

TE | Theological Education

ISSUE FOCUS

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Could Be Doing to Our Spirituality and Our Brains:
Some Augustinian/Niebuhrian Reflections**

Mark Ellingsen

**Instructional Designers and Online Theological
Education: May We Help You?**

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in Christian Higher Education**

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OPEN FORUM

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Living into the Hyphen as Theologians, Servants,
and Educators**

Grant D. Taylor

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Frank Yamada, Executive Director

DEBBIE CREAMER
ELIZA SMITH BROWN
LISA KERN

Senior Editor
Managing Editor
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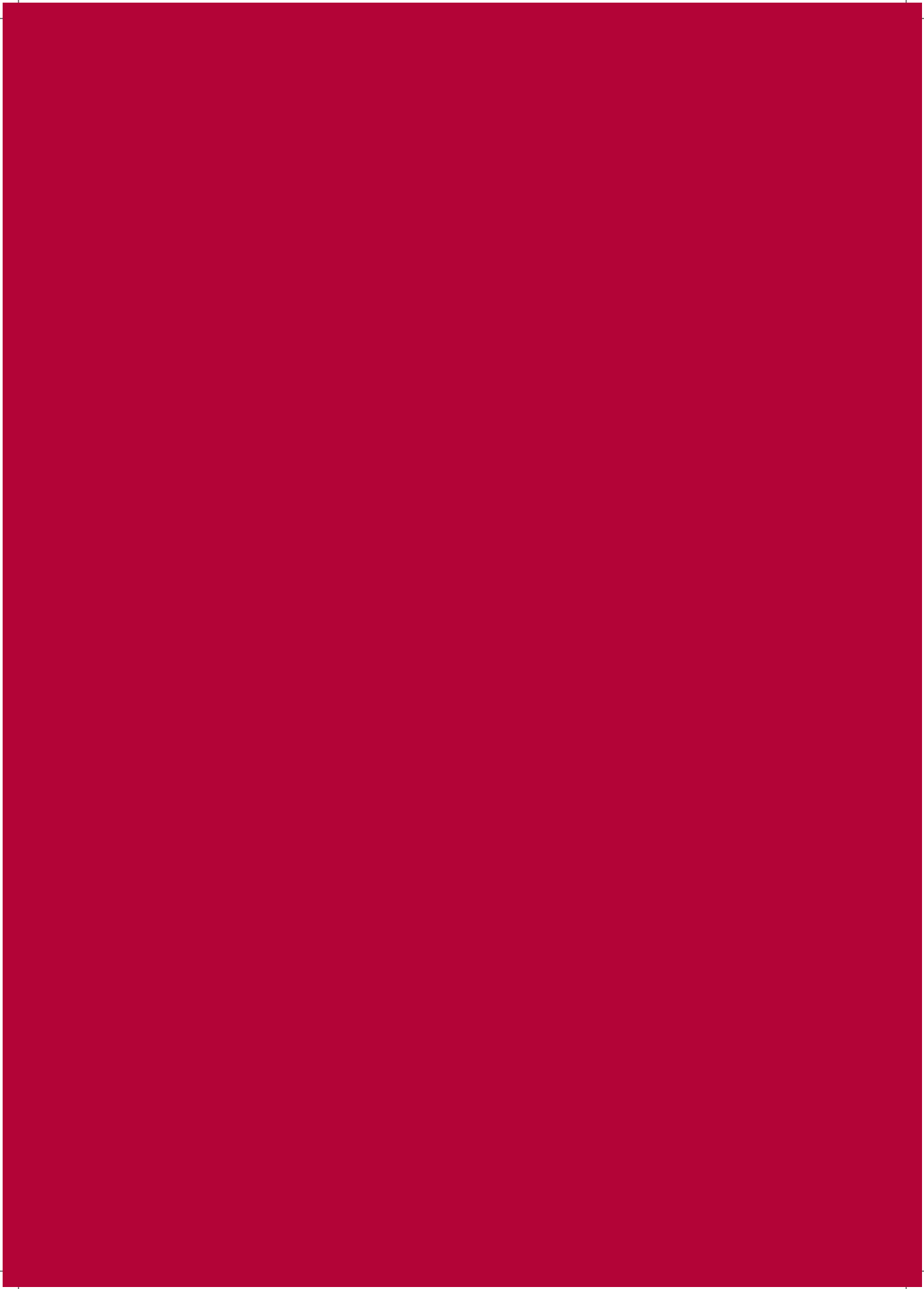
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Issue Focus



Neurobiological Data on What Online Education Could Be Doing to Our Spirituality and Our Brains: Some Augustinian/Niebuhrian Reflections

Mark Ellingsen

Interdenominational Theological Center

*ABSTRACT: A best-selling book written by Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, raises some hard questions about the use of the Internet as a tool for instruction.¹ The book cites various psychological and educational studies demonstrating that extensive use of the Internet does not produce the in-depth learning that reading books does. It seems that this is a function of how the repeated operations of the Internet—and the way it causes rapid multitasking without many occasions for thoughtful reflection—is changing our brains. We are not using the executive functions of our brain (the prefrontal cortex) as much, and so in many of us it is beginning to atrophy. And because this is the part of the brain that is the seat of spirituality, media that diminish its use are bad for our spirituality. The article raises these issues for ATS colleagues in order to initiate a dialogue on best practices we can develop in our use of online theological education that can counter these undesirable neural dynamics. A few suggestions regarding the desirability of including on-campus requirements for online students and finding ways to enhance long-term memory exercises are provided as discussion-starters for the broader deliberations on our campuses that this new book urges on us.*

Online theological education is the wave of the future. No turning back. The statistics are no doubt familiar to readers of this journal: 178 of the more than 270 ATS schools (more than 65 percent) are offering six or more courses online. At least 183 of the member schools offer one such course. We need these programs to meet the needs of the millennial generation who are most at home online and learn best in this manner. Faculty of the

¹ Nicholas G. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).

future will be “natives” to instruction by these means. Besides, online education helps keep seminaries functioning. While overall enrollment of ATS schools is dropping, online enrollment is up 200 percent according to a recent Auburn Seminary study, titled “(Not) Being There: Online Distance Education in Theological Schools.”²

The Auburn study provides good arguments for the theological soundness of theological education at a distance; after all, Jesus and God are at a distance. The study also nicely documents much of the recent literature about online theological education—most of it about the virtues of this approach—so there is no need to analyze this literature again. While taking seriously the critiques of online learning we have all heard regarding how such education deprives students of community and a culture of learning, it also reports that learning outcomes for online education students are higher than for those instructed in the traditional classroom. The claim is made, based on ATS student surveys, that personal/spiritual growth levels of online students are higher than those of residential students!³

To state the obvious, the decision-makers in ATS schools are pretty well committed to online education, even if older faculty still resist. The educational establishment at all levels is committed to this educational approach, and the businesses they serve expect it. As Reinhold Niebuhr pointed out, when we think something is good and just, it is probably the case that that is because the practice is just good for us.⁴ It is in that Augustinian spirit, not as a confirmed critic of online education (a “reformed critic” who’s been teaching online for nearly a decade), that I call our attention to a best-selling book and the neurobiological findings it reports, which the academy has been ignoring.

The book I am suggesting we take more seriously is a 2010 volume by Nicholas Carr. It has been widely heralded as the flashpoint for debate over the power and peril of the new technology. But to date, with one exception, theological educators have not grappled with the neurobiological

2 Auburn Seminary Studies Report, “(Not) Being There: Online Distance Education in Theological Schools” (Aug. 2, 2017), at auburnseminary.org/report/not-being-there.

3 Ibid.

4 Reinhold Niebuhr, “Law, Conscience, and Grace,” in *Justice & Mercy*, ed. Ursula Niebuhr (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 41ff.

and survey findings of Carr's book, titled *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing To Our Brains*.⁵

The title pretty much describes this best-selling author's thesis. Regular use of the Internet will change our brains and render us less capable of in-depth, reflective thinking. To date, there has been only one article that considers the implications of Carr's findings for online theological education. I refer to an article by South African biblical scholar Charles De Jongh, appearing in a 2015 Cambridge University Press book titled *Teaching Theology in a Technological Age*.⁶ But this article, like Carr's book itself, is still not a hot topic on most ATS campuses that shape our policies and deployment of online theological education. In addition, DeJongh does not grapple with the actual changes to the brain caused by Internet use, merely seeking to address specific symptoms of these neurological changes. Nor does he deal with Carr's charge that heavy Internet use undermines meditation and empathy—qualities that certainly are the business of theological education! And so it is evident that the theological academy needs an article—at least a book review and critical assessment—of *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. I don't have a lot of answers to the questions this book raises. I'm just hoping we can start discussing its implications together.

How online use changes the brain

Neurobiologists have instructed us about the plasticity of the human brain. It is always developing, more among youth, but even for those older than sixty-five. Carr points out how the human brain has been changed by earlier revolutions in communication, including the development of language, of reading and writing, of a phonetic alphabet, of reading silently, and even of radio, movies, and television.⁷ In this sense, changes in the human brain occasioned by Internet use are not problematic, to be expected. After all, other neurological changes occasioned by means of communication have turned out pretty well for *Homo sapiens* when you

5 Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*.

6 Charles De Jongh, "Challenges To Learning in the Age of the Internet," *Teaching Theology in a Technological Age*, eds. Yvette Debergue and James Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 113–126.

7 Carr, 17–57.

consider our evolutionary and socioeconomic cycle. But it might still be in Christian theology's interests to blow a whistle on some of the neurobiological alterations Internet usage stimulates.

Carr correctly points out that the Internet provides the user with a rich variety of sensory and cognitive stimuli, a steady stream of inputs to our visual, sensory, and auditory cortices. Our fingers, eyes, and even ears are regularly stimulated in different, often unrelated ways. And it seems that the stimuli of the Internet, due to their intensive and repetitive characters, are especially conducive to strong and rapid alterations in brain circuits and functions. The reward or reinforcement system of Internet interactions (all the "likes" or instant responses) further reinforces the brain changes. There is an addictive character to these patterns.⁸ But this should not be problematic in itself. Love and spirituality are addictions, facilitated by the secretion of the amphetamine-like brain chemical dopamine, which is addictive.⁹ What we need to examine carefully is what neural connections are facilitated by the Internet and also which ones are not nurtured or are allowed to atrophy.

The Internet keeps us moving, with lots of multitasking thrown in. Different senses are being used simultaneously. And even if we merely focus on the ocular, we are likely to move from the text considered to the related links suggested, not to mention our being attuned to the latest email, Facebook post, or text message being received.

In the earliest stage of online education (it is still the politically correct, pop culture version), it was contended that the opportunity to be enriched by various stimuli that Internet research provides would deepen comprehension and strengthen learning. But research seems to indicate that the division of attention demanded by the Internet strains our cognitive abilities and diminishes our learning and understanding. A study conducted by Steven Rockwell and Loy Singleton and other studies conducted at Cornell University and Kansas State University demonstrated that students focusing on a text, a lecture, or watching just one television screen

8 Ibid., 116–117.

9 Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009), 55–56; Helen Fisher, *The Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage, and Why We Stray* (New York: Random House, 1994).

retain information better than those who study the same phenomena through multimedia and/or Internet modes of viewing.¹⁰

This research (and more regarding studies showing that students do not retain as well when studying a hypertext) seems at odds with the findings the previously cited Auburn Seminary study.¹¹ What would be crucial to determine is what sort of learning outcomes were measured in the Auburn study. The multimedia experience of the Internet will clearly enhance the mind's abilities to multitask. If learning outcomes pertain to gathering a quantity of information or learning how to do some tasks (leadership, technical skills, not accepting the authority of ancient texts, predicting outcomes having to do with abstract thinking and visual acuity), exposure to Internet learning should be a benefit. But whether most seminaries really are measuring the best learning outcomes for ministry, that perhaps we should instead be measuring skills in exegeting Biblical texts, writing credos, or doing ministry case studies is another question that deserves another article. For the present, suffice it to note that there is hard data indicating that at least some seminary students do not learn as well when the instruction is interrupted, as it is on the Internet.

These reflections and data lead us to a consideration of what is involved in intelligence and how it is best nurtured, for the task of the seminary is to enhance theological intelligence. We all believe that students come to seminary with a faith perspective, with at least an "embedded theology." But seminary ought to enhance this faith perspective to offer students better tools to articulate and teach the faith to others.

Carr offers an interesting proposal, based on the work of Australian educational psychologist John Sweller. Intelligence, both contend, is derived from the schemas we have acquired over long periods of time. We understand concepts because we have schemas associated with those concepts. Thus, to work intelligently we need to be able to transfer information from

10 Steven C. Rockwell and Loy A. Singleton, "The Effect of the Modality of Presentation of Streaming Multimedia on Information Acquisition," *Media Psychology* 9 (2007): 179–191; Helene Hembrooke and Geri Gay, "The Laptop and the Lecture: The Effects of Multitasking in Learning Environments," *Journal of Computing in Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (September, 2003): 46–64; Lori Bergen, Tom Grimes, and Deborah Potter, "How Attention Partitions Itself during Simultaneous Message Presentations," *Human Communication Research* 31, no. 1 (July, 2005): 311–336.

11 Carr, 128ff; Auburn Seminary Report.

our working memory to long-term memory and to weave the working memory into the long-term schema we have stored.¹²

With this understanding, we can better understand why the information overload of the Internet impedes intelligent reflection. When the working memory is overloaded, only a small portion of what has been taught transfers to long-term memory, and what does transfer is a jumble of things and not necessarily a coherent stream from one source. Consequently, we cannot make all the connections with our long-term memories (stored in other brain cells) that are relevant to the situation and demand our full intelligence. The overload of the Internet impedes our use of all that we know that is relevant to the case. Put simply, we do not concentrate as well as we might if we were just reading or hearing a lecture without distraction.

But now we need to consider how online theological education might impact our brains long-term, when we are devoting the majority of our intellectual activity to time on the Internet. Neurobiologists like Eric Kandel have discerned that, for memory to persist, the incoming information must be thoroughly and deeply processed. This is accomplished by attending to the information and associating it meaningfully with knowledge already stored in memory—developing the schemas through neural connections. But the neurons holding these memories must maintain their electric charges.

Attention to new information and assessing it based on past memory begins in the frontal lobe of the cerebral cortex, which executes control over the mind's focus. When this transpires, the neurons (nerve cells) of the frontal cortex send signals to neurons in the midbrain that produce the monamine (brain chemical) dopamine. This good-feeling chemical sends signals from the frontal cortex neurons to other brain neurons that eventually facilitate their connections. You need dopamine for a present memory to be remembered long-term. And if these neurons have not been connected, connections facilitated by dopamine, and if such neural connections once made do not continue to be used, they harden and are of no use. Lose it or use it is a core principle of our plastic brains.¹³

12 John Sweller, *Instructional Design in Technical Areas* (Camverwell, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1999), 4–5, 11; cf. Carr, 124, 146–148.

13 Eric Kandel, *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of the Mind* (New York: Norton, 2006), 210, 312–315; cf. Carr, 193–194.

