

## An invitation to readers

John L. Allen Jr. | Nov. 10, 2009 NCR Today

I'm a big baseball fan, making me part of the core audience for TV's "MLB Network" that launched last January. One of my favorite shows is called "Prime 9," featuring a run-down of the nine best center fielders of all time, the nine biggest home runs, and so on. The show's motto is, "Designed to start arguments, not settle them."

If I had to choose a slogan for my new book *The Future Church*, I'd probably end up with something a lot like that.

The book is my attempt to describe the ten most important trends shaping the future of the Catholic Church, on a global scale. My choices are the product of almost two decades of reporting, and hundreds of hours of interviews with bishops, priests, religious women and men, and laity all over the Catholic world. They're not styled as my personal vision for the future, but rather a reporter's effort to capture those forces which really are most significant today, whatever I (or anyone else) might think about them.

The trends are:

- A World Church
- Evangelical Catholicism
- Islam
- The New Demographics
- Expanding Lay Roles
- The Biotech Revolution
- Globalization
- Ecology
- Multipolarism
- Pentecostalism

I put a lot of thought into making these choices, but as I note in the book's introduction, it's not like this list is chiseled on a set of stone tablets. Anyone can easily argue that one of the trends doesn't belong, or that there are other equally important forces not represented. Part of the fun is precisely the potential to start debates — to get people talking about what's really happening in the church, and where we're headed. I have no illusions about settling that argument, but I hope I've at least provided some new fodder for conversation in the pews, around water coolers, in cyber-space, and anywhere else thoughtful Catholics may gather.

On this blog, I'll keep an eye on current events from the perspective of how they fit into the trends outlined in the book — whether they confirm one of these trajectories, redirect it in some way, or maybe refute it altogether. For now, let's get the conversation started: What do you think about these ten trends? Is there one you think isn't worthy of being on the list? Is there another trend that you think should have made the cut?

To return to the baseball metaphor, let's play ball!

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