moral standard is another issue to describe the particularity of the Christian faith. In the Asian context,

¹ Pluralism refers to the presence in the contemporary world of multiple beliefs, with their contradictory claims of truth, which need to be acknowledged and debated in order to preserve unity and for mutual gains.

² Particularity refers to the specific statement(s) of a religion-theological, doctrinal formulations- that can be either similar or contradictory to other religious statements.

³ CR = "Good" means "socially approved." See Harry J. Gensler, *Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction*. Second Edition. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 8.

the so-called affiliation of Christianity with the Western world has, in certain respects, given rise to a degree of mistrust, cynicism, and animosity against Christians. Moreover, Christ's particularity is also misinterpreted as an imperialist imposition and/or referred to as the Christian battle to establish Christendom. Though this piece's emphasis is from the Pakistani, especially the Punjabi perspective, however, the implementation is universal for anyone who is facing similar challenges.

In Pakistan, Christianity occurs in a pluralistic context, and the question of interfaith relations has always been crucial. Pakistan since its inception, nationalist sentiments of Muslims are seemed to be growing day by day, and minorities are considered anti-nationals. Also, a few of the slogans produced under the guise of Islam undermine the national identity of minorities just to leave them amid nowhere to be considered only as aliens.⁴ A renowned scholar from Asia and Emeritus Bishop in Pakistan, Rt. Rev. Dr. Alexander John Malik in his article 'Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context' says:

While confessing Christ in an Islamic context, a Christian is faced with at least three basic difficulties. One, he is faced with a reductionist form of Christology of the Qur'an; second, the authority and authenticity of the Christian Scriptures is minimized by a belief that they have been corrupted and abrogated; and third, that the prophet of Islam has been gradually turned into the 'Muslim Christ'. One can easily see a development of the doctrine of 'Muhamadology' over against 'Christology'.⁵ One of the close friends of the researcher said that being a witness of Christ is not a flowerbed, and this argument has not only acquired meaning in the current world, but the case has also been the same in the history of the early Church, where the Apostles were using several methods to get people to the feet of Christ.

Taking Paul as a role model in preserving Christian identity and proclaiming the uniqueness of Christ uses different methods; he engages in a debate with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at the Aeropagus in Athens, he points to the pagan philosophers in support to prove his viewpoint.⁶ Alister G. McGrath has the same point of view by saying that Christian theology during the patristic age was using their context to bring people

⁴ See further Maqsood Kamil, *Faith and Freedom in the Land of the Pure*. (Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission, 2015).

⁵ Maqsood Kamil, *Faith and Freedom in the Land of the Pure*, 75-76.

⁶ Acts 17:18-34.

into the feet of Christ. The Jewish people were also using the concepts of other religions. For example, the name 'El' was also used to express the power of Yahweh.⁷

At another point, Paul implies incompatibility⁸ and warns not to be deceived by the philosophers.⁹ At some other point, he uses a different approach.¹⁰ However, the purpose remains the same to announce the uniqueness of Christ in a religiously diverse culture where people do not know Him yet or know Him. In this context, a profound Asian Bible teacher Ajith Fernando affirms:

While methods and strategies will vary, the timeless call of God to his people to bring his saving message to a lost and dying world does not vary. The church must press on its vital mission of bringing the mercy of God to the world, the most crucial aspect of which is bringing the greatest news the world has ever known, the gospel of Christ, to the ends of the earth—for the joy of the church, the salvation of the nations, and the glory of the Triune God.¹¹

In light of the aforementioned difficulties, the methodology to write this paper is Apologetic Evangelical Contextual Christology, and the purpose to compose this piece is three-dimensional. In the first place, it is an attempt to shed light on the uniqueness of Christ for fulfilling ecclesiastical responsibility in the face of prejudice against Christianity among the majority of religious communities. Secondly, it aims to find acceptable solutions that 'respect' both religious diversity and 'claims' within the context of the religious system. Thirdly, it also attempts to establish a framework for interfaith dialogue while at the same time upholding the uniqueness of Christ and Christian identity according to the scriptures.

DISCUSSION

Previous Studies on Christology in the Islamic Context

Several respected scholars from Pakistan have already published papers recommending the frameworks for the implementation of Christology in the Islamic tradition. The former Anglican Bishop of Rochester, England, and the Diocese of Raiwind,

⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism*. (Downers Grove, ILL., InterVarsity Press, 1996), 168.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:23.

⁹ Colossians 2:8.

¹⁰ Romans 1:20, 22.

¹¹ J. I. Packer, Wayne Grudem, & Ajith Fernando, *Global Study Bible, English Standard Version*. in *Mission and Evangelism*, Ajith Fernando. (Wheaton IL: Crossway, Good New Publishers, 2011), 1885.

