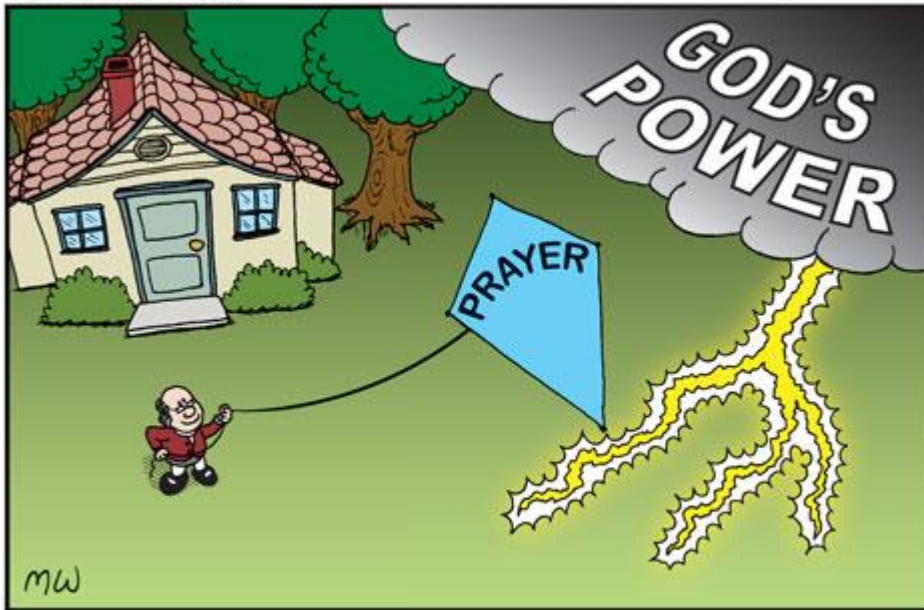


KITE FLYER



The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

- JAMES 5:16 NIV

Be strong in your mind and will.

Do not borrow money for interest and do not lend lest you lose your people

Do not drink because drinking alcohol steals your dignity as human being

Do not associate with robbers and cunning persons because they will try to find mileage out of your goodness

Hard work will bring fruit of joy and wealth, but hard work for evil intention will ruin you

God will not save you unless you save yourself but believe in His goodness

Whatever good you do to people, they will forget you after long time, so do minimum in dire need

Your desire to be found in the history is only an instinct, so better strive not to find yourself in the history unless history recognizes you

Your disappearance from the world is not loss to any one because there will come another like you

Monkey Business



Yes, that is, see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil followed by three monkeys sitting together. One closes its eyes with its hands, other closes his ears with his hands and the last monkey closes his mouth with his hands which clearly shows the above, isn't it? In this modern world, if I say that 90% people are following the above said monkey business will it be wrong?

Whenever or wherever we see a person lying on the footpath or on the road, do we care to check as to why he is lying on the road or if we see something is going wrong do we open our mouth to say the right thing? Or, if we hear a wrong thing through someone we pretend that we have not heard anything against so and so. We do all these things because we want to avoid problems for us, to save time and not get involved in unwanted (what we perceive as) thing. Are we not following the above like the monkeys did?

Being followers of Christ Jesus, if we also do this then we are certainly not true followers of Jesus who sacrificed his life on the cross for the salvation of mankind. Decide what you would want or like to be!

Message body

Implications of the arrest of a Pastor in Kashmir, India
Conversions, Shariah kangaroo courts, the law of the land and fragile unity of minorities

JOHN DAYAL

In retrospect, the church in India has displayed remarkable sobriety and a sense of responsibility in their response to the arrest in Srinagar of Reverend Chander Mani Khanna, pastor of the All Saints Church. The Muslim Ulema of the rest of India have been reluctant to condemn the arrest, precipitated by the demand of a local Mufti. The vital issues of the rights of minorities, and freedom of faith are however involved, which impinge on all minorities even in states such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Orissa and remain relevant in Kashmir. I suppose one can understand their reluctance in the backdrop of the complexities and sensitivities involved in anything that is concerned with the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The same is the reason perhaps for the silence of civil society in India and in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Only journalists and activists Seema Mustafa in New Delhi and Javed Anand in Mumbai have dared spoken, pleading for caution but articulating the voice of sanity and freedom.

