

# Theological Education

Volume 41, Number 1  
2005

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## *Continuing the Conversation*

*Theological Education* invites responses, of up to 1,500 words, to articles published in the journal in order to foster conversation among its readers. Reader responses may be emailed to the managing editor at [merrill@ats.edu](mailto:merrill@ats.edu). Responses are published at the discretion of the editors and may be edited for length.

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# Editor's Introduction

*Jeremiah J. McCarthy*

This issue of *Theological Education* is the first of two planned issues to emerge from the Association's project on Technology and Educational Practices. Louis Charles Willard, who provides principal staff support to the project, describes the genesis of the project, its intended goals, and the project activities and methods of procedure in his introduction to this volume. In this issue, theological educators have written from their particular areas of experience, expertise, and experimentation with the technological enhancement of theological teaching.

Victor Klimoski, director of lifelong learning at St. John's University School of Theology–Seminary, offers a strategic planning model of four interrelated stages for schools to consider as they seek to integrate technology into theological teaching and learning.

John Jewell of the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary asks what the digital revolution and its implications mean for theological education and the practice of ministry. What does it mean for the church? he asks. He proposes ways in which enthusiastic "early adopters" of technology and "skeptical resisters" might engage in theological discourse that may enhance both theological education and the practice of ministry.

Integrating digital technologies into theological teaching changes understandings of the role of teachers and how a theological faculty carries out its educational mission. Jan Viktora of The Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity discusses student expectations regarding technology and their accompanying expectations that educators attend to how they use the tools in response to new patterns of student thinking.

Edward Foley of Catholic Theological Union invites readers to explore their presuppositions about technology in order to engage in theological reflection on technology. He suggests that theological educators may begin with a perspective of suspicion that is not shared by their students. He then addresses how that perspective may prepare theological educators not only to use technology in their teaching but also to theologize from technology in a mission-related manner.

William Hook, librarian of the Vanderbilt University Divinity School, discusses the advent of the Internet, the emergence of electronic resources, the positive influences of digital technologies, the forecasts of transformative effects on education, and the "mixed blessing" they represent.

Structural institutional change for the effective use of technology is the topic of the article by David Neidert and John Aukerman of Anderson University School of Theology. The authors suggest a set of systems-based questions to guide schools into a more effective integration of technology into the teaching/learning environment.

Digital technologies can make a difference in helping theological faculty to align their Christian convictions and pedagogical strategies more effectively, according to Mary Hess of Luther Seminary, as she considers the implications of digital technologies as one element of the larger learning environment.

James Rafferty suggests where to look and how to choose and use technological products and tools as productive aids to teaching in theological schools. He also discusses minimum competencies for good stewardship of technology and where teachers can find assistance in adopting and adapting technological resources.

Steve Delamarter of George Fox Evangelical Seminary describes six types of technology classrooms that have emerged in recent years and offers visions for the role of technology in the teaching/learning process that are likely to develop in the coming years.

The Open Forum section of this issue offers four contributions related to contemporary theological education. A case study of one seminary and its relation to its denomination is the basis of David Forney's (Columbia Theological Seminary) exploration of the loosely coupled system of organizational theory. This descriptive theory helps detail both the interconnectedness and the independence many seminaries and denominations experience today.

Ronald Allen of Christian Theological Seminary reports the results of a survey of preachers regarding their most important experiences of learning to preach. Listening to other preachers was the most formative influence of the preachers interviewed. The author explores the implications for the teaching of homiletics, given this finding, primary among them reflecting on the preaching they have heard and helping students discover other approaches that may supplement or supplant their embedded approaches to preaching.

Frederick Guyette of Erskine Theological Seminary draws on H. Richard Niebuhr's love of God and neighbor as the goal of theological education by considering three biblical traditions of friendship: Abraham as a friend of God, Job's search for friendship, and friendship in the Johannine tradition. Communities gathered around the Eucharistic table and sent into the world to befriend others, he suggests, may offer the best hope for "the increase of the love of God and neighbor."

William Myers, director of leadership education for ATS, reports on a consultation with schools that are members of regional consortia of theological institutions. The article identifies current configurations among eleven consortia, the benefits schools derive from such arrangements, and challenges to the effectiveness of consortial relationships.

# The ATS Technology and Educational Practices Project

*Louis Charles Willard*

*The Association of Theological Schools*

In 2003, Lilly Endowment funded a proposal of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) to identify best practices in the use of educational technology in theological education, to conduct educational events providing information about educational technology and skill development in its use, and to create resources about education and technology for use by theological schools. A principal resource for the project is the experience of seventy-one theological schools that received planning and implementation grants from Lilly Endowment in its Information Technology for Theological Teaching program.

Flowing from the conviction that emerging technologies have potentially powerful teaching and learning applications, the goal of the Endowment's Information Technology for Theological Teaching program has been to improve the capacities of theological schools to use computer technologies and online resources effectively in their educational programs.

Meanwhile, as ATS and its member schools have been working deliberately on these issues, other sectors of American higher education have been moving at considerably greater speed and, with the larger size and greater in-house computing expertise of most colleges and universities, have implemented a wide range of educational technology applications. A visitor to almost any mid-sized undergraduate institution will find online library catalogs and other electronic resources, a majority of courses employing technologically enhanced content and delivery, most facilities wired for high-speed Internet access, and comprehensive computing resources.

Educational technology has, thus, emerged as a dominant shaping force in the practices of higher education. It combines features of most of the "technology" that has historically supported education—from chalkboards and overhead projectors to audio and video tapes and duplicated papers for distribution to students—with online library holdings and reference resources both local and remote as well as web-based resources, which expand tremendously the information that is available to faculty and students. Technology has compressed the time required to access these resources from hours to seconds. These resources take a role not merely as a new educational technology but as the central communication and information medium for higher education. This new educational technology is, therefore, more than a new delivery system for established educational efforts. It is beginning to challenge many hitherto

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normative practices in higher education. Theological education, largely with the support of Lilly Endowment grants, has begun to develop the institutional infrastructure and teaching skills that educational technology requires, but both the Association and theological schools are behind higher education as a whole. It would be shortsighted, moreover, to construe the task as merely one of catching up in order that theological schools become more competitive with other forms of higher education. Rather, theological schools need to develop the capacity and skills necessary to participate in a new educational ecology, and the purpose of this project is to provide direction and guidance for that development.

### **Goals of the project**

This project proposes to organize and expand the valuable repository of knowledge and best practices of educational and information technology in theological education that has developed since the mid-1990s. In service to this goal, the project is identifying the range and the varieties of learning that have accrued among ATS schools, synthesizing best practice models for the educational use of technology in theological learning, and implementing strategies to inform and to lead ATS schools toward these best practices. The project anticipates achieving its purposes through a combination of information gathering and analysis, seminars and workshops, and essays, such as those gathered in this issue of *Theological Education*.

One impetus for work in educational technology comes from the formally adopted work plan of the Association, which was most recently updated and adopted in spring 2004. The current work plan includes this project as one of five targeted areas of work during 2004–2010, stating, “ATS schools need to make the transitions necessary to accommodate and maximize the use of information technology to enhance educational practices and institutional administration.” It continues, “As ATS schools develop the necessary infrastructure, faculty will need to adjust their teaching and course development to accommodate new technologies for accessing information, and administrative leaders will need to learn how to use the information available to them to enhance institutional planning, evaluation, and advancement. Libraries will also change as a function of information technology.” Finally it proposes, “ATS will provide a clearing house for information about the application of these technologies, a venue for peer education, and ongoing assessment of the educational implications of these technologies for theological education.”

### **Project activities and methods of procedure**

The project moves through four primary phases of work over a four-year period. The first phase will include a review of the utilization of educational



technology in the schools that received the Endowment's Information Technology for Theological Teaching grants. The second phase will consist of several assessments of the technological infrastructure issues and the utilization of educational and information technology leading to the identification of best practices in this area. The third phase will identify the variety of applications of educational technology in theological education and will present several educational events for faculty and administrators. The fourth phase will provide consultation and broad educational and dissemination activities.

This issue of *Theological Education* flows from the work of the task force and the project management team, having undertaken a study of these seventy-one schools and other ATS schools perceived to have developed capacity in educational technology, with particular focus on three questions: (1) What is the infrastructure threshold necessary for the utilization of educational technology? (2) What has been learned about faculty responses to the adoption of educational technology, and are there common habits that characterize faculty who are using educational technology effectively? (3) What has been learned more broadly in higher education about effective and ineffective applications of educational technology—in terms of infrastructure, software, and efforts at faculty development?

The project will, in the course of its work, develop case studies, summaries of best practices, and basic information about institutional efforts to develop educational technology capacity and to implement institution-wide applications. The resources will be produced in a combination of print (this issue of *Theological Education*, for example) and nonprint formats, according to the intended use and distribution of the resource.

## Conclusion

This project will enable ATS schools to expand their capacities to educate men and women for ministry by offering the possibility of significantly improving the delivery of their educational programs. These improvements will come through the better informed appropriation of educational technology in support of varied approaches to teaching and learning the theological disciplines. The project will both gather and exemplify best practices in educational technology using a collaborative and ongoing evaluative approach to theological education.

*Louis Charles Willard is director, accreditation and institutional evaluation of ATS. He is providing principal staff support to the project on Technology and Educational Practices.*



# Planning for Innovation: A Framework for Reflective Practice

*Victor Klimoski*

*Saint John's University School of Theology-Seminary*

*ABSTRACT: Working with insights from the seventy-two schools that received Lilly technology grants, the project management team for the ATS study of educational technology has gathered a strategic planning model. Its purpose is to offer a way to attend to a host of issues and concerns as theological schools seek to take advantage of what this new resource for teaching and learning has to offer. This essay describes the model and what appear to be four distinct but interrelated stages. For each stage, the team has developed key objectives and the questions they generate for institutional discussion.*

## Introduction

Because educational technology involves the computer, one might assume that its incorporation into theological education would follow a logical linear path. That indeed might be the case for some ATS schools. What seems apparent from what we are learning as we gather information from schools who received Lilly Endowment technology grants is that the starting point for schools is as varied as their cultures, sizes, locations, and denominational identities. Even with planning grants, schools often launched educational technology projects with limited foresight about what would be required to move experiments with the computer as a teaching tool into how an institution reconceptualizes its educational mission with the support technology can offer.

There are reasons for this scattered approach to innovation. First, technology can be viewed as a "box," a clever device capable of quickly sorting and organizing data, providing access to the World Wide Web, and streamlining tedious routines. When that happens, action focuses on the instrument itself and not on the ways it interacts with the processes of learning. At its lowest level of use, the computer becomes an accommodation to "a generation raised on television." Second, there continues to be a sense of inevitability about the role of the computer. Whether one agrees with Marc Prensky's notion of digital natives, a rapidly expanding volume of literature describes emerging generations of learners wired in ways we book-and-pen bound teachers were not.<sup>1</sup> Seen as something over which we have no choice or control, introducing educational technology can generate even deeper patterns of resistance that are part of the innovation process. A third reason has to do with readiness. Some schools receiving a Lilly technology grant were already well along in their use of computer technologies as a teaching resource. Others had yet to establish a minimum infrastructure to support its use.

## *Planning for Innovation: A Framework for Reflective Practice*

Finally, the Endowment's challenge to theological schools to explore the use of educational technology to enhance the quality of teaching and learning was matched by a substantial investment in capital. Projects developed quickly and not always with the careful sorting out of the issues they would encounter. Was this initiative about providing budget relief for expensive technological resources, equipping schools to deal with shifts in how students learn, expanding faculty skills for fostering active learning, or stimulating a new level of reflection on the processes of teaching and learning themselves?

None of these reasons is trivial although some have less traction than seven years ago. Theological education in its institutional practices is often a scramble to balance revered traditions of intellectual and pastoral formation with changing learner needs and readiness. Think for a moment what occurred as many schools moved from exclusively residential communities to centers serving a wide variety of commuters. Or consider the impact on instructional practice of student bodies composed of a wide range of second-career persons with diverse backgrounds and levels of preparation for seminary education. In addition to issues of balance, the seventy-two ATS schools added their Lilly technology projects to environments often already taxed in terms of time pressures on faculty, staff, or students. If we know one thing for sure about educational technology, it is not a matter of plugging in the equipment. Unless it is simply used as a "clever device," the effective use of digital technology for learning requires a substantial investment of time to create a well-designed learning package. More importantly, even before faculty begin designing learning activities using technological resources, there is nearly a sea change needed to address the assumptions many instructors bring to their primary work as teachers.

This issue of *Theological Education* represents one phase of data gathering undertaken by the Association with a grant from Lilly Endowment. Lead by a project management team and an advisory committee drawn from ATS schools,<sup>2</sup> this study includes an effort to understand what schools have learned as a result of their technology projects. What are the issues that have bubbled to the top as external funding intensified efforts to use new technologies in seminary and theological school classrooms? How does the learning of individual schools cast light for all schools on the processes of change and adaptation that surround educational technology? What sorts of training and opportunities for sustained conversation must be developed for faculty members, technology specialists, support staff, and students? What happens to "the system" when an innovation of this magnitude occurs? Are there particular theological issues and concerns that require attention? This collection of essays begins the process of bringing together what we are learning from ATS schools—both successes and missteps—to respond to this list of questions. This is not a definitive reading of the context of our engagement with technology but a posing of key ideas and questions we believe are important for the sake of learning.

The following narrative describes a developmental model for strategic planning related to educational technology that draws heavily on the experience of the seventy-two schools that received Lilly technology grants. Introduced in its first iteration at a conference in August 2004 for representatives of those schools, the model is a work in progress. The project management team has reviewed extensive notes taken of conversations at the conference as well as project reports from participating schools. The team refined the model, drawing on the insights of the project's task force, and submitted it for additional feedback from the nearly fifty ATS schools that sent representatives to a second conference in August 2005. Our goal is not to find the Holy Grail about educational technology in theological education but to synthesize what we are learning about the stages and action objectives that seem to foster the best of what technology has to offer as it finds its place within any one of our complex environments.

As we sorted the results of the conference and our study of project reports, we began to see certain patterns emerging. They generally followed well-established points in the adoption of innovation process. We paid attention to what appeared to be fundamental questions a school needs to address if it is going to identify, test, and sustain levels of educational technology tailored to its mission and purposes. The resulting product (Appendix A) is less a map and more a means of highlighting points for discussion and analysis. Although the model unfolds in a linear fashion, we recognize that it fits better in a spiral, looping back to earlier stages. This reflects the rapid change within technology itself. The pace of change means there is little chance things will eventually just settle down. Rather, we think that schools can develop the capacity to stay on top of what is occurring so that technology remains a useful servant for the educational mission of a theological school. It is our hope that the model we are proposing is a resource for equipping schools for such capacity.

### **Assumptions of the model**

Several assumptions emerging from what we are learning from our study of the Lilly technology initiative underlie this model. To begin with, while we believe that digital technology as an educational resource is not a passing fad, we also recognize that it is only one element in an intricate web of factors shaping the lives of ATS schools. The temptation to inflate its role or to speak of technology as the driving force in seminary education tends to increase resistance, not foster deliberative dialogue. That said, we assume that any discussion about educational technology needs to flow from a sustained consideration of pedagogical theory and practice. Over and over again at the August 2004 conference and in project reports, people asserted that at the heart of the ferment about educational technology are the presuppositions we have about what it means to teach and to learn. Unless someone uses a computer merely to entertain her or his students,<sup>3</sup> the question is ultimately about ways to engage learners with ideas, questions,

and bodies of knowledge that will equip them as able leaders in the church. As Richard Nysse of Luther Seminary has noted, someone who is an ineffective teacher without a computer will likely be an ineffective teacher using a computer unless the focus shifts to more fundamental questions about pedagogy.<sup>4</sup>

Another assumption of the model is that the innovation process takes longer than first imagined. It is possible to teach people to use basic equipment and software in a relatively short period of time. Whether to use such equipment and software, when they are most useful for learning, how they can enhance teaching practices, and the extent to which they contribute to the outcomes of the curriculum as a whole are all matters that require time. We assume as well in this model that success correlates directly to the degree there is faculty ownership for incorporating technology as a resource for teaching and learning, and there is commitment of the administration at every phase of the adoption/adaptation process. It is tempting to rely on the early adopters in the faculty or to relegate this “technology thing” to a small group of faculty and staff who have a particular penchant for computers. The strategic model we are describing here depends for its usefulness on a fully engaged faculty backed by an equally fully engaged administration.

While this model presumes that any process for considering the educational uses of technology will engage the library staff, Melody Mazuk, director of the library at Palmer Theological Seminary and member of the task force for this project, suggests that schools be intentional in drawing on the expertise and leadership of library staff. For many theological schools, it is library personnel who grapple with the metaquestions about technology and its implications for managing information essential for the processes of education.

We also assume that systematic assessment is particularly useful as a school monitors the use and impact of technology for teaching and learning. The assessment movement has gained a great deal of momentum over the past few years, not always garnering enthusiasm from institutions. However, in this instance in which certain claims and counterclaims are made about what will happen as technology enters more definitively into how we do our work as schools, beginning early to collect and use assessment data based on good questions helps keep discussions on track rather than sidetracked by personal agendas, untested theories, or idiosyncratic anecdotes.

Any model that claims to be developmental in character suggests thereby some sort of progression from one stage or phase to the next. We find that is the case as we learn from the Lilly technology grant schools. It is also the case that schools may need to revisit earlier stages or objectives in earlier stages as new events occur in the life of a school or as personnel changes. The latter issue is not insignificant. There are many stories of talented technology or instructional development specialists supported by the Lilly grants who played an instrumental role as schools implemented their projects. Not anticipating how that specialized expertise would be supported after the grant ended left several schools scrambling

to consider their options. The same holds true for faculty and staff members who were leaders at the start of the project and then left to take jobs elsewhere. Such changes may necessitate looping back to earlier objectives.

Finally, we assume that as neat as we are in framing the four stages in the model, some schools may well be addressing objectives in different stages simultaneously. Moreover, all objectives will not have the same level of significance for every school. The value of the sequence is its encouragement of a systematic approach to decisions about the role of technology in teaching and learning. The sequence can also be helpful as a school tries to identify where the source of glitches might occur. What might seem a software or hardware issue, for example, may actually be a question about pedagogy not sufficiently defined or named. Again, the model is not a map but a guide for important discussions of the issues and concerns, enabling a school to exercise creative leadership for educational technology tailored to its culture, resources, mission, and purposes.

### **Stage I: Discerning**

This stage was added after the consultation at the August 2004 conference as the project management team began to recognize that the movement to structuring for technology could become preemptive. There was a need for a preliminary stage in which some foundational work would facilitate efforts later on. The leadership for the discernment stage comes, we believe, from the president and dean, reflecting our assumption about sustained commitment from administration. Their leadership, however, does not suggest passivity on the part of faculty as the five objectives for this stage make clear.

*Objective 1, Discussion of Pedagogical Assumptions and Attitudes*, is indispensable if educational technology is to be more than accommodation of the pervasive presence of computers. Discussion of pedagogical theories and practices as well as consideration of attitudes toward technology for teaching and learning uncovers the landscape for whatever action unfolds. Resisters are not evil just as early adopters are not visionaries. What we believe about teaching and about how students learn are deeply held values that are seldom uniformly held or widely shared. Treating such values as private matters left to personal preference eventually short-circuits the ability of a faculty to engage educational technology at appropriate and mutually supportive levels.

The issue of pedagogy includes concern about how the use of technology affects relationships between teacher and learner. While certain claims about what we presume happens in face-to-face settings can be exaggerated, faculty members' concerns about the potential of digital technology to "instrumentalize" the relationship between faculty and students needed to be addressed. The discussion about pedagogy, while logically centered in the faculty, can also extend beyond it to other constituency groups associated with the school. Students, ministry supervisors, alums, board members, pastors, and denomina-

## *Planning for Innovation: A Framework for Reflective Practice*

tional representatives can all offer perspectives about the larger educational mission of the school that can be enlightening as the faculty begins to make specific decisions about pedagogy and the role of educational technology within it.

*Objective 2, Assessing Student Readiness and Competencies*, is often passed over because we either overestimate their abilities with software applications or their preferences for various pedagogical practices. Because students are the primary audience for any use of classroom technology, understanding who they are, what they know, and what they really expect is an important foundational element in Stage I. Participants in the 2004 conference noted in this regard that considering uses of educational technologies for classroom instruction reinvigorates attention to ideas about learning styles and preferences as they apply to students and to faculty.

*Objective 3, Consulting with Other Schools*, and *Objective 4, Internal Audit of Resources and Talent*, provide important information as the discernment process unfolds. Because of the wide range of experience with technology across ATS and other professional schools, consulting with other schools can fill in the blanks about what is possible, what a school can anticipate for long-term investment, what obstacles tend to be most prevalent, and what actually works for the sake of effective learning. As a participant in the 2004 conference commented, conversations with other schools can be a welcome reality check, whether it is about what to buy, user resistance, or applications for various theological and pastoral disciplines. In addition to this form of external consultation, it is also important to do an early audit of what already exists in the school in terms of talent and resources available to support the use of digital technology. Few schools begin from scratch, but many fail to determine the full range of resources and readiness available to them as they begin.

*Objective 5, Discerning Congruence with Institutional Mission*, is, of course, the point of discernment. Perhaps the activity of Objective 5 can best be summarized in the question, "What are we prepared to commit ourselves to do?" This is a question that goes beyond access to an outside grant, beyond fascination with "the box," beyond a sense of inevitability, or beyond a fear of being left behind in the competition to attract students. Rather, the question calls for an intentional, informed decision about whether and how this particular school will use technology to accomplish what it does best. Objective 5 keeps technology as a servant to the faculty and the school, not its master.<sup>5</sup> Experienced faculty and technology specialists at the 2004 conference also agreed that educational technology is not an all-or-nothing proposition. The fruit of good discernment is identifying exactly what a school is poised to do at this time given the resources it has and the readiness and support of faculty and students. That realization is freeing.



### *Transition activities from Stage I*

Daniel Levinson, in his stage theory of adult development, proposed that movement from one stage of development to another involved certain transitional activities.<sup>6</sup> We found that to be a helpful insight as we worked with this model. As a school concluded a stage, were there certain activities it needed to undertake as it entered the next stage? Two activities in this first transition phase seemed apparent. First, assuming the faculty discerned its readiness to adapt educational technology as a resource for teaching and learning, there is need for a leadership team with broad representation. This includes early adopters as well as those who will ask the “slow-down” questions that help raise unforeseen issues and strengthen ownership. Without specific leadership, innovation around educational technology will falter. The second transitional activity emphasized by 2004 conference participants was cultivating an environment that supports experimentation. While there are some prepackaged software programs that can be used in a classroom, there are not a great number. More importantly, experimentation encourages faculty to think about ways in which the tools that the new media offer might enhance their teaching, creating or adapting teaching resources best suited to their learning outcomes. Testing such ideas is risky if the cultural norm is that “we never do things that don’t work well or that might make us look foolish.” One of the attributes of early adopters of technology is their willingness to “crash and burn” on the way to finding applications that make a learning difference. Providing faculty time to talk about lessons learned from successes *and* failures makes experimentation less threatening and more generative.

### **Stage II: Structuring**

Stage II is about getting organized and establishing structures to support pedagogy that draw on educational technology as one of its resources. Leadership again involves the president and dean (sustained administrative commitment) who are joined by the leadership team that intentionally reflects membership fostering faculty ownership.

The process of organizing begins with *Objective 1, Developing of a Strategic Educational Technology Plan*. The plan needs to outline leadership roles, describe the relationship of the plan to institutional mission, and spell out the implications for all constituent groups. Developing the plan also is the time to tailor what the school wants to do in relation to the real needs and interests identified by all key constituents—faculty, staff, students, trustees, denominational supporters, and alums—in light of the resources available.

*Objective 2, Identifying Assessment Outcomes*, is intrinsically related to the strategic plan because it connects identifiable learning outcomes with whatever actions the plan spells out. This is another way to tailor the plan to the school and its decisions about what it wants to achieve in terms of student learning and provides sound data for decisions along the way. A participant at the 2004

conference noted that a good practice is to define learning outcomes first and then consider whether there are ways technologically to enhance their achievement. Too often, she noted, someone buys software and then tries to figure out how to use it. Assessment is a dynamic part of this model that flows throughout and significantly contributes to thinking about technology and making decisions about its use in ways that prevent all-or-nothing attitudes.

*Objective 3, Designing Training Opportunities*, gives careful attention to training needs so that faculty and staff are equipped to meet the purposes of the plan and stated learning outcomes. What do faculty, staff, students, or administrators need to know in order to make best use of the teaching-learning resources available to them? This is a matter involving both the quality of training and its ready availability. Training that leaves people confused by obtuse vocabulary, complex software procedures, or mind-numbing management of hardware is always counterproductive. In contrast, just-in-time training tends to be more productive than periodically structured classes. Being able to work with a technical specialist as one seeks to link new skills to direct, personal instructional needs actually encourages experimentation.

This emphasis on training underscores the need for *Providing Adequate Technology Expertise, Objective 4*. The work of the faculty is teaching a curriculum. While some faculty members have a facility for figuring out software applications that work for them, many get easily frustrated at what seems a daunting task of adapting an application for specific instructional purposes. Without adequate support, the work of Stage II can move by fits and starts, even risking intensifying the divide between early adopters and frustrated late users. There is a modest consensus from the recipients of the Lilly grants that having a technical resource person on staff with an understanding of educational design significantly enhances the potential use of educational technology by faculty.

*Objective 5, Purchasing or Leasing Needed Hardware/Software*, is fairly central in Stage II although note that it comes after many other decisions have been made. The purchase of resources best follows decisions about what faculty want to do, what tools they need now, and what tools they will need as they gain proficiency. Some tools are tantalizing but would not have sufficient use to justify allocation of funds to their purchase. Technology is expensive, heightening the need for a well-considered educational technology plan linked to clear learning outcomes. The temptation to overbuy can be powerful unless a school has done the groundwork to identify what it needs immediately to accomplish its objectives and to be attentive to what evolves so that it can acquire new products when they will be most useful to the faculty and the other work of the school.

### ***Transition activities from Stage II***

The transition activities at Stage II feature some of the loop-back functions we have noted earlier. Because educational technology is only one pressing element in a school's life, it is opportune to assess the budget impact of the educational

technology plan in relationship to other institutional needs and priorities. Further, a strategic plan is a fluid document and requires frequent review and updating. It is also important in the transition to consider integrating administrative and academic computing in order to maintain maximum efficiency and provide proper stewardship of expensive institutional resources. There may also be objectives from Stage I that need revisiting such as keeping pedagogy front and center, assessing changing needs and expectations of students, and comparing notes with other schools at the same stage or with more experience in other stages.

### **Stage III: Institutionalizing**

Stage III entails making permanent decisions about how a school, working collaboratively as faculty, dean, and president, will regularize its use of educational technology as a significant resource for teaching and learning. Those decisions flow from ongoing conversations about pedagogy that advance achievement of the school's mission. They are augmented by the collection and analysis of outcome assessment data that provide evidence of pedagogical effectiveness and that sharpen faculty knowledge of the students as a body of learners.

*Objective 1, Determining Appropriate Leadership*, emphasizes once again the need for designating who has primary responsibility for attending to the range of issues surrounding educational technology. How that will be configured depends on the size of the school, budget considerations, and how the faculty is organized. Letting responsibility float among those who may have an interest in computers or the use of the new media does not ensure the sort of steady attention needed to take advantage of technological changes or to respond to what faculty, staff, and students are learning as they teach, work, and learn with technological resources.

*Objective 2, Regularizing Faculty Discussion of Teaching and Learning*, is linked to Objective 1 in that sustained conversation about pedagogy in service of theological teaching and learning focuses attention on emerging issues, ideas, theories, and practices. At the heart of a strategic plan for educational technology is the relationship between strategies/practices and outcomes, between what we do and what happens as a result, and between the potential of a resource like digital technology and its limitations given who we are and what we seek to achieve. Sustained conversations about teaching and learning are the most effective way of strengthening such linkages.

*Objective 3, Recognizing the Impact for Faculty Development*, is important for the institutionalizing stage because it signals changes in how a school hires, develops, and promotes its faculty. Deciding to institutionalize the use of digital technologies in classroom practice implies that the faculty's capacity for their use and demonstrated competency at some level will be included in criteria for faculty selection and promotion. This does not mean that every faculty member must be a "techno-geek." Rather, Objective 3 recognizes that making claims about the role

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of educational technology in the pedagogical practices of a school has a bearing on how faculty are formed in their roles as teachers and evaluated for their performance.

Finally, this stage depends on success in achieving **Objective 4, Funding the Refresh/Upgrade Cycle**. Computer hardware probably has a longer shelf life than some technology specialists claim. Still, a well-planned educational technology effort anticipates replacement and/or upgrade of equipment on a regular schedule as well as provision for new software and equipment that meet the changing needs and abilities of users. Although references to funding in Stage IV (Sustaining) are for extraordinary monies to support experimentation and the development of innovative learning designs, Stage III funding in Objective 4 refers to general fund allocations for technology.

### ***Transition activities from Stage III***

The transition activities between Stages III and IV prepare the school as it moves to sustain its commitments to educational technology. First of all, this involves a careful analysis of how institutionalizing activities impact the entire system. How will institutionalizing educational technology redefine roles, require new or altered structures, or call for clarified policies? A second activity concentrates on creating the sort of environment that cultivates and rewards creativity and experimentation so that faculty members feel encouraged to pursue new ideas they have for teaching. Times of transition like these are also opportune for returning to objectives noted in earlier stages: discussion of pedagogy and the nature of theological education, analysis of assessment data, active conversation with other schools, engagement with key constituency groups, and evaluation of training and support needs.

### **Stage IV: Sustaining**

In this final stage, attention focuses on sustaining gains a school has made based on what it continues to learn as it works with issues of educational technology. At the same time, this stage merely formalizes what needs to be an implicit part of the process from Stage I onward. By Stage IV, we would argue, a school has a sharper focus on what it indeed wants to sustain in light of other institutional needs and priorities.

**Objective 1, Aligning Institutional Planning and Planning for Educational Technology**, ties the need for regular updating of the technology plan to annual long-range planning for the school. This not only increases the viability of the school's commitment to educational technology but situates it in relationship to the other commitments of the school. Alignment is facilitated by assessment data that enable the school to anticipate needed changes or to rethink practices rather than to react as either crises erupt or breakdowns in the system occur. These data also provide a measure of longitudinal insight into the impact of what is

happening as the result of the use of educational technology. Finally, while annual planning and updating are fundamental to good planning, in this instance they can also stimulate the sort of institution-wide discussion that encourages continuous learning.

*Objective 2, Generating New Money for Innovation*, recognizes the importance of having access to extraordinary funding for innovations in instructional design that the faculty identifies as members grow more proficient in their use of the new media.

*Objective 3, Monitoring Change in the Field*, keeps the institution abreast of changes in the field of educational technology, expanding a sense of what is possible and deepening its knowledge of current research and testing of different applications.

*Objective 4, Disseminating Insights and Practices*, builds on what this ATS project is doing: encouraging schools to actively share with others what they are doing and learning as they use educational technology. While seminars may never be “hot” centers of educational technology applications, what they are discovering has a contribution to make to the knowledge base needed for more critical use of these resources. Dissemination is also a stewardship issue. Technology is costly. Preventing missteps, finding shortcuts, discovering low-cost alternatives to high-priced applications, and other such information benefit the cost-sensitive work of every school. Dissemination of what we know also cultivates networks of support and creativity, a process whose roots lie in Stage I. Who are the conversation partners we need to engage as we seek to find those uses of educational technology that enhance our mission as centers of learning? Early adopters tend to do dissemination naturally, seeking colleagues in their fields or in nearby schools who are “fooling around” with the new technologies in their classrooms. Such a practice needs to find its way to the institutional level.

## Conclusion

There is little in this four-stage planning model for educational technology that will come as a surprise to ATS schools. What the model attempts to do is provide an explicit and systematic framework for what can become a chaotic process of rushing to keep up with the frantic beat of modern technology. Stage I, with its focus on discernment about whether and to what degree a school might participate in this new “movement” returns agency to the school. Throughout the four stages, the model continually asserts the importance of keeping one’s institutional eye on pedagogy. People can be intrigued about or hostile toward PowerPoint. The use of streaming video, chat rooms, Blackboard, whiteboards, DVDs, uplinks and downloads, and Web pages can all be argued as vital additions to the classroom or as intrusive, entertainment-prone invasions. What can get lost because of the pervasive and persuasive power of the computer is that every technological innovation that has entered the educational mainstream

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received its ultimate test in the contribution it actually made to learning. What this latest innovation has done in a particular way is sharpen the questions about the role of teaching and what learning entails. The articles in this issue by Jan Viktora and Mary Hess offer perspectives on those questions that help us stay focused on what is really at stake. The nature of educational technology, heightened by an infusion of capital from Lilly Endowment, forced the realization that we were not simply talking about “the box” but about a process of change that reverberates throughout the system of a school.

As the model presented here evolves with further consultation, it promises to be a framework for making decisions about technology within the vision and values of educational mission. It can alert administrators and faculty to dimensions of institutional practice that might get lost—not out of neglect but because of the sheer magnitude of demands on the time and attention of a school’s faculty and administration. The path that any one school might follow as it considers the role of educational technology in carrying out its mission will be as distinctive as its history, culture, resources, and vision. What we have come to understand through this study is that as diverse as our experience may be, there are common points of intersection. Gathering what we know around those points can only contribute to a greater sense of wholeness and integration for what we choose to do.

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## Appendix A

# Strategic Plan for Integrating Educational Technology: A Developmental Model

### Stage I: Discerning

#### *Questions related to key objectives*

1. What are the assumptions and working theories of faculty about pedagogy and about the use of educational technologies for teaching or learning?
2. What are student expectations and readiness for the use of technology for learning, and what levels of proficiency do they have?
3. What have other schools learned from working with educational technologies?
4. What levels of in-house talent and resources are already available to support the use of digital technology?
5. Are we prepared to undertake a coordinated, systematic, and strategic use of educational technology that is congruent with our institutional mission?

#### *Transition Activities:*

- ◆ Establish a leadership team to direct the strategic planning process
- ◆ Foster an institutional environment that enhances experimentation

### Stage II: Structuring

#### *Questions related to key objectives*

1. How does the strategic educational technology plan describe leadership responsibilities, relate proposed action to institutional mission, and identify implications for administration and board, faculty, library, alums, congregations, and other key stakeholders?
2. What outcomes for assessment will best indicate the impact educational technology has on student learning in light of specific institutional needs, priorities, goals, and culture?
3. What sorts of training opportunities need to be available to equip faculty, students, and staff for success in their use of technology?
4. What level of technology expertise is needed to support the faculty and its work with design and delivery of curricula?
5. What hardware and software will be required to support the strategic educational technology plan and when is it best to lease rather than purchase such materials?

***Transition Activities:***

- ◆ Assess the impact of technology plan on budget in light of other institutional priorities
- ◆ Review strategic educational technology plan
- ◆ Assess the level of integration needed for administrative and academic computing systems to achieve efficiency, easy access, and internal and external networking
- ◆ Review questions in Stage I

**Stage III: Institutionalizing**

***Questions related to key objectives***

1. Should the initial leadership team become permanent and, if not, what alternatives for ongoing leadership for educational technology will best serve faculty, student, and institutional needs?
2. How will we regularize time for faculty reflection on emerging pedagogical and theological questions related to teaching and learning and the assessment data on student learning?
3. What policies and structural changes are needed to recruit and reward faculty and staff based on the institution's larger educational vision and goals that now include a strategy for engaging digital technologies?
4. What plans are in place to fund from the general budget the refresh and upgrade cycle required for hardware and software to meet changing needs and take advantages of new applications?

***Transition Activities:***

- ◆ Examine the system impact of the institutionalizing process
- ◆ Cultivate and reward a culture of creativity and experimentation
- ◆ Review questions in Stages I and II

**Stage IV: Sustaining**

***Questions related to key objectives***

1. How does the annual updating of the plan for educational technology coordinate with institutional long-range planning and draw on assessment data from stakeholders?
2. What new money will we need to fund innovation and new teaching projects identified by the faculty?
3. What developments in the field of educational technology are happening and how can they inform choices that build on our efforts?
4. How can we disseminate what we are learning about educational technology so that it can benefit other theological schools and the wider church?



ENDNOTES

1. Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5 (NCB University Press, October 2001). Also available as a PDF file at <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>.
2. The project management team is comprised of Jim Rafferty (formerly educational technology specialist for the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools), Jan Viktora (Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity of the University of St. Thomas), and the author. Task force members are Richard Ascough (Queen's Theological College), Steve Delamarter (George Fox Evangelical Seminary), Mary Hess (Luther Seminary), William Hook (Vanderbilt University Divinity School), Lucinda Huffaker (Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning), Melody Mazuk (Palmer Theological Seminary), Richard Nysse (Luther Seminary), Robin Steinke (Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg), and Mary Young (Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology).
3. Susan Wood, former associate dean at Saint John's University School of Theology-Seminary, has observed that what faculty might think is a *dazzling* use of technology may well be received as *ordinary* by increasingly tech-savvy students. This should caution those who think any random use of the computer will entertain students.
4. Richard Nysse, "Online Education" in *Practical Wisdom*, ed. Macolm Warford (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005): 197-213
5. Elizabeth Patterson, "The Question of Distance Education," *Theological Education* 33, no. 1 (Pittsburgh, PA: The Association of Theological Schools, 1996), 59-75.
6. Daniel Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986).



# What Does All *This* (Technology) Mean for the Church?

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*ABSTRACT: There is an urgent need for a conversation in the church and in the theological academy regarding the scope and nature of the digital revolution and its implications for theological education and the practice of ministry. The difficulty is that this much needed conversation has proceeded erratically in fits and starts, frequently resembling a political campaign rather than a reasoned and informed dialogue. The author proposes ways that enthusiastic early adopters of technology and skeptical resisters of new technologies can join in joyful theological discourse that will enhance both theological education and the practice of ministry. The alternative of not engaging in this conversation imperils both and moves the church and its educational institutions further toward irrelevancy in a digital world.*

## Introduction

The task of making a coherent statement about the meaning of technology for the church reminds me of a ten-page pamphlet I saw a number of years ago. The title of the pamphlet was *All About The Bible*. It was an ambitious, if quixotic attempt at an easy introduction to the biblical drama. Likewise, the scope of new technologies that have emerged in the past decade and what technology means for the church (and the theological academy) could easily fill three or four volumes. A brief essay cannot possibly address the wide reaches of the topic. What we plan to accomplish in this short treatise is to point to overarching themes and issues in technology that have an impact on the church and its institutions.

A second stipulation before we join the discussion is that this is not a paper about how to do PowerPoint<sup>1</sup> presentations or use film clips in education and worship. Most congregations have high school or junior high young people who can do all the “PowerPointing” or video editing and composition they need. This paper is also not about why everyone should use PowerPoint and film clips so that the pagan masses will come streaming into our nations’ churches and synagogues. It is, however, about learning to read our culture, learning its language and media, and understanding the depth of change that has been launched by the digital revolution. Just as the term *Silicon Valley* conjures up impressions and images, so also the term *technology* used in a theological or ecclesiological context brings perceptions and even prejudices to

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mind. This paper is also intended to serve as a kind of tool by which we can reflect on who we are and what we are about in a digital world.

If one were to arbitrarily pick a time or event that introduced us to a new and different world, an excellent candidate would be the democratization of Internet technology. On October 13, 1994, Netscape offered its beta version of its Internet browser available for free download. Thousands of people took advantage of the offer, and the world changed on that day without most of the world realizing it. The Pew Internet and American Life Project in its report, *Internet: The Mainstreaming of Online Life*, declared, "A decade later the internet has reached into—and in some cases, reshaped—just about every important realm of modern life. It has changed the way we inform ourselves, amuse ourselves, care for ourselves, educate ourselves, work, shop, bank, pray, and stay in touch."<sup>2</sup> As Internet use exploded both in the United States and around the world, some proclaimed it as a wonderful gift of God while others felt it was obviously from the pits of hell. Yet the days when parents asked me as their pastor, "Do you think we should let our children use the Internet," are gone. All students now have access to the Internet—if not at home, then at school, the library, or a friend's house. There is no longer a question as to *whether* we will use it, but *how* it will be used.

The Internet is the favorite child of the digital revolution, but it is just one of myriad digital technologies that have changed our world. The generation of young people who cannot remember a world without CDs, video games, cell phones, and Star Wars have been called "Net Gen" (Internet generation) and "D-Gen" (digital generation) among other things. No matter what we call the emerging population of our churches and theological seminaries, pastors and theologians must necessarily engage the question, "What does all of this mean for the church?" Our students have changed, the culture has changed, the world has changed, and sadly, the church and its academic institutions have for the most part been very slow to change. It is my sincere hope that we as pastors and theologians can enjoin the conversation with a view to furthering our missiological imperative to bring good news to a broken world. We can no longer afford to live in academic or ecclesiological ghettos. *Church* and *academy* are partners in mission. The one cannot be healthy without the other and both are servants of God.

Before setting three critical questions before us, I would like to say a brief word about what I mean by joyful theological discourse. Some years ago, I needed to address a major problem that was causing division in the congregation I was serving. The evening for our conversation about the problem arrived and the church council began with the obligatory opening prayer. I began the meeting by asking that we take the time to hear one another and hopefully begin to bring some healing to our life together, and said, "We have a significant problem in our congregation and we need to talk about it." A man who was chair of our board of trustees banged his fist on the table, yelled, "I've heard

enough!” and stormed out of the meeting. This would not be what I call “joyful theological discourse.” The man was reacting to the voices of prejudice and presupposition in his own head and had not actually heard anything at all. Joyful theological discourse has a spirit of joy deriving from the fact that the discourse is related to the God who reigns and who graciously gives us a part in the building of a just and righteous world and thereby invites us to fully engage one another in respectful listening, honest sharing of our deepest convictions and commitment to work toward mutual understanding and hopeful action. Unlike my storming-out-of-the-meeting friend, we in the pastoral and theological enterprise would never act in such a way—would we?

