

“RUBBISH OF THE WORLD”: CRUCIFORM MISSION AMID MUSLIM PRESSURE

The Rev. Canon Dr. Titus Presler

Principal-in-exile, Edwardes College, Peshawar, Pakistan

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Last November a Christian couple – man and woman, parents of four children – were seized by a mob at the brick kilns where they worked in the Punjab province of Pakistan and then stuffed into a brick kiln and incinerated. We do not know whether they were dead or alive before they were burned. Charred pages of the Quran were said to have been found in their trash, which is why local Muslim clerics incited the mob against them. I have seen those brick kilns in the Punjab: tall structures with black smoke belching out of their chimneys, and the workers – some of the lowest paid people in all of Pakistan and living in destitution – walking around like black ghosts, covered completely in soot.

Stuffed into an incinerator. “We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day,” wrote the apostle Paul to the Corinthians about his sufferings (1 Corinthians 4.13).

In September 2013 over 100 Christians were killed and over 150 injured when two suicide bombers set off their charges in the courtyard of All Saints' Church in Peshawar on a Sunday after church as the congregation was sharing a simple meal. I've preached there a number of times, and I've shared in that meal after the liturgy. I knew a number of the people who were killed that day, including three of our students, all of them women, at Edwardes College; and William Ghulam a headmaster who used to translate my sermons into Urdu; and the congregation's inspirational music leader, Naeem Nazir. As Mano Rumlshah, bishop emeritus of Peshawar and a former appointed missionary of our church, wrote bitterly afterwards, “Pray – and be blown to bits!”

Blown to bits. “We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.”

One of our students who was killed was Merab Naeem, age 19, the daughter of music leader Naeem Nazir and a very composed and intelligent young woman who often attended Morning Prayer in the College Chapel. A less dramatic story about her is this: I first met her while trying to redress a wrong she had suffered. After her two-year associate's degree at Edwardes she applied for our Bachelor of Science program in engineering. She'd been admitted, but during the interviews she had been harassed by two Muslim faculty members who criticized her essay because she had written that she wished to attend Edwardes partly because it's a church-sponsored college. You see, among our 2,800 students only about 300 are Christians, and among our 105 faculty, about 15 are Christians, so, as in society, Christians are a minority at Edwardes. The two faculty members had laughed at her – more minor than being bombed, obviously, but hurtful enough that she had wept and had to talk to a woman lecturer, who then brought the matter to me.

Laughed at, mocked. “We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.”

And then there is my own case. At a certain point last year, my defense of the rights of the Diocese of Peshawar and the Church of Pakistan in its own college was endangering my situation, so on the advice of Peshawar Bishop Humphrey Sarfaraz Peters I was staying with a Muslim supporter in Islamabad while we all worked on the situation. When it became important for me to appear in Peshawar High Court in support of the diocese’s lawsuit against the government’s takeover bid, my host and I drove up to Peshawar with what we thought would be the protection of a safe-passage letter from Pakistan’s Interior Ministry. After the court appearance, someone sidled up to the church’s attorney and threatened him with death if he pursued the case (he has continued undeterred). On our own way out of the city in the late afternoon, agents of the military Inter-Services Intelligence flagged us down, tore up the safe-passage letter and hauled me into their vehicle. For eight or ten minutes two agents, one on each side, beat me with fists while the lead agent in the front seat accused me of being a CIA agent, warned me to leave Pakistan, threatened to kill me if they saw me again, and tore the work visa out of my passport. My host argued strenuously with agents keeping watch outside, and I believe it was only his remonstrances that prevented much worse outcomes and secured my release.

As we drove away toward Islamabad, the prayer that rose to the surface in me was this: “Friend Jesus, this and so much worse is what your Christian brothers and sisters have been experiencing here in Pakistan for so long. This and so much worse is what your Muslim brothers and sisters, and many others, have been experiencing here for so long. Now I know it first-hand. I’m not thankful for the beating, Friend Jesus, but I am thankful for the knowledge. And for still being alive.”