Pakistan, strongly suggest that obedience to Christ is a central factor in beginning a dialogue with Pakistani Muslims on atonement. Nazir-Ali approves: to explain Christology in the Muslim context the urgency is to use the titles mentioned in the Quran 'the sent one'; 'the spirit of God' and 'The Word of God'. Nazir-Ali emphasizes that the word 'Abd' (servant) can also be used to portray Christ in the Muslim context; however, his emphasis is on seeing a picture of the servant from a biblical perspective who came to accomplish God's purpose in the person of Christ.¹²

Another profound scholar from Pakistan, Dr. Alexander John Malik, former moderator of the Church of Pakistan, and the longest-serving Bishop in the history of the Anglican community in the subcontinent. He splits his paper into two sections. Like Nazir-Ali, Malik in the first section of his essay mentions the obstacles in confessing Christ, and in the second section, he discusses the various ways in which Christ could be confessed.¹³ Malik develops Christology within the 'socio-religious cultural' scenario by examining the difficulties in bringing Jesus to the people.¹⁴ On this basis, he formulates a new hypothesis to present Christology, by dropping all the names that are most prevalent to present Christ.¹⁵ As a result, Malik takes a theocentric approach by asking, "Why to debate about Christ?" God is important.¹⁶ To develop this theocentric approach, Malik's first step is to find out when Muslims pronounce the Qur'an to be divine, which is a declaration that the Qur'an is a revelation of God. He argued Christians believe that Christ is the self-revelation of God. He further argued that as the Quran is in God and the "in" of God has a personal revelation in a quite similar way Christians confess that Christ is the personal revelation of God.¹⁷

In his second step, Malik argues that confessing Christ as the 'Son of God' does not mean that he is a 'Son' in a physical sense, but rather in a metaphorical way. Malik uses various Punjabi cultural analogies to prove his point, including 'Sher ka bacha' (Son of a Lion), which is commonly used to praise someone's bravery; Ibn-ul-Waqt (Son of Time);

¹² Vinay Samuel, Chris Sugden (Eds.): Michael Nazir-Ali, *Christology in Islamic Context: Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*, (Grands Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984).

¹³ Alexander J. Malik, *Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context*, 75.

¹⁴ Alexander J. Malik, *Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context*, 75.

¹⁵ Alexander J. Malik, *Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context*, 75.

¹⁶ Alexander J. Malik, *Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context*, 75.

¹⁷ Alexander J. Malik, *Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context*, 75.

and Farzandan-e-Tawhid (son of Tawhid). Based on these analogies, he concludes that the term 'Son' in this context does not refer to biological reproduction.¹⁸

In the final step, proving Christ's sonship, Malik tells the story of Gautama Buddha, who left his royal throne and went to the forest to meditate under the Banyan tree. Anyone who saw Buddha thought he was a 'fakir,' a 'swami,' or a 'sadhu,' but he was a king because he was born into a royal family.¹⁹ Malik goes on to state that the greatness of God can be seen in creation, that God made Adam and Eve out of dust. God's creative Word operated on dust.²⁰

Another well-known scholar, Charles Amjad-Ali, neither criticizes nor praises Islam in this episode. His methodology is historical contextual missiology through comparative study to see the problems of Pakistani Christians in this context.²¹

Amjad-Ali proposes to shift his focus from the old patterns of building an empire, power building structure, and culture,²² to carry out our mission in a biblical way: as a cross-bearing community, with the metaphor of leaven rather than dough, with the metaphor of salt, and with the metaphor of light to dispel darkness.²³ He argues, that we must not only articulate the mission in the language of Matthew 28 but it must also be carried out in the Kenosis of Philippians 2 and in the call to redemption in 2 Corinthians 5:19-21. We must also re-evaluate the mission of God, the Kingdom of God, and the Church of God considering Hebrews 13:12-13.²⁴ Furthermore, Amjad-Ali notes while discussing Christological issues in an Islamic context, Pakistani theologians tended to focus only on the notion of Jesus Christ's divinity while ignoring His humanity.²⁵ Therefore, he recommends, that Christians should base their statement of faith on God's incarnation in Jesus. This is the foundation of the conception of the divinity and humanity of Jesus.²⁶

¹⁸ Alexander J. Malik, *Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context*, 81.

¹⁹ Alexander J. Malik, *Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context*, 81.

²⁰ Alexander J. Malik, *Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context*, 82.

²¹ Charles Amjad Ali, *Mission among Muslims: Christian Mission*. in *Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic World: Christian Mission among Other Faiths*. Lalsangkima Pachuau, Knud Jorgensen (Ed.). (Oxford: Woodstock Road, 2011), 132.

²² Charles Amjad Ali, *Mission among Muslims: Christian Mission*, 132.

²³ Charles Amjad-Ali, *Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Islam Christian – Muslim Relations in Pakistan*, (Current Dialogue 52, Special Issue. 2012), 69.

²⁴ Charles Amjad Ali, *Mission among Muslims*, 138.

²⁵ Cited by Wahyu Satria Wibowo, *Jesus as Kurban, Christology in the Context of Islam in Indonesia*, (PhD Dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2014), <https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/jesus-as-kurban-christology-in-the-context-of-islam-in-indonesia> (Accessed February 2023), 42.

²⁶ Wahyu Satria Wibowo, *Jesus as Kurban, Christology in the Context of Islam in Indonesia*, 43.

Dr. Pervaiz Sultan, a former principal of the Karachi seminary is also one of the most prominent theologians in this perspective. Sultan, like Nazir-Ali, presents many problems when it comes to explaining Christ in the context of Pakistan. His writing from the suffering and economic perspective improving the lives of the Christian community for bringing peace and reconciliation is another brilliant attempt to understand the cross of Christ in this context.

