

Bridges to Infinity: Humankind, God and the Scientific Enterprise

Conference Prospectus

Date and Location

May 6-7, 2011, Santa Clara University

Goals of the Conference

1. To examine different ways in which science and religion can be related in the curricula of Jesuit universities. The primary focus will be on how these two seemingly disparate areas of human understanding can be connected in the context of “the true, the good and the beautiful”.
2. To underscore the role that technology and engineering play in society, particularly when it comes to improving the lives of the poor. This will entail a conversation about how Jesuit institutions in different parts of the world make their students aware of technical innovations that can benefit broad segments of the population. Possible collaborative engineering projects will be discussed, as will the development of a shared data base.
3. To explore how the nature of the science - religion dialogue varies across cultures. The fact that this conference will include representatives from the United States, India and South America will allow for a comparative analysis of different cosmological models, attitudes to technology, aesthetic preferences and pedagogical paradigms.
4. To assess whether establishing a rational and broadly interdisciplinary framework for the dialogue between science and religion can be a common programmatic goal for Jesuit institutions of higher education.
5. To evaluate the prospect of pooling together the resources of the Jesuit School of Theology, the School of Engineering and the Institute for Frugal Innovation at Santa Clara University, and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley to create a global training program for those who teach (or plan to teach) at Jesuit universities, and have an interest in science and religion.

Participating Jesuit Institutions

Santa Clara University
Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University
Catholic University of Uruguay
Catholic University of Cordoba, Argentina
Javeriana University, Bogota, Colombia
St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, India
Xavier Institute of Engineering, Mumbai, India

Sponsors

School of Engineering, Santa Clara University
Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University
Center for Science, Technology and Society, Santa Clara University
Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University
Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education, Santa Clara University

Conference Format and Schedule

Day 1: Friday, May 6, 2011

9:00 – 9:30 Welcome and Opening Remarks

Dr. Godfrey Mungal, Dean of Engineering

Fr. Ronald Anton, Secretary for Higher Education, *ad interim*
General Curia, Society of Jesus

Session I: The “True”

This session will explore a number of fundamental philosophical and theological questions that are in some way related to science. Particular emphasis will be placed on the development and teaching of interdisciplinary courses that address such issues, and allow for a meaningful dialogue between science and religion.

9:30 – 10:00 Keynote Presentation: *Bridging Theology and the Natural Sciences: Thirty Years of Courses, Programs and Insights*

Speaker: Dr. Robert J. Russell, founder and director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS), and the Ian G. Barbour Professor of Theology and Science in Residence at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU)

10:00 – 10:45 Panel Discussion

Moderator: Fr. William O'Neill, S.J., Associate Professor of Social Ethics, Jesuit School of Theology

Panelists

Fr. John Haughey, S.J., Fellow, Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University

Dr. Margaret McLean, Assistant Director, Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University

Dr. Aleksandar Zecevic, Professor of Electrical Engineering, and Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, Santa Clara University

10:45 – 11:15 Break

Session II: The “Good”

This session will examine the many different ways in which science can be applied for the benefit of humanity. Special attention will be devoted to the needs of the poor, and the design of technological solutions that can potentially improve their lives.

11:15 – 11:45 Keynote Presentation: *Engineering for the Underserved – the Global Challenge*

Speaker: Ms. Radha Basu, social entrepreneur; former Chairman and CEO of Support.com; Regis and Dianne McKenna Professor of Science, Technology, and Society; Dean's Executive Professor, School of Engineering; Senior Fellow, Center for Science, Technology, and Society

11:45 – 12:30 Panel Discussion

Moderator: Dr. Keith Douglass Warner, OFM, Lecturer, Department of Religious Studies and Assistant Director for Education at the Center for Science, Technology and Society, Santa Clara University.

Panelists

Fr. James Reites, S.J., Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Santa Clara University

Fr. Xavier Savarimuthu, S.J., Professor of Environmental Studies and Microbiology, St. Xavier's College, Kolkata

Dr. Alvaro Pardo, Professor and Chair, Department of Electrical Engineering, Catholic University of Uruguay

12:30 – 2:00 Lunch

Session III: The “Beautiful”

This session will focus on the extraordinary (and completely unexpected) fact that aesthetic considerations often serve as a guide to new scientific discoveries. The relationship between Beauty and Truth will be examined in various cultures, in art, music and dance - East and West - so as to throw light on that “impenetrable Mystery one of whose names is God”. One of the key ideas that will be discussed in this context is the possibility that genuine science and religion suggest distinct and exciting ways to bring the truth and the goodness of beauty into our daily lives

2:00 – 2:30 Keynote Presentation: *The Lure of Beauty - Science, Religion and the Arts, East and West*

Speaker: Fr. Lancelot Pereira, S.J., former Principal of St. Xavier’s College, Mumbai, and author of “The Enchanted Darkness”.

2:30 – 3:15 Panel Discussion

Moderator: Dr. Denise Carmody, Interim Director of the Ignatian Center, Professor of Religious Studies and former Provost, Santa Clara University.

Panelists

Kristin Kusanovich, Co-director of the Justice and the Arts Initiative, and Senior Lecturer, Department of Theatre and Dance, Santa Clara University

Dr. Mark Graves, Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies and the School of Engineering, Santa Clara University

Dr. Philip Kesten, Associate Professor of Physics, Santa Clara University

4:00 – 6:00 Reception

Day 2: Saturday, May 7, 2011

9:00 – 3:00 Round table discussion between representatives of all participating Jesuit institutions. Next steps and future plans will be considered, including common programmatic goals and global training programs.