

Virtual Publications or Virtually Publishing?  
The Opportunities and Challenges of On-Line Publishing in Religious Education

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Abstract

Contemporary scholars and library administrators perceive on-line academic publishing efforts as a crucial response to rising prices in print publication in the face of faculty desiring to distribute their ideas more openly. Not all on-line efforts share these same objectives, but often share similar challenges in this new environment of publishing. The following presentation explores the opportunities and limits of Internet publishing for Religious education from the experiential perspective of a three-year-old on-line journal, *Didache: Faithful Teaching*. The journal serves as a case study for the different challenges of communicating through the Internet key issues of faith, culture and education to an audience that is global but oriented in a particular faith perspective. In addition the paper will explore challenges to on-line publication such as the determination of "readership," accessible formats for international settings, language barriers, promotional challenges, and cultivating international scholarship.

Introduction

The advent of the Internet and its implications for Religious Education remains a topic of fascination and consternation, both in the United States (Ascough 2002, Hess 2002, Kelsey 2002, Litchfield 1999, Soukup et al. 2001) and in other international settings (Lombard 2003). Concurrent with issues of on-line distance education, technology in the classroom, and electronic concepts of personhood/community, it has become evident that the remarkable growth of on-line journals as an alternative means of publishing raises considerable attention, particularly in the broader academic realm (Hovav and Gray 2002, Mogge 1999). It has yet to be determined just how influential the Internet may be on the total direction of such disciplines as Religious Education. One thing is clear, however, that the Internet cannot be ignored, not only as format for teaching/learning, but also for the local and global communication of ideas (including ideas addressing faith, culture and teaching). Undoubtedly efforts in Religious Education will be influenced by this phenomenon along with academic disciplines already quite active in the field of on-line publication.

Scholars and research librarians serve as advocates and catalysts for the existing and emerging number of on-line journals. Researchers monitoring the growth indicate this academic advocacy exists primarily as a response to current economic issues in print journalism. Not all on-line journals, however, emerge with the same concerns. This paper presents a case study concerning one on-line journal that shares many of the same problems of on-line academic publishing. However, the journal also introduces a context and set of objectives that vary from other on-line efforts. The new context and stated objectives of this journal, *Didache: Faithful Teaching*, may lend new insight into the long-range opportunities and challenges of on-line journalism. The

paper will first establish the current climate of on-line publishing then introduce the reader to the rationale and creation of *Didache: Faithful Teaching*. Following this overview the author will assess the journal in light of the current challenges resident within on-line journalism, including examples from *Didache: Faithful Teaching*. The paper concludes with a series of observations that may assist religious educators considering future on-line ventures of virtual publications.

#### The Emergence of Internet academic publications.

No one can doubt the rapid rise of scholarly publications on the Internet. Both journals and newsletters increased dramatically from 110 in July 1991 to 3414 in December 1997, including an increase in the humanities from 318 to 1440 (McElDowney, undated). Research in 1998 revealed at least twenty of these journals offered free on-line were associated with Religious Studies (Bellinger 1998, Chapter 4, p. 5-6). By 2001 the Association of Research Libraries reported over five thousand electronic journals (Hovav and Gray, 229). Not all journals survive this rapid expansion, or supervising organizations like the Association for Peer Reviewed Religious Journals (<http://rosetta.reltech.org/apejr/apejr.html>). The influx of Internet publications makes the need for central databases and clearinghouses a priority (Chodrow 2000, 90-91). However, the number of quality collections and clearinghouses remains low as respectable sites like Project NewJour (<http://gort.ucsd.edu/newjour/>) record new publications on a regular basis. However, access to specific journals remains a limiting factor for those not familiar with Internet search engines designed to navigate the voluminous number of independent or "home grown" web-publications. General search engines often do not discriminate between sound academic resources and well marketed private distribution. Scholars attempting to locate even efficient search engines, like Muse (<http://muse.jhu.edu/>) or INFOMINE (<http://infomine.ucr.edu>) often resort to print resources to help them judge the most appropriate resources (Schlein, Sankey and Newby 2002, 113). Some scholarly Internet resource collections like INFOMINE no longer take suggestions for new resources. Their rationale reveals one the problems with on-line publication now and in the future.