Another initial response, however, was silence. Bishop Humphrey had been in Islamabad and was on his way back to Peshawar when we contacted him about the beating, so he returned to the capital, now in the dark, where he met with us at my Muslim host’s home. I found it difficult to discuss the incident, so my host told the story. Even allowing for shock, there was a deeper tide of withdrawal at work in me. Similarly, I could not bring myself to share the news with wife and my family back in the USA for 24 hours.

In beating me, accusing me, tearing up my visa, threatening me with death, and so on, the ISI agents had treated me as trash. They heaped blame and shame on me. Cognitively I knew it all to be false. Emotionally, though, some part of me was asking: “Does this happening to me mean that they’re right? I must have done something wrong to deserve this. I must be to blame. Maybe I *am* trash. I feel deeply shamed.” As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things.”

Such internalization of blame and shame is widely noted as common among victims of other types of abuse, especially domestic violence and sexual exploitation and violence, and it is not surprising that it features in the persecuted psyche. My experience of internalizing blame and shame became an additional dimension of empathy with Pakistani Christians, sharing not only their abuse but also a particular internal response to such abuse.

In inviting me to speak at this conference, the organizers wrote as follows:

We are especially interested in hearing the story of your own direct and unique experience in Pakistan as a Christian in a predominantly Muslim context, including the assault (if you feel comfortable speaking publicly about that). We would like to hear specifically about your particular struggles, challenges and successes there as an American and as an Anglican, your analysis of the role of the Christian church in Muslim countries, your vision of the future for Pakistani Christians, and your advice to us as to where you see the greatest potential and hope for peace-building in a frequently violent area of the world.

I would like to address that assignment first by reflecting biblically, theologically and missiologically about rubbish, enemies, foolishness, and suffering. Second, I will reflect on the relationship between difference and danger in mission at this historical moment in relations between the West and the Muslim world.

Rubbish, Enemies, Fools, and Suffering: Missiological Reflections

Rubbish

“We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things,” writes Paul to the Corinthians. That’s in the New Revised Standard Version, which is a predominantly USAmerican translation of the Bible, so it is surprising that the word rubbish is used, because rubbish is more typically a British word: the British have rubbish bins and rubbish collection, and when they want to signify strong disagreement with someone they sometimes say, “Rubbish!” We USAmericans use the word trash, so we have trash bins, trash barrels and trash compactors. Some of us use the words trash and garbage interchangeably, though I reserve garbage for organic kitchen waste. Rubbish and trash refer to what is dirty, as in sweepings from the floor, discarded packaging, or used Q-tips. The New International Version translates Paul’s words as, “We have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.” The Greek of the two words translated as rubbish (*perikatharmata*) and dregs (*peripsema*) refer to what is removed in the process of cleaning: first the sweepings from a floor, and, second, dirt removed from the body. The statement echoes the lament in Lamentations 3.45, “You [God] have made us filth and rubbish among the peoples.”

Paul is sarcastically contrasting his situation with that of his Corinthian critics: “We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless . . . We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things” (1 Corinthians 4.10-13). Paul is not boasting. Rather, he is writing in anguish, anguish about the arrogance of the Corinthians and also the anguish of his own suffering. In his second letter Paul writes movingly: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10). A good rule of thumb about Paul – and perhaps the rest of us as well – is to

recognize that whatever he says he has conquered is something he is still struggling with. So Paul was writing in a defiant and even counterfactual mood, for he sometimes did despair, he sometimes did feel crushed. The passionate terms in which he defends to the Corinthians his right to be considered an apostle is, partly, his battered ego crying out for recognition.

The physicality of getting beaten up was shocking for me. I limped for several weeks afterwards, I went to an orthopedist for my shoulder after returning to the USA, and I wondered about permanent damage, but all the injuries turned out to be temporary. As children we chanted, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." In fact, words can be psychically *more* hurtful than physical harm. At the same time, incarnate as we are, physical harm is a category of its own, especially when it comes with the threat of death, which means elimination from this world. For me as a missionary, getting physically beaten up marked a new and different chapter in my mission service, one that I am still trying to understand and integrate.

