

Seven Key Trends in the Church Today

by Jack Wintz, O.F.M. 1998

Lay ministry explosion

A familiar scene today in Catholic parishes is that of lay women and men gathered around the altar at Communion time as extraordinary Eucharistic ministers. Also observable at Mass are other lay ministers—servers, lectors and music ministers.

These very visible liturgical ministers are but a reminder of the even wider variety of lay men and women who minister and serve the Church as catechists, youth ministers, hospital chaplains, members of bereavement committees, lay administrators of priestless parishes, outreach workers distributing food to the poor.

Behind this multiplication of lay ministries within the Church is the growing awareness that all Catholics are called by their Baptism to engage in ministry or service to the Catholic community and, indeed, to the world at large.

Though the distinct role of the ordained minister is not diminished by the expansion of lay ministries, the Holy Spirit is clearly leading us to a "more inclusive" model of Church. Women are certainly among those becoming more and more engaged in Church ministry today. Most women believe that their potential has not yet been fully tapped. What full ministry for women should mean in the future is a sensitive question seeking further discernment under the light of the Spirit.

Other groups awaiting fuller participation in the Church are ethnic minorities, Catholics with disabilities and many other groups whose gifts have not been fully respected or utilized.

Enriched liturgies

The liturgical renewal that swept across most parts of the Catholic world after Vatican II has brought new life and vigor to the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments in the majority of our parishes. With the new sacramental rites initiated by Vatican II and the replacement of Latin with the local languages, Catholics are generally participating more fully, actively and joyfully in these rituals.

In the era before Vatican II, the priest celebrated the Mass in Latin. For the most part, his back was to the people and the altar seemed far away. Although the style of liturgy conveyed a rich sense of awe then, it was easier for the faithful to fall into the role of silent spectators.

Now it is much easier for the assembly to be more actively engaged and to see that "all of us" are truly celebrating the Eucharist along with the priest.

Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* supported this development, urging "that all the faithful be led to...full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations" (#14).

Following the lead of Vatican II, the Church has also been stressing the communal dimension of the sacraments, seeing them not as private rituals but as "community events."

The RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) is one of the most dramatic signs of this new approach to the sacraments and to liturgical renewal in the contemporary Church. Before the RCIA was reestablished in the Church in 1972 (appearing in English in 1974), the typical approach to adult Baptism in the Catholic Church left the candidates quite isolated from the parish community.

Preparation often consisted of six or so weeks of priestly instructions followed by a more or less private Baptism on a Sunday afternoon in a dim corner of the church, attended only by a tiny cluster of relatives or friends.

Today, candidates for the RCIA become part of a step-by-step process that often extends beyond a year and involves sponsors, catechists and, indeed, the whole parish. It culminates in a public initiation ceremony at the Easter Vigil. This spirit of communal involvement is reflected in the other sacraments as well.

Love of Scripture

In recent decades, the Church has encouraged its members to cherish the Scriptures and to make use of new methods of Scripture study. These attitudes were reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council and subsequent Church documents.

More and more Catholics are learning to improve their understanding of the Bible through the benefits of historical research, literary analysis and the findings of archaeology. Church documents have wisely steered Catholics away from literal-minded approaches and from reading the Bible as if it were a scientific textbook on the origins of the universe.

In short, more Catholics are reading the Bible today—and with a more solid understanding—than at any other time in its 2000-year history. More educated in general, the laity are getting a deeper grounding in Scripture. Lay women and men in growing numbers are attending theology schools, joining Scripture study groups or reading an ever-expanding array of good articles or books on the subject. No longer are priests and religious the only scriptural experts.

It should also be noted that since Vatican II, Catholics have been exposed to a much wider variety of Scripture readings at Sunday Mass through the introduction of a three-year cycle of readings. In other sacramental rites as well, the use of scriptural readings has been enhanced.

As more and more Catholics are richly nourished by the life-giving word of God, they become better instruments of evangelization and of the world's transformation.

Hunger for God

Despite the pervasive secularism and materialism of our times—and maybe because of them—many people today are hungering and searching for something more profound, for something spiritual or transcendent. There is a movement toward prayer and contemplation.

