

## **An Analysis Of Major Trends Affecting The Catholic Church**

1. The Catholic Church started in America during the time of the Reformation. Christianity was divided in Europe. That has tremendous impact upon Christianity in America, although Christopher Columbus, Vasco Dagama, Father Junipero Serra, and many of the early explorers were Catholic. The onslaught of non-Catholic Christians poured into America as well.
2. The founding fathers therefore, were mostly non-Catholic Christians, but they were Christians and they set this nation upon a tripod (1) the laws of Nature, (2) the Bible, and (3) a God-given inalienable dignity and right to life of every citizen. We were a nation not only under God, but under Christ. "The laws and institutions of this nation must necessarily embody the life and teachings of the Redeemer of Mankind. It is impossible it should be otherwise." (Supreme Court 1892)
3. There has always been tension between Catholicism and Protestantism in this country. In the 1890's for example, Irish farmers literally protected their Churches from burning with pitchforks.
4. In 1917, our Blessed Mother warned us that if we did not return to her Son, there would be the rise of an Atheistic system known as Communism and also a second world war, worse than the first. That war began for us Americans on her feast day, December 8, 1941 and ended on her feast day August 15, 1945. Many social changes in American life happened because of the war. With it, began the first wave of a permissive sexual revolution.
5. The Golden Age of Modern American Catholicism (1945-1960). During the cold war, Catholicism entered a golden age. Movies, for example, portrayed the Church and the priesthood and the sisters in a glowing way. For three consecutive years, 1943, 1944, 1945, the "Song of Bernadette, " "Going My Way," "The Bells of St. Mary's, "The Keys to the Kingdom" were nominated for 34 Oscars and won 12. Spencer Tracy as Father Flannagan of "Boy's Town," Bing Crosby as Fr. Chuck O'Malley in "Going My Way," Karl Malden, as a labor priest in "On the Waterfront" William Gargan as a compassionate priest in "You Only Live Once" and Pat O'Brien in "San Francisco" produced the image of the priest as wise, manly, good-humored, and compassionate. There was not a single World War II movie where the battlefield chaplain was not a Catholic priest. Bishop Fulton Sheen with a peak audience of 30 million was the darling of radio and television. Father Keller of The Christophers ("It is better to light one candle.") and Father Patrick Payton with his Rosary Crusades, ("The family that prays together stays together.") enhanced the image of the Church and many Catholic movie stars appeared on television for them.
6. The Terrible 60's. Beginning with the 1960's, with the explicit taking of prayer out

of public schools, there began a great sociological decline. Within a generation we saw the rise of the Beatles, and the infamous Roe v. Wade decision that ushered abortion on demand into our culture, and secular humanism became the new religion of the media.

7. With the Vietnam War, Woodstock, the Beatles, and the rise of the rock and roll era there was a growing tendency to mistrust authority. The lies of Vietnam led to the shameless acts of the Clinton Administration, the distrust of government ran from scandals in the military, the downfall of the FBI at Waco, and on through the public admissions of greed and harassment of citizens by the IRS. It was evident in the overall disgust of law, especially after the O.J. Simpson trial, as well as the decline of morals on college campuses. There was a growing cynicism on the part of many women concerning the institution of marriage when divorce and abortion became prevalent.
8. The Catholic Church was also undermined as many Catholics spoke disdainfully of the "institutional Church." Criticism, dissent, especially after the Encyclical Humanae Vitae (concerning artificial birth control) scandals, pedophile priests, clergy resignations, and some well publicized bad decisions, have added to the demise of the Church.
9. The Rise Of Corporate Capitalism. Whatever benefit capitalism has brought to our country, it cannot be denied it has done great harm to the fabric of the family and community. Many people were uprooted from their family backgrounds with the introduction of suburbia, and the high mobility that capitalism demands, divorce and fragmentation of families spread. Furthermore the success and complete dominance of world wide corporations have smothered local ethnic and religious groups. Although there are some good programming on television, in the end, both good and bad programs are identical in this respect: They are brought to us by companies trying to sell things. And materialism became the new purpose of life.
10. Modern science with its emphasis on evolution and its apparent ability to explain away miracles became another serious challenge and the new technology can not only clone animals, but apparently human babies as well. A new psychology replaced spirituality making sin obsolete. Now accordingly there are only early traumas, road rage, suppression, victim-hood and the new adjustment therapy and much of what was thought of as vice has even become virtue, and the overall meaning of man is not a life laid down for others, but self fulfillment.
11. The Breakdown Of The Catholic Ghettos. Throughout this country there were Polish, German, Irish, Italian, and Slovak ghettos, where Catholics sent their children to parochial schools and jealously preserved their national customs. Attending novenas and missions and held processions. Ate ethnic foods, blessed by the priest, and honored patron saints from their countries. Then people moved to the suburbs however, and grandchildren were homogenized