For the content of this conversation, I propose that there are three critical questions that need to be addressed: (1) What is the nature of the digital revolution? (2) What does this revolution mean for the church? and (3) What does this revolution mean for theological education?

### **What is the nature of the digital revolution?**

The first question that begs asking concerns the depth of change we are talking about. What is the “this” in the question of what technology means for the church. Is this truly a revolution that parallels the industrial revolution in any sense? Are we talking about changes so pervasive that they have an impact on the educational, political, economic, and social dimensions of living? Perhaps most importantly—is there any possibility that these changes are temporary blips on the radar screen, or is this genuinely a sea change?

If I can be so audacious as to answer my own question, in the interests of advancing the discourse, I would suggest a clear “Yes!” Yes, the digital revolution has changed our lives and our world in a way that calls us to seriously re-envision our work as pastors and theologians. The limitations of time and space necessitate brevity, but I would like to suggest a few ways that our world has been irrevocably changed.

#### ***The world has changed***

The notion of our world as a global village has reached a new and more mature, if dangerous, stage. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, first radio, then television (with on-location reporting) brought a sense of immediacy to world events. The difference between the old news reels of battles and bombings at the local movie theater during the Second World War and the daily scenes of the Vietnam War in our living rooms brought about a dramatic shrinking of the world. We were no longer observing a report; we were witnessing the news. However, the reporting was controlled by governments and media monopolies. The Internet has changed all this. Almost everyone in the civilized world has access to instant publishing via the Internet. Digital files of human beings being beheaded are loaded on servers to be

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accessed by anyone who has a connection to the Internet where they can view the carnage. (Yes, sometimes the Internet delivers material from the pits of hell.) On the other hand, there are countless stories of how people have used the Internet to search for life-saving information. The problem with the Internet is that it can be a vehicle for evil. The promise of the Internet is that it can be a vehicle for good.

The power of the information superhighway is just one example of how the digital revolution has changed the world. A major shift has taken place in that print media has given way to visual media as a primary means for the delivery of information. This digital, visual media has made possible a 24/7 world. You can get your headlines, entertainment, and financial information needs at one o'clock in the morning, when you arrive home from work, or when you rise for the day.

The technology that has made Internet technology possible has also had a dramatic impact on economic structures. The ubiquity of Internet technology makes the issue of time and space a moot point for many service industries. In the beginning of the personal computer age, I can recall sitting on hold for hours waiting for tech support to help me through difficulties with my computer. Recently all my calls for support have been answered within minutes. It is clear that my call is being answered somewhere in India or the Far East. I am concerned about the American economy and the outsourcing of American jobs, but I am torn by gratitude for the feature of a shrinking global village that frees me from the burdens technology can bring.

The issue of data theft points to a major shift in how our personal worlds have changed. Data theft is a growing national concern and all of us are potential victims. Armed robbers are no longer gun-toting thieves but bandits of cyberspace who are armed with computers and Internet access. Internet security is a multimillion-dollar business, and the new breed of robbers (hackers) keeps this industry busy, not to mention wealthy. In one comparatively minor incident, ChoicePoint, a broker of personal information to corporate clients, sold sensitive financial information about 145,000 consumers to criminals bent on fraud. In what may qualify as a finalist in an "understatement of the year award," the company Web site told worried consumers, "At ChoicePoint, we recognize that in an increasingly risky world, information and technology can be used to help create a safer, more secure society. At the same time, we appreciate that there can be negative consequences to the improper access to personally identifiable data."<sup>3</sup>

Because of the growing use of networks, government database records, and security cameras, personal privacy is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. A company named ABIKA can produce a complete background and psychological profile on any person in the country for a fee. This report would be available on a confidential basis to anyone who pays the fee. There is no background check on the person ordering the information. For example, I ordered a report

on someone who attended the technology conference sponsored by The Association of Theological Schools in Chicago in the summer of 2005. All I had to do was go to ABIKA's Web site ([www.abika.com](http://www.abika.com)), pay the fee, and receive the report. This particular report contained names, all previous addresses, an unpaid parking ticket, a court record, an account of a child who had gotten into trouble, and a psychological profile. (Just to allay any fears, I ordered the report on myself.) Anyone can order a report on anyone else.

As I reflect on how the world has changed and how some of that change troubles me, I have gradually come to the realization that my musings are those of a child who has lived in a world during its emergence from the Industrial Revolution. My grandparents were teens in the "Roaring Twenties." My concept of change and of technology has grown gradually and matured over decades. I worked for IBM when the most powerful computer to date took up a whole room and boasted a whopping 64K memory. My daughter's sparkly, flashing earrings with a microchip have more memory. It is as though Silicon Valley, the microchip, video games, and the whole infrastructure of teenage living hit a time warp somewhere in the last ten years and my industrial-age, analog, linear, print-oriented brain still struggles to keep up with the pace of change.

Technology for most of us has been something apart from and over against us. It is observable as though it were this "thing"—like a fish we can observe swimming about in an aquarium. We can get close to the aquarium and examine intently, or we can walk away and leave the aquarium behind. It is becoming clear that we are no longer observers of technology—we are *in the aquarium*. Many of us are struggling with the digital world, complaining about it, uncomfortable with it, or gradually learning to "breathe" (use our gills) in this new environment. There is, however, a growing number of persons in our culture who have grown up in the aquarium and have never breathed with anything *but* their gills. There is a significant discontinuity between the generation that has grown up with the rapid arrival and dissemination of digital technology and those of us who have gradually and often grudgingly found ourselves having to join the swim. Whether we like it or not, our financial, medical, governmental, and personal information is swimming around out there in bits and bytes. So, yes Virginia, this is a sea change.

### ***Students have changed***

I know technology well. My daughter, on the other hand, doesn't know it so much as she lives it, and her older peers are beginning to show up in our seminary. An example of how my daughter and I work and learn differently will help to us to understand the major shift that has taken place. A few months ago, after much discussion of what would be acceptable cartridges for a Game Boy and what kind of time would be allowed for "gaming," my daughter was allowed to make the purchase and was soon totally engrossed in a game. (She

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was, by the way, a bit offended that Nintendo does not have a “Game Girl” and has written a letter to express her displeasure.) After playing with her game for about ten minutes she was expressing frustration and impatience. “What’s wrong,” I asked her. “I can’t get this thing past level two—aarrghh!” she said. Personally I couldn’t figure out in ten minutes how all the buttons are supposed to move. I got the directions, found the address of an online site that had hints and tips for the game, and offered to go online with her and find them. She declined, preferring her frustrated storming of the game levels to the shortcut of reading how to do it. I wanted to show her how things work in the world of learning, so I went online, found the instructions, and voila—discovered the trick to getting past level two. I printed out the sheet, went back to my still-frustrated daughter, and with a bit of a smirk said, “Here, I have the way to get past level two.” She just rolled her eyes and said, “I’m working on level nine!”

I had read theory and propositions that there has actually been a shift in how digital age young people learn, but experiencing this personally was disconcerting. She has access to and has developed skills and intuitive processes that are born of her image-driven, digital culture while my preference is still for the printed word and linear thinking.

I was relieved to find James Paul Gee’s book, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*.<sup>4</sup> Gee, who is professor of reading in the department of curriculum and instruction in the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, tells about the time he was going to coach his then four-year-old son with a video game as the boy played. He found the game rather challenging even for an adult and reports that his son called what he was doing, “. . . bossing him around” and “telling him what to do when he could figure it out for himself.”<sup>5</sup> Gee concludes that the incredibly challenging world of video games has important clues for the learning and literacy of the digital generation. A review of the book on Amazon.com is revealing. It reads in part,

I read through the entire book today, enthralled that an academic of the same generation as my parents finally “got” what made videogames (focusing on action, adventure, and rpg [role play games]) a fascinating medium both for players and creators. Furthermore, the author was then able to apply this knowledge to his area of expertise, educational theory. I knew videogames could be art, I knew that as simulations they could be political, but I never quite saw what seems to me perfectly obvious now, that good videogames of almost every variety teach us how to think and learn, and that they do this much better than our school system.<sup>6</sup>

Gee is not alone. A *Wired* magazine article in May of 2005 raised the question of why IQ scores of students are rising, “Despite concerns about the dumbing-down of society—the failing schools, the garbage on TV, the decline



of reading—the overall population was getting smarter.”<sup>7</sup> The article suggested that skills and concepts learned in mastering video games may be a contributing factor.

Some of the most provocative work being done in the area of learning and video game development is that of Marc Prensky. In his article “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants,” Prensky uses the term *digital native* to describe what we have called digital gen. *Digital immigrants*, on the other hand, are people who have to learn the language of the digital culture—learn to “swim in the aquarium.” People like me are able to learn to speak the language of the digital culture, but we “speak with an accent.” Prensky states, “Our students have changed radically. Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach.”<sup>8</sup> In part two of his article, he documents significant research that demonstrates the fact that digital gaming is a significant teaching tool and that digital natives actually process information and learn differently than do digital immigrants.<sup>9</sup>

I was an enthusiastic and early adopter of new technologies and an early professional in a mainframe world. But I am not a digital native. I envisioned computers of the future as bigger, better, and faster. Our nation would have huge buildings filled with them. The American industrial engine would expand like the universe. I did not have a clue that computers would wind up being tiny little things that I could carry with me. My generation did not prepare for the digital revolution. We lived on what I call the “Flintstones to Jetsons’ continuum.” In this view, the Flintstones are the Stone Age and the Jetsons are the future. Progress would develop along the bigger, better, faster model. Instead of a wagon with stone wheels and a wooden axel, we would move first to something like a ’57 Chevy and then to a ’57 Chevy that we could fly to work through the sky instead of driving it along a highway.

As a pastor and as a theological educator, I am convinced that we lag behind in our understanding of the digital culture and its impact on ministry and theological education. It is critical that we address the issues—join in joyful theological discourse—of “What does this revolution mean for the church” and “What does this revolution mean for theological education?”

### **What does this revolution mean for the church?**

A diverse group of clergy began a Doctor of Ministry program at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in May of 2005. This cohort will explore and work with the theme “Revitalizing the Church in a Digital World” over the next three years. Prior to the initial residency, the members of the group participated in an online discussion of a version of Marc Prensky’s question about whether today’s students are the people our educational institutions were designed to teach. “Are today’s younger folk—or even folks in our culture—the people our churches were designed to reach?” An absolute

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majority of respondents said in one fashion or another that the church is ill-equipped to reach our unchurched culture. One student wrote, "I think there is a fundamental breakdown of the language being spoken by the church and the language spoken by those outside the church. My sermon today, as a matter of fact, dealt with this very subject based upon Paul's missionary work in Athens. Paul went around Athens and found things for his message that connected with his hearers. Are we doing that today (i.e., learning the language and/or culture of those we're trying to reach with the Gospel), or are we expecting them to understand the language of the church when (or if) they come in the door? I think it's more often the latter when we look at many traditional churches.

One of the most important consequences of the digital revolution for the church is a growing awareness that we are not equipped for the missiological imperative of reaching this generation. This does not need to be. *Not* being equipped is now a choice and no longer the inevitable consequence of a lack of technological tools or training. There are myriad new tools available that can enhance ministry when used appropriately. There is a learning curve that will be encountered, but the results can change ministries in a positive way.

One of our DMin students is a judicatory executive. She used our DMin group's online discussion to share a story of how one young pastor used a new technology in vital pastoral ministry.

A couple of years ago, one of our very few, young (late 20s) Gen X pastors here in the presbytery received a phone call when he had barely begun his ministry. A 15-year-old in his congregation had said goodbye to his mom and dad, left for school, and blown the back of his head out with a 12-gauge shotgun. [The pastor] needed some resources on teen suicide, and he needed them fast. I was out of town and my associate in the office, the Executive Presbyter, wasn't even dressed yet but sent him a list of links to a short list of Web resources.

The pastor, Jeff, spent the day with the family, the funeral director, and school officials. (It was the third youth suicide in a few months.) That night, word spread like wildfire among the youth that Rev. Jeff was on ICQ (their digital native instant messaging client) and had opened a chat room. More than 100 youth joined in the grieving ("Is it our fault?") and discussion ("How can God let this happen?"). Far more effective ministry happened than if he had held a face-to-face meeting. I think Jeff is probably the only one of our clergy that this would even have occurred to. The amazing thing is, it never occurred to him NOT to look for the youth on ICQ.

New technologies offer the potential of ministry, enhancing possibilities in every area of congregational life from administration and education to worship

and outreach. Digital generation seekers will visit congregations on the Internet before they will visit in person. The Pew Internet and American Life Project mentioned earlier reported that 82 million Americans have used the Internet for religious or spiritual purposes, and 48 million have used the Internet for religious or spiritual discussion.<sup>10</sup> All clergy who are going to lead congregations in our culture will need to develop digital literacy to become aware of the technological tools that are available, to know how to appropriately use these tools in ministry, and to know how to provide leadership in the integration of ministry and technology. A basic bibliography of essential reading for the development of minimum skills is given at the end of this article.

### **What does this revolution mean for theological education?**

In 1999 I came to the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary to administer and develop a grant from Lilly Endowment to offer theological education using technological means to lay persons who were preparing to serve the church as lay pastors. It is an amazing thing to realize that the entire modern history of distance education using Internet technologies has developed from that beginning until the present time. No one could have foreseen the amazing technological changes that have been made widely available to educational institutions for the delivery of Web-based education. Although there has been some debate about the credibility of online education in the past, it is clear that the field has matured in a pedagogically healthy way. There is no longer a valid debate about whether online delivery of education is in our future. The verdict is in: distance education via Internet-based technologies has come of age. The genie is out of the bottle, and the question is no longer *whether* but *how* that education will be delivered with integrity and positive learning outcomes.

But what of theological education? Are we somehow an exception to the trend? The train that has perhaps not yet left the station? What does the whole digital revolution and attendant revolution in education mean for those of us who are in the business of preparing persons for congregational ministry?

My background is primarily in parish ministry. I will have been ordained for forty-three years when this article is published. Six of those years have been spent in the theological academy and thirty-six have been in parish ministry and specialized ministries such as pastoral counseling and hospital chaplaincy. I intentionally chose the pathway of a practitioner rather than as an academic. Yet, after these years in the seminary working with students who are bound for ministry in a local congregation, I am concerned that we in the theological academy may not be properly equipping our students to *equip the saints for the work of ministry*. Here are some of the reasons I believe we need to take a new look at theological education in a digital world.

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The digital revolution has made available a theological dialogue that has not been possible until this generation. The *Journal of Christian Education and Information Technology* is published by the Korea Society for Christian Education and Information Technology (KSCEIT). At the fifth international conference of KSCEIT, Dr. Un Na Hur said, "As one of the most competent IT nations in the world, Korea can and should take the lead in evangelizing the world."<sup>11</sup> The shrinking global village that has been made even smaller by digital technology makes international theological dialogue possible in a way that has not been available until the present moment. If we are truly concerned for the religious and spiritual underpinnings of a just world, we will make use of digital technology to facilitate intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Turning to the immediate need of most of our students, the obvious, and perhaps safest place to begin an exploration of how all of *this* relates to theological education is the missional imperative of local congregations. If we are to faithfully prepare practitioners of congregational ministry, then it is necessary to equip them to understand the nature of the digital revolution. Additionally, it is important to enable pastors to give leadership and manage the appropriate use of new technologies in ministry. It is no longer essential (it never should have been) for pastors to learn all the specific skills that the use of technologies will require. In fact, it may be better for the pastor if he or she does *not* know all about PowerPoint, Web page design, and video editing. Nevertheless, a knowledge of how technologies can enhance ministry in the local church *is* critical.

Increasing numbers of students at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary are asking for courses that will prepare them for ministry in a digital world. Six years ago, when I first came to the seminary, students would ask for training in how to create a Web page or put together a PowerPoint presentation. As digital technologies expanded and became more sophisticated, students began to ask for training in video editing and more advanced resources. A Certificate in Ministry and Technology program was put in place to offer advanced training for the use of technologies in ministry and approximately thirty practicing pastors and judicatory leaders have taken advantage of the program. Students' requests have begun to shift, however, as they discern the depth of technological change in our culture. They are shifting from practical skill-oriented courses to opportunities for developing a broad-based understanding of the digital culture and how technology has changed our world.

A pastor who does not know what an iPod is and why it is essential gear for young people is akin to a pastor in the '70s who did not know that a Yellow Submarine was a Beatles' song, a youth culture movement and not an underwater vessel. In my opinion, a youth pastor who does not understand the iPod and its impact on the entertainment industry should probably find a new field of work.

One of my students is a pastor of a small congregation in a small, rural Iowa town. He came to take an independent study course to learn more about Internet technology. He is pastor to a young farmer who was featured in *Time* magazine as one of the most high-tech farmers in the world. He travels around the world giving presentations about his Iowa farm and how technology has had an impact on every phase of farming. The central issue for the student pastor was that he needed to understand more about the changing world that will be his context for ministry.

During a curriculum revision that took place at our seminary during the period of 2000–2003, a proposal was made to have a required 3-credit course on technology. That requirement was eventually dropped as curricular demands leaned more heavily toward the traditional disciplines. I acquiesced in that decision. The next time we visit the curriculum, I will be inclined to press hard for inclusion of a course in understanding the nature of the digital world and the image and media-driven underpinnings of the culture. The question for our curriculum is where this whole field of ministry and technology should live within the disciplines. The purpose of the old audiovisual subsection of the Christian education department or practical ministry division was to teach people how to use things like the old film strip projectors, film projectors before the self-threading Bell and Howell, and other AV aids. A couple of days in the Introduction to Christian Education elective course would do it for many. For a time, the use of PowerPoint and other high-tech tools made my department a kind of audiovisual department on steroids. It was bigger, better, faster, and more powerful media resources. It has become clear, however, that the digital revolution is about much more than super audiovisuals, and students are increasingly understanding that they need adequate preparation for ministry in a radically different world than the one most of us left seminary to serve.

A more difficult and, for many of us, more threatening area that sorely needs attention in the academy is the place of technology across the theological curriculum. Clearly the students who come to us will increasingly be children of the digital revolution. If we are to converse with them and they with their parishioners, we (and they) need to speak the language of the realm. To ignore the ways in which their learning modes have changed and the potential of new learning strategies, is to fail in our task of preparing competent practitioners of ministry. Yet, this whole digital revolution is difficult for many of us. Arthur C. Clarke, English physicist and science fiction author wrote in his *Profiles of the Future*, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."<sup>12</sup> A colleague at my seminary confided to me that, "The further technology gets away from common knowledge, the more mysterious it becomes." We might call this the "Harry Potter factor." People who love Harry Potter love Harry Potter. People who "don't get it" or simply don't care for "all that stuff" just don't "do" Harry Potter. The problem is that we do not have the choice of ignoring the digital revolution. Or better—we *do* have the choice of ignoring the digital revolution—it is just that we *dare* not ignore it if we hope to be relevant to the missiological imperative that is the basic premise of our task.

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Our motto at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary is, "Preparing Faithful, Competent Pastors." Most of us aspire to such a mission. We are unable to accomplish our mission if we do not address the issue of technology across the curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

It is very clear that the world has been irrevocably changed by the technological revolution. It is also evident that the church and its institutions have lagged behind in understanding and responding to the shift that has taken place and in equipping students and teachers to live and work in this new world. The conversation about these things that we are having in recent days, both at our summer conference and in the wider church and theological community, is among the more hopeful movements that has taken place in recent times.

*John P. Jewell is director of distance education and assistant professor of ministry and technology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary.*

### ENDNOTES

1. Microsoft PowerPoint is either a registered trademark or trademark of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries.
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10. Pew Internet and American Life Project, 58.
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# What Does All *This* (Technology) Mean for the Church?—A Response

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**M**y initial response to John Jewell's paper is one of appreciation for his outlining three central questions the church and academy must begin to address if we are to effectively communicate in the languages so fluently spoken by those who use digital media on a regular basis. For nearly one hundred years, Protestant and Catholic clergy have seen the development of technologies that brought us movies, radio, sound recordings, and television and have asked the church to address these developments theologically and practically. This is to say that with a few exceptions, churches and seminaries have failed to address what Catholic theologians named thirty and more years ago: that a whole generation has been raised with a new "mother tongue" of audiovisual language.

A second response I have to Jewell's paper is a desire to move the conversation along. What Jewell calls a "digital revolution" is what happens when computer systems are used to produce, edit, store, present, and distribute texts, still images, animation, motion pictures, sound, and other data. It is important for us to know that human brains have been fashioned by audiovisual language of film, television, photography, musical recordings, and art well before computers made it easier to copy, store, manipulate, and distribute these materials.

If these languages are becoming a mother tongue, and if Jewell is correct that we must begin a theological discourse about this, what language will be used? The church has been a speaking-listening (oral) culture completely reliant on the technologies of print for a long time, and yet these last one hundred years have begun to produce people fluent in electronic and digital languages. What shape does theological discourse take if it honors this multilingual situation?

Among the very important theological questions that can be illustrated by using electronic and digital sources are the questions of "what is real?" and "what is true?"

When an image can be manipulated by putting an image of a person into a picture who had not been present for the taking of the photograph, is it real? Is it ethical to do this? Another question has to do with the vast amounts of printed information available on the Internet. What is "true" and how do we know we can trust what we read? How do we help those who regularly use digital media to evaluate, criticize, and discuss what they see and hear?



What does the digital revolution mean for the church? Before answering that, we need to parse out what this digital revolution provides us. A first reality of the digital age is online information. As mentioned earlier, the Internet offers print resources so plentiful that libraries are starting to reduce their printed holdings and making room for more computers. Serious researchers know the ease and speed of online research. Few would argue that we are “dumber” because of the plethora of print resources available online.

A second aspect of the digital revolution is the number of devices that make it possible for people to be connected with one another from anywhere in the world through email, chat rooms, instant messaging, and text messaging. The growing number of online universities attest to the popularity of learning at one’s convenience and point to the promise of developing virtual classrooms in cyberspace.

Both of these examples show us the tools available to church and seminary: research and teaching. Digital technology makes them possible.

A final promising role for digital technology in church and academy is to use it for face-to-face Christian formation. By that I mean learning to use digital media in our educational and worship settings for Christian formation. Yesterday’s electronic or audiovisual language of film, sound, and image is much easier to create, edit, store, and present using the vast memory and speed of a personal computer. Through digital technology, pastors, teachers, professors, and laity can easily engage theological topics and themes through visual and auditory arts supplementing, illustrating, and amplifying the Word of God. As Paul Tillich wrote in his *Systematic Theology*, “. . . a ‘theology of the Word’ is presented which is a theology of the spoken word. This intellectualization of revelation runs counter to the sense of the Logos Christianity. If Jesus as the Christ is called the Logos, Logos points to a revelatory reality, not to revelatory words.”<sup>1</sup>

The digital revolution at last makes it easier for theologians to use more than words to express the Word.

*Michael G. Bausch co-leads a DMin cohort with John Jewell at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. This cohort is working in a local church and judicatory ministry context to apply the principles and discoveries made as they research and study the theme: “Revitalizing the Church in a Digital World.” John Jewell’s paper and Michael Bausch’s response were part of the inauguration of the program.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 157.



# Not Just One More Good Idea: A Reflection on the Integration of Digital Technology in Theological Education

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*ABSTRACT: A theological educator reflects on how the process of integrating digital technologies into theological education changes understandings of the role of teachers and the particular ways a theological faculty carries out its educational mission. The substantial shift in student expectations regarding technology in educational practices is requiring that educators attend to exploration of more than how they use the tools, to examine the most effective ways to engage digital technology to address new student thinking patterns. Theological and pedagogical examination of previous educational practices needs to address not only the what and how of teaching, but the why of educational commitments in light of institutional mission.*

## **Introduction: The context for change**

In my twenty years as a seminary educator, I, and those in my profession, have experienced a number of critical moments that have forced us to look at both our role as teachers and at how we articulate our core values. These moments arose as seminary faculties had to grapple with issues related to liberation theology, social justice, feminist theology, contextual education and service learning, globalization, multiculturalism, and the emerging field of leadership studies. The conversations and debates prompted some members of those faculties to change their syllabi, redesign the curriculum, and in some instances, adjust their teaching methods or the types of assignments they required. Accrediting agencies, school administrators, or key faculty members alerted us about how failure to address these realities could impact seminary education, and more importantly, our graduates in their ministerial leadership. In many ATS member schools there have been faculty in-services, discussions with leading experts to address the topics, and opportunities for faculty members to share syllabi and discuss what they do in courses relative to these important developments affecting theological education. Despite all this activity in response to these pressing issues, I maintain that they have not stimulated dramatic changes to our roles as educators nor have they sustained significant revamping of our educational practices.

Over the past decade, new digital technologies began to impact higher education in dramatic ways. While theological schools have not been at the forefront of the technology movement, it became clear that we needed to attend to these new technologies and their potential for improving teaching and learning in our schools. Enabled in the late 1990s by a major grant initiative of Lilly Endowment, seventy-two theological schools agreed to commit a considerable portion of their institutional attention to questions related to the integration of digital technologies into theological teaching and learning. Others schools without funding from the Endowment also engaged the challenge of integrating digital technologies and have, in fact, led the way in exploring their application for distance education as well as their implication for effective pedagogy.

This article offers an educator's reflections on how the process of integrating digital technologies into theological education changes our understanding of the roles of theological educators and the particular ways a theological faculty carries out its educational mission.

### **The Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools: A brief study of innovation**

I have served on the faculty of a theological seminary for the past twenty years. The Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity is part of the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools that includes Luther Seminary, Bethel Seminary, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, and Saint John's University School of Theology–Seminary. Over the past seven years, each consortium school has received a Lilly technology grant. Although the five consortium schools applied for the funding independently, they chose to work collaboratively on the implementation of their grants, leveraging what they could accomplish and learning from the range of activities they each planned. We had previously worked collaboratively to establish a shared library catalog and to sponsor courses and research in areas of mutual interest. Individual members of the faculties chose to meet professionally to pursue shared scholarly interests and build networks of support. Three of the schools jointly sponsored a Doctor of Ministry degree and a summer program of urban ministry. The executive committee of the consortium, composed of administrative leaders from each institution, met regularly and designed annual collegiality days for their faculties to foster dialogue and strengthen appreciation for an educational mission for the church we shared. As a consortium, we were loosely joined but institutionally strengthened in our association.

The Lilly technology initiative drew us together in yet another collaborative moment. The grant project directors from each seminary met monthly to share project goals and activities, update one another on progress, engage in continuing education, and explore common needs and concerns. By intent,

these meetings tried to forestall, where possible, unnecessary duplication of costly equipment or unproductive strategies. We jointly hired and shared the services of a consultant to guide us and were fortunate to find a person who was not only theologically educated but also an experienced educator with extensive technology experience in the corporate world and trained in art and media communication. He also happened to be an alumnus of one of our schools, so he understood the cultural context of the seminary.

Our consultant, Jim Rafferty, agreed to work with us as a “circuit rider,” spending one day each week on each of the five campuses. He began by interviewing the faculty members at each school to understand what each member taught and to help them identify the challenges they experienced as theological educators. He then worked with the faculty members to determine if and how technology could provide an effective means to address the challenges of teaching and learning they had encountered. Rafferty continually scanned the field of educational technology and updated faculty members through various opportunities and one-to-one coaching. He also trained support personnel on each of our campuses to assist faculty members as they worked to incorporate digital technologies into the classroom. The project directors, in turn, offered annual educational technology continuing education conferences that drew together faculty members from all five of our campuses. They also sponsored an annual summer “Computer Camp” at which faculty members could come together to learn and develop competencies aimed at specific projects that used digital technologies to enhance the quality of student learning.

The consortium schools each entered project activity from differing positions relative to the use of technology. The university-related seminaries had infrastructures already in place to support experiments with different software applications. The independent seminaries varied in the degree of infrastructure that was in place at the beginning of the grant period. This meant that while some schools needed to focus on getting basic systems in place, others could rely on what they had and build from there. Each school used part of its grant to purchase hardware and software to support faculty projects. Some schools offered a regranting program to free individual faculty members to do research on the use of digital technology for teaching.

As I reflect on our early years of experimentation, I recognize that we were often infatuated with the hardware and gadgets. As content experts in our respective fields, we were overwhelmed by the prospect of learning the new “digital language” and trying to master even the simplest of computer programs. As a group of faculty members, we fit nicely into a typical bell curve with some early adopters, a group of hesitant but interested teachers, and the recalcitrant few. The early adopters moved quickly to test interesting hunches about what might work.

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The large middle group of faculty members was cautious but curious. They were hesitant to commit themselves to something that was yet unproven to them as a means to improve teaching and learning. The constraints of a steep learning curve with the new technology also dampened their initial enthusiasm for the technology project. Expectations of faculty for teaching, formation, advising, committee work, community service, and scholarly research and publishing made many faculty in the middle group think twice about taking on something more.

Initially, some held hope that introducing technology into theological teaching and learning might save them time. Technology, after all, had long been touted to improve the quality of life by providing more leisure time. And perhaps with more opportunities to make learning resources available to our students in an online milieu, there was the hope our schools could harness the skyrocketing costs of theological education. In the initial years of the technology project in the consortium, neither of these “benefits” of more time or less cost came to pass—faculty loads increased with new expectations for faculty members to become competent in a digitally mediated culture, and the costs of computer systems for faculty members, student support, and “smart classrooms” increased. The middle group of faculty grew more open to examining the potentials of digital technology in teaching and learning as they themselves began to use email, online library catalogs/databases, online full-text journals, and the Internet as resources for their own research. Their curiosity grew as they witnessed their colleagues incorporate new forms of multimedia presentation into traditional lecture-based courses and use course tools like WebCT, Blackboard, or other total campus management systems like Jenzabar.

The third group of faculty members was very skeptical and less open to the use of technology at all in theological education. When we initiated work on this Lilly technology project, my own small faculty of nineteen at The Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity still had three members who had not yet requested personal computers for their offices. Some of these faculty members were keenly sensitive to what they considered to be a “depersonalization” of theological education when mediated through digital technology. Some felt they had seen sufficient misuse of technology in their daily lives so as to warrant a staunch critical opposition to its creep into the inner sanctums of seminary education or church life. They provided a necessary check and balance for the tendencies of the early adopters to be unrestrained enthusiasts for what technology could do.

The story of the schools in the Minnesota Consortium is not unique. We had faculty across the schools who saw wonderful potential for improving teaching and learning. Others viewed technology as an optional tool for more efficient organization resulting in time or cost savings but not holding much potential for real change. There were some faculty members who lamented technology as a cultural evil to be avoided in the serious work of theological education and

to be preached against from our pulpits. Whether pro or con, faculty members invested considerable intellectual and emotional energy as we began to implement our grant-funded projects.

### **Mixed blessings and missed opportunities**

The “problem” with having outside funding (like the Lilly technology grant) was that it was convenient money to spend. Each of the schools in the consortium had responsibly written initial proposals, stating carefully thought-out goals and committing in-kind and operational funding to the effort. We outlined the purchases of hardware and software we determined we would need, and we established the necessary infrastructure to support our efforts. We purchased desktops and laptops for faculty use. We sent faculty members to national conferences on digital technology for seminary education and offered them local training and one-to-one consultation. We set up faculty laboratories with cutting edge equipment and software to assist them with specific projects for the classroom. We began to design “smart” classrooms in our educational facilities so that reservation and transportation of expensive and heavy equipment needed in the classroom would not deter the faculty members from using the technology. Everything was conveniently installed, ready, and waiting for their use. Through our project committees, we offered support for faculty work and vision for scanning the ever-changing horizon of new developments in technology. We encouraged willing faculty members to learn the new language, to master the software they needed, and to develop new learning objects they dreamed would enhance their classroom lessons. We provided both staff and student assistance, when needed, to free the faculty from technical and repetitive tasks—like scanning slides, converting documents to HTML, or uploading resources to faculty course Web pages. Several of the consortium schools also pursued the development of hybrid courses and fully online distance education courses and programs that engaged learners in the use of the Internet for the completion of some or all of their course work.

With financial encouragement from Lilly Endowment, we brazenly marched into the era of information technology, naively, but with great hope that we would make a significant contribution to the quality of teaching and learning in our schools. At my institution, we made peer review a requirement for those faculty members who applied for a regrant project. Faculty members demonstrated their projects—many of which introduced them to PowerPoint presentation, WebCT, or the use of online forms. A few faculty members created multimedia learning objects on CDs for students to enhance their learning outside of normal classroom encounters. Two such examples are the recording of MIDI files for students’ private rehearsals of vocal music to be sung during worship services and CDs that included Middle Eastern art. By obtaining the necessary equipment early in the process, we discovered through assessment

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that most of our faculty projects focused on how we could do what we have always done in newer, more efficient, or more interesting ways. We became prematurely self-satisfied with these efforts when we encountered positive student response to our work.

Students commented positively on faculty members who effectively used PowerPoint to enhance the classroom encounter in contrast to formats of a “talking head” lecture. They appreciated receiving handouts that outlined the presentation, an online version of the presentation that they could return to at a later time for review, and more audiovisual images to maintain their attention in the classroom and to capture, at the best of times, their imaginations. Soon, students began to reevaluate what was an acceptable presentation style. The more technologically savvy students began to ask for access to the programs and equipment that would enable them to also make classroom presentations with PowerPoint. In many cases, the presentations of students who were sophisticated in their use of the technology were far more appealing and effective teaching objects than what the professors could produce. Many times students were frustrated when access to faculty-only computer labs was denied them. This experience raised a number of new questions for faculty members about accessibility in this new digital world.

Students in the consortium schools tended to be persons in their thirties and forties who very much fall into the same initial responses to the use of technology in theological education as the faculty. Some love it and become early adopters—often drafted by faculty members to assist them with their teaching and learning projects; others are mildly entertained but need more proof that digital technology contributes to real learning. Then there are those who have little time for the experimental efforts of faculty and little generosity for failed attempts.

Seven years ago when we began our concerted efforts to integrate technology with teaching and learning, few students owned computers or brought laptops to the classrooms. All of our students had email accounts and access to those and the Internet through student labs in the library or residence halls. In those seven short years, we have seen a substantial shift in student expectations regarding technology in educational practice. A professor of contextual education who recently attended our summer computer camp admitted that he was there to learn how to use technology well enough to be able to make it transparent to his students and to be able to answer student questions about its use. He said that he wasn't sure if his desire to learn to use online forms would make him any more effective as a teacher but that if he didn't learn the technology well, he knew that he would become less effective. The “digital natives” now registered in our graduate programs have an entirely different way of understanding than do we as “digital immigrants.” Marc Prensky maintains that today's students are no longer the people our traditional educational system was designed to teach. In fact, he claims that whether or not



students' brains have physically changed and are different from ours as a result of the way they have grown up, we can say with certainty that their thinking patterns have changed.<sup>1</sup>

Over the next decade, as more and more of these digital natives enter our theological educational programs, theological educators must attend to exploration not just of how we use the tools but what the most effective ways we can engage digital technology are to address these new thinking patterns.

### **The potential impact of new technologies on theological teaching and learning**

The traditional classic forms of European-influenced lecture style that have predominated in higher education in general and in theological education specifically are no longer doing the job. Unfortunately, the majority of our early attempts to cross the digital divide have been only impoverished experiences of transferring this passive learning mode—a mode in which the teacher does the majority of the talking while the students listen—to more “animated” versions of the same style in online environments. Faculty members repeat the classroom process, but, instead of face-to-face, they talk at the students through published lecture notes, PowerPoint presentations that provide outlines of the lecture, or actual streaming video of the lecture itself—all of which leave in place a fundamental approach to one-way learning. While these alternative forms of lecture may be effective in providing an opportunity for students to review the materials presented in the classroom, they do not necessarily enhance the teaching/learning process. If we want to improve theological education through the integration of digital technologies, we need to engage conversations about the purpose of education as it relates to our institutional mission and our assessment process. In our rush to learn how to use the tools, we failed to attend to the significant conversations about why we would choose to do this in the first place. The convenience of outside funding enabled us to leap into instrumental relationships with digital technology rather than engaging us in a theological and pedagogical examination of our previous educational practices. As theological educators, we need to engage one another not about the *what* and *how* of our teaching, but the *why* of our educational commitments in light of institutional mission.

In her new book, *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All that We Can't Leave Behind*, Mary Hess, an assistant professor of educational leadership at Luther Seminary, poses the question, “What is the end of graduate theological education?” She responds accordingly:

Up until 1994 Luther Seminary's mission statement read: “Luther Northwestern educates men and women to serve the mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Congregations and ministries throughout the Church rely upon this seminary for well-

qualified and committed pastors, teachers, and leaders. The Church and the public look to Luther Northwestern as a center of Lutheran theological reflection.”

Now it reads: “Luther Seminary educates leaders for Christian communities: called and sent by the Holy Spirit, to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ, and to serve in God’s world.”<sup>2</sup>

She reflects on this evolution in the institution’s expression of self-identity and purpose as a result of “intentional broadening of our institutional vocation and our sense that public leadership in the church takes more forms now.”<sup>3</sup>

I believe that similar developments are occurring in theological schools and seminaries in general. This evolving self-understanding of who we are, whose we are, and why we exist impacts our understanding of our roles as theological educators and will make demands on us to reimagine teaching and learning.

The new technologies, for instance, have thrust all of us into new forms of distributive learning. We live much of our lives face-to-face but are spending an increasing amount of our lives in mediated online environments. The early debates about whether using technology is a choice we should make in theological education are behind us because the engagement of technology has permeated all levels of education from preschool through doctoral studies and has become an acceptable and effective delivery system for lifelong learning. If theological schools wish to share their resources with the church, they will need to find more ways to do this through mediated online teaching and learning opportunities.

### **Digital technology and the identity of theological educators**

It is very dangerous to predict the future with any accuracy when change is occurring at unceasing and increasingly faster ways. In the rapidly diversifying nature of our organizations, we are experiencing less natural agreement on our common purposes and less certainty of the outcomes of our actions.<sup>4</sup> We are sending our graduates into chaotic environments and demanding that they lead effectively in the midst of change. How can our educational and formational programs in our seminaries address this reality? It is certain that at the very least, we need to renew our conversations about who we are as theological educators.

Tony Bates, director of distance education and technology at the University of British Columbia, predicts that:

Learning in the twenty-first century will be increasingly bound up with work and everyday life. It will be required on demand and will be organized in such a way that it fits the life style and needs of individuals. Learners will seek education and training from a wide variety of suppliers around the world. In particu-

lar, learners need the opportunity to interact not only with their teachers, but also with fellow students, even if continents apart. They need to be able to challenge and question what they are being taught; they need to be able to adapt what they learn to their own particular circumstances. In other words, education for life-long learners needs to be more learner-focused.<sup>5</sup>

How can we accomplish this? In our dialogues with each other we need to challenge the assumptions of our tried-and-true approaches involving more traditional models of transmission of information in order to weed out those approaches that have little effect on student learning. We need to assess program outcomes and not just the teaching goals, for as reflective educators know, the reception and repetition of information is not a clear indicator of understanding.<sup>6</sup>

As theological educators, we need to continue developing new pedagogical competencies that increase our understanding of and empathy for our students as they enter a new world of learning while enabling us to embrace more gracefully the role of teacher as facilitator of learning and designer of learning environments.

Our own graduate study could not have prepared us for the demands of teaching and learning in a digital age. Few of us had any extensive courses that focused on the pedagogical questions and issues we are now facing. Like many traditional educators who were classically trained, we fell into familiar and unreflective patterns for our teaching—either we taught the way we learned best or we taught the way we were taught. I have often heard the argument from colleagues in a discussion about examination of teaching styles that “I survived the lecture format and learned the content, so it should be good enough for my students.”

What is “good enough” shifts as the challenges in our classrooms shift. Schools throughout ATS report increasing diversity, larger numbers of students with previously identified learning challenges, students poorly prepared or missing critical prerequisite study, and increasing demands from students for media-enhanced learning opportunities. We cannot simply maintain the status quo for “good enough” teaching as we have known it.

As we learn new technologies and new approaches to outcome-based education, and as we critically examine our practice, we will inevitably go through periods of uncertainty and insecurity. We will question not only how we have taught before but also what we know with certainty. In our confusion, we will likely begin to experience what Stephen Brookfield calls “impostership.”

Teachers afflicted with the imposter syndrome have the conviction that they don't really merit any professional recognition or acclaim that comes their way . . . We believe that if we look as though we don't know what we're doing, our students, col-

leagues, and administrative superiors will eat us alive . . . Impostership means that many of us go through our teaching lives fearing that at some unspecified point in the future, we will undergo a humiliating public unveiling.”<sup>7</sup>

Brookfield goes on to say those stricken with feelings of impostership believe that others might interpret admitting our frailty as an indicator of failure. He affirms that feelings of impostership are likely to be experienced as we try to engage innovative pedagogical practices. “Any time we depart from comfortable ways of acting or thinking to experiment with a new way of teaching, we are almost bound to be taken by surprise. The further we travel from our habitual practices, the more we run the risk of looking incompetent.”<sup>8</sup> To counteract these feelings, Brookfield recommends bringing them out in the open and discussing them with trusted colleagues. Once public, it changes from being a secret to protect at all costs to being a common everyday experience. It is reassuring to hear our colleagues express similar reactions to experimentation or changes in their pedagogical practices. Critical reflection and teacher discussion groups can significantly contribute to overcoming the negative effects of impostership. Leadership from experienced educators who willingly share their own experiences of impostership can especially assist junior faculty members as they learn that becoming a teacher is a lifelong process, not an appointment. Being attentive to remedying impostership can keep us fresh and actively reflective about our practices so that we can be alert to options and opportunities for continual growth.

