Commercial Sexual exploitation of Children: Church's Response

Millions of children today are suffering and are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation. There is not only a social, economic and political crisis, but a deep moral and spiritual crisis which must be taken seriously. God's most precious gift to our generation is being destroyed by abuse of power, victimization by older persons, poverty, changing value system, the breakdown of families, consumerism, sex-tourism, and the profits of drugs etc. Underlying these factors are a few Biblical/religious beliefs and practices which must be addressed to redeem children from abusive and criminal practices.

Jesus Christ in my view is the greatest advocate of children's rights and wants his church to do likewise. It is a painful reality that the church, on the contrary, has betrayed Christ. It has confused and sidetracked the message of Christ: Love, Hope, compassion and Justice, with questions that are not helpful in engaging the struggle for justice and well-being of human race, which is the heartbeat of Christian Faith. The church is called to repent for not being faithful to its task. It is called to see and judge such oppressive elements in the light of Christ's teaching as willed by God, the author of life, and engage in the liberative and healing process of those who are abused as children every minute of the day.

This paper is comprised of three parts. Part one gives an overview of the problem of sexual exploitation from a global perspective. Part two is written to uncover factors that promote and perpetuate commercial sexual exploitation against children particularly the girl child. Part three entails the Church's theological and ministerial response. This calls the church to challenge the underlying assumptions such as patriarchy, cultural and religious attitudes and practices that promote such an heinous crime against children. This also means for the church in Pakistan, as a faith community, to be an advocate for Child's Rights. The Christian church, I believe, is called to construct a theology that is life giving and Christ centered. Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly." What does this mean to the sexually abused, the abusers, and to the Church which is called to embody Christ's message of Hope and Healing?

These children around the world thirst for love, care, protection, dignity, and total development as humans. Let us act forcefully to bring healing and hope to our children.

By: Khushnud Azariah
INTRODUCTION

Working with mentally challenged children for about 15 years has sensitized me to the issue of children's marginalization and poverty to a large extent. My work with young domestic women in rural and slum areas of Pakistan for the past five years had particularly drawn my attention to sexual abuse due to abject poverty, oppressive legal and religious practices which continue to be unchecked and unjudged. Child abuse exists in many forms in Pakistan including physical, verbal and psychological abuse; drug abuse; and sexual violation. However being exposed to the issue of incest and acts of violence even within the apparent safety of one's homes and religious boundaries has come as a big shock to me. The fact that children are at risk of sexual violation from those who are close to them and whom they trust has been something I found difficult to grasp. Reading the research report "Sexual Abuse Of Girls And Young Women", prepared by Fawad Usman Khan in collaboration with"War Against Rape"(WAR) Working Committee, was an eye opener for me because in this report he has highlighted the institutions, attitudes and practices in Pakistan that must be studied and addressed to alleviate this problem. "Incest is an alien concept to many educated Pakistanis. Such cases are rarely reported in the press," says Fuad Khan, whereas Dr. Saad Bashir Malick, a practicing psychiatrist in Lahore says, "Incest and child sexual abuse are far more common than many people would like to believe."(1)

My objective of writing this paper is two fold. Firstly to study and assess the problem of sexual exploitation from historical perspective. This calls us to study the underlying assumptions such as patriarchy, cultural and religious attitudes and practices that promote such an heinous crime against children. Secondly to challenge the church in Pakistan as a faith community to be an advocate for Child's Rights. This calls the church to participate and actualize the goals of the Government of Pakistan through National Program Action(NPA). This means "To undertake research studies to assess magnitude of child abuse, neglect and exploitation; motivation of voluntary agencies to undertake preventive and promotional services for children in difficult circumstances and establishment of legal aid centers to protect children from abuse, neglect and exploitation."(2)

The Church of Pakistan is called to respond because of its Faith which is rooted in the life and Ministry of Jesus Christ. That faith is geared towards bringing life, hope and justice to God's whole creation. Christ's attitude towards children was very positive. He
loved and cared for their needs. He rebuked his disciples when they forbade them to approach him saying, "Let little children come to me, for their's is the kingdom of God." He raised a little girl from the dead. He restored little ones to life and freed them from the bondage of oppressive powers so that all, including children, may have fuller life. While feeding the five thousands, Jesus demonstrated a little boy's will and desire to satisfy the needs of the multitude, thus making a point that children have much to contribute and that they are very much part and parcel of God's plan of salvation.

Jesus Christ in my view is the greatest advocate of children's rights and wants his church to do likewise. It is a painful reality that the church, on the contrary, has betrayed Christ. It has confused and sidetracked the message of Christ: Love, Hope, compassion and Justice, with questions that are not helpful in engaging the struggle for justice and well-being of human race, which is the heartbeat of Christian Faith. Christendom, in the name of Christ, has oppressed and killed people to achieve its worldly supremacy. The church is called to repent for not being faithful to its task. It is called to see and judge such oppressive elements in the light of Christ's teaching as willed by God, the author of life, and engage in the liberative and healing process of those who are abused as children every minute of the day. Child abuse baptized in Christian faith is mockery of God. God's most precious gift to our generation is being destroyed by abuse of power, victimization by older persons, poverty, war, and the profits of drugs. While judging the prevalent abusive attitude towards children, it is imperative for us as Christian educators and theologians to discern God's yearning and involvement in our own context, and learn how we can participate in God's yearning for life and healing. It is my hope and desire that the church in Pakistan will get involved in pealing off the abusive and ambiguous religious practices that have come to us in the garb of various mission movements and religio-cultural practices yet oppress God's children. The church is challenged to yearn for the true face of God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ, a friend of the poor.

This paper is comprised of three parts. Part one gives an overview of the problem of sexual exploitation from a global and Pakistan perspective. Part two is written to uncover factors that promote and perpetuate commercial sexual exploitation against children particularly the girl child. Part three entails the Church's theological and ministerial response. The Christian church, I believe, is called to construct a theology that is life giving and Christ centered. Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly." What does this mean to the sexually abused, the abusers, and to the Church which is called to embody Christ's message of Hope and Healing?

OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM
The Global context: Child sexual abuse is the most disturbing manifestation of sexual violence. Child sexual abused is not confined to any racial, ethnic, or socio-economic class. Children across the world experience the nightmare of abuse, says Reid & Fortune.(3) It is estimated that one female child out of every three will be sexually abused before she is eighteen years old. In addition one male child out of every eleven will be sexually abused as well. Statistics reveal that at least fifty percent of all child sexual abuse occurs in the family as incestuous abuse. Seventy-five percent of female teenage prostitutes on the streets have experienced rape, incest, or molestation earlier in their lives.(4)

Renate Bloem, a UN representative of the World Federation Of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, while reporting to the 9th assembly in Rio, Brazil, held in 1996 said that trafficking for prostitution is world's third largest illicit trade after arms and drugs. The perpetrators of child's sexual abuse are found within the family situation and the commercial sectors. The explosion of sexual exploitation of children for commercial purposes, that is for financial or in-kind profit, is alarming. The child is treated not only as a sex object but also as a commercial commodity. Various studies reveal that many children who have been abused at home have subsequently ended in prostitution. Although boys are also increasingly involved in this, "...an estimated 90% of victims of overall child sexual abuse are girls and more than 90% of the perpetrator are men."(6)

Many children die every year at the hands of paedophiles, child pornographers, and others as a result of commercial sexual abuse. Some die from AIDS, some from an overdose of drugs, others commit suicide for shame of facing their family. " The commercial sexual exploitation of children is the ugliest and most cruel form of modern slavery. It is unforgivable and must be stopped."(6)

A report based on twenty case studies has provided specific information about the children and the communities in which they took place. This report was prepared by the Non Governmental Organizations(NGO) for the " World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children", that was held in Stockholm, Sweden, from 27-31 August 1996. The Regional characteristics of the report are as follows:

Asia: In Asia alone it is estimated that 1 million new children are thrown into sex trade each year. A recent research commissioned by ECPAT(End Commercial Prostitution in Asia Tourism) claimed that children prostitutes in selected countries "service" between 2 and 30 clients per week or between 100 and 1,500 clients per year. Such figures reveal the truth that there are several million customers who regularly exploit children through commercial sex. Most of the clients are local men. Because of the low value traditionally accorded to girls, using them for prostitution services is often readily accepted. In some countries there are links to religion and culture, i.e. tribal cultures( India) with rituals
involving child prostitution, where as in other countries, engaging in sex with virgin girls is believed to prolong life, cure illness (even HIV/AIDS) or bring success in business. The number of children involved in the sex trade in Asia is increasing. Most conservative figures suggested by various NGO's is as follows: Thailand, (1996) 200,000 children involved; Taiwan, (1987-95) 1978 children sold; Nepal, 100,000-200,00 girls trafficked; and Philippines, (1995) 60,000 children involved in prostitution.7

South America: Here child prostitution is mainly due to poverty and broken homes, which have produced the phenomenon of street children in the past decade or so. Their precarious subsistence leads them into forced or voluntary prostitution. Many girls escape from family violence and family incest. There is also a strong connection between drugs and child prostitution. According to an investigation reported to the UN Human Rights committee in 1993, half a million girls are involved in this trade. Young girls are also transported into isolated mining towns. They are lured by false promises of guaranteed wages. Once there they have to pay back debt for transport and are mostly forced into prostitution. Organized criminal rings control these operations. Sex tourism is also on the increase. In Brazil, in 1992, 500,00 children were reported to be involved in prostitution, where as in Chile, 50,000 were working in commercial sex.8

Europe: Children are mostly trafficked from poor countries in the East to wealthier countries in the West, recruited by organized paedophile rings and through high-tech information services. There is also an increase in consumer-driven child prostitution, which push children into the sex trade in order to buy high cost consumer items or drugs. This phenomenon also exists in industrialized countries like the U.K, Canada, the United states, and Australia.9

Africa: Employment of children as domestic servants often includes sexual exploitation. In addition to child prostitution in hotels, restaurants, and brothels, there is much evidence that girls are sexually exploited in refugees camps. Both boys and girls are often recruited into the armed forces not only to fight but to "service" the soldiers. In many parts of Africa, governments continue to deny that the problem exists. Polygamy is still rampant. According to a national study in Guinea 26% of teenagers lived in Polygamous households. It further revealed that 17% of maternal deaths were caused by abortions. Out of these, 42% were found in the age group 15-20. Most of these girls had been victims of rape or incest.10

Middle East: The recruitment of children as domestic help is common and extends often to the use for sexual purposes. Early marriage has been seen as a convenient means of "legitimizing" sex with children and increase demand. Moreover, the practice of
polygamy reinforces the low status of women and girls and leads to the denial of their dignity and rights, making them vulnerable to exploitation.\(^{(11)}\)

Child Abuse in Pakistan: According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan’s report (HRCP) of 1993 the country’s population was estimated to be about 120 million. Half of the population i.e. about 65 million were under the age of eighteen. Due to poverty and malnutrition, which is one of the worst in the world, Child’s mortality rate remained one of the highest in the world, only exceeded by India, China and Nigeria. Mortality among the girls was significantly higher.\(^{(11)}\)

Crime against children takes many forms. Child labor is rampant in the country. The Government’s own figures of school enrollment and activity pattern suggested a working child population of 14 million. A great number of young girls work as domestic servants and are greatly abused sexually. Hospital sources pointed out that most of the working children were afflicted with ENT diseases, TB, even a few with lung cancer.\(^{(13)}\) Despite legal sanctions put on child labor, these laws are violated and children are subjected to bonded labor. Besides being denied education, leisure time activities and health services, most working children are exposed to physical, verbal, psychological and sexual abuse. Exposure to drug abuse and crime is on the increase.

