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Paul was engaged in with people like Timothy and Titus? He did not teach theology in a formal setting to pupils who had to learn what he imparted so that they could repeat it to others. For him, theological education took place as a practical preparation for or response to an actual evangelistic and pastoral task by a group of people in close community with one another.

3. Our definition of theology needs to be broadened. As we have seen, Paul's theology had a decidedly practical orientation. It was not, like most theology these days, mainly a product of his own private interests or the interests of his theological peers. It was not formulated chiefly by study and reflection, which was the way any good Pharisee would have gone about it. No, it arose from his experiences as an apostle and his attempts to make sense of these by whatever means God placed at his disposal. This certainly included the scriptures, which for him rightly occupied a normative place. It also involved other, at times more direct, encounters with God, through prophecy for example. But it embraced a range of other experiences, such as everyday actions and observations. It arose from personal struggles and suffering. It entailed learning from colleagues on the road as well as from mutual ministry in the church. It came during times of prayer as he wrestled with a particular problem. All these should be drawn into the search to know God if there is to be a fully-rounded, personally appropriated and life-changing theology.

Only if we take these three matters seriously do we have much hope of bringing our experience and our theology more closely together. Paul is the supreme example of a person in which we see this taking place. That is why he continues to speak as personally and relevantly to us today as he did in his own times.

Dr. Robert Banks is a fellow of the Zadok Centre Institute for Christianity and Society, Dickson, Australia. [p. 129](#)

The Major Trends Facing the Church

Howard A. Snyder and Daniel V. Runyon

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This article is a summary of the authors' recent book, Foresight: Ten Major Trends That Will Dramatically Affect the Future of Christians and the Church. The study is based on an empirical survey, of interviews with knowledgeable church leaders, denominations, evangelists, educators, etc., most of whom are North Americans. All these trends are the result, as can be seen, of the revolutions of modern times—of secularization, technological revolution and the liberation of oppressed people. What is significant in the paper is that the ten key trends major on ethical issues rather than dogmatic questions. Since it represents the findings of denominational leaders, the summary can be a watershed in future church mission and theological planning.

Editor

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 some 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.

Our profile of trends varies markedly from recent trends discussions in *Christianity Today* and elsewhere. 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. [p. 130](#)

1. 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 80 percent to about 40 percent.

This new internationalization of the church is producing a historic revolution: a shift of the church's 'centre 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 1980 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.

2. 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 programmes, Bible studies, evangelization programmes, 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 [p. 131](#) 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.

3. 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 Centre 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 nonurban 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.

4. FROM INSTITUTIONAL TRADITION TO KINGDOM THEOLOGY

A word 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 [P. 132](#) 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 worshipped and glorified by the whole creation. Biblically, this is not an otherworldly, disembodied, nonhistorical 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.

5. 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 towards 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 [p.133](#) 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 some reformulation of seminary curricula, and a more organic integration of a wide range of ministries.

6. 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 towards 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 enrolment. By 1980 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:

1. 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.
2. The emphasis on community, informality, and nurture in the church will be enhanced.
3. Theologically and conceptually, more women in church leadership will increase the tendency towards organic and ecological models of the world and the church. p. 134
4. More women in ministry may augment the trend towards 'lay' ministry and the equipping of all believers.

7. 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 behaviours 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 towards 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 lapses 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. p. 135 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.

¹ George Barna and William McKay, *Vital Signs: Emerging Social Trends and the Future of American Christianity* (Westchester, III.: Crossway Books, 1984), p. 136.

9. 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 politicize the church).

Earlier in the 20th 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 towards 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 [p. 136](#) 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 prolife 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 policy 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?

10. 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 convulsions as devastating as any world war.

These 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 [p. 137](#) 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 of the good news of the kingdom.

Dr. Howard A. Snyder is a Pastor at the Irving Park Free Methodist Church in Chicago, USA, and Daniel V. Runyon is a freelance Christian editor and writer. [p. 138](#)

The City in the Bible

David S. Lim

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In this comprehensive and well-documented piece of research, Dr. David Lira expounds a (badly needed) biblical theology of the City, which he himself sub-titles as 'Eschatological Hope in Historical Realism'. Starting with a definition of the city in the light of biblical data he proceeds to present a theological paradigm built around five biblical motifs on urbanization: history, Babylon, Jerusalem, New Jerusalem and the church. His main thesis: 'The scriptures reveal that God desires to fully redeem and ultimately perfect the city, and that this process is happening in world history.' The inclusion of a long section on the role of the church in this whole process of urbanization throws fresh light on current missiological