Integrating new technologies into educational praxis can indeed raise feelings of impostership and potentially heighten resistance to innovation in any form. At the same time, this period of teaching “deconstruction” effected by the arrival of digital technology might actually foster a new spirit of reconstruction regarding our roles as teachers. We can come to value our connections with others who are experiencing the same rocky terrain as we navigate between teacher-centered or content-centered learning and learner-centered learning. Perhaps the use of a Web log on the topic of theological education in a digital age might engage us in conversation with colleagues who are farther along the journey and who can provide us with survival tools and hope for thriving with our new approaches to teaching and learning. We also need sustained faculty development programs that cultivate skillfulness in regard to teaching practices as well as collegial reflection on what our classroom work teaches us about student learning. This is not optional but essential.

## **Conclusions**

The professional risks we take as we transform our teaching and self-understanding as teachers to integrate learner-centered and technologically enhanced approaches are not without peril. The recognition and reward system

for faculty work needs to be overhauled to take into account the work of faculty who make contributions to their professional fields in the areas of pedagogy and technology. Deans need to support and encourage classroom research that focuses on the purpose of teaching and learning and to assess learning outcomes. The dean can provide helpful consultation, training, and support for faculty who wish to develop new competencies in teaching and learning and who engage in the critical reflection necessary for bringing about effective changes with new technologies. Deans and faculty affairs committees need to review and extend the parameters of acceptable scholarly research to include work in the improvement of theological teaching and learning. This is a claim made by Ernest Boyer fifteen years ago that has ever more saliency now.<sup>9</sup> Our institutions need to incorporate language pertinent to sustaining the integration of technology and theological education into their long-range goals. Our institutions will improve as centers for learning if they can create and sanction a climate of curiosity and imagination within which the faculty members can explore their task as theological educators, be encouraged to pursue effective pedagogical and technological innovation, and be affirmed that failure of early efforts is part of the learning curve and not the death knell to their professional advancement. Instead, faculty members need to be assured that the only failure is to not learn anything from the failed attempt.

The opportunities for how digital technologies can be integrated into theological education for the improvement of teaching and learning have only just begun to be explored. The impact of our experimentation can have a cascading effect if we follow through with ongoing critical reflection on the purposes of theological education in the light of the changing worlds into which we send our graduates. In the end, it is not about becoming an aficionado of computer dexterity. It is a matter of using the potential of new teaching tools to develop and sustain excellence in theological learning and excellence in pastoral service.

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#### ENDNOTES

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# Theological Reflection, Theology and Technology: When Baby Boomer Theologians Teach Generations X & Y

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*ABSTRACT: Before assessing contemporary technology for the theological enterprise, it is necessary for theological educators to explore their own presuppositions about technology in order to engage in theological reflection on technology. Teaching across the digital divide we may begin from a perspective of suspicion not shared by our students. How does a phronetic perspective prepare us not only to teach with technology but also to theologize from technology in a more missional and appreciative manner?*

## **Introduction: My technological location**

**M**odesty is a valued commodity in the theological enterprise. When attempting to reflect upon technology, this theological virtue—which Thomas Aquinas thought held a certain pride of place in “the movement of the mind towards some excellence”<sup>1</sup>—becomes requisite. While I do not consider myself digitally challenged, my theological *métier* is definitely not to be found at the intersection of science and theology. Rather, I am more of a Roman Catholic practical theologian who specializes in worship and the arts. These reflections, therefore, are not those of a technological specialist but more so of a middle aged, academic who is a digital amateur in the original sense of that word, for I do have a certain affinity for, even attachment to, technology.

With two other colleagues, I acquired my first computer in 1983 while writing a dissertation in Paris. There was some irony deciphering medieval manuscripts by day and inputting transcriptions at night on our IBM with dual floppy disk drive and astounding 64K memory. Over the years, I made the usual trek through the computer revolution from monochrome to color monitors to flat screens, accompanied by increasingly larger hard drives, smaller laptops, and the usual array of external drives, hand held devices, and other peripherals.

My personal pilgrimage paralleled an eventual commitment by my institution to digital technology boosted by a generous grant from Lilly Endowment. Because of that combination, I now teach in smart classrooms, am relatively adept at animating PowerPoint presentations, do most of my advis-



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ing by email, and have recently converted my aging file of photocopied articles to a PDF library of nearly 1,000 titles. My graduate courses have been posted on two generations of Blackboard and now reside in cyberspace thanks to Moodle.

Like many of my colleagues, I am not a digital dinosaur. I have acquired some fluency, first with word processing, then with digitally enhanced teaching and even Internet research. While not exactly in the technological Stone Age, however, my middle-aged colleagues and I still speak “digital” as a second language. We remember radio B-TV (before television), grew up on pinball rather than video games, and still intuit that a telephone—even a cellular one—is designed for making telephone calls—not a platform for text messaging, weather reports, portable music, or photography.

As a consequence, my technological context—and that of many colleagues—is increasingly different from that of our students and their age cohort. This is true not only of students from dominant culture U.S. but also increasingly true of other domestic and international students. Consequently, rather than attempting some breezy assessment of technology’s contribution to or unsuitability for the theological enterprise,<sup>2</sup> it may be more useful to consider how those of us engaged in theological education reflect theologically upon technology. These ruminations are particularly addressed to colleagues like myself who—according to available data<sup>3</sup>—still comprise the bulk of the faculties engaged in theological education in the United States today. Maybe if we can attend to our own theological presuppositions about technology and understand how such preconceptions affect not only how we teach but also what we teach, then perhaps we can enable our students to acquire the habitus for doing the same even more effectively than we do.

### **Defining technology**

A requisite step before launching into any theological reflection upon technology is defining it. While the popular imagination often posits technology as synonymous with *digital*—treating it as though a late twentieth-century invention—technology is an ancient and enduring facet of human civilization. If culture can be considered what we make of creation,<sup>4</sup> technology could certainly be considered *how* we achieve this cultural fashioning. Generally understood as the process by which we produce tools for shaping our environment, technology—along with the arts—can be regarded as one of the enduring marks of civilization.<sup>5</sup> While it is true that nonhumanoid species have employed, even produced, “tools,”<sup>6</sup> there is little evidence that such tool-making advances the species in any dramatic way but rather remains more a repetitive than developmental aspect of such species. With humans, on the other hand, it is the advancement of technology that increasingly shapes our collective history.



It was Aristotle (d. 322 BCE) who offered the West not only an enduring epistemological framework for thinking about “technology” but an ethical one as well. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguished among three domains of knowing, corresponding to three states of knowing. *Theoria* (theory) is concerned with the “what” of existence and the eternal universals that undergird such existence. Its complimentary state of knowing is *episteme*. In its fullness, this type of knowing belongs to the gods but is also the goal of the philosopher. *Theoria* is its own goal and has little to do with the way we are to be in the world.

Radically different from the theoretical are two types of practical knowledge. Rather than concerned with the “what” of existence, these types of knowledge more attend to the “how” of acting in this existence. *Phronesis* (practical wisdom) and its complimentary state of knowing, *praxis* (doing), are concerned with acting in the world and the ethical consequences of those actions. *Praxis* in Aristotle’s sense is thus not simple practice but an activity joined with a clear intention for the human good. Aristotle distinguishes this type of knowing and action from *techne* (skill) and its complimentary state of knowing, *poiesis* (poetry), which is concerned with the fabrication and use of things.

Over the past decade there has been a growing emphasis on recovering *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, as both a model and a goal for higher education. Among theological educators, Bernard Lee has made the case for the priority of *phronesis* over *episteme*, not only in theology but for the broader educational enterprise as well.<sup>7</sup> He has further argued that *phronesis/praxis* should always have a mediating role in theology, disallowing any direct move from theory to practice. Lee opines, “It is never enough to know how to do it and to do it. We need to know whether the kind of life we believe all people should be living will benefit from the doing.”<sup>8</sup>

Lee’s Aristotelian reconfiguration provides a lens for offering a preliminary definition of technology from a theological perspective. Theologically speaking, technology cannot simply be *techne*, for as Lee remarks, while “*techne* is not wrong, we’d not get far without it . . . without tenacious connections to *praxis* and *theoria*, *techne* is a loose canon.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, from a theological perspective, technology is any process, tool, or other human fabrication that affects people’s well being; it is more *praxis* than *techne* requiring *phronesis* rather than simple *poiesis*.

### Examining our theological anthropologies

Thinking theologically about technology requires us to examine some of the presuppositions we bring to this reflection. I suspect that a significant number of us bring a hermeneutic of suspicion to bear when pondering contemporary technology. For example, those of us more comfortable with word processing than website construction may approach the Internet with more crinkled brow than hopeful anticipation. A few years ago my faculty

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chose technology as the topic of our year-long faculty seminar. Through these monthly gatherings, various colleagues demonstrated how they were using technology—mostly Blackboard, PowerPoint, and the Internet—in their classes. One of the questions that surfaced most frequently was how to enable our students to assess the vast amount of religious material on the Internet. A subtle undertone to that conversation was a distinctive concern about the dangers of the Internet.

While not wanting to downplay the perils of the digital landscape, one wonders what theological anthropology undergirds our various approaches to contemporary technology. Stephen Bevans suggests that we “can work out of a theology that is basically creation-centered, or one can do theology from a fundamentally redemption-centered perspective.”<sup>10</sup> Bevans goes on to explain that “a creation-centered orientation to theology is characterized by the conviction that human experience, and so context, is generally good. Its perspective is that grace builds on nature, but only because nature is *capable* of being built on.”<sup>11</sup> In contrast, a redemption-centered theology “is characterized by the conviction that culture and human experience are either in need of a radical transformation or in need of total replacement. In this perspective, grace cannot build on or perfect nature because nature is something that is corrupt. In a real sense, therefore, grace replaces nature.”<sup>12</sup>

Before launching into any theological reflection upon technology, it might be helpful to locate ourselves on the creation-redemption continuum. It may be that, especially when it comes to digital technologies and the Internet, those of us who are baby-boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) may instinctively approach technology more from a “redemption-” than a “creation-centered” perspective. Most of our seminary and divinity school classrooms, however, are filled with Generation Xers (born between 1965 and 1980) and, increasingly, with members of the Y generation (born between 1981 and 1995).<sup>13</sup> The former were brought up on television, Atari, and personal computers.<sup>14</sup> The latter generation made its advent the same year as MTV; its cohort was brought up on Nintendo and Game Boys, and it is sometimes known as the “Internet Generation.” That designation was confirmed by a 1999 America Online “Youth Cyberstudy” that polled 500 youth between the ages of 9 and 17. It found that approximately 63 percent of these youth preferred the Web over television, and 55 percent reported that they would rather go online than talk on the phone.<sup>15</sup> While a broad generalization, I think it fair to suggest that X and Y generation students of religion and theology are much more inclined toward a “creation-centered” perspective when it comes to digital technologies and the Internet—more inclined to see it as a grace than as something to be redeemed.

Ours is not the first age to bring different theological anthropologies to bear when confronted by emergent technologies. The famous twelfth-century duel of opinions between Suger of Saint-Denis (d. 1151) and Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) comes to mind. The technology in question was not digital but architect-

tural and decorative. The creation-centered Suger presided over the transformation of his monastic church through crossed vaulting, buttressed walls, and magnificent stained glass windows that resulted in a riot of luminosity that came to define Gothic.<sup>16</sup> From a more redemption-centered perspective, Bernard rejected the vision of Suger as harmful to the soul of a monk, and under his influence, his order's General Chapter of 1134 prohibited the use of stained glass, figurative carvings, and even the use of colors in copying manuscripts.<sup>17</sup>

Today, as well, religious leaders minister out of distinctive and often conflicting theological perspectives and anthropologies. As theological educators committed to shaping thoughtful and effective religious leaders for our own time, we need to develop a particular acuity for these theological deep structures—not only for our students, but first of all for ourselves. Attending is a well recognized first step in theological reflection.<sup>18</sup> The more personal attending we bring to the theological reflection process, the more effective that process will be. Such theological attending is particularly appropriate when confronting the new or unfamiliar, and for many of us that is digital technology.

### **Boundary crossing and appreciative inquiry**

While attending is an important first step in theological reflection, it can be undermined by an unchecked theological anthropology that, for example, could change “attending” to “attending for the unredeemed.” James and Evelyn Whitehead insist on a form of attending that requires “suspending judgment.”<sup>19</sup> That is a goal more easily envisioned than achieved.

One perspective that may enable the suspension of judgment when attempting theological reflection on technology comes from contemporary missiology. For many religious communities the twentieth century was a time for rethinking mission. One aspect of that rethinking was a growing awareness of a necessary mutuality between mission sending and mission receiving communities. Sometimes dubbed “mission in reverse,”<sup>20</sup> this approach affirms that mission is a partnership in God between peoples and between cultures. From this post-colonial perspective, mission is not a one-way transfer of knowledge, culture, and salvation but a mutually enriching encounter at the personal, spiritual, and cultural levels.

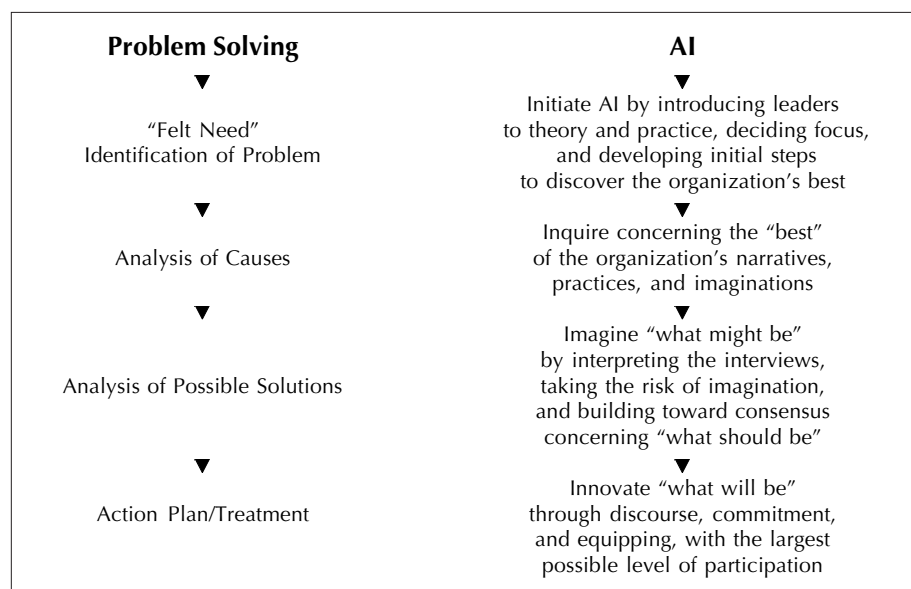
One important basis for this approach to mission is the growing awareness that each culture is to be respected for its potential for mirroring the divine. In my own Roman Catholic tradition, the 1965 *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* from the Second Vatican Council demonstrated a new respect for world cultures. It specifically notes the importance and variability of culture (nn. 54–62). The document maintains that, because the Church belongs to no particular culture, it “can enter into communion with the various civilizations, to their enrichment and the enrichment of the Church itself” (n. 58). Each Christian must strive to ensure that each cultural

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manifestation is respected, while at the same time it is imbued with a genuinely human and religious spirit (n. 61). Such a perspective puts reverence rather than suspicion at the forefront of the boundary crossing we have traditionally called mission.

Might it not be helpful for theological educators, especially those of us of a certain age, to approach technology in a similar way? While not strictly speaking another “culture,” this is certainly “another world” for many and a challenging form of boundary crossing. While many theological educators “speak” digital technology as a shared vernacular, it is not our first language, and there exists a certain “digital divide” not only between us and the experts but also between us and many of our students who grew up speaking digital as a first language. Let’s face it: we grew up playing with Tinkertoys, and kindergartners are now being introduced to PDAs.<sup>21</sup> Like more traditional forms of boundary crossing, it is probable that we carry deep-seated “cultural” preferences and prejudices when crossing the digital divide. Maybe a more missional or cross-cultural perspective might provide a frame for us to approach technology with more reverence than suspicion. Despite where we are situated on the “creation-redemption” axis, pondering the digital world as a fresh context for mission in reverse might invite a more respectful predisposition when pondering the technological.

If one accepts the opinion that it could be useful to hold in check our suspicions when approaching modern technology and that theological educators could benefit from a less suspicious theological anthropology when it comes to technology, one aid to a type of “attending” that could nudge us toward the “creation” axis in the creation-redemption continuum is the strategy known as appreciative inquiry (AI). AI is a contribution to organizational



development that arose in the 1980s. Two key figures in AI were David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva<sup>22</sup> who challenged the problem solving approach that dominated the business and organizational consulting landscape of the era. Their contention was that if your beginning point in consulting is problem solving, then you will undoubtedly find problems, and end up with a “problem-focus” in your organization. Conversely, if your goal is to find the generative and hope-filled, you will find that as well, and it will become the focus of your organization. Mark Branson, who specifically explores AI as a ministerial tool, has provided a useful chart comparing the problem solving approach to AI.<sup>23</sup>

AI is based on the common sense wisdom that you will find what you are looking for and, organizationally, you will develop in the direction of your inquiry. The theological orientation of AI is clearly more creation- than redemption-centered. Because of its orientation, AI might make a pedagogical contribution to those of us engaged in intergenerational teaching—baby boomers engaging generations X and Y in the teaching-learning enterprise.

Previously we noted the move among some in theological education to emphasize *phronesis* as both a model and a goal for higher education. We previously noted Bernard Lee’s case for the priority of *phronesis* over *episteme*, and the mediating role of *phronesis/praxis* in theology.<sup>24</sup> Other practical theologians have posited not only the importance of praxis for the theological enterprise but also its priority as a starting point both for theologizing and the theological education that prepares folk for the real life theologizing we call ministry.<sup>25</sup>

If there is validity in placing not only praxis at the center of the theological enterprise but also the experience of our students as a privileged starting point for reflection upon praxis, then those of us teaching across the digital divide might want to adopt at least the spirit if not the procedures of AI as a way to honor and not erase the technological experiences of our students. This is not suggesting that such experience is above critique or beyond reproach. On the other hand, it is also a powerful resource for theological reflection. If we allow a redemption-centered perspective to dominate our presuppositions about, reflections upon, and use of contemporary technology, then we might very well implicitly communicate to our students that one of the primordial languages of their generation is at least flawed if not intrinsically problematic.

### **Theologizing *with* to theologizing *from***

Many theological educators in the twenty-first century seem content to use developing technologies to support their teaching and learning. Reflecting on our theological presuppositions, considering where we are on the creation-redemption axis, exploring various technological divides in more missional frameworks, and employing tools such as AI could foster dispositions that might render us both more open to and effective with emerging technologies.

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As theological educators, however, pondering our dispositions about technology as a material aid to our teaching and learning might not be sufficient. A further invitation that awaits us is the transition from theologizing *with* the aid of the technology of the day to theologizing *from* emerging technologies. While maybe not a part of our current religious imagination, the ability to theologize from contemporary technology is richly symbolic of a willingness to theologize not only for the age but from the age, resulting in a particular form of contextual theology. There is a rich theological tradition for employing the new ideas of an era for furthering the theological enterprise. Augustine drew on Neo-Platonism, Aquinas on rediscovered Aristotelian metaphysics, Rahner on Heidegger and so forth. If we agree that the theory-practice paradigm of theologizing is bankrupt and that theology must construct a mutual correlation between contemporary praxis and theology, then it is not just the thinking about technology that needs to be invited into theological discourse but technological *praxis*. Such praxis invites a twenty-first century theology with true phronetic potential.

Stephen Garner offers an intriguing example<sup>26</sup> of this type of engagement. He is prodded by the questions of bioethicist Ronald Cole-Turner, who queries:

Can theology—that communal process by which the church’s faith seeks to understand—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? Or by our silence do we leave it utterly godless? Can we have a theology of technology that comprehends, gives meaning to, dares to influence the direction and set limits to this explosion of new powers?<sup>27</sup>

In response to these probing questions, Garner suggests that current technological practice might provide new “metaphors of God as a technologist—a hacker—and of human beings made in the image of God being technologists after their creator.”<sup>28</sup> Rather than engaging some theoretical aspect of contemporary technology for theologizing, Garner reflects upon a more mundane practice, “hacking.” He believes this practice is filled with metaphoric promise for reconsidering who God is and what it means for contemporary human beings to share this *imago Dei*. He writes, “The metaphor of God as hacker incorporates into it the concept of God as creator of new things as well as a certain playfulness. A God who, in this particular imagery, is defined by being creative and enjoying it.”<sup>29</sup>

In my own teaching, I have increasingly drawn upon technology for its metaphoric promise for exploring traditional teachings. For example, one of the most challenging concepts to communicate in sacramental theology is the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching on the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist. The official teaching is that Christ is really, truly, and “substantially”



present. "Substance" in this definition is a concept derived from Aristotle's metaphysics. It is a particular view of "essence" that combines "matter" and "form" existing on its own, without any need of a particular subject or object. Thus, while there are many chairs in the world, they all share the substance of "chairness," which is not confined by any single chair.

This idea of substance, which still undergirds official Catholic teaching, is notoriously difficult to understand, even by those who have studied philosophy. For many theological students and ordinary believers, the metaphysical concept of substance often collapses into physicality. Thus, when the Roman Catholic Church asserts that Christ is really, truly, and substantially present in the Eucharist, many wrongly equate that with Christ being physically present, even though that is not the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

Negotiating the terrain between "substantial reality" and "physical reality" can be facilitated by a wide range of analogous experiences of "reality" and "presence" mediated by contemporary technology. The telephone, a familiar and nonthreatening form of technology for most age groups and cultures, is particularly helpful here. I begin by inviting students to reflect upon their experiences of using a telephone. In particular they are asked to consider to what extent they experience the person with whom they are conversing by telephone "as really present." In the discussion students can distinguish between someone being physically present to them, and yet that same person being really present to them in a technological way, even if they are at some distance. Further reflection concerns how this digital presence does not reproduce physical presence but an electronic symbol of that presence through electronically translated voice production. The analogy for Roman Catholic sacramental understanding of Christ's presence in the Eucharist is next explored. Just as our conversation partner on the telephone is really present to us, but in an electronic rather than a physical way, so is Christ's presence real but nonphysical; it is a real, sacramental presence.

Substituting electronic technology for Aristotelian metaphysics is not only more understandable for most of my students but also many times a first for them—employing contemporary technology as part of a theological method. Besides the value of accessibility, the exploration of technological analogies rather than Aristotelian metaphysics also strikes me as an important move for Catholic sacramental theologians as well, given that Aristotelian metaphysics does not have much philosophical currency in contemporary thought.

### **From teaching to sending**

In the late 1960s I took my first course in the philosophy of education. A gifted pedagogue spoke often of the etymology of "education," and inspired us to be "leaders of the mind." He trained us to teach, to motivate, to lead; I was convinced that if I did so my students would "follow" me just as my colleagues and I followed him. Some forty years later I am still inspired by the memory but

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no longer embrace the goal. With the shift to student-centered or at least subject-centered<sup>30</sup> learning, my teaching-learning has become less about leading and more about mission, less about imparting ideas and more about engaging in theological reflection, less about theory and more about *phronesis*. In the process, my own intellectual life has been transformed, largely by the students and colleagues who inspire me with their dedication and challenge me in their difference.

As I teach and learn, graced and confronted by more and more difference, I recognize that I am helping to prepare ministers who will see a world I will not understand, will minister in places I have never visited, and will confront ecclesial and social issues that are beyond my experience. Simply teaching them what I learned is insufficient for the worlds they do and will confront. My hope is to help equip them for the future with skills and principles, methods and insights that will endure even as knowledge so rapidly increases and changes. From my perspective, the center of theological education is engendering a habitus for disciplined theological reflection for future ministers. Given the dynamic force of technology today, it seems at least a lost opportunity, if not an educational failure, to overlook the theological import and implications of the digital age for the ministerial enterprise and future mission.

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ENDNOTES

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 160, art. 2.
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3. See, for example, Barbara G. Wheeler, Sharon L. Miller and Katarina Schuth, "Signs of the Times: Present and Future Theological Faculty," *Auburn Studies* no. 10 (February 2005) at [http://www.auburnsem.org/images/publications/pdf\\_11.pdf](http://www.auburnsem.org/images/publications/pdf_11.pdf) (accessed May 8, 2005).
4. William A. Dyrness, *The Earth is God's: A Theology of American Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 58.



5. For a comprehensive overview of the role of technology in human civilization see W. Bernard Carlson, ed., *Technology in World History*, 7 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
6. Chimpanzees are documented to be the most effective tool-users next to humans. On the diversity of tool-using habits of chimpanzees see, for example, William C. McGrew, *Chimpanzee Material Culture: Implications for Human Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
7. See, for example, Bernard Lee's "Practical Theology: Its Character and Possible Implications for Higher Education," *Current Issues in Higher Education* 14, no. 2 (December 1994) 25–36; also, "Practical Theology as Phronetic," *APT Occasional Papers* 1 (1998) 1–19.
8. Lee, "Practical Theology as Phronetic," 14.
9. Lee, "Practical Theology: Its Character and Possible Implications for Higher Education," 34.
10. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (2002; repr., Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 21.
11. Ibid. This is akin to what David Tracy would consider doing theology out of an "analogical" imagination in *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), especially 405–421.
12. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 21–22; In Tracy's language, this would mean theologizing out of a dialectical rather than analogical imagination, *ibid.*
13. Not surprisingly, much of the best demographic information on these cohorts is supplied by marketing companies. See, for example, OnPoint Marketing and Promotions at <http://www.onpoint-marketing.com/> (accessed May 9, 2005).
14. See, for example, Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 13–14 *passim*.
15. [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/research\\_documents/statistics/internet/popular\\_web\\_activities.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/research_documents/statistics/internet/popular_web_activities.cfm) (accessed May 9, 2005).
16. Suger's own ebullient description of the transformed church reads, in part: *Claret enim claris quod clare concopulatur, Et quod perfundit lux nova, claret opus* (For bright is that which is brightly coupled with the bright, And bright is the noble edifice which is pervaded by the new light), from his *De Administratione* 29, in *Abbot Suger*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Erwin Panofsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 50–51.
17. For an introduction to Bernard's artistic views, see Georges Duby, *Saint Bernard: L'art cistercien* (Paris, Flammarion, 1979) esp. 11–12.
18. Thus the celebrated "attend-assert-pastoral response" of James D. and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, rev. ed. (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 13–14.
19. *Ibid.*, 14.
20. See, for example, Claude Marie Barbour, "Seeking Justice and Shalom in the City," *International Review of Mission* 73, no. 291 (1984): 305.
21. Young Mi Chang, Laurie Mullen, Matthew Stuve, "Are PDAs Pedagogically Feasible for Young Children?" *T.H.E. Journal* 32, no. 8 (March 2005): 40–42.
22. See Cooperrider and Srivastva "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life," *Research in Organizational Change and Development* 1 (1987): 129–169; more recently their *Appreciative Management and Leadership*, rev. ed. (Euclid, OH: Williams Custom

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Publishing, 1999). A good general introduction to AI is Sue Annis Hammond, *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, 2nd ed. (Plano, TX: Thin Book Publishing Co., 1998).

23. Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 22.

24. This view finds resonance in the writings of David Tracy who argues that, while it is possible to do theology from a “theory-practice” perspective (in which the theory is unaffected by practice), and even from a “practice-practice” perspective (which negates the value of theory), neither of these does justice to theory or praxis. Thus, Tracy argues that more appropriate is a mutually critical correlation, in which both theory and practice critique each other and collaboratively contribute to the development of description, normativity and understanding. David Tracy, “The Foundations of Practical Theology,” in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*, ed. Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983): 61–82.

25. The Whiteheads in their previously noted work certainly give priority to experience in theological reflection; for a sampling of others see James Fowler, “The Emerging New Shape of Practical Theology,” *Pastoraltheologische Informationen* 18 (1996): 206–223; Carol Lakey Hess, “Becoming Midwives to Justice: A Feminist Approach to Practical Theology,” *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theologies in Context*, eds. Denise M. Ackermann and Riet Bons-Storm (Leuven: Peeters, 1998): 52–73; Randy L. Maddox, “The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline,” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 650–672. For reflections on the role of experience in the enterprise of theological education, two classics are Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Way of Shared Praxis* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991) and Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley, eds., *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

26. Stephen Garner, “Hacking the Divine: A Possible Metaphor for Theology-Technology Engagement,” *Virtual Theology Colloquium* (February 11-12, 2005) <http://www.greenflame.org/docs/Garner-HackingtheDivine.pdf> (accessed April 9, 2005).

27. Ronald Cole-Turner, “Science, Technology and Mission,” *The Local Church in a Global Era: Reflections for a New Century*, eds. Max L. Stackhouse, Tim Dearborn, and Scott Paeth (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 100–112, here 104 as cited by Garner, *Virtual Theology Colloquium*, 1.

28. Garner, “Hacking the Divine,” 2.

29. *Ibid.*, 8.

30. Parker J. Palmer’s preferred term; his *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998): esp. 115–140.

# Implications of a Digital Age for Theological Education

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*ABSTRACT: The advent of the Internet and emerging electronic resources generated much excitement and hopeful forecasts of transformative effects on education. While there have been many benefits that are widely available, it is less clear that this technology has had the dramatic transformative impact early advocates envisioned.*

Twenty years after the emergence of personal desktop computers and ten years after the Internet was transformed into a widely used commercial venue, these technologies have become ubiquitous in higher education. While theological schools (like the humanities as a whole) are frequently on the trailing edge of the technological revolution, many ATS institutions are at least several years along with efforts to incorporate networks and electronic resources into their educational mission.

In the mid-90s when the first waves of this technology were striking university environments, Lilly Endowment embarked on a well-funded effort to explore the impacts and potential of computer technologies for theological teaching. At that time, the potential seemed enormous, and it was frequently heralded enthusiastically as a potentially revolutionary impact on learning.

Ten years later, is there evidence that the nature of teaching and learning has indeed been radically transformed? Or were the skeptics justified in characterizing "high tech" teaching as mere window dressing or a flash in the pan? Are there enduring questions about the effectiveness of these tools for theological education? Is the emerging reality of fully networked higher education what was envisioned ten years ago? Or is it still too early to tell what the effects of the digital age will be?

There are without doubt a number of ways in which education has been transformed by computers and the Internet. It is worthy of note in passing that there are some interesting parallels with the impact of an earlier innovative technology, the spread of photocopiers in college and university libraries. What had previously been a relatively expensive product primarily used in business rather quickly became widely deployed and emerged as a "standard" tool in the educational environment. It had a dramatic impact on the way in which students used library collections as well as the way many faculty developed syllabi and reserve reading assignments. It made information much more portable and easily accessed. While it was typically not free, the low incremental costs certainly did not seem to serve as a brake on student behavior, copying something now to be read later.

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The explosive growth in photocopiers and the emergence of “classpaks” raised large-scale copyright issues among publishers and intellectual property rights holders. In that case, as well as with home video recorders, widespread use became standard practice before attempts to control the behavior were effectively implemented. Consequently, with the emergence of the Internet and the technical capabilities to easily share files with no geographic constraints, publishers and the recording industry were determined to aggressively protect their rights, lest they again be faced with a situation of closing the barn door after the horse was already gone. Some possibilities for educational applications were foreclosed (or dramatically curtailed) early on as a result of these preemptive strategies to protect copyrighted materials.

### **Positive impacts of digital technologies**

One area where the Internet and digital resources have clearly had a dramatic impact is with distance education and remote learning. A number of seminaries have effectively used Internet access to offer a range of courses at sites remote from the main campus. Costs for the technology continue to go down, and the growing body of electronic resources is much more easily made available to remote students than printed books from library shelves.

The Lilly technology grants were intentionally defined to focus on changes for teaching in the local campus environment rather than as tools for distance education. Nevertheless, it became clear early on that networking technologies and electronic teaching tools had great applicability for distance education.

But have these tools been as transformative of learning on the home campus as they have for distance learning? Despite many examples of creative adoption and adaptation by individual faculty members, it seems dubious to claim wide spread transformation of the theological curriculum or of the way most of our courses are taught.

The Internet has certainly become ubiquitous on our campuses and in our libraries. Electronic databases are widely used reference tools; a growing core of journal literature in religion and theology is available in full text online, and a significant number of theological schools are using electronic reserves. Networking and electronic resources are without question pervasive and already a normal part of the educational environment. But has it had the dramatic qualitative impact anticipated by early forecasts? I would argue that it has not, in part, because (1) the most significant transformations will be generational rather than immediate, (2) the nature of theological education and reflection, and (3) the difference between education as imparting instrumental skills and education as a formative reflective enterprise.

### **Attention to pedagogy**

There are enduring consequences for theological education of the digital age, some of which are positive, though not all. One significant and encouraging development arising from the introduction of electronic technology is the elevation of our attention to pedagogical issues in our discussions about theological education. Attention to the nature of student-faculty and student-student interactions was raised for many by the implications of electronic discussions and fears for the loss or diminishment of face-to-face classroom encounters.

Some have argued that at its best, the character of ongoing electronic discussions between class sessions can foster more constructive interactions when the class gathers together, but it is by no means a given that ANY use of electronic discussions has this effect. Similarly, while it is all too true that sometimes a classroom presentation using PowerPoint may be nothing more than a high-tech slide show, that does not mean that ALL uses of classroom technology are merely rehashing older techniques in a glitzier package.

The difference does not reside in the technology itself but in whether the tool has provided an opportunity for instructors to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching. It is not necessary to use computer technology to teach more effectively, but the sometimes controversial discussions about technology's role in the classroom have certainly made more prominent in our discussions the importance of teaching effectively and of examining what tools we use to do so. Whether we do it on-campus or electronically with distance learners, we have become more explicitly attentive to student learning styles and to teaching more creatively and effectively, than was the case ten years ago.

### **Virtual library collections**

Early on, anticipation of the impact of digitized texts, both born-digital publications going forward and retrospective scanning of prior publications, created visions of the virtual library where practically any text desired would be freely and immediately available online. This was a significant part of the vision of the transformation of higher education, information available 24/7/365, wherever the student or researcher might be.

There has indeed been a dramatic growth of electronic full-text resources in just ten years, most prominently in science, technology, and medicine but rapidly expanding now even in the humanities and religion. Nevertheless, it has not yet had the sweeping impact or universal access envisioned in the early days of the digital revolution. Intellectual property rights, copyright laws, and the significant capital costs of digitizing print resources have impacted the extent to which digitized products are affordable by universities and theological schools, and specific limitations are enacted as to how and to whom access may be granted.

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Publishers had to play catch up with the influence of photocopiers in educational institutions, and only relatively late did the Kinko's classpak litigation impose constraints and significant royalty costs onto what had grown to be a popular tool in course preparation. When the Internet was expanded to become a commercial as well as research-oriented network, file-sharing and peer-to-peer tools like Napster raised immediate alarms for owners of intellectual property rights. Publishers and recording associations began aggressive efforts to litigate file-sharing of copyrighted music and movies.

Although the litigation has not eliminated or even dramatically reduced peer-to-peer sharing of copyrighted music, it has shaped the emerging consensus and legal context about what constitutes *fair use* of copyrighted materials. It has effectively eliminated the applicability of the concept of fair use when dealing with electronic resources.

Lawsuits have been focused primarily on music file-sharing, but the impact of that litigation has been felt in the much smaller market dealing with full-text academic materials. Technology to provide for electronic reserves is reasonably priced and scanning of reserve materials is almost as easy as photocopying them for paper reserves. But the ease of distribution and redistribution of a scanned copy of an article or book chapter have meant that electronic reserves are treated as fundamentally different from paper reserves.

There are many who would like to resist the surrender of the fair use concept as applied to electronic reserves. But the fear of litigation and a growing body of legal decisions in favor of the copyright holders have led to a much more constrained environment for electronic versions of copyrighted material. Advocates for fair use may be heartened by the recently announced Google initiative to digitize huge amounts of several research libraries. As is not surprising, publishing associations are moving to challenge Google's plans (still as yet rather secretive) for scanning materials still under copyright.

It is possible that Google's financial resources will allow it to face these challenges and produce a litigated decision that clarifies what, if any, is the appropriate role of fair use of electronic editions for educational purposes. It is also possible that such litigation might result in an even more restricted application of that concept than exists now.

### **Ownership vs. access**

Another significant development, again related to restrictions on access to electronic resources, is the emergence of licensing rather than outright purchase as the standard method for distribution of copyrighted electronic resources. Ownership vs. access emerged as a debate in library circles in the 1990s as the cost of materials—particularly serials—escalated rapidly and budgets were unable to keep pace with inflation and the expansion of scholarly publishing. Electronic journals and databases accelerated these concerns, as electronic resources are expensive and often duplicative of many print subscriptions already owned.



Electronic resources dramatically expand access on-campus and to authorized users, but they typically cannot be considered full replacements for the print versions. Rapid technological changes still leave uncertain how to guarantee the long-term availability of these products, with no well-developed standards for permanent preservation of electronic data. The historical archiving function of library collections is not readily transferred from paper to electronic editions. We hopefully can justify the costs by pointing to enhanced access and ease of use, but building a collection that remains over long periods of time is not yet secure in digital form.

Given the costs and licensing restrictions associated with commercial electronic resources, another place at which the early utopian vision of the virtual library breaks down is when students graduate and leave the institution. We have successfully created a generation of graduates who are accustomed—in many cases strongly addicted—to easy online access to a wide variety of electronic resources. But once they leave and become alumni/ae, it is rare that licensing allows continued access to these products. The promise of electronic access to scholarly resources wherever one is situated is ideal for the paradigm of creating lifelong learners as our graduates move into ministry. But the economics of these tools and the licenses controlling them currently prevent that.

### **Students change more than the faculty**

Perhaps the most pervasive impact on theological education and the grounding for a technological imperative for current faculty is *not* that the technology can or will transform them as teachers or researchers. Those transformations are likely to be generational, not overnight. But what *has* been transformed already are the students. Most current faculty and librarians were educated and socialized into research and teaching prior to the digital age. But already higher education and even theological schools are receiving students who have grown up in and been shaped by this technology. Their approach to learning and research assume these tools and assume (even when incorrectly) an abundance of information readily available on any topic on the Internet.

This is most prominently seen in the growing concern about information literacy and in the movement to create tools to assess these skills. One example is the recently announced ICT Literacy Assessment tool being developed by Educational Testing Service. It is commonly lamented that a Google search is typically the first and often the only stop for student assignments. When a keyword search on Google (or now even Google Scholar) retrieves dozens or hundreds of sites or articles on a topic, the imperative facing faculty is to teach students how to evaluate the source and quality of the abundant search results.

The need for faculty to attend to the rapidly changing tools and sources for information is not because they should abandon their own methods and approaches to research and teaching—though some faculty have already made extensive use of these new tools and more will likely do so—rather, the imperative

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comes from the need to be able to evaluate the way students use these resources and to be able to instruct them how these tools can and should be used in their course of study and reflection.

It is not uncommon now to hear undergraduate students say something like: “The assignment was to find three books and three articles. The teacher didn’t say the three best articles relevant to the topic, just three articles.” So the students will tend to just take the first three easily accessible articles—generally meaning the first three with full text online. If the assignment does not press them to critically evaluate the sources, the students will not bother to do so. It appears that when a faculty member giving such an assignment is unfamiliar with the online resources the students use, he or she may not be able to critically evaluate the sources selected. For whatever reason, it appears many undergraduates are not receiving adequate instruction on how to evaluate the resources they find.

Even though we expect more than that from graduate-level students, we cannot assume they will have adequate evaluative skills and must be willing to teach them the difference between peer-reviewed electronic journals and someone’s blog. A host of substantive scholarly materials is available on the Web, but unless faculty and librarians know how to evaluate these resources and instruct students on which to use, the seductive overabundance of Google citations will continue to be a major hindrance. Perhaps in ten years there will be a widely accepted tool for measuring information literacy. The emerging ETS ICT Literacy Assessment test might become such a standard measurement, though others may emerge as well. At some point, when a standard is available, faculty may not have to worry as much about teaching the skills to evaluate online resources. But that is not the case today.

Despite the rosy forecasts and anticipation of the benefits of the digital revolution, the benefits to date, while significant, are a mixed blessing, and the most significant and immediate impacts are not necessarily the positive ones we hoped for. The task of theological education requires more than rapid access to information and, as such, will not be fundamentally improved (or ruined) by the changes computer and network technology are bringing.

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# Mapping Structural Change

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*ABSTRACT: Barriers in our systems and structures may be keeping our seminaries from fully integrating and effectively using technology. Our seminaries may overcome these barriers, inherent in all organizations, by asking systems-based questions during the initial stages when discussing technology purchases. The result of asking systems-based questions is a more effective integration of technology into the teaching-learning environment.*

## **Seminary A scenario**

The grant provided significant funding for technology. Seminary A had worked diligently over a year to describe why the sought-after grant would enhance its educational objectives. Technology was woefully inadequate at that moment, but seminary leaders believed money would help them become more effective in meeting the needs of current and prospective students.

The plans were well documented. New computers, projectors, wiring, and software were among many purchases Seminary A believed would enable it to make a leap in educational delivery. With the technology installed and a few training sessions completed, the school went about its business and waited for the results.

With excitement, Seminary A's administrators a year later evaluated the funding decision and technology implementation. But much to administrators' surprise, few faculty members were actually using the technology. Most faculty members liked the faster computers for word processing, and a few were using PowerPoint for class presentations. But that was the extent of the technology use. It became painfully obvious during the evaluation that thousands of dollars in technology purchases had become nothing more than a recruiting tool for showing prospective students that Seminary A was on the cutting edge.