Feeling like rubbish, trash, garbage, that is, disposable, contemptible, out of sight and so out of mind – this did not and does not feel good. It marks one, maybe permanently. Those initial thoughts – "I must have done something to deserve this. Maybe I *am* trash." – have never quite gone away. Which is to say that my self-esteem took a hit. And that may not be a bad thing. "All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," as Paul says to the Romans, and so none of us is all that we think we are. What happened in Peshawar is like an asterisk or a bracket after my missionary identity: "Yes, missionary, but he got beaten up, so what does that mean? – some say one thing, some say something else." It feels like Paul's proverbial thorn in the flesh: "To keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated" (2 Corinthians 12.7). Another translation has "conceited" for "elated," which is more to my point.

Such are the ramifications of being trashed, rubbished.

Enemies

Evil and enmity are realities that a physical attack brings home. "Love your enemies," says Jesus. We often blunt the force of that by denying that we have enemies, for having enemies can feel like a failure, a defect in how we have handled our lives. The fact is, though, that the progression from envy to competition to resentment to hatred is so endemic in human nature that enmity is inevitable. It is important in life and in mission to realize that who you are and what you do can provoke real enmity in others – hostility, malevolence, evil schemes. Clearly I have enemies in Peshawar. Which ones were responsible for ordering ISI agents to attack me has never been clear, but they are there.

The crucial missional and Christian issue is how we respond to enmity. "Love your enemies," says Jesus, "and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5.44). Personally helpful to me has been how Justin Welby, archbishop of Canterbury, further radicalized Jesus' words when he said, "A church committed to the reclaiming of the gospel of peace

looks like those who join their enemies on their knees”* – *join their enemies on their knees*. This challenges our tendency to objectify enemies by reducing them to their negative qualities. They are *just that – enemies* – and nothing more. Their professional life, their family life, their networks of relationships – all in reality just as complex, interesting and important as our own – can be discounted, devalued, discredited, diminished, dismissed. And certainly their *prayer life!* We may not put it into words, but we’re likely to assume that if an enemy claims to be religious or spiritual, if an enemy claims to have faith and to pray, surely all that is inauthentic or fake, just nominal or obligatory, or at least shallow. “How can he/she be spiritual or prayerful and be that kind of person – and an enemy of me?”

Kneel with our enemies – that’s the exhortation. Praying *for* the enemy is generous, but in doing so we can retain our distance, even our sense of superiority. Praying *with* the enemy is humbling, for it puts us alongside the enemy in a relationship of parity. It may mean joining an enemy who is already at prayer, as many Muslims undoubtedly are, with the five daily times of prayer. It may mean inviting an enemy into prayer. In the natural course of things, none of that may be possible – as it has not been possible in Peshawar – but I have found that praying *as though* my enemy were kneeling and praying beside me has been profoundly edifying. Praying with the enemy forces me to open up to the other’s full humanity. The other is just as complex as I am, with just as many strong points as I have, and possibly just as faithful. Joining enemies on their knees and mine obliges me to accept the authenticity of the other’s relationship with God – the faith, the struggle, the prayer life of the enemy. When I embrace this, inner walls against the other begin to come down, opening the way to reconciliation, at least from my side.

Fools

“We are fools for the sake of Christ!” exclaims Paul to the Corinthians. “Fools” there is the Greek *moroi*, from which we have the word moron, so: “We are morons for the sake of Christ!” – fools. Mission has often seemed foolish, even moronic, in the eyes of the world, whether in Paul’s time, or in the British parliamentary debates of 1813 that finally opened the Indian subcontinent to missionaries, or today. “Titus going to Peshawar – after 9/11, as a USAmerican, with the Taliban, with bombings and beheadings? – You’ve got to be kidding!” So, after three years, what happened, happened. On one hand, maybe it was remarkable that there was so much progress at the college before I was attacked.

