

A People Betrayed: The Impact of Islamization on the Christian Community in Pakistan by Patrick Sookhdeo. Christian Focus Publications, Scotland, and Isaac Publishing, England. Hardcover, 454 pp.
Reviewed by Johan D. Tangelder

How real is the threat of Islamization of the West? Abundant evidence shows that the world of Islam thrives from its explosive population boom. In Western Europe many view with alarm the current unfolding conquest-by-immigration as Islam relentless presses upon their spiritually and demographically dying countries. In fact, across the world there is a proliferation of Islamic movements, seeking the Islamization of every country in which they are active. This spread of Islam, and in particular that of Islamism, should be a major concern and a matter of prayer for Christians. Why?

In Islamized countries non-Muslims cannot be equal citizens with Muslims. Islamic teaching assumes that the political, social and military dominance of Muslims over non-Muslims is the normal state; and where it does not exist, it must be sought.

In *A People Betrayed* Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo, Director of the Institute of Islam and Christianity, a Christian research institute specializing in the stay of Christian minorities in the Muslim world, shows that Pakistan, in its early days, seemed an unpromising context for Islamization, strongly influenced as it was by colonial British law and structures. But as the author shows, Islamization began early and largely unnoticed. Proceeding by small steps, mainly through democratic means and without violence, the advance was slow and steady. Today Pakistan defines itself explicitly as a Muslim country. In 1991 Shari'ah was declared as the supreme law of the land.

Pakistan's leaders have tried to claim the role of promoters of cooperation among Islamic states and the speakers for Islam to the rest of the world. And in the light of the current clash of civilizations, it is ironic that in the 1980s the United States, through the CIA, did provide financial support to Pakistan's radical Islamists (as well as funds and weapons totalling more than \$3 billion to similar groups across the border in Afghanistan) as part of their attempt to force the Soviets out of Afghanistan. This undoubtedly did much to strengthen the Islamist groups in Pakistan and their influence in the country. Sookhdeo even claims, "It could be said that American money funded the Islamization of Pakistan." And he believes that it remains to be seen whether the present government under General Pervez Musharraf, a very secular Muslim, can reverse the process and curb the power and influence of Islam extremists.

In the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Christianity is no stranger. A Christian presence from as early as the fourth century has been documented. Sookhdeo points out that it is of great psychological importance to Christians in modern Pakistan that their faith was present before the advent of Islam, and even before the birth of Islam. Although Christianity was apparently eliminated in the 14th century so that it had to be reintroduced again by Europeans, Christians are encouraged by reminding themselves that they follow a faith which is neither new to Pakistan nor a Western import. They also set great store by the fact that they are indigenous "sons of the soil," not immigrants.

Pakistan's Christian community is one of the largest in the Muslim world. The present Christian community probably numbers about three million, and forms the largest religious minority (over 2%, though official figures are lower). Almost all are ethnically Punjabi, most of them still living within Punjab. Protestants form the majority.

But Roman Catholics outnumber any single Protestant denomination. Compared with the population as a whole, the Christian community is more urbanized, more impoverished, and comprised of a larger proportion of the lower caste. However, despite their impoverished status, various Protestant and Roman Catholic relief agencies are active. Roman Catholics run twelve hospitals and Protestants twenty. In fact, the small minority Christian community provides 15 percent of the country's medical care.

When Pakistan became independent in 1947, Christians, unlike the Hindus, chose to remain in Pakistan. They looked forward to a free and equal existence in the new nation state. Today Christians in Pakistan live under great duress. Churches, a Christian hospital, and the Murree Christian School, which serves the missionary community, have been attacked. Abuse of Christian women by Muslim men and the near impossibility of poor Christians getting just treatment from their local police aggravate their already tough living conditions. The blasphemy laws are also a constant threat. Christians fear the influence of local Islamic leaders who could call for the death of a named individual on a fabricated charge of blaspheming Muhammad. Consequently, Christians feel increasingly that they have no place in Pakistan. Sadly, they are too divided and internally weak to effectively resist Islamization. The Christian community is fragmented along denominational lines, and a network of related extended families who are often more interested in the welfare of their own clans than of their churches. Sookhdeo comments, "It is hard to see how Christians can unite to confront Islamic ideology together."

Who speaks on behalf of the suffering Christian community in Pakistan? There is no international outcry on their behalf. Sookhdeo notes, "Their cries and protests go unheeded and they can only watch helplessly as the seemingly inexorable process of Islamization engulfs them."

Sookhdeo painstakingly traces and demonstrates the growing marginalization and oppression in Pakistan since independence. He hopes that his study, which is adapted from his doctoral thesis, will help Pakistani Christians to seek the proper enforcement of the existing laws, to work for a change in the electoral system to give non-Muslims a political voice, and to overcome the disunity and passivity that weakened their community for many years. His book has a helpful glossary, which explains Islamic terms, an extensive bibliography, and an index.

While Western political leaders and liberal churchmen call for tolerance of Muslims within their own nations, the fact is Muslims marginalize and persecute their Christian minorities. Sookhdeo's thorough and well-documented study is a clear warning to the West of what can happen when conservative Islamists gain political control of a nation.