If you are not focused, not getting the prefrontal cortex active and the dopamine flowing, you do not remember long term what you experienced. And that means that you can't study something casually and expect to remember it. There seems to be some neurobiological validity to the old educational techniques of repetition and memorization. And likewise, if you do not continue to keep your neural connections active—not regularly drawing on your long-term memories with present memories—the connections atrophy and you forget. Repetition of what we know has its place, despite what a lot of Christian education and the educational establishment tell us. But it is not clear how a stress on “creative, free” thinking or online theological education promote these ways of learning. In fact, it seems that if we do not provide a theological education that nurtures long-term memory and the ability to weave together long-term memory and working memory we have promoted ignorance, not helped our students gain theological intelligence.

What happens to these brain dynamics when most of our education is online (and especially when we spend most of our waking hours this way)? The prefrontal cortexes of the brain are not focused just on linguistic and memory functions. All the regions of the brain get in the act. Over time, this will lead to weaker neural connections among these brain functions. In its place, extensive activity among all brain regions is the order of the day. This has the virtue of keeping the entire brain active. But the cost is concentration and memory (and intelligence).¹⁴

To be sure, a 2008 study by UCLA scientist Gary Small did find that searching the Internet does increase the activity of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex. But the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex is associated with working memory and selective attention; it does not alone activate long-term memory or weave the working memory into what we remember long

14 Carr, 121–122.

term.¹⁵ And so these results do not negate the finding that Internet use dulls our use of parts of the brain (especially the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex) necessary for long-term memory and attention.

Over the long haul of the next century or two (assuming the next stage in the communications revolution takes another couple of centuries), the brains of human beings will be changed. The less we use the regions of the prefrontal cortex associated with language, long-term memory, and concentration, the more likely it will have genetic implications for further generations. More and more members of future generations will be less likely to have the strong and sophisticated neural connections to these abilities if they are not so strong in their parents and grandparents. To the degree that these functions are essential to the part of the brain (the frontal cortex) that distinguishes *Homo sapiens* from other animals, could these developments serve to make us less human down the road?

Certainly, life will be different in human culture if we spend less time reading, reflecting, and remembering. When the prefrontal cortex is not as active, we get less dopamine, and that dynamic deprives us of pleasure in our daily undertakings, makes us less happy. It is perhaps no accident, then, that increased social media use tends to be evidenced among those who are depressed.¹⁶

Some strong advocates of online theological education may be ready to challenge this article on grounds that I am making too much of the electronic media, that it is merely a vehicle for learning, a tool that may be used in a variety of ways. Indeed, these sentiments are widely reflected in the academy. But such voices need to hear again the message Marshall

15 Gary Small and C. G. Vorgen, *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alternation of the Modern Mind* (New York and London: Harper, 2009). On the role of the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex in long-term memory, the appreciation that the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex must collaborate with the former in long-term memory formation, see Robert S. Blumfield and Charan Ranganath, "Prefrontal Cortex and Long-Term Memory Encoding: An Integrative Review of Findings from Neuropsychology and Neuroimaging," *The Neuroscientist* 13 (November 3, 2007): 288. These insights defend the value of Carr's thesis from the critique offered by Jonah Lehrer, "Our Cluttered Minds," *The New York Times*, June 3, 2010.

16 Daniel Amen, *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 81, 140–141; University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, "Social Media Use Associated With Depression Among U.S. Young Adults" (March 22, 2016), at www.upmc.com/media/news/lin-primack-sm-depression.

McLuhan forwarded in the 1960s: "The medium is the message."¹⁷ Media like television or rock-and-roll music convey a message, shape us in accord with their world views. Television has made us less patient with character developments or stories. We want action and instant news. And rock opened us up to sex and drugs. Why should it be any less the case that the Internet shapes our way of life?

I hasten to reiterate that I am not blaming all these possible developments on the Internet nor suggesting that they are the inevitable outcome of the extensive use of online theological education. The point of the article is merely to identify certain tendencies in such a means of delivering theological education, which should worry us in the guild, so that we can find ways to counter them and/or to modify our online delivery system.

Internet education, secularism, and the dearth of empathy

Neurobiologists and psychologists have noted two more implications of an under-use of all areas of the prefrontal cortex and the flow of dopamine it spawns as well as the stimulation of other parts of the brain (that, as we have observed, are outcomes of increased use of the Internet). People experiencing less dopamine along with an active parietal lobe (the part of the brain orienting them in space and time) are likely to be more secular. And the region of the prefrontal cortex active in computer use can lead to less empathy.

We have already noted that spirituality is related to levels of dopamine, which are secreted when the prefrontal cortex is exercised and is in turn related to less activity of the parietal lobe. But because other parts of the brain are equally exercised when we use the Internet, we are aware of what surrounds us. The result is that we are less likely to lose ourselves (the parietal lobe is less likely to shut down). Consequently, we are less likely to lose our space-time orientation and experience a sense of wholeness with all that is. In short, time on the Internet is not a spiritual, transcendent experience. And when it is just the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex that is activated as it is by Internet use, the dopamine that is secreted may stimulate the D1 receptor, which increases impulsive behavior and lessens

17 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, ed. T. W. Terrence Gordon (critical ed.; Madera, CA: Gingko, 2003), 30.

empathy. Nicholas Carr makes that point in his book about how the rapid speed of the Internet renders contemplation difficult and undermines our abilities to empathize, which also requires concentration in order to transcend the body and feel the psychological dimensions of a situation.¹⁸

A theological education that diminishes our students' sense of transcendence and the ability to empathize is certainly not in the church's interests. There are even indications that scholarship is not being advanced by our Internet connections. A study conducted by University of Chicago sociologist James Evans found that as more journals move online, scholars are citing fewer articles than ever before. And as old issues of printed journals were digitized and uploaded, scholars who did cite articles tended to refer to the more recent articles with increasing frequency.¹⁹ In short, science scholars are reading less and attending less to precedents. It would be interesting to see whether theological scholarship is moving in similar directions, and it is probably predictable that it is. Nicholas Carr's conclusions seem vindicated: heavier online use is making us more shallow, more caught up in the present moment and its patterns, less transcendent in our thinking and behaviors. And as these trends become increasingly accepted as the *only* modern way to communicate and think (for Internet education is the way of our schools), as they consequently more and more shape the brains of our heirs, there may be less aptitude and less place for deep thinking, aspirations, and emotions that only emerge from meditative encounters with what transcends us.

18 Carr, 168–169, 213–214, 219–222. Also consider the research conducted by Mary-Helen Immordino Yang, Andrea McColl, Hanna Damasio, and Antonio Damasio “Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106, no. 19 (May 12, 2009): 8021–8026; Susheel Vijayraghavan, Alex J. Major, and Stefan Everling, “Dopamine D1 and D2 Receptors Make Dissociable Contributions to Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortical Regulation of Rule-Guided Oculomotor Behavior,” *Cell Reports* 16 (July 19, 2016): 805–816.

19 James A. Evans, “Electronic Publication and the Narrowing of Science and Scholarship,” *Science* 321 (July 18, 2008): 395–399.

What do we do with these data?

I hasten to reiterate that this has not been an article about the evils of online theological education and a call that, therefore, ATS seminaries should ignore such programs. We cannot stick our heads in the sand while other fields of the academy proceed to embrace and employ online education and research. It is possible that the next wave of technological advances will overcome the concerns raised by Carr and in this article. In addition, I hasten to highlight that the multitasking skills nurtured by the Internet are skills that can be beneficial for the parish pastor. You need to be a multitasker in parish ministry, a generalist in the best sense. No two ways about it—online theological education has its virtues.

However, this article is motivated by the Augustinian perception that, in our fallen condition, nothing is as good as it seems. There are problems with every human invention. My aim has just been to specifically highlight some of these problems and potential abuses for ATS colleagues and to get us talking about them. The more we talk about them, the more likely we can arrive at some best practices to remedy these potential problems (the nurturing of brain dynamics that discourage or impede contemplation, in-depth thinking, memory, and empathy).

I don't have the answers. We need to find them together. Perhaps ATS and its member schools were on the right track when we insisted on some on-campus work by online students. But we need more work on explaining why we would want such a policy and what happens on campus to balance the concerns raised by Carr and neurobiological research. Maybe we could find ways and assignments to nurture more concentrated reflection on central texts among our online students, to provide drills for them and our residential students that will stimulate the repetition that is necessary for long-term memory and theological intelligence. Let's get the conversation going. At least, let's not continue to pursue our online programs as if they were the panacea of the future. Augustine and Niebuhr would warn us about that.

Mark Ellingsen is Professor of Church History at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

Instructional Designers and Online Theological Education: May We Help You?

Pamela C. Moore
Capella University

ABSTRACT: As theological institutions expand their online educational offerings to meet the increasing demand by distance learners for a seminary education, they face challenges in providing a curriculum that meets the unique requirements of ministerial training. In particular, the author cites issues of formation and communication skills as well as theological education's unique theocentric pedagogy. Setting forth specific examples of collaboration, she posits that professional instructional design can provide valuable assistance in developing online theological coursework, functioning as a leader among networked institutions to meet the challenges in a cost-effective manner.

Online education in the United States is a popular and affordable venue for many learners. Likewise, theological institutions are expanding their online educational offerings to meet the needs of distance learners who desire a seminary education. Theological schools face unique challenges in providing an online curriculum that meets the demands of ministerial training. The field of professional instructional design may provide valuable assistance to the development of online theological coursework. An instructional designer can function as a collaborative leader among networked theological institutions to meet the unique challenges of online theological programs in a cost-effective manner.

Online education

In 2016, more than 5,500,000 students chose online education in the United States. Ninety percent of these students consider online learning to be equivalent to or better than traditional learning. Although more than three-fourths of academic leaders view online learning as a crucial part of

an educational institution's long-term strategy, only 15 percent of faculty have more than a minimum of experience in creating online materials.¹

Distance learning is also a popular venue for many theological learners. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) reports that more than 133 of its member schools offer distance education programs.² ATS requires distance education programs in member schools to meet a set of standards. Many of the ATS requirements may be found in standards for online programs in other higher educational organizations, such as (1) school library materials and staff must be accessible for distance learners and (2) school technical support services must be available to distance learners. Other ATS requirements may be unique to distance education in theological institutions. For example, ATS-accredited distance programs are required to (1) address spiritual as well as personal formation, (2) instill a sense of community through robust interactions among learners and instructors, and (3) ensure that each course is developed with sensitivity to the ministry goals and settings of the degree program.³ Requirements such as these pose unique challenges for theological institutions when developing an online curriculum.

Unique challenges of online education in theological institutions

One of the challenges theological institutions face is the need to address the objective of developing spiritual formation in the learner. Ministerial training for roles such as church leadership, chaplaincies, and pastoral counseling must prepare the learner for the spiritual demands of the job. However, ministerial training encompasses more than intellectual development. Ministerial training includes the process of "formation" in the learner. This term refers to the holistic development of the learner that encompasses all that a person is (i.e., the mind, body, spirit, emotions, and

1 "2016: Today's Students are Driving the Online Learning Imperative," Online Learning Consortium, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/read/olc-infographic-2016-higher-education-online-learning-landscape>.

2 "2015 Annual Report," The Association of Theological Schools, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/resources/publications-and-presentations/2015-annual-report>.

3 "Educational Standard," The Association of Theological Schools, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/educational-standard.pdf>.

relationships).⁴ A commitment to provide spiritual formation requires that theological institutions carefully create online coursework that addresses the challenge of developing spiritual formation in a distance learner. This is particularly difficult in a learning environment that is often heavily dependent on written and asynchronous forms of communication between learners who are separated by physical distance.⁵

The consensus among theological institutions is that ministerial formation in a learner requires an aspect of community. To accomplish this second objective, online coursework must intentionally pursue the creation of “communities of faith and learning.”⁶ Historically, theological institutions have created a communal space for students to grow in personal dimensions of faith through face-to-face interactions. Distance education creates a significant challenge for faculty and curriculum designers to offer an equally valid environment that will foster vital communities of faith among online learners. Particular questions come to mind: How do you create a sense of community with distance learners who are separated by physical boundaries? How do you create a sense of oneness among the expanse of cultural diversity in a global population of students? How do you handle relational conflict in virtual space?⁷ Can technology provide genuine community at a distance?⁸

A related challenge is the concept of virtual communication skills. The varied ministries of pastoral care, pastoral counseling, leadership, preaching, worship, etc. are intuitively relational. Effective communication is a

4 Kathleen Hope Brown, "Formation and the Education of Ministers," *Theological Education* 48, no. 1 (2013): 15–23, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/theological-education/2013-theological-education-v48-n1.pdf>.

5 Mark A. Maddix and James R. Estep, "Spiritual Formation in Online Higher Education Communities: Nurturing Spirituality in Christian Higher Education Online Degree Programs," *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2010): 428.

6 Travis S. Hines, Thomas R. McGee, Lee "Rusty" Waller, and Sharon Kay Waller, "Online Theological Education: A Case Study of Trinity School for Ministry," *Christian Higher Education* 8, no. 1 (2008): 35, doi:10.1080/15363750802201284.

7 Lisa M. Hess, "A Begrudging, Recalcitrant Academic Observes what She's Learning: Distance Learning in Leadership Formation," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 17, no. 3 (2014): 269, doi:10.1111/teth.12210.

8 Diane Hockridge, "Challenges for Educators using Distance and Online Education to Prepare Students for Relational Professions," *Distance Education* 34, no. 2 (2013): 144, doi:10.1080/01587919.2013.793640.

vital part of relationship building and conflict management. Body language, eye contact, verbal affirmation, and physical touch are ways of communicating empathy and care. Such elements of communication naturally raise questions of the ability of distance learning to adequately prepare learners for pastoral care ministries. However, online communication is a ubiquitous means of contact and relationship building in contemporary society. It may be argued that all pastoral care training, whether distance or traditional, should expand to include effective virtual communication skills.⁹

A final challenge for theological institutions relates to the requirement for pedagogical approaches used in theological higher education institutions to be based on biblical principles. Some theological educators believe that educational pedagogy for online biblical education requires a higher standard than the typical constructivist approach, often used in contemporary education. Constructivism posits that truth does not exist outside of one's individual perception of truth. Biblical theology posits that truth is absolute and objective. Truth is discoverable, but only partially.¹⁰

A second pedagogical concern in theological education may be in the choice of a teacher-centered versus student-centered approach. A teacher-centered model creates an environment where the teacher is the source of the instruction and the student is a passive receiver of knowledge. A learner-centered model, on the other hand, creates a collaborative environment in which the instructor is the facilitator and the student is a pro-active learner.¹¹ Both teacher-centered and learner-centered pedagogies are supported by biblical principles as found in Romans 15:14 and Colossians 3:16, respectively. However, intrinsic to theological education are the assumptions that the recipient of instruction is the learner and the goal of instruction is an improved relationship with God.¹² Therefore, theological education may require a more unique pedagogy—a pedagogy that is theocentric.

9 Melinda McGarrah Sharp and Mary Ann Morris, "Virtual Empathy? Anxieties and Connections Teaching and Learning Pastoral Care Online," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 17, no. 3 (2014): 256–257, doi:10.1111/teth.12211.

10 James A. Thorne, "Biblical Online Education: Contributions from Constructivism," *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 99, 104–105.

11 Information Resources Management Association, ed., *Instructional Design: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools and Applications*. (Hershey: IGI Global, 2011), accessed October 11, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central, 33, 1236.

12 Luz M. Ibarra, *Maritain, Religion, and Education: A Theocentric Humanism Approach*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2013), accessed October 11, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central, 155.