Recently, INFOMINE has been plagued by commercial Web site operators who have submitted sites without academic value, and who have submitted every page on their sites. (Some commercial service is probably "selling" these registrations.) After receiving 30,000 worthless suggestions over the last month or so, we have decided to stop taking suggestions until we find a reliable way to filter out this junk. Further, any suggestion made after December 20th 2002 will probably be discarded. (InfoMine, Suggest a Resource, <http://infomine.ucr.edu/feedback/suggest.php>).

Regardless, on-line publishing continues to grow and includes portions of many print journals, though often as archival or promotional ventures (Peek, Pomerantz, and Paling 1998). At best, the two publishing forums will co-exist, so early expectations of either venture's demise are long discarded (Sweeney 1997). On-line publishing of new, free-access, journals continues to gain acceptance and endorsement by organizations like the Association of Research Libraries and other academic groups who perceive their need on primarily economic grounds.

## Economic conditions for on-line journals

A coalition of faculty and research libraries currently stimulates the growth and advocacy of on-line scholarly publications, seeking to offset the limited and expensive number of research journals available through print (Bellinger 1998, SPARC Strategy 2003). Organizations like The Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition indicate a burgeoning need for more diverse and inexpensive outlets for scholarly publication (Case, 2002). The organization describes itself as “an alliance of universities, research libraries, and organizations built as a constructive response to market dysfunctions in the scholarly communication system” (SPARC para. 1). The coalition perceives the current publishing ethos as one where dysfunctions “reduced the dissemination of scholarship and crippled libraries” (para. 1). Many academic institutions see SPARC representing a vital concern since expenditures for serials by research libraries increased 210% between 1986 and 2001, over three times greater than the increase in the consumer price index in the same time (ARL Office of Scholarly Communication, section 2, para 2).

Theorists attribute the cost increase to the rise of institutional demands for new research. The need for new research not only determines faculty worth but also, following the Merrill act that created land grant Universities, justifies the academic institution's own existence as contributors to society. This demand shifted the need for publication from the free exchange of information among scholarly societies to an economically driven commercial publishing venture supporting institutional effectiveness (Chodrow 2000, 86-89). Stanley Chodrow, chair of the Board of Directors of the Council on Library and Information Resources, summarizes the problem

The marriage of the gift-exchange economy of the academy and the commercial economy of journal publishing has had very unfortunate results. The commercial publishers have exploited the division between the producers and the purchasers of information. The faculty gives its research to publishers for free; the publishers sell it back to the university library at high prices (89).

In response, SPARC and others employ a new strategy web-based initiative titled Create Change (<http://www.createchange.org/home.html>), calling for new journals; often controlled by faculty rather than publishing houses, and providing open access to these new, often less expensive, academic publications (Rogers and Oder 2001).

## Open access and subversive agendas

Libraries are not alone in the endeavor to add additional avenues of scholarly discourse. Faculties, discovering the possibilities of electronic access, advocate a broader dissemination of their work. Scholars call for a “subversive” program where papers are shared cheaply through file transfer protocol (FTP) sites, gophers, or other accessible formats, including Internet websites, which allow for the open exchange of information (Harrasowitz: Electronic Journal Providers). Faculty members advocating this format often frame their argument in the language of sharing “esoteric” or specialized information for a limited academic audience that has non-trade, no-market, value (Okerson and O’Donnell 1995, 11-12). Often scholars disseminate these electronic versions in the form of pre-publication papers called preprints (67) that are later

developed into peer review articles (67). Scholars admit that when the electronic publication is more formal there will remain several needs: rapid, expert peer review; rapid copyediting; peer interaction & commentary; and permanent archives that are searchable & retrievable (90). Advocates note such open access faces obstacles, particularly in the economic consolidation of scholarly publishing efforts and current copyright laws (ARL Office of Scholarly Communication).