He emphasizes that Islam is very optimistic about the human potential of doing good, therefore the focus is on the good works.²⁷ Sultan argues that in the context of Pakistan, believers' understanding of the reality of the cross should be pragmatic in a sense as the Islamic context does not believe in the death of the cross.²⁸ Sultan emphasizes that:

The Christian experience of suffering and poverty gives them a unique insight into the meaning of the cross which they can share with others to witness Christ.²⁹

The cross, according to Sultan, is one of the most powerful motivations for Christians that reminds them of the work of Christ in terms of peace and reconciliation. As a result, Sultan concludes that for Pakistani Christians cross is a symbol of hope that always reminds Christians living in such a context, though the results in terms of bringing peace and reconciliation between Muslims and Christians are slow, however, it would be fully shown upon the establishment of the kingdom of God.³⁰

Evaluation of the Previous Studies

The literature reviewed above explaining Christ, on the first hand, in the Islamic context provides us a ground to base our Christology by looking at the various challenges Islam is posing to explain Christ in the Islamic context. As clarified by Nazir-Ali Christ's ethical teachings and the various Quranic titles are helpful to explain Christ to Islam. That is a quite remarkable effort to explain Christ in this context, however, we need to be careful in our Christological investigation, not to lose the originality and uniqueness of Christ. Secondly, to explain Christ merely from an ethical perspective and just using titles

²⁷ Pervaiz Sultan, *A Pakistani Christian's perspective on the cross*, David Emmanuel Singh (Editor), *Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts (Global Theological Voices)*, (Eugene, OR 97401, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 118.

²⁸ Pervaiz Sultan, *A Pakistani Christian's perspective on the Cross*, 115.

²⁹ Pervaiz Sultan, *A Pakistani Christian's perspective on the Cross*, 119.

³⁰ Pervaiz Sultan, *A Pakistani Christian's perspective on the Cross*, 119.

is a reductionist view of presenting Christ in this context. It is noteworthy to consider that amid severe persecution, the early Church overcame every hindrance that was against the uniqueness of Christ. Although these disciples were in great danger in a sense because the same Jews who killed Jesus were now equally cruel to the disciples and they were threatened to not speak at all in the name of Jesus,³¹ however, despite all the challenges the disciples did not compromise to replace this powerful witness with any other thought. John Stott addresses this context in this way that the apostles ignored Sanhedrin's ban and they witnessed Christ with boldness, and thus because of this God's grace was sustaining disciples.³² Furthermore, Stott mentions that because of this courageous testimony, Luke does not leave it there. Luke is concerned to show that the fullness of the Spirit is manifest indeed as well as word, service as well as witness, love for the family as well as testimony to the world.³³

Secondly, Malik's idea of "Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context" in the socio-religious cultural environment by using the theocentric approach is another important attempt to admire. However, it is important to remember, that we cannot limit ourselves to 'confession' alone; indeed, 'witness' is equally significant in this case, and therefore both go hand in hand. Confession is for individual salvation,³⁴ which further proceeds to 'exercising faith' by witnessing Christ in the world.³⁵ As a result of the Gospel's influence, the apostles changed the whole world through 'confession and witness'.

Furthermore, in addition to the early Greek and Latin approaches, as well as Eastern and Western ways to explain Christ, Malik's claim of rediscovering Christ raises numerous challenges and questions in this phenomenon. The first is, why the early Church Fathers formulated their Christology under the guidance of Scriptural evidence and how can the fullness of Christ be understood apart from the first eyewitnesses? Also, to what extent, does this approach have the potential to explain the fullness of Christ by using socio-religious cultural aspects? Though it is true that because of our limited human capacity, God spoke to people according to their finite minds, Jesus did the same in His earthly ministry. Similarly, Jesus used parables according to the understanding of His

³¹ Acts 4:18.

³² John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, IVP Academic. (Philadelphia, PA, U.S.A), 2020, 88.

³³ John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 88.

³⁴ Romans 10:9-10.

³⁵ Romans 10:14.

disciples³⁶, however, it is equally important to note that behind every ‘doctrine of accommodation’³⁷ divine explanation was there to fulfill the human capacity to understand every revelation. For instance, Jesus used seven “I am” to prove who He is. Christ explained the earthly and heavenly meanings of these terms.

Along with this, does the title ‘Son of God’ is a matter of rationalism to prove Jesus’ Sonship? Besides, the theocentric approach limits to see Christ from the divine perspective alone, however, His humanity is equally important. He who abandoned His place and humbled Himself remaining fully obedient to God and even died for us on the cross. Along with that, Jesus understands our weakness as He was tempted in the same way as we are, but He did not sin.³⁸ Thus, God’s impassibility in Christ is quite important in the Islamic perspective to witness Christ.

Besides, Amjad-Ali’s stance to reevaluate the missiological journey and to explain Christ in a new theological way is another important study from mission perspective. Though, unlike Malik, this study tended to shift our focus from the divinity of Christ to humanity and emphasizes much more looking upon the incarnation of Jesus as a foundation, however, like the previous studies, this study does not provide any pragmatic approach to explain Christology in this context and does not provide any platform to quip grassroots Christians, who are the most marginalized in this aspect.

Lastly, Sultan’s approach to explaining Christ from the suffering and poverty perspective is another unique attempt to explain Christ in terms of bringing peace and reconciliation. However, the only weakness of this study is, it deals with the economic challenges alone and does not provide any pragmatic way to resolve our socio-political and religious challenges.