Seminary A seems to be the norm for the implementation of educational technology in theological education. While there are undoubtedly exceptions to this scenario, many seminaries may never reach the intended educational outcomes because of structural and systemic barriers. Without consideration of structural dynamics, many seminaries spend precious resources for updated computers, software, or delivery systems with little forethought as to how the educational goals—the enhancement of education and the effective learning of all seminarians—will be achieved or thwarted because of organizational barriers.

Systematic barriers are often deeply ingrained within organizations that unknowingly undermine the effective implementation of technology for teaching

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and learning. Peter Senge of MIT and founder of the Society for Organizational Learning helped us see this through what is termed learning organizations and systems thinking. In Senge's classic work, *The Fifth Discipline*, he notes that systems thinking is not the norm for most organizations when they undertake problem solving. As Senge writes,

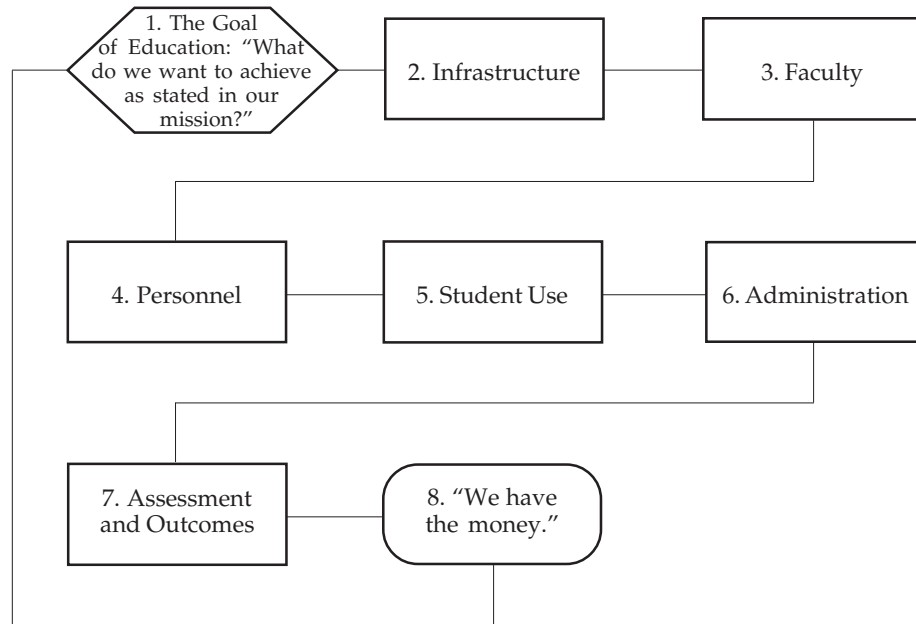
Business and other human endeavors are systems. They are bound by invisible fabrics of interrelated actions, which often take years to fully play out their effects on each other. Since we are part of that lacework ourselves, it's doubly hard to see the whole pattern of change. Instead, we tend to focus on snapshots of isolated parts of the system, and wonder why our deepest problems never seem to get solved. Systems thinking is a conceptual framework . . . to make the full patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively.<sup>1</sup>

Seminary A believed its educational outcomes would be achieved if only more money and the right technology were placed within the building and in the faculty members' hands. This seminary recognized only the snapshot of an insolated segment in educational delivery and effectiveness. It failed to understand that organizations are dynamic entities, where interrelated systems act, react, and interact with each other. It is the interrelatedness of these systems that can bring great success or dismal failure regarding the integration of technology.

### **Applying categories of systems thinking**

As authors of this article, we do not claim to have all the answers for creating a path to successful technology use and enhanced learning; neither do we claim to know all the questions to ask. But together through our individual expertise, we do believe we can provide some categories of systems thinking that will make the integration of technology and educational effectiveness more likely. We believe the questions put forward in this article are imperative for creating structural changes that increase the likelihood that technology will be thoughtfully integrated and educational outcomes strengthened.

The following flowchart visually captures our questions concerning thoughtful technology integration from a systemic perspective. While many of these processes may be undertaken simultaneously, we believe that answering these questions collectively provides the greatest success for identifying inherent systemic barriers and replacing or modifying them in a way that assists in reaching educational goals.<sup>2</sup> A sequential discussion of each element of the flowchart follows it.



### 1. The goal of education

The starting point must revolve around the question, “What do we want to achieve through technology as stated in our mission?” Beginning with the end in mind allows us to determine more accurately the complexities inherent in implementing technology by brainstorming backward. If we are to increase educational effectiveness and delivery, what must we consider first? This simple question provides a freedom for brainstorming the categories we have suggested in the flowchart that are unique to each seminary.

All technology decisions must be made with both the seminary mission and vision in mind. The mission (our purpose for being) and our vision (how we intend to contribute to the world) must determine the reason why we are seeking technological improvements related to teaching.<sup>3</sup> We often focus on the short-term gains without considering the long-term impact of our decisions. Being both mission and vision focused invites us to continually think about the opportunities and barriers inherent in our seminaries. As Senge writes,

Clarity about mission and vision is both an operational and a spiritual necessity. Mission provides a guiding star, long-term purpose that allows you to balance the inevitable pressures between the short term and long term. Vision translates mission into truly meaningful results—and guides the allocation of time, energy, and resources.<sup>4</sup>

## *Mapping Structural Change*

The mission of Anderson University School of Theology is *to educate at the graduate professional level both men and women for Christian ministry*. We believe we are *a place where scholarship, spirituality, and service are offered to the glory of God*. Our scholarship, through the enhancement of technology, must be offered as worship to God. It means that we must approach technology decisions by asking, “What barriers might exist in our institution that keep us from glorifying God in our teaching?” Is there a technology tool on the market that will, through its usage, enhance a person’s ministry and through that ministry lead someone into a deeper relationship with Christ? An example might be the purchase of sophisticated monitoring technology for preaching courses. Through the use of this technology, we may help pastors who are struggling with publicly sharing the Gospel. In time, these pastors may become more skilled in their presentation of Scripture with a result of bringing others to Christ.

A kindred question must also be asked, “Why do we feel this technology will increase the effectiveness of our educational delivery?” A carpentry maxim is useful at this point. “Using a power saw cuts an inaccurately measured board more quickly.” From that perspective, we must remember that effective teaching and technology, while interrelated, are separate issues. An effective teacher may use and get better with technology, but good technology will not make an ineffective teacher more effective; in fact, technology might make the ineffective teacher even more ineffective.

### **2. Infrastructure**

Infrastructure questions consider the physical realities of technology. These questions help us to acknowledge the limitations or barriers inherent in our physical facilities or delivery systems. For example, if we have CATV or twisted-pair cabling, what is the limitation of these media as it relates to the ability of delivering streaming video or audio? If the age of the seminary’s wiring structure limits some delivery systems, should it be replaced with fiber optic or other cable? Some questions pertinent to considering the infrastructure include:

- ◆ Should wireless technology serve as our medium replacing cable? What are the praises and pitfalls of wireless technology?
- ◆ Are the baud and bandwidths of our current infrastructures capable of handling higher computer speeds, streamed video, or other software?
- ◆ What is the capacity of the current institutional server? How will we replace it in three years when it becomes obsolete as technology advances? Should we over purchase initially to ensure some room for growth or buy only what we have funds to secure? Should a seminary delay purchase or seek additional funding for servers in order to have adequate space for future storage or network needs?
- ◆ How should the network be developed for optimal educational success? Should faculty members receive portable laptops as their media package or should an infrastructure be designed using a central host accessible from any workstation?

It is also important to ask whether the end users—our current and potential students—have the hardware capacities to function adequately in the learning environment. A case in point came through an experience that one author had at a rural development commission meeting. Some educational purveyors hoped to provide Internet training in rural areas and began setting up the planning process to implement such a project. The goal was worthy and the purveyors' passion was commendable. However, several months into the process they learned that the end users in these rural areas could not access the Internet in their homes because local telephone services were not adequate for sustained connection. Streamed video or audio was physically impossible. The only way residents in rural areas could access this learning project was to go to their local library. The project was stymied as the purveyors had to regroup for handling this new information about a barrier they did not consider.

This same question must then be asked concerning our seminary students, particularly those working with us over distance. Do they reside in geographic areas that provide the necessary infrastructures for Internet access, or are they physically limited by their local telephone providers? We can decide to ignore these issues and plunge ahead, but have we then created educational haves and have-nots? Is this theologically acceptable for us to enter into a technology arena that we willfully acknowledge segregates people? And if we willfully disregard the demographics concerning technology availability, our decisions may adversely impact certain socioeconomic, ethnic, or educational groups. Is this theologically acceptable in our pursuit of education and educating people for Christian ministry?

### **3. Faculty**

Technology use by faculty is an essential part of our systems considerations. Early indications from The Association of Theological Schools project on educational technology is that technology funding is being used in three primary circles: faculty development (training, teaching releases for developing resources, conference attendance, etc.), hardware (equipment, software, upgrades, and smart classrooms), and general infrastructure.<sup>5</sup>

While faculty seem to be gravitating toward training and course development, we believe the following considerations may assist the faculty member in more fully embracing technology integration. Some questions are:

- ◆ Is the current faculty open to technology and a different style of pedagogy from what they have used during their careers? For example, a faculty member might consider the educational use of email for disseminating classroom materials prior to the session so that the classroom may be used for dialogue and collegial exchange. Also, a faculty member might consider teaching students how to conduct research using the seminary's technology. Faculty might experiment with recording lectures prior to classroom instruction so that students may use the classroom for engaging the subject, not for merely receiving information.

## *Mapping Structural Change*

- ◆ How do faculty members view themselves professionally, as a “sage on the stage” or as a “guide on the side”(facilitator of educational process and dialogue)?
- ◆ Do faculty members even consider technology necessary? Are they open to learning new technology?
- ◆ Are faculty members teachable?
- ◆ If faculty members are not teachable or willing to engage technology, how are they held accountable administratively, particularly if tenured?
- ◆ If a seminary implements wireless technology, will it be permitted in the classroom as a part of student dialogue? We might consider that wireless technology changes classroom interaction because students can be connected with other classmates while the faculty member is at the head of the room. Students, through wireless technology, cannot only converse, but they may also check facts or statements on the spot made by the faculty member. Does the faculty member have the self-confidence to deal with this learning opportunity? The faculty member probably needs to face this issue even if the seminary does not implement wireless technology, because students can already text message one another through their individual wireless Internet service providers.

Senge believes that questions that impact our personal lives are the hardest for us to answer. He writes, “It is especially hard to get people to think about radical changes at the personal level. In some sense, it’s often the most difficult thing of all, because it is very hard for people to conceive of themselves as being different.”<sup>6</sup> Technology integration into teaching may upset a decade of lectures or precisely orchestrated formats for daily class interaction. Integrating technology into already established teaching formats may create anxiety or a challenge some faculty believe will be overwhelming.

Yet other faculty, through personal self-assessment of their teaching and the desire for using technology, may become invigorated or renewed by technology’s impact on their pedagogy. Sharon Pearson, associate professor of New Testament at our institution, may serve as an example of self-assessment in light of technology as a teaching tool and the desire for being an effective faculty member.<sup>7</sup>

When considering the use of technology for her online master’s students, Pearson realized that this integration actually “allowed me to be who I really am, a person who is visually oriented, not necessarily word oriented.” Pearson understood that she was not alone as a visual learner. Utilizing video delivery technology permitted her to become more effective in her teaching interactions with online students, because many of them are also visual-spatial learners. What Pearson discovered, however, was that she could also transfer this visual component into residential classes. The benefit was that visual technology provided more time for faculty-student dialogue. It also set the climate for her to

become less a sage on the stage and move more toward her natural teaching style as a guide on the side.

Pearson also believes the personal integration of technology has challenged her to work at a higher level. Being deeply committed to rigorous, ongoing research, she found that her research required recreating or developing new presentations that would more effectively deliver this information in the classroom. Integrating technology for effective teaching, in many ways, also forced her to redesign class presentations that were developed during the past twenty years.

Faculty, a central component for effective technology implementation, must be challenged to think about their personal attitudes and willingness to change instructional style. If technology is to be integrated within the system for effective teaching, then faculty and administrators must have ongoing conversations concerning its intentional use in the classroom.

#### **4. Personnel**

One of the most underestimated areas is the personnel system. Most personnel and evaluative or performance systems were created in past decades that did not encounter technology as a part of the teaching-learning process. Personnel and performance standards created in the past, which have now been institutionalized, may create significant barriers to the use of classroom technology. Some considerations regarding personnel matters include:

- ◆ Will faculty be held accountable for using the technology secured with funding? For example, at Anderson School of Theology, new faculty members will be required to teach online courses, but there is no formal performance evaluation of the faculty member, whether new or tenured, regarding technology use.
- ◆ Do student evaluations critique faculty on their teaching related to technology use? For example, at Anderson School of Theology, our students evaluate based only on the use of a “variety of teaching methods,” not on how effectively the professor used technology.
- ◆ If technology use is important to the educational and seminary mission, will a faculty member who refuses to use it be considered in “sustained and open contempt” of the institutional structure, mission, or vision?
- ◆ Will faculty members be given release time for restructuring their courses so that technology plays an integral role in the educational process? What are the financial ramifications of release time for these faculty members? What impact will this release time have on other operational necessities, such as faculty meetings and committee assignments?



### **5. Student use**

Preparing students for effective Christian ministry should be at the heart of seminary training. We must consider a number of issues or potential barriers to student use of technology such as:

- ◆ Does the age range of our students create gaps between those who are technologically savvy and those unable to use technology adequately?
- ◆ Will we intentionally create environments where students are taught and held accountable for technology in the learning process?
- ◆ Will we commit to structuring class blocks in our seminaries for adding learning modules focused on technology training? Will the use of technology by students be considered just as important a research tool as bound volumes in the library?
- ◆ Might we help broaden the impact of teaching in the local congregation by holding students accountable for learning how to use technology effectively in their ministry? For example, the dynamic of worship in the postmodern world is changing. Because of this, will seminaries teach students to use technology effectively in their ministry? We have seen some very ineffective uses of technology in congregations. Some pastors use it more to entertain their people or to showcase their technical expertise than to educate or pastor the people. Some pastors use technology in worship merely to project words on a screen. Where does the educational or worship value reside in this use?

### **6. Administration**

Administrations are accountable for the mission, vision, and long-term viability of our seminaries. As Peter Drucker observes, "The task of the nonprofit manager is to try to convert the organization's mission statement into specifics."<sup>8</sup> Seminary administrators are responsible, over the long term, for an institution's "momentum, flexibility, vitality, and vision."<sup>9</sup> If this is the reality of administrative structures, then they must also consider the hard choices and questions facing them. Some considerations, as they relate to technology integration, may be:

- ◆ Do administrators believe technology is essential for educational delivery and teaching effectiveness in the postmodern world, or is technology viewed mainly as a recruiting tool for staying competitive?<sup>10</sup>
- ◆ Is there administrative support from the seminary president or dean for holding faculty accountable regarding technology use and integration? Or will technology use be left to the discretion of the faculty member—academic privilege?<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ Will tenure considerations include the faculty member's effective use of technology or electronic publishing as opposed to traditional publishing venues?
- ◆ Is the seminary willing to commit ongoing financial resources for an educational technologist or whatever training is necessary to have all faculty competent in technology and related pedagogy issues?



- ◆ Is the administration willing to provide the necessary release time for faculty to update classroom materials or orient their current teaching activities toward technology?
- ◆ Is the administration willing to implement assessment and fund it adequately for understanding the use of technology and learning outcomes? Administrators must be willing to consider the monetary resources necessary for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data that show educational technology does in fact enhance learning. In the case of Anderson School of Theology, this funding is necessary for really answering the mission's question, "Is our seminary truly educating women and men on a professional level for Christian ministry?"
- ◆ Is the administration committed to both human and financial resources for also training support staff in the use of technology?
- ◆ Is the administration actively and creatively following the intent of the ATS guideline for learning, teaching, and research? Section 3.1.2.2 of the ATS Commission on Accrediting Standard 3 (Learning, Teaching, and Research: Theological Scholarship) states that "Instructional methods should use the diversity of life experiences represented by the students, by faith communities, and by the larger cultural context. *Instructional methods and the use of technology should be sensitive to the diversity of student populations, different learning styles of students, the importance of communities of learning, and the instructional goals* [italics added]." Does the administration hold faculty accountable for meeting the intent of this guideline?

### 7. *Assessment and outcomes*

Assessment is the evaluative process for determining the actual technology needs. Educational assessment and learning outcomes, as related to the seminary's mission, must drive technology additions or modifications. This assessment must, however, be a joint evaluation among faculty, students, administrators, and support staff. A collaborative enterprise among these essential parties is necessary for purchasing what will affect teaching, learning, and future ministry. Considerations related to assessment may include:

- ◆ Is the administration committed to assessment of learning outcomes and the purchase of technology that fits educational objectives and the institution's mission, or are current and future technology purchases reflective of chasing current industry upgrades?
- ◆ Is the seminary willing to complete intensive quantifiable assessment in order to determine the effective use of technology?
- ◆ Is there annual review of technology?
- ◆ Does a strategic initiative exist based on pedagogy and teaching effectiveness as compared to upgrading technology based on industry innovations?

**8. “We have the money.”**

We have chosen to end our perspective of systems issues with “We have the money.” We often feel that having the funding or pursuing resources is seen as the starting point for technology procurement or implementation and thus enhanced educational delivery. But in essence, it is the wrong starting point. Obtaining resources for technology is actually the final step in achieving educational goals and improving teaching. It is a fault from the beginning to believe funding for technology will be the panacea in solving our educational concerns and enhancing educational delivery. As Senge notes,

The really big issues facing mankind concern our inability to understand and manage our complex human systems. In fact, you might even add that blind technological progress exacerbates these problems, because it contributes more complexity when we cannot understand the complexity that already exists. We are out of control, driving down a dark road with little or no light, and most technological progress amounts to speeding up.<sup>12</sup>

Receiving funding for technology is the end result of asking good systems questions and making sure we have examined the broader organizational barriers that may mean dismal or mediocre results at best for all our labor.

**Seminary B scenario**

It had been some time since Seminary B upgraded its technology. Administrators knew if the seminary was to stay competitive in the marketplace of theological education, it would have to secure funding for replacing woefully inadequate technology currently available to students and faculty. But the question was where to begin.

The process began with a series of meetings involving all of Seminary B’s faculty, administration, some student representatives, and support staff. It was an energizing time as the seminary’s community affirmed again its educational mission, reasons for teaching, and why it remained connected to higher education. The meetings were not always conflict free, nor were they brief. But, nevertheless, the dialogue created an atmosphere focused on the seminary’s mission and commitment to teaching excellence.

During the initial meetings, many complained of slow computers and software programs that were one release behind. But it wasn’t long before their conversations began focusing on the items that would truly lead them to teaching excellence and student preparation. They jointly agreed that a new preaching lab and wireless technology within the seminary would greatly enhance the classroom and teaching dynamic. Yes, the computers were a bit slow, but they could be tolerated for the sake of graduating seminarians who would more effectively handle Scripture and preach the Gospel.

This was all wonderful, yet how would faculty find the release time necessary for upgrading their coursework accordingly? The administration had the answer. They would seek funding for the addition of a one-year visiting faculty appointment, freeing preaching faculty to restructure or create new courses around the needed technology.

The \$250,000 wasn't easy to come by, but the results were outstanding. In an assessment of churches in the following year, Seminary B found the effectiveness of preaching had increased. Parishioners also noted a maturity and accuracy in the knowledge base of the seminary's graduates. As a residual outcome, Seminary B also found that collegial work within its own halls improved and that all faculty were using some level of technology in the classroom. The seminary system was noticeably different to faculty, administrators, support staff, and students.

It may feel as though the Seminary B scenario is outlandish or overdramatic—pie in the sky. Yet some of the most influential practitioners of systems thinking have experienced such dramatic results in both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. The ultimate challenge, however, is whether our theological institutions have the courage to think differently about technology, its integration, our system barriers, and the human factors that will keep us from effectively using the resources we have available. Those seminaries that find success in technology integration will closely heed Senge's words,

Only a few (organizations) will have the courage of their conviction and patience to move ahead. Those that succeed will, I believe, have unique advantages in the twenty-first century, because they will harness the imagination, spirit and intelligence of people in ways that no traditional authoritarian organization ever can. . . . The learning organization (that is those who are systems focused) will be fundamentally characterized by dramatic enhancements in productivity and by people who feel like the work environment they are operating in is closer to what they truly value. And I think we are getting enough evidence that both are possible: that these statements are not hyperbole.<sup>13</sup>

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## Mapping Structural Change

### ENDNOTES

1. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1990), 7.
2. We are supported in our thought process when referring to an article appearing in the *T.H.E. Journal* (Technology Horizons in Education). In findings from the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) regarding technology integration, they have determined five conditions are necessary for effective technology use in our public schools: (1) Effective Practice—learning environments in schools are characterized by power research-based strategies that effectively use technologies, (2) Educator Proficiency—educators are proficient in implementing, assessing, and supporting a variety of effective practices for teaching and learning, (3) Robust Access Anywhere, Anytime—students and school staff should have robust access to technology at anytime and anywhere in order to support effective designs for teaching and learning, (4) Digital Equity—the digital divide in schools is being addressed through resources and strategies that ensure all students are engaging in an educational program aligned to the vision, and (5) Vision, Systems, and Leadership—school systems (effective in technology use) have re-engineered themselves into high-performance learning organizations aligned to a forward thinking vision. Cheryl Lemke, “Measuring Progress with Technology in Schools: SETDA’s PETI Framework and Suite of Tools Address State Assessment Needs,” *T.H.E. Journal* (April 2005): 18.
3. Peter M. Senge, “The Practice of Innovation,” *Leader to Leader*, eds. Frances Hesselbein and Paul M. Cohen (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 59. Michael Townsley writes that technology must serve the ultimate user: the institution and its mission and vision. As Townsley notes, “Spreading technology around campus will not automatically yield operational efficiency or strategic value. Upon its installation, a computer will not serve any purpose beyond that of its immediate user. Without a strategy guiding their purchase, implementation, and use, computers can become toys, or vehicles for empire building or day trading, or they may simply collect dust for lack of defined uses and savvy users.” Michael K. Townsley, “Strategy, Mission & Vision,” *Campus Technology* (May 2005): 44.
4. Senge, *Leader to Leader*, 62.
5. Vic Klimoski, project management team member, email response to author, April 15, 2005. Klimoski also noted that ATS is currently working through the Lilly Endowment reports to determine funding use. “Generally, while funds were spent on technological upgrades, there was quite good attention to funding opportunities for faculty to become more skillful.”
6. Peter M. Senge, “Through the Eye of the Needle,” *Rethinking the Future*, ed. Rowan Gibson (London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 1997), 135.
7. Sharon Pearson, personal interview by the author, Anderson, IN, April 28, 2005.
8. Peter F. Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization: Principles and Practices* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 5.
9. *Ibid.*, 10. Because administrators are responsible for the momentum, flexibility, vitality, and vision of an institution, they must help the organization make a paradigm shift in its learning environment. Townsley notes that “efficient/effective use of technology requires changes to structure, processes, policies, and delivery of services.” The changes give administrators the opportunity for turning “traditionally structured institutions into interactive learning webs wherein each student to student, student to faculty, faculty to administration line yields greater knowledge within and outside the classroom. Outside the one-way teacher to student information flow, the institution

swells with expertise gained when members of the college community inform one another." Townsley, *Campus Technology*, 46.

10. Knauft, Berger, and Gray found in their research of nonprofits that leaders who embody the organization's mission are the most effective. These authors note that the best leaders "clearly articulate the mission and transmit it to others with a sense of excitement. . . . They can make the mission come alive in the minds and hearts of others. And they can link an organization's mission to its past and bridge ahead from today's task to the future." E. B. Knauft, Renee A. Berger, and Sandra T. Gray, *Profiles of Excellence: Achieving Success in the Nonprofit Sector* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991), 8–9.

11. Knauft, Berger, and Gray found in their study of successful nonprofits that an overlooked leadership characteristic was the "leader's ability to create the culture of the organization." The authors additionally write that "a leader must have the vision to create a culture and the ability to articulate and enforce this vision." Knauft, Berger, and Gray found in their research that the "culture largely determines how the staff performs and, ultimately, how much an organization achieves." Leaders, thus, must pay attention to the developing culture and guide technology integration by asking systems questions. Without this focused leadership, seminaries may encounter lackluster technology integration and educational results. *Ibid.*, 14–15.

12. Senge, *Rethinking the Future*, 125.

13. *Ibid.*, 136 and 144.



# What Difference Does it Make? Digital Technology in the Theological Classroom

*Mary Hess*  
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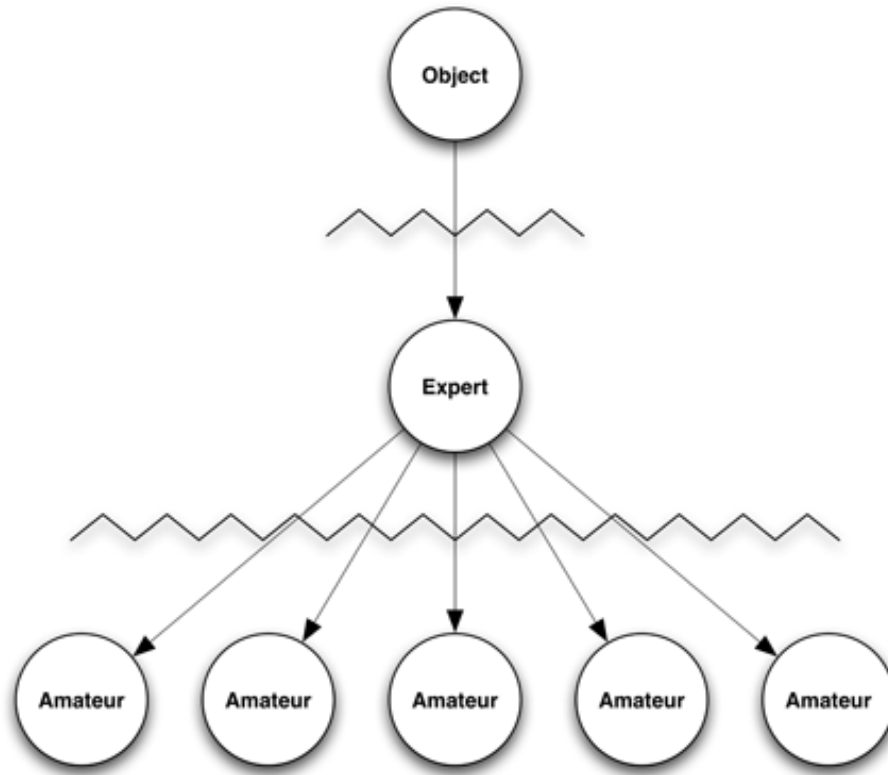
*ABSTRACT: Digital technologies can make a difference in helping theological educators to align their Christian convictions and pedagogical strategies more effectively by (1) providing a richer, more multiply intelligent environment within which to learn; (2) providing more opportunities for collaboration; (3) giving teachers a better angle of vision on the challenges their students are facing and the specific assumptions with which they enter courses; (4) providing better access to primary source materials; (5) overcoming constraints of geography and time; and (6) attending to the meaning-making contexts of our students and our communities of faith.*

What real difference does it make to use digital technologies within graduate theological education? There are no doubt many directions in which I could take such a question, given the literature in the wider field of education,<sup>1</sup> but the most pressing angle from the perspective of my own experience and convictions is the angle that leads to a deeper question, namely, what difference does your underlying theory of learning make in graduate theological education? In asking that question I can then consider the implications of digital technologies as one element of the larger learning environment through the lens of that theory.

## Models for learning and teaching

Consider for a moment Parker Palmer's two models for teaching and learning, as found in his book *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*.<sup>2</sup> His first model depicts a process in which the responsibility for learning is clear—the expert shares information that the amateurs take in. This is a model for teaching and learning that privileges a “transfer of information” paradigm, or perhaps what Paulo Freire once termed “banking education.” The benefits to such a model are obvious: teacher and student roles are clearly delineated, the nature of authority is directly linked to the expert's connection to the topic, it is relatively easy to measure the effectiveness of the teacher (did the information indeed get transferred?), the one-way nature of the process avoids the potential dilemma of situational or contextual factors contradicting the teacher, and so on.

*What Difference Does it Make?*  
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*Figure 1. The objectivist myth of knowing.*  
(Figures 1 and 2 reprinted by permission of Jossey-Bass/John Wiley & Sons publishers.)

This model of teaching and learning shares some striking similarities with assumptions that many religious institutions hold about the ways in which mass media function. Adán Medrano points to four such assumptions:

The first such assumption is that media and church are distinct, bounded, separate realities. Although they are related to each other, they nevertheless exist as two separate worlds. . . . The second operative assumption is that media are instruments of transmission and they are necessary to the church so that we can deliver a message. . . . The third operating assumption is that the voice of the church commands attention because of its traditionally strong moral authority both in the family and in society. . . . Lastly, church leaders assume that the meaning of media messages is determined by the producer, and the practice of media use and consumption is predictable. That is, one can more or less determine the effects of media and their messages upon people.<sup>3</sup>



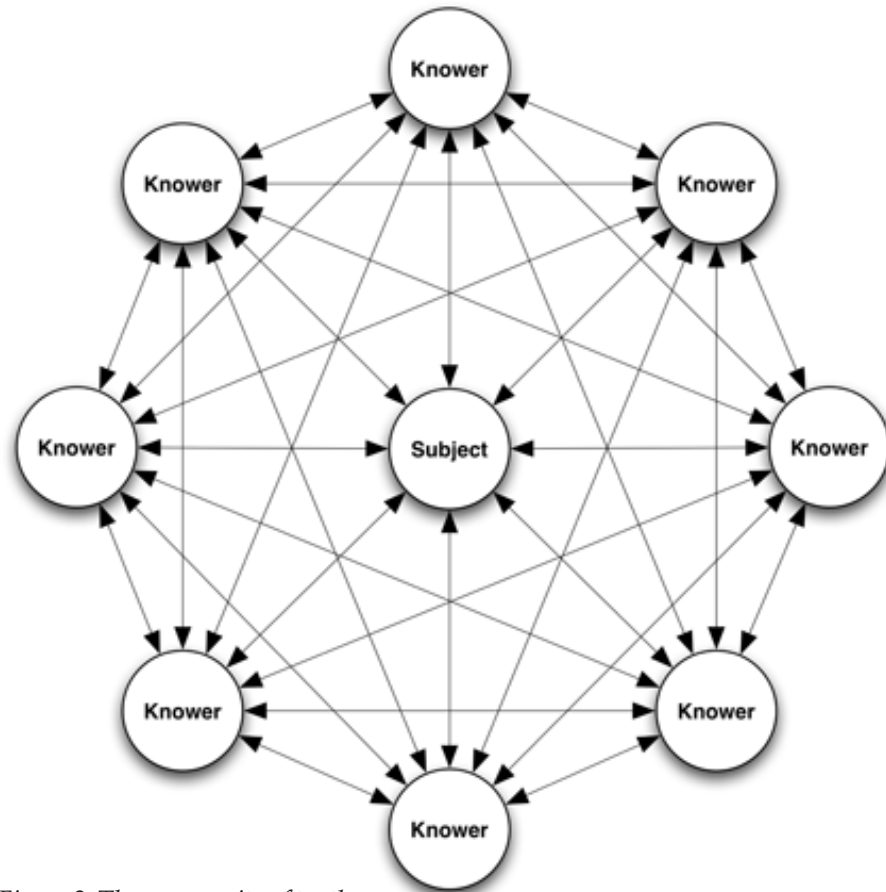


Figure 2. The community of truth.

Given the easy match between this prevalent understanding of mass media and Palmer’s first model of teaching and learning, it is perhaps not a surprise that many people advocate for the use of digital technologies in the classroom by pointing to the many ways in which they can enhance the transmission of information—making it faster, moving it further geographically, and so on. Indeed, this use of digital technology in teaching has in some ways completely overwhelmed many other conceptualizations through the equation of *digital technology + teaching = distance learning*. These are perhaps useful ways of thinking about the differences that technology might produce in a classroom, but they obscure the underlying problem: an understanding of the teaching/learning process that is fundamentally not a good match with Christian belief and practice.

If we consider the heartbeats of Christian thought, particularly the Trinitarian commitment that leads to an understanding of the fundamental relationality of God, then an instrumental paradigm for teaching is not appropriate. Parker Palmer’s second model, on the other hand, depicted in a figure he has labeled “the community of truth,” provides a rich and complex mapping of teaching and learning in theological contexts.

*What Difference Does it Make?*  
*Digital Technology in the Theological Classroom*

The Trinitarian nature of Christian belief is irrefutable, but the systematic theological exploration of that framework has been particularly robust and interesting in the last three decades.<sup>4</sup> At the heart of much of that exploration has been a renewed and energetic defense of the essential relationality of Christian belief and of Christian community. A map for teaching and learning that depicts learning as a process of transmission of information from an expert to an amateur, with a hard notion of authority that reveals itself in unidirectional transfer, does not align with these convictions of relationality. A mapping that demonstrates the multidirectional nature of communication and sharing, however, provides a rich medium for such learning to take place. It is critical to understand that Palmer's notion here is not of relativism but rather of relationality. As Palmer writes,

...by Christian understanding we must go one step further—and it is a critical step. Not only do I invest my own personhood in truth and the quest for truth, but truth invests itself personally in me and the quest for me. “Truth in person” means not only that the knower's person becomes part of the equation, but that the personhood of the known enters the relation as well.<sup>5</sup>

You can see this understanding at work in the ways in which Jesus taught. Over and over again he drew on notions of relationship to carry meaning—siblings, parents, communities, and so on. He is most often depicted as teaching in the midst of communities, not in didactic, transmissive patterns of practice.

Trinitarian formulations lead us to many other themes that do not map easily onto the transfer of information or unilinear transmission model, while they *do* map more directly onto the community of truth paradigm. God created the world, and in doing so created it *whole*, and thus organically in connection, one to another. Palmer's model of the community of truth is a model that makes those connections visible, that points to the reliance upon such connectivity to make learning possible. As Malcolm Warford writes, “teaching is often viewed as a solitary venture of self and subject, but on another level we know that both teaching and learning are a matter of relationships significantly shaped by the community in which they occur.”<sup>6</sup>

God gave God's only Son that “all might have life and life eternal”—a self-giving that is the very definition of *kenosis*—of “pouring oneself out”—a form of teaching that points *not* to the expertise of the teacher but rather to the truth of the “great thing” around which we gather (to use another of Palmer's terms).<sup>7</sup> While in Palmer's first model it is very easy to point to the role of the teacher—the expert—and to make specific claims about the authority of such a teacher, it is also easy to miss the way in which the learners have no direct connection to the thing about which they desire to learn. They have no relationship with the subject except as mediated through the teacher. While it is clearly appropriate to understand that Jesus *is* our mediator, that conviction *does not* make the theological educator the only mediator “through which” one encounters truth.

Indeed, the kenotic nature of the salvific event of Christ's entry into our lives is what must be kept at the heart of our learning. Palmer's second model provides a map for doing so if one puts that saving event at the heart of the map, as the "great thing" around which we gather as we seek to know and to learn. There is no obvious role for a teacher in this map, but that does not mean that teachers are not present. It simply points to the reality in Palmer's vision that *all* are teachers in some way, just as *all* are learners—we *all* "know as we are known." Indeed, the fundamental task of a teacher in this model is to get out of the way sufficiently to allow learners to engage the central topic; to create an environment in which direct relationship and direct engagement with the subject is possible. It is fundamentally a kenotic posture for a teacher, not an expert one.

It should go without saying, but nevertheless needs to be noted, that *kenosis* flows from a fundamental self-giving, and that one must first "have a self" to "give a self." In other words, this description is not a recipe for teachers simply to tell students whatever they want to hear or for people with varying amounts of ignorance to share that ignorance with each other; rather, it is for teachers to create learning environments in which differing knowledges can be tested, brought into relationship, and affirmed or discarded. In this model, teachers must be so deeply attentive to the subject they are teaching that they are able to be at once clearly loyal to a specific interpretation and yet demonstrably open to new insights. As Victor Klimoski points out, "being attentive is important in all aspects of a person's growth and development. First and foremost, it means being attentive to the movement of God in one's life, through the Word, and in the tradition one bears. When we are advised to listen for God's voice, it means we need to be still. We need *the ability to let go of our conclusions* long enough to grasp the sort of questions that should dog our steps."<sup>8</sup>

What of the third element of the Trinity? Images of the Holy Spirit *breathing* through our communities, images of tongues of fire crossing boundaries of language—these are not easily mapped onto linear, transmissive, unidirectional maps of learning. The communities of which I am a part (I am a Roman Catholic layperson, and I teach in a Lutheran seminary) take very seriously the role of the Holy Spirit in engendering change and the role of the community of faith in engaging that change relationally. The Holy Spirit may come upon an individual, but the sending into the world of that individual is never for the individual's gain or glory but always for the community, as part of the community, in the community.

From this brief reflection I believe that it is fair and appropriate to conclude that Palmer's second model is more adequately descriptive of teaching and learning within theological education than is his first, no matter how often the first model may be utilized in higher education contexts. That conclusion then allows me to use this second map to examine more closely the question of what difference digital technologies make in the theological classroom.

### **Questioning learning, questioning technology**

My first observation is that any underlying paradigms for teaching that exist in a specific seminary setting likely do not rest on digital technologies for their efficacy, at least not yet. Both of Palmer's teaching/learning models can be mapped in contexts that have nothing to do with technology. Yet in a seminary context in which the first paradigm of information transfer is operative, adding technology to the mix often has the consequence of making more obvious the problems and contradictions of using that paradigm in the first place.

When the first model of information transfer is used in a face-to-face classroom (not in a distributed format), it is often still possible to overcome some of its drawbacks, to create a bit of the second, more relational model in the ways in which a particular teacher is observant of body language, in the manner in which nonverbal language cues are shared, in the patterns of familiarity and rhythms used as one enters and leaves a classroom. There are also often present in the larger context of the institution curricular elements—worship, informal meals, library gathering places, and so on—that can mitigate the worst aspects of the information transfer model.

Within online teaching contexts, however, when an information transfer model is used, there is no particular reason either to attend to, or even to create, such additional aspects of the curriculum. If an expert is transmitting his or her understanding of a topic to amateur students (wherever they might be geographically located as they sit in front of their computer screens) in a clear way, the information transfer paradigm does not offer any particular intimation of inadequacy. Indeed, in some ways there is no particular reason for the teacher not to simply “set up” their lectures and then disappear altogether. If the learning is only going in one direction, if the transfer of information happens via technology, why should a teacher stick around? Yet by not doing so, that is, by not mitigating the worst aspects of the model through the context of the seminary campus's other curricular elements, the drawbacks of that paradigm for teaching and learning become dreadfully apparent.

That recognition alone is a good outcome. One level on which digital technology can make a difference in theological classrooms is if it allows us to see the contradictions between our expressed convictions, and the ways in which we are putting them into practice. This is one reason why so many faculty members have been concerned about digital technologies: they have intuitive or unarticulated concerns about the contradictions between their Christian convictions and the modes of teaching practiced in their institutions—contradictions such technologies amplify and make visible.

But what about a seminary context in which the relational model is already in place? As I noted earlier in quoting Medrano, there are understandings of mass media that describe such technologies in instrumental ways that map very well onto the information transfer model of teaching and learning. Clearly the instrumental understanding of digital technologies does not work very well with this

more relational understanding of teaching and learning. Yet just as there are other models for conceiving of how teaching and learning works, there are multiple models for understanding media. I quoted Medrano earlier. Let me return to him now to outline the four assumptions he believes are more descriptive of how mass media function in our religious contexts than the earlier four he noted:

... these two worlds [the world of the media and the world of the church] are conflated and share the same space. By this I mean that we are encountering religious experience in everyday media culture, and it is in media culture that our religious myths and symbols are alive. . . . Media technology has become naturalized in our daily environment, and is in fact the material with which we form and inform our habits, relationships, conversation and identities. . . . More and more the church must recognize that it is one voice among many. It seems to me that as we search more deeply and thoroughly to find our appropriate voice, as a church we are operating from strength. That strength is a prophetic voice, a witness of community, and a storehouse of symbolic, narrative and sacramental voices. . . . The meaning of media messages is constantly being created, negotiated, constructed between the producer of the text and the receiver of the text. The locus of meaning is the viewing experience.<sup>9</sup>

His is an argument that works from a cultural turn, that is, it describes media technologies as being fundamentally elements of the cultural contexts we inhabit, vast pools of meaning, or databases, upon which we draw as we make sense of ourselves—not to mention our relationships with each other, and ultimately, with God. For the rest of this essay, I'd like to work with this understanding of media, and thus probe the difference digital technologies might make within seminary education if understood in this way and if embedded in a model for learning that takes seriously Palmer's community of truth.

### **Relational learning, relational technology**

I've already suggested that one difference digital technology can make in the graduate theological context is that it provokes teachers to rethink their pedagogical models. Indeed, the literature is full of stories in which seminary professors who began to teach online found themselves rethinking the ways they were teaching in their more typical campus-based classrooms. Given the serious mismatch between the information transfer model of teaching and the convictions of Christian communities, this is quite a significant difference to produce. But are there other differences? I would point to six in particular.

1. providing a richer, more multiply intelligent environment within which to learn;

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2. providing more opportunities for real collaboration;
3. giving teachers a better angle of vision on the challenges their students are facing and the specific assumptions with which they enter courses;
4. providing better access to primary source materials;
5. overcoming constraints of geography and time; and,
6. attending to the meaning-making contexts of our students and our communities of faith.

