

# The parables of jesus christ theology religion essay



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## **6. 1 Introduction to Contextualization**

This chapter aims at defining the term Contextualization; briefly giving a background of when, how and why this term was introduced and in what contexts and for what purpose it is used. It will also look at the different approaches and views towards contextualization. It will then discuss the issue whether contextualization has any Biblical significance or not. Next the discussion will move on to discuss as to who should contextualize. Since the focus of this research is the parables of Jesus Christ therefore the discussion will move towards the contextualization of the parables of Jesus Christ. The focus will be on the contextualization of the parables of Jesus Christ in the current Pakistani context. A list of parables will be provided which have been selected for Contextualization according to the Pakistani context.

## **6. 2 Definition of Contextualization**

What is Contextualization? As I set out to look for the exact meaning and definition of the seemingly easy word Contextualization, I found out that like Stylistics this term too was not easy to define, Rev. Ralph Alan Smith considers it to be an ambiguous and clumsy term (R. A. Smith). Initially this was a linguistic term which was used to show the recognition of the various phonetic contexts in which the phonemes occur as well as the identification of phonemes by determining their lexical and grammatical functions (R. A. Smith). The further one probes into trying to figure out what is meant by it and how it can be applied to the contents of the parable texts the fog starts to lift. Jerome Gay Jr. defines Contextualization as the idea that there is a need for the Bible texts to be translated into language understood by our culture (Jr.). The theologians use this term, as John Bailey explains it, as the

process of adapting the unchanging gospel message to innumerable cultural contexts in the current world (What is Contextualization and is it Biblical? By John Bailey in *Globe Serve Journal of Missions* 2: 1 Jan 2008). Felipe Tan, Jr. in his paper prepared for the International Faith and Learning Seminar held at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies September 1993 explains that the verb "contextualize" comes from the word "context". Context refers to situation or the circumstances in which a particular event occurs. He states that texts can be correctly and properly understood if they are seen from a context. Similarly, through contextualization the gospel message is communicated so that it can be understood by the people within their cultural context and needs. He further asserts that, to contextualize the gospel message means that the Church cannot neglect the contemporary factors in cultural change in proclaiming the gospel. Byang H. Kato, a theologian from Kenya, pointed out that in contextualization the concepts or ideals are made relevant in a given contextual situation. According to Darrell L. Whiteman "Contextualization captures in method and perspective the challenge of relating the Gospel to culture" (<http://www.spu.edu/temp/denuol/context.htm>). Essentially, contextualization deals with how the Gospel and culture relate to each other over geographic space as well as down through time. Contextualization is that part of an emerging and evolving stream of thought which relates the Gospel and church to a local context. It is the process of assigning meaning, which might be linguistic or as a means of interpreting the environment within which an expression or action is undertaken or carried out. Regunta Yesurathnam defines Contextualization as: "the term contextualization includes all that is implied in indigenization or inculturation, but also seeks also to include the realities

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of contemporary, secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice... Contextualization both extends and corrects the older terminology. While indigenization tends to focus on the purely cultural dimension of human experience, contextualization broadens the understanding of culture to include social, political, and economic questions. In this way, culture is understood in more dynamic and flexible ways, and is seen not as closed and self-contained, but as open and able to be enriched by an encounter with other cultures and movements" (Van Engen, Charles E. (2005), " Toward a Contextually Appropriate Methodology in Mission Theology", in Kraft, Charles H., *Appropriate Christianity*, Pasadena: William Carey Library, pp. 194 isbn 0-87808-358-8). From the few definitions of Contextualization given above we can draw out that contextualization deals with making the message of the gospel easy to understand by relating it to the cultural context of the target community. Thus while contextualizing the Parables of Christ according to the Pakistani setting these parables will be seen in accordance to how they fit into the general cultural situation of Pakistan.

### **6. 3 Historical Background of the Term Contextualization**

The term Contextualization is said to be first used by the linguists in the 20th century to show the recognition of the various phonetic contexts in which the phonemes occur as well as the identification of phonemes by determining their lexical and grammatical functions explains Rev. Ralph Allan Smith in his article *The Trinity and Contextualization* ([http: www. berith. org/essays/trin\\_contxt/01. html](http://www.berith.org/essays/trin_contxt/01.html)), but the first time this term was used by the theologians with a diversity in its meaning was after its use in Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund

(1970-77). In this context the term Contextualization as John Bailey explains/describes is the process of adapting the unchanging gospel message to innumerable cultural contexts in the current world (What is Contextualization and is it Biblical? By John Bailey in *Globe Serve Journal of Missions* 2: 1 Jan 2008) the attempt to contextualize can be seen also as an endeavour to de-westernize the concepts of Christianity by which it is mostly identified i. e. in most of the non- Western parts of the world Christianity is considered as a western religion, therefore by contextualization of the biblical according to the indigenous cultures it makes them seem much more natural and right to those people.

