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Faith, Education and Communication Technology

NEW TECHNOLOGIES SUCH as the Internet and PowerPoint are altering the communication context in which educators, school administrators, students and counselors work. This essay suggests that biblical insights and historic Christian theology can help educators to act wisely within this high-tech context. Of particular importance are: listening, being self-consciously “multimedia” persons, and attending to the role of the Holy Spirit in the non-technological mystery of human communication.

Keywords: technologies, communication, listening, Holy Spirit, informationism, cyberculture, virtue.

The spread of computer-based technologies is both celebrated and lamented by educators. Christian educators rightly desire to discover effective techniques for using new technologies in and out of the classroom. Perhaps even more important than such immediate techniques, however, is general wisdom about using new communication technologies fittingly.

Christian educators can begin to gain such wisdom by: (i) rediscovering biblical and theological wisdom about human communication, and (ii) applying this wisdom discerningly to new educational technologies.

Clearly communication is not the only discipline that can contribute to the task of discerningly incorporating new technologies into educational practices and institutions. Nevertheless, the new technologies such as the Internet, database resources and PowerPoint are essentially communication devices that need to be assessed in light of wisdom about human communication, not just in terms of technical considerations.

As the American pragmatists such as John Dewey argued, the “transmission” of culture always depends on communication – literally, on the “making common” of particular values, beliefs, information, knowledge, wisdom, artifacts and practices.¹ This “making common” of information, values and skills is fundamental to education. All types of knowledge must be passed down from generation to generation or they will be lost.

Computers were developed as data-processing technologies, but the declining cost of microprocessors and the growth of high-speed digital networking expanded computing into communicating. Researchers and others still “crunch

1 See, e.g., Dewey, J., *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916) pp. 5-6.

numbers” on computers, but most educators spend far more computer time communicating, including researching on the World Wide Web, downloading information, interacting via email, and preparing text and image documents for distribution, publication or presentation. Students, too, are deeply involved in using the Web, email, and especially instant messaging.

Moreover, the brisk growth of communication technologies has outpaced even modest understanding of how to use them fittingly, ethically and effectively. The waste is staggering. Over forty-two percent of corporate information technology projects are abandoned before completion.² Perhaps the situation is not much better in education. Colleges and universities are cutting technology budgets particular because new technologies have not lived up to the hype about their revolutionary potential. Digital technologies are not one-time costs, but ongoing and often escalating.

Rather than charging ahead into highly specific educational applications of digital technologies, perhaps educators need wisdom. In particular, it might be time to rediscover Christian wisdom about communication so that educators can apply such wisdom to the new, high-tech context.

There are at least three biblical and theological truths about human communication that relate directly to the new technologies: (i) the beginning of all loving communication is listening, (ii) humans are inherently multimedia creatures whose entire lives speak, and (iii) the best human communication is open to the Holy Spirit.

The primacy of listening

The information gurus suggest that today is the information age. Access to information supposedly will improve nearly every part of society, from education (enhanced effectiveness) to politics (digital democracy), business (greater efficiency and productivity) and worship (robust multimedia presentation).³

This semi-utopian rhetoric of the technological sublime, however, is founded primarily on enhanced *transmission* rather than *understanding* or even *reception*.⁴ Educators, for instance, tend to spend considerable sums on providing access to digital networks and presentational technologies, but invest few resources in instructing teachers and students how to communicate well. Students often know more than teachers about how to download information and compose visual presentations, but they are not competent at critically evaluating such information and presentation. Focusing on mere “access” to information and technology is a far cry from any communication-related goals.

2 Wysocki Jr., Bernard, “Companies Let Down by Computers Opt to ‘De-Engineer’ After Clashes” in *The Wall Street Journal*, 30 April 1998, pp. A1, A6.

3 I recently addressed the issue of using technology in worship in Schultze, Q. J., *High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

4 I borrow the concept of “technological sublime” from Carey, J. W., *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989) pp. 113-141.