Instructional designers and online theological education

Professional instructional designers may be able to assist theological institutions in addressing the challenges of online education. More and more institutions of higher learning are hiring instructional designers who can assist faculty members in creating effective instructional packages that meet the demands of today's rapidly changing technology in both traditional and online learning environments.¹³ The professional competencies for instructional designers, according to the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction, include the following:

- Apply research and theory to the discipline of instructional design
- Identify and respond to ethical, legal, and political implications of design in the workplace
- Conduct a needs assessment in order to recommend appropriate design solutions and strategies
- Identify and describe target population and environmental characteristics
- Analyze the characteristics of existing and emerging technologies and their potential uses
- Design instructional interventions
- Select or modify existing instructional materials
- Develop instructional materials
- Design learning assessments
- Evaluate instructional and non-instructional interventions¹⁴

Equipped with these skills, an instructional designer can be a significant aid to theological faculty members. One tenured faculty member at a theological institution describes the difficulties of time constraints and the lack of training to competently incorporate the influx of new technologies for online coursework. She and her colleagues experience a high degree of ambivalence and emotional stress due to new demands created by the

13 Pearson Education, "Instructional Designers in Higher Ed: Changing the Course of Next-Generation Learning," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://results.chronicle.com>.

14 "2012 ibstpi Instructional Design Competencies," Download Center, International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://ibstpi.org>.

need to offer distance learning opportunities in theology schools.¹⁵ Therefore, instructional designers could be a valuable adjunct to theological faculty.

Moreover, instructional designers may be well equipped to assist theology schools at a broader level. Instructional designers can be leaders of transformational change in delivering online education as collaborative managers of instructional package development, maintenance, and evaluation. The remainder of this essay outlines the specific ways an instructional designer can be a leader in online theological education, using four suggestions by John Kotter, who describes the challenges of leading transformational change.¹⁶ He warns of the common pitfalls of (1) lacking a vision, (2) not creating a powerful guiding coalition, (3) not anchoring changes in the culture of the organization, and (4) not creating short-term wins.¹⁷

Have a vision

The quality of online education offered by an institution has strategic and financial implications. Students who feel that they have received a valuable education through an online learning program are more likely to remain loyal to the institution through re-enrollment or encouraging others to enroll.¹⁸ Therefore, new academic program development should begin with an analysis of market needs and the resources required for successful implementation. Plans to modify existing academic programs should begin with a performance analysis of the program that includes degree completion and job placement outcomes. Students, both potential and current, employers of graduates, and faculty can provide relevant input to academic program planning.¹⁹

15 Hess, "A Begrudging Recalcitrant," 270.

16 John P. Kotter, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail," *Business Leadership*, ed. Joan V. Gallos (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 370–81.

17 Ibid.

18 Brandon Kilburn, Ashley Kilburn, and Dexter Davis, "Building Collegiate E-Loyalty: The Role of Perceived Value in the Quality-Loyalty Linkage in Online Higher Education," *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER)* 9, no. 3 (2016): 99, doi:10.19030/cier.v9i3.9704.

19 Jay R. Dee and William A. Heineman, "Understanding the Organizational Context of Academic Program Development," *New Directions for Institutional Research* 2015, no. 168 (2016): 9, 15–16, doi:10.1002/ir.20158.

Instructional designers are trained to perform a needs analysis for instructional interventions, which includes a cost-benefit analysis of any proposed solution. Information about current training and gaps in training are analyzed before any design efforts. Key stakeholders of online instruction in the organization are interviewed to ensure that any proposed instructional design truly meets the objectives and expectations of the institution.²⁰

Create a guiding coalition

So, the ultimate test of creative leadership lies not only in having a new idea but in bringing it to life, accomplishing the real-world change it promises. To do so, the would-be leader must reach out to others for help. But would-be followers will respond only if the new frame articulated by creative leadership speaks directly to them, to their underlying wants, discontents, and hopes.²¹

Managerial level competencies for instructional designers require skill in managing not only projects but also collaborative relationships.²² An instructional design leader in theological distance education can create a valuable team of faculty members, administrative leaders, alumni/ae, and undergraduates who can supply the needed input and guidance for implementing a successful online program.

Anchor changes in the organization's culture

Churches and ministry sites are sources of valuable guiding information for training program development for ministerial positions. These places can provide key insights to the instructional designer concerning the current and future needs of the ministry. The online training program can then be designed to effectively meld academic and practical theology into the training curriculum.²³

20 George M. Piskurich, *Rapid Instructional Design: Learning ID Fast and Right*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 18–22.

21 James MacGregor Burns, "The Power and Creativity of a Transforming Vision," in *Business Leadership*, ed. Joan V. Gallos (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 310.

22 "2012 ibstpi Instructional Design Competencies."

23 Brian E. Woolnough, "Purpose, Partnership, and Integration: Insights from Teacher Education for Ministerial/Mission Training," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 33, no. 4 (2016): 251, doi:10.1177/0265378816644591.

In addition to reflecting the culture of the various fields of ministry, online program development must also reflect the culture of the theological institution.

Theological educational institutions communicate their principles and values to learners through intentional ethos enabler activities. Institutional ethos enablers are often imparted through (1) faculty member interactions with learners, (2) student services, (3) worship services, (4) ministry internships, and (5) codes of conduct.²⁴

An instructional design leader can ensure that the foundational principles of a theological institution are built into the fabric of the online program by utilizing applicable ethos enabler activities.²⁵ For example, the instructional designer is trained to select from options of current technology to provide an effective platform for learner-to-faculty and learner-to-learner interactions.²⁶ Institutional values can then be shared via technology-assisted interactions. An instructional designer can also insert (1) online learning program guides to provide campus information technology assistance, (2) online library accessibility, and (3) plagiarism checks to assist the distance learner.²⁷ These features would deliver ethos enablers through student services and codes of conduct.

Plan for and create short-term wins

The final suggestion that Kotter offers for effective transformational change in organizations is to create short-term wins to maintain the momentum of the implementation of the plan and to identify any necessary modifications to the strategy.²⁸ A phased approach to creating impactful online theologi-

24 James E. Watson, "The Inclusion of Intentional Ethos Enablers in Electronic Distance Learning Opportunities of Christian Institutions," *American Journal of Distance Education* 22, no. 4 (2008): 195–96, doi:10.1080/08923640802429860.

25 Colin M. Gray and Elizabeth Boling, "Inscribing Ethics and Values in Designs for Learning: A Problematic," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 64, no. 5 (2016): 973, doi:10.1007/s11423-016-9478-x.

26 J.V. Dempsey and Richard N. Van Eck, "E-Learning and Instructional Design," in *Trends and Issues in Instructional Design and Technology*, 3rd ed., eds. Robert A. Reiser and John V. Dempsey (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 283–84.

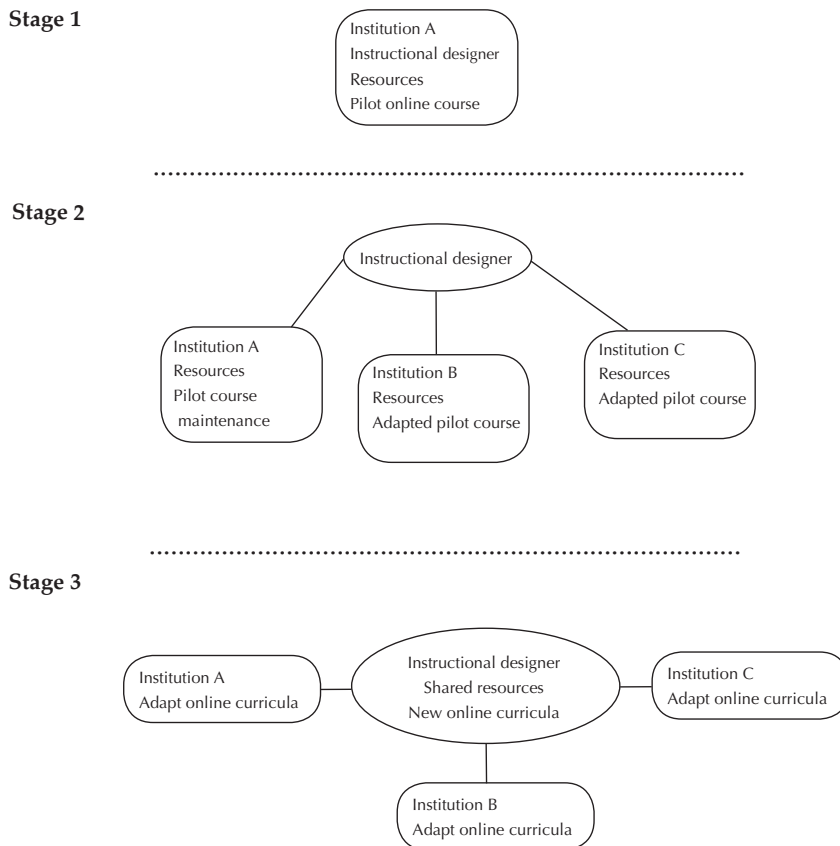
27 Frank Nyugen, "Performance Support," In *Trends and Issues in Instructional Design and Technology*, 3rd ed., eds. Robert A. Reiser and John V. Dempsey (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 148–49.

28 Kotter, 379.

cal education may also serve as a viable tactic for using an instructional designer, where costs may be prohibitive. The figure below illustrates a three-staged approach for implementing a plan to employ an instructional designer as a collaborative leader among three partnered theological institutions to develop online curricula.

In stage one, the instructional designer designs and develops an online course using the resources of a single institution. The developed course is then implemented as a pilot program in this originating institution. In stage two, the instructional designer adapts the pilot course for the unique needs of other partnered institutions. In stage three, new online curricula are developed for all partnered institutions. At this point, the instructional designer functions as a leader in a collaborative sharing of the resources from all the institutions in expanding their individual online learning programs.

Figure 1. Three-staged approach



A vision to share resources and adapt online curricula among partnered institutions is not without precedent. First, a school district in Oklahoma created a science instructional package for middle school learners through the collaborative efforts of teachers, librarians, media specialists, and technology designers. The end product was a successful science unit that incorporated core learning objectives in a flexible package that could be easily adapted for use in diverse school environments.²⁹

A second example involves the use of collaborative governance. Collaborative governance is a form of management that has been effectively utilized by public organizations to reach common goals through shared decision making and management.³⁰ To achieve shared objectives, organizations often pool their financial resources, personnel, knowledge, and material.³¹ Theological institutions that are associated through denominational ties or regional localities may be good candidates to successfully adapt these methods of program adaptability and shared governance toward a common goal of online education.

In summary, theological institutions are expanding their online offerings for ministerial training. The scope of theological education includes (1) the development of spiritual formation, (2) the creation of communities of faith in learners, and (3) a pedagogical approach that is based on biblical principles. Such criteria pose unique demands on the design and development of online courses for distance learners in theological institutions.

29 Kelsey Barker and Buffy Edwards, "In Principle and Practice: Developing a Guided Inquiry Design Unit for District-Wide Implementation," *Teacher Librarian* 44, no. 2 (2016): 23–24.

30 Chris Ansell and Alison Gash, "Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 18, no. 4 (2008; 2007): 545, doi:10.1093/jopart/mum032.

31 Youngmin Oh and Carrie Blanchard Bush, "Exploring the Role of Dynamic Social Capital in Collaborative Governance," *Administration & Society* 48, no. 2 (2016): 228–229, doi:10.1177/0095399714544941.

Instructional designers are trained to assist organizations to meet the learning goals of their training programs. By partnering together, theological institutions can cost-effectively use an instructional designer as a leader in collaborative design and development efforts to provide quality and affordable training programs for distance theological learners.

Pamela C. Moore holds a PhD in Education with a specialization in Instructional Design for Online Learning from Capella University in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Makeshifting the LMS: Strategies and Tactics in the Digital Classroom

Eric C. Smith
Iliff School of Theology

ABSTRACT: As online and hybrid pedagogies proliferate among ATS schools, many faculty report experiences of loss around traditional residential pedagogy and a sense of estrangement from online forms of education. This article argues that much of this grief and discomfort can be located in the function of the LMS (Learning Management System) and that Michel de Certeau's descriptions of strategies and tactics and ways of makeshifting everyday life offer suggestions for becoming more at home in emerging pedagogical spaces.

"To walk is to lack a place."

—Michel de Certeau¹

Introduction

At the end of 2017, 175 of The Association of Theological Schools member institutions—64 percent—had approval to offer some version of hybrid or online instruction. Collectively, these schools enrolled 23,000 students in online classrooms.² My own institution—the Iliff School of Theology—has been engaged in this mode of teaching and learning since 2008, with an ever-increasing proportion of its students enrolled in hybrid or online courses. This has shifted the institution's center of gravity from our traditional campus to a place that is less easy to locate, and it has provoked a great deal of introspection and even grief on the part of faculty and the remaining residential students. These constituencies often experience a sense of loss: loss of happenstance hallway conversations that no

¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 103.

² Tom Tanner, "Online Learning at ATS Schools: Part 1—Looking Back at Our Past," *Colloquy Online* (February 2017).

longer occur, loss of the spontaneity of classroom interactions that seems harder to find online, and loss of an unspoken ideal of what theological education ought to be. Our language betrays our nostalgia for another time, as we find ourselves speaking of “real” classrooms vs. online ones, or of getting to know hybrid students “as real people” when they come to campus. As a community of teachers and learners, my institution has committed to hybrid pedagogy with surprising vigor and effectiveness, and we have innovated as we have grown into new ways of teaching and learning. At the same time, though, we miss something of the old in all of the new ways we have learned.

This is not an anxiety that is unique to one school, nor is it a concern only of those faculty who have served through a transition from traditional to hybrid or online pedagogy. At a fall 2015 gathering I attended of persons newly appointed as faculty at ATS schools, participants went around the room and introduced themselves, saying something about their anxieties and hopes in their new roles. Many of the first- or second-year faculty in the room had the same lament—they found themselves teaching online, and they were less fulfilled and engaged by the work than they had expected to be by teaching at a theological school. At least from my anecdotal experience, it seems that frustration with hybrid teaching is common across faculty at different stages of their careers.

In this article, I argue that much of the frustration and dissatisfaction with hybrid and online teaching is a product of the platforms on which these courses are built and delivered, and the ways that those platforms are used and understood. I argue that the feelings of estrangement and impersonality are functions of the learning management systems (LMS) that we use to structure and manage our online classes, and that the theoretical framework offered by Michel de Certeau can help us imagine ways to escape the confining presence of the LMS, or to make new creative pathways within it, and reclaim the sense of personal presence, spontaneity, creativity, and genuine connection for which we long.³

3 Learning Management Systems may be used with traditional residential pedagogy, as a repository for documents, a place to submit assignments, or a kind of online syllabus, but in this article I am particularly concerned with the way they function in online or hybrid settings. In those kinds of teaching, the LMS is where the course “lives,” in the same way a residential course might “live” in room 503 of a particular building. In those cases, the LMS governs and structures the course as a space that insinuates itself into practice.