Child kidnapping is another major crime against children. These children are kidnapped for forced labor. A number of them are used to transport food and fuel across the Afghan border; they are also used for drug trafficking. In 1993 a number of children were kidnapped from schools. It was found that children who returned home came with a kidney less. Children were also kidnapped and transported to United Arab Emirates (UAE) for camel racing, a practice which was banned by UAE in 1993. An alarming racket unearthed in Karachi consisted in infant girls being regularly sold to brothels in various parts of Punjab and infant boys to a contractor who supplied them to beggar gangs. It was discovered that this business was going on for 35 years.

Child sexual abuse is rampant in the country. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan estimates that this crime occurs at a rate of one every three hours and that nearly half the victims are minors. Survivors of child sexual abuse or incest find it extremely difficult to reveal the problem which is often discovered by professionals through a child’s physical or behavioral symptoms after a series of sessions. The greatest obstacle for children in speaking out is the fear of rejection and of not being believed by the adults. An additional deterrence to speaking out is the pressures exerted by the offenders through threats, coercion or promises of reward for keeping silent. Parents keep silent because of the stigma that is attached with a sexual act.
Recognition of children as human beings in their own right is a relatively new concept in Pakistan as in many other Third World countries. They are largely seen as possession of parents, needing their protection and care, but the concept of their rights in relation to the family has found little or no acceptance. The level of consciousness of child rights even among the educated is also very low. Pakistan has ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). It is considered as a positive step.

The Government of Pakistan through a national Program of Action (NPA) has included in its major goals targeted for the year 2000, support, improved protection and development of children in difficult circumstances. The church, though it is involved in various kinds of child rehabilitation work, is not aware of the seriousness of the problem and has made very little effort to study the magnitude of the problem and underlying factors that germinate, nurture and support such abusive attitudes and practices against children such as master-slave relationship, bonded slavery, religious and legal ordinances i.e. Hudood ordinances which condemns the victim and protects the victimizer, culture of silence that spares the perpetrators and victimizes the innocent etc. Regarding child’s sexual abuse, both within the family and at commercial level, the church is either naive or "keeping the silence" hardly talks about the issue.

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Factors affecting commercial Sexual exploitation: What are the contributing factors that promote sexual commercial exploitation of children? It is popular today to explain everything in economic terms, saying that it is all the result of poverty. Of course, poverty is the breading ground for all kinds of evils but it does not explain the whole phenomenon. It is the poverty-plus factor that needs our foremost attention and careful analysis, such as changing value system, the breakdown of families and other support structures, the existence of an(ethnic) underclass, consumerism, wide disparities in economic status and the continuing dominance of patriarchy, which is deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian, and Islamic religious traditions, and the marginalization of religion generally.

Intra-familial factors: such as family breakdown, when children are alienated from caretakers, and abandoned by the family to live on the streets, physical or sexual abuse from a family member, lack of protection, sometimes coupled with a loss of self respect, a feeling of being "damaged goods" push children to live on the street to be abused by paedophiles.

People that are disadvantage economically, and for whom there is little access to opportunities for an alternative source of income, create a group for whom mere survival can precipitate their involvement in the sex trade." In many cases children are sold to
brothels by families, and neighbors. This may be done to repay debts or provide absolute essentials. Many Third World countries are faced with this issue. Most of these children have no access to education and work in labor markets, i.e. domestic service, forced laborers, street children etc. This context makes them vulnerable. These children and their parents can be easily coerced, forced and tricked into sex trade. Extremely poor sectors of the population carry on searching outside the system for ways to survive and constitute a subculture of poverty which produces and sustains itself. One of the root causes of this situation is the great poverty of the rural areas, partly due to the great inequality in distribution of land. Such poverty drives peasant families from their homes to urban areas. The families settle in slums with still greater misery. Prostitution becomes a way for survival.

Consumerism/materialism that leads to view an individual as a commodity is another factor that promotes sexual exploitation of children, particularly girls. This change in values and attitudes allow a parent to consider selling a daughter to a brothel, or intermediary, to provide them with certain consumer goods. A Taiwanese girl while explaining this phenomenon said, "The greatest disaster and betrayal fell; my grandmother sold me. She sold me into the brothel for life for NT$800,000. At that time I was eleven years old; there were many things I did not know, and when they asked me to sign my name, I did so. This was my signature to a contract that sold me for life to the brothel owner." Children, particularly girls in Taiwan are often sold to purchase luxury items for the family.

Another complicated factor that contributes to commercial sexual exploitation of children is the rise in International Tourism. Since these tourists bring in large sum of money, their presence has encouraged criminals to become more active in trafficking children across borders or from rural to urban areas. They are encouraged to engage more children in sex industry. The demand has increased the supply. Current thinking in development financing, also favors the promotion of tourism to increase export earnings in debt-ridden countries. This influx of money whets the desire of poor people to acquire that money to purchase goods that are essential for survival. It is quite tempting for the poor people to sell one's own child to earn cash in an easy way. Many a times poor parents can not even comprehend the fact that their children will be exploited. In fact the child and the parents are exploited by the tourists at the cost of child's emotional and physical well-being. It also appears that the fear of AIDS induces tourists to ask for younger children in hopes that the children are not infected. But the recent studies have shown that a number of children are also infected with AIDS.
Weak, confusing, and *defective legislative frameworks* that see the sexually 
exploited child as a criminal rather than a victim let go this abusive practice unchecked. In 
Pakistan the Shariah Law, particularly Zina ordinance (law on rape) is very abusive and 
discriminatory towards the survivor. Since the law requires the witness of four Muslim men 
to testify to the act of rape, a woman who brings charges against the rapist may be 
punished on her testimony and the offender is acquitted because of lack of evidence. 
Such laws attract and strengthen the hands of child abusers. 

*Cultural beliefs:* There are societies that have a belief that having sex with a virgin 
has a liberative power. In such cultures there is a demand for younger children. Certain 
religious practices, e.g., the Devadasi system, although illegal in India, continues in certain 
places and involves or condones sexual exploitation. A low regard for females, and the 
view that they are and can be treated as a form of property is still prevalent in many 
cultures, and perpetuates sex trade. 

