

Feedback on religion and technology seminar

The seminar this summer ended up with 14 participants plus Dr. Dan Bradley and I as teachers. Five were foreign Jesuits who received a \$1,000 scholarship from the President's office to cover their room and board at Jesuit House. The California/Oregon provinces also contributed \$500 for each of the foreign Jesuits enabling us to extend \$1,000 airfare subsidies for the 3 coming from Europe and Africa. We also had three American scholastics, three Gonzaga graduate students, Dan Bradley's wife, Dr Roisin Lally, (who has just defended her dissertation on the Philosophy of Technology herself last Spring) and a member of my parish who retired from the field of computer science:

lastname	first name	Location	Province	Stage of formation	background
Ekwueme	Evaristus	Herare	Nigeria	PhD Phil, BC	dean, Jesuit philosophate, Herare, Zimbabwe
Israel	Joe	USF	Calcutta	doctoral student	pursuing PhD in computer eng. Santa Clara
<i>Lally</i>	<i>Roisin</i>	<i>Spokane</i>	<i>lay</i>	<i>PhD Phil, Glasgow</i>	<i>post-doc U of Montana, Phil of tech and psychoanalysis</i>
Luharta	Pierre	Rome	Congo	theologian	biomedical researcher on local plant life in Congo
<i>Maroni</i>	<i>Gino</i>	<i>Spokane</i>	<i>parishioner</i>	<i>retired</i>	<i>retired information technology</i>
<i>McCutchen</i>	<i>Jennifer</i>	<i>Spokane</i>	<i>Lay</i>	<i>MA student</i>	<i>BA Phil from WSU</i>
<i>McDonald</i>	<i>Robert</i>	<i>Spokane</i>	<i>Lay</i>	<i>MA Phil</i>	<i>pursuing PhD in Religion, Claremont</i>
<i>Nguyen</i>	<i>Davy</i>	<i>Spokane</i>	<i>lay</i>	<i>BA Phil</i>	<i>BA Phil from Gonzaga</i>
Nguyen	Francis	Manilla	US West	theologian	architect
Rainwater	Trevor	Detroit	WIS	regent at U Detroit	MA in philosophy, SLU
Ruankool	Nopparut (Bee)	Rome	Thailand	theologian	BA phil, Habermasian critical theorist.
XU	Francis	Berkeley	China	STL student	pursuing ecotheology studies at JST, Santa Clara
Yim	Matt	Spokane	US West	regent at GU	MA in Philosophy, Fordham

I have asked the various Jesuit seminar participants to send a brief summary of their own research project they did for the seminar as well as a few sentences on what they got out of the program and its value for scholastics in formation. Below are the responses I have received so far.

Napparut Ruanpool S.J. (Thailand)

"This course helped me to develop and ask questions within my philosophical area of interest, especially that of Jurgen Habermas' concept of deliberative politics. It is clear that social media

has the form of a political public sphere as social media offers anyone to be an actor on political issues (through the internet) and includes anyone to participate in the public discourse process without limitation of time and space. My question is on the quality of the discourse, and for my argument, whether social media could be a means to maintain direct contact (face-to-face) in order to more deeply and reflectively exchange opinions and aspirations.

To respond what I found most valuable:

"First, i have learnt so much, from a philosophical point of view, about how the technology affects many aspects of our lives especially that of religion. Thus it would be certainly helpful for me especially as a Jesuit scholastic and my future pastoral work as a priest. Second, I loved the discussion of the participants, who are from many nationalities and backgrounds, which helped me to understand different perspectives and experiences."

Matt Yim SJ (Philosophy department Regent at Gonzaga)

In my presentation I argued, following Ong and Ihde, that as we as human beings continue to move from orality to literacy and into a hypertextual reality, there needs to be a better understanding of the archetypes we can draw from that allow us to explain what has been a seamless progression.

