Technology and Faith Unconference Notes
Seattle Pacific University Library
December 8, 2018, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Session Notes

Session 1a (Library Seminar Room) Are virtual places of worship real places of worship?

Prompt
Example of Roblox (https://www.roblox.com/) - digital development platform. Daniel connected with others on the platform and built a church (game). TRC (The Robloxian Christians) 16000 members.global church. But no idea about age, gender, racial ethnic background.
Initially started with worship service. Typed sermon in chat/ upload music. Now also have life groups, prayer meetings, meditiative site, game nights.
Had to go to two services for different time zones and to stop server from crashing
Additional note: Daniel's concern about this is rooted in a particular local context and a desire to be present in online community.

Raises questions
What is church? What is worship? Are you fully human/ yourself if your gender, race, or other features of your identity are hidden if you are anonymous?
Parallel situation in Judaism - what does faith look like in Post - Temple Judaism? Judaism had to reinvent what faith looked like after the destruction of the temple and diaspora. Localized community.
Buddhist tradition - teacher, teaching, community: if there is a digital community, the question might be what is the authenticity of the teacher and the teaching?
How are religious organizations, teaching, teachers authenticated online and offline?
Online and offline legitimacy
Sense of community in person, closeness and social cohesion is important. Hopes and fears around this
Megachurches and video-conferenced satellite campuses. Parallels in large organizations. Huge video conferences create a large group/ gross sense of connection that is really important. The fine-grained connection is also important and needed [but this may be achieved in another form/ format].
Selectivity of digital narratives. Does anonymity of online enhance or detract from self-disclosure?
What happens if you introduce AI? When the AI gives sermons? When the AI becomes seen as a spiritual leader or god?
Does this create an age-based digital divide in worship? Does it exclude people? Is this different from other ways (good, bad, neutral) in which places of worship are exclusive?
What does this mean for particular doctrinal concerns of focus (e.g. in Christianity - incarnation, baptism, other sacraments)? [how does the question express itself in other religious traditions - what are the markers of genuine religious community]
Does there always need to be a physical and tangible expression of a religious community?
Online presence - being forced to be yourself (FB) vs being able to create identities (twitter/ instagram).
What does VR add or detract from this? Is VR church different from church in a bar?
When did early xnity develop this focus on physicality [wrt churches]? Does/ when does technology change this?
Speed of AI, what does AI add to this? AI-customized sermons tailored to literacy level/ style / and background of reader.
Is the customization and personalization of sermons/ faith problematic in the same way as the personalization of the internet reinforces divides?

Session 1b (Library Classroom) AI and other Technologies - critical thinking

AI and other Technologies could be taken as truth. How do we train the new/any generation to question technologies?
Pre-computer to post-computer - new way of thinking.
How to engage in critical thinking about the truth that is being presented to us? And how do we do this in a diverse community?
Rush to embrace new technologies - learn later the downsides and pitfalls. Steep learning curve for the cost of the dark side of new technologies. Millennials use social media differently than it was originally used.
Reliable sources are becoming challenged.
Good work being done in K12 and higher ed on digital citizenship and literacy curriculum with ethical formation. Common Sense Media. The divide in online/offline behavior is starting to break down, but it's still pretty new.
Is trial and error a primary pedagogical method for gaining critical thinking skills?
Difference between technology and the content that is being distributed by the technology. Enhances bubbles people are in/choose. Need to separate the technology from the content.
What about for non-social media - using AI in medicine, data processing, business. Don't have time to learn through trial and error. But can be an opportunity for humans to partner with AI/technology - use our more flexible mind/critical thinking to guide the use of ai and technology.
Partnership between human and automated agency - how do we partner and not be shaped by them? From a faith perspective - what is human agency and how does it partner with other forms of agency?
AI is not good at assessing itself - it can give confidence but only based on the data it was trained on. AI can be correct, but also wrong. Example: recidivism for criminals. It might be right in its predictions, but also use things we don't want it to use.
How do we question the biases that AI uses? Faith becomes the grid work we use to challenge what we've be told. We need to be conscious of the filter we use
Education needs to become different - really need much more critical thinking, rather than content delivery. We need people who can ask questions and structure ideas. Critical thinking, reflective thinking, ethical thinking.
Uncritical acceptance of technology - usually preceded by "that's creepy" - can we push that feeling to think about why and how it's creepy?
Move to open book/open computer test - how can students hone in on the important information and think about it? Test for thinking and wisdom.
Project based assessment