Overall, on the one hand, it is important here to notice, do these attempts provide answers to the upper, middle, and lower-class (man-made structures) Pakistani Christians to explain Christ in the Islamic context? On the other hand, as our context is full of hatred and injustice demands every Christian to be fully equipped with the ‘knowledge and experience’ of Christ. Above all, our ecclesiastical responsibility should be the starting point of our Christological vocation; unfortunately, none of the studies

³⁶ Mark 4:33.

³⁷ Accommodation is the religious theory that God, while being unknowable and unreachable in His essence, has interacted with mankind in a manner that humans may comprehend and react to.

³⁸ Philippians 2:7-8; Hebrew 4:15.

above consider it at all. So, the argument is that the starting point to resolve this tension is neither poverty, nor persecution, but rather the denominational differences that are of utmost importance to handle at firsthand. (The researcher is not underestimating or undervaluing the previous studies as the first two are more focused on rationalism to explain Christ and the rest of the two are more focused towards the missional perspectives to respond to contextual realities).

Therefore, in the light of these four examinations, it is the researcher's task to employ these studies as a background for his vocation to articulate this Christology by mending the fractured Church (denominationalism) at the beginning of this journey to move forward to respond the contextual realities.

The Fullness of Christ in the Development of Faith and Mission: Christological Vocation

The first question that needs to be answered in this phenomenon is, how can we develop our Christology in a setting where the authority of the Bible has been rejected or has been destructively misconstrued as corrupted and abrogated? However, it is noteworthy to consider here to see Jesus on the road to Emmaus who opened the eyes of dismayed disciples from their negative thoughts and limited perceptions to show them the fullness of Christ. Like today, these disciples in Jesus' time were also confused and sad as they were merely perceiving Jesus as a prophet and a miracle worker, however, Jesus Christ Himself encountered and provided them an opportunity to witness the resurrected Christ.³⁹

Hence, in this phenomenon before elaborating on Christological vocation in the Islamic context, it is important to see 'Jesus is with us' in our socio-political, economic, and religious struggles. As our context plays an important role to highlight issues, and our Christological articulation in this specific manner fulfills the needs of the context. So, in this perspective, our culture poses various challenges and our Christological articulation becomes master above all to address our socio-political, economic, and pluralistic challenges by explaining 'who Christ is' amidst these challenges. However, the Christological formulation needs a concrete explanation; the starting point of this journey to articulate our Christological vocation.

³⁹ Lk. 24:13-32

So, back to our question again, shall we take the Bible for our Christological vocation to explain Christ in this context? This answer has been already given in the above preceding, however, in the light of this discussion, it does not mean that the Christian community does not believe in the Bible. But rather the situation is different, they believe that the Bible is the only authority and source to formulate our Christological understanding in any context. So, in this respect, it is important to understand according to Witness Lee that the need is to be watchful to never let the Bible knowledge unsighted us to the living Christ. The Bible is not a matter of knowledge or teaching [of Christ] but rather, it is a matter of the living Christ.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Lee argues that it does not mean that we do not need the Bible, but rather the need is to take it in a living way.⁴¹

Thus, in this case, the approach would start from the Pakistani Church to become a 'living witness of Christ' so that through our lives in this context the life of Christ must reflect. In other words, the articulation of Christology would start from our lives to reveal the life of Christ for changing the whole face of this context to explain Christ. But, the question comes, is it possible to do so? For the Bible believers, the answer lies in the teachings of Jesus on the mount as Pakistani Christians are the light of the world, a town built on a hill that cannot be hidden by any means.⁴²

Therefore, as the apostles were the 'living witnesses of Christ' in a similar way this heavy responsibility lies on the shoulders of every Christian in Pakistan to be a perfect reflection of Christ.⁴³ This powerful reality would begin by trusting that 'Christ lives in us' and wants to demonstrate His action, living and moving to our surroundings. And, to explain Christ's fullness in the Islamic context, our Christological reflection will gradually morph into ecclesiastical Christology. However, as discussed above in this regard, in order to become a living witness, the Church would have to remove the weeds of hatred so that the fight between the Catholic Church, churches in Pakistan and the Church of Pakistan⁴⁴ does not occur in the future. Unfortunately, in the Pakistani Church, local divides in almost every church have already weakened the body of Christ (Church) that

⁴⁰ Witness Lee, *Christ versus Religion*, (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1971), 72.

⁴¹ Witness Lee, *Christ versus Religion*, 72.

⁴² Matthew 5:14-16.

⁴³ 2 Corinthians 4:10.

⁴⁴ Church of Pakistan and churches in Pakistan are two different setups. The Church of Pakistan consists of eight dioceses and four denominations namely Anglican, Methodists, Lutherans and Scottish Presbyterians. Churches in Pakistan are mostly independent churches consists of Pentecostals, other denominations and some home-based churches.

has a small population of Christianity with many denominations, that relies on the Western alliance and copies the policies of the West that has no relevance with today's issues.⁴⁵ Moreover, the Pakistani Church has deliberately morphed into the Christological debates over Christ's Sonship, and self-centered on its own interests by becoming much more focused on its theological agendas that have no concern for today's challenges. Nonetheless, this can be only achieved by being 'Missional'—understanding God's mission in our context recognizing, appreciating, and valuing the gifts of each other's and being 'Servational'—to serve one another especially marginalized communities in love so that the body of Christ becomes stronger.

