Searching for the blue fairy: questioning technology and pedagogy in theological education

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[make sure my introduction locates me in a specific location – Catholic, layperson, teaching in a Lutheran seminary, parent of small children]

"Searching for the blue fairy…." I have three reasons why I chose this title, and they relate to my three main points. So, in case you'd rather just get the summary and tune out the rest, here they are:

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The "search for the Blue Fairy" perhaps first arose in the story of Pinnochio – do you remember the Fairy who finally granted him his wish to be real? -- but most recently has found cultural resonance because of its use in the film *AI.* In that film, David, a young robot, or "mecha" (for mechanical) sets out on what is a primordial quest: how can I become real? In his case, that question is bound up with what it is to be human, and therein lies the heart of that film. It seems to me that Steven Spielberg is using David's quest at the heart of the film *AI* to ask the question "what does it mean to be human?" in particularly embodied terms.

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Margaret Miles argues that in this time and in our culture we tend to work out large public issues in our pop films, and I would suggest that the question of what it means to be human is raised in some very compelling ways by our digital technologies – a reality that Spielberg is picking up on in this film.

But asking what it means to be human – particularly in relation to God – is at the foundation, if not the heart, of most theological reflection. My first point today is that theological educators need to hear the depth of this question; not just in our immediate contexts, but in the larger cultural settings of which we are also a part, whether we regularly engage them or not. Digital technologies are at the center of this renewed questioning, and we ignore them at our own peril.

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My second point grows out of this questioning stance. Films such as *AI* pose the question of what it is to be human in terms that contrast an "instrumental" or a controlling "for the use of" *notion* of human being, with an "expressive" or "in relationship" *understanding* of human being. The heart of the debate about genetic research also raises the issue of instrumental versus expressive understandings of human being. Is science to be governed solely by profit motives for instance, or might we believe that there are some limits as to what we do, technologically, with the basic science we pursue?

As Mary Boys points out, every definition of religious education (including more narrow descriptions of graduate theological education) defines how humans know,

whether such descriptions do so consciously and intentionally, or incidentally and unintentionally. We have to ask, as theological educators engaged in the process of integrating new technologies into our pedagogies, whether we understand human knowing and learning in instrumental terms, or in expressive terms. Is theological education simply a process of transmitting information? Or could we see it as a formative practice of engaging in, to use Palmer's terms, "the grace of great things"?

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Finally, my third focus flows from these first two: given a culture in which what it is to be human is increasingly questioned, and given a desire to think about education as more than a simple process of transmission, how might theological educators best engage digital technologies? You won't be surprised to learn that my answer is – to raise and pursue good questions in the context of relational communities! But I will also have some specific ideas about how to do so in a constructive way.

So there you have it, my own search for the blue fairy within theological education… Feel free to doze off now in daydream, or to stay with me as I try to unpack these three points.

I mentioned Margaret Miles' quote about films being a venue for discussing crucial public ideas. I tend to think that mass mediated popular culture in general is an essential matrix of theological reflection. Everywhere you look these days the question of what it is to be human, and what it is to be "real" is being asked.

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Consider films such as *AI, The Matrix, The Truman Show, Pleasantville.*

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Or consider how the news media are awash in concern about stem cell research, and the specific and distinct kinds of questions about human being that arise within genetic research more broadly construed.

Within theological education I can think of numerous ways in which the question of what it is to be human is at least implied, if not directly raised.

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Who are we in relation to God?

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What is salvation and why do human beings stand in need of it?

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Who is my neighbor?

These are familiar and ancient questions at the heart of Jesus' own pedagogical practices.

But there is a version of the question that is not so often directly stated, and which is deeply implicated in our discussion today. That is the question of what it means to be human in the process of learning.

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How do humans know? What are the limits to human knowing? How do we support human knowledge through learning? How do we increase knowledge? and so on. The process of integrating digital technologies into theological education raises this foundational question anew, because there are myriad ways in which we are facing new choices, new possibilities.