As these are differences that are best seen in relation to specific examples, let me walk through each by pointing to a number of concrete examples.

#### ***Making possible a more multiply intelligent learning environment***

One of the first digital technologies that professors have begun to experiment with in seminary classrooms is presentation software (e.g., Keynote, PowerPoint, etc.). These software programs make it relatively easy to bring images and sound into a classroom, whether that classroom is located in a campus building (in which case digital projectors and speakers support the process) or online (in which case the easy conversion that these programs offer into formats that work on the Web support the process). Teachers do not need to be experts in the manipulation of digital images or audio sound files but simply need to use standard interface commands (*insert file, copy and paste*, and so on) to import such files into a presentation. In doing so they can provide support for learning that engages more senses at once and that expands and layers the interpretations they are constructing. Of course, even here the information transfer model can rear its ugly head, with presentation programs becoming merely snazzier forms of the traditional overhead presentation, with long lists of bullet points that simply reiterate a lecture's main points.<sup>10</sup> Still, to the extent that such software programs enhance a teacher's ability to connect students with the main topic around which they are gathered, such digital tools can have a significant impact that supports learning because they create an environment in which more than one form of learning is supported.<sup>11</sup>

#### ***Providing more opportunities for collaborative learning***

Digital technologies can make the web of connection depicted in Palmer's second figure much more visible and tangible. Students can use email to exchange papers in advance of gathering (either in a campus classroom or an online classroom) and in doing so refine and hone their thinking. The collaboration need not end at the boundaries of the classroom, however situated, because the Web makes it possible to share materials and collaboration across much larger contexts. Students can post reviews of books they are required to read at Amazon.com, they can keep weblogs on course topics (in the process inviting comments from outside readers), they can evaluate religious education materials found on the Web for use in specific congregations, they can create such materials

themselves and post them for sharing with others, and they can work with other people scattered across the globe on topics of shared concern.

These examples have been centered on ways in which students in typical seminary programs can utilize these technologies, but such examples point to much broader and more potentially transformative uses as well. What if communities of faith were more directly involved in the teaching and learning process so that “learners” was a category that included not only those enrolled in degree programs but also those worshipping in a local community who had decided to participate in the learning as well?

Christian commitments to relationality compel us to understand the Christian learning community in much broader terms than merely “graduate theological education,” and if seminaries exist to prepare leaders for communities of faith, then the possibilities for collaboration with these communities all throughout seminary education (not simply at the endpoint, when they must “consume” our graduates) are breathtaking. Indeed, the dawn of the World Wide Web was really the dawn of global networking. Digital technologies can open up our classrooms on this same scale. Imagine students in a seminary context writing Bible study plans that a specific congregation has asked be developed for them in their unique context. Imagine members of congregations across the globe working with students within a seminary to plan prayer vigils for a specific social issue that will then be held simultaneously across the globe. Imagine digital images from one community’s context bringing mission concerns alive in the prayers of another community. The possibilities for such collaboration are endless and point to the enormous opportunities available for helping students see the precise reasons why theological study is important.

### *Giving teachers a better angle of vision on their students’ thinking*

One of the difficult challenges of supporting learning is that teachers must meet students where they are in their constructions of meaning if we ever hope to walk with them beyond those constructions into new understandings. As the famous video *A Private Universe* documents, if students’ fundamental assumptions are not directly engaged—particularly their misconceptions—they can conclude a program of study with the same misconceptions they had when they began.<sup>12</sup> Many teachers have begun to recognize the extent to which they can “see their student’s mind in action” when they include online discussion groups as part of their teaching (whether they are teaching in typical classrooms or in distributed formats). As Nysse points out,

... a threaded discussion allows time for everyone to contribute; everyone can “hear” by reading what everyone else has stated. There is no speaking over each other, and nothing is lost if there is a lapse in attention. If small groups are formed, the teacher can “hear” the contribution of every student.<sup>13</sup>



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Digital technologies make it possible to create spaces in which most if not all students can find a way to participate—indeed, in which they can be required to participate—and that also shows their thinking *in process*. There are ways to do this without using digital technologies of course, but digital technologies can make the process much easier, and can contribute to helping such work to feel in some ways safer for students. Dividing students into small discussion groups is a venerable practice in theological classrooms, but no teacher can possibly overhear all of the groups. Doing the same division but hosting the groups online in an asynchronous manner provides a way for a teacher to overhear what is going on while at the same time easing the pressure to perform that often attends such groups when run in real time.

*Providing access to rich primary sources*

One of my colleagues, a professor of Hebrew Bible who also teaches our Hebrew classes from time to time, has been heard to wonder out loud if it still makes sense to require study of Hebrew. He is not in any way suggesting that it is no longer useful to know some Hebrew when doing biblical exegesis but rather pointing to new software programs that bring original Hebrew words with definitions, grammatical explanations, and other resources readily to hand. He questions whether it might make more sense to teach a class that helps students to use such programs wisely and well in the process of preparing for preaching and teaching. This is one concrete example of the rich primary resources to which digital tools have given us access.

Professors of history regularly utilize the many collections of primary documents now available on the Web in digital formats, and professors of hymnody can access music recorded in MP3 files. Professors teaching cross-cultural mission courses can direct students to diverse collections of materials placed on the Web by communities of faith in specific locations, and professors teaching comparative confessions (or other courses that engage ecumenical and interfaith concerns) can point students to Web sites full of materials written from within a specific communion, rather than simply giving them secondary textbooks to read.<sup>14</sup> Recently the American Theological Library Association and The Association of Theological Schools have collaborated on a digital image repository that makes the digital resources held by member libraries accessible—and more importantly, easily searchable—in one joint location.<sup>15</sup> As theological educators grow more comfortable with the use of such resources, we will also grow more capable of creating additional collections. The American Studies Association has for years collaborated with a number of academic departments and philanthropic foundations to sponsor an innovative project (the Visible Knowledge Project) that supports professors within that guild in creating and teaching with such resources.<sup>16</sup> The project has made a demonstrable difference in energizing and supporting creative teaching and scholarship. It should serve as both a vibrant example to us within theological education and perhaps a competitive prod as well.



*Overcoming constraints of geography and time*

Perhaps one of the most palpable differences digital technology can make within theological education is that of overcoming the constraints of geography and time that many of our students face. This is the context in which distributive learning has become so important, learning, in essence, that is “distributed” via online technologies allowing people to access seminary education in ways never before possible. Many ATS member schools now offer elements of their degree programs in online formats, most of them using asynchronous Web technologies. Some schools have gone so far as to place large portions of degree programs into distributive formats, making it possible for hundreds if not thousands of students in the United States to attend seminary who might not otherwise have been able to do so. If we take seriously the community of truth model, then this easing of the constraints of time and geography is enriching our learning enormously, bringing many more people into the fabric of our teaching and learning contexts. A community of truth model, however, also requires us to recognize that teaching in this way demands full support for *all* of the curricular elements that contribute to this model. More informal elements of learning—communal worship, library research materials, spontaneous gathering places, and so on—must all be made accessible to students studying in online formats.

*Attending to the meaning-making of our students and communities of faith*

This category of significant impact is perhaps the one that is least visible within more traditional, historically grounded institutions of theological education. Although there are frequent calls to reform theological education, even going so far as to suggest that we move beyond the “theological encyclopedia,” or the “current fourfold academic division (biblical studies, church history, theology and ethics, and practical theology),” few if any of these proposals actually take much notice of the digitally mediated environments we inhabit.<sup>17</sup> Consider the ways in which younger people living in the United States access news sources: “less than a fifth of 18–34 year olds rank newspapers as their primary source of news, while 44% check out internet portals such as Google and Yahoo for updated information.”<sup>18</sup> When combined with another interesting statistic—

... more than one-third of Americans under 30 now get their news primarily from late-night comedians, and that 79 percent of this age group (and half of the adult population generally) say they sometimes or regularly get political information from comedy programs such as Saturday Night Live or nontraditional outlets such as MTV. . . .<sup>19</sup>

—theological educators should begin to ponder how to give students access to meaningful ways in which to critique their constructions of reality through news consumption. But we must also ask ourselves if we are sufficiently aware of such

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contexts to pursue our work in faithful ways. Quite frankly the satirical edge to news events that is regularly promoted on shows such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* requires more awareness of current events than what most regular TV news broadcasts impart.

Yet how are we to add “becoming aware of mass mediated news” to the already overwhelming tasks we face? Simple digital tools—good RSS [Really Simple Syndication], for example, feeds from a limited assortment of the common sites our students attend to—exist that can help us to stay current with the meaning-making contexts we are embedded within.<sup>20</sup> Using such tools would be one good response to our predicament. But this example also illustrates a key advantage of the relational mapping of learning over the information transfer model—in a world of exponentially increasing numbers of information sources, there is no realistic way to attain expertise or mastery. Instead we must be increasingly attentive to the multiple webs of knowing that we are embedded in and increasingly alert to ways to make our learning and teaching more collaborative and participatory.

Indeed, a recent review of “Elements of Effective e-Learning Design” in the prestigious *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* points to the utility of the relational model: five of the six elements they identify cannot be described apart from such a model. The six elements are (1) paying attention to the provision of a rich learning activity; (2) situating this activity within an interesting story line; (3) providing meaningful opportunities for student reflection and third-party criticism; (4) considering appropriate technologies for delivery; (5) ensuring that the design is suitable for the context in which it will be used; and (6) bearing in mind the personal, social, and environmental impact of the designed activities.<sup>21</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In the beginning of this essay I pointed to one big difference that digital technologies make in our classrooms—they alert us to the contradictions that can exist between our Christian convictions and our typical pedagogies. Let me conclude by noting the reciprocal impact: digital technologies can make a huge difference in helping us, as theological educators, to align our Christian convictions and our pedagogical strategies more effectively. They can do so in at least these six ways that I have described:

1. providing a richer, more multiply intelligent environment within which to learn;
2. providing more opportunities for real collaboration;
3. giving teachers a better angle of vision on the challenges their students are facing and the specific assumptions with which they enter courses;
4. providing better access to primary source materials;

5. overcoming constraints of geography and time; and
6. attending to the meaning-making contexts of our students and our communities of faith.

Each of these differences plays a role in making more visible and tangible the deep and enduring ways in which we truly know as we are known by the One who creates, redeems, and sanctifies. To the extent that we embody the community of truth, then our teaching and learning will make a huge difference. To the extent that theological education can support that community using digital technologies, then digital technologies can make a very real difference.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. The literature on the impact of digital technologies within education is growing by leaps and bounds. Significant Web sites that maintain current research include Pew Internet and American Life Project (<http://www.pewinternet.org/>), the Carnegie Foundation (<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/ourwork/index.htm>), the Digital Divide Network (<http://www.digitaldividenetwork.org/>), the Visible Knowledge Project (<http://crossroads.georgetown.edu/vkp/>), and the Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow research archive site (<http://www.apple.com/education/k12/leadership/acot/library.html>). I have also included key books in the bibliography included with this paper.
2. Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).
3. Adán Medrano, "Making Religious Media, Notes from the Field," in *Belief and Media: Cultural Perspectives on Media and Christianity*, eds. Mary Hess, Peter Horsfield, and Adán Medrano (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004): 146–148.
4. Here I am thinking of the writings of Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Elizabeth Johnson, Roberto S. Goizueta, Stanley Grenz, and others.
5. Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 58.
6. Malcolm L. Warford, "Introduction," in *Practical Wisdom: On Theological Teaching and Learning*, ed. Malcolm Warford (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).
7. See in particular Palmer's discussion of the "grace of great things" in *The Courage to Teach*, 107–108.
8. [Emphasis added] Victor Klimoski, "Evolving Dynamics of Formation," in *Practical Wisdom: On Theological Teaching and Learning*, ed. Malcolm Warford (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 33.
9. Medrano, "Making Religious Media, Notes from the Field," 147–148.
10. Tom Creed's classic essay on the reasons why *not* to use such programs is illustrative of this problem. His essay is available online at: [http://www.ntlf.com/html/pi/9705/creed\\_1.htm](http://www.ntlf.com/html/pi/9705/creed_1.htm).

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11. A wonderful example of this on the Web can be found at the journal *Kairos* (<http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/8.1/>) and Daniel Anderson's essay in particular (requires a plug-in). Recent research into how the brain functions is also particularly pertinent here, and an excellent introduction to that literature in the context of teaching and learning is James Zull's *The Art of Changing the Brain* (Stylus Publishing, 2002).
12. *A Private Universe* was produced by the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics and documents the sometimes startling ways in which people learn. The video documents the problem of countering enduring misconceptions with traditional teaching practices (read: instrumental notions of information transfer). Information on accessing the video and a wealth of additional learning resources are available online at <http://www.learner.org/resources/series28.html>.
13. Richard Nysse, "Online Education: An Asset in a Period of Educational Change," in *Practical Wisdom: On Theological Teaching and Learning*, ed. Malcolm Warford (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 205.
14. Some of my own favorite examples include O'Donnell's August site (<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine.html>), the Jesuit Plantation Project site ([http://www.georgetown.edu/departments/amer\\_studies/jpp/coverjpp.html](http://www.georgetown.edu/departments/amer_studies/jpp/coverjpp.html)), Hymnuts (<http://hymnuts.luthersem.edu/>), and the War Posters site (<http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/warpost.html>).
15. This repository is available online at: <http://www.atla.com/digitalresources/>.
16. More details at: <http://crossroads.georgetown.edu/vkp/>.
17. Jason Byassee, "Book Review," in *The Christian Century*, February 8, 2005.
18. Clare Goff, "Youth Abandoning Old Media," *netimperative*, [http://www.netimperative.com/2005/04/25/youth\\_abandoning\\_old\\_media](http://www.netimperative.com/2005/04/25/youth_abandoning_old_media) (accessed May 7, 2005).
19. "Heeeeeere's Democracy!," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 19, 2002.
20. A good basic introduction to RSS news feeds can be found at the Digital Divide Web site: <http://www.digitaldivide.net/blog/marniewebb/view?PostID=929>.
21. Andrew R. Brown and Bradley D. Voltz, "Elements of Effective e-Learning Design," in the *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, March 2005, [http://www.irrodl.org/content/v6.1/brown\\_voltz.html](http://www.irrodl.org/content/v6.1/brown_voltz.html) (accessed May 11, 2005).

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# Low Cost Things One Can Do that Have an Impact

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*ABSTRACT: The author suggests where to look and how to choose and use technological products and tools, including “playing around” with possibilities and options that can be productive for good teaching. He describes how movie clips, maps, and individual Web space relate to good teaching and learning, and how to “think through the message” to be a more effective presenter. He also discusses minimum competencies that reflect good stewardship of technology and where teachers can find good technological help.*

In my former position as director of instructional innovation for the five seminaries of the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools and as a technology consultant to member schools of ATS through its project on Technology and Educational Practices, I have experimented with many technology tools while trying to solve teaching challenges. I find myself going back to use some of them over and over again. Occasionally, I will add a new tool or technique or revisit some software or hardware that I may have previously ignored or abandoned because new circumstances made it worth reconsidering.

I enjoy “playing” with technology but love of gadgets for their own sake is not what drives me. Technology should serve good teaching and learning. I’m also aware that the technological environment in which we live actually changes how we approach good pedagogy. In this paper I share a few examples of current technology choices made by teachers who consult with me. Like Kevin Costner in *Bull Durham* sharing what he believes in and his love of the hanging fastball, I believe that:

- ◆ all good teaching has a playful, experimental nature<sup>1</sup> where different possibilities are continually explored in an effort to teach better.
- ◆ good teaching is as much an art as it is a craft with tools that need to be honed and periodically reexamined.
- ◆ academia can learn from business models like *just-in-time* instead of *just-in-case* adult learning.
- ◆ we should give as much attention to how we present as does the advertising community. Quality of images and sound is as important in the classroom as it is in the visual and aural environment that surrounds our students outside the classroom.

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- ◆ as soon as a professor shows a PowerPoint presentation, the dynamic in that teaching environment is forever changed. Now the student sees that this is a legitimate way to share, and the student wants to be able to use the same tools. Very few seminaries try to make the tools as available to students as they are for faculty.
- ◆ it is humbling (and probably a good thing) that we often learn from our students when it comes to technology. There may be something to what Prensky<sup>2</sup> calls digital natives and digital immigrants.
- ◆ the mission of the seminary is unique, and it is important to examine all our tools and techniques in light of the ministerial needs of the church.

### **Thinking through the message<sup>3</sup>**

I like to begin working with a teacher by exploring a learning styles inventory<sup>4</sup> to focus on what is known about the students and what the teacher knows about her own learning style. It is surprising how few teachers ever explore the learning styles of their students.<sup>5</sup> I have attended advertising agency planning sessions in which presenters knew far more about the receivers of their message than most teachers do about their students.

I use a common video example to discuss presentation ideas with the teacher. Tom Walker was the library and IT director at Luther Seminary in St. Paul when I was hired by the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools seven years ago. (He is currently the library and IT director at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.) Walker is one of the most insightful and gifted pastor/technologists I know who, when Web Course in a Box (now called Blackboard) was being designed, had also developed a very sophisticated learning management system for Lutheran seminaries across the country. He is a founder of The Fisher's Net, which is a main source for learning management systems (LMS) alternatives like Blackboard and Moodle for more than thirty seminaries.

I interviewed Walker on video a few months ago. The half-hour interview captured much of Walker's insight into the history of learning management systems in seminaries and his insights into what seminaries can expect in the future. Because I used to be a professional producer and director, I had the experience and professional equipment to shoot a quality piece. I also shot standard "cutaways" of Walker for editing, so I had a fairly typical piece of video similar to video often used to introduce courses or a new lesson in many seminaries. It looked better than most of the bad lighting classroom captures I usually see. Aware of the low bandwidth video problems students have with computer connections, I kept the cropping tight and avoided zooms.

When I watched the rough cut, I realized that a better way to present Walker's message would be to replace streaming full video of a "talking head" with a very tightly edited streamed audio only, resulting in a thirteen-minute .wav file. I then had it transcribed, keeping in mind the difference between



visual (text) and auditory learners. In this exercise, with the teacher who is planning to use the technology, we gathered still images from the video and highlighted key words to help the transcription look more visually pleasing. The transcript you will find online<sup>6</sup> does not reflect these visual improvements; however, exploring these presenter choices is part of my teaching method—presenters must consider how their audiences will receive their information.

I had a large .wav file of the thirteen-minute audio that I loaded into a free program called RealProducer Basic,<sup>7</sup> because I needed a smaller file for streaming. *Streaming* means the audio or video file is downloading slightly faster than the play speed. RealProducer produced an .rm audio file one-tenth the size of the .wav original, but it was still not ready to stream. Most major media players can play .rm files with rather good quality. At some of the seminars in our consortium, we have Real servers designed to stream audio, but I wanted to show my colleagues that it is possible to stream from a standard server by making one adjustment. I uploaded the .rm file to the consortium server, which is not a Real server. If I created a link in the .html transcript page to hear the audio, it would play—but not streamed—after a delay to download. I wanted the file to play no more than four seconds after the link was selected. A helpful hint from the RealPlayer archives suggested that a one-line .ram file can invoke an .rm file, allowing you to stream from almost any Web server. Now when you select the Hear the Interview link, you do not directly select the .rm file but rather the little one-line .ram file, which then launches the streaming .rm interview.

To capture video stills, I used a program called PrintScreen and resampled the stills in Corel PhotoPaint. I changed them to gray scale and grouped them as shown in the transcript. I now had a very fast download audio file that I could easily use—even for future podcasting.

As a teaching device, I didn't want to stop the Walker exercise here. I pushed the possibilities not because I could but because going further added something to the learning experience. How about a simple PowerPoint using a still of Walker with key points on the screen as he speaks? The presentation would be a mere fraction of the original video file size yet more effective because it is more focused. When I talk to teachers about technology choices, I know they will not consider them if the technique is complicated. This recycling of video into an audio stream, support transcript, and PowerPoint presentation is easy to do with tools most seminars already have.

To some teachers, it's easier to show an hour-long, poorly lighted, and insufficiently edited video lecture. With no real thought about what could be done to make the learning experience more interesting to the student, boredom is the certain result. Video is a wonderful tool when used properly and should be used for what it does best. If you say only the words matter and that all this visual stuff isn't that important, you haven't observed the visual environment in which your students live.

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I have a colleague in the consortium who claims that, until now, seminaries have been “blessed with low bandwidth.” What he means is that, seminaries, in general, have inadequate bandwidth, and, consequently, have to make choices about what to make available. As they add more bandwidth and as full streaming video becomes more cost effective, they will be tempted to use it more. However, more is not necessarily better. All successful teachers edit because they know what they *don't* present is as important as what they *do* present. They realize students are accustomed to highly processed visual and audio experiences and that insufficient editing will only produce boring video.

In the example of the teacher planning her own presentation, I suggested that, for slightly more work, she could improve the PowerPoint presentation by changing it to a Flash movie that can be easily viewed on the Internet. Tools like SWiSH Presenter<sup>8</sup> work very well for this purpose. We also discussed that her presentation, to this point, was still basically a “push” information delivery presentation—one-way from teacher to learner—with no interactivity that could better challenge adult learners. It is no surprise that many students also create “push” presentations because that is what they experience most from their teachers.

### **Using DVD movie clips in the classroom**

The one question I hear most from teachers is about how to use video clips in teaching. They usually mean, how do you conveniently play one or several scenes from DVDs through an LCD projector? I begin by warning them that, if the projector or computer is not a newer one, they may find the projector or computer incapable of playing the clip. Incidentally, an inexpensive progressive scan DVD player is a much better choice for a smart classroom than the nonprogressive scan DVD player built into the average computer. It's possible to cue a DVD to play directly and even repeat, but teachers would prefer to have one or several movie clips in a PowerPoint presentation ready to play when selected. PowerPoint 2003 allows full screen video for the first time, a feature teachers would like to take advantage of. There is little interest in putting copyrighted video clips on a seminary Web site for obvious reasons. But in many seminaries, the Fair Use provision of the Copyright Act is interpreted to mean that a teacher can show short portions of copyrighted video material for educational purposes. It is always possible to show a trailer or clips from a licensed Web site (e.g., *The Final Cut* trailer<sup>9</sup>) by simply having a broadband connection to the Internet and a good LCD projector in the classroom.

When I show a teacher how to capture a clip, I use a teaching technique called layering whenever possible. Any DVD could be used to illustrate the technique, but I choose *The Final Cut*, starring Robin Williams, because the movie deals with an ethical dilemma involving choosing images to share with others. When I teach the rather involved series of technical steps to effectively

capture a DVD clip, I have a chance to introduce a different layer—the content of the movie—to the discussion. I think of it as packing this just-in-time learning experience with nuanced content.

One principle I have observed when using technology tools to do even simple tasks is that seldom do you get to do it all with only one tool. You end up needing to know how to use a cluster of tools (particularly if you want to do something inexpensively) and so it is with capturing, manipulating, and converting a DVD clip. This may be the reason many teachers give up or need support for using even basic technology in the classroom.

### ***How to Capture and Convert***

Here is how to capture a DVD movie clip and convert it to a PowerPoint-friendly .avi file to play in class. The process uses the following cluster of programs that are either free or together cost less than \$100:

1. A DVD decrypter program that essentially clones the DVD onto a hard drive. An average movie will take up to 8GB of hard drive, so a portable external hard drive might be useful. I erase this full clone after I make the short clips.
2. A ripping program that creates the .avi or .mpg file from the decrypted files. Plato DVD Ripper is one of several programs that performs this task. Technically, you are making a DivX encoded .avi file so you will need to download a free DivX player. Then you can see the .avi program in RealPlayer or PowerPoint. This free DivX player must be on the computer you use to play the PowerPoint.
3. An .avi video enhancement program like EnhanceMovie to manipulate the movie clip, such as adjusting brightness or sharpness. (You could skip this step, but I like to make the video look as good as possible.)
4. An audio program like Total Recorder or Audacity to capture an audio clip from the movie. To edit the sound track, you could use Audacity or a better sound editing program like Adobe Audition.
5. A video still capture program like HyperSnap DX 5 allows you to go back to your starting clone and capture select video stills. Simple PrintScreen won't work to capture a DVD still image.

None of this is very difficult, but the teacher needs to know how to use several programs to accomplish what should be a simple task. Movie companies should make clips like this available for education, and many have begun by leaving promotional Web sites in place years after the movie has been released. Sometimes, however, the clips they choose aren't the ones you want.

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Finally, there are at least three options for inserting a movie clip into PowerPoint:

1. Using the Insert Movies and Sounds command,
2. Using the Insert Object command that puts Windows Media Player controls on the slide, or by
3. Using the Insert Action button command if you use RealVideo or QuickTime files or if you want multiple video windows on a single slide.

There is no special hardware involved for capturing and creating a clip from a DVD because it is already a digital medium. Capturing movie clips from a VHS tape is similar to capturing audio from cassettes or vinyl records—they involve a hardware connection between the computer and the player in order to digitize analog information.

A tool well worth considering is a DVD recorder—the digital equivalent of the VCR. A DVD recorder is a stand-alone unit that doesn't need a computer to operate. Most DVD recorders will record to the same kind of DVD disks you use in your computer. Recording broadcast video or video directly from a video camera to a DVD is a fast and easy way to bring digital images into the classroom. Most DVD recorders will automatically create chapters while recording, which makes cueing easier. These disks can be duplicated by using programs like Pinnacle's Instant Copy or they can be compressed to .avi files using the Plato DVD Ripper. With resolution at least double that of standard VHS, DVD recorders offer many possibilities for clips in PowerPoint. The DVD recorder can also be used to compile video clips in DVD or SVCD formats.

### **Making nested maps**

Many teachers I work with want good maps for class reference. All visual images come in two categories in the computer world: bitmaps and vector. Most maps are of the bitmap variety, usually scanned out of a book. They can, however, when enlarged, tend to look grainy.

Very few teachers use vector-based images; although, good ones would be far superior to bitmap images. Vector images are more like type. You can enlarge a vector image and it will always be in focus just like 10-point type and 72-point type both are equally sharp. And vector images are always much smaller files than bitmaps. One of the most popular software programs today is Flash, which basically is a vector-based graphics program.

Recently a Scripture teacher wanted to make nested maps to trace Paul's movement through the first-century Mediterranean so users could drill down through Macedonia to Philippi and all the way down to the Via Egnatia. In order for students to explore these areas on their own, he knew he needed to

create almost one hundred branching maps. He had some maps from a map CD and drew or scanned the rest. What he needed to know was the technique of creating images with “hot spots” that could link to the next map. It is possible to do this in FrontPage or Dreamweaver or with any good HTML editor. The hot spot is in the HTML, not the map. I also showed him that Flash would be an ideal candidate for this kind of linked image, although it would have involved learning a new program. Pedagogically, he could have controlled the drill-down by eliminating the alternatives and making far fewer maps, but he chose to let the students really explore these maps by adding lots of alternatives. He felt the learning experience was enhanced by offering the choices.

There is nothing easy about using technology for teaching. If anything, choosing to use technology usually increases rather than decreases work for the teacher. And it is not necessarily cheaper either. But the advantage of exploring information in nested maps is one not easily duplicated in print or even class presentation. It is by definition nonlinear learning that imitates how most of us learn. The teacher placed a value on that kind of learning that motivated all the extra preparatory work he went through.

### **Blackboard and teacher Web space**

Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Blackboard-WebCT, e-College, Moodle, Jenzabar, and others have become commonplace on many seminary campuses. In fact, LMS is mission critical to many schools. We will not discuss LMS in this article about low cost things you can do because they are anything but low in cost. What does fit here is a quick reflection on how pedagogically we should think about tools like Blackboard, because they have a great impact on the kinds of software and hardware tools we are discussing.

Why don't seminaries also explore models that work like LMS but are more in keeping with the nonacademic life of the church communities we serve? Blackboard, built on an academic model, is not the right tool for a parish. Do we show students the alternatives? Do we even know what the alternatives are?

I believe that teachers need to develop their individual Web space as their central teaching asset and mount as little inside Blackboard as possible. At the very least, teachers ought to know they have alternatives rather than creating all their assets within an LMS program.

### **Software and hardware that get frequent use**

The following are tools I find myself using again and again. I know this article has not featured many Mac-based tools because the seminaries I work with are mostly PC environments. I love Macs and know that there are alternatives for some of the software programs I've mentioned in this article. Wherever possible I have tried to include programs like Audacity or CorelDraw,

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which exist for both platforms, but I'm sure that this will not be enough for those who prefer the Mac platform. While the programs I mentioned work on the PC platform, similar types of software are needed on a Mac to accomplish the same goal.

The first thing I would give every faculty member and student is a USB2 thumb drive. Known technically as flash memory drives, these little pieces of hardware are absolutely essential and the easiest way to move data around.

If you use online forms or surveys, investigate SurveyMonkey, FormSite, and, my favorite, CoffeeCup Form Builder. Yes, you can build forms in FrontPage and even Acrobat, but you will find the straightforward HTML form-creating tool at FormSite will become your first choice. To build a quick form or survey in Flash and XML, use CoffeeCup.

If you are looking for a graphics tool that complements Microsoft Office or OpenOffice 2.X, I recommend CorelDraw Suite 12. At a fraction of the cost of Adobe Illustrator and PhotoShop it can do all the graphic manipulation the average teacher will ever need. It's almost a stewardship issue to consider this low-cost alternative. It comes for both PC and Mac platforms.

Use free programs like Microsoft Media Encoder and Microsoft Producer to move PowerPoint presentations and audio assets to the Web. Special mention must go to a software program called ProShow Gold that takes presentation far beyond what PowerPoint can do. Think of creating presentations with stills or video clips in which you can use all the visual sophistication you would see in a Ken Burns's documentary on PBS. Every time I demonstrate this program to faculty and show how easily it can create sophisticated images for the Web or for burning to DVDs, the teachers are amazed.

If you want to create a document for the Internet or to share one as an attachment in which foreign language characters and complex layouts appear just as they do in the original, use Acrobat Writer. You can create searchable documents and forms with this powerful program and even archive Web sites. I actually prefer the program pdfFactory as a less expensive alternative to Acrobat Writer. But once you have Acrobat Writer installed, you can easily make .pdf files from a number of different programs like Word, Excel, and even PowerPoint and CorelDraw.

Few people take full advantage of the extra programs that come with Microsoft Office Suite. There is basic OCR (optical character recognition) built in and a magnifier option under accessories that may help the eyes of older teachers. Mozilla FireFox and OpenOffice 2.X are open source alternatives to Microsoft Internet Explorer and the Office suite. These free alternatives are becoming the tools of choice on many seminary campuses.

Soon Web cams and headsets with microphones plugged into USB2 ports will become more popular as the Internet will make online meetings possible using a protocol called voice over IP (VoIP). Already students are using Skype to bypass the telephone and talk to others all over the world. Macromedia

Breeze is a Web-based program that allows users to participate in meetings in a variety of ways. Breeze is expensive, but it does model what will be possible in technology-enhanced face-to-face meetings.

IT departments talk about an “image” as a collection of programs that is burned on to all computers that makes it possible to repair computers when viruses strike. I strongly recommend the image on a teacher’s computer include the following software programs in addition to the standard plugins:

1. FinePrint is a program that allows you to print 2X or even 4X pages on one page. The capability goes far beyond the limited offerings in Microsoft Office.
2. Printscreen 2000<sup>10</sup> is freeware that surpasses the capabilities of the Print Screen key in Windows. Almost anything you see on the screen you can capture and save with Printscreen 2000 with the exception of DVD images for which you need HyperSnap DX 5 mentioned earlier.
3. The audio equivalent of Print Screen is Total Recorder. Anything you can hear through the speakers on your computer you can capture as a .wav or .mp3 file.
4. An FTP program. If a teacher plans to use a Web server as the first place she would upload her teaching assets, she will need a program to do the uploading. Generally that is done with an FTP program unless you are using FrontPage which uses HTTP. Dreamweaver and other Web editors have FTP built in, but you can get free or inexpensive FTP capability and it should be on your computer. WSFTP is a free FTP program. Many seminaries in the consortium use BulletProof FTP,<sup>11</sup> which is the most robust FTP program I know of for the money.

### **Are there minimum competencies that reflect good stewardship of technology?**

This is a hard question to answer. If a teacher says that she has many students who favor a visual learning style, it would follow that the teacher should pay some attention to the tools that create a more visual presentation. It would also follow that a teacher should know something about graphics and be able to take advantage of the visual nature of the Web. Most of the tools and techniques I discussed in this article are not expensive but they are time intensive to learn. I did not recommend that every teacher learn Flash because of the stiff learning curve but that doesn’t mean there ought not to be some place to get Flash production done in the seminary. Good technology stewardship is a seminary-wide issue and doesn’t reside with individual teachers. Some teachers will “bite the bullet” and learn software because they view it as mission critical. Others will need help. I believe seminaries need to look at technology needs and consider outsourcing or hiring gifted students as tech



assistants. The consortium has tried these and other experiments with some success and is well past the era where technically savvy meant knowing how to do email. I think minimal competency in 2006 probably includes knowing how to run a presentation using an LCD projector, using some basic graphics and audio visual tools, having and knowing how to use Web space, and familiarity with the Web's unique features.

### **Instructional technologists and seminaries**

Instructional technologists are in short supply in seminaries. Instructional technologists who understand the unique mission of a seminary and have a fluency with theology are even rarer. I am often asked how to go about finding such a person. In order to answer or clarify the search I make some important distinctions. First, the instructional technologist is a teacher who understands how to use technology tools to create effective learning. She teaches teachers. She ought to be good at it. She ought not to be a member of the IT department. Her fundamental role is to be able to negotiate with IT to accomplish instructional objectives. She can talk IT language when few teachers can. A central role of the IT department is the security of the network and the smooth operation of the various software and hardware components that people call technology. The IT department fulfills a vital role but, often, because of its gatekeeping duties (literally guarding the seminary portal), it may not be open to new software or hardware that a teacher wants to experiment with nor may it proactively recommend new software and hardware solutions to faculty. Most IT people are not teachers nor do they need to be. One IT department I work with requires staff members to sit in on at least one class but that is not common. In an ideal world, the IT department and the teaching mandate of the seminary all work together, but I have seen too many examples of frustrated teachers who can't get simple things done and frustrated IT people who buy what they believe to be a better technology solution for the seminary only to find tepid acceptance from the teachers on campus. I think it makes more sense to align the instructional technologist with the direct teaching mission of the institution reporting to the dean, not to the head of IT.

Second, I believe that a potential source for technology help in seminaries is found in the students and communities of faith that support them. Working with technology is a kind of ministry for which there is no DMin yet, but there should be. John Jewell at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary is trying to change that (see his article in this journal). We need to hire students as technical assistants and encourage them to see working with technology as a calling worthy of response. Theological students with technology gifts know what the role of the seminary is: they need to be encouraged and supported to learn new things and share them with their teachers. Our congregations are full of technically capable laity who don't even know their skills are needed in the seminary.



I am sometimes asked to identify the instructional technologists I admire. There are many but two published ones are Stanley Trollip,<sup>12</sup> director of learning strategies for Capella University, and Michael Allen<sup>13</sup> of Allen Interactions, inventor of Authorware. Trollip has taught me to blend the best of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. You can get into a lot of trouble adhering strictly to any one of them to the exclusion of the other. Allen just “gets it.” His Web site is fresh and loaded with great technology and teaching tips. His training programs at the University of St. Thomas and his publishing are all first class. He knows how to build fun, interactive e-learning.

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#### ENDNOTES

*Because this article makes extensive use of Web links for illustration and of audio and video clips, the endnotes will also be found online at <http://mncts.net/ATS/jr1endnotes.htm>.*

1. <http://www.luthersem.edu/mysse/PlayToLearn.htm>
2. Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. Part 1. Marc Prensky. <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>
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- Prensky critic Martin Owen: <http://www.nestafuturelab.org/viewpoint/art26.htm>
3. <http://mncts.net/audioreources/walker/walkercomparison.htm>
4. <http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/tutorials/id/learningStyles.asp>
5. Learning styles inventory: [http://www.hayresourcesdirect.haygroup.com/Learning\\_Self-Development/Assessments\\_surveys/Learning\\_Style\\_Inventory/Overview.asp](http://www.hayresourcesdirect.haygroup.com/Learning_Self-Development/Assessments_surveys/Learning_Style_Inventory/Overview.asp)
- Another helpful resource is <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm>,
6. <http://mncts.net/audioreources/walker/walkerintroATS.htm>
7. <http://forms.real.com/rnforms/products/tools/producerbasic/>
8. <http://swishzone.com>
9. [http://www.justmovietrailers.com/video/4463/the\\_final\\_cut\\_trailer.html](http://www.justmovietrailers.com/video/4463/the_final_cut_trailer.html)
10. <http://www.sssware.com/>
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12. Stephen M. Alessi and Stanley R. Trollip, *Multimedia for Learning: Methods and Development*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001).
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# A New Tool or a New Way of Doing Theological Education?

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*ABSTRACT: After stressing the avoidance of dichotomous thinking about technology and arguing for the integrated nature of technology vision and implementation, the author traces a brief history of the advent of technology into the seminary, making the point that technology has only recently made its way into the actual teaching/learning processes of classroom instruction. He then tries to show why it is that distance education is proving to be an engine that is variegating institutional visions for the role of technology in theological education. He goes on to describe six types of technology classrooms that have emerged in the last few years and concludes with a description of something of the array of visions for the role of technology in the teaching/learning process that will likely develop in the future.*

## **Introduction: Of false dichotomies and technology visions**

**I**s technology a new tool for theological education? Or is it a whole new way of doing theological education? Yes. No. And, it all depends on what you want it to be.

Along with huge benefits, the onslaught of technology into the modern world has brought huge headaches as it has forced change onto virtually every aspect of private and public life. It is no wonder that responses to the rise of technology range from wild optimism to committed opposition. For some of us, which camp we fall into depends completely on the events of the day you ask us.

All of this has led to an environment of exaggerations. Side by side exist wild claims about technological panaceas and prophecies of apocalyptic technological doom.<sup>1</sup> Theological educators all know about the dangers of dichotomous thinking and are ever alert to the fallacy of the excluded middle. But when it comes to technology, we are probably as guilty as the rest of succumbing to one or the other of these two extremes. We tend to be either technophobes or technophiles.

And this is my first point. Either/or thinking may be our first instinct toward technology in theological education, but ultimately it will prove useless as a means of identifying the truth of the matter.

It seems to me that in the next few years theological education—like much of higher education—is going to variegate itself around the issue of the role given to technology in the educational experience. It is already happening. Certain seminaries are developing reputations as technologically advanced, while others are developing a profile that says clearly, “technology is not what we do here.”

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To this point, much of the variegation has been the result of processes that have been more or less haphazard and experimental. One or two technology pioneers in a single institution can create a lot of buzz and produce an aura of technological innovation—even if what they are doing is idiosyncratic and irreproducible by the rest of the faculty in the institution. A few institutional settings have given rise to so-called “skunkworks” technology initiatives, particularly in distance education, in which one well-resourced but isolated office, working largely with adjuncts and a few “regular” faculty on overload contracts, has been able to create essentially a second seminary right under the noses of a regular faculty that has very little understanding of or commitment to the program. I suspect that these days will be giving way to ones in which the vision for technology in any given seminary will have to be the result of intentional decisions made in fully collaborative processes by a community of well-informed participants (as opposed to a community filled with technophiles and technophobes talking past one another) who are trying to fashion programs that are both of high quality as well as sustainable for the long run. And it will be a good thing, I believe, that we move in that direction.

And this leads to my second point. What we ultimately decide to do with technology in our individual seminary depends completely on the vision we have for technology. These visions may be finely tuned products of intentional research and planning, or they may be a set of ill-defined knee jerks based on a body of ignorant folklore, or they may be any point in between. But in any case, these visions provide the foundation for how we will think about technology and how it may, or may not, serve the task of theological education. As in so many other things, it is not whether we *have* a technology vision, it is only a question of how informed it is, how intentional it is, how disciplined it is, and how democratic and participatory (or not) were the processes that led to the adoption of that particular technology vision in any given institution.<sup>2</sup>

### **The pathway of technology into the seminary**

Technology entered into the seminary through the door furthest from the classroom. In most seminaries, surprisingly enough, it came first into the administration suite for business office and development functions, then it made its way over to the library. The financial impact of the former was not insignificant. But, neither was it so substantial that it threatened the financial viability of the institution nor required much more than executive committee board action for authorization and a relatively small fundraising campaign. The move of technology into the library was an altogether different story. This move brought with it a price tag of tens of thousands of dollars (at least) for a retrospective conversion and the installation of a library management system. The wider community was generally brought into this decision, and who could oppose it? Faculty members rightly saw the advantages of library automation

for both their own research and for that of their students. For many institutions, it was a difficult obstacle to surmount, but everyone agreed that the outcomes would be worth the price. At about the same time, personal computers began to show up on the desktops of individual faculty members. (The institutions that got to the game a little late skipped this phase and went directly to laptops.) Faculty members began to take advantage of technology tools that delivered a boost to their personal productivity with word processing tools and, in the case of biblical studies faculty, Bible research software. Some even made use of desktop publishing tools. Shortly thereafter, many institutions took the next step with the installation of networks that provided access to email and, for the brave of heart, early Internet protocols like telnet and gopher. And then the Internet arrived and without much time to even savor the moment, faculty members (and everyone else) had to begin to adjust their goals from mere improved productivity on a personal computer to functioning capably in a connected world.<sup>3</sup>

My point in this very brief sketch is that these early experiences with technology touched and transformed numerous personal and institutional patterns in the life of the seminary, but none—or very few of them—touched very directly on teaching and learning in the classroom. The actual classroom itself has been one of the last sanctuaries into which technology has been brought.

