

# When the Pope visits Pakistan

By [Peter Jacob](#)

Published: June 22, 2016

129<sup>SHARES</sup>

[SHARE](#) [TWEET](#) [EMAIL](#)



The writer is a freelance journalist specialising in International law, rural development and public policy, and a director of the Centre for Social Justice

As he came down from his aircraft on Karachi airport in 1981, Pope John Paul II kissed the Pakistani soil. Though he had made the same gesture of love to people wherever he went, for Pakistanis he brought alive the meaning of the first line of the national anthem. His kiss was a testimony to this land being sacred.

The Mass that he led at the National Stadium in Karachi was shown on state-owned television that enabled the people at large to witness symbolic Catholic

rites and listen to recitation from the Bible in Urdu alongside the millions of Christians who had gathered to greet the Pope in the city.

An invite for a visit has now been served to Pope Francis in Rome by the Minister for Religious Affairs Mohammad Yousaf and Federal Minister Kamran Michael. So, there is strong hope that Pope Francis might also visit Pakistan though a time for such a trip has not been determined yet.

The government deserves a pat on the back for its thoughtfulness, because Pope Francis has done remarkable things — from challenging the world conscience on the most pressing global issues such as poverty, armed conflicts and migration, to care for the environment and disarmament.

When he refused the extravagance of the Pontiff's office before preaching simplicity, the world listened to him.

Cleaning his house of financial irregularities and taking action against paedophile priests spoke volumes of his commitment to moral values.

He has been helpful in bringing the message of inter- and intra-community peace in situations such as Palestine and Congo as well as reconciliation between Cuba and the US. So much so, that analysts have started noticing the ripples of the 'Francis Effect' across the globe.

It is worth pondering over what Pope Francis's visit to Pakistan will and should entail. Hosting this prolific guest will require finding a match between Pakistan's objectives and the mission that Pope Francis supports. In other words, we need to find common ground.

Keeping in view the Pakistani context, we need to prioritise the goals that we would like to achieve if the Pope visits the country.

Sceptics the world over think that Pope Francis is following a personal political agenda. The evidence at hand suggests that he is not. Rather, his uprightness conflicts with how politics is usually conducted.

If John Boehner, the former Speaker of US Congress and a Catholic, is to be taken as an example, the Pope doesn't seem to be cut out for politics. Boehner's spontaneous resignation from his job after the Pope's speech in Congress, who spoke on Boehner's invitation, suggests that the speech was a factor in Boehner's decision besides the opposition he faced from within the Republican party. Hence an exposure to the Pope's convictions might be dangerous for political agendas.

The persona of Pope Francis exemplifies the moral worth of humans, a post-modern thinking of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that carries along the sensitivities of third world countries struggling with underdevelopment, social inequality and political instability.

The initiatives he has taken manifest an inspiring position of transcendence beyond human identities and distinctions. We also find him clearly siding with the marginalised — anywhere and in all respects.

Injustice and violence, even in the verbal form, make him angry as reflected in his reaction to Donald Trump's religiously biased statements. Hence his mysticism should not be mistaken as Malamati Sufism; he is more of a Jalali Sufi.

Justice (retd) Ali Nawaz Chowhan, the chairperson of the National Commission for Human Rights, is optimistic that mediation or a call on the part of Pope Francis can facilitate peace and help find resolution to the miseries of the people of Kashmir. Therefore, he is considering sending a request to the Pope through a direct communication.

The reconciliation between Cuba and America had three more elements besides Pope Francis's efforts — a black president in the US, the fading influence of Fidel Castro in Cuba and the flexible Raul Castro.

Though Justice (retd) Chowhan's idea could prove to be worthwhile in creating an environment of goodwill, India has time and again insisted on a bilateral approach to resolving the Kashmir problem, hence support for this proposition from India would be crucial. The local factors and actors will be important to achieve this end while garnering international support from various quarters, including from Pope Francis, may not be a difficult feat.

Besides visiting the churches and the Christian community in Pakistan, Pope Francis would probably be happy to meet with people like Abdul Sattar Edhi (may he recover from his illness soon), and visit temples or shrines such as those of Khawaja Farid, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, Bullhey Shah and Rehman Baba.

Pope Francis's interaction with prisoners, the youth, farmers and labourers could make his potential visit truly memorable as he is evidently keen to be humanised during his sojourns.

*Published in The Express Tribune, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016.*

*Like [Opinion & Editorial on Facebook](#), follow [@ETOpEd](#) on Twitter to receive all updates on all our daily pieces.*

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1128345/pope-visits-pakistan/>