How do we have conversations with diverse moral frameworks? What are our decisions based off of?
Coding boot camp - different education route - what do employers need: diversity, critical thinking - also faith.
What about the older generations? Is there a larger challenge with the generations that have *less* understanding of how social media and technologies work? Data shows that the younger generations suffer less from “fake news.”
We all have a set of rules against which we operate. For a civil society to continue to function, there needs to be a baseline set of rules. E.g. who owns my data - me or the collector?
Maybe the technology and the content might not be separated - perhaps they are tied together?
Do you manage the technology or does the technology manage you? Quality of life - number and depth or relationships. Are you using technology to enhance relationships or is it getting in the way?
Creation of echo chambers - group think vs critical thinking - speed of communication creating problems
Benefits of technology. Artificial intelligence is a solution to a problem we’re still looking for.
Where are you getting your guidance from? Lack of connection.
Technology has posed these problems in the past - we developed mechanisms to counter. E.g. printing press -> peer review/academy. Also -> reformation. The increased speed of current technologies changes some dimensions, but reason to believe humans can face these challenges with our critical thinking.

Session 1c (Writing Studio) How can faith address the digital divide created by technologies?

- Introductions
- Groups that get marginalized
    - People with disabilities and different AI inputs (speech)
- AI vs. Technology
    - Technology = tool
    - AI = evolutionary capacity of the machine itself
- Digital Twin
    - Having avatars that behave like you, trained to act like you.
    - Competitive advantage in the marketplace. Accumulates more power.
    - Drives divide.
- AI Superpowers: Khaifa Lee
    - AI winners will be China and US. No one else will have a chance to win.
    - Success is a function of data volume and data quality.
    - AI will lead to huge job loss - developing world is screwed, cheap labor will be irrelevant in a AI dominant world.
- Opposing view - job creation will also exponentially increase - new jobs we don't know about yet.
    - Peter Diamond - Abundance
    - New economies, new markets, new opportunities for capitalism to do its thing.
    - However, new jobs will require education and technology experience.
- Amazon Mechanical Turk
    - Keeping the human element into tech, probably will always be necessary.
    - Outsource to other cultures?
- People of Faith - bringing in ethical frameworks
- China has a homogenous culture - assumed ethics - gives expected outputs.
- What is enough for representation?
- AI - potential to be a megaphone - you can't claim not having responsibility
    - When people pretend that they have no biases, that's not real.
- Forces on technology companies to think about this
    - Yes, governments. But employees and social forces are the most important.
- Executives at tech companies want nannies to not allow screens.
    - Digital babysitter vs. actual babysitter.
    - Power imbalances in ability to pay for each.
- CSR - corporate social responsibility -
    - Clause about social responsibility
- Owning an ethical position - but who is the arbiter of that framework?
    - Who decides the orthodox Buddhist or Christian or Jewish position on this?
- Is there value in saying "I'm this religion, I am bringing it to this table" to your company?
    - Is expression changing?
    - Different groups at different companies
        - § Not really activists, just social groups?
- Philosophy -> Tech
    - Training in philosophy and religion keep eyes out for social harms, tech companies don't have that thing.
    - Profit vs. sustainable profit

Session 2a (Library Seminar Room) Personification of AI

No notes submitted

Session 2b (Library Classroom) What does it mean to be human in an age of AI?

- Kevin Kelley talk - Wired - what if a machine asks how to fit into faith?
- Extraterrestrials - strawman for AI
    - Octopus is intelligent, newly discovered. Restricts experimentation?
        - § Distributed brain. Model for robotics.
    - Is the question different for machines or something living that is different?
    - Another entity or another entity made out of silicon?
- What is a morally relevant property?