At *Catholic Update* we have seen that during the seasons of Lent and Advent there is an unmistakable appetite for aids to daily prayer, for *Updates* that nurture spiritual growth. There is a need to get away from the rat race and the media bombardment and to withdraw to the quiet places of the heart where contemplation is possible.

Many people today from all walks of life are seeking a closer union with God, perhaps by learning the art of centering prayer or other meditation skills. I know from experience that there is a long waiting list for people who want to make a retreat at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky. Students at St. Bonaventure University in southwestern New York go regularly for contemplative weekends to Mt. Irenaeus, a Franciscan mountaintop retreat run by the friars of the university.

Many Catholics say they have as much a need to deepen their relationship with God as to learn about a Church doctrine or point of morality or liturgical innovation. More than information about God, these Christians want an *experience* of God through prayer.

Broader view of salvation

One of the most warmly received notions coming out of Vatican II is that salvation is not solely concerned with the saving of souls but with the saving of the whole human person, body and soul, and all of creation as well.

Many find this holistic view of salvation appealing because we naturally do not want any genuine part of our human experience to be lost. The famous formula of St. Irenaeus, often quoted at the time of the Second Vatican Council, captures this notion well: "The glory of God is the human person fully alive!"

We began seeing more clearly in the Gospels that Jesus' mission on this earth was not only to set the human heart free from sin, as central as that might be, but also to set men and women free from disease and oppression and everything that hinders their development as human beings created by God and destined for eternal life. When we profess our belief in the resurrection of the body, this kind of integral salvation is implied.

The bishops of Vatican II, in *The Church in the Modern World*, tried to foster an intimate bond between the yearnings of the Church and those of all humanity. This great document begins with the words: "The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts."

Pope John Paul II expressed this attitude very powerfully during his first visit as pope to the United States in October of 1979. His very first words in Boston, his first stop, were: "I want to greet all Americans without distinction. I want to tell everyone that the pope is your friend and a servant of your humanity."

Every authentic dimension of human existence is meant to be saved and brought to wholeness. As the pope's words suggest, we are to help all brothers and sisters come to their full humanity as men and women created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by Christ.

Rise of the social gospel

In 1983 the bishops of the United States issued a pastoral letter on war and peace entitled *The Challenge of Peace*. In it they discussed the morality of war and of nuclear weapons. In 1986 they issued another major pastoral letter on the U.S. economy to help Catholics form their conscience on economic matters.

The bishops have published many other statements touching on political and social issues. Increasingly, these statements are being read by conscientious Catholics. When *Catholic Update* published condensed versions of the peace pastoral and the economic pastoral, requests poured in for more than a million extra copies in each instance. This is a clear sign that Catholics today are attuned to Catholic social teaching and to what is called the "social gospel."

Some sectors of the Christian community, however, are not always comfortable with the Church's involvement in public issues of this kind. They sometimes criticize the Church for "meddling in politics." Perhaps, as Catholics, we need a better understanding of the true nature of Jesus' saving mission (as conveyed in trend five above). On the whole, however, today's Catholics are coming to see that the mission of the Church is to heal unjust political structures and laws as well as unjust hearts.

Martin Luther King, Jr., once shed light on this point during a civil-rights speech in 1964. He said: "The law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me!" King helped his generation to see that Christian evangelization seeks to transform not only sinful hearts but also the sinful laws and customs of society that oppress and dehumanize our sisters and brothers.

This way of thinking was officially adopted by the World Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome in 1971. In their statement *Justice in the World*, the bishops declared: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as an essential dimension of preaching the gospel."

Catholic social teaching reminds us that it is not sufficient to passively await the arrival of God's final Kingdom in the next life where all tears and oppression will be wiped away. Awaiting the final Kingdom is very important, but we are also called to help make that Kingdom present *now*, by working as God's instruments to remove injustice, discrimination, poverty, disease from our midst.