According to Auerbach, in "Mimesis", the essence of orality is in its circularity, while literacy is defined by its linearity. Perhaps a way to envision this next step in relating to the world is through a modification of these two archetypes--the sphere. The sphere contains the basic elements of a line and a circle (hearkening us back to these earlier ages of human development), while it also calls to mind the very unlinear way in which information is stored, networks of people are arranged in a global setting, and how knowledge is transferred along more circuitous lines. Bruno Latour's Actant Network Theory when mapped onto the sphere presents a lucid description of what it is that we are experiencing every day in the real world.

There were at least two things about this summer's seminar that stood out for me as being important to my learning. The first, the philosophy. I've already written to you about this. The second is the value added component of being at Gonzaga and having a group of Jesuits with international experience in a variety of fields share that same experience with the rest of us. In doing so, these Jesuits provided the contexts and situations of their own lived life as Jesuits from particular areas around the world with their own series of issues that made them passionate in service throughout the world and at home. These fields were diverse as ecology, education, chemistry, and theology. This summer seminar also provided more direct entrée into the worldwide network of the Society and allowed us all to build relationships with each other that would not have been likely otherwise. I think the second and third areas are where other scholastics will find the value of this work. Too often American scholastics are quick to point out the issues they think are important in other countries and how they can implement change by themselves. The seminar you held actively works against that illusory response and better equips scholastics to enter into dialogue with our brothers and be supportive of their work

in whatever way we might be able to help them so that together we can work in service of the Kingdom. As such, I believe then that this is a good work that calls us to find the magis, what Fr. Nicolas has defined as a “deepening of our knowledge” of each other that works against the superficiality so rampant in our age. It isn’t the “more” that is needed; that is, according to Father General, a mistake in translation. This type of seminar leads us to what Ignatius desired for the Society at work in the world: a careful reflection and heightened understanding of how we together can theorize and speculate possible avenues of future action.

I think that there are a number of scholastics who would be interested in coming together to discuss ways in which partnership can be created and grown on issues of applied technology or speculations about potential uses of technology (above and beyond the limitations associated with the self-promotional aspect of social media) in more creative and thoughtful ways. This is not to say that such works as The Jesuit Post do not serve a valuable function, but there are other ways in which to grow our presence in different and positive ways. Although Matt Malone, SJ (current editor and chief of America Magazine), might be interested in tele-speaking to a future group. I know that he has been thinking and theorizing about this area for a while. As a younger Jesuit from the East Coast involved directly in a work that straddles the line between marketing and presentation of information, he may also know of some ways to promote the seminar as a worthwhile summer session for ours.

Francis Xu: (China)

The title of my presentation is Encounter You in the Street. I wish that Chinese Catholics could meet people of good will in China via the cyber highway. It is indeed a good Street/Plaza for us to meet people and proclaim the Gospel values. I hope to use ecology as my way to reach out to the multitude in China, after all, nature is our only mother on this planet earth. A care for nature is a reverence to its creator. I hope that nature can become the bridge in our 21st century to connect Chinese people and all people on this planet earth with their creator.

What I have found the most valuable about the seminar are:

- 1. The class setting (seminar type) really helps us engage ourselves with the designated topic of the day.*
- 2. The diversity of the participants colors and enriches the seminar, actually, we could inspire and learn from one another's sharing or presentation.*
- 3. As a person who loves movies, I definitely find Wednesday movie night helpful. It enables us to see the applied theories of electronic technology which some progressive people dream of.*
- 4. Finally, Dan and you are perfect team. You are quite progressive while he is rather conservative in terms technology. Therefore you could balance each other. We could have a different point of view to reflect about technology. .*

Jennifer McCutchen (Philosophy Graduate Student)

My research centered on the idea of transhumanism and how morality relates to it. I touched on the broad definition of transhumanism and attempted to focus on the idea of moral enhancement as a necessary step to fully integrated transhumanist ideals. I have found that a pluralistic approach to current ethical theories may give us the necessary tools to construct a new ethical theory that encompasses technological advances.