And it was, of course, right at this moment that Lilly Endowment stepped into the picture in a big way with its grant program that held out a new vision for technology: The bull's-eye of this grant program was technology for improved teaching and learning in the Master of Divinity classroom. In the first round of grants, the phrase “in the classroom” was defined rather narrowly (for instance, course management systems were excluded), but administered with some latitude. Many seminaries that had no network infrastructure were allowed to spend their money building one. Those whose faculty members had no computers, were allowed to spend the money furnishing them with one. Many of these round-one institutions tried to build at least one or two smart classrooms with their money, but few had any resources left over to train faculty in the use of the technology, let alone begin to probe the pedagogical issues involved in doing so. Many seminaries in the second round of grants were in a better position. Many of these schools had, by this time, already installed a network infrastructure and provided faculty members with computers. They were free to spend a greater percentage of their grant funds on equipment for smart classrooms and training for faculty, and a few began to probe issues of pedagogy. In addition, there seemed to be a conceptual shift regarding the question of what constituted uses of technology that affected positively classroom teaching and learning. As we mentioned, in the first round this was conceived rather narrowly and categorically excluded the use of course management systems. These were understood to be inherently tools

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for distance education. But by the end of the second grant program, it was clearly understood that there were ways to use course management systems to enhance the face-to-face classroom experience. In just the time that it took to expend these two grant programs, the level of the discussion among theological educators about pedagogical issues went from debates about the strengths and weaknesses of PowerPoint to valid uses of asynchronous learning environments to enhance face-to-face classroom teaching and learning. This is no small shift.<sup>4</sup>

But once again, my point here is that it has taken about a decade or more for technology to sneak in the side door of the administration building to the point where it has begun to knock insistently on the classroom door. During this time, the reigning vision for technology's role in theological education has been a fairly benign one. That is, it has been a vision that has seen technology as providing a series of tools to help us do theological education in the way we have been doing it until now: residential communities, lecture-based classrooms, library research with labs, and internships—what I call the classic approach to theological education.

### **Distance education: The great variegator of technology visions**

The application of technology tools and processes to distance issues in education promises to—or threatens to, depending on your perspective—change the possibilities for how we go about doing theological education. This transformation of possibilities began with the exploration of delivering fully online courses. As teaching and learning experiences, most of our early attempts at online courses were abysmal. This is not because we didn't spend time and money to construct the technology infrastructure and build the courses. We did. The problem was that we were thinking about online courses as though they were just another form of the traditional classroom experience. There had to be a lecture, right? So we either typed the lecture or, to go "the second mile," we captured the lecture and delivered it via streaming audio or, better yet, streaming video. There has to be reading and writing, correct? So we assigned textbooks and even employed links to written texts and other resources on the World Wide Web. We told our students to take in the lecture, read some good literature, and send us an email with a paper attached. The technophiles among us, bedazzled with the technological innovation of it all, were amazed and crushed when students reported these classes to be duds. And the technophobes bemoaned that this is just what they had expected. The low quality of the educational experience of these early experiments convinced many that the medium was ill-suited to the enterprise.

In fact, something was ill-suited to the enterprise, but it was not the medium. It was the pedagogy.

Looking back, it is a wonder that these sorts of classes work in person. In fact, many of them don't, if we are honest enough to admit it. And when they do, it is often because of other factors, the dynamism of the lecturer or of the classroom interaction generated from the lecture, the scintillating follow-up discussions among students over coffee after the class, or the personalized mentoring of a faculty member or more experienced classmate between class sessions.

By now many people have made this point: We went into online courses thinking that the challenges were going to be technological ones only to discover that the challenges of a good online class are far more about pedagogy. It's not about teaching the same way in a new medium; it's about teaching in a new way, one that is appropriate to the new medium.

All this to say that, those institutions that have persisted in their pursuit of online education have learned three things along the way. First, it doesn't work unless you teach differently and this means a total reassessment of the role of the faculty member in the teaching/learning process as well as a greater understanding of how learning actually takes place. Second, they learned that perhaps even more effective than the totally online course is the hybrid course, one that at least begins and ends with face-to-face time. And third, once you begin to think in terms of a hybrid course (i.e., one that defies the rigid dichotomy between online *or* face-to-face), it is a relatively small step to begin to think in terms of a hybrid *program*. A hybrid program is one that uses a strategic combination of both the face-to-face venue and the online venue to deliver an entire program rather than thinking in terms of a particular percentage of online courses alongside a particular percentage of face-to-face courses.

And this is the point in the development of new visions for the role of technology where something very significant is beginning to happen. The hybrid program is being conceived and executed in a way that makes it unnecessary for students to pull up stakes and move in order to get a theological education. The implications of this are staggering. This is not just a new way to capture old market share; it is a way to create new market share. People who couldn't get a theological education before because of the necessity of moving can now do so. Support networks remain undisturbed; ministry contexts are maintained; a spouse's income source can continue; children are not uprooted.

For some of the architects of hybrid programs, this is not just a pleasant collateral benefit. Some are going so far as to claim that this form of education—one that leaves students in their indigenous ministry contexts and brings education to them—is the best approach to education period, the ultimate in contextualized learning. They now ask, "Why did we ever think that education had to involve ripping students away from everything they know?" They cite examples of international students, for instance, who get transformed by their education but rendered useless to their native context.



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Many, though not all, seminaries have one or more distance constituencies who are clamoring for theological education. In the past, the only options for serving these constituencies were through the correspondence course or through student attendance at face-to-face intensives held on campus. This worked well for the delivery of workshops and smaller certificate programs, but most educators and students were dissatisfied with these means for delivering an entire theological education. The advent of electronically mediated distance education tools and the online classroom and the hybrid classroom is creating a tremendous variegating engine. Institution after institution is going to consider whether it should move into some form of distance education for the pursuit of its mission.<sup>5</sup> The end result is that some will and some won't and, among those that do, some will invest heavily in the approach (standardizing an array of tools and practices and requiring all faculty to be involved as part of their regular teaching load, for instance) and some will invest only peripherally (using a limited set of tools and working with adjuncts and a few of the regular faculty).

### **Crossing thresholds: Technology creates six new kinds of classrooms**

So, within a very short time after theological education opened the classroom door to technology, at least six new kinds of technology classrooms have emerged, each one based on a slightly different vision for the role that technology would play in the teaching/learning process or serve a particular teaching/learning scenario.

#### *The "smart classroom"*

The first is the so-called smart classroom. This is a traditional classroom that has been outfitted with an LCD projector, an Internet connection, and a variety of projection sources beyond the computer—video cassette player, DVD player, document camera, etc. Often a sound reinforcement system is part of the set-up and, in a limited number of cases, these are all tied together by a single integrated control panel. Depending on how you do it, the cost of these smart classrooms could range from \$8,000 per room to \$50,000 or more. But in all of these cases, the vision for technology's role in the teaching/learning process is the same: supercharging the traditional face-to-face classroom with a media-rich environment for live presentations (everyone in the same place at the same time).

#### *The "virtual para-classroom"*

We might call the second kind of classroom that emerged the virtual para-classroom. It was born when someone asked the question, "How could we use technology to enhance the time spent on this course between live class sessions



(i.e., while we are not physically together)?” Early on we had begun to exploit the technology tools for personal productivity related to class work (word processing for papers, electronic tools for library research, and Bible research programs for exegetical work). But a whole new set of possibilities came into being when the course management system (CMS) was created. Most of us had no idea how we could use the CMS for its intended purpose, to conduct an entirely online course, but we could see some ways in which its capabilities could be put to work for the live classroom. The virtual para-classroom was born. It makes use of a CMS, but its role is conceived in a very narrow way as a tool for enriching the face-to-face classroom experience. Within a very short time, we had discovered a wide variety of uses to which it could be put. One could start by using the CMS as a sort of class file cabinet. We posted an electronic copy of the syllabus and other class handouts there. Someone went the next step and posted class lectures there. Someone else took a very significant next step by posting an in-class tutorial to the CMS for students to do there. Someone else took the next huge step by moving class quizzes and even mid-terms and finals online.

Another significant discovery was made when we began to understand what the asynchronous threaded discussion could do. At first, we couldn’t get our minds around the notion of an asynchronous discussion, so we tried the chat room features of the CMS. We collided with the inevitable time management problems associated with the use of a synchronous tool. But very slowly we experimented with the discussion area and found that we could continue discussion started in the live classroom. And then we discovered that we could start discussions that we could finish in the classroom. This move actually had more impact on the live classroom than did the former use of the discussion board, because it actually allowed us to begin our class sessions in a different place, on minute twenty-seven, as it were, rather than from scratch. This was huge. The final insight that cleared the major remaining obstacle in the use of the threaded discussion tool was the realization that we, the faculty members, did not have to read every post in the discussion area, that it was possible to take on the role of facilitating the environment and actually have the students take turns playing the role of discussion facilitator—as a valid educational exercise in itself.

Creative thinking around the possible uses of the virtual para-classroom has given us a new set of teaching/learning options for the live classroom. But it has also prepared many of us to understand how to move into the fully online classroom in a way that is pedagogically more appropriate to the medium than were our first experimentations with the online class.

### *The virtual online classroom*

And this is the third kind of classroom that technology has made possible for us: the pedagogically savvy, virtual online classroom. The vision for

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technology in the online class is, of course, to solve the challenges to teaching and learning when there is a permanent distance between faculty and students and between students and students. Through our experience in the virtual para-classroom we had begun to learn some of the techniques involved in using this sort of space. But in that venue, if something didn't work, we'd just wait and sort it out the next time we got together in class. We could always revert to our primary mode, the face-to-face lecture to fix any problem. In the fully online classroom, the "lecture lifeline" has been cut. There is no falling back on a lecture to sort it all out. The import of this logistical reality is that faculty members arrive at a moment of truth: they either make the final transition from viewing their role as dispensers of knowledge through the live lecture to the facilitators of learning in the asynchronous learning environment, or they simply won't be able to make the online classroom work.

The second insight that makes the online classroom work is the notion of the student as active learner. If the online classroom requires a change in the role of the faculty member in the teaching/learning process, the same is true of the student. In some of the best uses of the online classroom, the student is called on to take a more active role in his or her own learning, assisting in the very definition of learning goals and processes for the course. When you put the previous insight together with this one, what you actually have is a new kind of student-teacher relationship. My friend, Mark V. Hoffmann from Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, describes it as "a sort of a post-modern thing where the emphasis shifts from teacher-driven content to method and student-oriented experience and relationship in community."

The third insight that makes the online classroom work has to do with a set of notions around the identity of the participants in an online classroom as a virtual learning community. Key emphasis is laid on community-building techniques and practices as a precursor for any learning content. The guiding principle is that learning effectiveness is directly related to the nature of the environment as community. The contention is that when this is successfully done, the actual content of the course is almost incidental in terms of students engaging with the material in some positive way, because they have already engaged with the other members of the learning community.

The interesting thing to note here is that the differences between the virtual para-classroom and the online classroom are mainly issues of pedagogy, not ones of technology. But, as we've pointed out, it is the pedagogical changes that are harder to solve than the technological ones, because they involve necessary changes in deeply entrenched personal and social roles and patterns.

### ***The hybrid classroom***

The fourth new kind of classroom that technology makes possible is the hybrid classroom. In fact, we could say this in the plural—classrooms—because the hybrid experience is grounded on the practice of making strategic

decisions about the distribution of the learning objectives of a course between two venues, the live classroom and the online virtual classroom, and then working carefully to integrate the learning outcomes from both. One might first think of the hybrid classroom as merely the alternating use of the face-to-face classroom and the virtual online classroom. But this vision is founded on a false conception of what the hybrid classroom is and how it works. In the same way that the virtual classroom will not work when we treat it as merely another form of the live classroom, the hybrid classroom will not work when it is conceived as merely the alternating use of the face-to-face classroom and the virtual online classroom. As we said before, perhaps the key characteristics that distinguish the hybrid classroom from the others is the strict attention that is given to the strategic distribution of learning objectives to their most appropriate venue and the careful attention given to the integration of the learning outcomes from both.<sup>6</sup>

*The videoconferencing and the synchronous “net meeting” classroom*

No list of this sort would be complete if we did not mention a fifth and sixth kind of classroom that technology has made possible, the videoconferencing classroom and the synchronous “net meeting” classroom. We mention these two almost in passing because most of the institutions that have explored these forms of technological classrooms find their use limited to very specific applications. Initially, both of them seem appealing, and that for at least two reasons. First, they are both synchronous tools, that is, tools that call on all participants to be “present” at the same time, and this is the pattern with which we are most familiar. Second, each seems to hold out the prospect of a two-for-the-price-of-one deal—serving a group of students who are physically present with the professor while simultaneously serving a second group of students who are not physically present. What distinguishes them from one another, of course, is the so called far point. In the case of the video conferencing classroom, all of the students are in one location. And this is the downfall of most attempts to make videoconferencing economically feasible. Most seminars do not have a sustained stream of students in a second center (over multiple years) that will be able to justify the costs associated with the construction and maintenance of the facilities, particularly when these may involve locating personnel at the center or providing library and student services in some form from that center. In most places, the numbers cannot be made to work. The synchronous net meeting classroom has a distributed far point, or, should we say, far points. Students are not together at one center, but each one connects to the class session from his or her own computer wherever he or she is. The technology tools developed for the synchronous net meeting have become quite robust, providing a set of functions that allow for a high level of interactivity, but there are two plaguing problems with the approach. The first is economic. The initial cost of setting up the system can be substantial. But

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even more onerous are the ongoing connection fees that these tools charge, essentially dedicated phone lines for every external or distance participant, complete with per minute charges. Very quickly the connection fees for the student become equivalent to the cost of tuition. The second problem is one of synchronicity, the necessity that everyone be available at the same time. While this may be the approach to educational experiences with which we are most familiar, synchronicity immediately limits the student pool to those within one or two time zones of the live classroom. This limitation can be worked around on the occasional basis but not usually for the sustained timeframe of an entire course or series of courses.

### **The variegation of visions for technology in theological education**

From the foregoing, it should be clear that it is completely possible to develop a vision for technology that asks it to do nothing more than provide a set of tools to serve a traditional vision of residential theological education. And it should also be clear that we can adopt a vision for technology that seeks to open entirely new ways for doing theological education, particularly at a distance.

So we can very quickly sketch out something of the array of institutional visions for technology that is likely to develop. (This list should not be considered comprehensive but representative of several points along a continuum.) Some institutions will be ideologically committed to the exclusion of all technology anywhere in the corporate life of the seminary or in the lives of its individual members. Some will envision a role for any technology that can supercharge an aspect of a traditional approach to theological education. Some will go this far but remain ideologically committed to the limitation of technology from classroom teaching/learning processes. Some will embrace a vision for technology that transforms the live classroom and extends its processes into the asynchronous spaces between class sessions. Some will develop enough online courses to add an array of scheduling options for their current residential and commuting students. Others will develop these online courses and a few more to be able to offer a certificate program or serve the needs of some church-related constituency. Some will try to find their niche serving the general need for theological education for distance students by developing a curriculum consisting of as many online courses as the accreditation body will allow. Others will move into the development of hybrid courses for their current students. Many, I think, will develop hybrid programs of theological education. And there are probably a number of scenarios I haven't begun to dream of yet.

But this is what I mean by variegation. There is probably no reason to be afraid of it and probably a lot of reasons to believe that those seeking theological education in the years to come will be better served by this array of options than is the current generation of students.

## Conclusion

Right now there is a lot of hype about developing electronically mediated distance education programs, and some institutions are worried about getting left behind. But I doubt that there is a great danger of being totally left behind. The only thing worse than getting to the market second is getting to the market first with a bad idea or a program so ill-conceived that it proves to be unsustainable. Theological education is not a quarter horse sprint. We've been at this for some time and all indications are that we will be at it for some time to come.

The more urgent matter, it seems to me, is how to help seminary communities develop more sensible, de-mythologized, understandings about what technology can and can't do for us, rather than the overblown or truncated visions that come out of dialogues (if they can be called that) between technophiles and technophobes. Such environments will always be rife with power plays and end runs by constituencies that believe they need to impose their view for the common good. In the end, we can do whatever we want. The best guarantees for success in either the traditional face-to-face classroom or in some form of the virtual classroom, is for our visions for technology to be based on good research and a deep understanding of the technological and, especially, the pedagogical issues that make for success.

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## ENDNOTES

1. In my recent article, "Theological Educators and Their Concerns about Technology" (*Teaching Theology and Religion* 8, no. 3 [July 2005]: 131–143), I listed twenty-six concerns expressed about technology by theological educators, particularly the concerns about electronically mediated distance education. These concerns are categorized loosely under three headings: Practical and Personal Concerns, Pedagogical and Educational Concerns, and Philosophical and Theological Concerns. More important than the list is the sociology of decision-making surrounding technology among theological educators. In the final section of the article titled, "How Concerns about Technology Function within Institutions," I discussed how it is that these concerns are allowed to function in very different ways across the spectrum of theological education today.
2. In my article "Strategic Planning to Enhance Teaching and Learning with Technology," (*Teaching Theology and Religion* 9, no. 1 [January 2006]: 9–23), I explore eight issues surrounding the strategic planning process when it comes to technol-

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ogy. These have to do with the obstacles to fresh thinking; the current best practices in strategic planning processes; detailed discussions of the impact of various models of technology for theological education on faculty, IT personnel, and students; as well as the issues surrounding delivery system models and the issue of sustainability.

3. In my recent article, "Theological Educators, Technology and the Path Ahead," (*Teaching Theology and Religion* 8, no. 1 [January 2005]: 51–55), I reviewed the developments in technology through which seminaries and theological educators have come. The first half of the essay identifies five areas in which theological educators have had to gain technology skills in the last several years: (1) individual facility with a personal computer, (2) functioning capably in a connected world, (3) information literacy for research and ministry, (4) technology for face-to-face instruction, and (5) technology for asynchronous teaching and learning. The second half of the essay identifies the forces that will likely drive technology learning for theological educators in the coming few years: (1) the pressure to meet student expectations, (2) the pressure to enrich the classroom experience by engaging the visual learner, (3) the pressure to enhance the traditional course through richer pedagogical strategies available with technology, and (4) the pressure to offer distance programs.

4. It was at this time (the fall of 2003) that the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion funded my sabbatical study on technology in theological education. I was able to conduct more than eighty interviews with representatives from forty-three seminaries in North America to gain insight into the attitudes of faculty toward the use of technology in their teaching and for use in the preparation of ministers. A report of basic findings is found in, "A Typology of the Use of Technology in Theological Education," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 7, no. 3 (July 2004): 134–140.

5. In my opinion, one of the most serious issues that will need to be addressed is the issue of "Information Resources for Distance Theological Students" (the name of a forthcoming article that I wrote along with my colleagues, Charles Kamilos and Robin Migliaccio Ashford).

6. For a full discussion of these issues, see my article with Daniel L. Brunner, "Theological Education and Hybrid Models of Distance Learning," *Theological Education* 40, no. 2 (2005): 145–161.

# Tethered Together: A Study of the Relationship between a Seminary and its Denomination

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*ABSTRACT: The relationship between institutions of theological education and their respective denominations are complex, fluid, and embedded in their traditions. Even so, a new call for better understanding this important relationship has been issued by The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) through its project on "Theological Schools and the Church." This paper explores this relationship through one organizational theory—loosely coupled systems. This descriptive theory helps detail the interconnectedness and the independence many seminaries and denominations experience today. Thus, when viewing one particular relationship between a seminary and its denomination through this loosely coupled systems' lens, nine relational tethers and several issues emerge inviting further conversation.*

## Introduction

At the Biennial Meeting of The Association of Theological Schools in June 2004, various discussions focused on "the fundamental patterns of relationship between theological schools and their respective religious communities."<sup>1</sup> Part of these discussions affirmed that the patterns are changing in a variety of ways:

For many schools, older patterns of institutional relationship that were typically characterized by ownership, control, and funding are dissipating. New patterns are emerging. For example, while some seminaries continue to be deeply connected to one denomination and educate students primarily from that denomination, denominational funding has been substantially reduced. Other seminaries, once deeply connected to national denominational structures, are becoming less connected to those structures and more closely connected to congregations and local judicatories. Many seminaries that historically educated students for one denomination are now educating students to serve in a wide variety of denominations. . . . The changes in the seminary-church system reflect changes in the denominations and the theological schools themselves as well as changes in the student bodies and, no doubt, changes in the place of religion in North



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American culture. These changes, in a previous era, may have been spread across a century, but in this era, have occurred in four decades.<sup>2</sup>

Given the importance of these changes, the Association has called for “renewed attention” to the critically important ways theological schools and their respective denominations relate.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, I propose that the organizational theory termed “loosely coupled systems” is a useful lens through which to view the multifaceted ways denominations and their institutions of theological education relate. First, I describe the basics of loosely coupled systems theory by providing an outline of it and a heuristic metaphor for its use in theological education.

Second, I analyze the relationship between Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Austin, Texas, (hereafter, APTS) and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (hereafter, PCUSA) using loosely coupled systems theory. This case study demonstrates that APTS is loosely coupled with the PCUSA and describes ways in which the school is currently tethered to the PCUSA. For this analysis, I am indebted particularly to Jack Stotts, professor of ethics and former president of APTS and McCormick Theological Seminary, and C. Ellis Nelson, professor of Christian education and former president of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and APTS. I conclude with some suggestions about the loosely coupled systems model and raise questions for further discussion.

### **Loosely coupled systems theory**

Robert Glassman first proposed the concept of loosely coupled systems in an article titled “Persistence and Loose Coupling in Living Systems.”<sup>4</sup> Glassman, a biologist, defines a loosely coupled system as one “whose parts are less richly interconnected, one with independence or temporary independence between parts, [and one that] forms local stabilities which ignore limited perturbations elsewhere in the system.”<sup>5</sup>

One example Glassman offers with regard to loosely coupled systems in social interactions is good manners. Consider the difference between how acquaintances interact when one has bad breath and how spouses do. Good manners suggest that acquaintances do not correct each other’s bad breath. In this way, good manners operate as a buffer and the acquaintances’ interaction is analogous to loose coupling. The spouses’ interaction, by contrast, is analogous to tight coupling; a spouse responds immediately. Glassman suggests:

The degree of coupling, or interaction, between two systems depends on the activity of the variables which they share. To the extent that two systems either have few variables in common or if the common variables are weak compared to other variables which influence the system, they are independent of each other.<sup>6</sup>



The relationship between a church-related college and its denomination exemplifies the movement from loosely coupled to independent. Historically, coupling variables included denominational funding, student and faculty membership in the denomination, and curricula oversight by the denomination. Today, however, these couplings no longer exist for the majority of church-related colleges. To understand what type of coupling two systems have, therefore, we look to the nature and extent of their interactions.

Organizational theorist Karl Weick recognized the value of Glassman's work for organizational theory and, in 1975, applied it for the analysis of educational institutions.<sup>7</sup> On the basis of his analysis, he argues that "the concept of loose coupling incorporates a surprising number of disparate observations about organizations, suggests novel functions, creates stubborn problems for methodologies, and generates intriguing questions for scholars."<sup>8</sup> Weick believes that when loose coupling is considered in an educational setting, fifteen "situations" come to mind.

1. Slack times—times when there is an excessive amount of resources relative to demands;
2. Occasions when any one of several means will produce the same end;
3. Richly connected networks in which influence is slow to spread and/or is weak while spreading;
4. A relative lack of coordination, slow coordination, or coordination that is dampened as it moves through a system;
5. A relative absence of regulations;
6. Planned unresponsiveness;
7. Actual causal independence;
8. Poor observational capabilities on the part of a viewer;
9. Infrequent inspection of activities within the system;
10. Decentralization;
11. Delegation of discretion;
12. The absence of linkages that should be present based on some theory;
13. The observation that an organization's structure is not coterminous with its activity;
14. Those occasions when no matter what you do things always come out the same—for instance, despite all kinds of changes in curriculum, materials, groupings, and so forth, the outcomes in an educational situation remain the same; and
15. Curricula or courses in educational organizations for which there are few prerequisites—the longer the string of prerequisites, the tighter the coupling.<sup>9</sup>

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Additionally, Weick contends there are seven advantages to loosely coupled systems.

Table 1: Advantages to Loosely Coupled Systems

Function	Loosely Coupled System	Tightly Coupled System
<b>Environmental Changes</b>	Lower probability that organization will have to respond to each little change	Higher probability that organization will have to respond to each little change
<b>Sensing Mechanism</b>	Know their environments better through independent sensing elements	Know their environments less through independent sensing elements
<b>Adaptation</b>	Localized adaptation	Standardization
<b>Solutions</b>	Greater number of mutations and novel solutions	Fewer number of mutations and novel solutions
<b>Spread of Unit Failure</b>	Breakdown is sealed off and does not affect other portions of the organization. However, break-down is more difficult to repair	Breakdown is not sealed off and will affect other portions of the organization. However, with stronger influences, the repair is less difficult to achieve
<b>Self-determination</b>	More room available for discretion	Less room available for discretion
<b>Cost-effectiveness</b>	Relatively inexpensive to run	Relatively expensive to run

Given the work of Glassman and Weick, I propose the following spectrum to describe the relationships between schools and their denominations:



The spectrum allows us to locate the intensity of the coupling for individual schools and their denominations, and even their specific interactions (e.g., funding patterns). It also facilitates comparison between different schools. I assume that theological schools are neither exclusively tightly coupled nor uncoupled from their denominations.

Table 2 presents five areas of theological education of import to this spectrum: (1) faculty composition, (2) curriculum creation and modifications, (3) institution's role in the ordination process and student body make-up, (4) regional concerns and the institution's response, and (5) an institutional purpose.

Table 2: Five Areas in Theological Education and a Coupling Spectrum

	<b>Tightly Coupled</b>	<b>Loosely Coupled</b>	<b>Uncoupled</b>
<b>Faculty composition</b>	100 percent of faculty membership composed of persons from the denomination	A simple majority of faculty membership within particular denomination but less than 100 percent	No denomination represented as a majority
<b>Curriculum creation and modifications</b>	The denomination creates and modifies the curriculum uniformly for all of its seminaries.	The institution creates and modifies its curriculum in consultation with its denomination.	The institution solely creates and modifies its curriculum.
<b>Ordination process and student body make-up</b>	The denomination sends a student to one of its seminaries and annually decides if he or she shall continue upon recommendations given by faculty members.	A student chooses which seminary to attend (usually within his or her denomination but not necessarily) and earns an academic degree. The denomination attends to the ordination process with limited formal and informal consultations with the seminary.	The institution is solely a degree granting one and leaves all ordination issues to the student and his or her denomination.
<b>Regional churches' concerns and institution's response</b>	The school has no formal relation to regional churches' concerns beyond what the denomination deems as important.	Sensitive to regional churches' concerns and attempts to meet those concerns through advising councils and informal contacts, especially when those needs match the denomination's concerns	Highly responsive and aware of congregations located near the school and attempts to meet those needs through formal relationships
<b>Institutional purpose</b>	The institution's sole mission is centered on the formation of pastors for its denomination's churches.	The institution has a dual focus on formation of pastors and the dissemination of information.	The institution's sole mission is centered on the dissemination of information similar to any other graduate school.

### **Heuristic metaphor: The thread of sound along which to return**

Aspects of a loosely coupled system may be represented metaphorically by the following story.<sup>10</sup> As a child born blind, Robert Russell remembers believing that the birds outside his window were angels, angels that he longed to capture and hold for just a moment. Throughout his life, he struggled with his blindness and desired more freedom of movement. He knew he could go only so far before he would become disoriented and lost. Although blindness limited Russell in many ways, an amazing exception came later in his life—fishing. Fishing was, of course, more dangerous than any walk. Still, his quest for freedom motivated him to buy a cottage on the St. Lawrence River in Canada. It was there that he came up with an innovative way to be able to fish safely. He writes:

So that I can go out by myself whenever I please, I have run a wire down to the end of the dock, where I have mounted a large electric bell. Before I go down to the dock, I plug the line into an outlet in the house. A timing device permits the bell to ring only once every thirty seconds. If I row too far upwind to be able to hear the bell, I can still fish without anxiety because I can always drift downwind, and then I am again in touch with my base. And a man needs a base to quest from, and he needs the sense that, however far he has strayed, return is still possible. Confidence that we have such a base is all that gives us the courage to reach past the edges of the familiar. It may be what he knows, what he believes, the table round, or Heaven itself. The river lies before me, a constant invitation, a constant challenge, and my bell is the thread of sound along which I return. To a quiet base.<sup>11</sup>

The bell rings every thirty seconds to position Russell relative to the dock, his quiet base. This ringing tether allows Russell a high degree of freedom on the river while regularly tying to his base. Russell's ingenuity provides a heuristic metaphor for the theory of loose coupling in theological education. He is able to venture forth because of the looseness of the tether *and* the tether's regularity. Without the ringing bell, Russell would not have the freedom to venture out onto the river and return home safely. And a more rigid tether (e.g., tied off at the dock or attached to a boom), would not allow the freedom of movement Russell needed to fish.

As with any metaphor, however, this one also has limitations. Loosely coupled systems theory and the relationship between seminaries and denominations are more dynamic than Russell's story can describe. Guided by the metaphor, for instance, we might liken the seminary to the boat and its denomination to the dock. While such an interpretation is accurate in particular situations, it certainly is not exclusively the case. The positions, (e.g., dock or boat), of a denomination and of its seminaries are more dynamic.

The metaphor allows for a more dynamic portrait of the relationship between a seminary and a denomination when the position of the boat and dock are understood as interchangeable. For instance, a denomination that is courageously paddling out into unknown waters sometimes finds itself having wandered too far afield. In this case, a seminary can function as the bell ringer that helps the denomination to return to its base. If the boat is understood as sometimes occupied by the seminary and other times by the denomination, then a dynamic dance begins with the only constant, so to speak, being the sound of the ringing bell tethering the two together.

### **A case study: Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary**

On May 3, 1900, the Synod of Texas adopted the resolution to create Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (APTS) and, on October 1, 1902, the seminary's doors were opened to six students and two professors.<sup>12</sup> With the exception of a brief closing during World War I because of a lack of students, APTS has grown and thrived. The seminary currently enrolls more than 300 students in three degree programs: Master of Arts in Theological Studies, Master of Divinity, and Doctor of Ministry.

A study of the relationship between APTS and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) finds at least ten of Weick's fifteen situations present and concludes that an "overwhelming presence of a loosely coupled system" is operative.<sup>13</sup> Table 3 (pages 124–125) summarizes examples of each of these ten situations at APTS.

The evidence that the relationship between APTS and the PCUSA is loosely coupled prompts a next question: In what ways are the seminary and the denomination tethered? A study conducted in 1999 identified nine such tethers: (1) Congregational, (2) Faculty, (3) Financial, (4) Governing Body, (5) Minority Group, (6) Presidential, (7) Student and Alumni/ae, (8) Trustees, and (9) Values.<sup>14</sup> These nine tethers often overlap and are not discrete. Also, these tethers are contextually based and, therefore, their importance will wax and wane depending on the current dynamics within both the seminary and the denomination. The following is a brief overview of how they tether APTS and the PCUSA together.

#### ***Congregational tether***

The tether between APTS and local congregations is distinguished in two primary ways: (1) in the seminary's recruitment and equipping of the church's leadership and (2) in the congregations' funding of theological education. These two connections demonstrate the reciprocity necessary for educating pastors for the church. First, when a seminary is attentive to God's mission in local congregations, it better understands the enduring and changing needs of the church. Likewise, when local congregations are actively connected with a seminary, they remember the tradition from which they came and can participate in what the denomination is becoming.

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Table 3: Weick's Loose Coupling Situations and Examples at APTS

<b>Weick's Loose Coupling Situation</b>	<b>Example of the Situation at APTS</b>
<b>Richly connected networks in which influence is slow to spread and/or is weak while spreading (Weick situation #3)</b>	Ordination exams are typically given four weeks into the fall semester. Over a number of years, faculty have consistently asked the denomination that this be changed to coincide better with the beginning of the semester so as not to interrupt the flow of senior students' course work. These petitions have yet to be acted on by the denomination.
<b>A relative lack of coordination, slow coordination, or coordination that is dampened as it moves through a system (Weick situation #4)</b>	The current desire of the church to have more instruction in spirituality at the seminaries has been dampened by the concerns of what is taught, who teaches it, and what are the intended outcomes of such a program.
<b>A relative absence of regulations (Weick situation #5)</b>	<p>According to the 1986 report, the seminaries have only five explicit regulations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. They shall report to the General Assembly through the Committee on Theological Education.</li> <li>2. Presidents and trustees elected shall be presented to the General Assembly for approval, yet the General Assembly cannot disapprove.</li> <li>3. Faculty members shall be elected by the governing boards of the respective institutions.</li> <li>4. Changes in charters shall be reported to the General Assembly.</li> <li>5. Relationships with other governing bodies may include provisions for funding from these governing bodies.</li> </ol> <p>All the remaining organizational decisions, funding avenues, and curriculum structures are left to the seminary's own charter, board, faculty, and administration.</p>

A second way congregations are tethered to the seminaries is through their financial support of theological education. "The tethering, of course, is through the contributions of both congregations and individual Presbyterians on which theological schools are all dependent."<sup>15</sup>

***Faculty tether***

At APTS, the members of the faculty function as one of the strongest tethers between the seminary and the PCUSA. They are so by virtue of their (1) participation in their respective guilds, (2) preparation of the students who are the future leaders of the church, (3) involvement in denominational governing bodies (in APTS's case, presbyteries<sup>16</sup>), and (4) proportion of faculty members who are Presbyterian.

***Guilds.*** At times, faculty members are criticized for paying more attention to their academic guilds (like the American Academy of Religion) than to the church. To this, Jack Stotts, former APTS president, commented:

Table 3 continued.

<b>Weick's Loose Coupling Situation</b>	<b>Example of the Situation at APTS</b>
<b>Actual causal independence (Weick situation #7)</b>	The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Part II, Book of Order (G-1.0200) states that the great ends of the church are "the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world." This mission statement of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is considerably broader than that of the seminary and points to the actual causal independence. In the strictest sense, a Presbyterian seminary is an educational institution that awards academic degrees and does not intend to function as a local congregation (even though many of the seminary's activities are similar, e.g., worship).
<b>Poor observational capabilities on the part of a viewer (Weick situation #8)</b>	The different minority groups, like the Presbyterian Coalition, have poor observational capabilities with respect to the day-to-day operations of the seminaries. The example of the Presbyterian Coalition's assertion that the faculty members spend more time with their academic guilds than in the church can only be explained by the Coalition's lack of knowledge of at least the faculty at APTS.
<b>Infrequent inspection of activities within the system (Weick situation #9)</b>	The strongest way in which the church "inspects" the outcome of the seminaries is through the ordination exams given to Presbyterian seniors. These examinations are given twice a year only for senior Presbyterian students.
<b>Decentralization (Weick situation #10)</b>	Of APTS's operating budget, two-thirds is supported by its own endowment while less than 4 percent comes through the Theological Education Fund.
<b>Delegation of discretion (Weick situation #11)</b>	The board of trustees has full discretion over the seminary's expenditures and oversight of its personnel.
<b>The observation that the organization's structure is not coterminous with its activity (Weick situation #13)</b>	One-third of the student body is composed of students who are not Presbyterian, yet they participate in the seminary's mission which is to be the custodian of the Presbyterian tradition.
<b>Fewer prerequisites (Weick situation #15)</b>	The opening up on the seminary's part for non-Presbyterians to be faculty members and board of trustee members represents a reduction of prerequisites. This is additionally seen in the relaxation of ecclesiastical sponsorship for incoming students.

To pay attention to the guilds is to pay attention to the mission of the church. What professors are doing is being intellectually honest and accountable to their peers. But I think if you looked at that question and tried to answer it empirically, the amount



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of time spent with the church is far more than with the guilds. And you don't have a homiletic professor going out preaching here and there and doing Sunday school classes, for the financial rewards, because they are not very great. So there is a false dichotomy. Second, it's a mistake in judgment. The faculty are in this case, in this place at least—and I think in most Presbyterian seminaries—deeply engaged in the work and ministry of the church, in the mission of the church.<sup>17</sup>

**Future leadership.** Faculty members are at the heart of training leaders for the church. When thinking about this work, Stotts recalled what notable church historian Bob Lynn has said.

Bob Lynn says that the seminaries are writing the history of the church twenty years from now. By that he means they have developed leaders who are in your seminaries now and who will soon be in your seminaries, and they will be the leaders for the denomination twenty years after they graduate. The sense is that the leadership function is the one that is going to contribute to the well-being of the church down through the years.<sup>18</sup>

In this way, professors' current work tethers the seminary and the denomination today and into the future.

**Governing bodies' participation.** A third way in which APTS faculty tether the seminary and the PCUSA is through their membership in the presbyteries. Every Presbyterian faculty member of APTS belongs to one of the presbyteries of the Synod of the Sun, which incorporates eleven presbyteries and 959 local congregations in Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas. As an active member of a presbytery, the professor engages in the work of the presbytery, which "falls into three general categories: that relating to congregations; that relating to ministers of the Word, inquirers, and candidates; and that relating to the synod and the General Assembly."<sup>19</sup>

As is the case with many of the nine tethers, the faculty tether is bi-directional. In other words, professors not only support and serve the church, but, in turn, the PCUSA supports and serves them. Consequently, professors should have, and do have at APTS, a sincere affection for the church; they are not disconnected from or cynical about it.

**Proportion of Presbyterian faculty members.** A fourth way this tether manifests itself at APTS is in the proportion of faculty members required to be Presbyterian, which keeps (in part) the seminary grounded to its tradition. A tension exists here, though, insofar as APTS aims to keep the proportion of PCUSA faculty members at, or above, seventy-five percent but not at one hundred percent.

You want to be an institution that is related to your tradition, which is feeding your tradition, but you don't want to be too



narrow, too parochial. You don't guarantee anything by having two-thirds or three-quarters of the faculty Presbyterian. It gives you perhaps a focus and direction.<sup>20</sup>

### *Financial tether*

Historically, the financial and governance tethers have been the two strongest connectors between APTS and the PCUSA. In its early years, the seminary was solely sustained through the financial support of the regional synods of Texas, which founded the seminary in 1902; Arkansas, which joined in the support in 1905; Oklahoma, in 1908; and Louisiana, in 1929.<sup>21</sup> While financial contributions from the whole church (including the General Assembly, synods, presbyteries, local congregations, individuals, and alumni/ae) continue to strongly support the seminary today, the percentage of money supporting the annual operational budget has significantly decreased. "In 1968 the governing bodies supporting the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. theological schools provided 24.8 percent of their budgets. In 1984 they provided 8.29 percent."<sup>22</sup> In 1996, the General Assembly provided just 3.9 percent of APTS's annual budget. For the fiscal year ending in June 2004, the General Assembly provided 2.4 percent of the seminary's total budgetary income. While the money from formal denominational lines has decreased, the tether remains an important one.

### *Governing body tether*

Two examples of how this tether functions formally and informally at APTS are the ordination process and the work of the Committee on Theological Education. In the PCUSA, the presbytery is responsible for the ordination of ministers of Word and Sacrament. "Ordination for the office of minister of the Word and Sacrament is an act of the whole church carried out by the presbytery."<sup>23</sup> The presbytery certifies that the candidate is qualified by several requirements including a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary. This degree requirement is the single most important way that APTS officially participates in the ordination process. There are, however, informal ways that APTS participates in this process that are difficult to gauge and regulate. One of these ways is by informal recommendations.

There is a continuing debate about the seminary's participation, back and forth with [the presbytery], for example: "Why didn't you tell us that this person was making C minuses?" Well, we won't tell them because, for one thing, it's against the law to tell them. It's a privacy right, and we cannot do it without permission of the student. . . . That is a continual source of tension. . . . There is some attempt to work together on these matters, but the formal processes are very limited, while the informal processes are wide open. "What do you think your graduate of two years ago will do here?" asks the chair of the Committee on Ministry. "What about this person coming out of the seminary? Is she or he prepared to do ministry?" Those are informal networks that operate.<sup>24</sup>

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Another way a denominational governing body tethers APTS and the PCUSA together is through the Committee on Theological Education (which is comprised of the presidents of all PCUSA seminaries and an equal number of at-large members). The purpose of this committee is:

- ◆ To further the cause of theological education in the church;
- ◆ To provide a vehicle through which the individual theological schools can coordinate their activities and report to the church;
- ◆ To provide for official communication from the church to the schools;
- ◆ To preserve the freedom of the schools for the benefit of the church;
- ◆ To assure visible representation of theological education at high levels of the church's organization.<sup>25</sup>

Given this list of purposes, the Committee on Theological Education operates as a more formal connection between the seminaries and the church than the process of ordination does, with the committee's primary responsibility being acting as the intermediary between seminaries and the General Assembly. Ellis Nelson remarked that they worked hard to set up this tether in a more loosely coupled fashion.

I was very careful (not that we had any cases) that the Assembly not have any right to command the seminaries. It's probably a good thing now, since we have more severe divisions and caucuses, over one thing or another, in the Assembly. From the standpoint of institutional integrity and autonomy, and just sheer ease of administration, we moved away from the fear that there is somebody out there attacking you—that may be more important than anything we did. There may be other factors, but the main thing was the relationship of the seminaries, as institutions, to the Assembly, and that's done through the Committee on Theological Education.<sup>26</sup>

#### ***Minority group tether***

The minority group tether comprises distinct groups in the church that are not local congregations or a governing church body. These minority groups—minority in the sense of their numerical size—are formed for a variety of reasons and purposes. They tether the seminary and the church together in important ways by their concern for the church and the role theological education plays in it. Note that members of these groups can be students, faculty members, alumni/ae, board members, or even the president and, thus, this tether can overlap with other tethers listed.