Underlying these factors are a few *Biblical/religious beliefs and practices* which must 
be studied and addressed to redeem children from abusive and criminal practices. Though 
the scriptures tell us that children are a gift from God, they continue to be viewed as 
parent's property. In pre-exilic days a Biblical chief counted his wealth in actual property 
and his status was enhanced by a large collection of wives, concubine, and slaves. History 
tells us that the Bible and the Talmud, encouraged sex between men and very little girls in 
marrriage, concubinage and slavery. "The Talmud held that a female child of "three years and one day" could be betrothed by sexual intercourse with her father's permission. Because a girl was rendered as a sexual property, all heterosexual relationships were defined 
as financial transactions. *Marriage* was the purchase of a daughter from her father, 
*prostitution* was a selling and reselling of a female by her master for sexual service, and *rape* 
was a crime of theft, legitimized by payment and marriage. A female who had lost 
virginity was considered having a second hand status and reduced value. 

The Bible (Hebrew Scriptures) did not perceive a woman having a free status. In pre-exilic days she always was someone's wife, slave or a concubine. In the Diaspora, however 
many females had no masters, and so she was left without any financial support. Her free 
status gave her decreased status. Even if she managed to obtain menial work, stigma and 
sexual exploitation were inevitable and therefore a "free" woman was a loose woman, and 
freedom meant whoredom. Hebrew law no doubt is unjust towards women, but let us not 
forget that it was greatly influenced by the more aggressive and powerful nations i.e. 
Assyrians and Babylonian codes. Though many other Judaic laws were altered, basic 
sexual decrees and customs remained unchanged even under Christianity.
Sexual abuse thrived under Christendom, says Rush. Christian knights, noblemen, crusaders, and princes of the church regularly traded little girls in marriages. Canon law forbade child marriage. Twelve was the legal age for the bride and fourteen for the groom. Under Christendom, a marriage could not be dissolved if the husband swore that sexual intercourse had taken place. Children who were illegally given when underage or without consent could, according to church law, repudiate the marriage when legal age was attained. But if vaginal penetration had taken place, the female was bound to her husband for life. Penetration qualified a child as ripe for marriage.

In a Christian family of four or five daughters, if a father could not provide dowries for all, one child was selected for matrimony while the rest were sent off to convents which became the dumping grounds for unmarried, unwanted, female children. In the beginning of the eighteenth century the prioress of the convent of St. Caterian di Pisola openly declared that monks and confessors alike treated nuns and young novitiates as wives, but their victims’ mouth were sealed by the fear of excommunication threatened by their spiritual fathers. Clerical sexual abuse is even practiced today. In Pakistan which is a highly patriarchal and feudalistic society demonstration of sexual power over those who are vulnerable i.e. women and children, is seen as a demonstration of absolute power in the society. This abuse of women and young girls is not merely to gratify the sexual urge but is used to humiliate and exhibit power over their subjects.

Effect of abuse on children: If child goes unheard, or fails to report due to fear or any other reason, he/she will develop coping skills and attitudes in-order to survive. These survival or coping skills include isolation and detachment, a mistrust of adults, the confusion of sex and affection, low self esteem, and self-destructive behaviors. Drug or alcohol abuse, self-mutilation, overeating, under-eating, and suicide attempts may result. These should all be regarded as severe symptoms of a problem and an attempt should be made to discover what lies behind it.

Children who are abused may grow up to abuse others. A survey of San Quentin Federal prison inmates found that every inmate surveyed had been abused as a child. Some estimate that 75 percent of all adolescents involved in prostitution, both male and female, were victims of prior sexual violence: rape, incestuous abuse, or molestation. Over 50 percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually or physically abused as children. The abuse experienced by children, especially young children, appears to explode into countless emotional problems that affect everyone in our society.

The most obvious impact of child abuse is on health. HIV/AIDS is both a cause and a consequence of sexual exploitation. The "pure virgin" child is sought as the "safest bet." Because of their vulnerability and weakness children are often forced to take more
clients than an adult might accept, and are generally powerless to ask the client to use a condom. Also, their young membrane are more porous and more easily damaged. Children rescued from brothels in parts of South East Asia were in general found infected with sexually transmitted diseases.\cite{24}

**THE RESPONSE: BREAKING THE SILENCE**

It is vital that awareness regarding sexual abuse grow amongst families, congregations and the community at large. Without this it will not be possible to find ways to prevent this horrendous aspect of abusive practice. In order to teach prevention techniques, we are forced to examine our social, cultural, and religious attitudes about sex roles, family life, sexuality, and violence.

The United Nations has played a significant role in raising the consciousness of people through governmental and non-governmental organizations. The United Nations "Convention on the Rights of the Child"\cite{1989} lists the rights that all children should enjoy, regardless of their race, religion, culture or place of birth. UNICEF also assists and facilitates the governments and NGOs to implement the convention. The Stockholm Congress on "Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children"\cite{August, 1996} was called the congress of Hope. Some governments committed themselves to specific action of change. For example the British Government announced officially to introduce Extra-Territorial Legislation, a measure Methodist women had so actively campaigned for. The new legislation involves the decriminalization of victims, increasing penalties for procurers, traffickers, and customers, as well as penalisation of parents who sell their children. The congress challenged religious communities in its final report urging the religious leader to reinforcing the Convention on the Rights of the Child in nonsectarian terms with the understanding of the child as an ultimate value, an entity that is sacrosanct.\cite{25}

Ron O’Grady, priest and coordinator of ECPAT, in a church service, called upon the churches, firstly to affirm and promote the sacred role of children. He advised them to talk about human sexuality in a more honest and open way, conveying a message and moral guidelines which would be relevant to young people and to the real issues of today. This would mean encouraging sexual relationships which are based on a loving consensual relation, on mutual respect for the integrity of the other, which never exploit the other and which are totally non-violent. He said many people are looking to the church for guidance and "This is the time to speak on issues which are of profound importance to young people and to the future of us all." \cite{26}

**Theological/Biblical Response:** "In the beginning God created human kind, male and female" in order to live in respectful relationship with one another and with God. When God
created the world, God said, "It was Good". Therefore any kind of violence and abuse is not part of the natural, created order. When a person lives in a broken relationship with God and his/her neighbor then he is manifesting the brokenness of humankind: a relation of victim and victimizer. Many texts in the Bible speak about God's support and care for victims. Yet victims of abuse themselves often raise challenges as they question our concepts of an all powerful God, authority, love, and forgiveness etc. It is natural that victims of violence look for answers to these basic religious questions: Why does God allow suffering? Why did this happen to me? On the other hand women and men who have survived suffering often tell of their comforting power of God. Images of God as comforter and healer helped them survive and heal.