Walking the LMS

In his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau includes a chapter in which he invites his readers to imagine the view from the top of the World Trade Center in New York.⁴ From the top of one of the towers, he writes that the view of Manhattan is godlike and all-seeing, and that it lays bare the organization of the city. Streets stretch out in a grid with cars coursing through them, and sidewalks run alongside, with throngs of people moving in rhythm with signals telling them when to stop and go. The view from the top of a tall building like the World Trade Center privileges the city as it has been designed by city planners with an organized layout meant to maximize efficiency, with smaller streets feeding into and intersecting with larger ones, and with a great deal of high-level planning evident in everything from the timing of stoplights to the management of disruptions from utility work. Standing at such a high vantage point, it is clear the way persons are shunted and moved by larger systems. Our routes through the city are chosen for us and by a series of invisible hands on the scales, we are ushered into the pathways set for us by city planners. “The desire to see the city” this way, writes Certeau, “preceded the means of satisfying it.”⁵ Humans wanted to see and understand the city—and their world—in this godlike way before technology gave us tools to accomplish it. In our own age, with the advent of extremely tall buildings from which to see cities and satellite imagery with which to scrutinize urban landscapes, we have achieved a certain divine perspective on the city. De Certeau adds that the view from the top reveals the work of city planners and urbanists, which “seems to have the status of the ‘proper meaning’” of space.⁶ From the top, we understand the city as it was *meant* to be understood by its official and sanctioned creators.

4 The book was written before the events of September 11, 2001. As one reviewer of this article noted, the subsequent history of the site carries profound and ironic ramifications for the way we think about de Certeau’s constructions of power and authority in this example. Although the view from the top of the World Trade Center provides a way of understanding the city from an abstracted perspective and although the World Trade Center was itself a center of power, power relations and spatial relations are always socially constructed and subject to shifts. We read nuances and associations in the words “World Trade Center” that de Certeau could not have anticipated.

5 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 92.

6 *Ibid.*, 100.

But this is in contrast, de Certeau writes, to the reality on the ground and to the city as it is encountered by walking through it. The person walking on the ground transgresses the set pathways regularly. Perhaps she is in a hurry and does not wait for the crossing signal. Or perhaps an unscrupulous cab driver takes a longer route to get a higher fare. There will be illegal turns that violate the conditions set out for driving, and on cold mornings pedestrians might pass through the warm lobby of a building rather than walk around it on the sidewalk or take a side street to pass by a favorite coffee shop. The real traffic in an environment like Manhattan is always more complicated than what is suggested by the view from a godlike perch atop a high building. People are always choosing their pathways through the city for their own reasons, which might or might not be the same reasons held by planners. *Most* people probably follow *most* rules and trace *most* official routes, but there is always improvisation in the flow of people and machines through the urban valleys. Makeshifting—the *bricolage* finding of unofficial pathways that are preferred for reasons of efficiency, habit, or aesthetics—will always be a part of the urban landscape. De Certeau likens walking to “pedestrian speech-acts,” arguing that walkers appropriate topography, act out place, and describe and inscribe relations between places and spaces in their walking.⁷ Walkers (and others who move through cities) make the city by their movements; their passages and pathways are more constitutive and descriptive of the urban landscape than the work of city planners and geographers.

Elsewhere, de Certeau uses the language of “strategies” and “tactics” to talk about patterns of human life. Strategies are official sites or ways of being—the strongholds of those who have the power to dictate terms. De Certeau calls a strategy “a place that can be circumscribed as proper” and given the authority of propriety.⁸ Fifth Avenue is a strategy—official, proper, prominent, and efficient (as far as traffic in New York City goes)—but there are other ways of moving around the city, invisible or irrelevant in the view from atop the World Trade Center. One could take the subway (still its own kind of strategy), a pedestrian might cut through Madison Square Park, and a car might cut over to 6th Avenue. A cyclist might follow 5th Avenue, but zigzag between traffic and cut onto sidewalks depending

7 Ibid., 97–98.

8 Ibid., xix.

on traffic. These alternative ways of travel—these different spaces—are what de Certeau calls “tactics.” Tactics, in de Certeau’s way of describing them, belong to the weak who do not possess the power to impose strategies. De Certeau claims that “the place of a tactic belongs to the other,” operating by insinuating “itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance.”⁹ Tactics are—in other words—the traces of makeshifters, working their ways through and around the margins of the strategies set out by more official or more powerful entities, out of view of the system as it was designed to function.

The physical classroom is the reigning strategy of higher education. It is the place “circumscribed as proper” by those with the authority to designate it so, and by a long tradition and history of practice. Nearly all people teaching in higher education experienced their own formation and training in physical classrooms, and a romanticized version of that classroom is what motivated many faculty to become teachers.¹⁰ The classroom—the room where “class” happens—is embedded in a legitimating system, protected, and imbued with authority that other spaces do not hold. The room is usually assigned by administration, and while a class is in session, the space is inviolable in all but the most unusual of circumstances; nobody can simply wander through while a theology class is underway, or use the space for a meeting while the introductory Hebrew Bible course is meeting there. Certain structures of authority and standards of behavior hold sway within its walls. It is a surveilled space where students understand that they are always being evaluated, and no matter what role a person occupies, the expectations are clear when they are inside the classroom during a class session.

Nevertheless, physical classrooms are subject to tactics. While policy, tradition, physical space, and institutional inertia make classrooms into

9 Ibid.

10 Near the end of the essay, de Certeau links the sense of “being there” in a space to childhood formation, and suggests that our spatial practices have their origins in our early experiences. “It must ultimately be seen as the repetition, in diverse metaphors, of a decisive and originary experience,” he says. The grief and sense of loss experienced by teachers (and some learners) in online and hybrid classrooms becomes more understandable if it is seen as this kind of spatial practice. We spend our lives replicating our “decisive and originary experiences,” and when some new structure like the LMS insinuates itself into our practice, it feels very disruptive. *Ibid.*, 109.

strategies, the persons within that strategic space often makeshift their existences within it—operating in the margins of the more official pathways. Professors can arrange the room in different ways, reinforcing or subverting power dynamics along the way; putting chairs in a circle does something to erode hierarchical structures (though it does not erase them). The rearrangement of bodies in space is a tried-and-true teaching tool; putting students into small groups or asking them to attend to their breathing, posture, body language, or place within the room can refocus and reinvigorate the work of the class. On nice days, the class might meet outside or the professor might incorporate activities or class sessions that meet somewhere other than the normal classroom. Students, for their part, might impose tactics on the strategic space of the classroom by browsing the Internet on a laptop or tablet, by passing notes, by staring out the window, or by appearing to take notes while actually doing work for another class. While the traditional residential classroom is a strategy imposed by institutions and individuals with authority, it is a strategic space—like all strategic spaces—inflected with myriad tactics on the part of both students and teachers. In fact, this is often the very aspect of the traditional residential classroom that is romanticized and made nostalgic by those teaching and learning in online spaces—the moments when something irrupts into the classroom, changing the dynamics in the room or shifting the terms of the discussion away from the planned topic, often stand out as the most memorable moments.¹¹ The traditional residential classroom—like the view from high above Manhattan—provides a map of human activity as it has been designed to be, but actual human activity is always more contingent, *bricolage*, shifting, and organic.

LMS as strategy

Each year before the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) meetings, an event called THATCamp happens. THATCamp, which stands for The Humanities and Technology Camp, is an “unconference” model that has taken hold at many meetings of

11 Perhaps the most memorable class session of my own master’s-level theological education came when my constructive theology professor threw out the planned discussion on September 12, 2001, and instead moderated a discussion on trauma, loss, theodicy, fear, and evil based on the events of the previous day.

academic professional societies in recent years. Attendees at this meeting have varied interests, including digital humanities research and traditional classroom pedagogy, but one of the most persistent topics of interest at the AAR and SBL THATCamp is teaching online. Attendees—who of course are at many different kinds of institutions and who occupy many different places professionally—often arrive at THATCamp seeking guidance and tools for teaching online, for which they have been almost inevitably prepared poorly or not at all, and which has been thrust upon them by department chairs and deans and mandated as a kind of necessary evil. Anxieties and questions span a wide range of topics, from the facilitation of discussions online to the use of video. But many, if not most, of them boil down to anxieties about LMS. Inevitably, at THATCamp, a discussion about something seemingly unrelated—digital mapmaking, teaching students to program, how best to use PowerPoint—will pivot to the question of teaching online, usually with the frustration focused on the limits of the LMS. The conversation will devolve into the trading of war stories, as Moodle users describe their trouble with embedding video, Canvas users wrestle with modules, Blackboard users (who are pitied most of all) describe their struggles with layers of nested menus, and those who are using smaller platforms or proprietary single-institution systems describe their idiosyncrasies.¹² These conversations, while cathartic, don't often result in much that is useful, but they usually conclude with knowing head-nodding from all those involved—the LMS is an enemy, and not an ally, in the quest to teach well in the hybrid and online contexts where it is most central to the teaching.

The catalog of complaints about LMS is long, and remarkably consistent across platforms. The technology is unreliable, unstable, or inscrutable. Neither students nor professors know how to access materials or else they lack the proper technology, and teachers are stuck doing tech support. It is difficult to know whether students are actually doing the work they are submitting. Discussions are stilted and formulaic. Video quality is substandard. Some institutions are legalistic and overly guarded

12 For some speculation on market share and the value of the LMS market, see Joshua Kim's short article. A major argument of this piece is that the shape and size of the market is difficult to know fully given available evidence. Joshua Kim, "How Big is the LMS Market?" *Inside Higher Ed*, September 19, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/technology-and-learning/how-big-lms-market>.

about exposing students to the Internet. Others require online courses to comply with lengthy and restrictive rubrics, the value of which for fostering learning is debatable.¹³ Classes delivered via LMS online require much, much more work upfront from teachers than does a traditional residential course; there is no such thing as walking into an online course and winging it. But the most prevalent lament of all, at least in my experience with these conversations, is that teaching online *just doesn't feel like teaching*. There is something missing in an online class, most people agree, and the gap between the affective and performative experience of teaching in a traditional residential classroom and in an online, LMS-structured classroom is where most of the mournfulness about and resistance to hybrid and online education occurs. One senior faculty member once described this to me as the inability to get to know students "as people," and another senior faculty member claimed that he couldn't embody the same fluid, bantering style in an online environment that he could in a traditional classroom. He couldn't read the room, direct discussion like a symphony conductor, or draw out the hidden gifts of his students. These complaints often come down to a qualitative assessment: *it's just not the same*, and people find themselves doing pedagogical work that is very different than the work they had imagined they would be doing, or the work that they feel best equipped to do.

Beyond these analyses and laments by teachers, theorists and practitioners of online pedagogy have begun to level other criticisms at the LMS. Kat Lecky has drawn attention to the role of technology as an all-seeing observer, and the role of graphical user interfaces in reinforcing hegemony.¹⁴ The LMS, in this view, becomes another invasive presence in the lives of students and teachers, gathering information on and surveilling everyone enrolled in the course. Jesse Stommel and Sean Michael Morris of the Digital Pedagogy Lab level this charge against Turnitin, the

13 Blackboard, for example, offers an eight-page, multi-column rubric for "exemplary course design" that privileges the satisfaction of particular goals around clarity of expectations (which is good) but remains nebulous about what, exactly, might be meant by, for example, "technologies are used creatively in ways that transcend traditional, teacher-centered instruction." Blackboard, "Blackboard Exemplary Course Program Rubric," http://www.blackboard.com/resources/catalyst-awards/bbexemplarycourserubric_march2014.pdf.

14 Kat Lecky, "Humanizing the Interface," *Hybrid Pedagogy*, March 27, 2014, <http://www.digitalpedagogy.com/hybridped/humanizing-interface/>.

popular anti-plagiarism software that often embeds into an LMS, reading and collecting student data as it is submitted.¹⁵ Audrey Watters critiques “edtech” by way of analogy to fitness trackers.¹⁶ John Warner writes more generally, and not positively, about the arrival of “big data” to post-secondary education.¹⁷ Inherent in all of these analyses is the observation that technology, while hailed as a panacea, can function like a panopticon, surveilling students and teachers and conditioning the experience of learning with the presence of a third entity—beyond students and teachers—in the online classroom. It is as if every traditional residential course took place with an administrator sitting in the corner, furiously taking notes on everything everybody said (and potentially passing it along or selling it to other parties). The chilling effect would be obvious in a traditional residential course, so it is no wonder that parallel practices in online and hybrid courses produce similar hesitation and discomfort.

Technology is of course necessary for all forms of teaching and learning, as a mediator of information and a facilitator of conversation.¹⁸ Chalkboards and dry erase markers are technologies, as are desks and lecterns. But technology is especially present and evident in online pedagogy, and often the technologies involved in online education are more advanced and less familiar than those employed in traditional residential classrooms. Furthermore, technology is often unleashed in hybrid and online classrooms as a means of assessment in ways that insinuate technology into the act of teaching and can, if we are not careful, reduce assessment to box-checking. In this way, technologies in online and hybrid contexts deploy de Certeau’s strategies at their most powerful. This is what we mean when we describe teaching and learning online as impersonal; we mean that it feels overly mediated and controlled by technology. Human presence can

15 Jesse Stommel and Sean Michael Morris, “A Guide for Resisting Edtech: The Case Against Turnitin,” *Hybrid Pedagogy*, June 15, 2017, <http://www.digitalpedagogylab.com/hybridped/resisting-edtech/>.

16 Audrey Watters, “The History of the Pedometer (and the Problems with Learning Analytics),” *Hacked Education*, June 22, 2017, <http://hackededucation.com/2017/06/22/fitbit>.

17 John Warner, “The Costs of Big Data,” *Inside Higher Ed*, July 6, 2014, <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/costs-big-data>.

18 All means of writing and reading are technologies, as is every form of classroom, every arrangement of teachers and students, and every curriculum, no matter how informal.

be difficult to discover and cultivate among all the pixels that fly around in online classrooms, especially for those who are not accustomed to relying on technology like smartphones and social media for the maintenance of their other human relationships, or whose most relational style formed in a time before things were so mediated by technology. This might map onto generational differences most obviously, but it also maps onto differences in students' and teachers' families of origin, social classes, abilities and disabilities, geography, and access to technology, among other things. It is tempting to see online and hybrid technology as an equalizer, and in many ways it is. But students and teachers bring a constellation of experiences and dispositions to online classrooms, each student's different from the others', and simply having common access to an online space does not erase those differences. A student or teacher who has never had access to a smartphone because of cost, or whose family shunned technology for religious reasons, or who lives where broadband is not available, will have a different relationship to technology than will other students or teachers, even if she is provided with the latest equipment and a blazing fast connection. Our experiences with technology condition our expectations of it, and these expectations are carried with us as we enter the landscape of online and hybrid education that is dominated by strategies "circumscribed as proper" by LMS platforms.

Makeshifting the LMS

The traditional physical classroom has remained a compelling pedagogical space for generations. This is partly a result of patterns and structures that de Certeau would describe as strategies: rudiments of teaching and learning like discrete synchronous blocks of class time, discussions moderated by the professor, lectures and guest speakers, and the like. But if we reflect on what makes these spaces compelling pedagogically, it is often not the strategies but the tactics that come to mind. Moments that disrupt the usual flow of things, spatial rearrangements, unusually passionate discussions, the use of audio or video, or some alchemistic combination of intangible factors can lead to electric experiences and memories of teaching and learning in traditional physical classrooms.