This educational penchant for technological transmission is like teaching writing without first teaching reading. Educators are easily seduced by the alleged marketability of students who know how to use new technologies, but “using” is not the same as “communicating well.”

Interestingly, Christian tradition emphasizes listening over transmitting. The first calling of disciples of Jesus Christ is to be good listeners, not speakers. Because God has already spoken, human beings must listen. Believers begin to get oriented to reality by attending to God’s Word. Indeed, the human vocation (or “calling”) is grounded in the fact that God calls disciples to go into the world as agents of the renewal of all things.

Already in Genesis God speaks the Creation into existence. The Creator soon creates human beings and calls them into obedient service as caretakers of this Creation. Such caretaking is “predicated” on what Nicholas Wolterstorff appropriately calls “divine discourse.”⁵ God’s Creation itself speaks (the hills clap their hands while the mountains declare). God also speaks through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. The discourse of Scripture and worship, in particular, orients believers to salvation and faithful living.

Whenever Christians see their role in God’s world first in terms of sending their own missives, they get into trouble. Such misdirected human transmission is a mark of the Fall from communion with God. Speaking without first listening to God leads human beings to define reality in tune with their own symbol systems, apart from divine discourse. Adam and Eve’s deceptive, face-saving, self-absorbed speech reflects a serious distortion of ultimate reality: she made me do it, the serpent made me do it, and so on. New technologies do not automatically undo this basic human tendency to speak before listening.

In the Hebrew, the word translated as “to listen” (*dabar*) means essentially “to be obedient.” Listening is the primary way that human beings practice obedience to someone or to a particular idea, theory or immediate need. Human beings are called to listen to God as a means of getting reality straight, being obedient to the right person.

The Tower of Babel shows what happens when human beings’ collective listening is separated from obedience to God. Babylonians worked together to “make a name for themselves” apart from their Lord. The artifice of the Tower was to be a way for Babylonians to tell themselves and the rest of the world that they were god-like people who could manufacture their own elevator into the heavens. Ironically, the Tower signified as well that the Babylonians lacked accountability to God (naming was essentially an accounting term that signified both ownership and reality).⁶ So God fouls up the Babylonians’ speech in order to retard the spread of their apostate culture.

Contrary to Babylonian techno-arrogance, scripture calls for human beings to be slow to speak and quick to listen (James 1:19). In today’s language, this could be translated something like this: “Be eager to comprehend and obey the truth before trying to transmit it to others.” Perhaps this caution explains why

5 Wolterstorff, N., *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

6 See Bruner, F. D., *Matthew: A Commentary by Frederick Dale Bruner* (Dallas: Word, 1990) pp. 1098-2001. I am indebted to Rev. Jack Roeda for this source.

teachers are identified in the scriptures as those who will be judged by a higher standard. Teaching is among the most communication-intensive, obedience-demanding professions.

Practically speaking, Christian educators should be quick to listen because without practicing listening well they cannot love God or others – including students, parents, colleagues, constituencies and communities. Because of the way humans are created, listening is how people get to “know” someone as a distinct person with particular needs. Only after listening to others can teachers personally serve them by addressing their needs (the biblical concept of “knowing” suggests such intimacy). Neither human beings in general nor educators in particular are created to “love” primarily ideas or abstract concepts – like the concept of “student.” Teachers are called to love particular students – to know them as God knows them.⁷

Any technologies that diminish educators’ ability to listen to specific individuals also reduce educators’ capacity for loving students as needy “neighbors.” If educators are not careful, technological excesses can make them less neighborly to learners and other staff.

In this regard, Christian educators need to ensure that schools do not import listening-poor practices from the wider society. Learning is not the same as media consumption. Nor is media-consumption an acceptable substitute for interpersonal dialogue. About 70% of U.S. families now eat dinner while sitting in front of the television set. Meanwhile, some schools now import satellite TV news programs into classrooms during lunch breaks – often with free equipment provided by the company that produces the programming and sells advertisements on the news. “Watching the news” is not itself a process that will improve student listening or make it easier for teachers to gain students’ attention. Quite the contrary, students socialized significantly into media consumption do not automatically learn how to listen to persons, dialogue with other students, and participate in discussion about the media.

