

To the Punjab and Back

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Each issue of the Haddington House Journal includes one article highlighting foreign missions activity. These articles are written more in a journalistic news fashion. In October, 2004, Dr. Whytock traveled to Pakistan to preach at the 71st annual Sahiwal Convention and to teach at a Pastors' Retreat. Along with this report on Pakistan, we have appended a separate article. It is a biographical sketch of one of the most significant yet much neglected missionaries to this part of the world, Isidor Loewenthal.

Introduction

What does the mention of “the Punjab” conjure up in your mind? For some of us in the West it has a certain mystique. It is the land of Rudyard Kipling, who made his home in Lahore, a great city of the Punjab, during the period that inspired his famous novel, *Plain Tales from the Hills*. Perhaps for some it evokes smells – heat, sweat, curries, and for others sounds – “Oh, yes, the sounds.” For anyone who has been there, the sounds of the Punjab never leave; they are always inside you. There is something of that mystique which continues to haunt the traveler, and, yes, in a different way, even the Christian traveler. He sees a mass of people going in every direction, flooding the streets of Lahore. There is a great sense of the barrenness of these souls. And of souls there is no end – over fifty million in this one province. Half of Pakistan lives here.

I will begin by setting the Punjab in its place in modern Pakistan. The Punjab Province is one of four provinces, Sind, Baluchistan, and North West Province being the others. Kashmir still remains a province in dispute with India. The capital city of the Punjab is Lahore. Also in the Punjab Province are the nation's chosen federal capital, Islamabad, and its twin city, Rawalpindi. Three other noted cities of the Punjab are Sahiwal, Multan, and Gujranwala. Sahiwal, where I spent most of my

time, is a long-standing centre for Christian work. Multan, a noted city with Muslim factions, was the scene of Pakistan's worst terrorist attack to date in October, 2004, which killed forty-one and injured another hundred and twenty. On that day I was one hundred kilometers away in Sahiwal. Finally, Gujranwala is the home of the Gujranwala Theological Seminary, founded in 1877.



The topography of the province is mainly a vast plain. It is dry land with large “dunes” in places, many of which are man-made. Yet also here are the pine-covered foothills of the Himalayas, leading you to the beautiful Murree Hills. The vast plain is crisscrossed with canals, the great legacy of the British and their methodical efforts to make the Punjab productive. Years later, the canals are still working, making the land arable for rice, wheat, corn, oil seeds, cotton, and sugarcane. Here is the heart of Pakistan's textile trade. The streets of the province's cities and villages are filled with three-wheeled rickshaws, camels, trucks (which look like they have been rebuilt five times since World War II), tractors, donkeys, and of course people moving everywhere. “People movers” can be anything!

Moving briefly to another province, I want to say something about the North West Frontier. Here half of the area is under tribal rule, with autonomous governance by tribal law and general “supervision” from the federal Pakistani government. This is the province with the famous Khyber Pass and the capital city of Peshawar, the land of the Pushtuns or Pathans, said to be one of the largest tribal societies in all the world – truly an unconquered people. Peshawar is the city of “The Arabian Nights,” of the tribesmen of turbans and rifles. It is to Peshawar that we will return to learn the tragic story of the death of Rev. Isidor Loewenthal on April 27, 1864. It is here near Peshawar, at the Khyber Pass, that we find that great crossroads of Asia and the subcontinent – where the “road” from China to the Mediterranean meets the route from India to central Asia. What a region – the land of the ancient Silk Route through the Himalayas, the Karakorams, and the Pamirs!

In one sense, Pakistan is an old land with cultures dating back for centuries and millennia, an ethnic mix of Persians, Greeks, Huns, Arabs, and Afghans, as well as others. In another sense, Pakistan is a very young nation, established in 1947 as “the land of the pure,” that is, a pure Islamic State. In 1849, the Punjab of modern Pakistan formally came under British influence when it was annexed by the East India Company and then directly under the British Crown in 1857. Starting in the early 1930’s, a movement began which aimed to found an all Islamic nation on the subcontinent, separate from the Hindus. The result was that the Punjab, once one great Indian province, was torn apart at partition in 1947. Six million Muslims fled from India to what would become modern Pakistan, and four million Hindus fled in the opposite direction to what was to be modern India. The two-way migration was horrific, with estimates of well over three quarters of a million deaths in just a few weeks, just before partition was concluded. It makes for chilling reading as novelist Kushwart Singh has immortalized it in his epic novel, *The Last Train to Pakistan*. Pakistan today is the second largest Islamic nation in the world, with 98% of its population being Muslim.¹