Integration and new growth

What is happening today in our Church as we start entering a new millennium? We seem like passengers in an airplane circling the airport in a holding pattern waiting for the weather to clear so we can see where we will ultimately land. What happened to the fast rate of change we experienced in those first years after the Council?

The pace has certainly slowed down a bit. The Vatican and the world's bishops seem to have decided that the Church needs to take a break after so much turbulence and change. However one explains it, we seem to find ourselves in a process of consolidation and integration, as if taking stock of where we are.

Perhaps the Church can be compared to an individual going through an identity crisis or a time of confusing personal change. Such individuals need time to reflect and get their act together before moving on. Maybe the Church leaders sensed that it was time for the whole Church to catch up with itself—to step back a bit and to put all the pieces of our fragmented vision into a new whole. To some degree, this need was satisfied when the bishops put together the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published in 1992 (appearing in English in 1994).

For many Catholics around the world who were asking "What is happening to us and to our identity?" the publication of the new catechism was like holding up a mirror for us and showing us a safe, orderly reflection of who we are. It helped us as a Church to understand where we were at this point in our journey, shoring up our sense of self and giving us strength for our next stage of growth and a new flowering of the gospel. At the same time, a number of Catholics, including theologians, are not convinced that the full brunt and scope of Vatican II teachings have been adequately reflected in the catechism.

According to Pope John Paul II, the new catechism has given us a "new synthesis" of the "richness of the teaching of the Church following the Second Vatican Council" (*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 164). Catholics agree by and large that the catechism is a valuable resource for the Church and for religious educators today. Surely, it has helped the Church integrate insights from Vatican II with traditional Catholic teaching.

Other theologians and religious educators are also helping the Church put the teachings of Catholicism (those before, during and after the Council) into a comprehensive system. In its own way, I believe, the *Catholic Update* series has been helping Catholics understand how the teachings of the Church have been enriched by insights of Vatican II.

But no matter how carefully we try to put all the truths of the Church into an orderly arrangement, we know that we must remain open to new questions needing new answers and to new challenges of growth from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, we have been taught, is like the wind. It cannot be boxed in or held in place. We have no idea when the Holy Spirit might tap some new follower of Christ on the shoulder, as happened to Pope John XXIII, and say, "Brother John or Sister Joan, it's time to open more windows; get ready for another Pentecost!"

Jack Wintz, O.F.M., in *Catholic Update*

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Ten Major Trends Facing the Church [Howard A. Snyder and Daniel V. Runyon]

What major trends will shape the church's life and witness over the next fifty years? Out of curiosity, we decided to find out by polling a number of knowledgeable church leaders as to their perceptions. Using an initial survey and a follow-up, we elicited "trends perceptions" from more than fifty denominational leaders, evangelists, educators, missionaries, writers, and others. Our sample represents a spectrum of theological and ecclesiastical perspectives and gives their perceptions and ranking of major trends in the church, or trends in the world affecting the church. Most respondents were North Americans, but we chose people with a broad knowledge of the international scene.

While this methodology is somewhat impressionistic, still it gives a fascinating and useful reading on perceived trends and on the issues with which church leaders will be dealing. We compiled the ten leading trends, researched them, and did sense analysis in light of the church's life and mission. The results have been published in *Foresight: Ten Major Trends That Will Dramatically Affect the Future of Christians and the Church*. This article condenses the major points from the book. We have defined the ten major trends as follows:

1. From regional churches to world Church.
2. From scattered growth to broad revival.
3. From Communist China to Christian China.
4. From institutional tradition to kingdom theology.
5. From clergy/laity to community of ministers.
6. From male leadership to male-female partnership.
7. From secularization to religious relativism.
8. From nuclear family to family diversity.
9. From church/state separation to Christian political activism.
10. From safe planet to threatened planet.

It will be soon immediately that this profile of trends varies markedly from recent trends discussions in Christianity Today and else where. The major reason, we think, is that we have tried to take into consideration the world scene, not just North America. And in that perspective, it seems clear that the most dominant, shaping trend is what might be called the new internationalization of the church--the emergence of the world church.