Jesus at the beginning of his ministry recognized that his ministry is to "set at liberty those who are oppressed". He calls us to do the same. Jesus' words remind us that as Christians we must publicly stand in solidarity with victims and help them in healing process. Many times people in the church treat victims as sinners, and hold them responsible for their abuse. Our sermons too many times leave the victim feeling like God is punishing them for their past sins and offenses. Even those who want to help, lack the skill to effectively help victims of violence. It is the task of a religious educator to teach children that God loves each child, that God comforts those that suffer, that the church is a community of God's people who care for others, and that each of us, both male and female, is created in God's image.

In order to carry out God's mission of Compassion, reconciliation and Justice, it is imperative that the Church re-read and re-interpret of the scriptures in such a way that it conveys the intent and passion of God for God's creation. Let us not forget that even devil(God's opposer) used the Scriptures to attempt Christ and to exhibit his power. Misinterpreted scriptures or sermons are frequently used by offenders to justify sexual violence. Therefore, every avenue of communication must be used to spread the gospel message of God's love and care for children. Some of the texts that are often confused and misused by the perpetrators to legitimize their abusive acts and therefore need our attention are as follows:

**Honor Your Father and Mother:** The commandment has been seen by Alice Miller as being at the root of Western violence and its attitudes towards children. The Christian parent is considered ultimate authority figure next to god. In Roman Catholicism, the priest virtually stands in for this. If we continue to hold these values it becomes difficult to challenge patriarchy and empower the weak, the poor, and the marginalized. If the parent misuses this teaching to demand unquestioning obedience from a child, then the incest victim is compelled to submit to sexual activity with the parent and feel there is no recourse
because not only the parental authority is invoked, but also the religious authority. This misuse of scriptural teaching is a blatant distortion. In Ephesian, Paul makes it quite clear that children's obedience to parents is conditional; it is to be in the Lord, i.e. consistent with the Gospel. The caution to the father not to provoke the child to anger is most telling and appropriate. Nothing provokes child's anger more quickly than abuse by a parent, especially sexual abuse. The children must be given information and skills how to protect themselves from abusers who are often elders. They should be given permission to refuse to obey an adult who would sexually exploit them.

**Love Thy Neighbor:** The love commandment is often misinterpreted. A good Christian is to be helpful, compassionate, and involved. A good and virtuous woman is always kind and polite to others. A desire not to be "self-centered" but having a concern for others is a dominant theme in Christian teaching. All this is fine but it does not tell us to submit ourselves to abusive circumstances and thus make ourselves passive and inactive. Let us remember that this commandment also calls us to love one's self enough to stand up for oneself and refusing to be someone's doormat. One can never engage in other's struggle unless one is sure of one's own self.

**Turn the other cheek as well:** Teaching non-violence as the primary value prohibits one's right to safety and self-defense. Jesus' teaching was not intended to encourage us to allow ourselves to be victimized and abused. As persons created in God's own image, we must protect ourselves from injury and abuse which contradicts God's image within us. We teach children how to protect them from other hazards like when fire breaks, or earthquake etc. They must also be taught how to protect themselves when an adult approaches them sexually.

**The Value of suffering:** Suffering is not desirable in the eyes of God. No where in the Scriptures God instructs people to suffer. God is not pleased by people's suffering. However Scriptures testify to the fact that God never abandons the oppressed, rather suffers with the people and is present in the midst of their pain and violence giving them the strength and courage to resist injustices. God transforms our suffering, say Brown and Bohn. And it is this transformation that gives us the courage to speak of things that are supposed to be kept secret and unmentionable. By refusing to endure evil and by seeking to transform suffering, we are about God's work of making justice and healing brokenness.  

**Image and Language of God:** One way to overcome and move away from patriarchy is to transform God's language and imagery. Jesus called God "Abba" to affirm his primary relationship to God based on love and trust. This word signified a meaning of respect and affection. Rosemary Reuther points to the fact that this radical meaning is lost in translation and interpretation. Instead, a host of new ecclesiastical and imperial " holy
father” have arisen, claiming the fatherhood and Kingship of God as the basis of their power over others. In order to preserve the prophetic social relationships, she says that we need to find a new language that cannot be as easily exploited by the system of domination. Sallie McFague’s suggestion to use alternative metaphors i.e. God as Mother, and Spirit signifies a caring, nurturing, sustaining, empowering and creative image of God. More over they are helpful to move away from Patriarchy that has used power over people to maintain their advantage and privileges at the expense of the weak and thus legitimize its existence over the years.

Jesus is found struggling in his own time to resist and transcend the patriarchal attitude and power, and control over others. He called his disciples not "servants" who are under the control of a master, but friends (John 15:15). Today, our first priority is to empower women to resist the blows of patriarchy. Becoming more aware of the offensive and defensive tactics of patriarchy as it functions in this capitalist society is essential if we are to make deeper systemic changes to end sexual violence.

A few others Christian beliefs and notions that need reinterpretation in today’s context and must be re-interpreted from the victim’s perspective are: Forgiveness, repentance, redemption, and Reconciliation.