The history of Pakistan since independence has been a continued saga of conflict, corruption, and instability with alternating periods of

¹ Isobel Shaw, *An Illustrated Guide to Pakistan* (Hong Kong: Liberty Books, 1990).

Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1964).

Jean-Jacques Bauswein and Lukas Vischer, eds., *The Reformed Family Worldwide* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999).

military dictatorship and democratic parliamentary rule. In 1999, increasing authoritarian rule and corruption led to public dissatisfaction and a military coup led by General Pervez Musharraf, the present military chief and president of Pakistan. Musharraf has promised to return the nation to more democratic control. Due to his cooperation with the West in the defeat of the Taliban and the “War on Terror,” he is disliked by some right wing, minority Islamic fundamentalist parties in Pakistan who have grown in strength since the September 11, 2001, attacks. But overall, Musharraf enjoys widespread support of the Pakistan people, who are mostly moderate Muslims.



National Emblem of Pakistan

Christianity in Pakistan

In the land mass now known as Pakistan, evangelicals have been labouring for nearly two centuries. Early work was begun in 1834 by Presbyterians from the United States, workers from Britain’s Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) in 1840, and later the Zenana Missionary Society. Lahore was the first station to be opened by the Presbyterians. The C.M.S. started its labours in Karachi in 1850 and followed with work in Peshawar, Multan, Narowal, Bannu, Lahore, and Quetta. The early American Presbyterian Mission was augmented by other Presbyterian bodies: the United Presbyterians, the Church of Scotland, and the Associate Reformed Presbyterians. Roger Hedlund of Serampore College, Madras, described the development of the evangelical community in the Punjab as unique in three ways. First, there was a “large-scale conversion movement in Punjab from 1880 to 1930.” Second, as a result of the first, an indigenous Punjabi metrical paraphrase of the Psalms and songs for worship was produced; and third, a revival broke out that resulted in further conversions through the Christian Life Convention in Sialkot in 1904 and for years following this Convention. One can see the significance which has to be attributed to the Sialkot Convention and later to the Sahiwal Bible Convention for the advancement of the gospel in Pakistan.²

² Roger Hedlund, “Pakistan” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, gen. ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Baker/Paternoster, 2000).

The Christian community of the Punjab, now several generations old, is mainly of Hindu or Sikh background, although some have come from Muslim or animistic tribal peoples. I will focus for a moment on Sahiwal, as that is chiefly where I spent my time. Sahiwal is the city's name today, but during the British period it was known as the District of Montgomery. In 1900 the area still did not have the great irrigation canals which would turn this vast desert plain of seven thousand square miles into a fertile land. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, the various Presbyterian bodies knew Montgomery, with the planned canals, would soon have a great influx of settlement. Thus, they assigned Montgomery to the Associate Reformed Presbyterians, and in 1910 a famous telegram was sent back to the Synod meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina, "Montgomery occupied today." On Christmas Day, 1910, a congregation was begun there.

The Punjab had experienced a tragic first decade of the twentieth century with some of history's worst epidemics of cholera and bubonic plague (some eight million died from these in that decade). In 1905, ten thousand more died in a devastating earthquake in Lahore. Thus, medical missions became a critical enterprise starting in 1914. The British government agreed to sell a parcel of land in central Montgomery for what would eventually become the Nancy Fulwood Hospital Society's work, Sahiwal Christian Hospital. As was common, educational mission work also followed, with boys' and girls' schools begun in Montgomery as well as in other villages. Thus, by 1947, at the time of partition, this one Presbyterian mission had opened twelve schools with eleven hundred students. As Emily van Dalen wrote, "Out of these schools were to come the future nurses, doctors, teachers, and pastors of the denomination."³ Then in 1949, the Nurses Training School was opened, which today, with its one hundred students, is having a tremendous impact for the medical community in Pakistan. It is amazing to think in a nation that is only 2% Christian, 15% of Pakistan's medical care is provided by Christians.