On the other hand, was such an outcome inevitable, and so was it a foolish venture to begin with? Here I confront the demonic side of the success criterion, where adversity signifies foolishness. When Paul exclaimed, “We are fools for the sake of Christ!” he went on to cite adversities – weakness, disrepute, beatings, homelessness, slander, persecution – adversities that indicated things were not going well and that therefore could be seen as signs of failure and hence signs of foolishness. Resisting that demon is difficult but crucial, for Paul’s cosmic point to the Corinthians is that “God chose what is foolish in the world to

* Justin Welby, Address at “Reclaiming the Gospel of Peace” conference, Oklahoma, 10 April 2014. <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5295/archbishop-justins-speech-at-the-reclaiming-the-gospel-of-peace-conference-oklahoma-usa>

shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God” (1 Corinthians 1.27-28). In my faithful moments, I rejoice in the ministry I’ve undertaken in Peshawar; in my weaker moments, I wonder, and inwardly struggle.

Suffering

The final Pauline reflection that I turn to is a mystical one that picks up on Paul’s reflection in 2 Corinthians 4:

... persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4.9-11).

Here Paul presents persecution as witness: witness to the suffering of Jesus on the cross, witness to the suffering that Jesus continues to experience through the suffering of the church, and witness to the risen life of Jesus shown through the church’s endurance. In writing to the Colossians from prison Paul[†] put it in a still more startling way:

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.
(Colossians 1.24)

Completing what is lacking in Christ’s suffering? What can Paul possibly mean? Commentator G. B. Caird rightly paraphrased Paul this way: “I am glad to suffer on your account. I make my contribution to the mounting tally of what Christ must still endure by drawing to my own person what would otherwise have fallen to his body, the church.”[‡]

Paul is correlating and co-relating the suffering of Christ, the suffering of the church, and his own suffering – all of it arising from persecution. Through his own suffering Christ is in solidarity with the church in its suffering. Indeed, because the church is the continuing body of Christ in the world, the church’s suffering *is* the suffering of Christ. Thereby the church shares in Christ’s suffering, just as Christ shares in the church’s suffering. Paul the persecuted missionary is part of the church and so shares in this mutual indwelling, this mutual solidarity in suffering, so that he feels personally an identification, a mystic union, with the suffering of Christ and a solidarity with the church in its suffering.[§]

[†] The authorship of Colossians continues to be discussed, so it is either Paul writing or a colleague writing in the spirit of Paul.

[‡] G. B. Caird, *Paul’s Letters from Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976): 184.

[§] The mystic mutual indwelling of God and Christ and Christ and the church is a theme often associated with Johannine writings in the New Testament, especially the prayer attributed to Jesus in John 17, but it is equally Pauline, both in his reflections on suffering and in his view of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

In all things Paul takes the long view, which always includes the end, the *eschaton*, when Christ will come again to bring all things to consummation. In the first-century circumstances of the Jesus movement being set upon by pagan religionists, Jewish zealots and partisans of the Roman imperial cult, Paul cannot foresee an end to the church's suffering. Since the church's suffering is mystically the suffering of Christ, Paul believes that this continuing suffering of Christ through the church has continuing significance, some role in the salvation of the world, just as Christ's suffering on the cross was pivotal in the salvation of the world. As he looks to the future, to the *eschaton*, Paul speculates that there is some quantity, some intensity, some volume of suffering that Christ must endure before the consummation of all things. He considers it a privilege to have taken on some portion of that in his own person and thereby to share in Christ's suffering. He likewise considers it a privilege to have taken on some portion of that suffering and thereby relieve the church of some of the suffering that otherwise might have been visited on the community.

In all this we see that the experience of persecution resonates in a number of directions: back toward Christ, forward from Christ, diffused in the church's life, particularized in the individual, and all of it forward toward the consummation. What happened to me was a minor one-time incident beside what Pakistani Christians have been enduring for decades: beatings, killings, church burnings, home burnings, and the low-intensity but daily discrimination that makes many Christian families despair for their children and try to leave the country through emigration. That totality is an instance the suffering of the body of Christ in the world of today. During one season of Morning Prayer at Edwardes College, when we were reading through the book of the Acts of the Apostles, I was moved to help the attending young Pakistani Christians reflect on the resonance between the life of their community in an age of Muslim extremism and Luke's many accounts of the adversities endured by the early church.