Contextual Realities

The life of Christ in the lives of the apostles was a role model to prove Christ to the world, who existed within them with the fullness of grace and truth to demonstrate what God is like⁴⁶ and the same would happen to the Pakistani Christian community. However, it is also noteworthy to highlight that explaining Christ neglecting our contextual needs is not the approach of this paper. This kind of Christology in emptiness would not respond to this unjust system, neither be the perfect reflection to change the lives of our surroundings and nor be fruitful for those who are experiencing marginalization in their contexts. In this regard, Van der Meer argues that even though Christ came from heaven in the flesh, however, He did not close Himself into the vacuum, but rather He interacted with that times' cultural, socio-economic, and political contexts to demonstrate that mission of God does not operate in a vacuum.⁴⁷

Miserably, our preachers are tended to preach Christ that gives prosperity and blessings and future glory, but this kind of Christ does not have any solution to the marginalization and unjust system wherein the community is dying with hunger, poverty, hatred, and oppression. Thus, these pastors explain Christ as a pacifist Jesus who would come in the future to judge the unjust world, however for them right now this Christ is sitting in heaven and smiling over the marginalized community and shall reward them

⁴⁵ See further, Maysood Kamil, *Pakistan*, (The Ecumenical Review, World Council of Churches, 2012), 154. Muhammad Shahid Habib, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue from Pakistani Perspective: Evaluation of the Contribution of Christian Study Center" *Journal of Islamic & Religious Studies* 2, no. 1 (2017): 135-139; Evelyn Ruth Bhajan, *Mission in the Pakistani context*. (Rethinking Mission, 2018), 8.

⁴⁶ John 1:14.

⁴⁷ Van der Meer, *Mission and Spiritual Mapping in Africa*. MTh. Dissertation. (University of South Africa, 2000), 16.

upon his coming. So, like Meer, Zablon Nthamburi argues in the same fashion that our Christological investigation will not be meaningful unless we translate it into our contextual situation.⁴⁸ It is important here to highlight that from Nthamburi's point of view it does not mean that our Christology is dependent upon context, it is not the culture and context that develops our Christological understanding, but rather it is the Gospel itself that helps us to understand the works of Christ when we place Him in our struggles and challenges to see the face of Christ amidst such situation. Like Nthamburi, David J. Bosch also insightfully argues that [C]ulture and context are the servants of the Gospel.⁴⁹ Bosch further argues that Gospel is ranked above any context and it shows the universality of the Gospel.⁵⁰

Regrettably, modern theologians are doing the opposite: they have positioned context above everything and developed Christology.⁵¹ If Jesus would have embraced the patterns of today's model, would it be possible for Him to reach His goal? He did not come to show a reductionist, sublime, or abstracted Christ operated by context as humans were perceiving.⁵² But rather, Christ showed Himself and responded to the contextual realities of His age by showing who He is, 'the Word of God that changes the hearts of the people',⁵³ 'the Light of the world that shines in the darkness',⁵⁴ 'full of Grace and Truth',⁵⁵ 'the Son of God that revealed God',⁵⁶ 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world',⁵⁷ 'who will baptize with the Holy Spirit',⁵⁸ 'the Messiah',⁵⁹ 'the King of Israel',⁶⁰ 'the Mediator between God and man',⁶¹ 'the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End'⁶² and so forth. (It is not the intention of this paper to write on the historical Jesus it suffices to highlight here that the Bible does not present Him as a reductionist Christ).

⁴⁸ Zablon Nthamburi. *Christ as Seen by an African: A Christological Quest*. in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, Robert J. Schreiter. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

⁴⁹ Cited by David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 543.

⁵⁰ David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in theology of Mission*, 543.

⁵¹ Contextualized deceptive theologies centered on self-satisfaction rather than God's concern. The objective of these theologies based upon human agendas neglecting the divine's role.

⁵² Matthew 16:1-5, 13, 14, 22-24.

⁵³ John 1:1.

⁵⁴ John 1:5.

⁵⁵ John 1:14.

⁵⁶ John 1:18.

⁵⁷ John 1:29.

⁵⁸ John 1:33.

⁵⁹ John 1:40.

⁶⁰ John 1:49.

⁶¹ John 1:51.

⁶² Revelation 22:12.

Thus, Christ did not put His eyes on the horrifying situation of the culture and context,⁶³ but rather He dismantled the economic, socio-political, and religious authorities by declaring that He will complete His mission.⁶⁴ In this regard, Leonardo Boff insightfully argues:

In Jesus is also revealed the Son—not so much because he referred to himself in this way (cf. Matt. 11:25-27; Mark 12:1-9, 13:32), but because he acted as the Son of God. His actual, living practices bespeaks an authority that can only be situated in the sphere of divine. He represents the Father in the World, and he makes that Father visible in his goodness and mercy.⁶⁵

In this respect, it is important here to mention that Christ fulfills this purpose of God by teaching them with authority to show that everything that comes out from the mouth of the Lord has the power to transform hearts.⁶⁶ This is the reason, the impact following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was so powerful that it transformed his disciples into people who faced persecution and death with courage.⁶⁷ The One who has control over the storm to calm down the wind and water,⁶⁸ feeding the poor in the wilderness to sovereign His authority,⁶⁹ who brought back to life a man after four days of his death to show He has authority over the dead to give life,⁷⁰ and finally the risen Christ who died and buried and raised after three days to show He has control over His own life to give and take it back.⁷¹

Attempt to Develop Christological Understanding

This is an attempt to develop Apologetic Evangelical Contextual Christology in the Islamic context. Apologetic, not in the sense of polemical or argumentative sense but in the sense of presenting Christ as a 'living witness' with courageous honesty. Consequently, in this perspective, a pragmatic approach would be employed to see the 'works of Christ' who has control over everything and make it a Praxis of the Church (Ecclesiastical Christology). Furthermore, the missiological perspective would be used to

⁶³ Luke 13:1-5.