Anecdotally, these kinds of spontaneous experiences are difficult to replicate in online and hybrid classrooms. I have argued already that this is due in large part to the looming presence of the LMS, which organizes

and surveils all aspects of the course. Like the view from the top of the World Trade Center described by de Certeau, the LMS circumscribes as proper certain patterns of behavior and dictates certain pathways of learning. Although LMS designers might not mean for them to feel that way, many teachers and learners experience LMS structures as restrictive or imposing, channeling pedagogy down a few well-worn paths (or major thoroughfares, to return to the analogy of New York City). This problem is compounded by an assumption that is shockingly common among professors, at least the ones I talk to, that online and hybrid teaching and learning ought to be approached as a translation of traditional residential teaching and learning. In this way of thinking, the lecture becomes a video, classroom discussion becomes a discussion forum, and less formal interaction goes away completely. The impulse to use synchronous, live-streaming technology is evidence of the power of this desire to translate the residential experience; the professor maintains a central position in the classroom. But, unlike a traditional residential classroom, in a synchronous live-streamed setting the camera insists on the direction of the students' gaze. Synchronous live-streamed pedagogy is a reinforcement of the strategies of traditional residential teaching and not a way of troubling it. The impulse to make online and hybrid pedagogy a direct translation of traditional residential pedagogy is a reduction; in the move from traditional residential pedagogy to online and hybrid pedagogy, the most vital and least formal elements are forgotten or squeezed out of consideration. It should not surprise us that teaching and learning stripped of its most vital valences can feel rote, disconnected, and impersonal.

Near the end of his essay, "Walking the City," de Certeau turns to the stories we tell as we pass through the city. "Stories about places are makeshift things," he writes. "They are composed of the world's debris."¹⁹ That is, the narration of space is another kind of *bricolage*, a way of passing through it on our own terms, with attention to the things *we* find meaningful. And after a certain amount of time in a place, our stories turn to memory. "'Here there used to be a bakery,'" de Certeau offers; "'That's where old lady Dupuis used to live.'"²⁰ The inflection of space with memory creates a different kind of passage through it, haunted by ghosts and other

19 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 107.

20 *Ibid.*, 108. Emphasis in the original.

older paths. The palimpsestuous nature of space is comforting to us, but it also dislodges our sense of presence, giving us a sense of nowhere in the midst of remembered places.

Most of us, teachers and learners alike, were educated and formed in traditional physical classrooms. Consequently, when we pass through pedagogical space that has been altered and shifted, we cannot help but remember those older, formative spaces. “*Here* there used to be light streaming through the windows in the afternoons while the professor lectured”; “*That’s* where I always taught the intro class.” As our teaching moves online, or is otherwise intertwined with the new spaces of the Internet, the LMS, and all manner of virtual presence, memory asserts its role and our passages through classrooms (online and physical) are narrated in view of the past. We struggle to see any newness in the city because of our commitment to memories as it used to be; we are something like de Certeau’s example of a woman living in Rouen who said of her city, “there isn’t anything special, except for my own home, that’s all . . . There isn’t anything.”²¹ The “presences of diverse absences” define our stories.²² This seems to be powerfully true of the stories we tell about our teaching and learning in online contexts; they are marked by absences and gestures toward *what used to be*, as well as discomfort with what is replacing it.

What used to be, for many professors and students alike, is teaching and learning undertaken on the terms of a particular strategy, the traditional residential classroom, and the tactics that sprung up and flourished in its margins. We remember the familiarity of it, the transgressions of its legitimated structures that over time became legitimate themselves, and the role of its topography in our own journeys. It was a known space, inscribed and re-inscribed with layers of experience, where even the tactics of the weak achieved their own kinds of acceptability. In the great upheaval and displacement of our time, hybrid and online teaching is replacing the strategy of the traditional residential classroom, giving rise to all of the anxieties and dissatisfactions described above. While most acknowledge the virtues of the new strategy in terms of increased access, expanded media capacities, and the bottom line of struggling institutions, the sense of loss remains. The lament is not unlike that of the Psalmist, transported unwillingly to a

21 Ibid., 106.

22 Ibid., 108.

new place: “How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”²³ The experience of teaching online is, for many, exilic.

In this metaphor, the LMS is the strategy of Babylon. It is the foreign land to which captives have been taken to live, and while it is not without its beauties (willows and rivers), it is not home. The controlling and surveilling strategy of the LMS describes a set of legitimated spaces, the “place that can be circumscribed as proper.” This proper space is itself an expansive landscape, with a great deal of terrain to be explored and traveled, but it remains an *other* space in the same way the Psalmist experienced Babylon. The question becomes whether to wait for a return from exile or to accommodate ourselves to the new space. As the former seems unlikely, I conclude with suggestions for how our pedagogy might “walk the city” of the hybrid and online environments that are mapped and described by the LMS.

Walking the LMS in resistance

The functions of de Certeau’s strategies and tactics can be summarized as official structures and resistance, respectively. The resistance of tactics is not usually outright or obvious, but it is the resistance of making-do. Tactics, the weapons of the “weak” in the language of de Certeau, are the everyday appropriations of licit spaces and structures for alternative purposes.²⁴ “The weak,” he writes, “must continually turn to their own ends, forces alien to them,” makeshifting their way through a world claimed as someone else’s power base.²⁵ De Certeau describes this as synthesizing work, making use of what is available, and achieving victory (but never a lasting one) in small redirections of power. If the LMS is the looming dominant space of our new pedagogical world, then we need to learn how to employ tactics within it and how to turn its imposing structures to our own purposes.

How this happens will vary from person to person—in the same way each teacher uses a traditional physical classroom differently—and how each person moves through a city in a unique way. Anecdotally,

23 Psalm 137:4, NRSV

24 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

25 Ibid.

the professors who receive the most enjoyment from teaching online are the most creative and transgressive with the LMS, ignoring its limits and official conduits and making new pathways through it. What follows is not intended to be anything like a full list, but rather a series of gestures toward tactics I have encountered or used myself. These tactics disrupt the hegemony of the LMS in ways that are analogous to the rearrangement of chairs in a physical space, or meeting outside on a nice day. Even when undertaken by teachers, these reframe the pedagogical space, appropriating power away from strategies and toward the “weak” through tactics. The best of these practices provide tools to students to do their own makeshifting—to employ tactics in the navigation of their own digital classrooms.

One way to introduce and allow tactics is to experiment with user interface. I have one innovative colleague who adds graphical layers on top of the LMS’ interface, using the program Piktochart to “skin” the site in a way that suits his aims.²⁶ My favorite example is his course on process theology; in place of the usual landing page of the LMS, there is an aspen tree with interconnected roots, silver branches, and golden yellow leaves that are all clickable links to parts of the course. In making this design decision, my colleague not only refashions the space of the course, but he also communicates something to students about process theology and its values of interconnection and co-creativity. Escaping a static and preauthorized course structure becomes a teaching moment, even if the metaphor is never made explicit.

Discussions provide a second opportunity to give space to tactics. In most online and hybrid courses, the discussion forum reigns supreme. Perhaps this is a vestige of the translation from traditional residential classrooms, but discussions where students post and respond to one another’s posts still occupy a large part of most courses. LMS designs usually center on this text-based form of communication, although all major LMS systems now provide easy ways to use audio, video, and graphics. But even with these new multimedia dimensions, discussion forums are not as simple as they seem. There are a number of pedagogical decisions to be made about how discussions work. Some teachers have one large discussion per week

²⁶ This colleague is Jason Whitehead, and I have learned from him both in terms of how to think about course design and how to undertake the technical challenge of creating and using graphics within the LMS.

while others break things down into smaller conversations. Several years ago, I moved away from a single large discussion and toward multiple smaller, lower-stakes discussions. At the same time, I stopped providing a list of things I was looking for in a post and started using a very simple rubric: engage in conversation with one another about the topic. Without specific instructions about length, citations, numbers of responses, and depth of analysis, I have found that students' responses have become much more authentic, honest, and useful. Instead of acting like a series of canned speeches, my students' posts now work like a free-flowing conversation. With some of the structure removed, our discussion became less stilted and much richer.

A third tactic concerns the ways students move through the course. While most LMS platforms provide one or two basic ways for students to proceed through a course, there is always room for experimentation. Probably the most common approach is to organize a course by week, with each week as a discrete unit. But others organize by modules, giving students space to roam around inside of larger units of material. Still others organize their courses by tracing a path through the broad internal space LMS, dropping readings and assignments along the way like breadcrumbs, and inviting students to follow them organically. I encountered this last approach in a summer course on critical digital pedagogy led by Sean Michael Morris of the Digital Pedagogy Lab (funded by an ATS grant). In this course, Morris offered pathways through the course but invited us to explore on our own as well, coming across readings and discussions in ways that varied from student to student. This had the effect of heightening my attention as a student; with the freedom to choose my own adventure, the adventure became mine in a way that I had never experienced in any other class.

A fourth major kind of tactic allows students to move in and out of the LMS itself, blurring the boundaries of the "room" wherein the class takes place. Even within the legitimated boundaries of LMS platforms, most allow the integration of semi-independent opportunities for make-shifting: integrating Twitter, communal annotation of the Internet, using video or audio instead of text, responding with animated GIFs and emojis, and so forth. These tools walk the line between strategies and tactics, and they are probably best understood as the appropriation and adoption of tactics by strategies. But by participating in spaces that straddle the LMS and the Internet at large, students begin to recognize that the boundaries

of the LMS are not absolute. I routinely use the web program *hypothes.is* for communal annotation of primary texts, and the orientation I give students to that program is useful in its own right. In my instructions about how to create a user name and join our class group, I note that doing so will make their annotations on the text private to just our course. But it also suggests the possibility of public annotation in the same virtual space—a reminder that the digital classroom is part of a much larger campus where some spaces are legitimated and safe while others are unknown, dangerous, starkly public, or alluring.

Among my colleagues at my own institution and in the broader AAR/SBL world, I have noticed that the kinds of experimentation listed above usually lead to broader, more robust questioning of pedagogy. Transgressing the authorized strategies of the LMS seems to give permission to teachers to makeshift in other ways. I have colleagues whose hybrid and online teaching has led them to explore contract grading, peer evaluation, and the eradication of due dates.²⁷ None of these are new ideas; they have been known and used for decades. But having makeshifted out of one set of boundaries, other prescribed pathways seem less authoritative and imposing. It seems that once a pedagogue has begun makeshifting, they often realize how much of the practice of teaching has been replicating inherited structures and how much innovation and creativity is available by simply questioning those structures.

Conclusion

As far as resistance goes, these are mild forms of resistance. Mostly, they involve bringing outside tools into the LMS, sending students outside the LMS to access resources and tools, and constructing new pathways through the LMS that thwart or invert the way the LMS is designed to function. But these are the small redirections of power that de Certeau points to, and

27 Julie Todd has used contract grading to great effect in her courses at Iliff, and now others have begun to adopt the practice. Students generally love having control over their workloads, and Todd and others report that contract grading results in a higher quality of student work. Carrie Doehring uses a robust form of peer evaluation rooted in the structures of our own institutional LMS, Canvas. In his summer course of 2016, Morris of the Digital Pedagogy Lab introduced the idea of eradicating due dates, which I am still digesting. But it leads to a profound question: what is at stake for student learning in our demand that the learning be done on a particular timeline?

they are precisely the kinds of remembered practices that fuel so much of our nostalgia for traditional residential classrooms. By understanding the ways we walked and reconfigured traditional residential classrooms, we gain insight into the source of that nostalgia—a nostalgia for both the strategy itself and the various ways we makeshifted our tactics within it. Having named the makeshifting nature of our lived experiences there, we are better prepared to take on the seemingly hegemonic strategies of the LMS, makeshifting our way through that until it feels less like a place of exile and more like a city we have made our own by walking.

Eric C. Smith is term Assistant Professor of the History of Christianity and New Testament Studies at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado.

Gaming the System: Online Spiritual Formation in Christian Higher Education

J. David Stark
Kearley Graduate School of Theology
of Faulkner University

ABSTRACT: Christian higher education continues wrestling with the opportunities and challenges presented by online learning. Serious concerns have been raised about online students' physical absence from their institutions and the implications this absence may have for these students' spiritual formation. Yet, online education can foster this formation because—whether on ground or online—language always mediates spiritually formative presence, and spiritual formation occurs as a language game.

In contemporary Christian higher education, spiritual formation is difficult to address satisfactorily. The process has various stakeholders that may well have competing ideas about what spiritual formation should involve or emphasize. Spiritual formation obviously benefits students, but it also involves faculty, staff, and administration. Accreditors have their own agendas for how efforts toward spiritual formation should take shape, as may the local churches in which students, faculty, staff, and administrators find themselves. If non-Christian students enroll, they have still other expectations for what spiritual formation an institution may expect from them. There are also uncountable other stakeholders who find themselves touching and being touched by the lives within an institutional community—e.g., the Facebook “friends,” the next-door neighbor, the grocery store cashier. The difficulties normally attending spiritual formation may be further exacerbated when a student remains physically removed from a Christian institution while taking individual classes or a full degree online.

Even the phrase *spiritual formation* may itself admit of differing interpretations. For convenience, it will here be treated as roughly synonymous with *discipleship*. As such, both descriptors identify what ultimately happens in obedience to the commands to love God and one's neighbor,

which the gospels mark out as the two foremost (Matt 22:34–39; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:25–28).¹

If Christian higher education is a legitimate and distinctive enterprise, it necessarily involves efforts to cultivate Jesus-followers whose lives evidence this love toward God and neighbor. It necessarily involves spiritual formation, or discipleship, and this obligation allows no exception for online education. Yet, there is no universal recipe for discipleship. Thus, there is no method for guaranteeing success in this effort online. Therefore, this essay proposes not so much a method for achieving discipleship as it seeks to describe a fresh stance from which the question of fostering online spiritual formation may profitably be pursued.²

These efforts' shapes will vary with different instructors, classes, and subjects. Yet, whether on ground or online, an ontological thread unites efforts toward spiritual formation. In so doing, this thread demonstrates the feasibility and legitimacy of pursuing spiritual formation online. That is, whether on ground or online, language always mediates spiritually formative presence, and spiritual formation occurs as a language game.

Fostering the love of God and neighbor online through linguistic presence

Various reasons have been cited for why online education makes this task difficult, or even impossible. Primarily however, these concerns revolve around the decreased levels of personal interaction that online education

1 Cf. Kristen Ferguson, "Evangelical Faculty Perceptions of Online Learning in Graduate-Level Theological Education" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 30; see also T. Iss. 5:2; Philo, Decal. 108–10; Philo, *Spec.* 2.63; Henry Ansgar Kelly, "Love of Neighbor as Great Commandment in the Time of Jesus: Grasping at Straws in the Hebrew Scriptures," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60, no. 2 (2017): 265–81.