into secular Americans who no longer spoke the languages, kept the customs, went to Church. Unfortunately the media has been run in general by anti-religious, anti-Christian, anti-Catholic, anti-life and anti-family liberals. Abortion on demand, widespread promiscuity and a rugged materialism and hedonism have daunted our newspapers, television and even the internet. Unfortunately, the media has become the new educator of American youth. Family is now fifth in influence and religion is seventeenth, which results that American Catholics along with the general American population have very liberal views concerning religion and morality. Most Americans recognize Mickey Mouse, McDonald's, Tim Allen, Princess Di, Sylvester Stallone, Tom Cruise, Madonna, and Leonardo Di Caprio before they recognize St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross, or St. Augustine. The American entertainment industry has a virtual monopoly on the images that influence young people throughout the world. The omnipresence of the media with its secular gospel is so pervasive that it leaves little time for reflection and for a spiritual life. In recent polls, many Christians say the main significance of Christmas and Easter is that they are a time for families to get together. And how do many Christian children and grandchildren spend Holy Week? The answer is Disneyland. In American culture today, Graceland replaces Lourdes, Disneyland replaces Church, and religious habits are replaced by communal (?) jeans.

12. Widespread Diversity. With a smorgasbord of different values being offered, diversity becomes the "in" word. Since there are so many types of religious and spiritual experience out there, from New Age, to Fundamentalism, the average American Christian falls into an unconscious relativism: One religion is as good as the next, and all religious experiences are pretty near equal. Just as long "as you believe in God."
13. The Success Of Evangelical Religion. In the past 50 years there has been a proliferation of other religions. There are over 2,000 different denominations in the United States, and nearly half were founded since 1965. The growth of Mormonism has been astounding as well as the growth of Jehovah's Witnesses, Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ. Many of these have claimed large numbers of former Catholics. Furthermore, the American landscape is no longer predominantly Christian. There are almost 1,000,000 Hindus in this Country compared with 70,000 twenty years ago. There are as many Muslims as there are Presbyterians and 750,000 Buddhists, the fastest growing Eastern religion in the United States. All this has led to a real relativism.
14. The Loss Of The Sacred Within The Churches. Many times traditional Christianity becomes so worldly it cannot serve the universal need for true searchers after the holy. Many ministers and priests have opted more for psychology than spirituality and moral categories are replaced by therapeutic ones. The sacred mindset has converted to secularism.
15. The Rise Of Religious Illiteracy. Most Catholics no longer know their faith. They

have not been introduced to the Bible and the Catechism is now "out of date."

16. The Dislocation that Came About as a Result of Vatican II. Liberal Catholics said the Council did not go far enough. Conservative Catholics said the council went too far. By making a distinction between the content of faith and its cultural expression, the Council opened the door to the demise of rigid scholastic expressions of faith as it embraced a relativism which stated " Faith is never really captured in any particular form for all time, but always needs reinterpretation by the culture."