Canadian Bibles impact Ethiopia

This past September Sharon Brandsma, a board member of Bible League Canada, visited Ethiopia to see firsthand the effects of her organization’s work. When she gave Bibles to Christians, she noticed that they often hugged them. “For them it was like getting an organ transplant,” she said. “It was a chance at [a] new life.” A sorcerer and witch doctor, who had intimidated many people in the area where he lived, became curious about Christianity, borrowed a Bible from a Christian evangelist, and read Matthew’s Gospel. Then Jesus appeared to him in a dream, and he accepted Jesus as his Savior. During 2013, more than 50,000 Ethiopians became Christians as a result of the work of Bible League Canada. —Christian Week

Christians can’t say “Allah”

In the predominantly Muslim country of Malaysia, it’s now illegal for Christians to use the word Allah when speaking about the God of the Bible, in spite of the fact that Christians throughout the Muslim world have been referring to their God as “Allah” for centuries. A Malaysian court ruled last October that the Catholic publication Herald is forbidden to use the word Allah. Technically all other Christians and Christian publications are allowed to say or write “Allah” when speaking of the God of the Bible, but that will probably change. Many Muslim scholars in other parts of the world have condemned the court’s ruling, and
the Herald’s editor plans to appeal the decision.—Reuters

**The benefit of persecution**

Christians in the West feel sad and alarmed at the persecution being perpetrated against their fellow Christians in certain parts of the Middle East and Asia. However, the United Bible Society (UBS) reports a positive trend: a dramatic increase in the distribution of Bibles. In Syria, more than eight times as many Bibles or portions of the Bible were distributed in 2012 than in 2011! The total for the year was 163,000. These Bibles are being distributed through a network of Christian volunteers. In Iraq, there was an increase of 57 percent in Scripture distribution in 2012 over 2011. And UBS is experiencing similar results in Egypt, India, Laos, and Nigeria.—Christian Today

**Clergy parsonage allowance challenged**

In the early years of U.S. history, churches provided pastors with a parsonage plus salary, and the pastor didn’t have to pay income tax on the rental value of the parsonage. However, as churches got out of the housing business, pastors had to buy or rent their homes, and the Internal Revenue Service allowed them to deduct the cost of maintaining a home from their income taxes. Recently, the Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation challenged that exemption in court and won. U.S. District Court Judge Barbara Crabb ruled that it violates the constitutional principle of church-state separation. However, she also granted a stay on her ruling’s enforcement pending challenges to higher courts.—Religion News Service

**Atheist-Christian billboards**

Christians and atheists duked it out on billboards in Janesville, Wisconsin, late last year. Atheist Wayne Hensler purchased space on a billboard that read, “Enjoy Life Now: There Is No Afterlife.” The sign identified the sponsor as the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Christians in Janesville responded by purchasing space on the same billboard that read, “Life is short. Eternity is not.—God.” The Christian sign was sponsored by Janesville’s Bethel Baptist and New Life Assembly of God Churches. The churches arranged for their sign to be put up immediately after the atheist sign expired in order to ensure that the atheist sign was still in people’s minds when they saw the new Christian sign.—Huffington Post, Christian Post

**Americans’ beliefs regarding creation and evolution**
That God created humans in their present form:
1993
47%
2005
45%
2012
46%

That humans evolved without God’s help:
1993
11%
2005
13%
2012
15%

Source: USA Today/Gallup poll, based on interviews with 1,012 adults, May 10–13, 2012.

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**As Quoted**

"It’s an embarrassment, it’s shameful, it’s not worthy of a great country like Malaysia. . . . We are laughing at you."

—American Muslim theologian Reza Aslan, commenting on the recent decision of a
Malaysian court that the Catholic newspaper Herald can’t use the name Allah when speaking of the God of Christians.—See news item above.

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