

# CGCM NEWS

## Center for Global Christianity and Mission

Number 19, Summer 2015

[www.bu.edu/cgcm](http://www.bu.edu/cgcm)

### The Global Christianity Speaker Series

This year, the CGCM has been dissecting various aspects of the question, “what is world Christianity?” In the previous newsletter, readers discovered the many ways the CGCM has been trying to answer that question through its web projects. This edition focuses on the work of the center as a platform for scholarly discourse. Over the course of the spring semester, the CGCM hosted leading scholars of world Christianity who addressed a variety of topics. The series was part of a class Todd Johnson offered on global Christianity. Johnson acted as the main organizer of the speakers, who came from a wide variety of denominational and social backgrounds. The following article summarizes the main contribution of each thinker’s lecture.

Dr. Margaret Guider of Boston College spoke about the Catholic Church and its approach to mission throughout the past century. Focusing her presentation on various popes, she talked about shifts in the church that paralleled wider world movements such as changing worldviews and charismatic forms of worship. She also mentioned a shift in the Catholic Church from talking about “the church universal” in its Western form to “the world church,” where international ministers can as easily go to the West as come from it. While Vatican II was a watershed event marking a definitive shift in terminology and approach to mission, Guider argued that incremental changes introduced by prior popes helped to lay the groundwork. One of Guider’s main concerns in this age of a global or worldwide church was how to pass on the importance of mission to children. Guider’s presentation was informative for listeners from both Catholic and other



From left to right: Margaret Guider, Brad Gill, and Luke Veronis.

traditions. Her chronological approach showed the clear progression of ideas in the Church as it embraced its worldwide status. Guider also offered helpful commentary for those more familiar with the Protestant history of the growth of Global Christianity.

Father Luke Veronis of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology described a very different story of the past 115 years of Christian history than many other speakers in the global Christianity series. While most other traditions experienced tremendous growth and numeric success in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Orthodoxy was nearly decimated by communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Orthodoxy has been revived in former soviet states and has put Eastern Europe on a trajectory very different that the rest of Europe, which is becoming increasingly non-religious. Veronis encouraged more efforts in Protestant and Catholic seminaries to educate non-Orthodox Christians about the history and plight of the Orthodox Church, especially in terms of the mission-oriented *This article continues on page 3.*

This issue of the CGCM News features an article summarizing the main contributions of the Global Christianity Speaker Series. Laura Chevalier, Daryl Ireland, Francisca Ireland-Verwoerd, and Gina Zurlo produced the content for this essay, which was then edited by Stephen Lloyd. Also inside is a brief essay by Stephen Lloyd on the changing shape of American Christianity.





## The Changing Face of Christianity in the United States

Stephen Lloyd

Over the past few weeks, Church pulpits, social media outlets, and cable news networks have been abuzz with the Pew Research Center's study on America's changing religious landscape. According to the survey, there has been a precipitous drop in the percent of the U.S. population that identifies as Christian, from 78.4% in 2007 to 70.6% in 2008. Over that same time, the percentage of the total U.S. population that identified as unaffiliated (atheists, agnostics, and those that check "nothing in particular" on the religion question) grew from 16.1% to 22.8%. Yet these numbers do not simply reflect the eclipse of an outdated institution. Rather, Christianity in the U.S. is undergoing dynamic changes; not only is it becoming increasingly diverse, but also those churches losing members are reconsidering their relationships with the wider world.

While Christianity in the U.S. is becoming less white, the percent of Christians who are African-American, Latino, and/or Asian has risen. At the same time, Christianity in the U.S. is becoming more global. Languages, practices, and rituals from around the world are becoming a more apparent and integral feature of Christianity in the U.S. In New York City, one can find Christian worship services in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Greek, Ge'ez, Igbo, Yoruba, Swedish, German, Haitian Creole, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, etc. Street evangelists come from a variety of backgrounds; Mennonites from Pennsylvania, Nigerian pastors, members of a Korean youth group, and Latin American preachers are now part of the fabric of the city's life. While New York has a remarkably large number of migrant communities, this high level of linguistic, ethnic, and national diversity is apparent throughout the country.

Christianity in the U.S. is also becoming more Evangelical. While the Roman Catholic Church and mainline Protestant churches lost members, and while historically black Protestant churches remained stable, Evangelical churches gained members. Facing decline, both Catholics and Mainline Protestants are reaching out to new communities. Catholics have been increasing their ministry to Spanish-speaking communities among others. A number of BU graduates and students have been working on re-envisioning the practice of mission and evangelism in Protestant churches. Alum Ian Douglas is now the Episcopal Bishop of Connecticut, where he is restructuring the diocese along missional lines. Christopher James, a Ph.D. candidate at BU, has conducted research on church planting in Seattle, and is currently instructor of Evangelism and Missional Christianity at Dubuque Theological Seminary (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)).



The face of Christianity in the U.S. is becoming increasingly diverse. This Spanish-speaking Seventh Day Adventist Church is in New York's Lower East Side. Note the church's transport service.

While the percentage of Americans claiming to be Christian is dropping, Christianity in the U.S. is undergoing a number of dynamic and exciting changes. It is becoming more diverse and even global in its composition; Christian communities throughout the country can be found using the languages of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe. Leaders of those churches that are facing decline are looking for new ways to relate to the world. Ultimately, Christianity in the United States during the 21<sup>st</sup> century has the potential to unfold as a rich tapestry, comprised of many unique images that are both complementary and contradictory.