From Regional Churches to World Church

The church has always considered itself "universal," but today this is empirically true as never before. In the nineteen centuries following the resurrection of Jesus, Christianity grew to embrace One-third of all humanity--yet more than 80

percent of these were whites. In the twentieth century Christianity has become a global faith; the most universal religion in history. The Church is said to be growing at the rate of some sixty-five new churches daily, mostly in the populous, poorer nations of the southern hemisphere. Today Christians number about one-third of all humanity and more than half the population in two-thirds of the world's 223 nations. The Christian church has become an amalgam of the world's races and peoples, with whites dropping from more than 90 percent to about 40 percent.

This new internationalization of the church is producing a historic revolution: a shift of the church's "center of gravity" from the North and West (mainly Europe and North America) to the so-called two-thirds world. In 1900 the northern hemisphere counted some 462 million Christians, 83 percent of the world total, while the South had about 96 million Christians, or 17 percent of the total. By 1961, the church in the South had grown to 700 million, nearly half of the world total. Today the church of the historically "Christian" nations is probably the minority church worldwide.

What does this mean for the future? We shall likely see a world church emerge that is much more diverse ethnically and culturally; exhibits a greater mutual respect for the leadership, styles, ministries, and traditions of other Christian believers; is increasingly urban; and ministers more intentionally to the poor, oppressed, and suffering.

From Scattered Growth to Broad Revival

New hope for revival in North America is being sparked by rapid church growth in places like South Korea and Central Africa. The United States is seeing a dramatic increase in religious education programs, Bible studies, evangelization programs, and other religious activities outside formal worship.

This continues a 200-year-old trend. In 1776 only 7 percent of United States citizens were church members. This figure rose to 20 percent by 1850, to 36 percent by 1900, and in 1976 approached 60 percent. These statistics may merely indicate that the church is simply getting fatter, not healthier. But many people anticipate a deep and genuine movement of renewal centered in a "third wave" of charismatic renewal, renewal in mainline denominations, resurgence of the Roman Catholic Church, and new dialogue among Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians. The growth of house churches and of "power evangelism" churches may be part of a new wave of revival.

Now that the world has become one global, interconnected communications network, the unprecedented Christian growth worldwide is bound to have an impact in the traditionally Christian lands of North America and Europe.

From Communist China to Christian China

The Christian church has come alive powerfully in China. While no one knows for sure how large the church has grown, the China Church Research Center in Hong Kong estimates 30 million Christians, or 50 million if border regions and secret believers are included. Dr. James Hudson Taylor leans toward the 50 million estimate, about 5 percent of the population and more than fifty times the number of believers thirty-five years ago when missionaries were expelled by the communist revolution. Others put the size of the current renewal much less.

Today the Chinese church exists in three main groups: a somewhat fragmented Roman Catholicism, the officially recognized Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and the house churches growing in the populous non-urban areas. The success of widespread lay leadership and house churches or other small groups suggests that the contemporary renewal in China is among the great Christian movements in history--especially considering the sheer numbers involved.

The resurgence of Chinese Christianity is likely to impact world Christianity in several ways. The Chinese church may provide sources of major new vitality, leadership, and structural forms for the church worldwide. Chinese Christianity will also enrich the theology and self-understanding of the world church. Historically the church has been dominated by Greek, Roman, European, and North American cultural and thought forms. We have yet to discover what the impact will be of a new and dynamic church rooted in one of the oldest and culturally richest societies on earth.

From Institutional Tradition to Kingdom Theology

A world church touched by renewal will require a global theology. Such a theology seems to be coalescing around themes of the reign or rule of God, stressing God's sovereign direction, despite and through human agency, in the course of world history. The kingdom theme is receiving increasing attention in conferences, journals, and book publishing.

Pressures for a new "world theology" that expands the way Christians understand the universe and their role in it are coming from several sources. The most important of these are internal, arising from the three trends previously mentioned. Others are external, arising from economic, social, scientific, and political developments now shaping the world.

