

SPRINGTIME REFLECTIONS

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I would think that in particular the development of technology has changed the world beyond recognition. Technocrats who continue to create this technology are not necessarily aware let alone concerned about their future applications. These applications have had a tremendous impact on society both in terms of engineering, media, politics, finance, business etc. Technology has enabled media to follow and report any movement anywhere anytime virtually obviating discretion, confidentiality, privacy and respect for anything. It has produced a lack of willingness to serve in public office and as a consequence weak leadership by largely professional politicians. It should therefore be no surprise that populists have turned up in many places and that even a proper functioning of democracy is threatened. Technology has enabled the finance industry to engineer structures which until recently were unheard of such as global financial markets, high velocity trading etc accelerated by competitive pressures and unchecked greed. Technology too has led to many new processes and products in industry with severe consequences for employment and income both bad and good.

Society has great difficulty coming to terms with this new environment.

In such era of uncertainty it is no wonder that religion is finding a lot of interest but not necessarily in the traditional structures as Churches too often have been unable to provide satisfactory answers. Churches may be half empty or worse but a Prado Museum, a Rothko exhibition or an opera *Les dialogues des Carmelites* by Poulenc draw huge crowds. Are those the new "churches" ?

Eminent scholars are not necessarily great church leaders. Churches are supposed to serve people rather than merely doctrine. In recent times in the Roman Catholic Church great church leaders have been Pope John XXIII as well as the current Pope Francis who in a way continues the work of John XXIII (at last). In many countries prayers during service have been made for the current Pope, the current Bishop etc as well as "our good Pope John".

Other recent Popes, John Paul II and Benedict, may have been excellent people as well as scholars (Benedict certainly is universally acclaimed as an eminent theologian) but they are often seen as poor church leaders as they suffered from a siege mentality as defenders of the Faith having made the lives of many outstanding church and lay people miserable. By the way I would think that the greatest achievements of Pope Benedict may have been the rehabilitation of Maarten Luther as Church Patron (did we need another German to do so ?) as well as his own abdication. Real life in the end is more relevant than doctrine.

It should be obvious that Modernity has to be plural. It should be perfectly OK for Christianity too but I must admit I find it difficult to admire a statement on a billboard in Zambia that "we are proud of our 43 different Christian churches". Too much of a good thing ? I like the Catholic Church as it is universal and has a spiritual leader in the Pope who should be just that rather than being a dictator. Even the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) states that the (current) Pope Francis has a greater moral authority in the world than anyone else. I wonder why Christianity in the world cannot speak with one voice from time to time. Theologians often do not help as they tend to stress differences to show "we" are different and to perpetuate their own existence ? It does not always seem necessary and must be unhelpful for a proper dialogue let alone any progress.

Coen Teulings