One of educators’ tasks, then, is to model well the practice of listening to *particular* students and colleagues, not to imitate ever more impersonal, mass-mediated transmission of information. If teachers in classrooms spend too much time with mere entertainment or information, and not enough in communion with learners, they are less likely to be loving teachers – which is to say that they will not know, love and serve students well.

Christian teachers can pretend that students need merely more information, but this is perhaps the greatest technological fallacy in education today. Some misguided educators even talk about education itself as the mere “delivery of information.” Such metaphors reduce teaching and learning to mechanical “processes,” to machine-like “behaviors.” By the time students get to college they are nearly incapable of discerning the real value of information sources or talking critically with others about those sources. Students know how to surf the Web and use advanced features of search engines. Yet they have barely a clue

7 Palmer, P., *To Know as We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

about the worldview behind the information that they gather and present as fact. Jacques Ellul rightly argues that technological societies are “profoundly incapable of meditation and reflection.”⁸

Technologically rich education can easily suffer from *informationism* – a faith in the power of transmitted information to transform lives and societies. More specifically, parents and teachers have to be careful not to believe too much in the techniques of acquiring and spreading information, since technological means will not guarantee educational progress. The individual Web surfer with a high-speed Internet connection is today’s metaphor for the power of information to serve, teach, and inspire. Getting online is itself a symbol of freedom, power and intelligence.

As Ellul argues, however, any infatuation with technological *means* is wildly ironic, because it can direct people away from worthy *ends*. For educators, the emphasis on the power of transmission can divert schooling away from the deeper purposes of education. Why should anyone teach? Why should students learn? Why should Christian schools teach and learn “Christianly”? These become essential questions whenever schools face decisions about importing new technologies.

One unexpected benefit of open discussion about the proper role of communication technologies in education, then, could be to remind school staff and parents to address a worthy *telos*. While examining the “methods” of high-tech instruction, educators also should be cognizant of the “ends” used to evaluate the methods. In other words, schools should foster dialogue about the ends of high-tech means. Administrators and teachers need to be listening to each other and to students, assessing the role of technology in the greater context of good education.

Being quick to listen will remind educators that they are called to serve persons, not mere informational “receivers.” Students bring to the schools their own hopes and fears, anxieties as well as joys, specific gifts in addition to particular weaknesses. In the biblical sense, students listen and learn with their hearts as well as their minds, with their desires as well as their intellects.

Listening will lead educators to discover the incredible diversity of the students that they serve – every one of them different within their shared createdness as God’s image-bearers. Moreover, listening helps teachers to learn how best to love each student as a distinct person, including when and how to encourage, which pedagogies to employ, and when to confer with parents about specific issues. In this kind of listener-centric teaching there is no one-size-fits-all technique, no super-powerful means of instruction that trumps all others regardless of time, place and persons involved. There is no “turn-key solution.” Listening cannot be rushed. Love is patient. Therefore, Christian teaching is as well.

Some monastic communities lived according to a very wise saying: “Speak only if you can improve upon the silence.”⁹ In other words, human beings ought

8 Ellul, J., *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989) p. 87.

9 de Mello, A., *Taking Flight* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) p. 27.

not to let their egocentric desires fill their hearts. In order to live and teach faithfully, educators need less of themselves and more of God and their students. In some cases, teachers probably should pursue less technology and more in-person dialogue. And perhaps teaching *through* or *about* technology should be premised on how to listen well (in the generic sense of attending to meaning and understanding).

Human lives communicate

Many parents and educators know that their entire lives can communicate to others. Sometimes even unintended communication is more powerful than intended messages. All human actions, not just speaking or writing, might “speak.”

