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Bold predictions for the biggest religion news stories of 2014

by Bill Tammeus

A small c catholic

Because the Bible instructs us not to hide our talents under a bushel basket, I will be obedient by offering you a peek into what's coming in 2014.

I am able to do this because of my prodigious talent for prognostication in the field of faith. I acquired this skill on the Internet from a prophet-making organization that was sliding into drankruptcy, an economic catastrophe that happens when the CEO makes critical decisions while intoxicated.

The online source of my astonishing powers of prediction may cause you to doubt the reliability of my forecasts. That's understandable, but fear not, as angels learn to say on their first day at angel school. My reputation as a trustworthy forecaster is so widespread that when I go on a cruise, I am inevitably assigned a cabin in seerage.

In fact, if you will save this column for a year and check up on my accuracy, you almost certainly will say this, perhaps even aloud: "You know, of all the prediction columns I've ever read, this is one of them."

OK. Let the soothsaying begin. In 2014:

- Pope Francis will order the Vatican bank to open walk-through facilities at its many third-world branches for people too poor to own cars and avail themselves of the drive-thru windows.
- The 349 churches belonging to the World Council of Churches will surprise the world by going against the Protestant history of division upon division upon division and merge into one giant denomination. Get ready for Google Faith, partly owned by Warren Buffett.
- The person who dreamed up the 2013 name Thanksgivukkah, referring to the fact that the start of

Hanukkah coincided with Thanksgiving, will be properly reprimanded and advised not to dip into the portmanteau word creation business again. Leave that to me, the creator of jackassembly, a clear reference to Congress.

- The name of the church liturgical season of Lent will be changed from past tense to present and become Lend. No explanation will be given.
- Among newly published English translations of the Bible will be: *The Bible for the Spiritual but not Religious* and *Praying with the Stars: The Bible Paris Hilton Would Read if She Could Read*.
- Pilgrims from around the globe will gather in Irondequoit, N.Y., outside of Rochester after two witnesses reveal that they can see an image of Cardinal Timothy Dolan and Stephen Colbert together on a water tower there.
- Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI will release the next in his series of books about Jesus. This one will be *The Lord Describes What Pope Francis Is Getting Wrong, as Told to an Unnamed Former Pope*.
- The latest English translation of the Roman missal will be abandoned after much controversy about it. But the replacement will not be in English at all. Rather, it will be in Aramaic because that's the language Jesus spoke. Two months into it, the cry of "*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani*" will be heard across the English-speaking Catholic world.
- The percentage of Americans who still believe President Barack Obama is a Muslim will fall dramatically when it's revealed that American Muslims are signing up for Obamacare at a much lower rate than members of any other religious group. In fact, only one Muslim will be signed up by the end of 2014, and he will have managed to do it by hacking into HealthCare.gov from his cell at Guantanamo.
- Catholic-Orthodox reunification talks will bog down when the Greek Orthodox delegation insists that the name of the headquarters of the combined faith become Vaticanopolous.
- Several of the televangelists pushing the "Prosperity Gospel" will become insolvent.

Well, there is much more heading our way in 2014. This is just a small taste of the excitement ahead. But I'll end with one final prediction: At least one real religious news story next year will turn out to be crazier than any of the ones I've forecast. Bank on it.

[Bill Tammeus, a Presbyterian elder and former award-winning faith columnist for *The Kansas City Star*, writes the daily "Faith Matters" blog for the *Star's* website and a monthly column for *The Presbyterian Outlook*. His latest book, co-authored with Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, is *They Were Just People: Stories of Rescue in Poland During the Holocaust*. Email him at wtammeus@gmail.com.]

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