## **6. 4 Examples of contextualization in the Bible**

There are several examples of contextualization found in the Bible. In the book of Genesis we read about Joseph the son of Jacob. He was brought to Egypt and the Pharaoh asks him to interpret his dreams. He answers " I cannot do it...but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires" (Gen. 41: 16). Although his faith in God was unshakable yet he seemed to fit into a pagan culture he looked like and Egyptian and spoke their language. The second example from the Bible is of Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Daniel 1: 6). They were devout followers of Yahweh, yet for years they served in pagan setting. They were given new names (Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) that were related to Chaldean gods; they were tutored in the Babylonian language and literature; they were even better at the Chaldean wisdom than their peers. They defied the king and tried to keep themselves from being defiled by the pagan ways. Eventually they gained high positions in pagan governments. They did not compromise

those aspects of their faith that were non-negotiable, but with a great deal of adaptation they felt at home. The third example is of Jesus himself. He was a Galilean Jew of first century. In certain cases we see that Jesus was willing to break the rules of his norms and culture when it was necessary e. g. in place of his earthly family he gives preference to his Father's (God) house, he touches the unclean lepers who were outcasts, similarly he talks with the Samaritan woman and asks her for a drink of water whereas the Jews did not like them. Lastly we have the example of Apostle Paul. The Jewish people who had become the followers of Christ did not cease to think of themselves as Jews. The word Christian was not yet in use or even invented. Each of the apostles was to spread out and teach the message of Christ to people in distant lands. These apostles did not fear to use the indigenous pagan source in order to explain a Christian concept better. Paul writes letters to the Romans, Corinthians (Greeks), Galatians (Turkish), etc. and contextualizes in order to convey the message he was sent to deliver." 19 For though I be free from all [men], yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. 22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all [men], that I might by all means save some. 23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with [you]". (I Cor. 9: 19-23) Thus we find a number of examples which encourage contextualization. It is good contextualization

which motivates the readers or listeners to see and hear the message of the Bible.

## **6. 5 Functions of Contextualization**

Darrell L. Whiteman in Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge gives three functions of Contextualization, and

### **6. 5. a The First Function of Contextualization**

" Contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture" ( <http://www.spu.edu/temp/denuol/context.htm> ).

### **6. 5. b The Second Function of Contextualization**

The second function of contextualization in mission is to offend. It offends but only for the right reasons, not the wrong ones. Good contextualization offends people for the right reasons. On the other hand bad contextualization or the lack of it altogether, offends for the wrong reasons (<http://www.spu.edu/temp/denuol/context.htm>).

### **6. 5. c The Third Function of Contextualization**

The third and last function of contextualization in mission as told by Darrell L. Whiteman is to develop contextualized expressions of the Gospel so that the Gospel itself will be understood in ways the universal church has neither experienced nor understood before, which expands our comprehension of the kingdom of God. In this sense contextualization is a form of mission in <https://assignbuster.com/the-parables-of-jesus-christ-theology-religion-essay/>

reverse, the elements of Christianity are learnt through context in which the indigenous people dwell i. e. through the cultural context of people living in a non-Christian context.

## **6. 6 Who should Contextualize the parables?**

This is an essential question ‘who should contextualize the parables?’ can this endeavour be made by a common man or is it the task and duty of the religious scholars to sit and ponder upon the religious texts and contextualize them for the public and congregation. There can be numerous arguments in this regard. John Bailey is of the view that the mostly the religious scholars try to contextualize or deculturate themselves and their message for the hearers, but the hearers themselves need to contextualize the Gospel. He further says that as messengers they may have some role in guiding that process but ultimately the hearers/believers have the privilege, freedom, and responsibility of self-contextualizing, it is only then that they would be able to own the message and thus the gospel will grow in their own culture. Keeping this suggestion in mind I want to make this endeavour to contextualize the parables to the best of my understanding and how I see them fit into the lives of the Pakistanis.