Ministerial Response: "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And Jesus took them up in his arms, laid hands on them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)

Jesus’ attitude towards children was very affectionate, caring and accepting. He considered them worthy of relationship and citizenship in the “Kingdom of God”. Though they were being ignored and made to feel abandoned by the disciples of Jesus, they found their place in and under Jesus’ protected and liberating arms. It is not unusual for street children, child laborers, and domestic girls who are often victims of sexual violence to feel abandoned or betrayed by the church even today. At times the clergy and lay have been unprepared to help and so have too frequently not been able to respond helpfully. They lack the skill and proper information to address the issue. Very often when victims/survivors approach the representatives of the church the normal response is, "Keep praying. God will take care of everything.” The parable of the “Good Samaritan” reminds the Church to stop and to expand time, energy and resources to help victims of sexual violence. The community of faith is called to respond to the hurts and pains of children who are sexually abused and treated as a piece of property and be an agent of change.

But let us accept the fact that it is not easy to know how to respond. These situations often seem disturbing, or too complicated for a pastor or a layperson to handle.
The needs of victims and their families are often great and many seem overwhelming: crisis intervention, support, advocacy, information, spiritual guidance, justice making, etc. The needed response to offenders and their families is equally complex: to make justice, to support repentance and restitution, and hopefully to enable movement toward healing and reconciliation. A congregation’s fear and discomfort can be reduced as information is presented and discussed in an open and non-threatening environment. The key to a capable and effective response is for both pastor and congregation to work together to be well-informed and prepared to help. In the following section I would like to suggest a few steps that the church in Pakistan, particularly, needs to take to play its prophetic and ministerial role.

Program/ Strategies for change. Though it is important to work with both the victim and the perpetrator, here I will only deal with the issue of providing and/ or strengthening and extending the social support services to the victim. Addressing this issue is not easy. It involves working and planning at various levels. Some of the areas that need the Church’s immediate attention and action are: Creating a climate that is child centered, that recognizes the rights and “the sacredness of all children”; encouraging and educating parents to reintegrate the children into their families and communities enabling them to start the process of regaining their dignity and sense of worth; equipping the pastor and the congregation to listen to the victim and accept him/her as a worthy child of God; and providing preventive, protective and rehabilitation services to the victim, the family of the victim and congregation at large. To achieve these objectives the church in Pakistan should engage in an advocacy, educational and rehabilitation work.

Advocacy. Advocacy means raising awareness of the extent and scale of the problem of child abuse targeting particularly those communities from which children are recruited. Advocacy involves lobbying and building networks with Governmental and Non Governmental Organizations, and coordination among the concerned citizens to develop broad based programs to address the issue more effectively. It ensures that those groups that are voiceless and powerless have their rights and concerns raised. The church is called to develop global networking to change attitudes within the international communities specially those who are involved and concerned: potential tourists, donors, economic partners, etc. At this point, I wish to draw the church’s attention to the National Action Programs undertaken by the Pakistan government, the Convention of Rights of Children to which Pakistan is a signatory, and the programs/actions taken by the Global church. To effect a change, the church needs to learn and be challenged to work in close relationship with all such agencies.
Community Based Initiatives. It is vital for the church to explore and enhance the resources of the local leaders, and use them to raise people's consciousness: i.e. the use of role plays, story telling, drama, and songs. To effect changes through media has a deep impact on people's psyche. Teaching drama to the exploited children, to equip them with the skills to write and present dramatic representations of the dangers and consequences of sexual abuse is one strategy that can be used to maximize both relevance and impact.

Use of legal system to prosecute and protect. Legal literacy must be increased through a team of para legal lawyers, which includes children who have been sexually exploited. This protective framework empowers the victim and debilitates the abuser. The church should try to use its influence to motivate politicians and decision makers in bringing about changes in the legislation aimed at protecting children and prosecuting offenders.

Educational Response: Education plays a great role in combating and preventing the sexual abuse of children. Education can help break through the individual and societal silence and denial that have long supported and tolerated sexual abuse of children and adolescents. Prevention education that aims at societal change directed at the root cause of sexual abuse needs to be introduced both in church schools and Christian education at all levels. Research needs to be done to further examine the basic cultural, and religious attitudes and practices that support and encourage violence, particularly against the most vulnerable members of the society. Christian educationists must get involved in the prevention of sexual abuse. Human sexuality courses should be part of the curricula so that children learn about their bodies and they function.

Alternate Income Generation/ Informal Education: Both strategies are designed to provide choices for children and their families, where entry into the sex trade may be seen as the only available survival strategy. For children who are excluded from mainstream education, their future prospects and choices are severely limited and this creates a greater risk of being sexually abused. Alternate education with no fees offered to children who are also working, with the capacity to recognize the needs for those who have missed a great deal of school or who are less academically inclined can maintain a child's hopes and chances for a more positive future.

Parenting Classes: It is important that parents be equipped to help end enhance their children's total development. Rev. Paul F. Wilson gives an important advice to the parents by saying that God by entrusting the Christ child into this human condition, provided us with the role model of a parent who gave up ownership and control, while retaining responsibility for guidance and love. He goes on to say that, "The gift of the Messiah was given to human parents to be valued, enhanced, and allowed to grow in wisdom and in
stature and favor with God and humanity”. It is vital for the church to find and create resources to provide education and awareness to parents and all care-takers of children.

Rehabilitation. The Church can play a significant role in rehabilitating both victims and their families to restore self-respect and dignity, which often they feel they have lost in sexual exploitation of their children. This will free the child from social, physical and psychological restraints to which the child was subjected. Sex is a taboo, so it is not discussed in open. Moreover it is believed that only the morally corrupt are prone to sexual abuse, and good women/children are much safer. It is important for the minister and congregation at large to recognize that we are vulnerable to sexual abuse or attack which is contrary to God’s will for our lives. To meet the psycho-social needs of these children, it is important to listen to children, and to believe in them, to provide group and individual therapy and to help remove their shame. Pastoral care and counselling is an important subject and must be included in the seminary course. Congregations should be encouraged to provide therapeutic services to their families, and provide safe place for their total rehabilitation. Some projects, working with children from ethnic minorities have made use of positive role models, dramas, to change some of the negative stereotypes that have been taken by the children. The mobilization and equipping of the children themselves as agents for change, as actors, as advocates, as community organizers, and as part of the support networks for others, can play a positive part in redressing the negative images to which many have been subjected for years.