The advent of the web, for instance, and with it the ability to take teaching and learning out of our typical classrooms and practice it in a way that erases time and ignores geography, has brought some particularly thorny dilemmas front and center.

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We profess faith in an incarnational God – what does it mean to engage a technology that perhaps urges us to ignore our own embodiedness? Isn't the practice of ministry a fundamentally relational process, and so shouldn't our teaching of it be that, too? Does

technology urge us to ignore our embodiedness? Or can it make are relationality more tangible?

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Does digital technology erase our humanity, or make our common bonds more visible? These are images of Mecca and the Vatican, and I was struck by how similar they felt to me.

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Or consider this visual meditation…

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These are crucial questions for all of us to ask, but I am impatient with some of the rush to simplistic answers. Rather than assuming that online distributive formats are disembodied, for instance, or that our most familiar forms of pedagogy in typical classrooms are also our most fully embodied pedagogies, I'd like us to pause and consider the questions more deeply.

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How do we "know" what we know? What do we confess about what it is to be human and embodied? And how does that confession – which takes specific shape in different communities -- shape our teaching and learning? In what ways is that confession shared

in our approach to leadership within communities of faith? Only then do I think we can begin to describe what an embodied pedagogy that is faithful to God might look like.

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At Luther Seminary, my own most immediate teaching context, we are struggling with these questions. We have observed the Lutheran church becoming more and more marginal – even in the middle of the upper Midwest, where I am assured that vestiges of Christendom still remain! In observing this cultural shift we have asked ourselves how it has come about, and what we can do about it. Part of our answer lies in recognizing that some of the organic linkages that once bound local communities of faith and our seminary have been weakened, in some cases attenuated to such a degree that they are no longer tangible.

Our understanding of what it means to be church, particularly church as the people gathered, as the body of God, needs to be renewed. And so we have committed ourselves to a missional understanding of our enterprise. We have embarked on radically reshaping our educational process so that it is deeply contextual.

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We are building frameworks in which students will learn in the context of the local neighborhood, not just in the context of the seminary;

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where our teachers will be drawn from the ranks of practicing leaders, not solely practicing academics.

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We have begun to understand our "body" in ways that are quite different from how we've done so recently; but are actually more deeply linked to earlier Christian understandings.

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And we have begun to experiment with the ways in which the internet – usually most specifically the web – can help us to overcome the constraints of time and geographic location.

In this case, asking what it is to be human and embodied has led us to respond, in part, that it means to be relational, and to be members of the Body of Christ. From this perspective, using digital technologies in our teaching grows out of a desire to build communities of learning that visibly demonstrate the global nature of the Body of Christ, that tangibly gather knowledge from diverse corners of the Christian community.

Today I want to share with you – in the format of this presentation itself, not simply in its ideas – some of the possibilities. So I've chosen to include some excerpts from two different pieces of digital media. I'm sure you can guess that one of them is the film *AI.* But the second is a brand new CD-ROM that is just coming out, entitled "Beyond Borders: Ministry in a Multi-cultural World." It is a rich resource, chock full of interviews with a variety of respected theologians, as well as with several pieces of new media meant to provoke meditation and perhaps inspire prayer, that tries to engage the new media and its cultural issues directly and immediately within the context of theological education. The first excerpt I'll share with you is from an interview with Dr.

?? Lloyd, where she speaks directly to this issue of integrating both the academic and pastoral in our learning in theological education.

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[click on video excerpt]

This understanding of learning community requires us to support both teachers and learners whose lives prevent their knowledge construction from being confined to a 9 to 5 residential campus. It also invites us into the recognition that Parker Palmer so beautifully states, that learning is about practicing "the grace of great things."