⁶⁴ Luke 13:32.

⁶⁵ Leonardo Boff. "Trinity." in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology (Readings from *Mysterium Liberationis*)*. Jon Sobrino & Ignacio Ellacuria (Ed.). (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

⁶⁶ Matthew 7:28.

⁶⁷ Nthamburi, *Christ as Seen by an African*, 1991.

⁶⁸ Luke 8:24.

⁶⁹ Luke 9:17.

⁷⁰ John 11:44.

⁷¹ John 10:18.

explain Christ that would respond to context to show the mission of God to our Muslim brothers and sisters.

Thus, to begin this Christological vocation, we need to see Jesus, and how He equipped His disciples. He asked an important question to His disciples, who do you say, I am?⁷² Simon Peter correctly replied to the question: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.⁷³ It shows Jesus' radical impact on the lives of the disciples, who vehemently proclaimed this fact after seeing Christ's marvelous wonders on earth. Jesus expressed His admiration for Peter by saying:

You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because no person taught you that. My Father in heaven showed you who I am Thus Jesus said to Peter. On this rock, I will build my Church, and the power of death will not be able to defeat it.⁷⁴

Thus, along with becoming a 'living witness' our Christological vocation would begin withholding this powerful prophetic declaration of Jesus Christ 'the power of death will not be able to defeat it' [Pakistani Church].

According to Douglas W. Waruta: Jesus knew that the "Kingdom of God' had dawned among men, the fulfillment of God's promises to his people had been inaugurated and nothing would stop it from reaching God's people in every place and in every age.⁷⁵

Waruta, rightly argues that Peter had seen Christ as a narrow nativistic political Messiah⁷⁶ however, on Pentecost, by the power of the Holy Spirit so 'living and powerful' happened within disciples' lives that radically transformed them and they boldly testify Christ to the whole world. People in the neighborhood started to embrace Christ through them, which was radical discipleship, and this changed the face of the whole world.

So, in this phenomenon, our Christological articulation would begin to have 'concerns of God' rather than 'human concerns' denying from post-Constantine missiological agendas of gaining power, rule, and authority. Thus, on the first hand, we should not focus on the post-Constantine church, but rather the intention should be focused on the pre-Constantine approach that is biblical.⁷⁷

⁷² Matthew 16:15.

⁷³ Matthew 16;16.

⁷⁴ Matthew 16:16-18.

⁷⁵ Douglas W. Waruta, *Who Is Jesus Christ for Africans Today? Prophet, Priest, Potentate*. (Schreiter, 1991).

⁷⁶ Douglas W. Waruta, *Who Is Jesus Christ for Africans Today? Prophet, Priest, Potentate*.

⁷⁷ Charles Amjad-Ali, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Pakistan*, 69-70.

Furthermore, on the other hand, in the broader context of Christianity, Stott critically reflects on the one hand, to sit with Muslims in dialogues the ultimate need is to know the mentality of Muslims about Christianity. On the other hand, he asserts that the Christian must feel the shame of the crusades and of the bitter medieval polemic against Islam and grasp the Muslim's abhorrence of Western imperialism and secularism and his utter incomprehension of the West's unjust espousal of Israel at the Arabs' expense."⁷⁸

Numerous scholars have highlighted similar issues, in this regard. The urgent need is to devise our own Christological interpretation within the scope of the Islamic context by saying goodbye to the former imperialistic policy of mission.

Thus, again in this entire framework for demonstrating the 'works of Christ,' the first and foremost need is to be witnessed and require to remove the conflicts of denominationalism and then challenge the horrifying facets of our modern context by denying our current mission paradigm; that focuses more on 'conversion' rather than 'transformation'; 'condemnation' rather than 'love and sacrifice'; and 'dominance' rather than 'cross of Christ.' If the work is carried out with a transformed heart, immersed with love and sacrifice by centering the cross of Christ, this is how it can bear fruit.

A Pragmatic Approach: Marginalization Not Minority to Resolve Socio-Economic Challenges

The stage that follows leads us to the pragmatic challenge of starting 'concerns of God' in our Islamic context to show the 'works of Christ' to understand the personhood of Christ. The irony of the matter is that our Christian community leans more toward the total number of Christians living in Pakistan (as it says that the government does not have an accurate figure for the Christian population). Whereas the focus should be on marginality rather than a minority. Jennifer Jag Jivan and Peter Jacob, notice that the marginalized community is poor and eighty percent are underprivileged because of the economic crisis, while forty percent are living below the poverty line.⁷⁹ In this regard, David T. Williams is right to say that to overcome economic challenges from the community the answer lies in the teachings of Jesus' suffering according to His given

⁷⁸ John Stott & Christopher J. H. Wright, *Dialogue, Christian Mission in the Modern World: Updated and Expanded*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 116-117.

