



Technology – a new Pentecost?

By Associate Professor Gerard Moore

Worship and technology: there are a few issues at play there. But before we begin to lament the additions of screens and computers, it is worth admitting that electric lighting has allowed us to worship at night, hearing loops have given the deaf new levels of participation in liturgical rites and the ubiquitous car allows us to gather from afar.

Worship has been made more accessible by technology.

But there are some misgivings. The use of videos, YouTube splashes and consequent placement of screens stretches our access to symbols. Much that is so moving in Christian worship at large and its Catholic face in particular, is at risk when there is a restless quest for novelty and relevance which simply replicates the speeding up of western society in general. Addiction to pixels means that our bodies, sight, senses and voices are rendered passive, if not unfeeling and mute. On the surface then there is need for a 'middle' ground between the adoption of technologies that are integrated into the rites of worship, and those that trivialise the symbolic and hold us back from the depths of ritual. Any search for a balance may be practical, but ultimately it perpetuates one of the great illusions associated with technology in today's culture and environment.

Technology is not only understood as an aid in removing the drudgery that is involved in human activities, but also as necessary for human happiness, and as the solution to intractable problems. In this technology is being given a quasi religious status: as source of salvation and the fulfilment of things! The marriage of technological innovation and consumerism has put the development of new technologies at service to the meeting of capricious human desires rather than genuine human development and liberation. Rather than making us better humans, it is changing us into another sort of human. The picture has some ugly features: an incessant drive for the latest, wastefulness and pollution on a massive scale as old products are jettisoned, control of interpersonal interactions through programs, filters, 'pokes' and accepting 'friends'.

The 'technologized' human, and indeed the 'technologized' generations, hold a most dangerous belief: that human error can always be righted by technology. The massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico can be fixed with advanced technology! Future environmental problems from global warming to nuclear waste are acceptable now because the future technology will create solutions! There is in this a loss of our moral selves. There is a lessening of the sense that actions have implications, and that for the Christian when one is hurt all suffer. It is a reckless gamble to wager the living conditions of our grandchildren on an unfounded hope in 'progress'. And in the strange comfort that making this gamble offers there is a consequent willingness to

close an eye to more difficult questions such as who are the real beneficiaries of our addiction to technological innovation. Is it the poor? Is it the sick and the bound? Has it led to a population with a higher level of health? Has it brought equity in wealth across the nations?

There are aspects of technology that represent a new Pentecost, in particular the social networks and communication revolution. But there is a larger picture as well, one that may well be reshaping us in ways that we cannot or do not wish to discern. The debates about technology in worship are a small part of this larger picture, but perhaps it is one place where some resistance to constant innovation may give us room to think and pray into a more mindful future.



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