Before anything else, it is important to recall the political geography of Jammu and Kashmir. It is, of course, an inseparable member state of the Union of India, as patriotic voices constantly remind us. It was once ruled by a Hindu King, the late Hari Singh, not much liked by the large Muslim population of the Valley of Srinagar, which is one of the three district entities that make up the state. The other two are the areas of Jammu, with a huge Hindu population and a record number of temples, and Ladakh, an almost entirely Buddhist region with just a handful of Muslims, Hindus and Christians. The tiny Christian minority in the State lives largely in the Jammu region, mostly of Dalit origin, with about 500 in the valley and a much smaller population in Ladakh. For some time after Independence and the ascension of the state to the Union of India, J and K, as it is known popularly, had its own prime minister and *sadr-e-riyasat*, [head of state] Karan Singh, before they were designated chief minister and Governor respectively. Special status is accorded to the State under Article 370, many Indian institutions have no jurisdiction in the state and many laws have to be extended to the region through the state legislature.

India and Pakistan have fought four wars over the State, the last being the infamous Kargil glacier encounter which cost both countries precious human lives with tension still prevailing in the uninhabitable heights. In the habitable valley, there is another confrontation. Half a million Indian soldiers, by some counts, are in the valley tackling both the border situation and a continuing confrontation with terrorists as well as with the civilian population. The confrontation has been violent most of the time. Many innocents have been killed, entirely illegally. Women and children have been victims. A major victim of the communalised situation in the valley has been the exodus of the Hindu Pundit population to Jammu, Delhi and refugee camps elsewhere. A sad aftermath has been the rise of fundamentalism and the supremacy of a doctrinaire kind of politico-religious Islamic clergy.

The seeds of the confrontation with the Christian community lies in the powerful segment of this clergy which is carving out its space in challenge to the established state government, the other political groups, the military and the political parties. As Seema Mustafa points out, the vast majority of Kashmiris in the valley, all Muslim, are peaceful people adhering to a soft and melodious Sufi Islam, far removed from the stridency of Wahabism espoused by the extremist groups. But there do not seem to be any routes of approaches to the aggressive clergy,

Apart from the confrontation with the state forces, and the occasional violence on the small number of Pundits who remain in Srinagar and some rural areas of the valley, there has been violence against Christians in the past too. On 26 February 2011, the school run by a Christian family was burnt. The government helped with the reconstruction. Before this the Tyndale Biscoe School Tangmarg was burnt, The Good Shepherd School of the Roman Catholic church at Pulwama was burnt. The community as a whole has suffered much, in silence. The people, who speak with us on conditions of anonymity, and the family of Rev Khanna, say the situation is very volatile and bad, stressing they do not want to add fire to the situation there at present "but try to apply some political pressure from outside the state in an silent manner so that we get what we want and the lives of people are safe also".

This is a sentiment shared by Seema Mustafa who says "We must take into account the sensitivity of Kashmir as it is different from Madhya Pradesh and UP. That is imperative

or anything you say will create more trouble than the initial trouble itself. Unlike the popular perception created here, Kashmiris are secular people and we can reach out to many there to ensure that sane voices emerge. The state government has created additional trouble with the arrest, and that needs to be countered as well. The separatists can be persuaded to give a statement for secular harmony, I am sure, as can civil society, and for the release of the pastor. But it has to be worked out properly.'

Pastor Khanna is a well known personality in Srinagar. Dr Richard Howell, general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India and outgoing secretary of the National United Christian Forum, says "I have known Rev. Khanna for many years. He in fact was involved in reconciliation work in Kashmir valley. He confidently went to Srinagar from Jammu, much against the advice of all. I am sure that he has done no wrong. We need to move soon on some sort of a dialogue to stop rumours, the latest being; now it is the turn of Christians to leave the valley. There are about 400 Christians working in schools and hospitals, a few in government service."