        - Intelligence -> more ethical concerns?
        - Sentience?
        - Really intelligent machine, but no sentience?
    - Fourth Age by Byron Reese
        - All the predictions related to potential evolution of AI are not a function of people's empirical ability to understand what is going on with AI. They are based on assumptions people have.
        - What's a human being? 1) machine 2) animal 3) over and above both?
    - Machine piece is not mutually exclusive to human piece.
        - But also, machines are limits on AI - only able to reproduce mechanistic parts of the brain?
    - What is a person?
        - Different than just a human.
        - Autonomy, sentience? Dignity and rights.
        - Memories, beliefs, and desires
        - Need to have more than pure psychological characteristics.
        - Maybe not a material instantiated, but likely a body.
            - Can you be embodied in 1s and 0s?
            - Maybe closer to agency.
    - God as person, but personhood? Or three-person-hood?
    - Human vs. animal?
    - Distinguishing factor as having a soul?
    - Should we acknowledge other "persons" interests?
        - Vs. should we invite them to church?
        - Would you invite your AI to church?
            - Well why not?
        - They are clearly not human person candidates if you don't want to invite them to church?
    - God's creation vs. our creation?
        - We have responsibility for what we create in the world, moral responsibility
        - AI in our own image? Vs. octopi doing things we cannot control.
        - AI - we don't even know what we are doing.
    - Part of human experience is creating technology?
        - Technology facilitates emergence of the human species
        - Cultural memory facilitation
    - Why does it matter what it means to be human?
        - Does it matter if we use technology more than other species to our moral framework?
    - Custom-built sermon that speaks to you?
        - AI becomes moral authority.
        - Could a computer be better at moral questions than we are?
        - Should vs. other people have done
        - Youtube already does this - recommended videos.
        - Does transform you as you are in the environment
    - Sacred texts are a technology
    - Do we feel as if there is a threat to our personhood?
        - If we change how we deal with humans because of how we deal with machines?
        - We also like to conveniently dehumanize other humans.
    - AI - examples of intuition and creativity happens
    - We create AI to do things a person would do but better
        - We are exhibiting an understanding of what a person would do.
        - Example of power - whoever designs AI = who defines person hood
    - We always use what the latest technology is to define ourselves, hard for us to define us.
        - Are we just what we do? Mechanistic ways of thinking. Or are we more?
    - What makes humans a distinct kind?
        - Should we apply ethics to things that are not human anyway?

Session 2c (Writing Studio) Does AI enhance relationships or undermine them?

YES
Intent of people using it? What are you doing with it? Loss of personal relationship.
Example - using cozy friendly robots to help older people and provide companionship. Is it better to have an inferior relationship with a robot that can't empathize than have none? Is it a solution to loneliness? Imputed emotions to AI. Crutch?
Black mirror: companionship post spouse's death. Story of training AI based on digital life of dead person plus learning algorithm.
Not binary question. Does it help as a tool?
We don't have true AI yet, when we have some limited form of digital sentience,
Affective computing - MIT - Prof Rosalind[?] research - glasses for autistic kids to help recognize emotions.
Speed of decision making. And power of AI.
Transition from industrial society to digital society - impact on workforce.
Race for sentient AI for economic advantage.
Returning to companionship question - why are animal companions ok if AI companions are not? Let's not think in exclusive terms but how do these things (AI, Animal, human) complement each other?
Are people now out of practice talking? Social media shifting from text to video. Efficiency of email.
Technology empowering but being careful of the bite back.
Ed tech and student success example.
What are the new skills to navigate? Interdisciplinary perspectives. Figuring out what is a reasonable response? The human check.
Discussion of needed skills.

