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Conversions and Transformations: Missiological Approaches to Religious Change

Inter-religious Issues in Mission in Islamic Context of Pakistan

This presentation focuses on the Christians' role in the development of People in Pakistan. The church has played a visible role in the development of communities in the areas of education, health and social uplift to the extent of playing a role in the nation-building, a process started from the creation of Pakistan. This raises a missiological question which has implication for inter-religious issues in the Islamic Context of Pakistan at political and socio-religious levels. A major question comes under discussion-how Christian faith-based development is carried out by the Church and perceived differently by the beneficiaries- majority of them are Muslims belonging to different socio-religious backgrounds. The qualitative and quantitative data help this research and study to further elaborate a role of the Church in Pakistan to have show solidarity with the people at grass roots level. The study of the Five Year Development Plans by different Governments of Pakistan and their achievements in that regard are on record that what was achieved was not distributed among all. The church stands for justice and equality and maintains a distinction of service to the community.

This however has been perceived by the religiously minded people as a mission motivated activity to evangelize and possible conversions of local people to Christianity whereas the open minded people have perceived it as a service on humanitarian grounds. The political sector, the governments' representative including the top leadership has recognized church's role in educational development of people in particular. Also some among Muslim religious circles have acknowledged the role of the Missionary Movement in social action and take it a model to follow.

This raises the issues of method and resources of evangelism. The Christian Educational and Medical Institutions were established in the late 19th Century by different International missions and Churches in Pakistan as part of their solidarity with the local people for their development. They played a great role up to early 1970s when most of the educational institutions were nationalized as part of a process of social democracy of Z.A.Bhutto's government. Then in early 2000 these Institutions were denationalized-given back to the Church- mostly with national leadership to run as Church Institutions. This raises the challenge of moving forward with an out reaching strategy and thoughtful missiological discourses. There have been Islamization in Pakistan- a socio-political process to bring Islam into the daily lives of people at all levels which brings certain restriction and affects the overall situation for other religions.

The role in development of people as a mission of a national church in the midst of legal restrictions and social pressures will be discussed in the presentation at some length to identifying the challenges and opportunities of serving the nation of Pakistan in the name of Christ, who is taken as a major Prophet by the majority people of Pakistan.

P.S. The Paper is to be presented at the IAMS' "Inter-Religious Studies and Mission" study group.
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