## **6. 7 Contextualization of the Parables of Christ**

Now that all the preliminaries have been dealt with we can proceed with the actual contextualization of the chosen parables.

## **Chapter 6-B**

### **Parable No. 1**

#### **Contextualization of the Parable of Candle Under the Bushel**

The symbol of the candle reflects the enlightened heart or rather the light of faith. In these modern times where the faithful heart is bombarded with ideas and influences of secularism and atheism it is sometimes overwhelming for any faithful to keep holding on to one's faith and beliefs, or to openly declare his beliefs. Although I myself am a Christian with secular views (i. e. equality for all) subjectively speaking religion is something that is very personal, intimate and liberating at the same time. Now if this statement is objectively analyzed from the perspective of a believer it is personal because it is a person's direct relationship with his/her creator; intimate because it comes with deep passion; and liberating because when there is nowhere for a person to turn to in times of turmoil and trial s/he knows where s/he will find peace and comfort and assurance. Although it would be quite a subjective point of view but as mentioned earlier in the theoretical framework that due to gap in the information in this area the researcher will have to rely upon her own experiences and observations and those of other fellow Christians living in Pakistan, having being born as Pakistanis, but part of the religious minority. Here I would like to use myself as an example. On a personal level I am as much a Pakistani as I am a Christian. And before anything else I am a human being. And these three aspects of my personality are actually integral aspects of my being. No matter what I achieve in life or where ever I go these aspects of myself will always proudly accompany me. I cannot deny who I am or what I am.

Contextualization of this parable in a Pakistani setting is quite evident in day to day life of any Pakistani (Muslim, Christian, or otherwise). Looking at this parable in a broader spectrum we see that it is most aptly suited to the Pakistani context than any other parable. If we go back into our national history we will come to realize that this parable basically encompasses the very foundation of Pakistan. In a time where the British were rulers over the sub-continent inflicting injustice upon the local people; mistreating and maltreating them; forcing them away from their land and title, it was the very belief and struggle against injustice of the founding fathers of this country that led to the creation of Pakistan. Their faith became their identity. Their faith shown, like a beacon of hope in the darkness of slavery and misery. It provided for them a path, a course to follow. It gave them a direction to follow and a goal to achieve. It was on the basis of their belief and faith that the common man joined in the struggle for freedom. The vision of one man, Allama Iqbal, lit flames of freedom in the hearts of millions, and the result was a free, independent Pakistan. The emergence of Pakistan could never have become a reality if they had shied away and hidden their identity. So for the faithful this is a very significant parable because it suggests that through Word of God comes their identity and like the light it is not meant to be concealed but to be revealed and spread, only then can true liberation and salvation be achieved. Their identity is through their faith and in their faith lays their liberation & Salvation.

## **Parable No. 2**

### **Contextualization of the Parable of the New and the Old**

#### **Setting: Position of Christians in the contemporary Pakistani Society**

The parable of the New and the Old deals with Christ's requirement from his disciples and followers to change completely in order to imbibe or absorb his message of salvation. He makes it quite clear to them that if a person only changes his outwards ways of dealing in his everyday life it is not enough but it is important for him to change his inner self, his very core and accept the true Word (Christ). Only then can he be transformed and prepared to enter the kingdom of heaven. Another aspect of this parable is total submission to Christ. One cannot declare loyalty to Christ on one hand and on the other hand stay totally engrossed in a mundane lifestyle. Both these things are as incompatible as an old garment is incompatible with a piece of new garment for instead of strengthening each other one piece takes from the other. So as a piece of a new fabric will only set right with another new fabric so also will the word of God find its true place in a new (completely changed and accepting ) heart. For it is only when the heart and mind work in unisons will there be peace between mind, body and soul. Christ's requirement of total submission is a golden rule which holds true in any field of life be it sports, relationships or any other aspect of human living, for if a person aspires for greatness then he should be prepared to make any sacrifices and undergo any trials in order to attain his final goal. Now for each person it is his goal which will determine his course of action. Let us take the example of a sports person—a footballer or a cricketer. For a footballer or cricketer attaining the world cup is the ultimate goal. It is something he dreams of at all hours of his

