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Napster, Moody Bible Institute and Christianity Online

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Let's put educational technology and theological education into context at the beginning of the new millennium. 'Of the 332 million people online in the world, less than 1 percent are in Africa. Developing countries as a whole contain fewer than 5 percent of the computers connected to the internet.'¹ While the world wide web and its availability to theological schools around the world is

not the totality of educational technology, computer mediated educational systems are shaping educational design and availability. So why should we put energy into exploring applications of educational technology to theological education? I would suggest three reasons:

First, theological education has become the domain of the wealthy. Most theological schools are to one degree or another tuition dependent. Few schools accredited by ICETE² related associations draw tuition dollars from governmental sources. Fewer still have sufficient endowments to provide scholarships to worthy students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore only those people with access to large amounts of money can obtain the type of education that is comparable to the

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1 R.C. Longworth, 'Digital efforts encounter web of challenges', *Chicago Tribune* 5 August 2000.

2 International Council for Evangelical Theological Education, affiliated with World Evangelical Alliance.

training of other leaders in their various countries.

Second, theological education is done outside the context in which leaders will minister. One Southern Baptist leader in Chicago bemoaned the fact that emerging African-American leaders had to be sent to Louisville, KY (300 miles, 480 kilometers) for a seminary education because the contrast in culture between Black, urban, northern Chicago and Caucasian, small town, southern Louisville were so great. If this is true within the United States where many other factors would appear to be so similar, how much greater the problem in the nations represented in this convocation.

Finally, theological education is being provided for the wrong people. A look at a list of the graduates from your school in 1980 might be very revealing. How many of those people are in leadership positions in the church twenty years later? How much of the Christian impact in your country came from those graduates? Fortunately we have shining examples of effective ministry in evidence at this convocation. But if your country is anything like mine, many of the most gifted leaders are like the description of the Peter and John—'unschooled and ordinary men' (Acts 4:13). Their learning came outside the schooling system understood by the religious leaders of the day.

So we turn our attention to educational technology to help theological schools address these problems. Yet the pursuit of educational technology in theological education is not without risks. An uncritical use of educa-

tional technology for the purpose of theological education is likely to create a cyber-colonialism in higher education. To appropriate G.K. Chesterton's famous quotation about the church, 'Educational technology in theological education has not been tried and found wanting, but found difficult and not tried.'

All Christian ministry is local. Growing churches in all cultures are rediscovering this principle. Similarly, the training of Christian ministry leaders must be local. Unfortunately, schools specializing in pastoral training appear to be late in coming to terms with this reality. The challenge before this collection of leaders is how to use the tools of the twenty-first century to prepare the church for a century of challenges to her very survival in the increasingly complex cacophony of cultures in our world.

One myth must be put to rest at the outset. According to Daniel O. Aleshire, Executive Director of the Association of Theological Schools, addressing the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School last month, theological education mediated through educational technology is not likely to save schools money in either the short or long term. The savings will be realized by students rooted in communities who no longer have to relocate in order to expand their biblical and theological knowledge and skills. Perhaps this reason more than any other should drive theological education to pursue the benefits of educational technology.

Whether we rush to embrace edu-

cational technology or not, we need to be aware that computer mediated education is already changing the manner in which Theological education happens. Napster, Moody Bible Institute, and Christianity Online represent fundamental changes in theological education as the twenty-first century begins.

Napster—shared curriculum

Sixteen months ago, Napster, a small online company, began providing a service by which people could 'share' music through the internet. As of last month, *Business-week Online* reports that 20 million people had traded copyrighted music—free.³ Despite legal ongoing challenges based on alleged copyright infringement, Napster has left an imprint on the world of intellectual property. 'Whether Napster wins or loses is highly irrelevant', said Mark Mooradian, an analyst with Jupiter Communications. 'What everybody should be looking at is who's going to be smart enough to create a business model based on this service.'⁴

Like Christian publishers and theological schools, the record industry has a fierce commitment to intellectual property rights and expects emerging theologians to be ethical in their use of texts, books and curricular materials. Yet the laws have not caught up with cyber-ethics. Arising theologians may have their own set

of ethical issues with kingdom people who increase their net wealth based on intellectual property rights.

With more and more theological schools placing curricular materials on the internet or in digital formats, it may not be long before all of these materials will be available to students who will merely 'copy each other's notes' via the world wide web. Though 'fair use' rules limit the extent to which professors can distribute materials for classroom purposes, student to student collaboration is not affected in the same way. All that is needed is an index of people who have digital curricular materials and in time word will spread. Students from all over the world will have relatively free access to the finest of theological courseware with total freedom to contextualize apart from the classroom influence of a western professor.⁵

Implication: Professors and educational institutions need to rethink the issue of intellectual property rights of books and course materials lest they find themselves in embarrassing legal suits that serve as a scandal to the Body of Christ.

Moody Bible Institute—tuition free

Since its founding, Moody Bible Institute has provided tuition paid

3 Spenser E. Ante, 'Inside Napster', *Business-week Online*, 14 August 2000, p. 1.

4 Jim Hu, 'Record firms learn Napster lesson slowly', *CNT News.Com*, 2 August 2000, p. 1.

5 On February 14, 2001, a three judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held Napster liable for copyright infringement, in effect shutting down the on-line service that allows free sharing of files containing music. Despite this fact, the technology remains in place and will be used by others in much the fashion that copying machines have allowed copies of articles and even books to be made.

undergraduate education. While students must pay for room and board, donors and other sources of revenue provide the income to cover tuition costs. As the Institute seeks to expand undergraduate educational offerings through the Department of External Studies, the question arises, 'Should not external education be free as well?' While currently at a modest \$120 per semester hour of credit, that is \$120 more per hour than residential students pay.