⁷⁹ Jennifer Jag Jivan and Peter Jacob, *Life on the Margins: A Study on the Minority Women in Pakistan*, (Lahore, Pakistan: National Commission for Justice and Peace, 2012), 17.

mission (Luke 4:18) including: [L]iving in faith, remitting of debts in terms of Biblical Jubilee, redistribution and so on.⁸⁰ Williams further asserts that this approach is not charity, but rather sharing, neither status quo but to provide the needs of the poor.⁸¹

In Pakistan many of Punjab's mainline churches have ample resources to fulfill the needs of the province's impoverished population. There are few mainline churches in rural areas where tithes are at least 100,000 rupees (\$600-\$650) per month, with an annual rise to about \$8000. A sanitary worker's monthly pay in Pakistan is less than 15,000 Pakistani rupees, which is not even close to \$100.⁸² To improve the Punjabi Church's economic situation, each church should give \$100 a month to at least 80 impoverished poor families, which will make a significant difference in raising the community's standards.

The income is three times higher than that of churches in Punjab's cities. The Punjabi Church must take the initiative to uplift the grassroots population by offering schooling, political assistance, and economic development using available resources. Unfortunately, Christian workers' salaries in missionary establishments (schools and colleges) are also very low, and due to a lack of having enough understanding, workers are still encouraged to do so for the sake of Christ, even though the institutions have the means to pay them well. Raising people's standards will imply more money for churches to assist more families. Churches, missionary schools, and universities are one of the most abundant resources for improving the standards of the Christian grassroots community in terms of educating the children of sanitary workers. It would also assist the Punjabi Church in breaking free from its dependency on foreign resources. From this vantage point, it will enable the Church to experience and enjoy the abundant available resources to the Punjabi community by depending on Christ, who supplies what we need.⁸³ As it is the Church's responsibility to change the whole view of economic crises by serving the oppressed community by giving them food and water.⁸⁴ Thus, the Church's task to serve the marginalized community as a serving body of Christ would go beyond the church

⁸⁰ David. T Williams, *Christian Approaches to Poverty*, Authors Choice Press, Incorporated (Wood Dale, IL, U.S.A), 2001, 283.

⁸¹ David. T Williams, *Christian Approaches to Poverty*, 283.

⁸² The Researcher is serving in an underprivileged community, so the salaries of the congregants are one of the proofs to support this figure.

⁸³ Philippians 4:19.

⁸⁴ Matthew 25:35-40.

parameter, so that nobody else remains poor in our country.⁸⁵ To become the helping hand of the marginalized community would not be limited to Christians alone, but rather it would go beyond the other religious communities to change the face of the earth. Williams puts this healing service of the community in this way that Paul sees the work of salvation not in the individual alone, but rather in its effects on the whole universe (Romans 8:1).⁸⁶

As a result, experiencing economic breakthroughs outside of the Pakistani Church would have a powerful opportunity to become a “living witness of Christ”. Consequently, the Church will be able to witness that, just as Christ, the healer of the broken world, died for humanity to remove the ‘first sin’,⁸⁷ the Punjabi Church, as a co-healer and serving body of Christ, is eradicating the consequences of ‘first sin’ from this world. ⁸⁸ because this world belongs to our Lord.

Living as a Christ to Die for the Community to Resolve Socio-Political, and Religious Challenges

Many individuals in this context have already given their lives to see systematic oppression in this way. Dr. John Joseph, a Roman Catholic Bishop, committed suicide in front of the court after hearing many blasphemy lawsuits against the Christian community.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Shahbaz Bhatti, a former minority leader was assassinated for speaking out against discrimination and vehemently opposing blasphemy prosecutions. Bhatti said: I believe in Jesus Christ, who has given his own life for us. And I’m ready to die for a cause. I’m living for my community and suffering people, and I will die to defend their rights.⁹⁰

This would help to change the socio-political, and religious condition of the most deprived community who is dying at the hands of oppressors in this context. The ‘cross

⁸⁵ Deuteronomy 15; Acts 2.

⁸⁶ Williams, *Poverty*, 371.

⁸⁷ Muslims do not believe in the ‘original sin’ or its origins, which were committed by Adam and Eve. The researcher has deliberately avoided using the word ‘original sin’ because it involves explanation. As a result, the first sin is defined as the sin committed by Adam and Eve, which is sufficient for their understanding.

⁸⁸ Williams, *Poverty*, 371.

⁸⁹ Kaleem John. “Christians and the Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan.” *Transformation* 17, no. 1 (2000): 20-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026537880001700107>.

⁹⁰ Michele Norris, “Pakistan Minister Killed.” *npr*, March 2, 2011, <https://www.npr.org/2011/03/02/134207966/Pakistan-Minister-Killed>.

of Christ' changes our missiological perception in the Islamic context which leads us to the second aspect of our Christological vocation. Thus, changing our paradigms of doing missions from the Islamic perspective would open our eyes to see the horrible aspects of our society wherein thousands of cases of this phenomenon can be seen where our Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Bhai, and other religious community members are brutally suffered, discriminated, by social, and religious threats.⁹¹

The cross is the foundation and source of spiritual, social, psychological, and physical healing, and it should always be at the center of the Church's healing ministry.⁹² As already seen from the studies above that our Muslim community does not believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, thus this would be only shown to be partakers of Jesus Christ in this mission⁹³. Dietrich Bonhoeffer defines the church's mission: "[T]he church is the church only when it exists for others."⁹⁴

Our ecclesiastical responsibility of bearing the cross would lead us to show to our Muslim brothers and sisters that our responsibility as partakers of Christ is just like a healing community and imitators of Christ. As Christ suffered for humanity to save the world, we, as a compassionate heart community, will fulfill this duty by embracing suffering in the same manner as Christ did.