2 For more methodological suggestions, see Andrew T. Babyak, "A Teaching Strategy for a Christian Virtual Environment," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 24, no. 1 (January 2015): 63–77; Helmut Burkhardt, "Christlich leben in nachchristlicher Gesellschaft," *Kerygma und Dogma* 60, no. 4 (2014): 303–18; Benjamin K. Forrest and Mark A. Lamport, "Modeling Spiritual Formation from a Distance: Paul's Formation Transactions with the Roman Christians," *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 110–24; Joanne J. Jung, *Character Formation in Online Education: A Guide for Instructors, Administrators, and Accrediting Agencies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); Sebastian Mahfood and Paule Pierre Barbeau, "Emphasizing Relationality in Distance Learning: Looking toward Human and Spiritual Formation Online," *Seminary Journal* 18, no. 1 (April 2012): 44–51.

can be perceived to foster.³ Thus, students are encountered not as whole human beings but as disembodied producers of assignments to grade or problems to resolve.⁴ Therefore, online education may foster an un-Christian and dualistic pedagogical anthropology that privileges the mind and denigrates embodiment.⁵

These dangers are real, and even otherwise well-intentioned faculty may succumb to them. It may be worth asking at the start, however, whether a setting on ground necessarily involves any less temptation to interact with students more transactionally as “producers of assignments to grade or problems to resolve.” For faculty with some personality types, it may, but for others, it may make this temptation even stronger. The fundamental difference between an on-ground and an online setting, therefore, is not the possibility of viewing students simply as such producers.⁶ The difference is in students’ embodiment, or physical presence, when performing the action that is addressed transactionally.⁷

Additionally, in the Christian tradition, discipleship is not one of the things for which physical presence is necessarily part of its own mode of being. Instead, Christian discipleship’s mode of being is one of becoming present in language.⁸ This linguistic presence may also be physical, but it need not necessarily be so.

This suggestion may be counterintuitive. Embodiment is central to the incarnation and resurrection, but discipleship’s correspondence to

3 Babyak, “A Christian Virtual Environment,” 64, 74; Forrest and Lampert, “Spiritual Formation from a Distance,” 112–13; Paul R. House, *Bonhoeffer’s Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 11–16, 90–100; Paul R. House, “Hewing to Scripture’s Pattern: A Plea for Personal Theological Education,” *Colloquy* 18, no. 2 (2010): 4, 6; Mahfood and Barbeau, “Relationality in Distance Learning,” 46.

4 Mark A. Maddix and James Riley Estep Jr., “Spiritual Formation in Online Higher Education Communities: Nurturing Spirituality in Christian Higher Education Online Degree Programs,” *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2010): 427; Mahfood and Barbeau, “Relationality in Distance Learning,” 46–47.

5 Maddix and Estep Jr., “Spiritual Formation,” 427.

6 Cf. Steve Delamarter and Daniel L. Brunner, “Theological Education and Hybrid Models of Distance Learning,” *Theological Education* 40, no. 2 (2005): 148.

7 Cf. House, *Bonhoeffer’s Seminary Vision*, 12–13.

8 Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ed. and trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed., *Bloomsbury Revelations* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 455–514.

these events is incomplete. Human embodiment remains important, but it may not be a defining feature of the thing called “discipleship.” Disciple-making may be more like preaching than communion. Preaching requires embodiment to come into being, but it may not include physical presence in all forms (e.g., radio or recorded sermons), or it may include neither physically audible sound nor the physical presence of the preacher (e.g., a book of sermons transcribed into Braille; cf. 1 Pet 3:18–20).

This observation does not denigrate the importance of Christian communities’ physically gathering under and around the preached word.⁹ It simply recognizes that Christianity has a substantial tradition of doing spiritual formation both with and without bodily presence. In Romans, Paul writes to a church he had not previously visited.¹⁰ Yet, throughout the letter, Paul expects the Roman Christians to find themselves spiritually formed by what he writes.¹¹

According to Thomas Aquinas, one thing may be present with another through its effects.¹² If Aquinas is correct, this observation questions the soundness of reading a text like 2 Cor 10:11 to suggest that written correspondence is considered simply as a poorer substitute for physical presence. Not least in the Corinthian letters, writing may be portrayed as a means by which Paul becomes present more adequately with the Corinthians than he can do physically (e.g., 1 Cor 5:3; 2 Cor 10:9–11; 13:2). Obviously, physical presence and epistolary presence are different. What may easily be overlooked, however, is that both are precisely different kinds of presence, rather than one being a kind of presence and another a kind of absence.¹³

Thus, on its own terms, the concern about dualism or disembodiment is quite reasonable, but those terms do not fit the essential mode of being

9 Contra the concern of House, *Bonhoeffer’s Seminary Vision*, 98–100, 183–85.

10 Rom 1:8–15 and 15:22–29; Forrest and Lamport, “Spiritual Formation from a Distance,” 116.

11 Forrest and Lamport, “Spiritual Formation from a Distance,” 116; cf. Steven B. Frye, “Religious Distance Education Goes Online,” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2012, no. 133 (2012): 13.

12 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.8, I.8.1–3.

13 Mahfood and Barbeau, “Relationality in Distance Learning,” 46; contra the concern of House, *Bonhoeffer’s Seminary Vision*, 185–86; cf. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, corrected ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1997).

shown by online education. Online education need not be understood as a poorer, knock-off imitation of on-ground education.¹⁴ Online education is a means by which education becomes present to students.¹⁵ An online environment is a body of effects by which a particular mode of human being (e.g., an instructor) becomes present with students.¹⁶ Consequently, contemporary technology that allows for greater simulation of physical presence (e.g., video conferencing) can certainly play a role. But, such technology's chief value is in how it can augment presence, not in how it can augment physicality.¹⁷ Therefore, in principle, even an asynchronous, text-based online environment can include spiritually formative presence. And even on-ground education does not offer "unmediated presence."¹⁸ Instructional presence in on-ground courses is still mediated through language, through being (e.g., instructional being) that is interpreted (e.g., by students).¹⁹

Some online pedagogies doubtless denigrate embodiment or run counter to the incarnational principle.²⁰ Suggesting that this element pertains essentially to online education, however, effectively overlooks how this difficulty obtains even within on-ground education. Both online and on-ground education require embodiment and disembodiment. If a student is physically removed from an institution, that student's online engagement with that institution will be disembodied. On the other hand, to be present at the institution, the student will need to reduce to zero—for some amount of time—the physical presence he or she has in the life

14 Delamarter and Brunner, "Theological Education," 147; Stephen Delamarter et al., "Teaching Biblical Studies Online," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 14, no. 3 (2011): 281; Jung, *Character Formation*, 13–15, 23–24; contra House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision*, 14.

15 Babyak, "A Christian Virtual Environment," 65; Ferguson, "Evangelical Faculty," 36–38.

16 Delamarter et al., "Teaching Biblical Studies Online," 259, 265; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 135–44.

17 Cf. Delamarter et al., "Teaching Biblical Studies Online," 257; Jung, *Character Formation*, 76; Mahfood and Barbeau, "Relationality in Distance Learning," 47.

18 Contra e.g., Jung, *Character Formation*, 13–14, 92.

19 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 401–7.

20 See House, "Hewing to Scripture's Pattern"; House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision*, 11–16, 88–100, 183–97.

situation that gave rise to the student's educational aspirations.²¹ In such cases, could requiring physical presence at the institution actually be the more mechanizing and dehumanizing approach as student "ore" is brought into the educational "factory" and stamped into further "cogs" to fulfill assessment or enrollment quotas?²² Could institutions' efforts to reach students online while those students remain in their own life settings perhaps prove *more* helpful in fostering those students' spiritual formation?²³ Can one be so sure that the institution—rather than a local church in a place removed from that institution—stands most in the place of Jesus regarding prospective students and is, therefore, most rightly capable of expecting truly dedicated individuals to leave their local contexts to be present at the institution?²⁴

Of course, an online community will fundamentally differ in shape from an on-ground community, but communities exist in both settings.²⁵ Thus, the binaries of "community and non-community" or "presence and non-presence" do not correlate well with the relations of online and on-ground education. Both involve their own kinds of presence and

21 Babyak, "A Christian Virtual Environment," 64–65; Delamarter and Brunner, "Theological Education," 154; Matthew C. Ogilvie, "Teaching Theology Online," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 13 (2009): 15.

22 The mechanizing or industrializing parallel is drawn against online education in different contexts. E.g., House, "Hewing to Scripture's Pattern," 4; House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision*; Robert John Muirhead, "E-Learning: Is This Teaching at Students or Teaching With Students?," *Nursing Forum* 42, no. 4 (2007): 182–83. Of course, it would be a grievous overstatement to suggest that this dynamic is inherent in on-ground education any more than it is online. The point is simply that there is good rationale for seeing these dangers in on-ground education, precisely where concern over them is less typical. Thus, the danger is independent of whether education occurs online or on ground. Cf. Delamarter and Brunner, "Theological Education," 154; Delamarter et al., "Teaching Biblical Studies Online," 261–62.

23 Delamarter et al., "Teaching Biblical Studies Online," 275, 279; Thomas Esselman, "The Pedagogy of the Online Wisdom Community: Forming Church Ministers in a Digital Age," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 7, no. 3 (July 2004): 164; cf. Ogilvie, "Teaching Theology Online," 15.

24 E.g., House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision*, 89–94.

25 Babyak, "A Christian Virtual Environment," 65, 68; Delamarter and Brunner, "Theological Education," 147, 150–51; Delamarter et al., "Teaching Biblical Studies Online," 261, 265, 274, 277; Jung, *Character Formation*, 60–62; Mahfood and Barbeau, "Relationality in Distance Learning," 44. On the other hand, respondents to Ferguson's survey "do not believe that community can sufficiently be achieved online." Ferguson, "Evangelical Faculty," 136. But, this perception's correctness is put into question by the argument pursued here.

community, non-presence and non-community, that need to be intentionally navigated wherever they occur.

Online spiritual formation as a language game

How can this navigation be successful? Here comes into focus part two of the thesis stated earlier—namely, fostering spiritual formation online has the character of a game (and the same case could be made for it on ground). Recently, “gamification” has gotten some traction as a pedagogical strategy.²⁶ Yet, “gamification”—as the term is normally used—*is not* what is in view here in asserting that efforts to foster spiritual formation online have the character of a game. Rather, the point is that, whether online or on ground, the mode of being for the thing called “fostering spiritual formation” is one of bringing-to-presence-in-language. This bringing-to-presence-in-language itself has the character of a game, and it has this character apart from any special pedagogical method that might be employed.²⁷

The notion of “game” requires a definite relation between a player(s) and the game.²⁸ If this definite relation (e.g., a system of rules) is disrupted, the game does not happen. One cannot play solitaire by turning playing cards into confetti. Similarly, and as is particularly helpful for this discussion’s context, games that need multiple players create a definite relation

26 E.g., Patricia Bruder, “Game on: Gamification in the Classroom,” *Education Digest* 80, no. 7 (2015): 56–60; Aaron M. Cohen, “The Gamification of Education,” *Futurist* 45, no. 5 (2011): 16–17; Darina Dicheva et al., “Gamification in Education: A Systematic Mapping Study,” *Journal of Educational Technology & Society* 18, no. 3 (2015): 75–88; Katja Fleischmann and Ellen Ariel, “Gamification in Science Education: Gamifying Learning of Microscopic Processes in the Laboratory,” *Contemporary Educational Technology* 7, no. 2 (2016): 138–59; Bohyun Kim, “Gamification in Education and Libraries,” in *Understanding Gamification*, Library Technology Reports 51 (Atlanta: American Library Association, 2015), 20–28; Marcus Leaning, “A Study of the Use of Games and Gamification to Enhance Student Engagement, Experience and Achievement on a Theory-Based Course of an Undergraduate Media Degree,” *Journal of Media Practice* 16, no. 2 (2015): 155–70; Susan M. Moncada and Thomas P. Moncada, “Gamification of Learning in Accounting Education,” *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice* 14, no. 3 (2014): 9–19; Marie Olsson, Peter Mozelius, and Jonas Collin, “Visualisation and Gamification of E-Learning and Programming Education,” *Electronic Journal of E-Learning* 13, no. 6 (2015): 441–54; Kentaro Toyama, “The Looming Gamification of Higher Ed,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 6, 2015.

27 Cf. Babyak, “A Christian Virtual Environment,” 75.

28 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 106–24.

between or among those players. If one player sits down to play chess but another tries to play checkers, the definite relation that either game requires is disrupted. Something may happen between these individuals (e.g., an argument), but chess or checkers will not until the players come to terms with each other in the relationship that one or the other game defines.

Thus, the game has its own existence independent of the individuals who play it.²⁹ Therefore, for any game played between or among multiple people, no one of those people creates the game. Even when children invent games (e.g., “let’s pretend”), the game only happens as the players mutually establish its definite relation. One child may bully others into accepting his terms for the game. But, the others still must “play along” with the bully for the game to happen.³⁰ Consequently, the game still happens because multiple players abide by a definite set of relations within their shared social space.³¹

The relation of “game” has been argued at length to be a comprehensive category under which all human communication falls.³² Therefore, although it may initially seem afield from the question of spiritual formation in online higher education, it may helpfully provide a rubric for addressing this issue in at least three ways.

First, the game metaphor facilitates broadening the question of spiritual formation beyond that of student-faculty relationships to include students’ relationships to staff and administrators. Whether a student is learning accounting, paying a bill, or creating an appeal, all these scenarios are communicative. They all are actions where the game of “bringing-to-presence-in-language” occurs—and this game encompasses “what communicates” or “what requires interpretation” and not simply what

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 106–14.

31 Cf. Delamarter et al., “Teaching Biblical Studies Online,” 259, 277; Bill Martin, “The Difficult Ways of God and Caïssa: Chess, Theodicy, and Determinism in Gadamer,” in *Philosophy Looks at Chess*, ed. Benjamin Hale (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2008), 105.

32 E.g., Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Phenomenological Movement,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. and trans. David E. Ligne, 1st paperback ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 130–81; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 505–6; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, 4th ed. (Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

takes the form of a particular “language of instruction.”³³ Thus, for faculty, staff, and administrators, even nonverbal elements can be language—they can and do communicate to students positively or negatively. Even elements in the design of online courses or the flow of institutional processes communicate to students something about how the institution understands its relation to them.³⁴

Second, the game metaphor may suggest that faculty, staff, and administrators are themselves not game masters. Rather, they are—with students—other kinds of players in the game of bringing-to-presence-in-language in the field of higher education.³⁵ Much of what happens in any given institution is determined—the game is largely set—by factors outside that institution (e.g., the market; industry-standard expectations for the curriculum, for accreditation-worthiness, for audit-readiness).³⁶ To an even greater extent, the mandate to love God and neighbor is already part of the game Christian institutions must play. All players in this game have then the responsibility to play their respective roles as only they can.

Third, spiritual formation is a matter of faculty, staff, and administrators’ coming-to-presence in the game of higher education in a way that encourages students’ discipleship—as these faculty, staff, and administrators play the roles the game defines for them. All must bring *themselves* authentically and immersively “into play” as they seek to care for students whom they may never meet face-to-face.³⁷ To use a further example from the game of chess, that game certainly may emphasize winning and destruction by one side against the other, not least as the game imitates war.³⁸ On the other hand, the players can take an attitude toward each other as coworkers in coming to see “which side has the stronger arguments (i.e., moves)” and thereby learn to “understand better the truth of

33 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 407, 416–17, 457–72.

34 Cf. Jung, *Character Formation*, 25–81.

35 Delamarter and Brunner, “Theological Education,” 151; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 111, 113; Mahfood and Barbeau, “Relationality in Distance Learning,” 44–45.

36 Cf. Delamarter et al., “Teaching Biblical Studies Online,” 282.

37 Babyak, “A Christian Virtual Environment,” 64–67, 70; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 106–14; Jung, *Character Formation*, 19–20, 29–30, 70–71, 79, 90–93, 100–3; Mahfood and Barbeau, “Relationality in Distance Learning,” 44; cf. Ferguson, “Evangelical Faculty,” 21–22.

