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Title "From statistics, facts and definitions to prayers stories and conversations"

I enjoy statistics; I like analyzing them, thinking about them and quoting them. We live in an age of technology; an age of mobiles i tunes and e mails. Churches have web sites powerpoint and digital cameras. However we have not adequately in the churches reflected on what technology is doing to us. This survey used e mail primarily; it allowed for a quick survey but in the pressing of buttons there is much danger. People do not respond as predictably as machines to touch and to "yes no" answers. You acknowledge that very sensibly in the survey itself. I have scanned the gospels for a statistic unsuccessfully. Instead of buttons there are agrarian metaphors which speak of slow growth. The gospels contain stories prayers and conversations. So this survey is at its best when it is used to stimulate conversation.

TS Elliott writes

"Where is the life we have lost in living

where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge

where is the knowledge we have lost in information."

Neil Postman talks about the idolatry of techopholy

there is a belief "that the primary if not the only goal of human labour and thought is efficiency; that technical calculation is in all respects superior to human judgment; that which cannot be measured either does not exist or is of no value; and that the affairs of citizens are best guided and conducted by experts"

This drive for efficiency and management has had a profound impact on the last generation of church leaders. One priority for the church is to reflect theologically on the change.

In the world of face book and bebo where people have virtual friends some want virtual churches; p13. The question must be asked how do such concepts connect with the gospel message that the word became flesh. Has technology removed us from facing reality. Sebastian Faulks recent novel "A week in December" is based around the inability of 7 people to deal with reality.

It was important for the purposes of this survey to have separate questionnaires for clergy and faith leaders and lay people although this is a distinction with which Presbyterians and others are uncomfortable. Clergy were asked whether they had "preached" or taught on immigration diversity or welcoming strangers. Clergy were also asked what had they "done" that was out of the ordinary to accommodate ethnic minorities. Now this is good if it meant that preaching and teaching needs to put on flesh. Yet as I filled it in I could feel a certain guilt and tension which I have reflected on since. In one sense in teaching and preaching we have done something. A few generations ago church leaders main tasks were to pray preach and pastor. Now there is a subliminal message that is not good enough. You have to do more ; you have to manage and motivate to be an efficient and relevant church. I wonder has this led to a new type of clericalism and a neglect of what God has called us to do. Is this why the affect of preaching and teaching seemed so low on the list for lay people? I would argue the whole church must "do" but the primary role for clergy is to pray preach and pastor the whole people of God who together discern what God is doing and participate.

It was fascinating how many clergy and indeed laity defined themselves as evangelicals. For a generation now within the Protestant community evangelical churches have produced high octane commitment linked with dynamic enthusiasm and inquisitive theology. Those people are now emerging into church leadership. While the word "ecumenical" is avoided by friend and enemy, the word "evangelical" is embraced with increasing enthusiasm. Most want a bit of the good news. In one sense this survey tells us of the strengths and weakness of this new emerging leadership. The attitude to ecumenism is a challenge to those who feel comfortable with the adjectives. More than a generation on from the emergence of the term and the big story it contained about a big church in a big world the word has been demeaned. Evangelicalism emphasis on the individual is picked up in the report. The danger is that Christianity could become a self help exercise; church a place to meet what Eugene Peterson describes as the replacement Trinity of "my holy needs my holy feelings my holy wants". Church can become an exercise in competition where the church that best fulfills those needs are the ones that are growing.

Andrew Marr in his history of Britain writes "The big story of post world war 2 Britain is the defeat of politics by shopping. Consumerism has shouldered aside other ways of understanding the world - real political visions, organized religion, a pulsing sense of national identity."

Evangelicalism with its emphasis on meeting individual needs, its expertise in advertising itself, its ability to welcome strangers and its self confidence has been able to thrive numerically under those conditions.

The challenge of the whole church is to integrate the social the spiritual the environment into one big story that catches the imagination and inspires. Living in Ireland with our history of institutionalized sectarianism churches have the challenge have to come to terms with our past. Moreover in western Europe there is a broader spirit of anti institutionalize. However the challenge for the church is to move individuals beyond narcissism into community. We need a new vision of God as community, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We need a new vision of church as a community reflecting the diversity of the Godhead. We need a new purpose based on the resurrection of the body - of God creating a new heaven and a new earth and calling us by grace to participate.