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His definition is stated so as to work even within "secular" contexts, but if you understand "Grace" with a capital "G", or hear "God" when he speaks of "great things," then I think his prescription is eloquent and appropriate for us today. He writes that:

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"We invite *diversity* into our community not because it is politically correct but because diverse viewpoints are demanded by the manifold mysteries of great things.

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We embrace *ambiguity* not because we are confused or indecisive but because we understand the inadequacy of our concepts to embrace the vastness of great things.

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We welcome *creative conflict* not because we are angry or hostile but because conflict is required to correct our biases and prejudices about the nature of great things.

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We practice *honesty* not only because we owe it to one another but because to lie about what we have seen would be to betray the truth of great things.

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We experience *humility* not because we have fought and lost but because humility is the only lens through which great things can be seen -- and once we have seen them, humility is the only posture possible.

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We become *free* men and women through education not because we have privileged information but because tyranny in any form can be overcome only by invoking the grace of great things."

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p. 107

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This is a way of understanding teaching and learning that at its heart is profoundly transformative, rather than simply transmissive.

(explain image)

It will most likely not surprise you to learn that in experimenting with teaching in this way at Luther, even our smallest experiments via the web, have been the source of much concern and debate amongst Luther's faculty. Yet because the experiment has grown out of our deeper commitment to a mission that is clearly rooted in our theological convictions, the questions that arise have for the most part been fruitful.

Point two:

I'll have more to say about what we've learned in that process in the third section of this presentation, but for the moment let me move to my second point – that asking what it means to be embodied, and then how learning can be nurtured in non-instrumental ways, requires us to rethink our understanding of how technologies work, and of how learning happens with them.

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In the film AI, it is the robots, or "mechas" who can collaborate with each other, who know how to physically respond with care and attention, who have some critical perspective on their situation, who evidence learning. The "orgas" (short for organic), on the other hand, are pretty much people without emotional insight, so caught up in their feelings that they either must deny them by sublimating them in their intellectual work (as does the scientist who creates David), or give way to them, enjoying the ramped up fear and mass energy of the "flesh fair", a kind of Roman circus where old

mechas are taken to be destroyed in a highly inventive and supposedly entertaining fashion.

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I confess that watching this film reminded me anew of all the reasons why modernist thought worked to move beyond affective frames of knowing, strove to find a universal perspective from which to critically engage and construct knowledge. So many theological school faculty worry about the disembodied nature of digital technologies in learning, but I suspect we ought to worry equally about learning that is focused solely on the affective to the denial of cognitive issues.

The film *AI*, like *The Matrix* before it (another recent film full of religious analogies), worries that human beings can be captured by our emotions, rather than learning to sense reality through them. And the central symbol of that captivity these films present are our forms of entertainment. Yet these films are, themselves, examples of "entertainment." What are they problematizing, and what can we learn from it? Is there a deeper understanding of the word "entertainment" here? Perhaps one that builds on its root meaning of "between-ness"?

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Both *AI* and *The Matrix* are films that "work" with us on emotional as well as intellectual levels. They are films that repay our engagement with them. So perhaps part of the message is that there is a delicate balance involved, a creative tension

necessary, between ideas and feelings. What do you think? Here's a trailer for the film *AI.* Watch it, and let's see what how it engages you.

[click on trailer here, and let it run]

[slide]

So…? How did it feel to watch this trailer in the middle of a presentation of this sort? Did it evoke feelings for you?

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Did it provoke any reflection?

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Could our modern media function in any way like, say, a parable might have for Jesus?

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Jesus taught using metaphors, images, ideas from his local, daily context. But his parables are not easy to understand. If you "get them" on the first take, you've probably missed the bulk of their meaning! I'm not trying to argue that digital media are directly equivalent to parables, but perhaps, analogous to parables, they require us to reflect emotionally as well as rationally. Jesus' parables went a step further… Beyond just engaging our ideas and our feelings, they also invite us to live in a certain way – to act upon what we've learned.