The fact that what happened to me happened to a USAmerican priest, the head of a prestigious a college with a national reputation – that stood out for the Christian community, but in messy, unpredictable ways. On one side, it sharpened the issues, so that the church held a number of press conferences advancing its case for the College, and so its case appeared in national newspapers. On another side, it served to intimidate the opposition within the College, the message being: "Watch out, you Edwardes College Christians: if we can do this to the USAmerican principal, there is no limit to what we can do to you!" As in war the threat of force is often as effective as force itself, so with hegemonic religion the threat of persecution can be as effective as persecution itself.

Rubbish, fools, enemies, suffering – these elements are related. The suffering church that ministers as a fool for the sake of Christ is rubbished, trashed, by the enemies of the gospel and thereby shares in the trashing of Christ, who likewise suffers with and through the church until Christ comes to make all things new, including the fools who have been trashed for the sake of Christ.

"Difference is Dangerous" and "Difference defines mission"

Faith Friends is the inter-religious group in Peshawar that brings together Sunni and Shia, various Christian groups, and Hindus and Sikhs for mutual encounter. Its efforts, though small, seemed promising, so I invited the group to meet at the College, taking care to ensure that a good cross-section of Muslims and Christians from our faculty were included. The meeting went well, and all agreed that this could be a good thing to try within our College community. The chair of the Islamic Studies Department and I planned an agenda and carefully selected those to be invited. The day for the gathering arrived, and all the invited Christians pitched up, but only one Muslim arrived.

It turned out that the others decided not to come in order to protest a particular development that had come out on the Web that morning: Terry Jones, the fundamentalist pastor in Florida, had announced that he was going to have another Quran-burning! His activities were disgraceful, obviously, but how much more irrelevant to the situation in Peshawar could his actions be? Showing up at our event were minority Christians whose communities were being subjected to indignities every day, and the majority Muslims boycotted the session because of a bizarre event being planned 10,000 miles away in the US state of Florida! The one Muslim who attended was equally indignant about his fellow Muslims' absence. "For many of us," he said, "it seems that difference means danger. We need to get beyond the idea that difference is dangerous."

"Difference is dangerous." That's one statement I'd like you to keep in your mind.

Here's a definition of mission: Mission is the phenomenon of sending and being sent, by God and by communities, across boundaries of human social experience to bear witness in word and deed to the reconciling action of God in Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The missional distinctive in that definition is the sending across boundaries. *Ministry* is the totality of our service to God, but we are distinctively on *mission* when we reach out beyond who and where we are to encounter and form community with others who are different from who and where we are. I sum all of that up in a very short definition that is easy to remember: mission is ministry in the dimension of difference. *Mission is ministry in the dimension of difference.*

So the second statement I'd like you to keep in mind is: "Difference defines mission." Now consider the two statements together: "Difference is dangerous. Difference defines mission."

When my wife Jane and I were Episcopal missionaries in rural Zimbabwe we were certainly reaching out to difference – racial difference, linguistic difference, cultural difference, economic difference – but, interestingly, not so much religious difference, for we were in the midst of a regional Christian community experiencing vibrant renewal after the suppression of Christianity during the Liberation War that brought black majority rule in 1980. Yes, the Shona Christians' Christianity was very different from our own in many ways, and that enlarged our faith, but we were among Christians. Yes, there were spirit mediums in the shadows, but their following was a minority. And I later devoted a good

deal of research and scholarship to exploring gospel-culture dynamics in African Christianity.