Internet use, however, may not solve all economic or access issues often associated with print publications. As indicated by INFOMINE's statement above, the Internet itself is increasingly seen as a commercial venture. While Internet sites provide open access, discerning between scholarly versus marketing ventures remains a difficult task when Internet providers blanket sites with marketing schemes. Scholarly writings enjoy some "gatekeeping" not only through the editorial control of print publications, but also in the selectivity of libraries to house more reputable academic journals. For all of the limits of print publications they do help limit the workload of libraries in determining which journals to house or recommend. Professional organizations may prove helpful if they too do not buckle under the weight of multiple submissions. If the American Theological Library Association's efforts maintaining up-to-date database resources provide any indication (ATLA 2003, para. 15), this will remain a constant challenge.

The national tensions of on-line publishing reveal both the hopes and concerns of faculties, libraries and even publishing companies engaging this new medium. In the midst of the ongoing struggle to provide new, free, on-line resources, new journals are being conceived and implemented. In the midst of this movement other journals also emerge, cognizant of the struggles of on-line publication yet developed with a different agenda. One such publication is *Didache: Faithful Teaching*. This journal reveals some of the emerging challenges to on-line publication, but also some of the possibilities that might influence the current discourse on Internet publishing.

### *Didache: Faithful Teaching*

In the fall of 2001 another on-line publishing venture emerged. *Didache: Faithful Teaching* is designed to encourage writing across three disciplinary domains: faith, culture and education. The journal's introduction reveals much of the publication's primary goals.

*Didache: Faithful Teaching*, an interdisciplinary academic journal, offered on-line, that explores the intersections of Christian conviction, culture and education for the Church of the Nazarene and other international Wesleyan communities in higher education. This new journalistic endeavor is a project of the Resource Institute for International Education (RIIE: Church of the Nazarene) designed to foster a conversation among our diverse international communities of higher learning, each seeking to educate in various academic disciplines but all guided by Christian conviction shaped through a Wesleyan heritage. With this international context in mind our editorial focus will be upon articles and resources that explore intersections between:

- an emphasis on Christian faith and practice,
- an awareness of cultural influences, and
- the exploration of educational practice and administration.

Intentionally our hope is to resource smaller communities around the globe who have little access to scholarly sources and who may find this journal helpful in shaping their education endeavors. We also hope to include research from quality scholars and educators from around the world who have little opportunity to publish in other settings. Ultimately the journal will include research articles, insights from the practice of teaching and learning, book & resource reviews, as well as opportunities for journal participants to discuss on-line (moderated) topics of interest. (*Didache: Faithful Teaching* Introduction)

The journal is part of a denominational effort by the International Board of Education for the Church of the Nazarene, through its Resource Institute for International Education) to create an Academy for International Education (RIIE), whereby scholars (primarily within the denomination) could interact regardless of their global setting (Academy For International Education). A conference held in Johannesburg South Africa in the summer of 2000 identified the primary need and challenges for this organization (Truesdale 2000). With fifty-seven institutions globally, denomination leadership sensed the need to both resource smaller institutions with easily accessible resources on faith & teaching, and to provide a means of discourse between faculties (Lambert 2000). Members of RIIE determined that such an endeavor should include a new journal that would provide resources for global faculty. Editors and officials launched the inaugural edition *Didache: Faithful Teaching* (from now on addressed as *Didache*) the following June, 2001 to coincide with a large gathering of Nazarene educators in the United States known as the Faith, Learning and Living Conference.

Publishing an on-line Journal: Considerations on self-reporting.

The following account comes for this author who also serves as journal editor (Blevins 2001). Obviously there are recognizable limitations of being both resource and reporter in an experiential account, both in the organization of the material and in the accuracy of the account. In order to help with organization, the author chose an outside source to provide a methodology for reporting. Anat Hovav and Paul Gray (2002) state that scenarios are best explored through eight domains (231, 238-40):

- Material (type of work within the journal)
- Mode (format and use of various images)
- Medium (delivery system such as print, Internet or CD)
- Means (distribution methods)
- Market (readership)
- Money (fees/income and cost, including labor issues)
- Management (decision making process)
- Mannerism (social aspects including journal perceptions, dispositions, etc.)

Four of the categories (Means, Mode, Material and Medium) are primarily technology related factors. The categories of Markets, Money and Management reveal insight into the influences that affect the employ of technology while the category Mannerism details the social perspective (journal quality, flexibility and access globally). These categories guide the author's reflection on the current case study or scenario. One hope emerges that this organization not only guides the comprehensiveness of the account, but also compels frank and accurate reporting. There are always self-limitations with personal narratives, the author concedes these obstacles, but hopes the information presented is nevertheless helpful.