I am convinced that learning the practices of ministry requires this multiple engagement. Ministry is an embodied practice, so it is not surprising that theological educators should wonder and worry about how we practice teaching and learning as

embodied disciplines. Terrence Tilley, a Catholic theologian who teaches at the University of Dayton, has just published a profound and substantial book entitled *Inventing Catholic Tradition.*

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 In this book he argues that traditions are neither "made" nor "found," but actually a complex amalgam of both those dynamics.

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Tradition is not the "things passed on," but the ongoing practice – and indeed, the substantial argument over – the actual process of passing on a faith. Kathryn Tanner has argued something similar in her book *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology.*

Why do these definitions matter? Particularly in the context we're engaging today? Because they point to the need to understand that the learning that takes place within theological education has to be about more than "right understanding" or orthodoxy, but also about "right practice" or orthopraxis.

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As theological educators we care about more than simply transmitting accurate information, although that's important. We also care deeply about finding ways to support our students into living into and living out the traditions we care so much about. One way to talk about this would be to say that we want to be about transformative pedagogies, rather than simply transmissive ones.

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What might this kind of theological pedagogy look like? I think there are very many

answer, and they are as diverse as the people and contexts within our schools. But here

is one example taken from the CD-ROM I mentioned earlier.

[click on Alex's video]

How do we carry the Big Story? And can digital technologies do so?

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The field media education has shifted dramatically in the last few years, largely because

of a shift in the way in which scholars think about how mass media function. It used to

be that when thinking about how mass communications technologies "worked,"

scholars used images as data pipelines, or trucks carrying cargo, to talk about how mass

media communicated.

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In these metaphors producers created messages which were then delivered via the mass

media, which were essentially large conduits through which the messages flowed. On

the other end were the recipients of the messages, who for the most part were passive

receivers who "off loaded" the cargo, or took the messages in.

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Now communications scholars are beginning to talk about mass media as sources of

meaning making materials, as symbolic inventories or cultural databases, from which

people draw materials and around which people create rituals that in turn construct

meaning. This is another good example of a shift from a "transmissive" or

"instrumental" model, to one that is a "expressive" and oriented to the "reception" of media.

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There are two very important consequences of this change in metaphor for media educators.

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First, the model actually shifts the energy of the meaning making from the producer of the message to the interaction between the message and those who engage it. We have to understand the diversity of ways in which people make sense of their lives using media, and we have to focus on the process involved as being one of cultural intervention.

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Growing directly out of this consequence is the second point, which is that while it is still possible to see that mass media have "effects," we have to talk about them in terms of how they shape our practices. Rather than arguing, for instance, that television or film representations of violence "cause" the kinds of violence we saw at Columbine High School, or in other more recent school shootings, media educators ask: what materials were provided as "raw elements" of the meaning making process around the violence? what kind of attention focus did the media strive to create around these events? what practices did people use to engage the media representations? How did kids play with the film "The Basketball Diaries" for instance?

You may feel like I've gone down a long tangent here, but religious communities also engage mass media, and in fact have been at the heart of experiments with every kind of new media that's appeared.

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Consider the advent of television for instance. Something about its visual power, or the dawning awareness of its ability to draw mass audiences -- sparked enormous effort on the part of religious communities to engage the new medium. There were, roughly speaking, two primary responses. One was a full scale effort to use it as a tool for evangelization (here you can think about televangelists as being one of the most obvious examples of this mode).

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The other was what might at first appear to be the exact opposite response: a push within many religious communities to develop curricula that taught people how to deconstruct the negative messages of television, how to counter its consumerist values and prescribe instead gospel values.

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I say "at first appear," because although these two responses tended to grow out of opposite ends of the theological spectrum -- with more conservative communities favoring television as a tool for evangelism, and more liberal communities seeking to mitigate its negative "secular" messages -- both efforts pretty much assumed that television was a broad band pipeline delivering meaning. In other words, the televangelists decided that it was a pipeline they could use to deliver their own

meaning, and media literacy proponents chose to focus their efforts on inoculating people against the negative messages carried through its pipelines.