Pakistan took me in a different direction. The three chief challenges facing the world community in the 21st century are the poverty crisis, the ecological crisis, and the crisis between Islam and Christianity. Therefore those three are the chief challenges facing Christian mission. Poverty alleviation is so prominent on the churches' agenda that it has become for many Episcopalians and other mainline Christians the sum total of their understanding of mission – which, by the way, distorts and impoverishes a wholistic view of God's mission.** Mainline denominations are coming up to speed on the ecological crisis, and that is congenial with our social justice and environmental instincts. But the crisis with Islam is in a separate category because it concerns differences in faith. Given the ramifications of what Samuel Huntington famously called “the clash of civilizations,” especially since 9/11, Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and now ISIS, Al Shabab and Boko Haram, mainline churches tend to steer clear of the Muslim heartlands and wring our hands at the daily drumbeat of carnage. The invitation to go to Edwardes College was an opportunity to do otherwise. Here was a church college where 90 percent of faculty and students are Muslim – what a remarkable opportunity for Christian-Muslim engagement! What an opportunity to mobilize higher education to counter extremism and nurture a moderate Islam open to dialogue, open to the world! The demographic center of Islam is not the Arab Middle East, but Asia, and Peshawar is certainly in the Muslim heartland. Further, I felt intuitively that there was something more to learn about God in community with Muslims. It seemed urgent to seek the sacred in the world of Islam. If opportunity beckoned in an Islamist enclave such as Peshawar, so be it.

And I wasn't worried about being a foreigner. The devolution of leadership and management from the missionary era to indigenous leaders around the world since 1960 has matured to the point that occasional appointments of westerners in the Two-Thirds World is now no more locally disenfranchising than the numerous appointments of Asians and Africans to church leadership positions in Britain and North America. To conclude otherwise today would actually be condescending toward churches in the Two-Thirds World by supposing that their sense of identity is too fragile to undertake global personnel searches. In accepting the appointment, therefore, I deferred to the judgment of the College board of governors and the church, that is, to the judgment of Pakistanis, both Muslims and Christians.

The crisis between Islam and Christianity is evident in the fact that conflict between the two is erupting in violence in so many parts of the world – Nigeria, Sudan, Kenya, Egypt, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Texas, Boston, Paris, and various other places. It is not the only religious crisis, for Hindu nationalism in India is putting all religious minorities there under pressure, and Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar and Sri Lanka is pressuring Muslims and Christians in those countries. But the global proliferation of violent incidents

** See chapter 9, “Poverty and Wholistic Mission: A Challenge in Difference,” in Titus Presler, *Going Global with God: Reconciling Mission in a World of Difference* (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 2010): 129-145.

between followers of the world's two most populous religions, especially under the auspices of *jihad*, is a major fact of the 21st century, and we in Christian mission must be engaged. We must be willing to catalyze both witness and dialogue in inter-religious encounter. We must be willing to be midwives of reconciliation, which is the ultimate direction of God's mission in the human story and in the cosmos. The opportunities may not be numerous, but when they occur we should embrace them.

The Muslim-Christian crisis means that there are many Christian communities in Muslim-majority countries that are isolated, vulnerable and persecuted. They desperately need the solidarity of the world church, which can and must be expressed in all the ways possible: prayer without ceasing; visits to get to know Christians under pressure; telephone calls and email to nurture continuing relationship; financial assistance when appropriate; and, as much as possible, presence in the form of longterm residential service.

In the case of Pakistan, the nation was established in 1947 as a haven for south Asia's Muslims who feared for their welfare in a majority-Hindu India. Yet, despite having an overwhelming 96 percent majority in their own country, many Pakistani Muslims maintain a fearful minority mentality that has prompted discrimination against the nation's religious minorities, especially Hindus and Christians. Most of Pakistan's Christians are confined to menial labor with little opportunity for advancement,^{††} and there are sporadic outbreaks of violence against Christians.^{‡‡} Extremist tendencies have been aggravated by the legitimation of *jihad* as a tactic of modern warfare against Soviet and, later, NATO forces in Afghanistan, and by the continuing ideological contest in Pakistan between Saudi Wahabi Islam and Iranian Shiite Islam.

So standing with the oppressed Christian community was and continues to be crucial. As an Anglican I feel at home in Peshawar: Edwardes College was established by the Church Missionary Society, long in the forefront of Anglican mission. It is now an institution of the Church of Pakistan, the ecumenical church established in 1970 by the union of Anglicans,

^{††} The most comprehensive treatment of persecution of Christians in Pakistan is Patrick Sookhdeo's *A People Betrayed: The Impact of Islamization on the Christian Community in Pakistan* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications; and Pewsey, Wiltshire, England: Isaac Publishing, 2002). See also Titus Presler, "A Toll on the Soul: Costs of Persecution among Pakistan's Christians," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 39:2 (April 2015): 72-77.

^{‡‡} In addition to the instances already cited are the following: riots in Gojra, Punjab, in 2009 that killed eight Christians and burned 40 homes; the 2010 death sentence decreed for Asia Bibi, a Christian woman laborer accused of blasphemy; the 2011 assassinations of Salman Taseer, the Muslim Governor of Punjab Province, and Shabnaz Bhatti, a Roman Catholic who was the first federal Minister for Minority Religious Affairs, both of them for opposing the blasphemy laws; the 2012 burning of St. Paul's Sarhadi Church in Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; blasphemy accusations in 2012 against Rimsha Masih, a mentally handicapped girl in Islamabad; the March 2013 Badami Bagh riots in Lahore that destroyed 175 Christian homes.

Lutherans, Methodists and Presbyterians, the Anglicans being the most numerous among those four, and the Church of Pakistan is a full member of the Anglican Communion.

The obvious challenge to mission in the Muslim world today is the element of danger and the attendant risk. Here I ask you bring together again, the initial two statements I highlighted: "Difference is dangerous. Difference defines mission."

The world is dying of difference. I mean this in the sense that millions of people die on account of socially constructed views of differences to which life-and-death valuations have been attached. The implicit human attitude behind such social constructions and valuations is this: "You and your group are different from my group and me, so you are not as important as I am. So it's all right if you have less food and shelter, less security, less freedom, less opportunity – even a lot less. You do not deserve these things, because you are different. Maybe you don't even deserve to live." The successive genocides of Jews, Cambodians, Bosnians, Rwandans and Darfuris since 1940 are instances, as are the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Liberia, Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, and Syria. Discrimination and violence based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, sexual orientation and religion are responses to difference. Obviously the Muslim-Christian crisis is just such a crisis over difference.

As Christian mission seeks to participate in God's healing of the world, understanding itself in terms of engaging difference is a crucial starting place. Difference defines mission. And if the world is dying of difference – if people are being tortured over difference, losing their homes, losing their livelihoods, losing their very lives over difference – if, in short, difference is dangerous, Christian mission that enters into the great differences of our time is going to be dangerous. But how can we do less, since God is calling us to join God in trying to catalyze reconciliation amid the destruction wrought by dangerous difference?

Such mission entails risk. Clearly going to Peshawar was a risk. But if there is a call from God, God's peace envelops the risk. Some have said to me, "You're so brave – I could never do that," or words to that effect. I do not feel brave. Bravery as a category does not come into it. I have always had peace about it, the peace that Paul invokes as "the peace of God that passes all understanding" (Philippians 4.7). With that peace I have not had to screw up my courage, wince and face the danger. Not at all: I am at peace, and I come and go in peace. So it is not bravery. It rather Emmanuel, God with us. It is not virtue or achievement, but simply God's grace.

Summary Comments

I conclude my remarks with some summary comments:

- The phenomenon of human difference is recognized today as a major driver of human interaction, and the response to difference is being recognized as a major ethical criterion for individuals and societies. Societies all over the world, including in this country, are realizing that how they deal with difference expresses the depth and authenticity of their

humanity and how they deal with difference signifies their readiness, or lack of readiness, to be fruitful in the world community.