The events leading up to Khanna's formal arrest at the behest of a Mullah, the Grand Mufti, have opened up serious questions that need to be addressed. Pastor Khanna had baptised some people in the church during the regular baptism ceremonies. A few of those were former Muslims who had been coming to the church for a long time. All were adults. A video was made of this event and put on YouTube on the Internet. The pastor was summoned, not by the police, but by the Mufti, He was questioned for seven hours, harangued, threatened. The government became scared, or possibly wanted to divert attention from other on-going crises in the state, not the least of which is an accusation against chief minister Omar Abdullah of involvement in the murder of a member of his own party who had become a criminal.

The police told Khanna they were protecting him, then raided his church, and finally arrested him on charges of fomenting communal strife. The church feels cornered. It took days for the local church to make statement. The NHRC, National Commission for Minorities and the National Advisory Council and others are silent though they have been informed by many. The political parties are mute. Civil society is dead in Srinagar, and silent in India. No group of activists has yet denounced the arrest or the kangaroo court. Right wing Hindutva groups agree with the mullahs. Political action is patently required and people have call upon the President of India, the prime minister, the governor of the state of J and K and the leaders of various political groups to take steps to get the priest out of the police lockup

Above all, the frail relationship between Muslims and Christians -- both minorities in India -- is under great stress. Remember, Christians had made common cause with Muslims in their hour of crisis in Gujarat 2002 and elsewhere.

The media, as usual, seems barking up the wrong tree, giving tendentious stories, not questioning how religious groups over-rule or act on behalf of the police. This is how a local newspaper reported the episode: Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Central Kashmir Range, A G Mir told 'Kashmir Images' that Khanna has been arrested by Police Station Ram Munshi Bagh and FIR 186 of 2011 under section 153A and 295A registered against him. Police have also registered a case against six unidentified Kashmiri youngsters who were allegedly baptized by the Christian priest. Kashmir's Grand Mufti, Mufti Bashir-ud-din last month summoned the priest to his court to explain about the

alleged attempts of conversion. The Pastor, however, was out of station and had sought time to appear before the Grand Mufti, who heads Court of Islamic Jurisprudence in Kashmir. And finally when Khanna presented himself before a group of 15 Islamic scholars and representatives of various religious groups headed by the Grand Mufti, he denied his involvement first, but later on confessed his complicity. Initially he did not accept that he was doing this," Mufti Bashiruddin said. The Pastor reportedly said he was on a "peace mission promoting communal harmony between Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Christians. But when confronted by some boys, he had no option but to accept," the Grand Mufti said, adding that they had a CD containing evidence about how the Pastor was performing conversions. The Pastor has confessed to having converted 15 boys so far and promised to give their list to the Grand Mufti, reports said. "The Pastor said some NGOs and intellectuals were with him in this mission and some of them had accompanied him to South Africa to preach Christianity," said the Grand Mufti. Terming the issue a "grave" one, he said Muslim 'Ulema' (scholars) from various organizations including the Jamat-e-Islami, the Jamiat-e-Ahle Hadees, the Islamic Study Circle and the Nadwatul Ulema would meet again to take a final decision. As of now I have reserved my judgment. The Ulema council was scheduled to meet on November 19, but it has been postponed," the Grand Mufti said."

The Church of North India and the local Christian community deny any wrong doing by the pastor. They have also reaffirmed their resolve to continue with their mission of service in the valley and the state.

The most incisive comment has come from Javed Anand, general secretary, Muslims for Secular Democracy of Mumbai. "Addressing the media, Kashmir's grand mufti, Mohammed Bashiruddin warned that such activities "warrant action as per Islamic law" and will not be tolerated. "There will be serious consequences of this. We will implement our part and the government should implement its," the mufti thundered. What's Islamic law and a shariah court doing in a secular democratic polity? ... For what crime has Khanna been booked? Unlike states like Gujarat, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, J&K does not have a law against conversions. But where there is a will there's a way. The pastor has been charged under sections 153A and 295A of the Ranbir Penal Code, the J&K equivalent of the Indian Penal Code. Section 153A pertains to the offense of "Promoting enmity between different groups..." and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony". Section 295A has to do with "Deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs".