### Technological factors

Very quickly the decision was made that materials to be published by the journal would be academic in nature but contain both research articles, reviews of pertinent writings, and more general editorial essays on the nature of education (Insights into Educational Practice). Following the standard expectation to publish research results in article or review form (Hovav and Gray, 239), the editor actively solicited well-documented research articles. Some materials included reprints from other smaller print journals with limited circulation (McEwan 2002, Stultz 2002), the primary intent to both highlight the level of scholarship and promote readership in these small journals. As a resource for global higher education the desire was to include research articles and reviews with sufficient scholarly rigor to serve as a resource for student and faculty studies in settings where such documents were limited.

However, the editor also desired to publish articles that were more reflective but less academically rigorous (Blevins 2001). The Insights section of the journal includes public addresses (Bond 2001, Eversley 2001); personal reflections on teaching (Lyons 2003, Spaulding 2003); and more descriptive accountings of student cultures around the globe (Silvernail 2003). Later a section was included for student publications (Brophy 2003, Porter 2003, Winstead 2003), a choice made with some apprehension, fearing a perceived reduction in the quality of the journal. However, the majority of the journal tries to maintain a balance between the various modes. Interestingly very few book reviews are published.

The mode of publication is primarily English language text with limited graphics in electronic medium of web-based hypertext (html) and/or portable document files (pdf) on CD (for sites where Internet access was limited). Mirroring print journals, *Didache* is heavily text based and currently struggles to include graphics; even charts created in word-processing formats must often be converted (via scanner) to a jpeg file before they will translate well in the medium (Payette 2003, para. 11, see diagram Vail 2002, para. 13 see diagram). Pagination is controlled through multiple WebPages per article, though paragraph citation is preferred since many international page sizes vary and many printers generate different, often irregular, page sizes.

Publication materials do include research articles from people outside the Church of the Nazarene but within the journal's self designated Wesleyan community (Datu 2002, Kinsey 2003, Payette 2003). The means of distribution includes direct (asynchronous) access through the Church of the Nazarene denominational website as well as direct mailing of CD Rom versions to institutional leadership (primarily Presidents of each school). CD versions are also available to

individuals who request them at the cost of shipping and handling. Journal editions are offered as complete projects; published bi-yearly (January and June) primarily to provide for a regular editorial cycle and to offer complete CD versions. ISSN numbers exist for both mediums.

In subsequent editions attempts were made to provide published materials in two languages, English and Spanish. This decision first focused efforts at translating English to Spanish (Bond, 2002, Oord 2002, Spaulding 2002). Ultimately cost factors (both monetary and labor) precluded continued efforts of dual language articles. It did not take long to discover that the very people qualified to translate theologically nuanced articles were the selfsame people who needed to be writing as contributors to the journal rather than serving as translators. Later editions of the journal actually included articles in both English and Spanish but with no translation (Canales 2002, Garcia 2002, Muñoz 2003, Sierra 2002a). Occasional synopses of Spanish articles were included to highlight Spanish authors to a predominantly English-speaking readership (Meador 2003, Sierra 2002b).

### Dynamics influencing technology

While the journal's market was predetermined in part by the goal of the Academy for International Education, reaching that market was not as simple as the architects of the journal originally thought. While there are fifty-seven institutions within the Church of the Nazarene there is no immediate means of communication to those representative faculties alone. In addition, the journal relied on local faculty to promote pertinent articles to their students. This problem continues even with a journal advisory committee particularly selected to serve as advocates globally in their settings. There also remains a desire to reach a broader academic community. The journal editor submitted for listing with a number of academic sites, religious, educational and electronic: including NewJour (above), the ERIC clearinghouse for Higher Education (where it is now referenced) and the American Theological Library Association (ATLA). Surprisingly the journal quickly received ERIC endorsement and is listed as a resource in for higher education (personal email correspondence). Unfortunately, after two years, the journal still awaits review and notification from ATLA.