Speech can be particularly nuanced communication, but other forms of intended and unintended communication are also important. Human beings’ multimedia messaging apparently reflects part of the nature of the Creator-God. Just as the Creation “speaks” of God’s power and majesty, human beings’ own mini-creations communicate something about who they are and what they value.

Augustine says in his commentary on Psalm 149 that believers should praise God with their “whole selves,” with tongue, conscience, life, and deeds. “Let your voice, your life, your deeds, all sing” praise to God, he writes.¹⁰

Therefore, educators might consider new technologies broadly as tools that can give praise to God when used well for “earthly” purposes – including teaching. From this perspective, technologies are more than means for instruction. They are also opportunities for being stewards of the unfolding Creation and expanding culture. As caretakers of the new technologies, educators are called to “speak” of God’s glory by using them wisely.

In order to accept this responsibility under God, however, educators have to accept responsibly God’s claim over all of their educational efforts – both the high-tech and high-touch. How teachers treat students and colleagues *with* new and old technologies is just as important as what and how they intend to communicate *through* the latest digital devices. Educators need to establish the right attitude toward technologies and students. In the worst cases, teachers would treat students like receivers rather than persons, like machines rather than image-bearers. Much so-called “distance education” falls into this trap.

To extend Marshall McLuhan’s famous dictum (the medium is the message), teachers’ attitudes toward technologies and learners become part of the message. Often the impact of attitudes is unintentional, just as instructors might not realize how differently they treat boys and girls. Everything an instructor does, including use of technology, becomes part of this message. Teachers are media and messages, similar to the way that Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh.

In *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age*,

10 Augustin (sic), *Expositions on the Book of the Psalms* in P. Schaff (trans. and ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956) p. 673-674.

I address human beings' medium-like nature in the context of technological living.¹¹ I distinguish between *cyberculture* and *virtue*. Cyberculture embraces the "attitudinal message" that technologies are means of increasing human efficiency and giving great human control, whereas the concept of virtue suggests that the impact of technologies depends also on the character of the users. *Who* educators are, both intentionally and unintentionally, is just as significant as *what* they intend to communicate *through* the use of technologies.

Living in a technological milieu, educators understandably assume that the purpose of technology is to provide greater control over the educational process, and thereby over students' learning. The language of educational technology as "tool" is largely predicated on this attitude. Tools supposedly help people to accomplish various things. Efficiency and control, in turn, become the dominant values in the application of technologies to education.

This power-oriented attitude toward technology is not wrong, only dangerously incomplete. Just as important as the impact of technology on educational processes is the character of the persons who use the technologies. Yet this later aspect of human technologizing is seldom examined. Researchers examine every imaginable aspect of the impact of technology on teaching and learning, but rarely consider the ways that the characters of the communicators become part of the technological "message."

Educators should consider how their own virtuous or non-virtuous characters, and those of their learners, become part of the use of technologies in education, schooling, and learning communities. In the New Testament virtue is associated with the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. Certainly researchers could examine how technological applications make teachers and learners more or less virtuous. But the reverse is just as important: the kinds of attitudes that educators bring to their use of technology are also important. For instance, are efficiency and control more significant than the fruits of the Spirit? To approach educational outcomes without first addressing character is to put the cart before the horse, unless virtue itself is included as an "output" as well as an "input" in technological efforts.

By and large, virtue is off of the radar of technological societies, including many public and private educational institutions. One reason is that virtue is hard to measure. In the state of Michigan, standardized test scores used to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning totally disregard virtue. Perhaps testing for educational *content* does say something about teachers' and students' *character*. More likely, educational assessment has fallen to the kind of technological attitude evident in cyberculture.

Another reason that virtue is not considered part of the educational "message" is that virtue seems to suggest a moralistic or religious bias. Who has the right to tell anyone else's children what they should be like *as persons*? But the 20th century has shown how inherently biased all education really is – including

11 Schultze, Q. J., *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

all messages, content, and instruction. Part of the role of Christian educators is to face this dilemma without shying away from the hard decisions.