Increasingly, Christian thinkers are pointing out that the kingdom of God was prominent in Jesus' preaching and is a central category unifying biblical revelation. Kingdom theology speaks of justice in economic, political, and social relationships, and ecological harmony and balance throughout the creation. God as supreme Ruler and Friend of all will be worshiped and glorified by the whole creation. Biblically, this is not an otherworldly, disembodied, non-historical realm of existence. Rather, it is something sufficiently like present experience that human bodies will be resurrected to be a part of it. Kingdom theology foresees not the total destruction of this world but its liberation (Rom. 8:21) through a process of death and resurrection.

Such a theology has wide-ranging implications for all areas of the church's life, including worship, the church's internal community life, its witness through evangelism and justice ministries, and its relationship to political powers.

From Clergy/Laity to Community of Ministers

A new model of pastoral leadership appears to be emerging, which will produce a very different kind of church in the future. The New Testament pattern of each congregation being led by a team of spiritually mature leaders is receiving new emphasis. A long-term trend toward plural leadership and the New Testament "equipping" model of pastoring may be underway, especially outside the United States. The evidence is spotty here so far, but this is an area that bears watching.

The equipping model, based on Ephesians 4:11-12, stresses the primary function of nurturing and leading the congregation so that each believer grows and finds his or her unique function and ministry within the body. This model may be carried out through a range of possible culturally viable patterns. Its main principles include (1) plurality or team leadership, (2) mutuality and consensus decision-making among the leaders, rather than top-down authority, and (3) a primary focus on enabling all believers for their particular gift ministries and spiritual priesthood.

If the equipping model is adopted broadly, some anticipated results could be a greater emphasis on and practice of the priesthood of believers, the emergence of alternative forms of pastoral training and seine reformulation of seminary curricula, and a more organic integration of a wide range of ministries.

From Male Leadership to Male/Female Partnership

In the last decade the North American church turned a historic and probably irreversible corner with a shift toward women as pastoral leaders on a par with men. In 1970 only 2 percent of United States pastors were women. That doubled by 1984 to 4 percent--still small, but continuing to grow annually. The number of women in seminary jumped 223 percent from 1972 to 1980, compared to a 31 percent increase in male enrollment. By 1990 one-fourth or more of all ordination-track seminarians in several United States denominations were women (this was true in the American Baptist, Lutheran Church in America, United Methodist, United Presbyterian, and Episcopal churches). We estimate that by the year 2000 approximately 20 to 25 percent of pastors in the United States will be women, with the total possibly approaching 50 percent by the middle of the next century.

Women already comprise a significant minority of ordained pastors in many church bodies. By 1985, 10 percent of all Disciples of Christ pastors were women. The figure was 12 percent in the United Church of Christ, 7 percent in the Episcopal Church, 5 percent among United Methodists, and 6 percent among Presbyterians. In Pentecostal groups, 17 percent of all pastors are women in the Pentecostal Holiness Church, 12 percent in the Church of God in Christ, and 11 percent in the Assemblies of God. One-third of female ordinations reportedly occur in Pentecostal churches.

The implications of this trend include the following:

The definition of the pastoral role will probably become broader and more flexible as women bring more variety, fresh ideas, differing perspectives, and a broader range of leadership styles into church leadership.

The emphasis on community, informality, and nurture in the church will be enhanced.

Theologically and conceptually, more women in church leadership will increase the tendency toward organic and ecological models of the world and the church.

More women in ministry may augment the trend toward "lay" ministry and the equipping of all believers.

From Secularization to Religious Relativism

The church has always faced the problem of how to be in the world yet not of it. But secularization comes in waves. Today the church faces a tidal wave, with many Christians in North America and Western Europe accommodating to values shaped more by the world than by biblical faith. Surveys show little difference between the views and behaviors of those who claim to be committed Christians and those who don't.

In the last fifty years United States attitudes have largely changed from the survival mentality of the Great Depression to a drive toward self-identity and recognition as persons. Yet the understanding of the road to success hasn't changed. The survivor of the depression sought security through good pay and financial stability. The modern "identity achiever" still follows the materialistic route to reach his or her objective.

According to Barna and McKay, Christians are no different from the larger population in this regard.

