Rights, Equity and the Democratic Construction of Knowledge

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Overview

- **Part 1: establishing a platform**
  - Introduction
  - Bringing personal experience
  - Clarifying the topic
  - Setting up a discourse framework
  - Seeing this in practice
  - CST Principles
 - Technology as the missing link (religious discourse)

Overview

- **Part 2: tackling the issues**
  - Knowledge and information
  - Knowledge versus information
  - A Salesian addition
  - The changing world of information
  - Software Libre as a response
  - Concrete action
  - To Do List

Introduction

- Two examples (DB's Circular, Information on rare plant)
- Two approaches to knowledge
- We will plot our way between these two poles...as well as between the religious and the secular
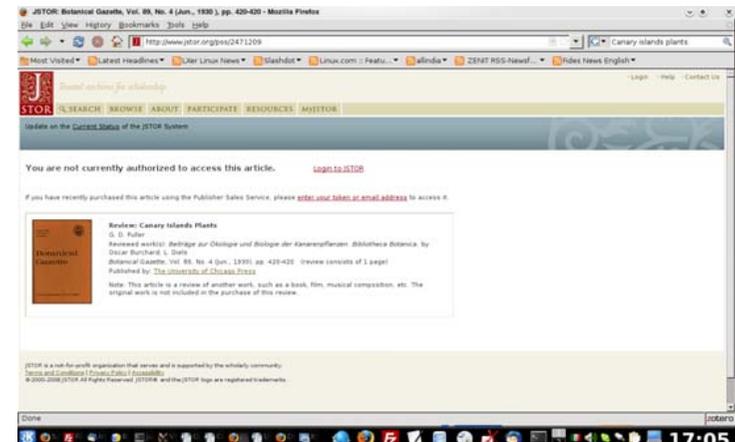
Spreading good books

....It can even enter homes
where the priest cannot.
The dubious will
take it as a gift
or remembrance.
There is no blush in the offering of it.

Rare plant in Canary Islands

"you are not currently authorized to access this article"!

I am not an expert!

- I have never been to a computer class in my life!
- But I began building websites when Tin Berners Lee set up the World Wide Web*
- I bring 20 years of hands-on experience

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* "1989....the driving force I had in mind was communication
   through shared knowledge and the driving 'market' for it
was collaboration among people at work and at home"
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Clarifying our topic

- Equity! There is obviously rather little of it!
- A range of issues are involved in the 'democratic construction of knowledge:
    - Collective nature of knowledge implies an epistemo-logy and pedagogy
    - The strong presence of market forces

world summit
on the **information society**
Geneva 2003 - Tunis 2005

The collective nature of knowledge – and indeed knowers – involves questions of epistemology and pedagogy

congreso internacional
SOFTWARE
libre
Quito
octubre 2008

Discourse framework 1

- Technocratic discourse tends to dominate
- So try to 'tell the story' with Christian vocabulary and grammar

"Can theology aim at understanding technology? Can we put the words God and technology together in any kind of meaningful sentence? Can theology guess what God is doing in today's technology?

Discourse framework 2
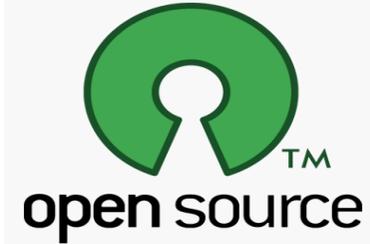
- Critique the ideology presented by FSF and OSI
- Critique the concept of 'information society'
- Be aware of the threat of neo-liberal dis-course colonizing other discourses
- Habermas: faith and knowledge must live together in a self-reflective way

What might it look like in practice? 1

- Lk 4:18-19: "He sent me to proclaim freedom..."
- Liberation of informationally poor communit-ies (NZ example)
  - Maori
  - Pacific Island peoples
  - Lower income earners
  - Sole parents
  - People with low/no qualifications
  - Unemployed
  - Without telecommunications structure

What might it look like in practice? 2

- Catholic Social Teaching principles
  - Human dignity
  - Common good
  - Solidarity
  - Subsidiarity
- Technology the missing link in religious discourse

We need a theory of technology based on Christian principles

Theory of technology based on Christian principles

- Catholic anthropology
- Social institutions facilitate personal development
- Gospel imperatives (Second Judgement, Great Commandment)
- Trained lay apostolate
- New vocabulary
- New forms of governance for new authority
- New institutional ethics
- Public theology to convert ethics to norms
- Re-invigorated notion of common good
- Technology apostolate for laity
- Application of CST

Knowledge and Information

- Democracy needs 'knowledge spaces', 'virtual agora'
- Avoid a commodity view of knowledge
- International law assumes that knowledge is a commodity.

"A propensity in policy for resorting to technocratic, instrumentalist and anti-intellectual views of knowledge"

Knowledge versus information

- It is important to distinguish between know-ledge and information
  - An over-abundance of information does not imply the wisdom to deal with it.