CONCLUSION: Millions of children today are suffering and are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation. There is not only a social, economic and political crisis, but a deep moral and spiritual crisis which must be taken seriously and addressed by the church. A group of children and youth that attended the Stockholm Congress raised a few questions for us. They are asking: "Can you fight the problems of today so that they won’t be repeated tomorrow and can you give us the better world that we all dream about?" They are asking for solidarity and commitment by saying, "If you support us today, we will be able to support your grandchildren tomorrow." These children look towards us, parents, educators, leaders, theologians, and members of Christ’s church to hold and bless them. They thirst for love, care, protection, dignity, and total development as humans.

Jesus calls the church to drink of the "Living water" to receive healing for itself and for all God’s children. This is my prayer: "O Living Water, Healing Stream, flow through the Church, particularly the Church in Pakistan, to soothe the tears of children that we have known and those unknown." Amen.

Let us act forcefully to bring healing and hope to our children, our nation.
Endnotes

2. Ibid. p.2
6. Ibid. p. 7
7. Ibid p. 7-8
8. Ibid. p. 8
10.Ibid. p. 9
11.Ibid. p. 9
13. Ibid. p. 64
14. Fuad Khan. *"Preparing For The Future: Sexual Abuse Of Girls And Young Women"*. p.1
17. Ibid. p. 19-23.
18. Ibid. p. 29.
20. Ibid p. 32-33
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CHILD LABOR IN PAKISTAN

By: Khushnud Azariah

Recent reports about Child labor situation in Pakistan appearing in the national and international media has drawn a lot of attention about this issue. Some industries were specifically targeted because of the use of child labor in products exported from Pakistan. Though these reports have been challenged by the manufacturers and the Government alike, one cannot deny the fact that Child labor does exist in Pakistan on a large scale and that children are exploited and oppressed in many ways especially through the practice of bonded labor. Bonded labor is very much along the lines of slave labor and is prevalent in many work places.

The constitution of Pakistan prohibits employment of children under the age of fourteen in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment. Pakistan has also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is a signatory to the ILO Conventions on the employment of children. However, the prohibition does not apply to labor by children in an establishment where such processes are carried out in the family, farm and many formal and informal sectors. Until now no extensive research has ever been carried out at the official level to give a correct estimate of the number of children, the nature of work they are involved in, their socio-economic background, or the different form of exploitations suffered by them. This has resulted in the total absence of short term and long term strategies to eliminate child labor.

Children in Pakistan work in factories, tanneries, at loom making carpets, stitching footballs, and in restaurants. They also work as domestic servants, street vendors, rag pickers, beggars and do many other works at their homes.

In this paper I will pursue the issue of child labor particularly in tanneries and carpet industries. The human Rights Commission of Pakistan conducted a survey in this regard. My deliberations and reflections in this paper are based on its report of 1995.

The tanneries in Kasur: This area falls under the diocese of Raiwind, where there is a concentrated population of Christians, who are extremely poor, illiterate, and work as unskilled day laborers. There are about 275 tanneries in Kasur- 80 large units and the rest small, some are not even registered. There is an extreme form of environmental pollution. Liquid waste from the tanneries containing poisonous chemicals flows down open drains along both sides of the street. Fumes and the odor of chemicals add to the stink of animal hides processed in the tanneries. This was a residential area into which the tanneries have moved. There are homes all around the area. It is difficult to imagine how the residents survive the polluted environment.

Unfortunately this is one industry that utilizes child labor extensively. Five to fifteen children work in each small tannery. Even children as young as five years old work
in the most atrocious working conditions. They basically work in washing, drying and spray painting of the leather, inhaling not only the fumes from the chemicals used in the processing but also the paint spray. They spend hours doing monotonous chores such as stamping the finished pieces of leather in small, poorly ventilated rooms.

Labor in the tanneries is almost entirely on contract. Wages paid to children range between $ 8 to 12 per month. In some cases daily wages are as low as 10 cents per day. Children work for about ten hours a day. They usually get half an hour to eat lunch, which they bring from home.

The majority of the workforce in the tanneries including children are Christian. Most of them have never been to school and expect no better prospects than continuing to work in tanneries or finding other labor on daily wages. The fathers of these children have irregular jobs, and their mothers work as domestic servants. Most of these children work unwillingly and under parental pressure and if have the option would like to go to school.

The child labor in the tanneries is not only illegal, it is extremely detrimental to their health and development. The owners however believe that education can not help to eliminate this practice, as extreme poverty leaves the parents with no option but to send their children to work. The industry prefers to employ them because child labor is cheap and submissive, and does not pose any threat to the owners. Therefore they have no interest to eliminate this practice. However there is a center for children working in the tanneries started by a non-government organization in collaboration with ILO, which provides educational facilities and recreation for working children. The owners cooperate with such organizations and have agreed to free children an hour early to attend these programs that provide entertainment and release from stress.

Politician's attitude: Two influential and prominent politicians from both major political parties belong to this constituency. Neither of them have ever raised the issue of child labor or conditions under which the tannery labor works. One reason for this could be that the affected population is largely Christian, and the prevalent system of separate electorate makes them irrelevant for these politicians as they do not need their votes to attain position of power and authority.

The carpet Industry: Behind the intricacies of a beautiful carpet lies a hard and exploited labor of children. In Pakistan these carpets are knitted in abundance. Here I would like to share some facts about the child's working condition and exploitation done in this industry with reference to Thar, which is a backward and neglected area in Sindh province of Pakistan. The water obtained from wells has been declared unfit for human consumption by UNICEF. Tuberculosis, and Malaria is rampant. A spell of drought occurs every 4 to 6 years, and may stretch for as long as 2 years. During this spell, many People are forced to take loans from traditional money lenders at very high rates. The loan procured by the child's father shackles him to the loom.
The child in this industry works from daylight to sunset and has no time to play. Prior to 1991 the children worked in the factory under harsh and arrogant management in a master slave relationship. At times they would work till past midnight behind locked doors. And when the child workers were defiant, they were beaten up. Now the looms are shifted from the factories deep into the villages. Here the middleman, commissioned by the owner sets up cottage industries, fitting some two to four looms in a room.