But there has been real human cost in all this work. It is John Piper in *Let the Nations be Glad!* who boldly reminds us that we must not ignore the reality or effects of the suffering: "Therefore we must not judge too quickly the apparent setbacks and tactical defeats of the church. If you see things with the eyes of God, the Master Strategist, what you see in every setback is the positioning of troops for a greater

³ Emily van Dalen, *A Brief History of World Witness* (Greenville, SC: World Witness, 2003), 12.

advance and a greater display of his wisdom and power and love.”⁴ On February 1, 1960, young Esther John, a Muslim convert, was martyred. It was humbling to stand and teach in the chapel on the grounds of the Sahiwal Christian Hospital and see above the chapel doors, “Esther Memorial Chapel.” It is the price of the gospel and it continues into the



Esther Memorial Chapel, Sahiwal, Pakistan

twenty-first century. In 2001 and 2002 there were martyrs in the Punjab, Presbyterians amongst them.

One institution which has attracted interest in Pakistan for over fifty years is the Murree Christian School, set in the beautiful Himalayan foothills. The school was begun after partition by the United Presbyterians, who felt the need for a school in Pakistan. The United Presbyterians took the school through the process of transition into becoming a cooperative body which has remained active ever since. The school was forced to close temporarily due to terrorism but reopened in 2004. For an amazing book describing the period of terrorism, I refer you to *Angels in the Rafters*.⁵ This is a riveting

⁴ John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 96.

⁵ Sue Morton, Compiler, *Angels in the Rafters: Reflections from the MCS community following the attack on Monday 5 August 2002* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Actscs, 2002).

testimonial of a suicide attack on Murree Christian School, two months in planning. The book contains a brief description of what happened, student and staff testimonials, and a list of the six staff members who were killed in the attack.

The actual attack was on Monday, 5 August, 2002, and lasted fifteen minutes. It was discovered later that the terrorists had been living outside the school for two months observing the daily schedule. However, due to rain on the day of the attack, students were not outdoors as usual at that time. Also, the terrorists missed the gathering for coffee break for that day's schedule by fifteen minutes! The details of the day are incredible. On one building the doors actually resisted the attackers because they opened outwards and not inwards! Teachers had acted quickly and locked virtually all doors they could with the inside locks, which had only been installed months earlier. All of this proved too much for the terrorists and without killing one child or teacher, they were forced to scale a fence and escape. Police later told school staff that the terrorists had intended to enter the hostel and detonate explosives. The terrorists left a note "describing the attack as retaliation for Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Palestine and promising more."⁶ On the fourth floor of the old nineteenth century British church, the Grade 11 physics class was quickly joined by the Grade 10 students high under the rafters. One student asked if they could sing, and so they began, "Our God is an Awesome God." They later learned that somewhere else in the building the same hymn was being sung. God in His mercy chose to protect those children and young people.

Then there was the Board's action to seek a safe site for the students to complete the academic year. Within days, the Board had located a facility in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where students and staff were welcomed with open arms. When one considers the logistics of visas, etc., it is incredible to think that within six weeks Murree Christian School, Thailand, opened with seventy students! Later, in August, 2004, the school was able to return to Murree, Pakistan.

The Lord's ways are wonderful and mysterious. The staff, students, and families have all been deeply affected. For the families of the six nationals killed, the Lord's people around the world have made provision and have established a fund to educate the fifteen children left fatherless. As I write this, I wonder what our Lord has in store in the years to come for many of these young people whose lives were protected. The Kingdom of God marches forward amidst much strife, but with great promise:

⁶ Morton, 10.

“Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him,
for he shields him all day long,
and the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders.”
Deuteronomy 33:12 (NIV)

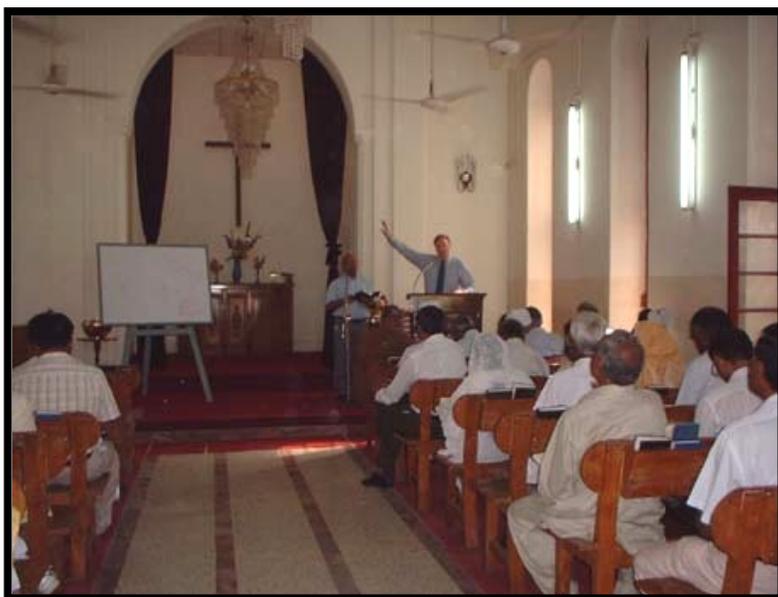
God Meant It For Good

What a privilege the Lord granted me this past October to travel to Pakistan and to meet many of our brethren there. The chief reason for my being invited there was to conduct a Pastors’ Retreat through a series of lectures on Church Growth for three Presbyteries of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Pakistan – Sahiwal, Heelibar, and Ravi, and to preach at the 71st Annual Sahiwal Convention. This teaching opportunity in Pakistan fitted well with the goals of the Mobile Theological Training Team (MT3), to train national church leaders. Shortly after my arrival, at the conclusion of my first sermon in the large, outdoor tent on the opening evening of the Convention, we were informed of new security measures for foreign visitors. This came because earlier that day, on October 7, there was a terrorist bomb blast in the nearby city of Multan. This had direct implications upon the Sahiwal Convention. We could no longer have the big, outside evening tent meetings where we had hoped to reach two to three thousand with gospel messages because the government imposed a ban on all such outdoor religious gatherings following the Multan attack.⁷ However, we saw the hand of the Lord in the rearranging of the meetings in a wonderful way. We changed venues to the Esther Chapel at the Sahiwal Christian Hospital, and the Pastors’ Retreat was expanded to become a combined Pastors’ and Nurses’ Training Retreat on Church Growth. I repeated the first session given the day before to the pastors, this time to a full chapel – about 130. I am

⁷ Events during October were highly publicized in leading newspapers, such as the following:

- “Biggest Terrorism incident in country,” *The Nation*, Lahore, Vol. XIX, No. 259, Friday, Oct. 8, 2004, p. 1.
- “Ban on congregations likely,” From our correspondent, *The Nation*, Lahore, Vol. XIX, No. 259, Friday, Oct. 8, 2004, p. 1.
- “Car bomb kills 40 in Multan,” Riaz Ahmad Chaudhry, *The Nation*, Lahore, Vol. XIX, No. 259, Friday, Oct. 8, 2004, pp. 1, 8.
- “Four die in Lahore mosque blast,” Salman Aslan, in *International: The News*, Monday, Oct. 11, 2004, “Lahore Editions,” pp. 1, 9.
- “Death toll of attacks rises to 71: Thousands of Pakistanis defy government ban....” in *Kuwait Times*, Saturday, October 9, 2004, p. 9.

not certain of all the evangelical denominations present, but the praise and spirit of prayer grew with each passing day inside that chapel. It was wonderful to observe the signs of earnest study growing over the audience of nurses, student nurses, doctors, and pastors. For these lectures I was granted a wonderful translator, who became a real inspiration to me. The Lord certainly reminded us of the need for flexibility according to His providential leading. The end result was that we covered six lectures on Church Growth with a biblical expository focus. The Lord obviously wanted to reach the leaders, and



Dr. Whytock Lecturing to Pastors and Nurses

we had far more time to do this than was originally planned. In all things to God be the glory! We concluded the retreat on Saturday afternoon with a lovely luncheon served in the Hospital Auditorium. In God's grace the Body is continuing to be strengthened and to persevere in the work of Kingdom extension.