Learning environments which enculturate into a practice...such as Linux and Open Source

A 'Salesian' addition
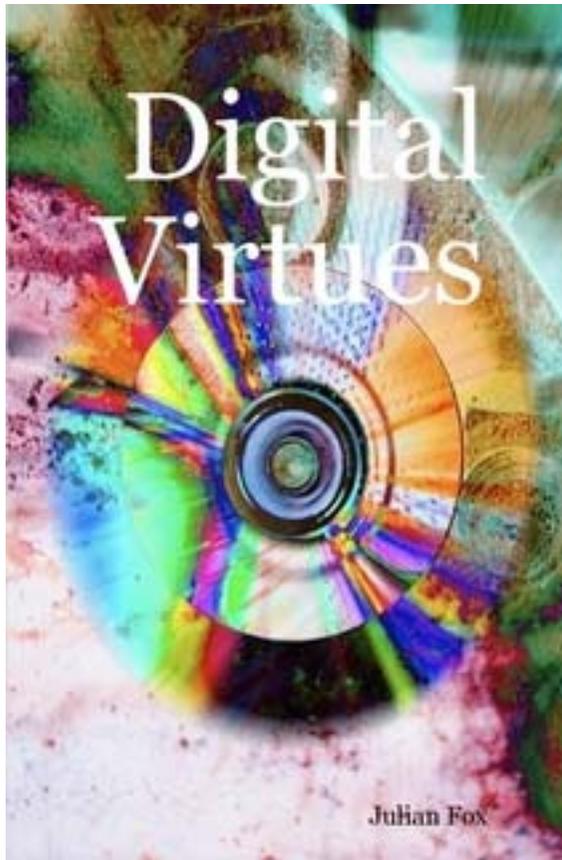
- Don Bosco's notion of 'honest citizen, good Christian'
  - Citizenship for him implied rights, duties, participation, religion, and education
- We could add this notion to Catholic Social Teaching since it was explicitly recognised by the Pope who 'launched' CST in the modern world

The changed world of information

- Castell's notion of the 'networked society'
  - Networks have replaced hierarchy. It is crucial to be 'in' the network' and/or 'switched on'.

"If you do not care about the networks, the networks will care about you anyway. For as long as you want to live in this society, at this time and in this place, you will have to deal with the network society"

Software Libre as a response

- FLOSS helps bypass the Intellectual Property regime
- FLOSS helps avoid a situation of dependence (on foreign development), passiveness (because one cannot access the source code), inequality (because all the cards are held by the informationally rich) and the hegemony of English!

Concrete action

- We need to re-interpret the debate in Christian terms
- Take into account education and citizenship needs via FLOSS
  - Formation of a free-judging spirit who feels responsible in society
  - Balance personal formation and encyclopedic information
  - Urge and enable ongoing education
- Networks, connections, choice, ecology of knowing and learning = WORLD WIDE WEB
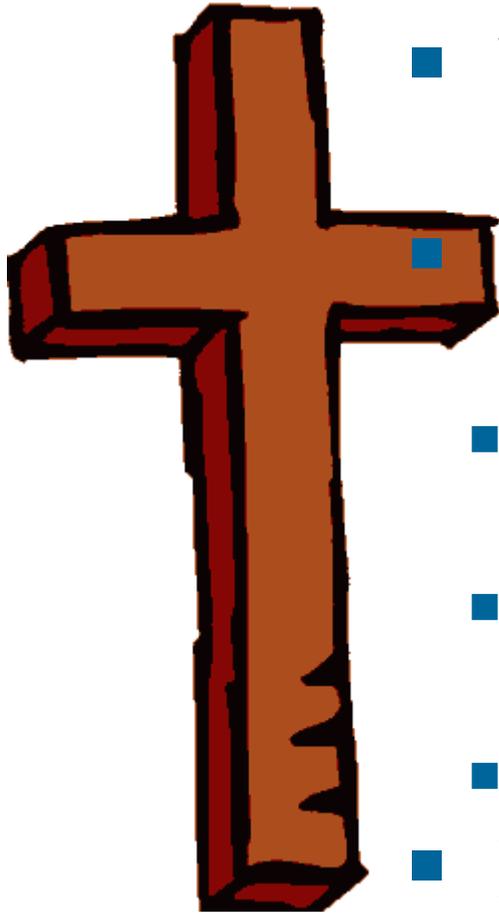
TO DO list ....

- Tim Berner Lee's vision of communication through shared knowledge?
- Challenge practices, policies, technologies that disenfranchise.... and liberate communities
- Join WACC
- Where do we stand on FLOSS? Policies?
- Salesian action on behalf of young – networks
- Salesian international learning environments which enculturate into a practice?

TO DO list (cont)

- Making the Third Sector a more self-aware force
- Models for sharing information, stimulating innvoation
- Overcoming difficulties regarding awareness, qualified teachers, appropriate educational materials in FLOSS