Cyberculture naively assumes that all “information” is somehow worth including in public databases and, presumably, education. The very concept of “information technologies” carries a falsely objective value (Who can be against information *per se*?). As human cultures give meaning to technologies, however, these meanings in turn shape how people think about technologies. As with the Tower of Babel, contemporary assumptions about the goodness of new technologies and the beneficence of their users are sometimes self-deceptive. The Internet, for instance, spreads “bad information” like wildfire. Hate speech and pornography probably have never been distributed with more efficiency and control!

Researchers might never be able to determine precisely how information and information technologies form students’ characters. Nor will they likely be able to discern exactly how the character of teachers and learners becomes part of the messages attached to the use of educational technologies. But these topics need to be addressed, even imperfectly, or the values of efficiency and control will utterly dominate discourse about the value of educational technologies.

Clearly the information age needs people and communities of good character that model the fruits of the Spirit. Mere informationism will not deliver us into the educational Promised Land! The values that set the course of technological innovation in schools are critically important. And the best way to identify the implicit as well as explicit values is by assessing the language that educators use to talk about technology.

Most of the language of technology – inputs, outputs, bandwidth, power and impact – is insufficient for addressing virtue in educational institutions. Worse yet, this machine-like lingo can squelch serious discussion of the role of character in Christian educational communities. The data about technology might look grand: faster Internet connectivity, more computers per school, smart classrooms, and increased technology across the curriculum. But what do such trends really have to say about the character of people in educational communities?

High-tech educational ventures provide new opportunities for pretending that teachers and administrators are doing their job simply by introducing more technology. Such superficial attitudes might help raise funding for schools, but they communicate the wrong message. God makes clear that human beings suffer from a tendency to evaluate external images rather than internal matters of the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Just as societies can mistakenly assume that they are achieving social progress because of technological advances, school systems can wrongly convince their members that technology is itself a valid measure of instructional advancement.

Instead of falling into this superficiality, Christian schools should balance the assessment of measurable outcomes with an honest appraisal of the character of teachers and students. Teachers’ *being*, for instance, is just as important as their *doing*. As more and more education becomes technique-driven, Christian schools have an opportunity to lead the way to a more robust kind of educational assessment that considers virtue as well as test scores.

Such broader assessment probably will show that nurturing good character

is less a matter of passing along information than it is modeling goodness. How Christian educators conduct themselves – how their lives “speak” – more or less reflects their inner convictions, desires and qualities of character. In this sense, schools are indeed mini-cultures that communicate intentionally and unintentionally both to the schools themselves and to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Finally, the fact that human beings communicate with their whole lives reveals a tendency toward *mimetic desire*.¹² From shortly after birth until death, people imitate others. In thousands of ways, often without reflection, individuals become like others. Some young people desire to look, sound or act like the celebrities whose personas are portrayed in the media. Teachers become role models, too, even if they do not seek the job. So do peers, older siblings and colleagues. In fact, most students seem to evaluate teachers based partly on how the teachers conduct themselves. Students want teachers who care for and about them, not just teachers who are technically gifted pedagogues.

One key to real progress amidst the prevailing cyberculture is remembering that lives speak. Teachers are not called fundamentally to be technologists, but instead to be wise caretakers of the educational dimension of God’s world. How can teachers use technologies in ways that model wisdom, truth, compassion, justice and peace – not merely efficiency and control? What is educators’ attitude behind the message of technological instruction and assessment?

Being open to the Spirit

Digital technologies are sold primarily as means of gaining more power. Clearly some technologies do give administrators and teachers more power over *some* people and processes. A teacher or student today is probably able to *manage* more information (in the sense of *manus*, or being able to “hand” more information).