Rather than adhering to a Christian philosophy of life that is occasionally tarnished by lapse into infidelity, many Christians are profoundly secularized, and only occasionally do they respond to conditions and situations in a Christian manner. Recent research shows that many Christians are especially vulnerable to the worldly philosophies of materialism, humanism, and hedonism.¹

From Nuclear Family to Family Diversity

The traditional North American church has been ambushed by cultural diversity, especially in family lifestyles. By and large, white Protestant churches still assume the importance of the nuclear family (two parents, two or more children), when in fact very often that's not the primary clientele they deal with, especially in cities.

The "typical family" is almost extinct. Only 7 percent of the North American population fits the traditional profile of father as breadwinner and mother taking care of the home and two or three children. Demographers count as many as thirteen separate types of households, and these are rapidly eclipsing the conventional family pattern.

Some of the multiple forms of people living together are morally unacceptable to Christians, but many are morally neutral. Diversity and homogeneity both have their place, in society as well as in the church where there are "many members but one body." Single households, extended families, and shared households are viable Christian options.

The challenge for the church will be to minister to this diversity without compromising the gospel.

From Church/State Separation to Christian Political Activism

In the 1980s Christians in North America entered a new phase of political involvement. The religious right, increased political activism by fundamentalists and evangelicals, and the growing number of theologically conservative Christians holding public office reflect what appears to be a new trend. Meanwhile, the "people power" revolution of Corazon Aquino in the Philippines, where the Roman Catholic Church played a key role, reveals other dimensions of Christian political activism.

Conflicting views of church and state have been with us down through church history. At one level the struggle has been between the legitimate claims and powers of political and religious authority; at another the question is how to achieve a balance between spirituality and social and political involvement. In their quest for the spiritual, monks and mystics through the ages attempted to transcend not only human affairs but the material world itself. In contrast the Roman emperor Constantine became a Christian and saw no conflict in attempting to Christianize secular government (and in the process substantially politicized the church).

Earlier in the twentieth century conservative Protestantism, especially, tended to drive a wedge between religious experience and matters of economics and public policy. Adherents often turned inward, sharply dividing the spiritual and material realms. Yet the trend today is toward political involvement. The most visible example is the new right. While most media attention has focused on such conservative new-right groups as the Moral Majority, not all Christian political efforts are on the side of political conservatism. Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) is a broadly based coalition working for greater sensitivity and activism on issues of social justice, poverty, and international peace. ESA is organizing local chapters across the country. Bread for the World, another primarily Christian organization, lobbies for legislation and policies that will provide adequate food for the world's peoples. Sojourners magazine and the Sojourners community agitate for international justice and promote a new abolitionism against nuclear weapons. And in 1986 a new broad-based political action committee, Justlife, was formed to advocate a "consistent pro-life stance," particularly on the issues of poverty, abortion, and the nuclear-arms race.

As Christian political involvement expands to include far reaching issues such as foreign polity and the earth's resources, a crucial question is whether or not Christians can distinguish between kingdom priorities and narrowly nationalistic interests. This applies certainly to North American believers, but equally to Christians in places like South Africa, Lebanon, and Taiwan. The issue can be boiled down to this simple question: Will tomorrow's Christians be able to see, and persuade others to see, that the priorities of God's kingdom are ultimately more in one's own national interests than are narrower self-serving aims?

From Safe Planet to Threatened Planet

Three major world realities are shaping a new and volatile situation for the church. They are so basic and potentially dangerous that together they constitute a world of mega-dangers for all earth's peoples. These realities are (1) the widening gap between rich and poor, (2) our threatened ecosphere, and (3) the dangers of nuclear armaments.

One need not be a prophet to see that eco-crisis and nuclear terror in a world increasingly split between rich and poor, yet intimately linked by radio and television, could easily add up to a recipe for global conclusions as devastating as any world war—Three issues present not a scenario for despair but simply the dimensions of the challenge we face. Europe survived the Black Death of the fourteenth century, though in many places half the population died. Floods, earthquakes, disease, and wars have threatened major parts of the globe in the past and will do so again. Today's issues, however, are unprecedented in their scope and reach, and in the way they interact and touch the very fabric of life for all earth's peoples.

