

The Year in Review: Top Spiritual Trends of 2010

God is working all around us today. Don't let negative headlines distract you from the real story.

2010 was a year of shaking. It began with a magnitude 7 earthquake in Haiti, followed by an 8.8 quake in Chile, followed by the eruption of the Iceland volcano that sent tons of ash into the skies over Europe and shut down air travel faster than you could say Eyjafjallajökull. While the ground shook, economies in Europe teetered. As floods displaced 13 million people in Pakistan, Americans worried that we might drown in federal debt.

There were plenty of negative headlines—which explains why one of the biggest movies of the year (Inception) was about a guy who escaped reality by dreaming. We had the BP oil spill, the WikiLeaks scandal, double-digit unemployment, and angry debates about Obamacare, illegal immigrants and full-body scanners. There were a few bright spots, especially in October when 33 Chilean miners climbed out of a dark shaft and donned T-shirts that read, “GRACIAS, SENOR!”

As I've pondered the events of 2010, I've realized that the most important trends are often not the most obvious. Mainstream media pays most attention to the wealthy, the famous and the powerful. But today's significant spiritual trends are linked to the nameless, faceless people who will never appear in the New York Times. Here's my list of 10 Most Significant Spiritual Events or Trends of 2010:

1. Haiti's earthquake triggered a wave of international relief. More than 230,000 people died in the Jan. 12 quake. A million were left homeless. But thousands were spared because brave Christians ventured into the disaster zone to bring

food, medicine and clothing, and to rebuild orphanages, clinics, churches and schools. Many relief agencies and churches are still working there to transform the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Compassion is alive and well.

2. The number of Muslims converting to Christianity increased. One mission worker announced in 2010 that more Muslims have come to faith in Jesus in the past 10 years than in the past 15 centuries. Radio, TV and Internet-based programming have been key in this wave of evangelism. Mission workers in the region say Muslims often embrace faith in Christ after having a spiritual dream. The underground Christian movement is especially strong in Iran, where youth are desperate for spiritual solutions to social and political problems.

3. The threat of Islam prompted a backlash. Switzerland banned minarets, and France and Belgium banned women from wearing full veils. Plans for an Islamic center near Ground Zero triggered a national outcry in the United States. Terry Jones, the pastor of a tiny church in Gainesville, Fla., announced he would burn copies of the Quran on the anniversary of 9/11. After religious, civic and military leaders reacted with disgust, Jones canceled the bonfire. (And we all sighed with relief, and prayed that Muslims would realize Jones wasn't speaking for all Christians.)

4. Christianity continued to grow in Asia. In 2010, China's economy grew to become the second largest in the world. Meanwhile a documentary filmed by charismatic evangelist Jaeson Ma showed that a New Testament-style spiritual revival is sweeping countries in Asia. The movie, 1040, reported that since the 1970s the number of Christians in China has grown from 1 million to at least 70 million. Ma says: "What's happening in Asia today is actually the greatest move of God in human history."

5. Persecution of Christians increased. At a conference sponsored by the European Parliament, researchers admitted that Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world. Human rights organizations revealed that between 200 and 230 million Christians face threats of murder, beatings, imprisonment and torture. They also stated that 75 percent of all religious persecution is aimed at Christians. This year, persecution of Iraqi Christians was intense. Even as President Obama pulled U.S. troops out of Iraq, Islamic radicals closed down churches there. The Open Doors organization says the “religicide” of Christians in Iraq today is similar to what happened to Iraqi Jews in 1941.

6. American megachurches grew in spite of economic recession. Although unemployment remains high, a report from the Leadership Network revealed that 81 percent of megachurches in this country are still growing—and meeting budgets. Only 4 percent of megachurches cut salaries in 2010. A growing number of the churches also reported that outreach to needy people is a budget priority. “The recession is helping us focus on what we really need and want to do,” said one Ohio pastor, David Fletcher, who was interviewed in the survey.

7. Younger Americans lost their faith. While a segment of charismatic youth are engaged in prayer and evangelism movements, such as the International House of Prayer or Campus Crusade for Christ, a large percentage of “millennials”—people born between 1980 and 2000—don’t consider religion important in their lives. A new book, *The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation*, says only 13 percent of people in this age category consider any form of spirituality to be meaningful. Hint: This must become a ministry priority for America’s churches.

8. Mainline denominations continued a downward slide. As Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Lutherans argued over the issue of gay clergy and gay marriage, their churches continued to empty. Lutherans who were upset over their 2009 vote (to

allow gay clergy) split from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to form dissident networks.

9. Scandals plagued high-profile charismatic ministries.

Bishop Eddie Long of Atlanta vowed to fight accusations from four men who claimed he had sexual relationships with them. A few miles away in Conyers, Ga., charismatic pastor Jim Swilley announced he is gay but vowed to remain pastor of Church in the Now. Benny Hinn's wife, Suzanne, filed for divorce in February. In the midst of the turmoil, charismatic leaders distanced themselves from the flashy, money-focused message of the past and emphasized the importance of accountability and integrity.

10. Evangelical church-planting movements grew. Francis Chan, pastor of 4,000-member Cornerstone Church in Simi Valley, Calif., and author of the popular books *Crazy Love* and *Forgotten God*, stepped down from his prominent pulpit to plant a church in an undisclosed location in Asia. Chan's decision reflects a quiet but significant trend: Many Christian leaders are engaging in brave church-planting efforts, and a refreshing apostolic spirit is on the rise. The trend is obvious in some older Pentecostal denominations (Foursquare, Pentecostal Holiness) as well as among newer networks such as the Alabama-based Association of Related Churches, or "ARC." Since 2001, when ARC began, its leaders have planted almost 200 churches in 36 states—and ARC now gives more than \$8 million to missions around the world.

Please don't let the headlines distract you from the real story. God is working all around us. I invite you to join Him!

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