- Christian mission is ministry in the dimension of difference. Our vision as missional Christians must be one of reconciliation across the vast array of human differences that are tearing the world apart at great cost in human life and human flourishing.
- The differences between Muslims and Christians constitute one of the great challenges of the 21st century. It is a challenge with social, cultural, political and religious ramifications. As missional Christians and as church communities we must not be content to gaze in horror from the sidelines alongside all our secular colleagues. Rather we must discern how God is calling us to engage.
- The Muslim-Christian crisis catches many in the Christian community either unprepared or wrongly prepared. The unprepared are those who delusionally try to separate the conflict from religion by saying about perpetrators of violence, “Oh, those are not real Muslims. Oh, those are not real Christians. These conflicts are not really religious, but only social, political and economic.” Yes, the conflicts are complex, as any social phenomenon is, but that complexity includes a religious element. The Christians who are wrongly prepared are those who say, “Oh yes, these conflicts are religious all right, and Islam is really just a religion of violence. We must exclude it from our homeland and go to war against it in its own homelands.”
- As Anglicans we are rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and at the same time we are open to what God may be doing in other religious ways. With that orientation we have the opportunity to walk a distinctive path. We believe in the centrality of both witness and dialogue, both sharing what God has done with us in Christ and learning more about God alongside faithful Muslims, and faithful Hindus and faithful Buddhists – in short, everyone in the religious world, but Islam is the major challenge and the major opportunity.
- As missional Anglicans we need to explore the ramifications of the fact that historically Christianity and Islam are the two great missionary religions, each with a mandate to share its news of God and invite others into its community of faith. Both these religions have committed atrocities in the name of mission. Our experience of that on the Christian side should condition our response to renewed atrocities on the Muslim side.
- We need to keep in mind the two linked statements: Difference is dangerous, and: Difference defines mission. That means that missional engagement with the world of Islam in the 21st century can be perilous. It involves risk, but we live in the vision of a risk-taking God.
- In most Muslim-majority societies there are minority Christian communities, many of them Anglican or with Anglican roots, and in many instances they are living in danger. Solidarity is one of the current touchstones of Anglican and ecumenical missiology. If our solidarity stops at the border of danger, how authentic is our commitment to solidarity? Surely we are called to be in solidarity with our fellow Christians experiencing

discrimination, violence and persecution. Again, if our solidarity stops at the border of danger, how authentic is our commitment to solidarity?

- Companionship in mission is another current touchstone of Anglican and ecumenical missiology. Our solidarity with Christians can and must take the form of companionship in mission with them in their contexts. This companionship is also, in fact, the main avenue through which we can undertake Christian mission in the Muslim world today. The organizers of this conference ask: “Where do you see the greatest potential and hope for peace-building in a frequently violent area of the world?” My answer is: Locate the besieged Christian minority community, enter into a companionship of solidarity with them, and there you will discern avenues of mission in the Muslim world. The particular forms may be pastoral, educational, medical, theological – all forms that that familiar to us – but undertaken with our Christian companions and in interaction with our Muslim brothers and sisters.

Let’s return to the incinerated Christian couple in Punjab, and to the congregation of All Saints’ Church in Peshawar, and to Merab Naeem and her father Naeem Nazir who were killed in the blast there. Communities who live in the shadow of being trashed like that are communities who know they have enemies who wish them harm, but who nevertheless witness as fools for Christ because they, like the writer to the Hebrews, know that they are strangers and foreigners on the earth, and they look forward to a better country, the consummation of all things when Christ shall come to make all things new (Hebrews 11.13-16). They know that difference is dangerous, but they remain faithful in mission amid difference because they celebrate the fact of God’s reconciling love in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who suffers with them and sustains them in the hope that difference can be turned from curse to blessing.

Our call in the 21st century is the same as the mission call in any century: to embrace that hope, to venture forth into difference despite danger, to live in solidarity with the oppressed, and to join God in the healing of humanity.

*An Episcopal priest, Titus Presler has served Edwardes College in Peshawar since 2011, currently as Principal-in-exile. Earlier he was president of the Seminary of the Southwest, academic dean of General Seminary, rector of St. Peter’s Church in Cambridge, missionary in Zimbabwe, chair of the Standing Commission on World Mission, lecturer at Episcopal Divinity School, and organizer of the Episcopal Partnership for Global Mission. He is the author of Going Global with God: Reconciling Mission in a World of Difference; Horizons of Mission in the New Church’s Teaching Series; Transfigured Night: Mission and Culture in Zimbabwe’s Vigil Movement; and numerous articles and book chapters. He blogs at TitusOnMission.wordpress.com. Publications related to this address include:
<http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/2015-02/2015-02-072-presler.html>
<http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2014-08/persecuted-Pakistan>*