Due to restrictions at the time, I was unable to visit other extensive works of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Synod, including the agricultural work in outlying villages. However, I want to briefly share about my encouraging tour of the Sahiwal Christian Hospital, conducted by Dr. Michael Misari, and also of the Nurses' Training School, conducted by nursing superintendent, Miss Florence Wilson. I was able to view these facilities as well as to meet the doctors, the

nursing heads, and the hospital administrator, John Gill. This gave me a greater appreciation and understanding of the work in Pakistan. The Hospital (a 120-bed facility with three operating rooms, complete lab



*Dr. Whytock with Tutor Sisters
School of Nursing, Christian Hospital, Sahiwal*

facilities, etc.) and Nursing School were both so very clean and in good repair; they gave an excellent testimony for our Lord. Also, I was struck by the evangelistic efforts and spiritual focus at the Hospital and at the Nursing School. It was a great encouragement for me to see that the Word had clearly not been supplanted by good deeds – a proper balance was there. The evening dinner and programme by the nursing students really touched my heart – to hear such clear Christian testimonies of students coming to life in Christ.

Pakistan and the Church of Today

Christians today are generally free to gather for worship, although as I personally experienced, this, too, can be restricted. Under law (sharia), it is illegal to evangelize a Muslim, and the penalties if convicted can be imprisonment or death. However, true justice even under that law does not always occur. We must remember that according to extreme Islamic theology, Islamic martyrs have their sins forgiven, avoid all purgatory, are taken into paradise, and receive crowns of honour. Thus, many Muslims are zealous to fight the

“infidel” and persecute the Christian evangelist.⁸ Unfortunately, much of this persecution is difficult to document. While we hear statements that President Musharraf and his government are trying to “relax” the situation for Christians, there remains much uncertainty.

In the March, 2004, *Voice of the Martyrs* magazine, several stories were told of Christian men and women who are presently suffering for their Christian witness.⁹ In fact, rarely does a month go by that this Christian organization is not highlighting Christian oppression in Pakistan. If readers will but take a moment to study the website of The Voice of the Martyrs, “Persecution News,” they will see a sobering reality. During 2004, this website carried twenty-three stories of Christian oppression in Pakistan, about two stories per month. The first was the murder of a pastor in the Punjab in January, 2004, while he was waiting for a train to Lahore. Later police reported it could have been cardiac arrest. When the autopsy confirmed death by a bullet to the heart, the police story changed to “strife within the local church”! Also, in January, 2004, in Karachi, a car bomb went off in front of the Bible Society building, injuring eleven. Then a verdict was given on January 28, 2004, dating back to an August, 2002, murder of three nurses at the Presbyterian hospital in Taxila during their morning prayers in the Chapel. An additional twenty-three had also been injured in that bombing. In February, 2004, a Christian businessman, age thirty-three, who ran a bookstore, was kidnapped and murdered. And the list goes on.¹⁰

What should this cause us to do? I believe first it should cause us to desire to be informed about the wider church. We must not ignore the plight of fellow believers in the Body. Second, surely it must impact our prayers in public worship, in prayer gatherings, and in private. I am reminded of that classic Puritan work, *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, and its “timely,” although dated, examples for prayer, amidst the timeless principles. I quote: “To pray...for the deliverance of the distressed churches abroad from the tyranny of the antichristian

⁸ J. Dudley Woodberry, “Terrorism, Islam, and Mission: Reflections of a Guest in Muslim Lands,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 26, no. 1 (January, 2002) 2-7.

⁹ Communications Team, “Pakistan: Not Fear But Christ,” *The Voice of the Martyrs* (March, 2004) 2-5.

¹⁰ “Pakistan,” <<http://www.persecution.net/country/pakistan.htm>> (20 January 2005).

faction, and from the cruel oppressions and blasphemies of the Turk....”¹¹

My journey home was from the capital of the Punjab in Pakistan to Delhi, India, and then safely back to Canada – hence “To the Punjab and Back,” a story of God’s grace.

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¹¹ *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, (Edinburgh: General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, August 24, 1647), 377.

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