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The one focused on loading its own messages, using it as a tool for its own ends, and the other focused on preventing the "off loading" of negative messages, in some cases even advocating boycotting of various kinds of media. Both understood television primarily, if not entirely, in instrumental terms.

What both of these responses missed, however, was the more complicated way in which we engage media, particularly mass media. Some fifty years later, we -- that is, people in religious communities who care about media education -- have finally begun to realize that it is this underlying conception of how mass media function that has gotten in our way.

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Televangelism has ultimately failed to build and nurture strong communities of faith. And the process of trying to inoculate people against negative media messages has instead often inoculated people against *religious* communities, because people have been unwilling to accept such a uniformly negative stance toward a cultural practice they enjoy.

So people engaging media -- at least those in religious communities -- are finally beginning to move beyond either the "it's only a tool to push content" stance, or the "we have to inoculate people against it" stance. Instead, media educators are going back to the work of an earlier literacy advocate, Paulo Freire, and struggling to find ways to ensure that we engage mass media with full respect for our own subjectivities. In short, we've begun to work towards an expressive understanding of mass media, one that stresses reception theories.

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We've learned from Freire, in particular, that we have to take seriously the ways in which people engage, resist, contest, and in other ways, play with, mass media. Media culture -- which is increasingly digitally created and mediated -- is the water in which we swim. It may even be, as Tom Beaudoin argues, the "amniotic fluid" of younger generations. Adán Medrano, a noted filmmaker and videographer suggests:

[click on Adan here]

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If we really are going to push for a different understanding of the sacred and proface, or at least recognize that people experience those spaces differently from how we've conceived them in the past, then media education takes on a particular edge.

It pushes us to think about the ways in which we are socialized into various kinds of media practices, and seeks to ask foundational questions about our processes of meaning-making.

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We need to engage people's sense of their lives in daily ways, of which popular media is one.

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We need to engage media with a clear intent of cultural intervention.

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We need to understand how we might be crossing borders in the process.

So how *CAN* we engage these digital technologies responsibly and well? How can we practice "the grace of great things" within digital realms?

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I think there are numerous answers to this question which are just now beginning to be experimented with. My own responses grow out of trying to take seriously the expressive nature of media, and to fight minimalist and instrumental notions of how digital technologies "work." So how do technology and pedagogy interact in theological education? in part through cultural intervention. Cultural intervention requires that we ask at least the following questions of any medium we choose to engage for the purposes of teaching and learning:

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What is the primary grammar or architecture of this medium? How does it communicate, in what ways do people make meaning within it? Tex Sample argues that our musical "beat" has changed over the last generation, and that different music communicates differently. I may not go so far as he, but I do think that electronic screens – whether television or computer monitors – invite us to engage them as windows into a world, and in doing so they shape how we see reality. Fast paced, moving images, pulsating music, the ability to multitask, to access information quickly – these all shape our knowing and learning in this medium. Before critiquing the limits present, we need to grasp the language.

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What is the social infrastructure that makes it possible to use? What kind of an investment does it require of us, both financially as well as socially? Computers exist in such high numbers in the US at the expense of high consumption of natural resources elsewhere, not to mention significant amounts of cheap labor in other parts of the globe. But they also exist here because of a social infrastructure that has a highly inter-connected market system. Globalization – at least in the terms in which Thomas Friedman talks of it – exists only because of the digital infrastructures that make exchange of economic information so seamless and accessible.

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In what ways do we want to challenge its meaning-making frame, stretch it enough to recognize its limitations? How do we build such challenges into the ways in which we use it? If digital technologies make globalization possible, in what other ways might communities of faith understand globalization, or stretch and challenge the prevailing economic assumptions?

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What are the practices that we use to make sense within it, and do those practices make sense for us?

