
Book Review

GABRIEL, Theodore. 2007. *Christian Citizens in an Islamic State: The Pakistan Experience*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 118 pp. ISBN 10: 0754660249 (hbk). £50.00. ISBN 10: 0754660362 (pbk). £16.99.

Theodore Gabriel's book is a thought-provoking study that deserves close attention and will repay the reader with much detailed insight into the dilemmas facing Christians in Pakistan. Written by a British academic who is an Indian Christian, this book takes a deeply compassionate view of the Indian subcontinent against the backdrop of Pakistan's difficult and unfinished journey towards statehood since partition. This is a sympathetic partisan view, and valuable as a Christian-Indian analysis of the suffering of Pakistani Christians.

Christian identity in the twenty-first century is a major discussion point, and issues regarding identity are of profound significance in this book, which analyses the problems experienced by Christians who seek to practise their faith in Pakistan, a Muslim state. Gabriel describes the journey that many untouchables took to become Christians, seeking liberation (just as, in the history of the caste system, many low-caste Hindus also converted to Islam). If 90 percent of Christians are still from the untouchable castes, *dalits*, and also Goans or Anglo-Indians, then Gabriel suggests that cultural factors still play a key role in discrimination. He gives this and other interesting examples of the complex ways in which cultural factors suffuse religious and socio-political practices, and describes issues regarding perceived loyalty. Can a non-Muslim be regarded as loyal to Pakistan, and is it possible that a non-Muslim may even be considered to be more loyal to another state than Pakistan?

Pakistan itself has identity problems: a state that is 50 years old this year, and is known to the outside world for its cricketers and its "jihadist recruitment camps" rather than for its immense importance to Islam, its exquisite Moghul architecture, its generous hospitality and the beauty of its people and its landscapes. External and internal factors militate against the development of a coherent and reasonably effective state. Gabriel analyses the pressures that are exerted on Pakistan by the West, the history of the relationship that the Taliban have with the US and the overwhelming desire by certain western governments to see democratic structures, regardless of realities on the ground. Gabriel calls for secular government. He also looks at the internal pressures; corruption and ineffectual legal procedures, difficulties for women and President Musharaff's constant struggle to balance secularist and theocratic concerns. It would strengthen the argument if Gabriel were to elaborate on his sources and research methods and clarify some of his more sweeping statements about extremism in the region.

Gabriel is at his best when he writes about the way forward. In chapter 7 he writes of the possibilities for interfaith understanding, the dialogue of emulation, the dialogue of deeds, and the dialogue of education. There are good proposals for ways of reducing the impact of the Blasphemy Laws. Gabriel emphasizes the urgent need for education and economic stability as the way forward, as he finds most educated Pakistanis to be moderate and supportive of interfaith dialogue. He also leaves the reader in no doubt about the injustices perpetrated by the US and Britain in the name of the so-called "War on Terror" and the chronic instability that it brings to a region so desperately in need of the chance to develop a new identity that

is neither Wahabi nor Western. This is a brave, bold book that conveys a complex situation with compassion and hope.

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