Minority groups take avenues both concrete and nebulous to communicate their perspectives to seminaries. Some groups publish position papers.<sup>27</sup> Other groups convey their perspectives through much less explicit means. Currently in the PCUSA, there is increased interest in more education about *spirituality*. Where and how this interest started cannot be traced but it is evident and felt by the seminary:

The church can intimidate Presbyterian seminaries without making a conscious effort to do so. So that when the church, in its congregational form, becomes very interested in the whole spirituality question—a question that has not been dealt with adequately by the seminaries, so some would say and maybe it has or maybe it hasn't—that can become such a force in the culture of the church. It becomes intimidating to the schools, driving them to a defensiveness about what they are doing and what they are not doing. It drives them often to change. I don't use that intimidation or defensiveness negatively. I'm trying to be descriptive of what happens. So a big wave of influence around spirituality, just to use that example again, comes flowing over the campus. It's not something you can ignore. Nobody may say to you, "You ought to be dealing with spirituality," but it's being dealt with everywhere.<sup>28</sup>

Minority groups tether APTS and the PCUSA by providing information about what the seminary is and is not accomplishing and by what it ought and ought not to be doing. These various pieces of information, whether they are accepted and incorporated or not, are valuable because of the conversations they create.

#### *Presidential tether*

No other individual at APTS plays as crucial a role in tethering the seminary and the PCUSA as the president. The president is the face by which the seminary is known, from local congregations all the way to the General Assembly. The identity of the seminary and its president are often conflated. Thus, the president often gives his or her school personality, interests, statesmanship, and the ability to raise money.

Additionally, the president is the one who is best able to fill in the leadership gaps that exist in the denomination by offering the gifts and talents of the seminary. Consequently, the president's presence out in the church can increase or decrease the strength of the coupling.

#### *Student and alumnae tether*

When asked, "Do Presbyterian seminaries have a clientele or are they the only game in town," Stotts replied:

It is both. Certainly you don't have to attend a Presbyterian seminary to receive a theological education or to be ordained by a presbytery. All you have to do is look at the school's enrollment, like here with the number of Methodist students. It is a much more open system in terms of clientele. So what was historically a clientele would now be clienteles; we are "multiclientele." Without the Methodist students here we wouldn't be able to support the number of faculty we have, for example. So it's a matter of numbers. But more important is that it reflects again the shift toward ecumenicity.<sup>29</sup>

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The expansion from one primary clientele to additional clienteles marks the seminary's movement toward becoming a loosely coupled system. For instance, earlier this century when the seminary was tightly tethered to the Synod of the Sun, the students at the school were exclusively Presbyterians from the Southwest region.

Being in the Southwest, if one of the presbyteries in these four states had a candidate for the ministry, the student really had to make a strong case to go somewhere else. It was just assumed. And if you came here, at least when I came, there was no tuition. The church created this seminary to train ministers. Now, that has changed because we have so many other denominations represented. There was no one here but Presbyterians earlier. For instance, today I ate lunch with a student who is the daughter of one of our trustees. She didn't just say, "I'm going to Austin Seminary." She came up here and talked to me, and she wanted me to go over the list of Presbyterian schools and discuss whether she should come here or go somewhere else. She is a graduate of Yale University, and she wanted to know how this school rates. Not only is she the daughter of a trustee, she's the granddaughter of a person who gave one our buildings. So, there's a strong connection to the school. But she wanted to know what else is out there. I think the day of just going to Austin because you are in this area is over.<sup>30</sup>

So what was once a tightly coupled system with the ecclesiastical endorsement accompanying a student's admissions application is now a loosely coupled system with no requirement of ecclesiastical endorsement.

Once the coupling began to loosen, Presbyterian seminaries began admitting students from other traditions that had the academic background to complete the degree program. Ecumenically, this shift tethered APTS to other denominations. For instance, APTS is much more attentive to the United Methodist Church and its policies for MDiv education because a significant number of UMC students attend the seminary.

Once students decide to attend APTS, they not only bring their personal connections from the churches they attended before school, but they also tether the seminary to local congregations through internships and the Supervised Practice of Ministry program. All MDiv students are required to participate in local congregations as interns. These internships tether the seminary to the church through joint educational activities. For example, pastors of the participating churches take part in educational activities at the seminary to prepare them to mentor their interns. Additionally, the ongoing work of the seminary is seen whenever the seminarian teaches, preaches, prays, participates in committee work, provides pastoral care, or conducts any other ministerial activities.

The second part of the student and alumni/ae tether is the graduates from the seminary. The alumni/ae tether the seminary to the church through their

participation in continuing education events sponsored at the seminary and through their financial contributions.

### *Trustee tether*

The movement toward a loosely coupled system may also be traced in the evolution of the boards of trustees at the Presbyterian seminaries. At first, the denominational governing bodies functioned as the governing board of many seminaries; even when schools began having their own independent boards, the denomination elected their members. In the case of APTS today, its board is truly independent, as Stotts cited.

We said, "Now wait a minute, we are now a different institution and a different church. So, how do we signal that?" Well, one way is that governance follows funding as well as funding following governance. And so is it appropriate anymore to have your trustees elected by the synod? And the answer to that is no. So we moved toward this parallel with other church-related institutions. We moved toward an autonomous board, rather than having a board that was elected by a church governing body. . . . This opened up the trustees so that we now talk about people who are outside the synod and people who are not part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) serving on the board.<sup>31</sup>

There is an important requirement, though, for all board members:

Board of trustee members are all required to pledge allegiance to the flag of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), whether they are United Church of Christ or Church of the Brethren or Presbyterian. They don't have to agree with it all, but they will have to agree to support the Presbyterian Church's mission.<sup>32</sup>

The way in which individual board members tether the church and the seminary together is similar to the ways in which many of the other tethers previously discussed operate. Board members are present in both arenas, the seminary and local congregations, where many of them are also ordained as elders, deacons, and ministers of Word and Sacrament. They are also present in the seminary as trustees who receive a large amount of information about the seminary to help them make informed discussions about the life and future of the school. This dual presence provides yet another tether connecting the seminary and the church.

### *Values tether*

The values tether represents those connections that focus on tradition, covenant, and reputation. Each one of these connections is vital to the existence of the relationship between the seminary and the church. Unlike the previous

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tethers, however, the values tether addresses areas that are difficult to define and describe precisely. By tradition, I refer to those ways in which a school's history, space configurations, memory, practices, physical location, and ethos embody the denomination it serves. By covenant, I point to the regular renewal of promise to serve the denomination. Stotts offered this example of the covenant aspect:

We ask the chairs of the Committees on Preparation for Ministry of the region, "What can we do better to help you?" They say why don't you do this, why don't you do that. Why don't you give more attention to this and get rid of that. This is not an action by a legislative body, but it is part of the covenanting relationship that goes on between the school and the governing bodies. It is both a formal and an informal network of relationships and the ongoing tension between the academic and the ecclesiastical.<sup>33</sup>

These presbytery committees and the seminary work collaboratively because of the covenant they have to best prepare women and men for ministry. Moreover, this covenant is strong enough to allow for candid discussion about any shortcomings in the process for which the other is responsible. Finally, by reputation, I mean the way the seminary is perceived within the denomination.

Indirectly, but very importantly, is the reputation of the school. Generally speaking, that would be the general reputation of the school as a school that's in tune with the Presbyterian Church. This reputation provides a foundation on which a school can do recruiting.<sup>34</sup>

The relationship between APTS and the PCUSA is a complex one that continues to change and grow. The nine tethers briefly discussed here are not exhaustive but illustrative of how the relationship functions as a loosely coupled system.

### **Implications and questions**

Several issues and questions emerge from this analysis. This concluding section lists some of these implications and questions with the intent of inviting further conversation.

Understanding the particular context of a school is instrumental for analyzing the relationship between it and its denomination, especially when viewing the relationship through the loosely coupled systems theory. Consequently, this analysis enables thick description and leaders to make sense of the particular school's relationship yet limits generalizations. As Weick noted, loosely coupled systems theory "creates stubborn problems for methodologies"<sup>35</sup> because of the complexities of the context (so creating a way to *measure* the coupling intensity is not viable). Therefore, schools that want to investigate the ways in which they are coupled with their denominations can begin by

asking questions about each of the tethers explored in this paper. The following list of questions provides examples of such an inquiry.

*Questions.* In what ways do local congregations intersect with the work of the seminary? What is the percentage of faculty members who are from the representative denomination? How much of the school's operating budget is formally funded by the denomination? In what ways do the denomination's governing bodies advise or instruct the seminary concerning faculty and presidential appointments, curricula, and admissions? What are the avenues for the seminary to hear the voices of minority groups and how responsive is the seminary? How are board members elected and can they be members of another denomination than the one that has traditionally sponsored the school?

Weick strongly suggests there are at least seven advantages to loosely coupled systems in the educational environment, as summarized in Table 1. He argues that in the K–12 educational setting the advantages of a loosely coupled system outweigh the disadvantages of a tightly coupled system.

*Question.* Do Weick's identified advantages, though, translate to the relationship between a theological institution and its denomination?

Inherent in a relationship that is loosely coupled is a tension between the denomination's interests and the seminary's well being. At times, these two concerns diverge and at other times they converge. The danger for the relationship, however, is not divergence but neglect. A loosely coupled relationship is one that is active not passive. Both the denomination and the seminary must be vigilant about attending to the voices of the other or the relationship either becomes more authoritarian (by either party) or weakened to the point of detachment.

*Question.* Given the necessity of attentiveness, in what ways can a denomination and its seminaries strengthen and use the existing tethers without becoming authoritarian?

The movement of the relationship between APTS and the PCUSA has moved from a tighter coupling to a looser one. However, the relationship can move in the other direction, toward a tighter coupling, as well. For instance, when a denomination takes over a seminary (as some put it), the coupling becomes tighter.

*Question.* Is theological education in the United States and Canada moving toward a loose-couplings model in general or are the relationships between seminaries and denominations simply oscillating in the intensity of their couplings?



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Finally, the metaphor taken from Russell's life suggests how dynamic a loosely coupled relationship is. If we take a bird's eye view of the river, we would see various docks along the shore, boats moored, and boats moving out on the water. If we watch for a while, we see some boats that rarely leave the dock, some traveling back and forth from their docks, and others that constantly work on the river rarely returning to a dock. Another observation from the bird's eye view is that boats rarely (if ever) attend to a dock other than its home base. For instance, when the Pentecostal bell rings, the Presbyterian boats do not change course.

**Question.** Are we missing part of God's mission when we do not heed the ringing of bells that are not our own? If so, how can we tune our ears to those bells that we have long been unattentive to?

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ENDNOTES

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14. Ibid., 127, 148-210.



15. Jack Stotts, interviewed by David Forney, February 23, 1999.
16. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is governed by four representative bodies composed of presbyters, both elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. These governing bodies are the session (for each local congregation), the presbytery (for a number of local congregations in a region), synod (for a number of presbyteries in a region), and the General Assembly for the whole denomination. "Governing bodies of the church are distinct from the government of the state and have no civil jurisdiction or power to impose civil penalties. They have only ecclesiastical jurisdiction for the purpose of serving Jesus Christ and declaring and obeying his will in relation to truth and service, order and discipline" *The Constitution of The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II: Book of Order, 2003–2004* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly), G-9.0102 (a).
17. Ibid.
18. Jack Stotts, interviewed by David Forney, February 23, 1999.
19. Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker, *Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990): 107.
20. Jack Stotts, interviewed by David Forney, February 23, 1999.
21. Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, *2004–2006 Catalogue* 120, no. 1, (Austin, TX: 2004): 4–5.
22. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Special Committee on Theological Institutions: A Report Approved by the 198th General Assembly* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 1986), 24.083.
23. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II: Book of Order* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 2004), G-14.0401.
24. Jack Stotts, interviewed by David Forney, March 11, 1999.
25. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Special Committee on Theological Institutions: A Report Approved by the 198th General Assembly* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 1986), 24.029–24.035.
26. C. Ellis Nelson, interview by David Forney, February 10, 1999.
27. Presbyterian Coalition. (1998). Declaration and strategy paper of the Presbyterian Coalition. (Available from the Presbyterian Coalition, PO Box 22227, Louisville, KY 40252; [www.presbycoalition.org](http://www.presbycoalition.org))
28. Jack Stotts, interviewed by David Forney, March 11, 1999.
29. Jack Stotts, interviewed by David Forney, February 23, 1999.
30. C. Ellis Nelson, interviewed by David Forney, February 10, 1999.
31. Jack Stotts, interviewed by David Forney, February 23, 1999.
32. Ibid.
33. Jack Stotts, interviewed by David Forney, March 11, 1999.
34. C. Ellis Nelson, interviewed by David Forney, February 10, 1999.
35. Weick, "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," 1.



# Is Preaching Taught or Caught? How Practitioners Learn

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*ABSTRACT: In recent interviews, thirty-two preaching ministers (as part of broader interviews with more than 260 lay people who regularly listen to sermons) indicated their most important experiences of learning to preach were listening to other preachers. Most of these preachers perceived that seminary instruction in preaching (and other forms of ministerial preparation) provided them with tools to refine and broaden approaches to preaching that they have heard from others. This observation resulted in several implications for the teaching of preaching, such as naming and reflecting on the preaching they have heard and helping them discover other approaches that may supplement or supplant their embedded approaches.*

In 2001–2002, Lilly Endowment funded a study conducted by Christian Theological Seminary that interviewed 263 lay people who regularly listen to sermons in twenty-eight protestant Midwestern congregations.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the interviews was to determine qualities of preaching that engage and disengage the listeners.<sup>2</sup> In addition to talking with lay people, the study team also interviewed the preachers of those congregations.<sup>3</sup>

A question asked in the clergy interviews pertained to the work of this Academy,<sup>4</sup> “How did you learn to preach?” This paper explores how the ministers interviewed for the study answered this question.<sup>5</sup> I first indicate leading motifs in responses to the question (as these appear in the transcripts of the interviews), then explore the roles attributed to seminary instruction and mentors as well as feedback from colleagues and parishioners, and conclude with possible implications for helping students and ministers learn to preach or strengthen their preaching. I try to remain as close as possible to the words of the interviewees themselves.<sup>6</sup>

As a teacher of preaching in a graduate theological school, I expected these pastors to speak in rapturous tones of their work in seminary. However, most ministers in this group said they caught a vision for how to preach primarily by listening to other preachers and that they developed as preachers by preaching in congregations and reflecting on their preaching. Seminary classes, denominationally sponsored learning events, and mentors helped them pick up analytical tools. Feedback from other pastors and from lay people was often critical. A number of respondents intertwined several themes, such as a spouse in a clergy couple who said, “I think for me, probably the way I learned is by doing it week in and week out. It’s one of those things that I think you have to practice by being open to constructive criticism from other people, and from my spouse who is a pastor, and by listening to people who, I think, are really good preachers.”

### **Learning by listening: The role of good preaching**

When asked how they learned to preach, most interviewees first said that they did so by listening to other preachers.<sup>7</sup> From hearing other preachers, the interviewees said they caught a spirit of the importance and purpose of preaching and of how formative preachers put together sermons. After naming the preachers who were most formative for them, the ministers in the study explained that seminary or other forms of education or mentorship helped them refine their approaches to preaching. The subjects in the study described formative preachers as those to whom they gave particular attention for reasons that range from the preachers' topics coinciding with issues in the interviewees' lives to captivating sermons that prompted the interviewees to pay closer attention to the preaching.

We hear these themes in remarks in the interviews. One minister was asked, "Did anyone in particular teach you how to preach?" The minister replied, "No. No. But many preachers have influenced my preaching." Another concluded, "I learned to preach really just by watching my own pastor as I was growing up as a child." Another preacher who came into ministry as a second vocation said, "Listening to how the minister in my home church made points or connected with people—that was where a lot of my training and education came from." Yet one more confided that "listening to other preachers" was this person's mode of learning to preach. "It just seems to me that there was this long line of folks over time that I learned from. I don't remember anyone sitting me down and saying, 'Now you do this.'" After recalling regularly hearing several well-known preachers, a clergyperson said, "As I looked at what they were doing and how they were doing it, I guess I picked up things."

Another clergyperson whose parent was a minister remembers listening to the parent's sermons and to those of guest ministers.

I think that being exposed, growing up, to various preachers who came to our church for one reason or another taught me a good bit. I feel like I had a feel for what a preacher was supposed to do before I ever went to seminary. I think the seminary influences helped, but I had a feel just from being exposed to so many other preachers.

The interviewer continued, "Kind of in your blood." The interviewee responded. "Yes."

In a similar vein, another pastor grew up in a congregation served by a half-time preacher who frequently invited other ministers to preach. "I got to hear a lot of different preachers and variety of styles and a variety of topics . . . I just slowly picked it up. What are the different ways you can approach this preaching task?"

Still another minister shifted the theme toward hearing preachers after graduating from seminary.

I served as a student assistant in a congregation. That congregation had a woman pastor who was just a marvelous, marvelous preacher. I learned a lot from her. I went to another church and worked with another preacher, who was also a marvelous preacher. So you learn, I think, more by being in the life of a congregation and having good models to follow.

Others responded similarly.

The other persons whom I've learned from over the years have been persons whom I've encountered since seminary. In fact, I've probably learned to preach since leaving seminary. Seminary happened to lay a part of the foundation, but I didn't really learn to preach in seminary. In fact, in seminary I probably had more fear about preaching than I had freedom because at seminary it was an academic requirement. I was trying to reach a certain academic plateau and trying to pass. After being out of seminary and moving around to various meetings—that's where I think I really learned or continued to learn. I have to say, "continued to learn" because I still struggle with preaching.

This respondent cites several experiences of hearing other preachers in the postseminary years who have contributed to the respondent's approach to the pulpit. Another participant in the study underscored the same point. "I think probably the majority of learning to preach comes from watching others that you connect with and respect and that fit your style or your person and your character."

While many ministers in the sample group picked up their approaches to preaching earlier in life without being conscious of doing so, a few interviewees have been quite intentional in learning from other preachers. One way an interviewee learned was from listening to effective preachers.

When I was in school and a few years afterward, I would get tapes and even the records of people I thought were effective communicators, and I listened to them. There was a variety of them. I think by listening to effective communicators I learned more than I did studying in a classroom.

This interviewee substantiated a main theme we have found in foregoing remarks from other interviewees. "I think it was helpful for me, in a way, not to have had an effective communicator as my lifelong model growing up, because I've seen so many young preachers that were emulating somebody,

and I didn't have anybody to emulate." This void necessitated the interviewee developing a distinctive preaching voice.

The respondents reported the following as among the kinds of preachers who functioned as models: my father, my mother, the ministers of the church in which I grew up, the senior minister of the congregation in which the interviewee was an associate minister, a college chaplain, a "parent in the ministry," hearing seminary professors preach (including but not limited to preaching professors), well-known preachers, and television preachers. Several preachers in our group iterated that the Holy Spirit is operative in learning to preach. Only a handful of respondents mentioned that reading books had been influential in helping them become preachers.

### **Learning by instruction: The role of seminaries**

Most of the respondents indicated that their work in seminary did not so much introduce them to the preaching task as it gave them a deeper theological understanding of preaching, ways to understand what they wanted to do when they preach, broadened their awareness of ways to put sermons together, and provided analytical tools for thinking about preaching and preparing and embodying sermons.

The following quote sums up many of the facets of this theme that came to expression. "I would say the courses I took in preaching were more honing the skills, giving me some additional ideas, but I learned all the basic skills before I took a preaching course. Frankly, I've never had an Introduction to Preaching course."

One minister in the sample group recalled the table around which students sat for feedback. "The preacher sat there, and the professor sat there and said, 'About your sermon title—need I say more,' and then went on. I thought, 'Oh, geez.' That professor was really tough because that professor really wanted us to think through these things." This listener was grateful for the toughness. Another clergy person who earlier confirmed coming to the seminary with established ideas about preaching from having heard sermons since childhood said, "My seminary professors gave us an exegetical method and how to find your focus—your function and your focus."<sup>8</sup> These ideas echoed in another response, "For me, learning to preach started with listening to pastors throughout my years of growing up in the church. Then it evolved through seminary as far as getting the exact tools for preaching." These tools included skills for exegesis and public speaking. After citing "the pastor I grew up with" as the main source of learning to preach, an interviewee continued, "I had courses in homiletics, but they more or less aided in my development," along with courses in public speaking.

After an initial reservation about seminary instruction in preaching, another listener came to a similar conclusion.

I think I learned to preach by listening to other preachers. I don't remember seminary being very helpful except that seminary introduced me to so many new ideas, which I found very interesting that I worked to try to make sense of and make connection with what they might have to do with our life today.

A resonant description of the seminary's contribution came after the preacher mused over hearing a grandparent preach. "I hope that I internalized some of the things that my grandparent embodied living out a life as a pastor in a preaching role . . . certainly several preaching courses in seminary helped. Hearing differences between saying, 'Here are the three points I am going to talk about,' versus leading people to a surprise. For me it was really helpful."

Although it is helpful for the preaching professor to be a solid preacher, occasional interviewees reported beneficial learning experiences from teachers who are not accomplished in the pulpit. "Although the person who taught the preaching class, I did not think, was all that great of a preacher, I did learn a lot from that class that I had not picked up on my own." Another said of the seminary's teacher of preaching, "The seminary professor's preaching style was not that impressive to me, but the teaching style—helping us to learn about preaching—was challenging."

For some ministers classroom instruction in preaching was pivotal. One person who arrived at seminary with a fairly clear vision of what a sermon should do reported,

What I discovered in seminary was that I really didn't know how to preach. I guess, like many others who went to seminary, you make assumptions about being able to deliver the Word. What I discovered is that I really didn't know how to preach. I didn't know how to organize the ideas.

Instruction in preaching gave this pastor indispensable perspective on the nuts and bolts of "getting up a sermon."

### **Learning by mentoring: The role of denominational programs**

Preachers interviewed for the study who did not attend a typical graduate school of theology but who received their ministerial training from denominational programs (often for lay pastors) or from mentors make similar comments.

A pastor who came into ministry in midlife and who has been certified for the ministry through a denominational program reflected on the relationship between learning to preach by hearing other preachers and classroom education in preaching.

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I learned to preach by hearing others preach and also by living. I think sermons at this stage of my life are different from what they would have been if I were younger when I started this process. I did have some training—very limited actually—and it was primarily reading about what people are thinking about when they design a sermon as well as giving a sermon and having it critiqued. Primarily, though, the critiquing was on the delivery as opposed to the content.

The interviewer who heard this person preach reported that the sermon was theologically mature, exegetically informed, well crafted and illustrated, and related an important idea to the specific life of the congregation. Though short on formal training, this person is an effective preacher.

Witnessing to a similar process, one more homilist recounted as a young adult learning to preach by “observing the reverend” preaching. But, then, after becoming an associate minister, “I learned more in terms of the hands-on preaching when I had an opportunity to get into the pulpit. It was learning by doing.” Another person who was in business and went directly into preaching (without any formal training), revealed learning to preach by “being under a good preacher” in the years prior to assuming this person’s own pastorate.

A minister nearing retirement age who did not attend theological seminary remembered, “I learned preaching by attending seminars and workshops, and also I was taught under some of the older preachers of our conference.” Another pastor in the same denomination recollected taking preaching classes in divinity school that provided a lot of useful information but that extensive conversations with this person’s “parent in the ministry” were the integration point for this pastor’s understanding of the sermon.

### **Learning by feedback: Colleagues and parishioners as critics**

Several, though not a majority, of participants in the research reported that critical feedback had been (and often continues to be) important in helping them identify approaches to preaching that are more and less communicative. Indeed, some ministers in the project sample said that some of the most important things they have learned about preaching have come through feedback.

With regard to feedback from colleagues, half a dozen of the ministers in the study reported meeting regularly with clergy friends. While such groups most often help with sermon preparation, some provide feedback that the preachers take seriously. One minister had several sermons reviewed by another colleague who undertook the task in order to fulfill a requirement for a course in homiletical supervision. The one whose sermons were examined said appreciatively, “I’m open to that kind of peer criticism or peer review or whatever the word is.” Another preacher who went through a program of



supervision had to preach for the supervisory group and receive feedback said, "It was devastating at first because I thought, 'I'm doing this all wrong.' But that has helped me in so many ways with my preaching."

We heard resonance in a report from a group in which a half-dozen clergy met for several years. "Once a week we would each take our [recorded] sermons, and one of us would play it for the others. We would critique it, because the tape recorder doesn't lie."

With respect to feedback from parishioners, one preacher in the study meets from time to time with a member who is a speech teacher. The interviewee said, "The speech teacher focuses on how I communicate as that is the teacher's area. That's the teacher's key." Another minister who has served several congregations said,

There have been people in every congregation who have been willing to say, 'You have good things to say. Tell me more about this,' or 'Let more of yourself show through. Let more of your humor come through. Your words are good, very interesting, and thought provoking. Now get off the page a little. Talk to me like you're just talking to me' . . . It was always very supportive criticism. I think probably this congregation has challenged me the most because they've challenged me to say the things that I really believe . . . This is a place that really pushes me as a person of faith and that supports the kind of honesty and truth-telling about what it means to be a person of faith in this world.

Yet another clergyperson reported a specific instance in which a congregant's feedback provided a method for gathering other feedback. "I learned from that congregant that when people say to me, 'What a great sermon,' instead of saying, 'Thank you,' to say, 'What did you learn about?' So I've gotten lots of feedback. I ask for that." The same preacher recruits people to be in a feedback group that meets for four consecutive Sundays two or three times a year. "Immediately after worship, we go right in and sit down and I have a series of questions. 'What did you hear today? What helped you?' We talk about a half-hour or so."

Parishioners with sporadic attendance who were interviewed for the project were aware that congregations can help ministers develop as preachers, as we hear in the following remark from a parishioner who has listened to sermons for many years.

I think of one minister in particular who was really pathetic in preaching. This minister was not very deep in thinking, and the delivery was pathetic, and we had this minister maybe for about seven years. I guess we really taught that minister to preach, because by the time the minister left, the minister was doing pretty well.

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This parishioner did not discuss how the congregation provided feedback. Later the parishioner indicated being “too shy” to volunteer feedback. When invited, however, the parishioner would be quite willing to speak with the preacher.

When asked who taught another interviewee to preach, the interviewee responded that the congregation had done so. The interviewee recalled with appreciation several seminary courses in preaching that helped this pastor find a distinctive voice.

I left seminary and went to intern. My congregation was approximately a hundred—some under the age of eighteen and for most of them English was not their first language. I lived in an apartment building with many of them. I ate with them. Did everything with them for a year. I preached fairly regularly. I began to realize what a difference it was preaching to that group . . . I got feedback immediately. Most of them were not American citizens. Also, they’re not English speakers. So I had to adjust to that. I began to really get a sense of interaction.

The preacher’s next parish did not afford the advantage of living and eating with parishioners every day. Nevertheless, the preacher applied the principle learned in the first parish to adapt the sermon to the circumstances of the congregation.

I was surprised at the willingness of the pastors with whom we spoke to receive feedback. More than half of them said they welcomed it. No one expressed reluctance to receive critical evaluation.

### **Learning along the way: Miscellaneous tools**

Other motifs are also mentioned in the interviews. Several interviewees indicated that classes in public speaking gave them resources for analyzing the congregation (audience analysis), organizing the sermon, and especially embodiment.

Another said, “I was an adjunct member of a local university faculty, and I had to lecture to people for three hours after they had spent a whole day working. That was the greatest discipline and learning laboratory [for learning how to communicate in a public setting] I ever had in my life.” Still another listener reported learning about preaching from the venue of the college classroom but from the perspective of a student.

When I was in college, what struck me was that I could listen to a seventy-five minute lecture without losing my focus, my concentration, but I couldn’t do that with a sermon. Sermons never held my attention, usually. Except for very good speakers, they never held my attention. Five or ten minutes into the

sermon, my mind was wandering. But I could always focus on a lecture. So I started to learn from good professors, from their lectures, how they lecture, and tried to incorporate that into preaching as well. By the time I decided I was going to be a pastor, which was even before I went to seminary, I already had honed a lot of my oral communication skills.

Two ministers in the study group described themselves as largely self-taught in the sense that they gathered most of what they know about preaching from observation and reading with, according to what they remember, little input from others.

### **Implications for helping students and ministers learn to preach**

While the limitations of the sample of preachers in the study do not permit broad statements of implications for learning to preach, we identified six themes for further reflection.

First, it would help many students, whether in seminary or other modes of learning, to preach to name and describe the preaching they have heard and how those sermons play into their understanding and practice of preaching. Who are the preachers who have nurtured their nascent attitudes about preaching? How has hearing these preachers affected the students' perceptions of what it means to preach? Students should, then, reflect on the sources that fed their understanding of preaching to identify the degree to which they are theologically appropriate.

Second, because listening to other preachers is a key way that students and ministers develop their own approaches to preaching, it follows that providing opportunities to hear—and reflect on—preaching could be very important to many learners. The following might be an approximate order of priority of ways to accomplish this goal: visit congregations, watch videotapes, listen to audiotapes, and read sermons.

However, students do not always have adequate theological norms by which to gauge the degree of faithfulness of sermons that appeal to them. Students need to develop standards by which to discern whether a particular approach to preaching is theologically responsible, is intelligible, and fits the context for which the student is preparing to preach. Classes in preaching, then, cannot simply pass the hand of blessing over what students might want to do; they need to help learners identify criteria by which to evaluate their visions and practices of preaching.

Third, one of the key roles interviewees identified for seminary instruction in preaching (and other modes of learning) is to provide tools that assist them in deepening and broadening their awareness of the issues involved in preaching and the resources for addressing those issues. They also need to become familiar with other ways of preparing and preaching and to do so in a setting in which the question of theological adequacy is pressed at every moment.

Fourth, the importance of feedback, as described by the interviewees, suggests that students and ministers need frequent occasions for receiving disciplined and critical feedback. This perspective prompts the suggestion that in the early stages of course work in preaching, students need less attention to theory and more opportunities to preach and to receive responses to the sermons.

Fifth, several of these preachers called attention to the importance of preaching every week in a parish, especially in the early years of ministry, as a setting in which their approach to preaching came into focus and maturity. Seminaries and other loci of theological education need to develop approaches to continuing education that allow preachers to work with one another, with parishioners, and with teachers and authors in the field of preaching in order to bring the preachers' perceived strengths and weaknesses into dialogue with resources for helping them reinforce and build their strengths and for addressing weaknesses.

Sixth, at the risk of invoking the wrath of seminary instructors in the field of preaching, I extrapolate the following from the long-term and multifaceted nature of learning to preach: seminary students need not so much more courses in preaching as they need deeper knowledge of the Bible, Christian tradition, systematic theology, ethics, along with capacity for critical theological reflection in their particular contexts. Once in the parish, ministers are much more likely to pursue continuing education in preaching than in Bible, tradition, or theology. Insofar as academic disciplines are a useful structure for theological education, I think we should spend less time lobbying for more required courses in preaching and more time trying to get students into courses in the classical theological disciplines.

A proverb continues to circulate among ministers that preaching is not so much taught as it is caught. One of the ministers in the sample said, for instance, "I don't know if anybody really taught me. I don't know if that's something you can teach." Nevertheless, while most of the interviewees in this study revealed that they "caught" the spirit of preaching, they also benefit from instruction. Courses in preaching can help students recognize the importance of resources, reinforcement, reflection, and reconsideration.

### **A broader conversation: Scholars of preaching reflect on the study**

At the suggestion of the editorial board of this journal, I asked several scholars of preaching to read this article and reflect on it. Did the themes in the article seem true to their own observations? Did they think the respondents might have overlooked or downplayed some qualities of their seminary work (where applicable) in preaching? Did we researchers overlook something? The five scholars who responded were generally sympathetic to what the practitioners reported, although they contributed some nuanced observations and raised significant questions.

These members of the guild generally agree with the preachers that a significant amount of learning to preach takes place by listening to other

preachers. Scott Gibson of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary said, “The insight that the study emphasizes, that most ministers learn preaching when they’re ‘out there’ doing it and seeing it modeled, makes sense.” Sally Ann Brown who teaches at Princeton Theological Seminary commented further.

This study confirms what we preaching professors have known for years: students come into the preaching classroom often confident that they already know what preaching should sound like and what a good sermon should do. The sanctuary on Sunday morning, not the preaching classroom, is probably by far the more significant space of homiletical learning. Preachers—famous or obscure, able to average, some equipped with sophisticated theologies and theories of proclamation, but most not—are mentors and models of what preaching looks and sounds like when it “works.”

Lincoln Galloway of Claremont School of Theology agreed. “The researchers in this project have captured a very essential dimension of the way people learn to preach. Preachers, I believe, are strongly influenced by the preachers around them who minister to them over a period of time.”

Susan M. Smith of Saint Paul School of Theology wondered “if there isn’t a difference in the effect of seminary preaching classes upon those who are already engaged in preaching ministry versus those who won’t do it until they get their degrees [e.g., Episcopalians and Roman Catholics].” Smith continued, “I recognize the truth of your conclusions for my students [mostly United Methodists and Disciples of Christ], but I never preached ever until the preaching class that I took—and I hung on Fred Craddock’s every word [in the text book] on how to think about it and how to prepare.”

However some of these scholars also think that the respondents who went to seminary (or received other kinds of training) may not have articulated fully how their work in the classroom affected them, as does Terriel Byrd of Palm Beach Atlantic University. “While it is true, as suggested by respondents, that seminary provided the analytical, exegetical tools, and methods for preaching, I think respondents might be overlooking the creative and innovative approaches to preaching they learn as a result of having studied various forms, structures, and patterns of sermons.” Byrd supported this observation empirically. “The typical response I get from students after taking a preaching class is, ‘I’ll never listen to a sermon the same way again.’ Students develop a critical ear for sermonic moment. They listen more closely to what is said and how it is said.”

Sally Brown extrapolated from these remarks an agenda for the preaching classroom.

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I'm struck that most of the respondents seem to see the basic problems and challenges of preaching as *how-to* questions and not *why* and *what* questions. Maybe our job is to help them care as much about the *why* and *what* of preaching as the *how*. If future preachers are picking up clues about the how-to of preaching *outside* the classroom, maybe what should go on *inside* our classrooms is listening to sermons with a critical ear, asking questions like, "What assumptions are implicit in this sermon about *why* we preach?" "What hermeneutical assumptions are embedded in this sermon regarding the relationship of the divine Word, human word, biblical text, and cultural context?" Over the course of several sermons, the teacher could ask, "What seems to be 'gospel' for this preacher I'm hearing? Is that gospel adequate?"

My colleague, Dan Moseley of Christian Theological Seminary, goes further.

My observation is that seminary has subtle effects in shaping the life of the minister/preacher. We are formed by engaging people and concepts outside our familiar zone of security. We are not always aware of the way these engagements influence us. We become different *in the space between* the idea or person whom we study and the self who engages the study. The transformative effective of the encounter is seldom obvious. I think engagement with persons or concepts in the study of preaching shape the preacher in more ways than she or he is aware. Our preaching is as much affected by the internal processing of multiple encounters as it is by a particular person we may identify as important to us.

Moseley's observation reinforces the idea that preaching classes should help students become as conscious and critical as possible of the various factors that influence a student's particular approach to preaching.

Carolyn Ann Knight of Interdenominational Theological Center is concerned that learning to preach by watching and imitating other preachers can frustrate the development of the preacher's own voice. "While this study mostly reinforced suspicions that I have personally held for some time now about how ministers learn to preach, as a professor of preaching at what is considered the largest African-American graduate school of theological education in the world, I am frustrated by the not-so-subtle attempts of my students to imitate persons they have heard." Knight assigns a paper intended to encourage students to identify those "influential persons that influenced their preaching" and then to get the students to "move beyond imitation to innovation." Knight believes that "what we teach in the classroom must often counter what is 'caught' in the church and on television."

Susan Smith reinforced this observation. "I'm especially appreciative of the implication that suggests seminarians may not need more preaching courses but more courses in theology, Scripture, history, etc. That is my instinct also."

In a similar spirit, though with a slightly different focus, Scott Gibson remarked,

Allen's qualified statement, "In seminary, students need not so much more courses in preaching as they need deeper knowledge of the Bible, Christian tradition, systematic theology, ethics, along with capacity for theological reflection in particular contexts," appears to be correct, but there's more to seminary than that which one knows. It also includes what one does with what one knows. Sometimes seminary students aren't able to sort out all the components Allen mentioned and how they fit together in the fabric of one's ministry.

The preaching classroom would appear to be an ideal arena for such sorting for the act of preaching (and the teaching of preaching) because it brings together the various theological disciplines in a way that is unlike almost any other sector of theological education. Carolyn Ann Knight offered a vivid analogy.

When I first began taking golf lessons, my coach, who is a PGA professional, discouraged me from listening to and watching other golfers on the driving range. This is what the coach said. "Carolyn, while there are surely some excellent golfers on the driving range, everyone's game has faults. Their faults will become our faults."

Instruction in preaching seeks to help preachers discover and embody their own approaches.

These scholars also noted some weak points in the present study. Scott Gibson rightly noted, "A wider sampling would strengthen the study." Lincoln Galloway called attention to a more specific matter.

I think one aspect that was not sufficiently investigated or emphasized was the extent to which preachers are shaped or opened to being shaped by mentors who reflect the traditions of their own faith communities. These preaching exemplars are encountered in their own local church pulpits, their own denominational retreats, synods, conferences, and conventions. There are some traditions such as those found in the Black Church in the United States that may become normative for the community and can only be learned in the context of worship and preaching within the tradition.



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By way of future research, Terriel Byrd would like to see “a study evaluating students’ preaching before and after seminary training. Are there significant changes in the approach, preparation, and delivery?” Lincoln Galloway offered a suggestion along the same lines. “It would also have been helpful to have feedback from persons who had preached their first sermon in the context of a preaching class in seminary. Younger preachers with less experience in the pulpit may have given more attention to the experiences gained in seminary.” Susan Smith would like teachers of preaching and appropriate bodies in the church to “suggest structures for preaching feedback *post seminary*.”<sup>9</sup>

Smith pondered possibilities for theological education beyond the preaching classroom. “It seems to me that knowing—reflecting—on preaching as [an art of *poesis* as described by Aristotle] gives a wider lens not only on preaching per se but on the breadth of theological education.” She wondered whether theological education could make even more use of the educational principle of learning by doing. Such education would be like learning to play the piano. “It’s about practicing the finger moves and having a teacher or coach give feedback as to whether the fingers are indeed curved enough or the fingering is proper. Music history and theory are, however, essential for playing well. They enable the mind to know some things that can affect the embodied knowing of the fingers.” Such awareness “makes all the difference in composing music, in interpreting music, in making judgments in interpretation, in remembering what you’re playing, etc.” In such settings, “learning is all about doing it and getting feedback from the masters” as well as from colleagues and congregants.

Scott Gibson provided a helpful frame for the ending of this discussion when he wrote:

Teaching people how to preach is tough sledding. Listening to people who are learning how to preach can be tougher still. While this project is important, the importance lies in helping people to preach better—not that seminary is made to look good or that the congregation is praised, but that men and women and girls and boys are able to understand what it means to be a follower of Christ through the preached word.

I suspect that teachers in other religious traditions in which preaching is central would agree. Regardless of how preaching is taught, its goal is to strengthen the religious life and witness of the community of hearers.

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ENDNOTES

1. The project team was composed of Ronald Allen of Christian Theological Seminary (director), Dale P. Andrews of Boston University, Jon L. Berquist of Westminster John Knox Press, L. Susan Bond of Brite Divinity School, John S. McClure of Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Daniel P. Moseley of Christian Theological Seminary, Mary Alice Mulligan of Christian Theological Seminary (associate director), G. Lee Ramsey, Jr., of Memphis Theological Seminary, Diane Turner-Sharazz of Methodist Theological School in Ohio, and Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm of Bethany Theological Seminary. Congregations came from the following denominations and movements: African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, American Baptist Churches in the USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches and Church of Christ, Church of the Brethren, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Mennonite Church, National Baptist Convention, nondenominational churches, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and United Methodist Church.
2. Chalice Press is publishing the initial results of the 2004–2005 study in a four-volume series called *Channels of Listening: Listening to Listeners: Homiletic Case Studies*, John S. McClure, Ronald J. Allen, Dale P. Andrews, L. Susan Bond, Dan P. Moseley, and G. Lee Ramsey, Jr.; *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship, Content, Feeling*, Ronald J. Allen; *Believing in Preaching: What Listeners Hear in Sermons*, Mary Alice Mulligan, Diane Turner-Sharazz, Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, and Ronald J. Allen; and *Make the Word Come Alive: Lessons from Laity*, Mary Alice Mulligan and Ronald J. Allen. The congregations in the study included nine predominately African American in makeup, sixteen predominately non-Hispanic European, and three ethnically mixed.
3. Thirty-two ministers who preach regularly in the twenty-eight congregations were interviewed. These included three African-American women, ten African-American men, six non-Hispanic European Women, and thirteen non-Hispanic European men.
4. Some members of the guild of teachers of preaching have reflected in print on how they *teach* preaching, but these reflections are more from the perspective of what the teachers do and of how *they* perceive students learn than from the perspective of the students themselves. The most comprehensive work is Donald M. Wardlaw with Fred Baumer; Donald F. Chatfield; Joan Delaplaine, O.P.; O.C. Edwards, Jr.; James A. Forbes, Jr.; Edwina Hunter; and Thomas H. Troeger, *Learning Preaching: Understanding and Participating in the Process* (Lincoln, IL: Lincoln Christian Seminary, 1989). Papers are regularly generated on this subject by the pedagogy group of the Academy of Homiletics, [www.homiletics.org](http://www.homiletics.org). Other works include Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 39–55; Eunjoo Mary Kim, “Conversational Learning: A Feminist Pedagogy for Teaching Preaching,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 5, no. 3 (July 2002): 169–177; cf. Bernadette Glover-Williams, “Toward a Methodology for Teaching Preaching to Baptists,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 40 (March 22, 2005): 52–58; Katie Geneva Cannon, *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003) (the approach to preaching of Isaac Rufus Clark); 2003 Homiletics Consultation, “Who are we Teaching?” [http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/programs/2003\\_workshop3.html](http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/programs/2003_workshop3.html); Mary Donovan Turner, “From Silence to Voice,” <http://www.psr.edu/page.cfm?l=62&id=225>; Most of this literature is shaped by what the authors seek to do in the teaching of preaching but is not greatly informed by how learners themselves perceive their own learning.
5. Eighty percent of the preachers in the study completed the MDiv or closely related degree from a graduate theological school. Twenty-percent of the preachers have not

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completed a degree from (or, to our knowledge, had long-term exposure to) a graduate theological school but received their preparation through denominationally sponsored programs of ministerial training and/or through being mentored by senior pastors of congregations in which they received their call or in which they had their initial ministerial experiences.