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And finally, how is God revealing Godself within this medium, and how are we opening ourselves up to that revelation, or blinding ourselves to its possibility?

To recap, in integrating digital technologies into theological education, we have to think of our work with them as a process of cultural intervention. And there are many cultures within theological education!

For instance, we have to be very conscious when we first introduce digital technologies into theological education that many people will primarily think about them in instrumental ways. Do any of these sound familiar?

"Computers will make us more efficient. Computers will bring our courses to a much wider audience. We have to use computers, they're the future. Computers will eventually replace teachers." In each of these cases, computers have agency, but we do not, at least not obviously.

It's not surprising that many faculty are very wary about the process of integrating digital technologies into theological education. We know, deep within ourselves and in our practices, that theological engagement, *logos* about *theos*, is not an instrumental process. It can't be. The Holy Spirit breathes where and how it will, not how we would wish it. If we believe that digital technologies are at heart instrumental, then we are right to resist them. Theological faculty are arbiters, passers on, of a culture, a tradition, and we worry that the cultural imperatives of new technologies will overwhelm us.

When we – that is, people who are trying to bring these technologies to seminaries – treat them primarily as new tools faculty should want to pick up, we risk reinforcing instrumental assumptions at the same time as we ignore the cultural concerns that are legitimately being raised.

If we stay within the instrumental framework we find ourselves forced to argue either that these technologies will allow us to spread the gospel further and more effectively, or admit that we shouldn't use them at all because they recapitulate and reinforce all that we find dangerous about globalization. As with television, both of these positions assumes an instrumental dynamic.

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Instead we need to integrate digital technologies into theological pedagogies by understanding that our foundational pedagogies are not instrumental. By understanding that theological education is at its heart about practice. By giving people access to digital technologies in ways that deconstruct instrumental assumptions. And by encouraging expressive uses of digital technologies.

Point three:

I mentioned earlier that bringing digital technology into the process at Luther Seminary has sparked much concern and many questions, but that our focus on the missional reasons for doing so created a fruitful context for addressing the concern. I would not be truthful if I didn't acknowledge that "being fruitful" does not come without pain. But there are some things we've learned – both at Luther, and in other contexts I've taught in – that can help to make the process a constructive one, with the pain growing out of giving birth, instead of from inducing trauma.

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First of all, I think it's important to understand your institution's pedagogical mission, and to be clear about how the goals you have for the integration of technology support that mission. If you don't yet have such a clear vision, then your first steps ought to be

to develop a process whereby you can create such a vision. One of my favorite aspects of the now decade-long process of using these technologies within theological education is that it has revitalized questions of teaching and learning.

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It may seem counter-productive to spend time debating pedagogical mission when you've got all this money waiting to be spent on equipment. Or perhaps you've already purchased the equipment, and it's waiting to be used, and now all you want to do is be told how to use it (or tell others how to use it). The temptations to move in instrumental ways are always strong!

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But I can tell you from experience that if you don't work on raising and responding to these questions now, you will find yourself responding to them later – and probably in more difficult circumstances. Questions suppressed do not go away, they simply become more circuitous and painful.

Beyond that, communities of faith remain one of the few spaces left in our culture that are not entirely governed by narratives of profit building, generational isolation, and environmental wreckage. We may well be one of the few cultural spaces left in which some of the ethical questions that surround digital technologies can be raised and engaged. If we stifle the generation of questions – on any issue – we make that kind of inquiry extraordinarily difficult.

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What kinds of pedagogical goals might you consider? I would suggest that one place to begin would be with Jack Seymour's typology of theological education. He argues that theological education generally consists of four kinds of activities. Different institutions will emphasize these activities differently, with some neglecting one or more altogether, and others trying to pursue all four to some degree. Here are his four: theological understanding, denominational socialization, spiritual formation, and the reconstruction of church and society. Can you identify which of these your institution emphasizes? You might want to consider beginning with integrating technology into that component of the curriculum first, and then bringing it to more marginal goals later on.