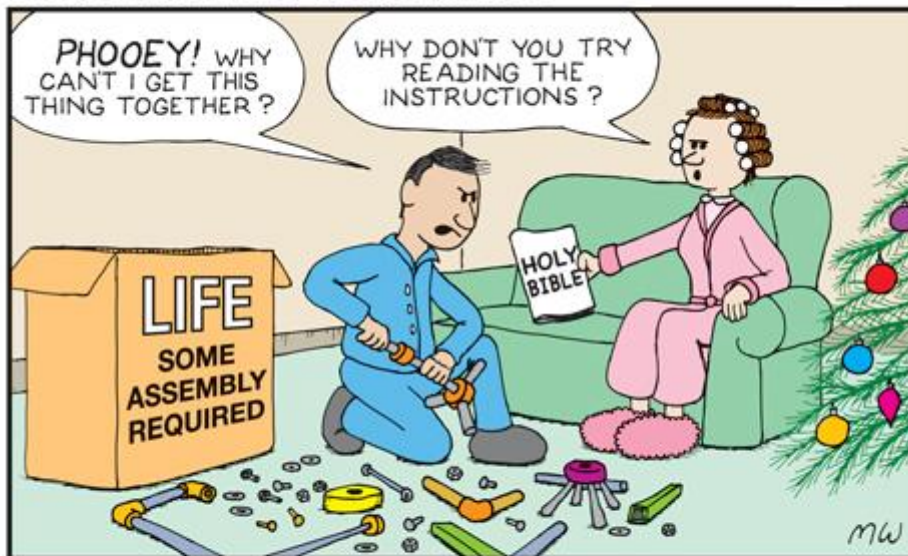
"Why should conversion of a few Muslims to Christianity be deemed a malicious act intended to outrage religious feelings? Why should it be tantamount to promoting enmity between different groups? These might be questions for you and me. But Omar Abdullah and his police may well be wondering whether the FIR and the arrest are enough to douse the flames. The worse quite possibly is yet to come. A Dharma Sansad comprising of leaders of different Muslim sects in Kashmir is to meet soon to deliberate over the "grave issue" and decide on further course of action. The responses to the video-clip have apparently been venomous. "We promise to kill all Christian missionaries and burn their buildings, schools and churches!" pronounces one of them while another proclaims, "We should burn this priest to death!" Echoes of Pakistan's obnoxious blasphemy laws?

“It is far from clear whether the priest is in fact guilty of a cash-for-conversion deal. Only a thorough and impartial investigation could establish if there’s any truth in the charge. But in the brand of Islam the grand mufti and most mainstream Muslim organizations espouse, the issue of inducement is irrelevant. The theology is simple: for conversion into Islam, there’s Divine reward aplenty for both the converter and the converted; but conversion out of Islam is *gunaah-e-azeem*(mahapaap), treason of the highest order, deserving of the harshest punishment.” Human rights groups and Muslim bodies from the Valley and elsewhere especially, must denounce the hounding of the pastor and the ‘Islamisers’ reminded that Article 25 of the Indian Constitution guarantees to all citizens “the right freely to profess, practice and propagate (their) religion”.

The last word, of course has not been said. Even as efforts continue to get the pastor out of prison on bail, or to get him transferred to the Jammu jail for safety reasons, National Commission for Minorities vice chairman Dr. Hmar T Sang liana was paying a visit to Srinagar to meet with various groups and the government. Efforts were also on to open a dialogue with various national and Kashmir Muslim groups for a long term peace with a broad basic agreement that the dialogue must continue in an environment of mutual understanding, and not in short term grandstanding. The government, meanwhile, is being encouraged to stick to the points in law and not to exacerbate the situation in the guise of buying peace.

[First published in Indian Currents, New Delhi]

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED



Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. — PROVERBS 3:5-6 NIV