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waking and sleep. He will put in all his energy, time and strength into his practice sessions, and give his all during the matches so that when the final match is played he is totally prepared and is able to give his best performance. Similarly let us take an example from the marital life of a young newlywed housewife. For her marriage signifies change, growing up and maturity; it signifies the formation of a new union, a new family. Marriage signifies new responsibilities. Marriage signifies the beginning of a new life. For any young Pakistani housewife, her goal is to strengthen her relationship with her newlywed husband. She will do her best to please her husband and will try to outdo herself in order to impress her husband. On the contrary, if the footballer or the cricketer takes his sport casually and does not give his hundred percent, then he will never reach the zenith in his career. He would never be able to achieve victory or get the honor of winning the World Cup. In the same way if the young wife does not relinquish her old girlish habits and careless attitude then she will never be able to make her place in her husband's heart. She has to transform from being a daughter and sister into being a wife. She has to adopt her new role which is required for her new life. Her willingness to adopt her new life is what will gain her favor in the eyes of her husband. Likewise for a true follower of faith attaining the Kingdom of Heaven is his ultimate goal. One must understand that in order to attain this goal the change for the betterment should come from within and only when a person truly and completely submits to the teachings of the Word will he be able to actualize his goal. Therefore true and complete submission to the Word is imperative.

## **Parable No. 3**

### **Contextualization of the Parable of the Sower and the Soils**

#### **Setting: Contemporary Pakistani Situation**

This is a very interesting parable in which Christ points to the different aspects of human faith and also very subtly hints that faith and its adherence is different for each and every individual. Christ in this parable quite clearly states that the Word of God, The Good News, His message is the same for all Mankind. But the interesting thing to note through this parable is that its acceptance and outcome is different for each individual, each culture, and each society. Now the sower in the parable is any of the prophets of God who came to this world to deliver this word and message of God and made no discrimination in spreading His message. But the response of each community to this Word is different. In fact the response of each individual within the community is different. Some are more accepting than others, while others reject it completely and totally. And yet there are those who at first accept the Word readily but then when times are tough or when it does not serve their purpose they conveniently reject it. This parable reflects the frailty of human commitment on the one hand and the impartiality of God's grace on the other. In this parable the ground reflects the human race, The seed stands for the one true Message i. e. The Word of God who became flesh. Whereas the Sower is each and every prophet or messenger who brought this glad tiding. The Sufis and Mystics of the sub-continent are a wonderful contextual example of the sower, for they were the people or holy people who in their own way brought forth their own interpretations of God's message. And they gave this message to any and

every one without any discrimination of cast, creed, colour or religion. Now how this message was interpreted by the different people was different as well. There were some who revered their message to the extent that they put these Mystics and Sufis on a pedestal as high as God Himself if not more. Then there were others who understood the true meaning of this message and tried to abide by the teachings to the best of their abilities. Then there were those for whom the teachings made good sense and they accepted them too but when trials and tribulations came their actions fell short of their faith. And then there were those who thought of these Mystics and saints as nothing more than a bunch of eccentrics wasting their time on the road sharing the good news which made absolutely no sense to them. How truly this Parable reflects the shifting sincerity of human commitment in our modern times. It highlights in its own subtle way the difficulty of us humans to stand by something that is pure and true when it hinders our purpose or intent. We all talk about Global peace and equality and pose to believe in it completely, but our actions tell a different tale altogether. For how proudly we talk about the weapons of mass destruction that our country is capable of manufacturing or has already manufactured to use against our so called enemy who in fact is our neighbour. In our drawing rooms we hold meetings to promote equality for all when in the same room the servant's six year old child is restricted from entering for God forbid he might soil the expensive carpet with his bare unattended feet. And then there are those who spend their lives working in the slums and with the poorest of people to make a difference in their lives, bringing hope to the hopeless and peace to the distressed. Take the medical profession for example. All doctors when they graduate take an oath to serve humanity. They take this oath in their