Equipping Every Christian by Using Rich Contextual Resources

The Punjabi context is rewarded with many contextual resources thus to equip every Christian in this Islamic context as a serving body of Christ this could be achieved, on the first hand, through music which is one of nature's greatest gifts. By using this medium, the Punjabi Church can more powerfully articulate its message and become a platform for the voiceless, responding the loudest voices. Punjabis are talented in composing Urdu, Punjabi, and Hindi music, and their efforts would help to reduce the strong tones of injustice in this perspective.

In this respect, we must not neglect the blessed services of Rev. Dr. Imam-ud-din Shahbaz's ministry, which was able to interpret the whole book of Psalms in Punjabi

⁹¹ Shikha Dilawri. Searching for Security: The Rising Marginalization of Religious Communities in Pakistan." (Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2014), 24.
<https://minorityrights.org/app/uploads/2024/01/mrg-searching-for-security-pakistan-report.pdf>

⁹² Nazir-Ali, *Universal Christ*, 49.

⁹³ Luke 4:18-19.

⁹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer & Eberhard Bethge (Ed.), *Letters and Papers from Prison, The Enlarged Edition*, (New York, NY: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing, 1971), 382-383.

versified version. The strongest methods to be a prophetic voice in the oppressed culture wherein dramas, documentaries, and stage plays can play a vital role. Waves Studios, Lahore's efforts in composing music for Punjabi psalms (Sialkot Convention: Geet kee Kitab), and publishing audio cassettes are also tremendous gifts to the Pakistani Christian community. Additionally, broadcasting and publishing numerous programs on Christian and secular TV channels could also be a major contribution. Books, journals, and magazines, on the other hand, are among the most vital resources for transforming culture. According to James H. Cone, I write because writing is the way I fight. Teaching is the way I resist doing what I can to subvert.⁹⁵

To become an anti-voice in such an immoral, powerless, unjust, and corrupted society (where women are coerced into prostitution or forced conversion to the majority's faith, rapes, racism, and inequality are widespread), this will be a step further toward the development of Christology as Christ the liberator. The Church's goal would be fulfilled by imitating Christ's role as co-liberator and co-restorer in this context of hatred and mistreatment. Writing blogs, journals, and books will act as a memorial service for those who have been martyred and encouragement for the generations to come. There is a shortage of decent Urdu and Punjabi literature in this context; the imperative is to develop strong Urdu literature based on the Asian context, which can be understood in their native languages. The Punjabi Church is too dependent on Western literature; seminary libraries are brimming with English literature, and these establishments have completely ignored Asian theologians' contributions. Journals, novels, and posts must be written in Punjabi or Urdu to restore the beauty of this region. Explaining what the Punjabi Church has to offer in their contexts would be the greatest assistance to marginalized communities.⁹⁶

Furthermore, Social Networking Services (SNS) have a significant impact on advancing the formation of the insane evil system. Even so, the same networks, such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media, have enough space to counteract the unjust system, by not only uploading and transmitting videos of a destitute and needy community but rather to bring significant change. However, it is critical to

⁹⁵ James H. Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian*. (Maryknoll, New York, 10545, Orbis Books, 2018).

⁹⁶ This is the researcher's own observations based on the trends of vulgar Punjabi stage and songs support the argument that the literature is lacking in this region.

remember to always use social media with responsibility, transparency, and accountability, because the purpose is not to spread rumors, but rather to become the voice of the voiceless.

Thus, by using the different mediums mentioned above, we can imitate Christ the liberator and through this phenomenon, we can become co-sufferers, co-redeemers, and co-healers to rescue all humans. [E]xperiencing the suffering in the context of suffering becomes a powerful witness by sharing Jesus Christ with others.⁹⁷

CONCLUSION: MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Firstly, the cross of Christ would only become a meaningful and ultimate reality in this context when our Christian community would become a healing community from every aspect: to liberate the Christian community and other religious communities from the clutches of strong harming powers, by overcoming injustice and revealing the face of the risen Christ. Secondly, being a 'living witness of Christ' in this sense will demonstrate the unconditional love of Christ-like as He does for the whole world,⁹⁸ showing the power of the resurrected Christ amidst economic, socio-political, and pluralistic challenges. Thirdly, this would provide a great opportunity to the Christian community to explain Christians being sons and daughters of God as Christ is the Only and begotten "Son of God" not in the sense of any physical or generic, but rather being the Only restorer and renewer of the world and we being co-restorer and co-renewer in this world.

Fourthly, this pragmatic approach to Apologetic Evangelical Contextual Christology would change the hearts of oppressors and be carried out with full commitment in the coming generations, with the prophetic promise of the Lord,⁹⁹ witnessing Christ as a healing community, co-sufferers, co-redeemers, and serving the body of Christ towards our Muslim brothers and sisters and other religious communities until the end of time. Finally, above all this Christological vocation could only begin to keep ecclesiastical responsibility in mind by removing the weeds of hatred among churches in Pakistan and the Church of Pakistan.

⁹⁷ Pervaiz Sultan, *A Pakistani Christian's perspective on the cross: Jesus and the Cross*, 119.

⁹⁸ John 3:16.

⁹⁹ Matthew 16:18.

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