

CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN THE ENCOUNTER WITH ISLAM

The Rev. Dr. Titus Presler

Workshop at the 2019 Global Mission Conference

Boca Chica, Dominican Republic, April 2019

Inter-religious conflict is one of the three major challenges the world community faces in the 21st century, alongside economic inequality and climate change. While many Christians and Muslims seek understanding and reconciliation, Muslim-Christian relations are conflictual in many places, and most churches' mission efforts are minimal in the world of Islam. How do we as Christians relate theologically to the world's second-largest religious community? How can we nourish relationships with Muslims in our own communities? What might it mean to offer Christian witness with Muslims both at home and globally? Titus Presler will address these questions from the perspective of his experience in India, USA and as former principal of Edwards College in Peshawar, Pakistan.

Glimpses of recent Muslim-Christian encounters, some conflictual, some reconciling

Three major crises of 21st century: Poverty, Inter-Religious Conflict, Climate Change

Muslim-Christian conflict is the most prominent among religious conflicts

Grievance accumulation on both sides in the religion-scape of today's world

GEMN groups that engage with Islam:

Jerusalem Peacebuilders, Sudan Sunrise, AFRECS, Caravan, Bridges to Pakistan

Think *religiously* about the inter-religious crisis:

- Resist the now superseded 20th-century secularization hypothesis
 - Realize that the secularization hypothesis was Wester-centric
- Focus on religion amid the press of politics – resist secularizing your thinking!
- Acknowledge the reality of religious motivation among other motivations
- Recognize the power of religion in society alongside the power of other factors

Moving forward in Christian-Muslim engagement:

- Go out of your way to engage with Muslims
- Initiate relationship with Muslims
- Develop *friendship* with Muslims
- Explore, discover, discuss
 - Think about your theology of religions

- Be prepared for your theology of religions to shift
- Explore differences as well as commonalities
- Resist clichés such as ‘We’re all the same’
- Act together as well as *talk* together
- Bear witness to the fruit of your Christian-Muslim journey

Missional Approaches:

- Incarnational Humility – as Christians, we don’t know everything
- Mutual Discovery – Muslims and Christians can discover more of God together
- Missiological Exploration – discuss Muslim *dawah* and Christian mission together
- Reconciliation Pilgrimage – explore healing the wounds in the relationship

Anglican Contributions:

Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (1956)

Canterbury-Al Azhar Dialogue

Cambridge Interfaith Programme at Cambridge University

Work in provinces & dioceses throughout the world:

Peshawar & Church of Pakistan. Jerusalem & the Middle East.

Egypt & North Africa. Cyprus & the Gulf. Nigeria. Sudan. South Sudan. Iran.

Southeast Asia. North India. South India.

Take the long view with God:

- Setbacks are inevitable
- Pray into solidarity and forgiveness

The Rev. Dr. Titus Presler is a missiologist who specializes in mission theology and the interaction of gospel with culture. President of GEMN, he has extended mission experience in India, where he grew up, Zimbabwe and Pakistan. He coordinates Green Mountain Witness, the evangelism initiative of the Diocese of Vermont. He has taught at EDS, Harvard, General, Pittsburgh Seminary and Seminary of the Southwest, where he was president. He holds a B.A. from Harvard, M.Div. from General, and Th.D. from Boston University. He is past chair of the Standing Commission on World Mission, researcher for the Global Anglicanism Project, and consultant for Anglican Indaba. Among many publications, he is author of *Horizons of Mission and Going Global with God*. He has lectured ecumenically and widely in the Episcopal Church on Christian-Muslim relations. He blogs at TitusOnMission.wordpress.com.