full conscience and out of their own free will. But in reality how many of these doctors are truly able to keep this oath? The mushrooming growth of private hospitals in large and small cities of Pakistan tell a sad story. Not all doctors are bad and money hungry, but in reality only a handful of them will treat a patient without first receiving their full fees. It is not my intent to point fingers at any individual or any profession or negate the fact that there are good people in all professions. My sole intent is to bring to light the fact that the increasing demands of modern living act as weeds in the soil that take up space in our hearts and minds and leave no room for any sapling of selfless service to grow. Now the responsibility lies with the individuals, for the individual can choose what kind of people s/he wants to be. This is an opportunity of us all to ask ourselves a few questions. Do we want to be the people who have eyes but do not see? Do we want to be the ones who see injustice every day and conveniently ignore it saying that it is none of our business? Do we want to be the people who have ears to hear yet do not listen to the cries for mercy and help of our fellow countrymen saying that it is someone else's responsibility to help them? Do we want to be the people who have a heart but do not feel compassion and love for our fellow beings? Do we want to be the people who go to our respective places of worship and listen to lectures of love, peace, tolerance and brotherhood, and yet not think twice before slitting each other's throats over a trivial dispute? Do we want to be the people who camouflage their own selfish and heinous designs under the wrap of faith? All these are important questions which this parable keeps in front of us. Not only does it jolt our idea of faith but also forces us to think twice about our sincerity of commitment. And this is the beauty of the parable of the sower for it not only runs on a level of personal faith but it also

runs on a human level encompassing the entire human life with all its relations and their sincerity.

## **Parable no. 4**

### **Contextualization of the Parable of the Mustard Seed**

#### **Setting: Contemporary Pakistani Social Situation**

In this parable Christ talks about the Kingdom of Heaven (Word of God) and compares it to a small seed like the mustard seed and teaches His disciples that how a little seedling develops in to a sheltering tree and provides perch and shelter for many birds. Some people debate that the mustard seed is not the smallest seed and that the mustard tree is more a shrub than a tree, but these arguments are quite beside the point that Christ is trying to make. The mustard seed's smallness or the mustard tree being a tree or a shrub holds no importance in the context that Christ has used them in. Like in all His parables Christ has used symbols and comparisons that the people of the time were quite familiar with and could easily visualize (at the time there were no visual aids to help explain a point of fact ) He picks a common seed the mustard seed to bring his point. Christ is in fact pointing to the spread of the Word of God spreading throughout the world providing comfort to those who embrace it. One has to remember here that to receive the kingdom of God both faith and deeds have to be kept side by side. Faith without deeds is empty and so is deeds without faith, for only when both faith and deeds combine the results are long lasting and fruit-bearing. A good deed no matter how small it may be if done with the right intention and faith will grow and prosper and people will benefit from it. (This is what the Word of God teaches to love your neighbor as yourself). A perfect example of this

parable can be found in the life of Mr. Abdul Sattar Edhi. An eminent social-worker in the Pakistani community, has dedicated his life to the service of humanity. The Edhi Trust has many orphanages, hospitals, ambulances and even helicopters to aid in the services they provide today. But this picture was not always this affluent before. Mr. Edhi a middle class businessman started his charitable work from his small house in the suburbs of Karachi years ago. At that time there was no funding available for all the things that he wanted to do for the people of his community, but he did not lose hope and kept helping people as much as he could. And as time went by his good work touched the hearts of many and more and more people joined Edhi in his endeavour to serve humanity. Another example of the parable of the mustard seed can be seen in the lives of evangelist missionaries who have been working for years in the war torn, hunger & AIDS stricken villages in Africa. These missionaries worked with the locals and helped them to stabilize their lives with the remote resources they had as much as they possibly could. The evangelists also brought them the Word of God which provided comfort to the troubled hearts of the locals. Many of whom have embraced this Word of God. And those who have not embraced it yet, it still provides comfort and hope. The work of these missionaries has inspired many other religious and non-religious groups who have now joined hands in helping these troubled people of Africa.

## **Parable no. 5**

### **Contextualization of the Parable of the Wicked Tenants**

#### **Setting: Contemporary Pakistani Socio-Political and Religious Situation**

We live in a world which is running after money and power and other material gains. All the wars and unrests are due to both economic or political power struggle, and religion is the biggest weapon or tool which is used to keep a control or restraint over people. It has become difficult to trust anyone to hold power and do the right thing by those who have entrusted them with this honor especially those who hold religious and/or political power or both. In this parable Christ talks about the Kingdom of God being held hostage by those who were in fact appointed as care takers (Pharisees and religious leaders). By the medium of this parable He is in fact prophesying his own death at the hands of the Pharisees. If we take a look around us in our so called modern civilized world we come to realize how true it stands even today. Many religious leaders in our country misconstrue and misinterpret the teachings of the Holy Books for their own selfish gain. They mislead their own followers making them believe that their philosophy of ritualistic practice of the teachings of their religion is the only way to salvation. Thus misleading their followers from the true purpose behind each ritual and only focusing on the act itself and not in what it stands for. They in fact not only play with the faith of their innocent followers but also hold their minds hostage and force them to believe in their own word rather than the Word of God. Anyone who does not agree with them is an infidel and thus needs to be eradicated or excommunicated. This in turn leads to chaos which is what we can see in our country today. It is such so called beacons of

