

German evangelist taking gospel to Pakistanis

Several open-air meetings held in Pakistan in September brought thousands to faith

While U.S. and world news headlines continue to speak of Muslim opposition to Pakistan's involvement in the war on terrorism, the Word of God, says evangelist Andreas Huebner, is alive in this country where blasphemy against Islam and its prophet Muhammad is legally punishable by death.

Just days before the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States, Huebner held successful open-air meetings in the Pakistan cities of Kasur and Faisalabad, as well as Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Huebner's work has helped produce many Pakistani believers who today pray and worship together in local house churches.

"Since the [U.S.] attacks on the Taliban and the al Qaeda network of Osama bin Laden, Pakistani Christians feel like they're sitting on top of a volcano," Huebner said. "How

ever, many of the Pakistani Christian churches have started holding special prayer vigils—not only to pray for boldness and protection for the Christians—but also to pray for the salvation of those considering themselves as their enemies."

Huebner adamantly stated that

the United States should continue to make it clear the attacks are not against the Muslim faith but against organized terrorism that threatens Muslims and Christians alike. If

Muslims in Pakistan believe the Taliban's stance that America is attacking Islam and not terrorism then Pakistanis are more likely to side with the Taliban movement, which has elements inside Pakistan, Huebner said.

Huebner, 31, founded the Germany-based nonprofit organization Jesus to the World Mission in 1995 and has been in full-time ministry for eight years. He first visited Pakistan last year in September.

To prepare, Huebner contacted the Pakistan Gospel Assemblies, a ministry that includes 2,000 charismatic churches and house churches in Pakistan. Since then Huebner has conducted several meetings in Pakistan, a Third World country where Islamic fundamentalists continue to expand their reach, and more people own guns than refrigerators.

The two-day meeting in Kasur was Huebner's first in the city. It drew a crowd of 5,000. In Faisalabad, some 16,000 people came to hear the gospel. On each of the four nights, an estimated 8,000 people answered altar calls.

According to Huebner, 74 percent of Pakistanis are illiterate and unable to fill out a decision card. So the number of converts is derived from a head count of those standing up, arms in the air, who have just prayed to receive Christ. After the meetings, new converts are integrated into house churches near their homes.

The potential for healing drives many Pakistanis to his meetings, Huebner said. Without clean water to drink, poor sanitary conditions and the money for vaccinations, bacterial and viral sicknesses are rampant. Although almost every

Western luxury is available, most Pakistanis cannot afford to see a doctor or buy things considered as basic needs in the West.

For the meetings in Faisalabad—Huebner's largest-ever Pakistan campaign—some 16,000 Pakistanis walked long distances to the event despite evening temperatures between 100 and 110 degrees. Much like the multitudes traveling to see Jesus, some Pakistanis brought their sick by donkey carts. Others carried them on beds.

On Wednesday night Huebner asked all those who had been physically healed while he was praying for the sick to stand up. Some 5,000 people responded.

"We asked those standing to demonstrate what they can do now," he said. "Some moved their arms, others ran around. I have never before seen such an outpouring of miracles like the ones that night."

To reach the predominantly Muslim country with the gospel, Huebner said he doesn't even mention the word Islam in his messages. "Jesus commissioned us to 'preach the gospel,'" Huebner said. "Unbelievers are not our enemies. We need to overwhelm them so much with the love of Christ that they cannot help but receive Jesus Christ into their hearts."

The Pakistani government provides police protection at the events, he said.

Though Huebner traveled alone to Pakistan for the 2000 and 2001 events, he plans to take several others with him in 2002—if he's allowed into the country. Due to America's

ongoing war against terrorists in Afghanistan, entry into Pakistan is not possible.

But “if God opens a door, nothing can shut it,” Huebner said. “The churches are only getting stronger. All over the world, persecution never weakens the body of Christ. Instead, it strengthens the churches as people get very serious with God. In a nation like Pakistan, you can’t ‘play’ Christianity.”

—Lindy Warren