38 Martin Shubik, *Game Theory in the Social Sciences: Concepts and Solutions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 224–25.

a given position."³⁹ The moves on the one side open particular possibilities as better or worse on the other.⁴⁰ By comparison, fostering spiritual formation requires—from faculty, staff, and administrators—the kind of “moves” that will open and legitimate for students the movements that will further their discipleship.⁴¹ Although a great deal is out of any given institution’s hands, faculty, staff, and administrators can certainly work to “stack the deck” for the game in favor of online students’ better coming to grips with the spiritually formative truth that lies at the heart of the Christian message and mission in the world.

Conclusion

Spiritual formation will continue to require serious thought, reflection, and wrestling by Christian higher educational institutions, whether they consider it in an online or an on-ground context. Spiritual formation is core to such institutions’ identities. But, to develop for spiritual formation a set and effective curriculum or process is certainly not an easy task, nor is it susceptible to a universal prescription.

Consequently, rather than addressing method, this discussion has focused on the mode of being by which spiritual formation may be fostered, particularly online. This mode of being has the character of a game, and the game may be played on any number of discipline-specific fields. The essential thing about the game in any case, however, is not that spiritual formation is bolted onto the side as something else of importance to a Christian institution of higher education. Rather, the game requires that faculty, staff, and administrators become present as players, bring

39 For examples of such language, see John Hartmann, “Garry Kasparov Is a Cyborg, or What ChessBase Teaches Us about Technology,” in *Philosophy Looks at Chess*, ed. Benjamin Hale (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2008), 41–42; Peter Kurzdorfer, *The Tao of Chess: 200 Principles to Transform Your Game and Your Life* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2004), x; Martin, “God and Caïssa,” 93, 107, 114; see also Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 106–14; Shubik, *Game Theory in the Social Sciences*, 128, 224.

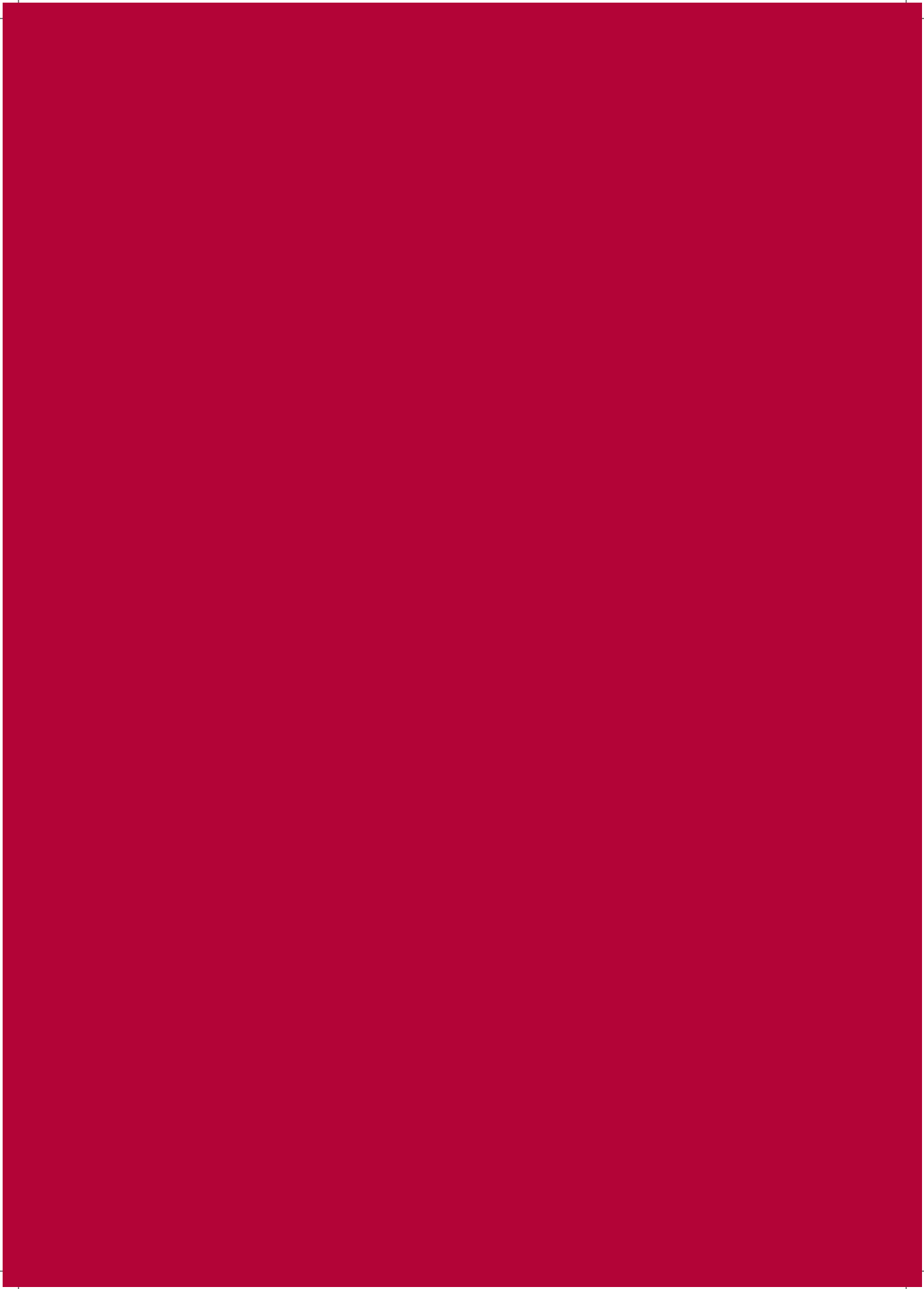
40 Martin, “God and Caïssa,” 99; cf. Delamarter et al., “Teaching Biblical Studies Online,” 264.

41 Mahfood and Barbeau, “Relationality in Distance Learning,” 48–49; see also Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. and trans. David E. Ligne, 1st paperback ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 31–32; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 313, 445–72, 490–506; Martin, “God and Caïssa.”

authentic discipleship to presence for students, and so encourage these students' own discipleship.

J. David Stark is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies and Winnie and Cecil May Jr. Biblical Research Fellow at the Kearley Graduate School of Theology of Faulkner University in Montgomery, Alabama.

Open Forum



The Vocation of the Faculty-Administrator: Living into the Hyphen as Theologians, Servants, and Educators

Grant D. Taylor

Beeson Divinity School of Samford University

ABSTRACT: Recent research into the nature and practice of theological education shows an increasing level of administrative work for faculty such that long-held assumptions about the vocation of the faculty member are changing. As a result of these changes, others have observed a developing, hyphenated role in theological education: the faculty-administrator. By way of personal and theological reflection, this article explores the faculty-administrator role as a single vocation that consists of at least three vital characteristics or identities: theologian, servant, and educator. Those who discern and pursue such a vocation may happily live into the hyphen that is the faculty-administrator.

Introduction: context for a hyphenated vocation

Recent research into the nature and practice of theological education shows increasing levels of administrative work for faculty but a lack of education for faculty to become effective in that work. As an ATS survey reveals, faculty members are educated to become scholars, but they are not prepared effectively for teaching, administration, student formation, or service.¹ It also seems faculty members have less time to do what is most important to them—research and write, teach, and interact with students—while more of their time must be given to tasks they consider less important, especially administration. So, it may also be that faculty members who now enter theological education find their vocational expectations insufficient and, perhaps, their hopes dashed. Long-held assumptions about the vocation of the faculty member are changing.²

1 Stephen R. Graham, “Changes in Faculty Work,” *Colloquy* (Fall 2011): 38–43.

2 See the articles dedicated to the topic, “The Changing Character of Faculty Work,” in *Theological Education* 49, no. 2 (2015).

Administrative work for faculty, however, need not be disappointing. Expectations can be reshaped and satisfaction increased for those who embrace an emerging vocation in theological education, the faculty-administrator. As Michael Trice defines the term, “a faculty-administrator is an individual who teaches, who is attentive to one’s guild, *and* who provides executive-level, structural leadership that is essential to the direction of the institution.”³ Those who “live into the hyphen,” as Trice suggests, may enjoy their work as vocation instead of an unwelcome combination of unexpected and seemingly divergent tasks.⁴

To live into this hyphenated work, we must explore the reality of the hyphen. If, as Trice notes, “the vocational heart of what we do resides in the hyphen . . . ,”⁵ faculty-administrators of every rank ought to discuss their work as vocation. For that reason, the present author and Trice planned and participated in a panel on this topic at the 2016 national meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Three colleagues—Patricia Killen, Mary Boys, and Mark Chung Hearn—joined us to describe the faculty-administrator role and discuss it with academic deans, provosts, a seminary president, an ATS staff member, and others with varying ranks and administrative roles.⁶ The discussion revealed the unique pressures, joys, and struggles of the hyphen and the need for more training and support. Indeed, *faculty-administrator* development is needed.⁷ The present article aims to participate in this development through a description of my own vocational discernment and present role in theological education.

3 Michael Trice, “A Future in the Hyphen: The Dawning of the Faculty-Administrator,” *Theological Education* 49, no. 2 (2015): 47.

4 *Ibid.*, 54–55.

5 *Ibid.*, 56.

6 Patricia Killen, Mary Boys, Mark Chung Hearn, Michael Trice, and Grant Taylor, “Living into the Hyphen: The Faculty-Administrator,” American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, TX, November 19, 2016. The present article is a revision of a paper presented at the same meeting—Grant D. Taylor, “The Vocation of the Faculty-Administrator: Suggestions from a Faculty-Administrator at the Beginning.” I am grateful to Michael Trice for his interest in this project and partnership in the work. It was Michael’s good article on this subject, “A Future in the Hyphen,” and our resulting correspondence that led to the session.

7 See Graham, “Changes in Faculty Work,” 39. ATS seeks to meet some of this need with midcareer faculty development seminars on related topics. See “Midcareer Faculty,” The Association of Theological Schools, accessed June 14, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/resources/faculty/midcareer-faculty>.

This personal reflection then leads to theological reflection on the one vocation of the faculty-administrator. I argue that this one (not two, or less than one) vocation consists of at least three vital characteristics or identities: theologian, servant, and educator.

Vocational discernment: a hyphen in the making

I am the associate dean for academic affairs and an assistant professor at a university divinity school. As associate dean, I am the chief academic officer of the school. I supervise and evaluate all faculty members and a majority of staff members. I lead faculty and staff meetings. I lead any review and revision of the degree programs and curricula. I appoint faculty committees and serve *ex officio* on each of them, meeting regularly with at least three of them. I plan and design the course schedules. I oversee the academic affairs and library budgets. I advise and counsel students on academic matters. I also serve as the project director for two significant grants from a national organization. In all these responsibilities, meetings and emails abound. Thus, I serve my institution in an executive level administrative role. I also serve as a faculty member. As assistant professor, I teach a reduced load—one or two courses per year. I am also expected to publish in my fields of study, although my heavy administrative load allows for a different expectation level. Still, I want to publish; the expectation is not unwelcome.

With this profile, I am classified as a 12-month “administrative faculty” member of the university. Notably, my contract indicates that the bulk of my salary comes from the assistant professor role. Yet the bulk of my *work* comes from the associate dean role. The contract, for which I am grateful, reflects the prevailing idea that academic administrators usually come from the ranks of the faculty with years of distinguished teaching, scholarship, and service experience. The contract also reflects the idea that administrative work can be added on top of another job. The contract itself does not indicate that these two roles, associate dean and assistant professor, can be integrated into one *vocation*. From personal experience and theological reflection, I argue that they can.

My personal experience has encouraged and forced me to integrate my roles into one vocation. Different from academic deans who came from the ranks of experienced faculty, I entered my present role almost

immediately after completing the PhD.⁸ It should be noted that I do not know for sure how I got the job in which I now serve. One would need to ask my dean and the search committee. I am confident, however, that I was considered for such a job and reasonably prepared to enter it because I had prior mentored experience in academic administration under a previous academic dean at the school where I now serve. Most importantly, that mentored experience revealed a calling for me.

A friend and colleague served as associate dean at my present institution for six years. When I was completing my MDiv at the same school, he offered me a job as his assistant. He planned for me to learn various aspects of academic administration, classroom teaching, and scholarship while I also applied to PhD programs in biblical studies. He thought that if I were exposed to such hyphenated work early in my development then I might discover gifts, strengths, and interests in the same kind of work. (Or at least I could rule it out as a career path, also an important discovery in vocational discernment.) Significantly, he thought it would benefit me to make such discoveries earlier rather than later in my career.

Through this mentorship, I learned how to interact with faculty, staff, and students for the common mission of the school. I learned how to consider the goals of the curriculum and strengths of the faculty when creating course schedules. I learned how to advise students academically and vocationally and how to recruit them for admission to the school. I learned how to solve problems with a concern for persons, not only the problem. I also learned how to construct a course syllabus, prepare and deliver lectures, and grade papers. I began to learn how to serve as a teacher and administrator. I did not learn every facet of the academic dean role, but I discovered that I was gifted for such work. I found that I liked this hyphenated work and wanted to do it in the future. My mentor and others at the school affirmed my fitness for this work.⁹ Thus, after two years in the role, I grew confident that I had gifts and skills that I once only thought I might

8 See Jeanne P. McLean, *Leading From the Center: The Emerging Role of the Chief Academic Officer in Theological Schools* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 275–76; Linda W. Bryan, “The Vocational Call and Multiple Occupations of a CAO,” in *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Education*, eds. Kathleen D. Billman and Bruce C. Birch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 78–85.

9 I remain grateful to Dr. Paul House for his mentorship and to Dr. Timothy George for his trust.

have. Even more, I discerned that I had been given such gifts. I developed a sense of calling—a vocation—as a hyphen in the making.

The mentored, communal, and personal experience described above encouraged me to pursue one vocation within theological education. Still, because most students enter academics to become faculty members, not faculty-administrators, questions arise: What is the vocation of a faculty-administrator? Is there one vocation, or is the hyphen merely the indefinable doubling of paperwork, emails, and meetings on already-busy faculty and administrators? Again, the ATS survey previously mentioned identifies administrative work as an unexpected, if not burdensome, load for faculty members.¹⁰ So why *embrace* it? A sense, indeed conviction, of vocation provides the necessary rationale and motivation for such embrace. As Jeanne McLean argues, “the shift from serving primarily as a teacher to serving primarily as an administrator is not a change *of* vocation, but a change *within* a vocation Administration is not a sell-out or a loss of that vocation, but simply another way of responding to the call of the academic life and to service of the theological school community.”¹¹

Personal experience as described above is significant for vocational discernment, but discernment of vocation requires theological reflection. Theology should govern personal experience. In the next section, then, theological reflection serves to develop the argument that faculty-administrators can live into the hyphen as one vocation. In particular, this vocation consists of at least three vital characteristics or identities: theologian, servant, and educator.