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faith who are igniting the fire of terrorism only to satisfy their lust for power and control. It is such leaders who have stigmatized the name of their country as well as their nation on both national and international fronts. In European history the Dark Age is a period of time when the tyranny of the Church terrorized not only the common man but also the political leaders, kings and statesmen. The bishops and Archbishops of the time were as powerful as the king himself if not more. They twisted and turned the Word of God whenever and wherever it suited them. Religious fanaticism was at its peak during this period in Europe. Innocent people were executed publicly by accusing them of witchcraft and blasphemy. The people who were appointed to uphold the Word of God held it hostage. They were responsible for service to humanity but they in turn used humanity for their own service and pleasure. Like indicated in the parable that all tyranny comes to an end the Dark Ages ended in Europe, the World Wars ended. In the wake of this scenario where all bad things come to an end this parable can be seen as a warning to those who have been neglectful, and dishonest in their duty towards the service of God, and covetous of the materialistic and worldly gains. The punch line for the parable is the question asking what the lord of the vineyard will do when he comes, and the answer provided for it is that he would take away the vineyard from the wicked husbandmen and they will be destroyed and the vineyard will be handed over to others. So it is a warning to be aware of God's wrath. It can only be hoped that our national religious and world leaders mend their ways and end this gloomy era of terrorism and fanaticism ends in Pakistan and the world over.

## **Parable no. 6**

### **Contextualization of the parable of the Fig Tree**

#### **Setting: Contemporary Pakistani Political Situation**

What is the parable of the Fig Tree about? What did Christ use the fig tree a symbol of? Christ wants His faithful to be vigilant at all times and He wants his His followers to be always prepared for the time when of His second coming. He is telling the people that the signs of the destruction of the world before His second coming will be given of which they should be aware. In this parable Christ instructs his disciples to keep a watchful eye on the occurring signs which will lead to the second coming of Christ. Christ uses the imagery of a budding fig tree which is equivalent to the series of events to follow. For it is these events which will lead them to the time when the new kingdom of Heaven will be formed on this earth. For no one except God the Father knows the exact time when this will take place not even the Son (Christ) (Mark 13: 32). Often the events that occur in our everyday life help us to estimate the main event that is going to follow as a result of those events. For example, if there are riots taking place in a particular city then it is often expected that a curfew will follow. If the unrest is still not under control then armed forces are ordered by the government to establish peace. If the unrest is political in nature then often an early election is called for which ultimately results in the formation of a new government. The key element that one should pay attention in these series of events is that the unrest was political in nature and because of which we could predict an election taking place resulting in the formation of a new government. In the beginning no one knew the exact date when the new Government will be formed. All that

was there were signs pointing to the formation of a new government, due to the existing situation, that would bring stability to a city that was torn by unrest. Now in the scenario of these events a wise politician will be the one who has worked in his district and has gained the confidence of the people of his district. He does not wait for the announcement of the election date to start his political campaign but has been preparing for it for a long time and he can be sure that in case of an early election he will get most votes. Likewise a wise man is one who fills up his own stock of faith and works to strengthen his faith and relation with God. He will lead his life according to the Holy Commandments of God Almighty. He will take each difficulty and obstacle towards his faith as a sign of the second coming of Christ. He will keep God's fear in his heart and will walk the path of life in His (Christ) light. And even though he does not know the exact time of the hour of Judgment but he will try his best to be prepared and recognize the signs which point to the End of Days.

## **Parable No. 7**

### **Contextualization of the Parable of the Strong Man**

#### **Setting: Position of Christians in the contemporary Pakistani Society**

The wider application of the parable of the strong man of a person especially a Christian living in Pakistan would be the day to day challenges he faces regarding his/her faith. The existence, acceptance and faith of a Pakistani Christian is always questioned. It will be a bold step to take and to express my true feelings on this particular subject and thus try to contextualize the parable of the Strong Man in the Pakistani Context. Here I would not quote

any prominent scholar on the subject but am going to go completely subjective, based on the experiences I have had throughout my life being a Pakistani Christian myself. The demons that Pakistani Christians, who are a religious minority in Pakistan, have to fight are not evil spirits, but with challenges of being acknowledged, accepted and given space to practice their faith.