But technologies can also diminish power. Some of the systems for digitally reporting grades to parents, for instance, greatly limit teachers’ communication of subjective comments about students. Perhaps to help administrators and teachers avoid law suits from disgruntled parents, or maybe to make it easier and faster for grade reporting, some software companies are depersonalizing grade reporting as a statistical convenience.

In the classroom, presentational technologies might help teachers gain student attention. At the same time, however, such machines could foster particular types of learning while hindering other modes. Teachers sometimes complain that when they use instructional technologies they actually feel like they have less distinctively educational control in the classroom. Surely researchers will produce many more studies on this complex topic.

No matter how much power educators gain over messaging, however, they can never manage it entirely. Complete control eludes even the most technologically savvy instructors. The classroom is a complex communication setting, an organic culture in its own right. As communication, teaching occurs within

12 One of the best sources on mimetic desire is Girard, R., *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001).

a classroom *ecology* that neither student nor teacher can fully control and that administrators cannot dictate.

While the dynamic nature of human communication might be frustrating at times for educators, it is also a gift from God. Human beings are not merely the product of their own messages; God is present in the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the reigning model of human communication as a closed, cybernetic system is too secular to be complete. God and human beings live together in dynamic relationships. Human cultures – including schools – reflect God’s three-in-one character, with diversity amidst unity. And God is part of the diversity and unity of Christian education.

The Bible supports this organic, Spirit-involved view of communication and community under God. Rather than even trying to seize complete control over their destinies, believers are called to give up some control, to turn their lives and communities over to God even as they accept responsibility for them. Paul tells the Romans that the mind controlled by sinful man is “death,” whereas the life controlled by the Spirit is life and peace (Rom. 8:6). Communicative self-control – or self-discipline – rather than other-control is actually a way of inviting God to be part of human community. The Christian educator not only should seek classroom control; he or she also should relinquish some control to God. Perhaps the best way of understanding this mystery is re-learning again and again the importance of being a living sacrifice under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

This a-technological, Spirit-enabled fortitude makes sense only in the context of a personal God who comes into the lives of teachers and learners for the good of community. By giving up some control, humans become vessels of God’s control, mediators under the Lord. They seek direction from the Spirit, not just their own initiatives.

All of this might seem impractically theological except that it is so remarkably obvious in teaching. Some of the classes that instructors prepare for the most fully are utter disasters. An educator can enter a classroom absolutely convinced that the lesson plans will engineer great learning. If this personal confidence grows too strong, however, the teacher becomes a kind of instructional technocrat, dependent on the power of human manipulation.

How humbling it can be when such carefully developed and administered plans fall apart! The beginning of the end might be a student comment that exudes confusion, a group of faces filled with dismay or boredom, a sudden recognition by the teacher that what seemed great on paper simply does not work when spoken or written on the blackboard or presented via PowerPoint, or through a video that elicits no discussion.

Consider the opposite circumstances as well. A teacher is ill-prepared, awaiting disaster. Perhaps he or she got little sleep the night before. Maybe the instructor suffers from a lack of confidence, even doubts about being called to education. Every teacher could write an essay about the things that cause them to feel that they are not in complete control of a given class, a particular student, a subject, a lesson, and every other “given.”

Why, then, do some of these disasters-in-waiting become beneficial class sessions? Why does a lack of preparation sometimes seem to work out for good? Why does the instructor sometimes connect with students and quickly

build the classroom as a community of self-learners? Why do students sometimes respond favorably?

Like all human communication, teaching is not only an art. It is also somewhat of a mystery. Even some of the best teachers are not able to articulate what they do right. Only a fool claims to be in complete control. He or she probably is not listening to all of the evidence.

I recently spoke at a very large conference of over 8,000 people. I was wonderfully prepared. Within ten minutes, however, people started leaving. By the time I finished the audience had dropped in half. The more I struggled to stop the flow of people out the door, the worse it got. I started sweating, even loathing myself. I was bombing – no doubt about it. And I teach communication! This was deeply humiliating. I wanted to sneak out of the building and drive home.