From a Christian standpoint, these issues caution us against triumphalism or an easy optimism. Human sin is still with us, not only in each individual and group, but cumulatively, clogging the structures of our social and environmental systems. As we move into the twenty-first century, the world is one family at war with itself and threatening to poison or explode its own home.

Conclusion

Where does all this leave the church? First of all, these and related trends will require much more study and analysis. Some are clear and empirically validated; others are more questionable and may clash with significant countertrends. But all represent areas of ferment or challenge for the church.

In our book we have reviewed these trends in light of John Naisbitt's Megatrends and have suggested possible long-range implications. In the conclusion we suggest four possible "alternative futures" for the church and society: friendly fascism, Armageddon, nuclear terrorism, and world revival. We stress that any of these scenarios is possible, in whole or in part, or possibly in combination or sequence.

The future rests on the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the church and, finally, on God's sovereign activity. We hope that some attention to actual and potential trends will aid Christians in sorting out the challenges they face and responding faithfully to the good news of the kingdom.

Trends Don't Create Values, Says Pope

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 17, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The hierarchy of values isn't determined by either trends or politicians, said Benedict XVI. The Church the need "to protect the hierarchy of just values, without bending to the trend of the moment, or to the unjust demands of political power." "The authentic hierarchy of values, does not come from the

emperors of yesterday or today, but from Jesus Christ, the perfect man, equal to the Father in divinity, but at the same time a man like us.

MEMBERS PER 1,000 UNITED STATES POPULATION

Church	1960		2002-4		Change	Rank
	Members per 1,000 Population	Rank	Members per 1,000 Population	Rank		
African Methodist Episcopal Church	6.5	16	8.7	10	34.0%	2
American Baptist Churches in the USA	8.5	13	5.0	14	-41.1%	9
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	10.0	12	2.7	16	-72.7%	16
Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)	8.3	14	19.4	4	135.4%	1
Churches of Christ	12.0	10	5.2	12	-56.7%	13
Episcopal Church	19.1	7	8.1	11	-57.9%	14
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	29.4	4	17.3	6	-41.2%	10
Greek Orthodox of North and South America	6.7	15	5.2	12	-21.9%	6
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod	13.3	9	8.7	9	-34.3%	7
National Baptist Convention of America	14.8	8	12.2	7	-18.0%	5
National Baptist Convention USA	29.2	5	17.4	5	-40.5%	8
Presbyterian Church (USA)	22.8	6	11.3	8	-50.7%	11
Roman Catholic Church	233.9	1	230.6	1	-1.4%	4
Southern Baptist Convention	54.1	3	56.4	2	4.4%	3
United Church of Christ	11.2	11	4.5	15	-59.9%	15
United Methodist Church	60.0	2	28.7	3	-52.2%	12

US CHURCH MEMBERSHIP (In Millions)

Church	1960		2002-4		Change	Rank
	Membership	Rank	Membership	Rank		
African Methodist Episcopal Church	1,166	16	2,500	10	114.4%	2
American Baptist Churches in the USA	1,521	13	1,434	14	-5.7%	9
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	1,801	12	786	16	-56.4%	16
J Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)	1,487	14	5,599	4	276.5%	1
Churches of Christ	2,163	10	1,500	12	-30.7%	13
Episcopal Church	3,444	7	2,320	11	-32.6%	14
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	5,300	4	4,985	6	-5.9%	10
Greek Orthodox North & South America	1,200	15	1,500	12	25.0%	6
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod	2,391	9	2,513	9	5.1%	7
National Baptist Convention of America	2,669	8	3,500	7	31.1%	5
National Baptist Convention USA	5,256	5	5,000	5	-4.9%	8
Presbyterian Church (USA)	4,108	6	3,241	8	-21.1%	11
Roman Catholic Church	42,105	1	66,407	1	57.7%	4
Southern Baptist Convention	9,732	3	16,248	2	67.0%	3
United Church of Christ	2,022	11	1,297	15	-35.9%	15
United Methodist Church	10,798	2	8,251	3	-23.6%	12