Session 3a (Library Seminar Room) AI without bias

AI trained from data set. When we choose the data set, we can create problems and bias. We when create AI and training set how do we work to avoid bias and implicit bias? How do we identify and catch problems quickly?
Responses:
*reduce the magic. Make things less opaque. Own the fact that tools are built by us.
*do we have clear goals from the outset and metrics? How do we stop thinking that playing with cool toys and seeing what happens is enough?
*perceptual arms race - algorithms and AI; will people perpetually train for echo chambers?
*if we trust the output of algorithms blindly we're in trouble? How do we critique when we like/ aren't bothered by the results?
*do you have a list of biases by culture to guard against?
*how do we take advantage of intuition and innate wisdom? How do we take advantage of emotional intelligence and creativity? How do you [see story] as well as the data?
*how do you bake empathy into processes? Can you have empathy without a self?
*what are the spiritual technologies that can help with this?
*does being fully human help us code a better AI? Is being more aware of our bias, more self-aware and more attentive to our personal growth and collective intelligence the necessary starting point for this work?
*these things are hard to quantify and scale - you could possibly train an AI to be empathetic within a small group but trying to quantify and scale this is hard. Can you scrub out bias in data? Response - whose bias, from what perspective.
*can you measure biofeedback and brain activity?
*how do you work on the biases and empathy of the developers? What does it mean to be fully human?
*who makes the choices about helping the devs become fully human?
*what's the balance between good and good for you?
*we build an AI to predict something, we typically don't get AIs to predict things we don't want to happen/ we don't ask it to include counterfactuals / the best job at predicting X but rarely asking it to ignore Y or Z. letting it know what i don't want it to predict.
*a human learning problem
*setting the expectations at the right level of what AI can and will do. AI as different from automation.
*what does spiritual look like in this context? A driver to care and engage on these issues. To make choices for reasons other than pure profit. Example of Judaism as legal codification of spiritual and ethical behaviour.
*Faith wanting to shape the future - AI currently trained on the past/ present; is there a way to use AI differently? It trains with the data we give it but there a good questions about how we use it and what we ask it to do. Examples of medical tech.
*AI doesn't create the future, we create the future and can use AI.
*the need to think carefully about causation and correlation.
*Google's principles for AI dev https://www.blog.google/technology/ai/ai-principles/
*how do we engage this conversation if we're not the person creating the AI?
*AI and Faith group
*continued conversations, developers interested in knowing what people think.

Session 3b (Library Classroom) Power imbalances

No notes submitted

Session 3c (Writing Studio) Evaluation of tech from builder, personal, organizational, and societal perspectives

-Over the years, there's been a decline in general research, and increase in research that only has a commercial benefit.
-How can we automate the job of a pilot? If we automate the menial, it may make the pilot not be able to react when required.
-Looking at technology holistically.
-How do faith communities adopt technology?
-How can we learn from our past mistakes with technology for building future technologies?
-Technologies
-Boeing Project Evaluations. If successful what would this project do for us? We should ask: What might it do to us?
-Agency - to what extend am I doing what I'm asked to do, and to what extent am I responsible for my actions?
-Daniel Chapter 1 - we're responsible to speak up. we need to be creative on how to bring it up
-We sometimes yield a lot of agency to systems.
-Most of us interact with tech in all four perspectives. What is your responsibility through each?
-Asking Questions is really useful in changing minds (yours or someone else's')

Session 4a (Library Seminar Room) Faith and AI ethics

- Lots of frameworks out there
- What's unique about a faith perspective?
- Golden rule / love your neighbor of yourself is the bedrock for human reality
- Something distinctive / soul about humans
- Universe is grounded in purpose vs. chance
- View of human destiny
- Jewish - good = abstract concept that requires more definition
    - Codifying and figuring out what things should look like beyond abstractions
- The people in the front lines are not ill intended
    - The ability to have a voice that asks the tough questions within our value system
    - Other perspectives actually need to be brought in
- Good intentions don't count for much at all (Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook)
    - Problem is naivety, not intentions.
    - Necessary but not sufficient to produce the right thing.
    - Need different voices.