*Speaker Series continued from page 1.*

nature of the Orthodox Church, which has greatly contributed to its revival.

From 2009 until 2015, Kirstine Haglund was editor of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. In her work, she has tried to affirm the positive aspects of Mormonism while also providing a space to have difficult, yet important, conversations. In her presentation, Haglund discussed gender roles, race relations, and sexuality in ways generally not prescribed by church hierarchy, yet remained firm in her commitment to being a member of the LDS church. Students very much appreciated her candid approach to Mormonism as she described the many challenges the church has faced as an exclusivistic faith in a religiously pluralistic world. Yet, she also affirmed the church's sense of community and their deep desire to be a global faith rooted in the American context. She described the history of Mormonism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as focusing on the streamlining of leadership, authority, and doctrine, yet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the church is experiencing an "unwinding" of that authority as it absorbs vitality from the margins of the tradition, including listening to different perspectives on race, gender, and sexuality.

Brian Grim is a leading scholar on tracking trends in religious freedom in the contemporary world. He is president of the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation and has previously worked as Director of Cross-National Data and Senior Researcher in Religion and World Affairs at the Pew Research Center. Brian explained the differences between governmental restrictions on religion and social hostilities toward religion. He provided real examples of where religionists of all kinds face persecution in today's world: from being fired for wearing a small cross necklace in Britain to being charged with the death penalty for being an atheist in



Reaching out to new communities, St. Teresa's Catholic Church near New York's Chinatown now offers Masses in English, Chinese, and Spanish.

Indonesia. He further explained the connection between religious freedom and business—that religious freedom is good for business, and vice versa—and the possibilities that exist for big business in particular to strive toward bringing peace to peoples and cultures in conflict.

Dr. Robin Harris gave a brilliant lecture on the new and upcoming field of ethnodoxology. Harris—a former missionary, trained musician, and leading ethnodoxologist—used music clips from various cultures to shatter the myth that music is a “universal language.” Instead, she argues that while music is present in every culture, its meanings and moods are culture specific—different peoples have different “heart music.” Therefore, it is clear that ethnodoxology or “the study of the worship of God by peoples around the world” is increasingly important for understanding Global Christianity today. However, Harris also noted that ethnodoxology is not only an academic field of study, but a practical field dedicated to “encouraging all people to create in response to God's work in their lives.” It is not uncommon for groups of people to worship using Western or another majority group's forms. Ethnodoxologists help peoples to develop worship styles in which they feel “at home.” While ethnodoxology did grow out of the related field of ethnomusicology, it goes beyond music to include other forms of art such as visual art and dance. Harris' presentation was exceptional; using a multitude of audio-



### Upcoming events this summer:

American Society of Missiology's Annual Conference, *Missio-logoi: The Many Languages of Mission* on June 19-21, 2015 at Wheaton College.

Yale-Edinburgh Group's Annual Conference, *Religion and Religions in the History of Missions and World Christianity* on June 25-27, 2015 at Yale Divinity School.

### Events this fall:

CGCM and BU African Studies Center to co-sponsor a conference on African Christian Biography on October 29-31, 2015 at Boston University. Participants include Lamin Sanneh, Jacob Olupona, Richard Elphick, Philomena Mwaura, and many other leading scholars.

S. Lloyd edited this edition of the CGCM News. For more information about the center, visit our website [www.bu.edu/cgcm](http://www.bu.edu/cgcm) or write to [cgcm@bu.edu](mailto:cgcm@bu.edu).

Photographed above from left to right, Dana Robert, Xiyi Yao, Kirstine Haglund, Brad Gill and Robin Harris.

visual aids, she introduced her listeners to a dynamic field and provided information on numerous opportunities for further study.

Xiyi Yao, Professor of World Christianity and Asian Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, pushed students to consider the role of governments in the formation of world Christianity. Whereas in the United States the state is seen as a non-interfering presence in the life of Christian communities, Chinese Christianity cannot escape politics. In fact, politics defines Chinese Christianity. Protestants are classified into two groups: those who attend the state-sponsored churches and those who refuse. Professor Yao described how the role of the Chinese government in religious life creates a distinctive type of Christianity, or maybe two different Christianities. For, in the end, the view Chinese Christians have of the state is not only political; it is deeply theological.

Brad Gill, editor of the *International Journal of Frontier Mission*, spoke about frontier missiology: what it is and what it means for global Christianity. From an Evangelical perspective, he described the purpose of frontier mission to reach unreached people groups, which are ethno-linguistic groups that have little to no access to the gospel message. Gill challenged students to consider new expressions of Christianity that frontier missions have produced, such as "insider movements" within Islam and Hinduism, where former Muslims and Hindus remain in their home religious communities while still following Jesus. Students wrestled with where the boundaries of Christian identity are located, and new forms of ecclesiology that result from these new expressions.

CGCM director Dana Robert shared a glimpse into her latest historical research project, friendship as a global missional ethic. She described world Christianity in terms of its geographic expansion, cultural diversity, local/global intersections, and multi-cultural doxology. She argued that world Christianity is, in addition, a cross-cultural network of friendships. This perspective puts personal relationships at the center of the transmission of the faith across space and time, creating a global network that is also deeply personal. Laying out a historical and biblical basis for studying world Christianity through the lens of friendship, Robert offered an eschatological vision of community where cross-cultural and cross-racial friendships prefigure the already-not-yet kingdom of God.