Several years ago I began a web site that tried to give some examples of this, you can find it at: http://www2.bc.edu/~hessma/AMBS/web%20site/highlight.cgi

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My second learning grows out of this one – it's my belief (and you should feel free to argue this with me!) – that any learning goals you might have need to be arrived at through what Craig Dykstra calls a "process of collaborative inquiry" or "evaluation as purposeful inquiry." He suggests that evaluation, rather than being a process of classification or sorting used for someone else's purposes (such as a funding agent

27

deciding on grants, or a teacher who mechanistically assigns letter grades to students), is better understood as a primary principle of reflective practice.

I can think of no better way to approach the integration of technology into theological education than to develop a process of collaborative evaluation around it. Dykstra lists five components of active evaluation pursued in a collaborative way:

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"(1) building into your work regularly-scheduled time for reflection on what you are learning;

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 (2) discerning when you want and need the skillful help of others;

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(3) thinking through as best you can what kind of help you need;

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(4) finding people you trust to give you what you need in a way that you can use it; and

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(5) making yourself available and open to receive the help you've asked for."[1]

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[1] P.2 of "Evaluation as collaborative inquiry," by Craig Dykstra, in *Initiatives in Religion*, a newsletter of the Lilly Endowment, Inc. Fall 1993, Volume 2, Number 4.

This is, not incidentally, also a wonderful prescription for active adult learning. We won't have the time today to look at each of these elements in depth, but note that the first three are about raising questions, and the next two are about creating conditions that will allow answers to be offered and engaged. Such a process is never easy, and requires learning how to listen.

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(Jane Hotstream video)

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I would offer by way of an example, a process with which a Wabash Center teaching workshop that has focused on technology has been engaged. [show Claremont website here]

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To return to where I began, the search for the Blue Fairy…

When the young "mecha" David searches for the answer to the question – "can you make me real?" -- he is presented with an answer by his scientist "father:" that it is the search, and the desire to pursue that search, that has already made him "real." Yet this

is the point of deepest crisis in the film, for David discovers that he has been made not unique, but one of many, coming off an assembly line of robot children.

He responds by throwing himself off a skyscraper into the flooded streets of NYC. Yet neither the fall, nor the submersion, kills him. Instead, he catches a glimpse of the Blue Fairy – enough of a glimpse to renew his search. It is not, finally, the search to be real that is his goal, but reunion with the source of his relationship, connection with and acknowledgement of his mother's love. The search did not define his humanity, rather, the relationality did. The conclusion to this movie can be "read" in at least two distinctly different ways, but for myself I like to read the final scenes as an ultimate recap of the earliest ones, only this time, instead of it being the mother who yearns for her son, it is the "children" – the mechas who have evolved and survived past their parents – who are yearning for these parents.

In both cases it is the relational bond that is paramount, and in both cases it is a bond that stretches past the instrumental. Monica will not accept that this robot is simply a tool for her to use, she refuses to destroy him and instead pushes him out of her home – the catalyst for his journey. Similarly, David can not compel Monica's love, nor even "keep" her past the one day's time that the evolved "mechas" can manage to regenerate her. Instead, it is enough for him that she acknowledges her love for him.

We cannot control God, we cannot even use God for our own ends. Computers will not make that control any more likely. Theologically we know this. And pedagogically we need to accept it as well. It is our questions that can open us up to new relationships,

and it is our questions that, when grounded in community and humility – in the 'grace of great things' – can nurture our faith.

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Roberto Goizueta believes there are crucial questions arising out of our faith right now.

[click on his video]

How do we understand our God? And are we faith-filled enough to imagine a way in which God could be revealing Godself in the midst of our search to integrate digital technologies into theological education?

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These are the questions that keep me passionately engaged in what I do. I hope that the rest of the time we share together, I can learn some of yours!