Radio was the 'e-commerce' of the 1920s. When WMBI went on the air in 1926, the Institute made a commitment to be commercial free. The bills would be paid by listeners who could afford to give and programmers who had the option to appeal for support over their broadcasts. That policy is still in effect today.

Perhaps the future of theological education lies, not in tuition driven strategies, but in tuition paid approaches that are free to students. The question is 'how?' In the pre-'e-commerce' days, options were few. Appeals for donations and effective stewardship departments constituted the primary approach.

E-commerce may have provided an entirely new approach to funding theological education. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* provides an interesting parallel to schools who have not chosen to follow the example of Moody Bible Institute. Just at a time when the standard of the encyclopedia industry appeared ready to go out of business, the decision was made to put its massive resources on line—free. Links to other web sites, products, and banners (advertising) pro-

vide a revenue stream that should keep the publisher profitable.

The key to free on-line theological education is an ability to attract people a web site constructed like www.britannica.com. To my way of thinking, the three organizations that have the best possibility of creating a critical mass for such a venture are Moody Bible Institute, Focus on the Family and *Christianity Today*. With James Dobson's hesitancy to commit to theological positions, only two agencies appear positioned to lead the way to tuition paid theological education funded through e-commerce.

Christianity Online— alternative curriculum

One of the most fascinating changes in education in general and theological education in particular, is the move from pre-service to in-service training. Peter Drucker, writing in *Management Challenges for the Twenty-first Century*, comments:

The center of gravity in higher education (i.e., postsecondary teaching and learning) may shift to the continuing professional education of adults during their entire working lives. This, in turn, is likely to move learning off campus and into a lot of new places: the home, the car or the commuter train, the workplace, the church basement or the school auditorium where small groups can meet after hours.⁶

Educational technology is at the heart of this shift. In May, Christianity Online, the cyber arm of *Christianity Today*, opened a web site at

⁶ Peter F. Drucker, *Management Challenges for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Harper-Business, 1999), p. 101.

www.preachingtoday.com. The response has been overwhelming. Pastors have a seven day cycle in their life long learning programme. Each Sunday they must have taken another step in their education as they step into the pulpit with new perspectives on the timeless truths of Scripture. Even before the web site had their bugs worked out, five thousand pastors had paid \$50 a piece to have full access to the resources provided. Admittedly, the most popular feature has been fresh sermon illustrations, yet the idea of pastor-defined rather than school-defined (or accrediting association defined) in-service educational programmes may provide a profound shift in theological education.

Perhaps the most profound shift in theological education may come as a result of in-service education. If theological education can re-frame itself as life long learning, serving Bible school and seminary graduates as well as established leaders who have no formal educational credentials, educational technology in its various forms will prove to be an essential tool. Graduates of traditional Bible colleges and seminaries may soon find their greatest benefit from their alma mater is the continuing education they receive through the internet after graduation.

Conclusion

If time would permit, I would love to discuss the manner in which e-books could make textbooks and even libraries, obsolete. Already the technology is in place for an instructor to personalize a textbook for classroom

use (see www.digitlearn.org). The range of options is endless as the instructor is permitted to insert his/her own notes as well as links to helpful web sites on the world wide web. Discussion questions and chat rooms in which to explore the issues raised in class, further enable the instructor to serve the students.

For those unable to access the internet, e-books and CD ROMs will become live options as prices fall and 'obsolete' models become available to schools in the regions represented by the constituents of this conference. For example, it is already possible to load an entire semester's worth of text books onto a single e-book the size of the popular Palm Pilot⁷. If licensing agreements could be worked out with publishers of theological works and e-books, devices already obsolete in technologically advanced countries could be provided in a manner similar to that by which pharmaceutical companies provide medicines to less affluent nations, then textbooks could become available for minimal costs each semester. The same e-text books could be reloaded with new texts at the beginning of each semester throughout the educational process. At graduation, the e-text books could be returned to the school for the next class of incoming students.

While these and many other ideas may seem unrealistic for theological education in the portions of the world where they might be the most useful, the question is not one of technical possibility, it is a question of vision and facilitation. Just as bil-

lions of dollars worth of medical products annually are provided to mission agencies with minimal charges, so theological books could be similarly distributed. All that is

needed is a champion from the technology sector to become the advocate for theological education in the countries represented within this convocation.



ERT on CD from WEF

World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) has released WEF The Theological Resource Library on CD ROM. This CD ROM is completely searchable using Logos system and is rich in material for missions, evangelism, discipleship, church history and theology. If you purchase all the material the CD contains in print it would cost you over \$1000. The CD

normally sells for \$49.95. But the special for **ERT subscribers** is only **\$40** plus shipping. The complete run of the WEF Theological Commission journal *Evangelical Review of Theology* 1977-2000 is on the CD. The journal contains articles from a global perspective covering a wide range of topics in missions and current theological issues such as homosexuality, ethics, salvation, and theological education. Among the title on the CD are the acclaimed, **A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism** both in English and Spanish is included. The resource library contains Bibles, ASV and KJV, in English, Spanish, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Arabic and Chinese. Historic Creeds and Confessions, **History of Christianity**, eight vol. set by Schaff, sermons by Wesley and Whitefield and WEF publications are also on the CD.

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