The working conditions in the villages are somewhat less harsh in that the children can return home at night, but the work hours are long. The child here works from 7 am to 7 pm, or till he completes weaving three inches of the carpet. A child who fails to turn up for work is summoned, and unless ill, he is under great pressure both from his family and from the owner to be at work. A child who works only half a day is not entitled to any pay at all. There is a half hour break for lunch which he must eat sitting by the loom. The children get very exhausted. When one child was asked if he had time to play after work at 7 pm, he said, "If you ask me to stop work now, I will fall asleep". Some children begin work at the loom at age five or six. According to a study conducted by Save the Children Fund (1991-94) of the 3000 carpet workers, 2000 were below the age of 14. The children are paid $25 - 30 a month. The wages have improved after the worker's strike in 1991. Although no scientific study has been conducted of health hazards that the carpet children are exposed to, the medical practitioners observed that these children tend to suffer from respiratory diseases, such as bronchial asthma, due to lack of proper ventilation and inhalation of fine wool fibre. It is suspected that the growth of the child worker gets affected by his sitting cramped for long hours at a stretch. The children also suffer from frequent finger cuts and are afflicted by short sightedness after a few years. In case of illness, the employer does not provide medical aid.

Bondage: Taking loans is an established practice in Thar. A significant segment of the population is heavily in debt. The frequencies of draught brings hardship and makes families vulnerable. The owners are fully aware of this vulnerability, and therefore use it to exploit the poor people. The families at times tend to spend beyond their means at birth, marriage ceremonies and at funerals. Savings is not possible due to extreme poverty, and therefore no funds to fall back upon in times of need. This is the time when owners extend loans, which of course are no risk to them, but in return they gain bonded / slave labor for life.

According to the Save the Children's Fund 90 per cent of the children surveyed were in bondage, with their families having borrowed a sum ranging from $150 - 1500. This indebtedness puts the head of the family in a weak bargaining position. He can be easily exploited. And the burden of the debt falls on the child worker who must work for up to 12 hours on meager wages for seven days of the week. Some children find that they can not take so much pressure and a few cases of committing suicides have been reported. Most parents find it difficult to return the loan. This means that the child
continues to work for years in bondage.

Due to lack of a dual system of accounting, the owners tend to cheat the family. And even when the loan is returned the owner picks fault in the finished carpet and charge the master artisan worker a sum of money for the real or imagined defect, thus prolonging the bondage. The owners always establish alliance with the power holders so that they can better exercise an undue hold over the workers. When a family is unable to return the loan demanded by the owner, the owner seizes whatever valuable possessions it has, such as cattle-heads.

Similar kind of bondage exists in the brick kiln industry and domestic work, where parents are forced to take loans to meet crisis in the family. When it becomes absolutely impossible for them to return the loan, parent bond their children to work for the master until the loan is returned. In Pakistan, one third of all going school children (5-15) are working. This makes a total of about 10 million children both boys and girls. They also make up one third of total labor force. Girls suffer more than the boys because they have to do work at their own homes as well. Working children are exposed to verbal and physical abuse and frequently sexual abuse.

It is true that child labor cannot be studied in isolation, and has to be seen as an issue in the context of the social, economic and political conditions prevalent in the country. These conditions, however must not dilute our commitment to act in the best interest of the children. All children should be treated as equal human beings. Sending young children to work at the expense of their education and development is exploitation of children. Employers do it all the time because they want cheap and passive labor. Parents do it either because they are genuinely in need of money or because in most cases fathers take it easy at the expense of their children. The society accepts child labor as a norm. The government is at fault for not building enough schools, not getting good teachers and not making primary education interesting and practical.

Child is a gift of God. To ensure its health and wellbeing is our sacred responsibility. To diminish this life or to restrict child's freedom and equality in any form is to commit sin against the child and God. The question which we need to ask is what must be our response of faith in this alarming situation.

The solution for me lies in the education of liberation. Education is never neutral. It either perpetuates the present social system or brings about transformation. It believes in the power of the oppressed. Working children should have non-formal education that prepares them to be conscious and responsible people of God. Keeping in mind the extreme poverty and ineffective educational system that prevails, we can not remove all children from labor force. What needs to be done at this point is to closely monitor their working conditions, conscientizing them to be be active participants in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation. Their working hours should be reduced and wages improved and gradually we should take them out from dangerous work. I strongly believe that in
the long run only education which is liberative and aims at conscientization and working with the oppressed, not as masters but comrades, will alleviate all kinds of poverty and oppression.

The Women Development and Service Program of Raiwind diocese is committed to working with young girls who work as domestics in the rural and slum areas where they are constantly harassed and looked down upon with contempt. We hold a number of self-enhancement workshops every year for young girls (ages 10 - 18) which give them an opportunity to name their world of oppression in relation to their experiences at home, workplace and society at large. These girls freely speak about their own work. At first some of them are shy but then they describe the kind of menial work they do at other people's homes. One girl described how she did all kinds of domestic work, then came home and took care of her brother's children and also did a lot of work at home. Participants are usually eager to talk about their work when they are encouraged to do so. These workshops conscientize these girls to their realities, teach self-determination and challenge them to take affirmative actions to transform their life and the life of the total community. They also receive literacy and vocational training that helps them to have a positive image about themselves and live with dignity. The WDSP also aims at mobilizing the whole community to participate in their children's development programs. The diocese gives small loans to those young boys and girls who are school drop outs and wish to start small business to support and sustain their family life.

Special attention is also being paid to literacy and income generating projects for children working on brick kilns. This program helps children to acquire education that is useful and helps them not only to earn better wages, but also to work and live with dignity.

There is so much to be done. As children of God each one of us has a calling to be God's partner in bringing justice, equality and freedom to all God's people and the whole creation. Our small actions are like ripples that begin the revolutionary movement. Let the ripple start with us wherever we are and let these ripples do their part. Trusting the process we continue to perform our responsibility.