## **Existence of Christian Pakistani Nationals**

The thing that plagues them is that their existence is not acknowledged. It is a very common statement which we get to hear everywhere and regardless of whether or not it suits the context, 'We are all Muslims'. Which I must say is an over exaggeration and totally untrue. In Pakistan where there is a heavy majority of Muslims there is also a healthy minority on non-muslims. This is such a common and clichéd statement that I wonder if it holds any real meaning, and it makes me wonder what is it that this statement proves. I have heard people saying that they speak the truth because they are Muslims, they speak Urdu because they are Muslims, they wear shalwar qameez because they are Muslims, they fought bravely in the 1965 war because they are Muslims...on and on and on the list is never ending. Whenever the President or the Prime Minister address the nation (which makes me wonder if it is the Muslims they are talking to or all Pakistanis as a nation) they use the same phrase. Any non-Muslim Pakistani whether Christian or not feels left out, and deliberately dropped of the communication or gathering. The very existence of the Pakistani Christian is negated. This negation of the existence of a Pakistani being a Christian is enough challenge for him/her to continue being faithful to his/her faith in the face of

such adversity. The next point is that of acceptance of Christian Pakistani Nationals.

## **Acceptance of Christian Pakistani Nationals**

The next Strong Man for the Christian Pakistani Nationals is acceptance. For the non-Christians it is not easy to accept a Christian among them. There are about three stereo types of Pakistani Christians. One that they are dark, speaking Punjabi and working as janitors or domestic servants (commonly known as Punjabi Christians), which is the type not to be considered as an equal, but as 2nd or 3rd class citizens; the second stereo type is those who speak English and broken Urdu, and wear western style attire. The third type is the one which is not distinguishable as a Christian on first sight basically due to complexion or attire or speech. It is common knowledge and practice that the utensils used by those Christian Pakistanis who work as janitors or domestic help are kept separate. The janitors are called Christians because of their profession, I have heard my very own colleagues say it more than once " the Christian is on leave that is why no one have emptied the waste baskets", the word Christian here is used synonymous to janitor. People make fun of those who speak a broken version of Urdu or wear western style clothing. Whether in child play or in common conversation among people of any age or social group almost every Christian is asked to convert or to say the Kalma. Many a times young Christian children are made to say the first Kalma (of which they don't even know the meaning) in sport and then they are told that they have now become Muslims, thus leaving them confused and scared. The other very demeaning thing which many Christian Pakistanis face is that they are told that they don't look like Christians at all or that they

don't speak like Christians. This happens to most of the third kind of stereotyped Christians. If we decode these statements then by looks they mean either very dark or fair (European complexion), and by not speak like one it is meant that they don't speak incorrect Urdu or that they don't normally converse in complete English or Punjabi. To anyone who is not a Pakistani these things might seem strange but in Pakistan this is a common practice, whether anyone is bold enough to accept it or to run away from it.

### **Practicing the religious faith by Christian Pakistanis**

The third and biggest Strong Man for a Christian Pakistani National is freely practicing their faith. In most of the government, semi—government and private schools and colleges no provision is made for any non-muslim student to study anything other than Islamiyat. And the education system does not believe in giving secular education. Yes in board examination the non-muslim students can appear in ethics or civics papers but in their academic institutions they are not provided with any teachers who would teach them a class of civics or ethics. As a result many Christian students have no choice but to study Islamiyat. The Bible is openly mocked, the concept of the Holy Trinity is openly mocked, which form the basis of the Christian belief. These are the reasons many Christians prefer to stay quiet than to openly talk about their religion or faith. At the same time they also face the danger of being falsely accused of blasphemy. So if seen in the context of the situation that the Christian Pakistani nationals live in and still hold on to being Christian very much contextualizes the parable of the Strong Man according to the Pakistani society. They can look upon Jesus as the one who binds the Strong Man and still makes them be Christians,

because they believe Him to be their savior. Since it is the Pakistani context and the Pakistani Christians that form the subject of this study therefore I have spoken about their marginalized situation. If seen on a broader universal scale the minority groups world-wide have to face their Strong men and have to have something or someone stronger to bind them.