Turkey

Turkey is 99% Muslim
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Present-day Turkey includes the area where the seven churches of Revelation are located. Turkey, known to the Romans as “Asia Minor”, saw Christianity spread rapidly during the first century after Jesus’ death and resurrection. It was here that several of the early Christian communities, such as the Ephesians and the Galatians, were found. The city of Istanbul used to be Constantinople, the capital of the Christian Byzantine Empire.

Today this rich Christian heritage is mostly confined to ancient ruins, and Christians comprise a tiny minority of the total population. Turkey’s image is now one of a modern, secular country, but this belies the danger in which many Christians there have to live. Promises made in 2011 that Christians would be better protected by the country’s constitution do not appear to have led to improved conditions for them.

In March 2012, Turkey was newly named as one of the world’s worst violators of religious freedom in the US Commission on International Religious Freedom’s (USCIRF) annual report. “Turkishness” is held to include being a Muslim, and so Christians are viewed with suspicion. There has been an increase in attacks on Christian individuals and communities, ranging from harassment and vandalism to death threats.

After an Easter service in 2012, Semiyh Sertek, a pastor in Istanbul, was attacked in his church by a group of Muslims, who beat him and threatened to kill him unless he recited the Islamic confession of faith, thus – in the eyes of his attackers – converting to Islam. Several other pastors are under police protection after receiving threats. Converts from Islam are also particularly at risk of harassment, as are Christians who share their faith or teach Christianity to children.

Christians face government restrictions on their rights to own property, conduct worship services, and open schools, hospitals and other institutions. Because some theological schools have been closed down, it is almost impossible for some Christian groups to equip new leaders to guide and encourage the Church. Christians are often portrayed very negatively in the media.

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