

CULTIVATING DEPTH

Every morning we wake up to a deluge of news. Some of them are true, but some of them, as we know, turn out to be fake.

But that's just part of the story. While technology brings many, many benefits, it also often assaults us with too much information, too much entertainment, too much content.

It feels like it's impossible to keep up! There's simply too much content, but just too little time! To complicate things, researchers have found that when we read using our phone, tablet, or computer screen, we tend to skim rather than read and think deeply.

That's because whenever we go online, we enter an ecosystem of disruption technologies.

Our former superior general, Fr. Adolfo Nicolas (2010), previously talked about this content overload. He said: "When one can access so much information so quickly and so painlessly...the laborious, painstaking work of serious, critical thinking often gets short-circuited."

The result is what Fr. Nico calls the "globalization of superficiality." Superficial thinking has become the default response to the complexity and uncertainty of our times.

Today, more than ever, we realize how complex and uncertain reality is. Never in history have there been so many obviously different--and opposing!--points of view and claims to truth. Even experts often disagree among themselves.

What results from this growing sense of uncertainty and complexity are two powerful temptations. Both are manifestations of superficial thinking.

The first is fundamentalism, when we insist that there is only one absolutely correct answer. This black-and-white reaction to uncertainty gives us a comforting sense of security, but it distorts reality by pretending that it is simpler and neater than it actually is.

The second equally inadequate and lazy response is relativism. Because it's hard to figure things out, we give up altogether and just claim that everyone is equally correct. "Whatever!" This relativist approach is very appealing because it keeps us open-minded and politically correct, but guess what? We end up abandoning our responsibility to think.

Of course the only adequate and proper response to uncertainty and complexity is critical thinking, to accept our responsibility to be open to different perspectives but also to embrace the commitment to evaluate them and to decide--even without 100% certainty-- which of these perspectives makes the most sense for now. But that's a lot of hard work!

When no one was looking, this type of clear and deep thinking has become an endangered species in the digital age.

No doubt technology offers us countless benefits and of course we should make the most of it, but it also brings some risks and dangers. One of these dangers is losing our ability to think and to learn with depth.

It's time to reexamine our habits and lifestyles.



After all, it is only when we really learn to pay full attention to the world and to think clearly and deeply about it that we will learn about the world and yes, find God in all its things.

What can we then do to cultivate depth in this age of technology?

What can we do so that technology does not get in the way of what's good for us, but actually helps make us better learners and thinkers?

How can we help ourselves become deeper thinkers and learners?