DARKNESS AND LIGHT

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Categories: Observations, Politics, Theology

The British press have, rightly, been full of reports about the death of 10 Aid workers, including one British doctor, in Afghanistan over the weekend. The ten who died worked for a Christian Charity, the International Assistance Mission. IAM is a humanitarian organisation which has worked inside Afghanistan for forty years providing healthcare to people in the rural areas. They are not an evangelistic mission; in fact the British doctor who died was a humanist with no religious agenda (Daily Telegraph).

In all probability, the group were the victims of a violent robbery, but this hasn't stopped the Taliban claiming responsibility for the deed.Â Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, said bibles translated into Dari had been found.

> *"Yesterday at around 0800 (0330 GMT), one of our patrols confronted a group of foreigners. They were Christian missionaries and we killed them all," he told the AFP news agency.*
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> *He later told the Associated Press they were "spying for the Americans". (BBC)*

Leaving aside the fact that the group were not all Christians, and certainly were not missionaries and the fact that the Taliban may not have been the murderers; it is clear that this spokesman believes that killing Christian missionaries is legitimate.

What the poor fool from the Taliban does not realise is that Christians have always been a target. From Nero, to Pol Pot and Stalin, people have tried to stamp out the Christian faith with violence and all of them have failed. Indeed, the more the forces of darkness seek to extinguish the light of Christ, the brighter the light shines. Tertullian had it right: "the blood of the martyrs, is the seed of the church".Â Indeed, how could it be otherwise? At the heart of the Christian faith is the cross of Jesus. The forces of darkness seemed to triumph, only for Jesus to burst out of the tomb and usher in a new dawn. Darkness can't understand light and it can't extinguish it.

But there is a message here for Christians, too. We are called to witness to Christ into the dark and uncomfortable parts of the world. It is all too easy to present Christian discipleship and mission as a pleasant, easy ride and to forget that we are to lay down our lives, take up the cross and follow the Crucified One. Light will triumph over darkness, but only at the cost of the lives and comfort of many of the light bearers. Western Christian missionaries do get killed or attacked from time to time and these cases tend to hit the headlines. However, persecution and martyrdom are still common experiences for our fellow believers in many parts of the world as this example shows. If you want to know more about the situations of Christians in the world today, I can't recommend Kingdom Without Borders: The Untold Story of Global Christianity highly enough. As for Western Christians; I have argued elsewhere (in a different context) that we desperately need to regain a theology of suffering.

There is a political point here too. We cannot expect to end the violence in Afghanistan by the use of

violence. We may restrain it, but we won't end it. It is the example of people who put others before themselves; Christians and others, which will eventually help to change Afghan society. But this will be a costly exercise. It is also extremely sad that (as the Taliban statement shows) Christians have become associated with the military efforts of the NATO governments in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Though, all too often, Christians only have themselves to blame for this.

Meanwhile, my heart goes out to the family and friends of Dr. Susan Woo and her nine colleagues: may God comfort them in their distress.

> *The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. (John 1:5)*