Faculty-administrators as theologians

Faculty-administrators are, first, theologians. This is because, as Trice states, “we take the noumenal seriously; to do otherwise is a false start in theological education The theological vocation of the faculty-administrator is the hyphen, or bridge, itself”¹² To take theology seriously means that commitment to theological reality—the Triune God—not only

10 Graham, “Changes in Faculty Work,” 38–43.

11 McLean, *Leading From the Center*, 259–60. Emphasis original.

12 Trice, “Hyphen,” 49–50.

study of theology, establishes the foundation for the vocation. Theology is foundational for faculty-administrators because commitment to God allows for commitment to people and places created and redeemed by God. Such commitments are key to the vocation because faculty-administrators are servants of God and people. Theological commitments also foster theological thinking for our specific contexts.¹³

As theologians, then, faculty-administrators can apply the language and logic of theology to faculty and administrative work. For most of us, enjoying theological thinking first sparked a path toward theological education. We rightly apply theological reflection to teaching, research, and writing. Yet faculty-administrators must also theologize about administration. Our training as academic theologians must be integrated into the work of administration. Such integration is possible and advisable, indeed necessary. Stephen Graham argues that hyphenated roles like academic dean are not reserved for cut-rate scholars. Rather, the hyphenated role “requires *more* scholarship and teaching, but they take different and, in some cases, more challenging forms.”¹⁴ The faculty-administrator vocation can be understood theologically as one of the more challenging forms of scholarship and teaching. Our academic training in biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology can inform and enhance our hyphenated work.

For example, I try to integrate my own academic training in biblical theology to the work of academic dean. Biblical theology is a theological discipline that seeks to relate the parts of the Bible into an integrated whole, to discern, as Gerhard Ebeling says, “the inner unity of the manifold testimony of the Bible.”¹⁵ These principles—integrating parts into the whole, discovering and explicating unity in diversity—help me to consider how my institution’s people, programs, and resources can be related and integrated to accomplish its mission. When we integrate theology and

13 As developed below, place matters in understanding our educational contexts. On the similarities and differences between Canadian and American theological education, see Mark A. Noll, “Learning from Canada: Canadian Religious History and the Future of Theological Education in North America,” *Theological Education* 50, no. 1 (2015): 33–52.

14 Stephen R. Graham, “The Vocation of the Academic Dean,” in *C(H)AOS Theory*, 71.

15 Gerhard Ebeling, “The Meaning of Biblical Theology,” in *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 96.

administration, we may serve as exemplars of the vocation of the school. As Trice states, “The faculty-administrator must embody the mission of the school by fleshing out the vocational direction of the institution in creative ways.”¹⁶ The Triune God and commitment to him and to others created by him, and the academic study of theology, shapes our motives and actions. Reflection on theological reality, therefore, leads faculty-administrators to consider the motivations beneath our actions. These actions may be called service.

Faculty-administrators as servants motivated by love

If faculty-administrators are theologians, it follows that they are servants motivated by love. Love refers to the affections and habits of the heart as explicated by St. Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, and, recently, James K. A. Smith.¹⁷ These writers explore a biblical idea taught by Moses, Jeremiah, and Jesus. That is, the affections of our hearts motivate our words and actions. Love shapes our lives.¹⁸ Animated by love, faculty-administrators are servants of God because of love for God. Pope Benedict XVI says well, “To educate is an act of love, an exercise in ‘intellectual charity,’ which requires responsibility, dedication, consistency of life.”¹⁹ If we are servants of God, we are also servants of people in places out of love for both.

Servants of God because of love for God

Faculty-administrators are servants of God because of their love for God, the creator and redeemer of people and places. As theologians, we recognize that we are created by God, thus we are limited by him to the times, locations, and gifts he has given. Paul House states, “We can only carry out

16 Trice, “Hyphen,” 49.

17 See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960); Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, 1746 (repr. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959); James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

18 See Paul R. House, “Investing in the Ruins: Jeremiah and Theological Vocation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56 (2013): 5–15.

19 Pope Benedict XVI, “To Educate is an Act of Love,” in *A Reason Open to God: On Universities, Education & Culture*, ed. J. Steven Brown (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 83.

our theological vocation in the times God gives us. *God* rules persons and history.”²⁰ We are created, contingent, and temporary. Yet Scripture also teaches that we are created by God to be his image in the world (see Gen 1:26–28; 2:7, 15; Eph 4:17–24).

People are created by God but can also be redeemed by the God who serves humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Mark’s gospel narrates Jesus’ instruction to his disciples, James and John, who boldly and ignorantly requested prime seats in glory. Jesus responds that, instead of requesting glory, they ought to serve. Jesus says, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be bondservant of all. Even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43–45 ESV). Disciples of Jesus are servants of Jesus because he served them by giving up his life in service to God. Therefore, faculty-administrators are disciples who serve God out of love for him in keeping with this self-sacrificial logic of Jesus’ life and death. It is this self-sacrificial logic that shapes our service to others.

Servants of people in places because of love for people in places

Jesus also teaches that the first shall be last and the greatest must be the least: “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35 ESV). Mutual service of one another flows from love for one another rooted in love for God, and especially God’s love for us. As Jesus teaches in John’s gospel, “just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34 ESV; cf. John 14:15; 15:12–17). Jesus incarnates and explicates God’s love for his people. Redeemed by his love, then, God’s people love and serve one another. Theologians are, as Australian theologian and theological college principal D. B. Knox claims, “other person-centered” servants.²¹ The faculty-administrator vocation must be one of service to others for their sake and their vocations.

While the academic dean, for example, must teach and write to do her job well, the job has a necessary “other person-centered” scope and

20 House, “Investing in the Ruins,” 8. Emphasis original.

21 D. B. Knox, *The Everlasting God* (1979; repr. Sydney: Matthias Media, 2009), cited in House, “Investing in the Ruins,” 6. Knox served as principal of Moore Theological College from 1959 to 1985.

goal that governs the priorities of the week and semester. If this is true, then academic deans must see faculty development as crucial to our own development as faculty-administrators. Graham writes, "The academic deanship exists largely to help others be successful in their vocations. The dean is a leader but is necessarily a servant to others' agendas."²² Academic deans must regard the faculty members we supervise as those for whom we lay down some of our academic interests for the sake of their academic interests. Our vocation is caught up in their vocations.

The "other person-centered" nature of academic deanship applies to many faculty-administrator roles. And the argument advanced so far could be pressed further in generalities. Yet particularities matter. We serve other people in specific contexts. Our vocations are bound and informed by time and place. As Schwehn observes, "Academies are places of learning."²³ Thus, faculty-administrators are servants of particular people in particular places.

The institution where I serve is a theological community of like-called people who gather in a particular place in time for shared work under a unified mission. By charter, it is a Protestant Christian evangelical interdenominational school at an historically Baptist university in a major city in the southern United States. Because it is a community of people in a particular place, the social, cultural, and religious history and present characteristics of the broader university, the city, and the region provide context for our work. The needs, challenges, and resources of the particular place inform our work together.

The particularities of mission, place, and time give the institution an ethos that spans the past, present, and future. This ethos informs how faculty and staff work and worship together, how we admit, teach, and shepherd students, and, therefore, how I carry out my work as academic dean. The ethos of the school shapes my own vocation. As Linda Bryan observes, "The ethos [of a school] determines the indigenous role of the dean."²⁴ If faculty-administrators are servants of people, we must know

22 Graham, "The Vocation of the Academic Dean," 65.

23 Mark Schwehn, *Exiles From Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 33.

24 Bryan, "The Vocational Call," 81. On the work of the theological school, see especially, Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

the people by learning well the place in which the people gather, serve, learn, and worship together. Such knowledge serves the generations, too. Future persons will contribute to this ethos. This knowledge of persons and school ethos serves us well in our vocation because vocations are merely theories unless they are localized and personalized. As Wendell Berry writes, “If this education is to be used well, it is obvious that it must be used *somewhere*; it must be used where one lives, where one intends to continue to live; it must be brought home.”²⁵ Such contextual matters are vital to the work, but they are penultimate. There exists an ultimate, theological reason for serving people in places in time: the incarnation.

The particular institution I serve attempts to fulfill its mission by working in light of the reality, beauty, and mystery of the incarnation. In the incarnation, the Word of God went local, personal, and communal. As John’s gospel teaches, “the word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .” (John 1:14 ESV). John theologizes about a specific person, Jesus of Nazareth, and the implications of his revelation, teaching, death, and resurrection among a certain people in a specific place for specific and yet universal purposes (see John 1:11–13; 20:30–31). In the incarnation, the Triune God accomplishes cosmic purposes by way of a person among people. Jesus of Nazareth called, taught, healed, and sent persons in the flesh. He trusted God’s plan through the work of disciples he called to spread his message (see John 17:6–26; 20:21). Likewise, this personal pattern of life shaped the early church’s apostolic efforts.²⁶ The incarnation, then, commends the person-to-person nature of theology. The incarnation reminds theological communities to live the Christian life together as visible communities.²⁷

25 Wendell Berry, “Higher Education and Home Defense,” in *Home Economics* (New York: North Point Press, 1987), 52. See also, Jack R. Baker and Jeffery Bilbro, *Wendell Berry and Higher Education: Cultivating Virtues of Place* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017).

26 For example, the apostle Paul sent Timothy to the churches as his personal representative and apostolic delegate (see 1 Cor. 4:16–17; 16:10; Phil. 2:19–24; 1 Thess. 3:2; cf. 1 Tim. 1:18–20; 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:2–14). Note also the desire of the author of 3 John to see his addressees rather than only write to them (3 John 13).

27 See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller and Irmgard Booth (London: SCM Press, 1959; New York: Touchstone, 1995), 115–19, 248–71; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together, Prayerbook of the Bible in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Works*, vol. 5, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly, trans. Daniel W. Bloesh and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); Paul R. House, *Bonhoeffer’s Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015); Schwen, *Exiles from Eden*, 35.

Faculty-administrators shaped by the theology of the incarnation will more readily embrace the “other person-centered” nature of their work. In so doing, they can embody (incarnate) the mission of the institution. Those who do so will serve God and people in specific places as educators.

Faculty-administrators as educators

This account of the faculty-administrator as theologian—and, especially, servant—runs against the dominant mode of academic vocation in North America, which may be traced to Max Weber, who describes academic vocation from a rationalist framework. For Weber, the scholar is a researcher, an expert in *Wissenschaft*, and his life depends on it. He states,

Whoever lacks the capacity to put on blinders, so to speak, and to come up to the idea that the *fate of his soul* depends upon whether or not he makes the correct conjecture at this passage of his manuscript may as well stay away from academics . . . without this, you have *no* calling for academics and you should do something else.²⁸

Perish or publish. Note the absence in this account of any reference to other persons with this same calling. Note also the absence of any reference to students. For Weber, the scholar serves ideas more than people.

Contrary to this rationalist and individualist mode of academic vocation, the faculty-administrator in theological education serves colleagues, students, and staff as an educator.²⁹ Different from Weber’s scholar, the educator recognizes that her vocation exists not only to inform students and fellow educators about God and the church, but also to form students and coeducators into more loving and obedient servants of God and one another. The educator, therefore, operates with an epistemology different from Weber’s rationalism.

28 Max Weber, “Science as Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 135.

29 Thanks to my former assistant, Mrs. Susan McNabb, for reminding me that faculty-administrators also serve the staff members who so humbly and readily serve them, their colleagues, and students. I am grateful for her and for my current assistant, Mrs. Jenn Daniel.

Mark Schwen offers a different, communitarian epistemology that shapes academic vocation. Following Parker Palmer, Schwen claims that knowing is a “reunion of separated beings whose primary bond is not of logic but of love” Knowledge itself is a form of “responsible relationship.”³⁰ No doubt, scholarship requires intense focus and solitary time to read, analyze, and write. Yet from a communitarian epistemology, scholarship advances knowledge as responsible relationship. Scholars become educators and, thereby, “other-person centered” servants in relationship with God and people. Knowledge of reality flows from these relationships, and theology norms both. As Pope Benedict XVI writes, “God is he who has a relationship only with a totality of the real; consequently, to eliminate God means to break the circle of knowledge.”³¹

Faculty-administrators should, then, reject rationalist and industrialist modes of education wherein scholars disseminate information to nondescript masses. Instead, faculty-administrators ought to embrace knowledge as “responsible relationship” to teach students in particular places and support colleagues who strive to do the same. We also must publish scholarship for particular audiences that will benefit from an education and not mere access to information. If we apply a communitarian epistemology to our vocations as theologians, servants, and educators, it will inevitably and happily influence theological education. Thus, two implications for the future of theological education follow.

Conclusion: faculty-administrators for the future of theological education

Theological education as practiced today is a recent phenomenon in church history. Current models and institutions may strengthen or diminish in the coming decades.³² Still, faculty-administrators who live into the hyphen as theologians, servants, and educators can influence North American theological education in at least two ways.

30 Schween, *Exiles from Eden*, 35. See Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (New York: Harper and Row, 1993), 8–10.

31 Pope Benedict XVI, “To Educate is an Act of Love,” 85.

32 See Justo L. Gonzalez, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 117–30.

First, we can change how our academic communities educate students. Instead of credentialing students to fill a spot in a workforce that may or may not exist, we can educate students for a vocation.³³ And instead of treating students like heads to count (“FTEs”) or credit hours sold, whether online or in a classroom, we might see them as persons to serve in particular places because we love them and the God who made them. As Berry remarks, “To educate is, literally, to ‘bring up,’ to bring [young] people to a responsible maturity, to help them be good caretakers of what they have been given, to help them to be charitable toward fellow creatures.”³⁴ To shape our students into maturity as charitable, future caretakers of what God has given chiefly in the church requires that we first see them as persons worth educating.

Second, we can change the way future faculty-administrators are educated. We rightly apply our academic training to teaching and scholarship. But one wonders if we, as a guild, apply such training to our administrative roles?³⁵ We are trained to be researchers and writers, not necessarily educators. Most are trained according to Max Weber’s account of academic vocation, not Mark Schwehn’s.³⁶ Of course, scholarly training must continue. This article is not an argument against the intellectual life.³⁷ However, the dawning of the faculty-administrator as a distinct role in theological education suggests that PhD or related programs ought to provide more teaching and administrative experience to PhD students, especially for those called to hyphenated work.³⁸ Seminaries might explore mentorship programs for academically and administratively gifted students, or

33 See Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels*, 27–59.

34 Berry, “Higher Education,” 52.

35 Again, see the survey conducted by ATS and reported by Graham, “Changes in Faculty Work,” 38–43, esp. the chart on 39. See also, Trice, “Hyphen,” 47; Mark Chung Hearn, “Figuring It Out: A Junior Faculty-Administrator’s Emerging Journey” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, TX, November 19, 2016).

36 See William R. Myers, “Antecedents to a Hopeful Future: Challenges for the Theological Faculty,” *Theological Education* 50, no. 1 (2015): 81–93. Myers discusses the important role Friedrich Schleiermacher played in the founding of the University of Berlin, which included an argument for *Wissenschaft* as the preferred method of theological study and teaching. See Myers, “Antecedents,” 84–89.

37 On the intellectual life, see A. G. Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods*, trans. Mary Ryan (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1998).

38 See also Hearn, “Figuring It Out.”

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internships for recent graduates. As with my development, mentoring relationships will be key for the education of future faculty-administrators.

Faculty-administrators are busy, sometimes overwhelmed, members and leaders of seminaries and divinity schools. Yet they are also key persons in the work of forming, not only informing, the future generation of ministers in the church and academy who will live and work as theologians, servants, and educators. In this way, the vocation of the faculty-administrator may aid the renewal of theological education in North America. Such renewal would be a good result of hard but rewarding, hyphenated work out of love for God, creation, and the church in the world.

Grant D. Taylor is Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Assistant Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.





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