This seminar gave me the opportunity to explore new ideas regarding the use of technology and how it can both enhance religion and cause it great strain. More importantly, this seminar gave me the necessary starting ground for my future thesis research.

Pierre Luhata SJ (Congo)

From 7 January to 6 March of 2008, the Society of Jesus celebrated the General Congregation 35. After the election of Fr. Adolfo Nicolás as new Father General, the Congregation, during two months, was debating different issues related with the mission, the structure, and the identity of the Society. After days of meditation, reflexion and prayer, Jesuits found a response to the question: “Who are we?”. The answer is the Decree 2 of the 35e GC: a fire that kindle other fires. Rediscovering our charism. Jesuits have recognized that they are working today in context different from that of Ignatius and the first companions. The world has changed and there are new frontiers. The word frontier can be explained in different ways.

A frontier is a space of variable thickness, an imaginary line separating or joining two territories, especially two sovereign states. The word “frontier” has a military origin. It is etymologically related to the word “front” referring to a battle zone or fortified boundary. To be at the frontier means to be in the front line, in a zone of tension, insecurity. Frontier is a zone of challenges. Therefore, there is the necessity of dialogue. According to Gadamer, accepting to go to a dialogue is a risk because the other can win. The most important thing is the question. The one who asks the question gives the direction to the dialogue. To be at the frontier means to be able to dialogue. Without dialogue, there is no possibility of surviving on the frontiers.

The Jesuits’s story is a story of frontiers. In others ways, a story of dialogue. Portuguese discoveries and explorations sent Jesuits to the front line of new worlds and unknown ancient civilizations. Francis Xavier was sent to Asia, Mateo Ricci to China, John de Brebeuf to New France, Pierre de Smet to the Northwest among hundreds of other interped Jesuits.

The 4th of July 2013, when Pope Francis met with the writers of the Jesuit journal "La Civiltà Cattolica" at the Vatican in June, he had a clear message for Jesuits: “Your proper place is on the frontiers. This is the place of Jesuits.” “You must go to the frontiers and not bring the frontiers home to varnish them a bit and tame them. In today’s world, subject to rapid changes and agitated by questions of great relevance for the life of the faith, a courageous commitment is urgent to educate to a faith of conviction and maturity, capable of giving meaning to life and of offering convincing answers to all those seeking God.”

The virtual age is one of the new frontiers for Jesuits. Can we find God in the virtual age? According to Saint Ignatius, yes, we can find God in the Virtual age. But, the most important thing to do now is to dialogue in order to understand very well the new technologies. We need people who are trained and qualified to understand the language of post-modern technology. Because, there are many good things that we can use to consolidate and promote faith and justice from virtual technologies.

Evaristus Kweme Dean, Arrupe College First Studies Program, Herare, Zimbabwe

"Martin Luther King Jr and the Transhumanists: Understanding the Virus in the Network."

The transhumanists' conception of present and future technoscience advancement is indirectly proportional to humanistic morality. Martin Luther King's speech, "Paul's Letter to the American Christians," indicates this unforeseen incommensurability of the desire to lead the 'imaginary' world in techno-science to the very detriment of 'real' humanity or a part thereof.

The seminar on "Religion in the Virtual Age" was an insightful experience into our present world and a foretaste of our shared future as inhabitants of the info-sphere. It made me realize that our insignificant and unconscious contributions to the use of techno-sciences equally shape our lives and most importantly our religious beliefs. There is a Jesuit tradition that, Jesuits, ought to read the scriptures on one hand and the newspaper on the other. I'll say, we ought to read and write our scriptures, our news feeds, social media and research papers all on the same screen. We ought to remain contemplatives in the info-sphere to bring to consciousness, "the end for which we were created," and la raison d'etre for all techno-sciences. I truly encourage Jesuit scholastics, fathers and brothers, and other religious congregations to participate in this seminar because the world we are used to is fast becoming history.