6. The observations in this paper come with an important qualification. The paper purports to report only on the clergy with whom we spoke. They were not selected as a random sample according to criteria used in the social sciences. Before generalizing the conclusions of this study, they should be tested in a broader and more representative sample.

7. Only one interviewee took issue with the question itself. “Well, with my faith tradition, I’m not sure ‘learning to preach’ is an appropriate term to use. We believe a person has to be called to preach, and I went into the ministry when I was fifteen years old. So I was still in high school. I wouldn’t say that anyone taught me to preach. It might be that I learned some points observing different people, but a formal preaching class, I’ve never had.”

8. A repeated, though not universal theme in the interviews is that once removed from seminary, many ministers do not practice what they learned. While following this notion goes beyond the present paper, note this interviewee’s next comments. “But obviously, I don’t practice that (exegesis, developing foci) all the time. I just read the text and look for what I think is the main idea that’s going to speak to people.” Some ministers in the study *do* mention regular uses of the exegetical, theological, and hermeneutical skills to which they were exposed in seminary.

9. For some initial steps in this direction, see Ronald J. Allen, *Interpreting the Gospel: An Introduction to Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998), 238–243.

# Revisiting H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry:* Love of God and Neighbor as the Goal of Theological Education

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*ABSTRACT: Fifty years after the publication of The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry, it is time to reflect once more on the theme H. Richard Niebuhr identified as the goal of theological education: "... the increase among men of the love of God and neighbor."<sup>1</sup> Niebuhr's perspective on theological education is informed by Scripture, to be sure, but his treatment of the twofold love command tends to remain too much at the level of an abstract Kantian categorical imperative. A reflection on three biblical traditions concerning friendship can help flesh out further what Niebuhr was aiming for: Abraham as a friend of God, Job's search for friendship, and friendship in the Johannine tradition. A concluding section focuses on Robert Bellah and his critique of utilitarian individualism in American culture. If there is "a famine in the land" for love and friendship, communities gathered around the Eucharistic table and sent out from it to befriend others may offer the best hope of bringing this famine to an end.*

The goal of the Church is the increase among men of the love of God and neighbor.<sup>2</sup>

Fifty years ago, H. Richard Niebuhr made this affirmation in *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*. This fiftieth anniversary provides a good opportunity to revisit Niebuhr's landmark work in theological education, but my aim is not so much to recapitulate what Niebuhr says. Instead, I want to advance his affirmation that "love of God and neighbor" is the goal of theological education, to move with it in a somewhat different direction, and if possible, to broaden its implications. I hope to do this by offering a reflection on Christian friendship as one form of "loving God and neighbor."

Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson were serious when they identified love of God and love of neighbor as the goal of theological education. They were not simply stating a goal that everyone then took for granted. Augustine's *Christian Instruction* helped orient their claim about the twofold love command.<sup>3</sup> When we read their account today, however, it seems to remain too much at the level of a formal principle, too much like a Kantian "categorical imperative." We might ask of Niebuhr's book: Where are the concrete stories from Scripture or from congregational life that provide vivid examples for our students and teachers to work with, so we can learn more about what the love command means?

If this observation is near the mark, one of the best ways to flesh out Niebuhr's claim is to explore specific accounts of love and friendship as they are found in Scripture. From these accounts of friendship with God and other human beings, we move to consider the work of Robert Bellah. Bellah has also expressed deep appreciation for Niebuhr's work, and Bellah's work is especially important for this project because he calls on us to challenge America's "utilitarian individualism" by strengthening Eucharistic friendships.<sup>4</sup>

We begin, then, by reflecting on the role of friendship in theological education. Wadell and Morr are among those who encourage us to inquire about the connections in Scripture between Christian friendship and spiritual formation.<sup>5</sup> Following their lead, I propose that we explore three biblical traditions: (1) Abraham is said to be "a friend of God." What can we learn about love of God and man from the stories told about Abraham in Genesis? (2) Likewise, the story of Job and his friends can be read in a way that sheds light on learning to love God and neighbor. (3) A Johannine perspective on friendship and discipleship also helps illuminate the view that the purpose of the church is to teach human beings to love God and to love their neighbors.

### **Abraham: Friend of God**

In Genesis 14 there is an account of a fierce battle between Abraham and King Chedorlaomer. For a dozen years Chedorlaomer has run amok in the region around Sodom and Gomorrah. He does nothing to contribute to the common good but preys on defenseless settlements, destroys families, and rules by terror. Abraham does his best to keep out of this tyrant's way, because he and Sarah are living by a promise from God that they will soon have many descendants (Gen. 12:2–3). The quiet life that Abraham desires remains possible for a time. As Genesis 14:13 tells us, Abraham has been living in peace "by the oaks of Mamre." Here, Abraham cares for his flocks. He works hard. The Lord blesses him, and, in turn, Abraham's life is a blessing to many other people in his tribal family.

But then word comes that Abraham's kinsman, Lot, has been kidnapped by Chedorlaomer. Abraham feels responsible for Lot, because they came out of Ur together many years ago when Abraham first answered God's call to leave and look for a new land.<sup>6</sup> So Abraham gathers his men for battle, and they pursue Chedorlaomer and his men a long way—to Hobah, north of Damascus (Gen. 14:15).

Yet Abraham is not prepared for the shedding of blood that takes place during combat—it doesn't matter that his adversaries receive the worst of it. After rescuing Lot, Abraham turns back toward his home, a shaken man. Along the way, Abraham is met and befriended by a man of kindness and generosity, Melchizedek. Melchizedek begins to restore calm in Abraham's heart with a blessing from God (Gen. 14:19–20). Yet even more important than Melchizedek's friendship and his blessing is the vision of God that subsequently comes to Abram in Genesis 15:1, in which God says: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield."<sup>7</sup>

Genesis tells us many more stories about Abraham, enough to convince us that he is far from perfect. He needs God not only as a shield but also as a Friend who forgives. Abraham lies about his wife and puts her in danger in order to save his own skin. He sends Hagar and Ishmael away into the wilderness, where they are in danger of perishing. His willingness to sacrifice Isaac, too, makes us tremble for Abraham's family, so much so that we are tempted to wonder: Will their covenant with God be enough for everything they must face? Yet in all the events of Abraham's story, whether he has acted justly or sinned greatly, God remains with Abraham as a shield and a friend. By His gracious favor, He is teaching Abraham a special way of life that will fix covenant loyalty deep in his heart.<sup>8</sup> Later traditions build on this theme, and in the following passages, Abraham is said to be "a friend of God":

But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend (Isa. 41:8).

[A]nd the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God (James 2:23).<sup>9</sup>

Who other than a *friend* of God could plead for the lives of people in Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of wickedness, the way Abraham does in Genesis 18:16–33? Only a friend of God would dare to be so bold.<sup>10</sup>

**B**ernhard Anderson proposes that God's covenant of friendship with Abraham is the key to understanding the unity of Genesis. Stories that otherwise might have remained separate and disjointed become one in the book of Genesis by being brought under the canopy of this covenantal view.<sup>11</sup> God makes a new beginning with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, and their children are also part of this covenant. This is a story of a God who teaches human beings how to trust Him and love Him and how to love each other—a God who calls, promises, commands, leads, and goes with them into the future of the promise. Many years later, after the Exodus, this covenant of friendship will become formalized in the Shema of Deuteronomy and in Leviticus.<sup>12</sup>

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might (Deut. 6:4–5).

You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18b).

Obedience, trust, love—these are significant dimensions of friendship with God, and they can only be learned through experience with Him in a community of friends, companions who each embody varying degrees of faithfulness to the covenant God has made with them.

This suggests that theological education is best understood as entering into a covenant with those who are also grasped by this vision of loving God and loving the neighbor. Walter Brueggemann describes the meaning of covenant in the Bible as “being grounded in Another who initiates personhood and who stays bound to persons in loyal ways for their well-being.”<sup>13</sup> This covenant-making God holds his partners to himself and does not forsake them. Where anomie prevailed, or oppression, this covenant-making Friend now offers life, love, and justice. In the context of this covenant, it is possible to protest or to lament to this trusted One—He is listening. Yet most important is to praise Him for his lovingkindness to us and to all whom He has made.

### **Job’s search for friendship**

However, Job’s troubles raise many serious questions about the meaningfulness of covenant and living faithfully before God. Undeserved suffering is taken by many people to be a sign that a just God cannot exist. Eventually, Job will find himself making an unexpected theological affirmation that is much closer to the truth of his experience: the deepest closeness and intimacy with God may emerge *in the midst* of his suffering. This deeper fellowship with God will lead also to a different perspective on the significance of human friendship in Job’s life.

Initially, however, the book of Job is about a *failure* of friendship. If all that we could learn about friendship from Job was based on Job 30:29, for example, the lesson might be very short and very bitter. Here Job laments that he has only the jackals for friends.<sup>14</sup> Those he counted on for compassion and solidarity—Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Elihu—are more interested in proposing explanations than in comforting Job, explanations by which they hope to “manage” Job’s suffering and keep it at a safe distance from their own lives. Yet Job knows at a visceral level that his experiences of undeserved suffering do not fit with the packaged wisdom his friends are trying to “teach” him about God.<sup>15</sup>

We might conclude from the losses Job suffers—family, possessions, health, losses made worse by friends who are seeking some hidden fault in him—that this marks the end of faith and joy in his life. Yet a clue offered by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* helps us better understand Job’s search by reminding us that:

1. Joy is not a matter of personal wealth (SCG III, 30).
2. Joy does not depend on health (SCG III, 32).
3. Nor is joy built on honors (SCG III, 28-29).<sup>16</sup>

Instead, Job is longing for a Presence who will remain compassionate and stand with him when all else fails utterly. If such a Presence can be found, *that* will be the unshakeable source of a joy that cannot be lost.<sup>17</sup>



St. Thomas takes Job to be a man of virtue, a man who does not sin against God, against his neighbors, nor even against himself.<sup>18</sup> Job clings tenaciously to his own integrity, and yet there is something that will come to mean much more to Job than his own uprightness and it is this: God *speaking* to him from the whirlwind (Job 38:1). God does not utter a single word about *why* He has allowed Job to suffer so many dreadful losses, but instead He addresses Job from the whirlwind as a mysterious and powerful Other. God has questions of His own for Job—not answers—but more questions to add to those Job is already asking. “Where were you when . . . ? Do you know how . . . ?

Somehow the questions that come spinning out from the whirlwind toward Job offer him a consolation far better than the “answers” given by his circle of friends. And what is this consolation but God’s own presence? Job says in 42:5, “I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee.” While we cannot fully comprehend the depths of this relationship between Job and God, we might try to view the matter from St. Thomas’s perspective: “It is clear that with his view of happiness, Aquinas would certainly attribute a deep, sweet consolation to anyone who could truly claim to be seeing God.”<sup>19</sup>

Our reflection on Job began with his search for friendship, and it was sobering to see how his search came perilously close to ending in failure. However, the deeper meaning of Job’s story for theological education emerges when he begins to focus on a different question: What kind of friend will Job *himself* be for others from now on? What has Job learned about *being* a friend, after suffering horrendous losses, after enduring the shallow chatter of his companions, after he has been addressed by God from the whirlwind? In his *Literal Exposition of Job*, Aquinas says, “Justice is destroyed in twofold fashion: by the false prudence of the sage and by the violent act of the man who possesses power.”<sup>20</sup> After his encounter with God in the whirlwind, we can only imagine Job as one who from now on will counsel his neighbors with the deepest wisdom and compassion.<sup>21</sup> Job will never act violently toward them. He has seen more than enough of both “false prudence” and ruinous violence in his lifetime. Perhaps this is why, near the end of this story, God entrusts the celebration of sacred rites to Job as well as the tasks of pastoral care. “[G]o to my servant Job,” says God to Eliphaz and the other companions, “and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you . . .” (Job 42:8).

Job, as a man of virtue, will always have friends. We can imagine that these friends will understand his faith up to a point, though perhaps Job knows far more than he can ever hope to tell them. Job will likely always have enemies, too, though they may yet find a way of being reconciled with each other.<sup>22</sup> Job’s “theological education” comes to this: He learns that he must continue to love all these people, to hold in his heart the possibility that they, too, will also become friends of God. Job is called to be an agent of transformation, one who must continue to give humble testimony, hoping and trusting that God’s peace, His love and justice, will finally be known and embraced by many others.

### **The Johannine tradition: Friendship and the love command**

Richard Niebuhr's claim that the purpose of the church is to teach human beings to love God and to love their neighbors can be further strengthened by drawing from the Johannine account of friendship and discipleship. The Johannine tradition cherishes each encounter with Jesus as Teacher. In John 3:2, Nicodemus announces that Jesus is "a Teacher come from God," and in John 6:45 Jesus says, "they shall all be taught by God." From this Johannine portrait of Jesus as Teacher, we begin to learn a great deal about the intimate connection between agape-love, friendship, and discipleship.<sup>23</sup>

Very early in his Gospel, John asks us to consider Nathanael's first meeting with Jesus (John 1:29–50). Not much is provided in the way of a context, except that these things happened "on the other side of the Jordan." For John the storyteller, the setting does not need much more detail than this—this is above all a company of friends: John the Baptist, Andrew, Peter, Phillip, and Nathanael. Among these friends, it is Nathanael who is the most stubborn, the one who has a settled view of the world and of everyone's place in it. When Philip says he has found the Messiah, Nathanael is the one who says in derision: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip's wise reply? "Come and see."

And what is it that these friends see Jesus doing? Jesus seems always to be crossing barriers and spending time with the wrong sorts of people. In John 4, Jesus befriends the woman at the well, a notorious sinner. After their midday talk, she finds her "thirst" is satisfied, and she becomes an effective evangelist for God's Kingdom.<sup>24</sup> Something similar happens with the woman taken in adultery in John 8. She is about to be stoned by an indignant crowd, but before they take her life, they stop just long enough to ask Jesus a question: Do you agree that she should receive this punishment? She needs a true friend urgently at this moment, and this is when Jesus steps into the fray. He prolongs the suspense by writing something in the dust, and then he speaks on her behalf: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." Yes, this is one of the most persistent criticisms aimed at Jesus: "He is a friend of sinners."<sup>25</sup>

Not all of Jesus' friends have a bad reputation, however. Among his most loyal friends are Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. This brother and two sisters make their home a center of generosity, welcoming Jesus and His message.<sup>26</sup> When Lazarus dies, Mary and Martha call many people to mourn with them. Jesus weeps at the news of Lazarus's death, and this makes an impression on the gathered mourners: "Behold how He loved him!" After Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, John 11:45 says, "Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed on him." It would be hard to imagine an event that discloses more fully the close relationship between the ministry of Jesus and friendship.

In John chapter 15, however, the twofold command to love God and to love one another receives even more sustained attention.



This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you (John 15:12).

You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you (John 15:14–15).

In his essay, “The Kind of Friend We Have in Jesus,” Lewis Smedes reflects with some care on how these verses in John should be interpreted.<sup>27</sup> Smedes registers a caveat about “trimming Jesus down to our size,” which is what will happen if we think of him *only* as a friend. Revelation 1:14–18a describes Jesus in language that is not at all like a friendship of equals:

[H]is head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore.

Yet faithful people return again and again to the plain meaning of Jesus’ words in John 15:15b: “I have called you friends.”

**A**mong these companions of Jesus, no one’s faith may any longer resemble a neatly packaged educational object, but, instead, it will begin to look much more like a journey undertaken with friends. And what does the plurality of names for Jesus in John’s Gospel show us—Rabbi, Lamb of God, Light of the World, Messiah, King of Israel—except that no single statement can by itself adequately capture the full significance of an encounter with Jesus?<sup>28</sup> This willingness to use more than one descriptive title for Jesus also has implications for what we might call the “sociology of faith.” It means that no one group will be able to lay sole claim to Jesus so as to say, “He is our friend only, and not yours.”

Yet, John’s Gospel also implies that Jesus knows us more intimately and deeply than any other person, and he is calling us to a life of deeper friendship with him. He knows everything about his friends in John’s Gospel—their wounds, their failures, their gifts and their hopes. He knows the marital history of the woman at the well, yet this does not keep Him from speaking to her. He knows the long medical histories of the lame man in John 5 and the blind man in John 9, but He sweeps these obstacles aside in order to heal them. He knows who will betray him and who will remain His friends. Even after Peter denies knowing Jesus, Jesus continues to love Peter and gives him the most important task to perform<sup>29</sup>—“Feed my lambs” (John 21:15b).

Friendship, discipleship, and learning to love others as Jesus loves them are all intertwined in John's Gospel. We may even go so far as to speak of "the eleventh commandment" in John, the commandment to love one another as a response to the love that has been shown toward us by God.<sup>30</sup> Niebuhr himself puts it this way: "Love of God and neighbor is the gift given through Jesus Christ by the demonstration in incarnation, words, deeds, death and resurrection that God is love—a demonstration we but poorly apprehend yet sufficiently discern to be moved to a faltering response of reciprocal love."<sup>31</sup>

So in light of Abraham's covenantal story, Job's search for friendship, and John's account of love, we come now to an inescapable question for self-examination: Do our forms of theological education encourage those we teach to grow as "friends of God"? Have we also committed ourselves to growing with them? If we are to judge by Matthew 23:15, Jesus Himself thought this kind of question to be of the utmost importance. Let us not be like the ones He indicts: "[Y]ou traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves."

### **The love command and the American ethos**

I John 3:14 maintains that we can be *sure* that we know God by obeying his commandment to love our neighbors, especially our neighbors who are poor and hungry. It has been suggested, however, that many Christians in America are less than eager to embrace projects that would help feed, clothe, and educate their neighbors.<sup>32</sup> In one sense, Scripture itself tries to prepare us for rude awakenings of this sort. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' own disciples suffer from "hardness of heart" (Mark 6:52, 8:17). Failure to love those beyond their circle causes them to stumble in the mission Jesus has given them.<sup>33</sup> John's Gospel, too, tells of those who turned back and "walked no more with him" when Jesus summoned them to a deeper love and a more costly commitment (John 6:66, KJV).

One of the tasks of theological education is to demonstrate how much and in what ways the Christian vision of loving God and neighbor differs from human existence as it is understood by "the world."<sup>34</sup> If we mean to become better disciples, more faithful to the covenants we have made and to keep renewing ourselves in weekly worship services, we need some understanding of how our society is trying to squeeze us into its own ideological mold. In one such account, Robert Bellah describes America as a nation that places an inordinately high value on utilitarian individualism.<sup>35</sup> Messages that support this ideology are carried into our homes and shape our imaginations from a very early age. Through the market and the state, especially by their agencies of socialization—television and education—we are taught mainly to be producers, buyers, and sellers.<sup>36</sup> As a consequence, many of us feel very little loyalty to groups or traditions beyond ourselves, very little feeling of responsibility toward others. The market sets producers in competition with one another, and through advertising, businesses encourage us to see ourselves primarily as self-centered

consumers rather than as citizens or disciples. As consumers, we need never give a thought to the common good—we are preoccupied mainly with ourselves, and our own personal desires come first and foremost.<sup>37</sup>

There are strands of America's religious and social history that could help challenge this individualism. In the canon of America's literature, John Winthrop's *A Model of Christian Charity* (1630) is one of the earliest attempts to map out a form of communal solidarity shaped by Scripture.<sup>38</sup> From eighteenth century America, we read in John Woolman's *Journal* that he worked for reconciliation with Native Americans, and that he took stands against slavery and war, despite encountering serious opposition.<sup>39</sup> Martin Luther King was also a witness to our need for "The Beloved Community."<sup>40</sup> Yet today we do not find nearly enough people speaking the language of *koinonia* and *agape* in America's public life.

Bellah believes that the best possibilities for changing the shape of American society will come from Eucharistic communities. Gathering together around The Lord's Table, listening to the words of Jesus, then going out to befriend others—these are the practices that hold the greatest promise for nourishing a deep solidarity and showing us what human flourishing looks like.<sup>41</sup> Brian Wren is concerned, however, that many celebrations of the Lord's Supper remain much too privatized. Communion, says Wren, is not just a matter of loving God but also of loving our neighbors. How much do we accomplish by teaching the proper words and symbols for The Lord's Supper, if we are not also learning and teaching others how to share the bread and the wine with the poor?<sup>42</sup> Monika Hellwig, too, tells us that: "Eucharistic communion is not merely church ritual. As a meal fellowship, as the Lord's own supper, it is an act of divine hospitality that calls those who participate to share hospitably with all people—not only at the altar, but also at their own tables and at the larger table of the global economy."<sup>43</sup>

**H**Richard Niebuhr drew from the riches of Scripture when he made the claim that the purpose of the Church is to increase love of God and neighbor. Sensing that in his book, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*, these scriptural foundations were not made as visible as they could have been, I have sought to renew his vision of the goal of theological education by bringing into the foreground several biblical stories dealing with love and friendship. From Genesis, we have the story of Abraham, who was befriended by God. When Abraham said yes to God's call and promise, he began to learn about God just as we learn about any of our friends, by spending time with them and learning to live in covenant with them. Job, who longed for a true friend, found God to be an unending mystery, and also one that is ultimately trustworthy. To his further astonishment, he found that God was asking him to approach the question of friendship from a first-person perspective. What kind of friend would Job himself become for others suffering unendurable losses? In the Johannine tradition, the family of Lazarus learns about the centrality of the love command and the importance of friendship with Jesus, and the same can be said of the woman at the well, the woman taken in adultery, and the disciples who meet with Jesus in the upper room.

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Following some indications from the work of Robert Bellah, I have also tried to sketch a wider social context in which there seems to be “a famine in the land” for the love command. Bellah’s view is that Eucharistic communities that cherish the love command represent a tremendous source of hope for changing society. Whoever teaches the love command as it is found in the New Testament keeps faith with Jesus Christ, and it is he who alone can end the famine for love and friendship. “I am the living bread,” says Jesus in John 6:51. “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (John 6:55).

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# Considering Consortia

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*ABSTRACT: Thirteen persons representing eleven consortia of ATS member schools met at a consultation on consortia in Washington, DC, in January 2005, sponsored by the ATS Leadership Education program. This article serves as an overview of the consultation conversation, including types of consortial arrangements that exist among ATS schools, the advantages of such collaborations, and current issues they are facing.*

## What is a consortium?

A consortium can best be described as three or more schools engaged in various forms of cooperative behavior. Consortia within the ATS membership reflect three configurations: (1) those legally organized with paid staff, (2) those legally organized but without paid staff, and (3) those in a loose alliance with no staff.

Is a consortium a benefit or a distraction for member schools, and is there value added to schools by virtue of being a member of a consortium? Both the missions of the consortium's individual member schools and the mission of the consortium itself need to connect in specific ways that provide answers to the questions above. For example, if the consortium is a structure with a larger theological vision or if it is an effort to find cooperation within recognized diversity, the rudiments of a missional connection can be easily identified. Still, the consortium needs to *theologically* and *pragmatically* understand why it exists, how it benefits its members, and how it can begin to work its way into its own unique future.

The pragmatic concern can be addressed by defining a consortium primarily as a functional delivery mechanism, a means of bringing together persons and ideas from the consortium's schools in value-added ways that create a community larger than any single school. This pragmatic argument suggests that consortia help expand educational delivery systems and better prepare students to serve in an increasingly complex world (via contact with different students, different experiences, and different professors—perhaps from other faiths or disciplines not available within each school's local context). This position holds that consortia work well when the world is understood to be rapidly changing and that isolation within one's own faith community will not be the best way to be engaged in ministry in the future. This is the "value-added" rationale for consortia.

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But the question remains—deliver “what”? What are particular needs that a consortium can best address or deliver? Expanded library resources? Courses on Islam? Shared purchasing of new technology? Hiring one common registrar? Identifying how the consortium can best serve the needs of its members can become complex in light of each school’s distinctive mission. Should the consortium distance itself—and remain descriptive? Or, should it move *inside* the confessional norms of its members and more clearly deliver that which confessionally reflects what is understood as each seminary consortium member’s mission? This moves us into a more complex world where theologies don’t necessarily collide but are distinct and missionally connected. A school’s theological identity will be protected at all costs when a consortium is perceived as impinging in this area. Such theological concerns and choices are not easily answered, and no two places will answer them in the same way.

A commonly shared view among the participants at the ATS consultation was that a consortium demonstrates a kind of “practical ecumenism”—multiple schools sharing library resources or cooperating by sharing a faculty member or providing cross registration of classes that attracts students who seek wider opportunities from schools and traditions other than their own. Graduates of the schools represented at the consultation have been very positive about their schools’ consortial cooperation and the intellectual and theological richness it brought to their educational experience.

### **Four broad consortia concerns**

Viewed in this fashion, the idea of consortial relationships seems inherently positive, but there are concerns. For example, when consortium members are located in schools that are in close proximity, cooperation and collaboration is more easily attained, and member school administrators more easily coach and mentor one another. Long-term consortium members are quick to affirm the advantage of such ongoing relationships.

At the same time, members of legally organized consortia with paid staff but at some distance from one another frequently noted the common concern of having no easily identified peers with whom they could converse about possibilities and issues. And, all three consortial structures named four additional concerns. The first has to do with occasional intense local conversations about the future of member schools and how these conversations often fail to involve the consortium. (Often consortia are the last to be informed about important member school missional conversations or decisions.)

A second concern relates to finances and whether a consortium is understood as simply an expense for member schools or as a value-added entity as schools deal with budgetary concerns. The assumption of most of the participants in the consultation was that local institutions will push for increased consortium financial backing as long as the mission and finances of the local school are not



compromised. This concern clearly calls on consortia to demonstrate the value they add to constituent schools.

Third is the concern that persons (and not structures) often drive contractual arrangements; thus, there is concern regarding the implied weakness associated with the frequent rotation of consortial leaders. Some consultation members advised that consortia do better regarding this issue when they come to rely more on structures than on individual personalities. Nevertheless, all consultation members noted that they must continually educate newcomers to their particular consortium's history and narrative.

A fourth concern raised had to do with denominational politics, especially bilateral denominational agreements that hurt individual consortium members. Consultation members believed, in this regard, that little could be done except to continually seek denominational agreements that could potentially help consortia (and keep local doors open).

Despite such concerns, consultation members agreed that all three types of consortia were making important contributions to theological education in the United States and Canada, and that consortia are vital (though often underused) players in theological education despite the various issues and concerns that can threaten to derail their progress.

### **Consortia begin with low-risk cooperation**

There were few consortia prior to 1960. In the seventies, ATS had concern about the number of small schools in the Association and about cooperation among all schools. Consortia began during that time as an effort to strengthen cooperation among groups of schools and to improve some areas of their work through cooperation.

Accordingly, consortia began as low-risk cooperative efforts; examples included cross-registration of classes among schools and opening library privileges to other schools. These activities are prominent among most consortia. Some took a brave next step in combining their library databases; Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley went one step further by building a single physical library building. More typically, libraries of consortia kept their own buildings and shared in a variety of ways short of physically consolidating member collections.

For example, the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools credits the self-starting, professional innovation of five librarians as the impetus for establishing cooperative library relationships. The initial cooperation and formation of the Minnesota Theological Library Association (MTLA) actually predates the establishment of the consortium itself, and the MTLA has remained largely driven by the commitment of the library directors and staffs to the collaborative process. Early interaction through interlibrary loans and borrowing privileges led to the eventual development of a shared/union catalog, an effort that bound the

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librarians together “for the long term.” This undertaking strengthened both personal and professional affinities, the development of a united periodicals list, formalized acquisition strategies, and an increasing number of professional development opportunities.

In the years since library cooperation began, the needs, resources, and priorities of the individual institutions of the consortium have changed dramatically. Evolving technology has rendered the original union catalog obsolete, for example, but is creating opportunities for more powerful search engines and other resource sharing prospects for the group. Throughout its history, the MTLA has continued to focus on identifying and pursuing a broad range of voluntary cooperative activities while maintaining institutional integrity. As a result, each library’s purchasing power has expanded, smaller institutions found (among other things) that their accreditation reviews were enhanced, and, ultimately, the faculty and students of the consortium were better served. Value was added to each school because of this unified effort.

### Faculty and administrator conversations

A second historical move (also low-risk) by consortia had some commonly shared and now regularized event, program, discussion, or activity that brought together interested faculty or was occasioned by administrators. Participants in the ATS consultation noted four ways that this usually occurred:

- ◆ **Faculty events/disciplinary conversations:** Almost all consortia hold events for faculty; some hold regular meetings in disciplinary and cross-disciplinary groups.
- ◆ **Grant proposals:** Most consortia note that, on occasion, work related to grants has been more effective when several schools have become engaged.
- ◆ **Technology:** Some consortia report that sharing across consortia members has been most useful in purchasing and shared expertise related to technology.
- ◆ **Administrator meetings:** Several consortia report that they provide regular occasions for deans, registrars, librarians, and chief financial officers to meet and discuss common issues.

### Cross-registration and increasingly complex relationships

Cross-registration is a low-risk operation for some consortia; for others, it is a more complex activity that raises the risk factor, if only slightly. Consultation participants were quick to point out that cross-registration opens courses to a wider range of students and changes course dynamics by allowing those “outside” the tradition of a school to come “inside” the educational process. Some schools in consortia cross-registration arrangements *require* that students take

one, two, or more cross-registered courses. Other schools “invite” students but don’t mandate their participation. Some consortia offer cross-registration as a central part of a January or summer term. In almost every cross-registration case, certain professors become favorites in the cross-registration process and faculty load issues emerge; nevertheless, even with the problems that emerge from such enrollment patterns, cross-registration is a minimal threat to institutional self-definition and is a low-cost example of consortial cooperation.

In the same low-risk vein, some consortia offer not only cross-registration but *certificates* designating completed study in areas better provided by several schools than by one alone. Boston Theological Institute (BTI), for example, offers certificates in International Missions, Ecumenism, and Science and Theology.

Occasionally, a consortium risks moving toward more collaborative behavior without benefit of paid staff. For example, a case presented by the Theological Consortium of Greater Columbus (Ohio) noted the following process: There was a shared disciplinary need on the part of the three consortium schools for a common faculty appointment in world religions. The academic deans of the three schools in the consortium developed a joint job description. A foundation was willing to provide initial funding if the appointment was a tenure-track position, which meant that the schools would need to fully fund the position after the grant ended. A search committee was formed (one dean, one faculty member, and one trustee from each of the three schools for a total of nine). This group’s candidate was vetoed by the three presidents. A new search committee was formed, consisting of the three presidents, three deans, and three faculty members. The three deans and three faculty members screened candidates, and the final choice was approved by the three presidents and ratified by the boards of trustees as needed. The new faculty member is now located at one school and accountable to that school’s tenure review process.

This appointment came with concerns that are not yet fully resolved. Would the new faculty member need to attend the faculty meetings of each school? How difficult might it become to negotiate multiple dean relationships (even with accountability to one dean and location in one school)? How would funding be secured to sustain the position after the grant funds were expended? While participants in the conference felt that the issue of relating to three academic deans could be solved (one dean, after all, being accountable for mentoring), they were less certain about fundraising across the three consortium schools. How would possible donors be identified? Might the new position in world religions stimulate the identification of a new funding constituency? Could the new professor emerge (quickly) as a public presence, which could assist the funding effort?

When a consortium hires common faculty and/or begins to award common degrees, its fundamental structure changes rapidly, and governance and accountability issues become much more complex. More is at stake, and “local” governance *resists* that which intrudes on local concerns. An antidote for such

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resistance is the move to continually demonstrate to boards how a consortium *benefits* each member seminary.

This example illustrates what can be accomplished when administrators find it important to work together on common issues. A consortium without its own staff requires that schools commit personnel time and effort to bring the schools to a common resolution. Relying on individuals, instead of structures, however, has the potential to hinder project longevity.

### **Paid staff: Trusting the big jump**

Hiring staff requires funding, of course, and therefore increasingly threatens individual school autonomy. Consortia that have moved from low to increasingly higher risk often recognize the wisdom of stepping up to a shared contribution of money, released time, or both, in order that a part-time or full-time person can be hired to serve as a paid coordinator of the consortium. This person administers the lower-cost activities associated with the consortium and (usually) begins to suggest the possibility of advancing to an even more complex level of operation.

When three or more schools agree to function at this more complex level, they will have decided to “do together that which we cannot do individually.” This is not as bold as the Lund Principle of Ecumenism<sup>1</sup>, committing to do all things together except those that our different confessions and mandates require us to do separately. However, neither is it a commitment to do together only those things that will bring financial savings. It is, instead, a commitment to improve the resources and quality of theological education by working together. For example, while the MDiv and the Master of Theological Studies degrees are the core degrees of some consortia, when a consortium moves to this advanced level, it may decide to grant the degrees itself (thus becoming a degree-granting institution) or help member schools broker such degrees between the consortium and some of its member schools or institutions outside the consortium.

Below this level of consortial arrangements, most consortia report helping schools structure courses with multiple or shared leadership from or among consortium members. This activity ranges from the “loan” of a professor from one school to another to joint faculty appointments or to shared degrees structured on the basis of shared faculty (and shared budgets, admissions, etc.) with degrees awarded by the member institutions. Accordingly, consortia not yet functioning with paid staff or consortia-awarded degrees report numerous shared faculty and program arrangements ranging from shared work on one course to shared work in a cooperative Doctor of Ministry program.

Consortia with paid staff have been able to provide both programming and specific task forces across member schools that enable the pursuit of particular academic projects. One example is the Boston Theological Institute (BTI) that has addressed issues of Religion and Ecology and Religion and Violence. The Washington Theological Consortium (WTC) has sponsored a program on Faith

and Order that dealt with issues related to poverty. Such work among schools has been useful to denominations and ecumenical agencies, especially when denominational staff have been reduced in certain areas.

Schools working on such issues via their consortia have moved from coexistence to cooperation and are moving toward collaboration. They demonstrate increasingly complex patterns of behavior through the layering of multiple activities. For example, they:

- ◆ form sub-clusters or whole cluster patterns of sharing, engage in certain kinds of cooperative work (student loans/international student advising, etc.),
- ◆ consider geographical or denominational possibilities for shared economic development initiatives or common fundraising services, and
- ◆ seek expansion of technology/library cooperation in which further shared library staff, collection development, or common expansion occurs.

While several consortia at the ATS consultation reported that they currently enjoy *cooperation* without benefit of paid staff, all recognized that the “right” paid staff person can greatly facilitate increased *collaboration* among consortia members. Clearly, however, the addition of a paid staff person would occur only when a number of the practical and theological concerns raised in this article had been addressed and earlier, less complex consortial work had been judged to be worth the increased risk associated with paid staff and multiple programs.

### Expanding consortia membership

Perhaps the most provocative example of a consortia doing that which could not be done by individual member schools occurred when the Washington Theological Consortium (WTC) granted affiliate membership status to the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences in Ashburn, Virginia. WTC executive director, John W. Crossin, OSFS, described how this occurred in a case study he presented at the consultation titled “Non-Christian Consortia Membership.” He reported:

The relationship of the Washington Theological Consortium to the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences goes back three years to when its dean, Ahmed Alwani, wrote to us in the spring of 2001 inquiring about membership in the consortium. I replied to him and outlined the steps I would take to pursue his request. These steps included forwarding his letter to all members of the consortium’s Executive Committee and initial consultations with groups such as the consortium’s librarians. My inquiries to scholars both within and outside of the consortium membership confirmed the fine scholarly reputations of the GSISS faculty.

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These internal discussions led the board to encourage me to visit GSISS, which I did in May 2002. I reported to the board that my visit with them was quite positive, and I raised two questions:

- ◆ Should the consortium admit non-Christian schools? and if so,
- ◆ Should it admit GSISS?

The first question led to the work of the Task Force that later became the Membership Committee of the Board of Trustees. The Task Force recommended having a third category of membership—Affiliate Membership. It identified eight possible criteria for Affiliate Membership. This recommendation was approved by the full board in March 2003. The InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington became the first Affiliate Member on July 1, 2003. The Conference includes in its membership both Muslim and Jewish organizations. I should note that Affiliate Members have voice but no vote at the annual meeting of the corporation.

The Membership Committee then pursued the second question. Several of the members of the committee had questions about the possible membership of GSISS. In the fall of 2003, the committee sponsored two visits to the school. The first group, headed by Dr. Richard Jones of Virginia Theological Seminary, who serves on the Membership Committee, reported on October 23, 2003. Their observations were generally positive and indicated that they were convinced that the GSISS wished to engage in dialogue. This group welcomed the affiliation.

A second visit took place in December 2003. The team included the consortium's board chair, the Rev. Thomas Prinz, four committee members including two former Foreign Service officers who have expertise in the Middle East, and myself. This visit included a host of questions, all of which were answered forthrightly. We discussed items such as the school's financial and enrollment trends, and the current positions of the graduates.

Dean Alwani affirmed that the Graduate School is still recognized by the Department of Defense for training chaplains but that it has not seemed wise to recruit candidates in the current environment.

Questions about the theological stance, openness to dialogue, finances, and so forth were answered. A three-year Affiliate Membership was then approved unanimously by the Board of Trustees of the consortium.

In this first year, GSISS has been quite active. Faculty members attended the Consortium Faculties' Convocation in late September 2004. Faculty and students of GSISS attended the Consortium Tachmindji Lecture at Virginia Theological Semi-

nary by Bishop Kenneth Cragg, the former Anglican Bishop of Beirut, who spoke on Christian-Muslim relations.

The executive dean of GSISS has attended board and Executive Committee meetings, and the librarian has been active in the Consortium Librarians Faculty Group.

## Summary

If all theological education is local (having peculiar rituals, traditions, norms), then all consortia are trans-local. Accordingly, consortia have to navigate their own unique way through the various local identities that make up the broader face of the consortia. A consortium on paper only will not work; it only “works” as local identities make room for it to work. The more engaged a consortium becomes, the more threatening it can become to local identities. Nevertheless, the “value-added” argument that supports increased consortial arrangements, programs, and services remains compelling in an increasingly complex world.

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**[Editor’s Note:** The text of this article was provided by William R. Myers from notes, newsprint, and transcribed tapes of the consultation that occurred January 2005 in Washington, DC. The host consortium was Washington Theological Consortium. Participants included: Steven C. Boguslawski (Detroit Catholic Consortium), Deborah Carnahan (Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools), Steven Charleston and Rodney L. Petersen (Boston Theological Institute), John W. Crossin (Washington Theological Consortium), Norman E. Dewire and Paul J. Langsfeld (Theological Consortium of Greater Columbus), James A. Donahue (Graduate Theological Union), David E. Gray (Theological Education Association of Mid-America), Margaret A. Krych (Philadelphia Area Institutional Partnership and Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries), Christopher J. L. Lind (Toronto School of Theology), D. Cameron Murchison (Atlanta Theological Association), and Lon Oliver (Appalachian Ministries Educational Resource Center). Daniel O. Aleshire and William R. Myers of ATS provided staff support.]

## ENDNOTE

1. The Lund Principle was formulated at the third world conference on Faith and Order in Lund, Sweden, in 1952. It states that “activities which can be carried out ecumenically should not be carried out denominationally.”





## ***Theological Education Submission Guidelines***

The Association of Theological Schools is a membership organization of schools in the United States and Canada that conduct post-baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and advanced study of the theological disciplines. The Association's mission is to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public. The Commission on Accrediting of ATS accredits schools that are members of ATS and approves the degree programs they offer.

*Theological Education*, the journal of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, is devoted to the distinctive concerns of graduate theological education in North America. The journal supports the mission of the Association by providing those concerned with theological education—including administrators, faculty, and independent researchers—with scholarly discourse and reports on issues and trends, research findings and resources, and models of critical analysis and effective practices in graduate theological education.

Unsolicited submissions are reviewed by members of the journal's Editorial Board, who then make recommendations regarding their publication. The Editorial Board will not consider articles that are being submitted simultaneously to other publications.

### **Article Formatting Requirements**

1. Recommended length of articles is 5,000 words (approximately 18 double-spaced pages).
2. Follow *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition, using endnotes.
3. Convert footnotes to ENDNOTES, if necessary, using author's given name and then the surname with no intervening comma.
4. The *American Heritage Dictionary* and the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* are the references for preferred spellings.
5. Provide a paragraph ABSTRACT at the beginning of the article in approximately 80 words.
6. Add a short (2–3 sentence) paragraph at the end of the article identifying the author(s), institution or relationship to the project/topic, position held, and/or other information relevant to the experience of the writer(s).
7. Articles should be emailed to the managing editor (merrill@ats.edu) in Microsoft Word, followed by a hard copy sent by conventional mail to: Nancy Merrill, Managing Editor, *Theological Education*, The Association of Theological Schools, 10 Summit Park Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15275-1103.