Journal leadership remains concerned whether to use broader distribution media such as denomination-wide print or electronic publications via the Nazarene Communications Network (<http://www.ncnnews.org/>). The concern remains due to the academic nature of the journal. Normally journal "gate-keeping" includes the fact that most speculative journals are either directly purchased by colleagues in the field or by research libraries. This normally means that a general public that might not have the scholarly context to understand the speculative nature of some research does not normally access articles. As an open access journal, however, *Didache* does not have this gate-keeping mechanism in place so local church members may read the articles. The concern was raised early that academics submitting more speculative works to the journal might suffer from a general, at times uninformed, public reaction. To insure some range of academic freedom under the potential of such public scrutiny the journal has not been advertised in more general venues. In addition the journal is not very "visible" on the denomination's website, requiring a minimum of three levels of navigation before accessing the

journal. This is a small deterrent for idle onlookers but one that often insures the journal will only be explored by academics that know it's location on the web.

For all its marketing limits the journal has enjoyed some surprising success by web standards. IT staff for the Church of the Nazarene produced a 265-day audit of website visits from March 13 to December 4 2002. The winter edition of *Didache* (2001) received a fairly sizeable number of visits. From March to December the journal received 664 "hits" indicating at least one Spanish translation article (Oord 2001) received quite a number of visits, making it the 25th most active page on the total Nazarene web site for that period (Blevins, email correspondence 2002). Reasons vary why the article received such success. The article could have been a class assignment (driving up the hits) or it could mean that initial surfers used the main page and then "book marked" special pages. The editor has explored strategies for estimating consistent (subscription) use such as requiring some type of sign-on as a "free" subscription. Pursuing this strategy was postponed for fear the subscription would drive people away thinking there may be some "Spam" (selling of personal information for email promotional material) associated with the subscription. As an open-access publication traditional means of tracking readership (subscriptions or purchases) continues to prove difficult. Monitoring web use through hit counters can also be problematic if repeat visits are not taken into consideration. The journal has also maintained the possibility of interactive "chat" through an Internet message board (<http://domino.nazarene.org/forums/iboe/didache.nsf>) but this effort has never been utilized.

Money has not been a primary factor for the journal since publishing efforts are endorsed and housed by the denominational website and supported by denominational Internet technology support staff through the auspices of the International Board of Education. In addition no monetary compensation is given for articles or editorial oversight of the journal. As noted, startup costs for on-line publishing is relatively inexpensive provided one is able to access a web provider like a University or non-profit organization. The first edition of *Didache* was originally housed by Trevecca Nazarene University, using the editor's personal web page as the primary linkage, while the final format was being completed at Nazarene Headquarters (Z:\Didache\didache cover first edition.htm). While absorbed by the denomination, there is a labor cost associated with each journal. HTML design, formatting and posting of articles involves about two-weeks of work per edition. However, the current web designer often works on journal between other institutional projects so actual cost accounting is not maintained. Editorial duties require about the same amount of time not including time given for article development, resulting in late nights between other educational assignments. While cost has not been a major consideration in the past it may yet loom. With the difficult task of hiring personnel that can maintain complex websites, the Church of the Nazarene is considering how much of their web-development will be outsourced to independent contractors. Such a move might jeopardize a project like *Didache* that often exists in the small "gaps" of other larger projects. A near future decision may place the entire project in jeopardy, unless RIIIE secures funds to insure the journals ongoing livelihood as part of the goals for the Academy for International Education.

Management of the journal has been primarily left to the senior editor. Appointed to the role by members of RIIIE and endorsed by the Director of the International Board of Education, the Sr. Editor exercises primary oversight of the timeliness, quality and direction of the journal. An

advisory committee also exists, mentioned previously, that is often consulted prior to macro publishing changes (<http://www.nazarene.org/iboe/riie/Didache/committee.html>). Members were primarily recommended by RIIE leadership and invited to serve to help endorse and advocate the project. While informed of the journal's goals and progress, to date members have not been as active in the editorial oversight. The constitution of the committee is reminiscent of the electronic world that sustains the journal. Board members were invited by email and correspondence is maintained electronically. To date the advisory committee has never physically met. This "virtual" leadership model may well be problematic since motivating the advisory board to remain invested in the journal has been a primary concern. One humorous example of the limits of on-line leadership occurred when one committee member left their academic post without notifying the journal of their departure. It was a year later that the editor was informed (by a colleague) of the move and the committee member replaced. In addition the senior editor now maintains an informal network of contacts (primarily those who have published in *Didache*) that also help serve as informants and advocates for the journal.

