

BABY BUSTERS or GENERATION Xers

Department of Parish Life / Pastoral Resources (2/98)

Prepared by: Dr. Michael McCallion

Information Reported below is from: Christian Century (January 7-14, 1998)

A new study on the religious attitudes and beliefs of baby busters confirms that they are a lot like baby boomers in their individualism and few attachments to institutions --- ONLY MORE SO.

The study, conducted by Jackson Carroll and Wade Clark Roof, surveyed 1,150 people in North Carolina and southern California about their beliefs, worship styles, and church-going habits. The Christian Century reports that Roof and Carroll found that 45 percent of the busters or Generation Xers went through some sort of family disruption, such as divorce of parents, compared to 27 percent of baby boomers and 23 percent of the pre-boomers. Such disruption may be a cause of Xers loose attachments to congregations. The survey shows that 35 percent of Xers indicated religious involvement while growing up, compared with 45 percent of boomers and 53 percent of pre-boomers.

The main differences were found not between Xers and boomers as much as between pre-boomers and the later generations. Xers and boomers are more interested in autonomy, freedom, independent thought and religious exploration, with less institutional commitments. Carroll finds that for both Xers and boomers, the most successful churches are those that function "like a shopping mall. People pick and choose among small groups that meet their particular needs like a variety of shops and boutiques. And they come in and out."

CATHOLIC MEGATRENDS

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The following is from: Davidson, James D. And Williams, Andrea S. 1997. "Megatrends in 20th-century American Catholicism." Social Compass, vol. 44 no. 4, December.

The authors identify 18 megatrends.

The authors note four major changes in the relationship between Church and American society:

1. Catholics have experienced considerable upward social mobility.
2. Catholics have moved from the margins to the center of American life.
3. Instead of one main source of religious formation (the Church), Catholics now have several.
4. As the immigrant experience has receded into the background for many Catholics of European descent, an increasing proportion of American Catholics have Latino or Asian ancestry.

The authors then go on to note that because of these changes official Church teachings have changed. In particular, since Vatican II, liberal clergy and lay people have mobilized and gained considerable influence. In this light, they specify seven theological, ecclesiastical, and liturgical changes.

1. We show that the Catholic concept of Church has shifted from a focus on the institutional Church to an emphasis on the Church as "the People of God".
2. The Church's anti-modernist view of the world has given way to a view that the Church is an integral part of modern society.
3. Strict hierarchicalism has been modified to include greater collegiality.
4. The exclusive concentration of authority in the hands of male clergy has been redistributed to include many more lay people, especially women.
5. A punitive concept of God has been replaced by the concept of a loving God.
6. Traditional Catholic liturgy has given way to more contemporary forms of worship.
7. The Church's former emphasis on being the "one true Church" has been transformed into a more ecumenical view of other faiths.

The authors then note that lay people are likely to respond to these changes in a variety of ways, with greater diversity, but the changes also tend to produce central tendencies in new directions. They specify seven megatrends in Catholics' beliefs and practices:

1. Whereas Catholics used to equate Church law and God's law, now they tend to make a rather sharp distinction between the two.
2. An older emphasis on specifically Catholic identity has given way to a greater emphasis on general Christian identity.
3. Specifically Catholic language also has given way to generic Christian language.
4. Though Catholics used to have an institutional view of faith and morals, they now tend toward more individualistic views of these issues.
5. They used to ground their moral perspectives in natural law; now they tend to have a consequentialist view of moral matters.
6. There has been a gradual decline in overall levels of commitment to the Church.
7. Formerly high levels of theological unity have been replaced by increased pluralism.