- Something outside of the human that has a say on what we ought to do.
    - Does the isolate or draw me close to divine presence?
- Creation of human rights and human dignity from the faith perspective?
    - Lots of these discussions happened after WWII from faith communities
    - Human rights framework is an example of deep faith convictions brought into non-religious space.
- Rights conversation
    - Autonomy - no real ties to religious presuppositions
    - Natural equality - more of a religious track
        - Created by God to be equal to each other.
- Faith brings narrative into the discussion about God's purpose in the world
- Religion that wants to worship AI
    - But faith communities challenge as idolatry or worshipping as human creation
- Probably won't have one answer about all the faith traditions - hopefully won't
    - We say our framework - features in our motivational structure in a unique way
    - The fact that we bring a different set of motivations in might just be all there is.
- Being transparent about our motivations/narratives is something that can be helpful
- Reformed Christian perspective - fallen nature -> fallen AI, but God's redemptive plan -> redeemed AI
    - What does Grace look like in AI? Rules have no grace, but we our tradition makes us think about that.
- Can you create an AI with religious narratives but a user does not? Is that ethical?
    - Need to also respect other values.
    - AI is task oriented but can also interact with human values.
- Divine presence, doesn't collapse into ethics
    - Closer or further separated from divine presence?
- Overcoming evil inclinations personally, but also overcoming evil overall in the world
- Autonomous cars
    - Building in ethics? It can make decisions
    - Who decides
    - Germany has guidelines about this.
        - Not making decisions based on human characteristics
            - In China, who has the best social status?
    - Do we trust the person over the car though?
        - Our cognitive biases are a huge risk
- 99% of AI is content recommendation/advertising - reduced to clicks
    - Perverse incentives
    - Image bearers shouldn't be reduced to clicks - that may be easier to resist.
    - What type of engagement as a person of faith should I have?
        - Being a part of it is good to ask the broader questions
- Why do you get to decide what I see? Centralization of power.
    - Faith perspective, empowerment and decentralization.
- We are learning things as a culture - we are learning about the attention economy
- Technology is just another reminder of the injustices that plague us.
    - We are not actually more moral, we still need to understand the ethical problems.
    - We want to start with reflection for sure - but that's not inherently religious
- Not about being unique and better than others.
    - We ought to start by trying to apply what we believe we understand
    - Proverbs 11:1 - a false balance is bad. We need to do things well to be moving into the presence of God.
        - Purpose of pleasing God, not because of the consequences.

Session 4b (Library Classroom) AI for human creativity and flourishing

What are machines good at? What are humans good at? What brings humans delight? What kind of software/technology can promote creativity?
Subsidiary focal integration
How can these tools promote the things that are most basic about human beings - creativity?
Using Word to get words down and then organize thoughts and express articulate.
What happens when the mechanics of using the tool get in the way of thinking about them?
Technology has made some things - cameras, music, etc. - more affordable.
Also needed to curate the abundance of content that now exists.
But could the curation be also curating us? - Illusion of choosing content when we're really being directed.
How do you get someone to play? Creativity is risk? Try new things. We're in a place where we have things rated - how do we promote creativity?
Changing the parameters - e.g. snapchat vs instragram.
Creativity - too much freedom can be scary, intimidating.
Oscillation between restrictions and openness. Scaffold and stage development by balancing those two.
What does creativity - finding solutions, problem solving, think outside the box
Art for art's sake.
Need creativity to understand big data to use it in new ways.
Reduce fear, intimidation, specialization. Cultural engagement
Individual creativity - vs group creativity (e.g. jazz musicians).
Where is failure in this model? Need freedom to fail, but also the feedback.
Digital editing brought a lot of new creativity but has also reached a point of so many options that it's hard to commit and to decide when something is complete.
Nimbleness
How do we empower people to get up from failure? from feedback?

Use tools for flourishing?
Flourish with boundaries - have them adapt and grow with users.
Six Thinking Hats: black hat = critical thinking, blue hat = upside/potential, red=gut feeling. Think in parallel.
E.g. 32 plots. At forks in stories/films it can shape the directions.
Are they culturally specifically?
Integration and diversity -
E.g. pulpit exchange with pastors of different ethnicities provided different perspectives.
E.g. selfies allow self-representation for people who have been under-represented. Created by a self-imaging God. Help us to find our God-given image. **Selfie: Searching for the Image of God in the Digital Age**
How do we train to be for others?
Economic factor - to stay in business need to meet a need.
Can we value free time?

Session 4c (Writing Studio) How can faithful technologists make the world a better place?

Make sure people have enough oxygen [do our jobs].
Remember, accommodate, and recognize difference.
Many new folk in tech have a lot of freedom and a lot of choice (freedom and responsibility).
Assess your work.
Recognize opportunity, accountability, and privilege.
For many folk, especially those in tech, how they spend their time is of greater impact and value than any donation they will ever make.
If you want to solve a world problem how do you choose work and prepare yourself to help you address that problem in 10 or 20 years.
What's the opportunity cost of your time?
80,000 hours - how many people in the world will die if we don't solve this problem.
Parallel to going into finance 20-30 years ago - did people of faith add value?
Tiered systems of access
Is there a balance question, how does faithfulness tie into social fabric and work-life balance?

Ideas for Continuing the Conversation?

Slack Channel for general information sharing / questions
FB group
Commit to writing our thoughts publicly on Medium
Meetups / Zoom meetings on specific items
Working groups

Hashtag: #faithfortech