Efforts to expand the editorial team with two assistant editors for book reviews met with limited results as well. The English-speaking book editor proved less than diligent in her role and book reviews have suffered as a result. The Spanish book editor, however, now has an expanded role of oversight of all Spanish language articles to insure both advocacy and quality control. There is no established peer review system though a peer review board is under development. Instead, an informal peer review system is employed when needed, though many articles are judged based on other criteria mentioned below.

#### Mannerism or the social aspect

The leadership of the journal still juggles an ongoing desire for quality (using text articles that reflect print journals) with goals to profile international scholars and to cultivate new scholarship via student writings. This requires some flexibility in determining the level of writing quality for the journal. Many non-western schools do not yet have the same level of scholarship available due to lack of resources and little opportunity for advance graduate studies. Many faculty members are often quite capable but still lack the means to expand their personal scholarship. In addition, as noted, developing scholarship within teaching colleges may be more challenging due to the emphasis on professional programs rather than research based academics. In these settings professional practice (particularly administration) may be rewarded more than writing. In order to encourage writing from emerging scholars and to overcome the limits of smaller academic settings, the journal publishes articles that might not normally receive the same consideration in print journals. The quality of these writings, however, remains quite good. In fact, several Spanish-speaking scholars gained a wider respect in Wesleyan settings due to the journal's publishing efforts. Still, the range of scholarship places additional pressure in representing the journal to a broader academic audience. This tension will remain in future editions.

Peer review remains a key criterion in academic publishing, both for gate keeping and for journalistic authenticity (Bellinger Ch. 5 p.1-2. Hovav and Gray 236). Yet peer reviews are not as accommodating as often perceived in an electronic environment. E-journals may operate on the philosophy of "just-in-time," submissions, allowing for a late article submission to be

included in the journal. Admittedly *Didache* has been forced in this direction due to the busy schedules of many of the contributors. In addition, due to the esoteric nature of the academic community supporting *Didache*, many current or potential contributors are known. Finally, articles must be judged not only on academic quality but academic context (see above) so that professors working with limited resources or working with a second language are not excluded from participating. To provide guidance in accepting articles the editor employs several criteria as a “matrix” for admission. The article may have had a public venue such as a conference or publication in another small journal. The article may be solicited by qualified scholars or recommended by previous scholars (particularly in the case of student publications but also in cases where Bible college teachers may also be students under a graduate program). The Spanish editor also reviews all Spanish-language articles. The journal has yet to receive many “blind” submissions but, when received, forwards them to respected scholars within the tradition that might serve as an informal peer review judges. This method of “good enough reviewing” may be indicative of future web publications (Chodrow 90) Beyond these steps; the establishment of a formal peer review process waits a future date.

A final concern is the reality of how denominational influence provides a form of gatekeeping. As noted the journal resides on the website of the Church of the Nazarene as one location that provides both support and access to an international community. There is always a balance in allowing academic freedom while recognizing the inevitability of denominational scrutiny. Subtle pressure remains to modify one’s stance in light of this reality. “Employing” (particularly when there are no funds attached) an editor accustomed to a level of academic freedom helps mediate this possibility. Contributing faculty, however, often reside in schools/academic settings that rely heavily on institutional mission support. This mediates the level of criticism (naming the present problem) that often stimulates ongoing research and, to date, may have limited the number of submissions. However, gatekeeping may take other, more “pastoral,” forms. One article on Hindu fundamentalism in India was delayed when regional leadership feared the writer, also a pastor, might be endangered by the article’s publication during the recent India/Pakistan crisis. Gatekeeping remains both a positive and negative challenge not only in denominations but also in professional societies and academic communities (who are also guided by a set of assumptions) so the challenge will remain.

