

Technology and Religion

Lesson 2: How does technology define us?

1.29.2023

Objectives: Explore how technology defines the human.

Materials: Flipchart, bells for trivia game.

Time allotments: Suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 20 minute closing service (end class around 9:50/11:50 to begin chapel 9:55/11:55).

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ In the gun violence debate, do you think the gun is an ethically **neutral** tool and focus should be on the human agent? Or do you think the gun is ethically **not neutral** and shapes people and culture? Is the gun neutral or not neutral?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: Counting on each other (5 minutes max)

Youth sit with their heads bowed and eyes directed at the floor, trying to count to 20 together. Here are the rules:

- Only one person can speak a number at a time. If two people talk at the same moment, everyone starts over with new person beginning count each time.
- Youth may NOT follow any prearranged order, or speak immediately after the last person speaking to their right or left.
- Game ends at 5 minutes, with highest count as the record.

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

Teacher reads: (from William Stahl, scholar and author)

“Stop for a minute and think what your life would be without any technology... Without fur we can neither stay warm nor protect our skin from the sun very well. Our teeth and nails are all but useless as weapons... [We’re] unlikely to outrun our dog [and] nobody has

senses as acute as the cat... From our earliest ancestors on the African savannah, our species has shaped and been shaped by technology.”

4. Exploration of theme: (25 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: Consider how humans increasingly define ourselves through the machines and technology we use. We commonly refer to our species as *Homo Faber* (“human as tool-maker”) and often label cultures and eras by their technology: Stone Age, Neolithic (“new stone age”), Bronze Age, Space Age, Information Age, Digital Age.

Learning Activity: group trivia

Divide youth into teams of 3-4 for this *challenging* trivia competition.

- Each team should come up with a name that is a technology the group really likes.
- Each trivia question can be answered by any number of teams who wish to answer, NOT by whoever first rings the bell. Once a team has rung the bell, they must provide a response. Actual answer will be revealed by teachers *after all teams* who have rung in have provided responses.
- After each question is asked in order listed below, give teams 1-2 minutes (depending on difficulty of question) to consult with teammates before ringing the bell, as points will be deducted for incorrect answers.
- Teachers have final say in deciding whether answers are acceptable or not.
- Tally points at the end, and the winning team receives the prostrations/deep bows from all the other teams (in fun, of course!)

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- ▶ **(10 point question)** What technological inventions do you think capture the culture of ancient Greece? (*Answer: Scholars point to the spindle and potter’s wheel as defining technologies of ancient Greece, with their mythologies often captured on pottery.*)
 - ▶ **(10 point question)** What technology was created by medieval monks to regulate their prayer time and work time? (*Answer: The mechanical clock. Prayer and work were both spiritual ways to coordinate the monastic life.*)
 - ▶ **(30 point question)** If technological tools came to define eras and cultures, how did the mechanical clock shape how humans imagined God? (*Answer: The Benedictines sought to define sacred time, to divide and isolate and evaluate time, and in the process began to view God as the “Ultimate Watchmaker” who set the wheels of the universe in motion.*)
 - ▶ **(10 point question)** What technological invention came from studying the mechanics of the winepress in the Rhine Valley of Germany, by Johannes Gutenberg? (*Answer: The printing press.*)

- ▶ **(40 point question)** Although Gutenberg could not have anticipated, what major religious event that changed church history forever could not have happened without his printing press? (*Answer: The Protestant Reformation.*)
- ▶ **(50 point question)** Explain how the printing press could have contributed so significantly to the Protestant Reformation. (*Answer: The ability to print and distribute Bibles, pamphlets, and maps on a massive scale sparked the individual's ability to **personalize religion**, to read and think and have greater say about one's own religion rather than simply following church dogma.*)
- ▶ **(optional 70 point! question)** If you combine the monk's mechanical clock that viewed work time as sacred time, with Gutenberg's Bible that put the work of seeking salvation in the hands of the individual, what do we get that's shown in industrial workers punching the clock? (*Answer: The Protestant Work Ethic made hard work, diligence, efficiency, productivity a display of a person's religious virtue and character.*)

5. Questions for Discussion: (20 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: We may assume that humans define and shape technology, but technology also shapes and defines us. Like the story of *Frankenstein*, we may try to control and use it for our purposes, but we may be surprised when it actually has a course of its own and ends up shaping us. The telescope or microscope shapes how we see and understand the world. But a microscope that brings something into focus also pushes other things out of focus; we see some things with amazing clarity but find ourselves blind to other realities.

- What technology most defines how you personally see and understand the world?
- What does it help you to see/know, and what does it prevent you from seeing/knowing?
- Probably the most well-known among the 7 UU Principles is the first: "The inherent worth and dignity of every person." Does your chosen technology enable you to live out that principle or does it hinder you? In what specific ways?

6. Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

"May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."

7. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets