

## The Ten Major Faith Struggles of our Age



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Sometimes the simple act of naming something can be immensely helpful. Before we can put a name on something we stand more helpless before its effects, not really knowing what's happening to us.

Many of us, for example, are familiar with the book, *The Future Church: How Ten Trends are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church*, by John Allen. The things he names in this book, even when they don't affect us directly, still help shape us for the better. As journalist who travels the world as the Vatican analyst for both CNN television and the National Catholic Reporter, John Allen is able to provide us with a wider, global perspective on church issues than is generally afforded to those of us whose vision is more emotionally mired in our own local and national issues. Heartaches at home can make us blind to the wider concerns of the planet; just as seeing the concerns and pains of others first-hand can put our own concerns and pain into a healthier perspective. John Allen's global frame of reference, as outlined in the mega-trends he names in his book, helps us keep our own ecclesial concerns in a healthier perspective.

So here is my own attempt to name some things: Several years ago in an interview, John Allen asked me to draw up a list of what I considered to be the ten major faith and church struggles of our time. I took this as a healthy challenge and the list that follows, no doubt less global in perspective than Allen's ten trends (My vision, I fear, speaks more for Western and secularized cultures than for the world at large), is my own attempt to name the key faith and ecclesial struggles we deal with today.

What are the ten major faith and church struggles of our time, at least as manifest within the more highly secularized parts of our world?

- 1) The struggle with the atheism of our everyday consciousness, that is, the struggle to have a vital sense of God within a secular culture which, for good and for bad, is the most powerful narcotic ever perpetrated on this planet ... the struggle to be conscious of God outside of church and explicit religious activity.

- 2) The struggle to live in torn, divided, and highly-polarized communities, as wounded persons ourselves, and carry that tension without resentment and without giving it back in kind ... the struggle inside of our own wounded selves to be healers and peace-makers rather than ourselves contributing to the tension.
- 3) The struggle to live, love, and forgive beyond the infectious ideologies that we daily inhale, that is, the struggle for true sincerity, to genuinely know and follow our own hearts and minds beyond what is prescribed to us by the right and the left ... the struggle to be neither liberal or conservative but rather men and women of true compassion.
- 4) The struggle to carry our sexuality without undue frigidity and without irresponsibility, the struggle for a healthy sexuality that can both properly revere and properly delight in this great power ... the struggle to carry our sexuality in such a way so as to radiate both chastity and passion.
- 5) The struggle for interiority and prayer inside of a culture that in its thirst for information and distraction constitutes a virtual conspiracy against depth and solitude, the eclipse of silence in our world ... the struggle to move our eyes beyond our digital screens towards a deeper horizon.
- 6) The struggle to deal healthily with "the dragon" of personal grandiosity, ambition, and pathological restlessness, inside of a culture that daily over-stimulates them, the struggle to healthily cope with both affirmation and rejection ... the struggle inside of a restless and over-stimulated environment to habitually find the delicate balance between depression and inflation.
- 7) The struggle to not be motivated by paranoia, fear, narrowness, and over-protectionism in the face of terrorism and overpowering complexity ... the struggle to not let our need for clarity and security trump compassion and truth.
- 8) The struggle with moral loneliness inside a religious, cultural, political, and moral Diaspora ... the struggle to find soul mate who meet us and sleep with us inside our moral center.
- 9) The struggle to link faith to justice ... the struggle to get a letter of reference from the poor, to institutionally connect the gospel to the streets, to remain on the side of the poor.
- 10) The struggle for community and church, the struggle inside a culture of excessive individuality to find the healthy line between individuality and community, spirituality and ecclesiology ... the struggle as adult children of the Enlightenment to be both mature and committed, spiritual and ecclesial.

What's the value in a list of this sort? It's important to name things and to name them properly; although, admittedly, simply naming a disease doesn't of itself bring about a cure. However, as James Hillman used to quip, a symptom suffers most when it doesn't know where it belongs.

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