#### Virtual publications or virtually publishing? Reflections on Journal Efforts

Reviewing the efforts of *Didache* in light of broader issues of academic publishing, several insights emerge that help judge whether the journal is an authentic though “virtual” publication or whether each continuing edition is “virtually publishing,” i.e. struggling to stay alive. Primarily the journal raises the question of access vs. specialization on the one hand (esoteric yet global) and quality vs. cultural mission on the other hand (scholarly yet diverse in academic expectations). The issue of economics and gatekeeping are also evident as well.

Esoteric globalism: “virtual publication”

Obviously the journal does in some ways meet a preliminary understanding of esoteric writings. Much of the publication is dedicated to a specific faith tradition (Wesleyan) within a

denomination committed to said tradition. As such, for all the diversity represented in the broad categories of faith, culture and education; the controlling tradition limits the participants (and audience) for the journal. Particularity is then affirmed if only through acknowledgement of a particular faith tradition. However, there is another form of “esoteric” community conditioned by the responsibility of most of the teaching faculty. Many faculty members, even in the United States, see their role primarily as teaching/resourcing professional programs rather than developing scholarship. This cohort of teachers sees themselves as primarily just that, teachers. Encouraging scholarly writing becomes challenging in such an environment since many faculty members see research as antecedent (or tangential) to their responsibilities as teachers, administrators, and ministers. Writing, particularly writing in an Internet world becomes doubly challenging for this peculiar cohort.

At the same time the journal has chosen a format that is global in nature. Admittedly not all world regions afford electronic access in the same way as western countries. However, most educational institutions, if not all, enjoy some level of computer support. The decision to provide Didache in both Internet and CD format has allowed local institutions access as long as a single, relatively efficient, computer functions. The global emphasis invites a slightly larger “esoteric” participation, necessary since the diversity of disciplinary topics (faith, culture, and education) sometimes confuses scholars habituated to writing/publishing on in their disciplinary field. The global nature of submissions lends to some unevenness in writing quality as well. This unevenness might leave the journal with a sense of being a “virtual” academic publication rather than the real thing. However, in many ways the e-journal method allows for an interesting blending of scholarship that is focused in a tradition but resourced globally. The journal has the opportunity to model its desire to reflect various theological, cultural and educational interests. Obviously this creates problems for future archiving and classification. Issues of language do complicate matters as well, but only when there is a perceived need to provide all articles in multiple languages (almost cost prohibitive in terms of money or personnel).

The “economics” of gatekeeping: “virtually publishing”

Gatekeeping remains a key consideration, but the gatekeepers may be the submitting faculty and readership as well as the editor of the journal. A significant moment came when the journal switched from being merely a provider of resources for small schools to being a writing forum for teachers and students globally. This shift reflected the broader goals of the Academy for International Education as a collaborative effort. Yet, for all of its global intent, the journal still relies on a relatively small cohort of scholars and writers to sustain it. Ultimately gatekeeping issues are limited due to the labor economics that require a continued need to cultivate writers. With no explicit professional association or yearly professional conference to provide a “pool” of potential articles, the editor is constantly vigilant to identify potential articles for the journal. In addition, the lack of reader subscriptions/tracking really does make it difficult to assess the journal’s effectiveness. While existing at the graciousness of a denomination, the ongoing shifting tides of Information Technology and shrinking church budgets may one day force the journal to provide a level of accountability the technology does not reveal.

More than once the senior editor has wondered if anyone really reads this material. This concern is probably shared to some degree even with print journal editors, who might wonder at times if an edition is ever taken from the library shelf for reading. Attempts to engender feedback (Internet forums, solicitation of email responses, etc.) have not been that effective. Nevertheless *Didache* exists to meet goals that are somewhat different to those expressed by agencies like SPARC and ARL. As an effort to support a given community with a not-to-familiar format, the journal may have to endure for several years to allow faculty familiarity to catch up with the medium. If current numbers of e-publications are indicative, this “learning curve” will not take long and *Didache* will become an important resource.

In the meantime Religious educators might learn from the struggles, the successes, and the failures resident in this journal’s short life. Seeing on-line publishing as a means to develop new writers and to link global settings might be as important as providing existing scholars and libraries with new, less expensive, outlets. Religious education needs to take seriously the strengths and limits of on-line publishing. Other disciplines have, it is only a matter of time when this “esoteric” community will need to do the same.

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