Then a woman came up to me after the presentation to show me her ticket for the event. I read my name in large, black letters. But she pointed at the tiny title of my talk. I looked at it carefully, astonished. I had spoken on the wrong topic! She was not happy with me. I was furious with myself.

Several hours later I was talking to some people in the hallway when a woman came up to me in tears. She said that my speech had been among the highlights of her life – just what she needed to hear. Her compliments were embarrassing. On and on she went, extolling my greatness. I thanked her. Then I asked her about the topic of my presentation. “Great,” she said. “But it was the wrong topic,” I reminded her. “It was?” she asked, “I guess I never looked!”

There is no reason for educators to be intentionally poor communicators in classrooms and lounges, or in meetings with parents and administrators. Teachers ought to work hard for the “most excellent way,” to borrow from St. Paul. Surely this is true for the use of educational technologies as well.

But education is not merely a matter of human technique. Teachers are not in complete control. They never were. And they never will be, no matter how much power teachers think they can gain with the latest technologies. God is alive in faithful teaching, renewing hearts and minds and techniques. The Holy Spirit repeatedly transforms instructional chaos into cosmos, just as the Creator did in the beginning.

Using the latest technology wisely requires humility before the power of the Holy Spirit. Although teachers ought never to give up control irresponsibly, or even to reject their role as caretakers of education, they are called to give up some control by listening to God and learning from others. Christian education is partly the job of submitting to divine grace, the gift that passes understanding.

Conclusion

Perhaps the greatest antidote to over-technologizing education is living prayerfully in the Spirit, both as individuals and as communities of faith. One type of prayer is “technological,” through which believers seek God’s specific intervention on behalf of specific needs. The other type of prayer is a giving up of control and resting in God’s mercy: “Thy will be done.”

In an essay titled “Petitionary Prayer,” C.S. Lewis struggled to understand

these seemingly contradictory types of prayer. How can humans pray both for what *they* want and for *God's* will? In the end, he decided that the only way of discerning which way to pray was to pray for God's insight.¹³

So it is with all human endeavors – even the most technological ones. Educators do need to seek what they think is best for students, colleagues and school communities. And they should employ technologies fittingly. Along the way, however, teachers must also call on God to direct this labor.

Even in a technological culture good teaching is utterly dependent on the triune God. Faith communities of learning have the opportunity to be countercultural in the sense of not falling prey to mere efficiency and control, but seeking instead higher ends. Perhaps most important of all, Christian schools might be able to avoid the kinds of technological depersonalization that make learning communities less holy and organic, and students and staff less virtuous.

Doing God's will, calling for "Thy will" to be done, is urgently needed in high-tech cultures. Martin Heidegger suggests that technology – technological mindedness, not just the machines – is the metaphysic of the age, evidence of humans' de-facto faith in their own ability to determine a destiny.¹⁴ Giving up some technological control in order to act more responsibly as God's stewards might seem foolish to many educators who are rushing headlong into what they consider to be an inevitable future. But giving up some control is wisdom.

Czech Republic President Václav Havel cautioned at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland in 1992, "We have to abandon the arrogant belief that the world is merely a puzzle to be solved, a machine with instructions for use waiting to be discovered, a body of information to be fed into a computer in the hope that sooner or later it will spit out a universal solution." Instead, he continued, "we have to release from the sphere of private whim and rejuvenate such forces as a natural, unique, and unrepeatable experience of the world, an elementary sense of justice, the ability to see things as others do, a sense of transcendental responsibility, archetypal wisdom, good taste, courage, compassion, and faith in the importance of particular measures that do not aspire to be a universal, thus an objective or technical, key to salvation."¹⁵ This is a fitting call for Christian education as well.

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The Stapleford Education Conference

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Intending participants are invited to submit short papers for seminars. It is expected that these will seek to integrate Christian faith with some aspect of educational thought and practice. Proposed titles/outlines of papers should be submitted by 31 October if possible.

Further details from:

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