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BOOK REVIEW: Hilton III, J. (Ed.). (2018). *Teaching Religion Using Technology in Higher Education*. New York, NY: Routledge. 212 pp. ISBN: 9781138087224.

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According to a 2015 report by Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman for the Babson Survey Research Group, 70.8 percent of higher education institutions agreed with the statement, "Online education is critical to the long-term strategy of my institution" (Allen & Seaman, 2015, p. 15).[2] Despite concern about the impact of online education on the higher education landscape, few scholars of religion and education have published research on the subject. In fact, there is a paucity of research on the relationship between religious studies education and technology in general. One scholar reviewed more than 400 articles in a journal on religious education and found no articles on digital technologies (see Chapter 13, Hilton III et al, 2018).

Teaching Religion Using Technology in Higher Education, edited by John Hilton III, is a timely collection of articles that seeks to fill the gap in research about the relationship between religious studies education and technology. According to Hilton, the book "offer[s] fresh perspectives on using technology in the context of teaching religion," arguing that both students and faculty benefit from the use of technology (p. xi). The thirteen chapters of the book introduce readers to practical technological tools and strategies for implementing those tools in the classroom, outside of the classroom, and as a means for expanding the classroom. The book is the eighth volume in the Routledge Research in Religion and Education series. As the series editor, Michael D. Waggoner, notes in his introduction to the volume, the practical technological tools and strategies for implementing those tools are intended to apply both to those who teach religion in a confessional sense and those who teach about religion in a secular, academic setting.

Teaching Religion Using Technology in Higher Education is divided into three sections: Part I: Technology in the Classroom, Part II: Leveraging Technology in and out of the Classroom, and Part III: Using Technology to Expand Your Classroom. Whereas Part I

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[2] Referenced by Anthony Sweat in Chapter 8. Note that the latest and last report on the subject by Babson Survey Research Group, published in 2016, saw a decline in the percentage of institutions that agreed with the statement, "Online education is critical to the long-term strategy of my institution." Report authors Allen & Seaman explain that institutions with online offerings continue to agree with the statement, whereas very small institutions that have not yet adopted online offerings no longer say that online education is a critical part of their future plans. See Allen & Seaman, 2016, p. 21-22.

explores how minimal uses of technology can augment a traditional, face-to-face classroom environment, Part II offers more ambitious tools and strategies for blending in-person coursework with online learning. In Part III, authors discuss maximal uses of technology in education about religion, including through online-only courses. Taken as a whole, these sections demonstrate that instructors need not radically restructure courses in order to reap the benefits of tech-enabled education and should not immediately dismiss the possibility of transitioning to an online-only or blended learning model. While some chapters connect the use of technology with improved, specific learning outcomes in a religious studies course, other chapters name general benefits of technology in education. Importantly, some authors also identify specific shortcomings and potential dangers related to the use of technology in education.

Part I includes five chapters that explore how software, the Internet, and tech-enabled tools can affect learning, instruction, and assessment in a more traditional classroom environment. In the first chapter, Dr. Richard Newton (Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, Elizabethtown College) invites instructors to consider how smartphones might enable students to both consume and produce knowledge. He challenges the "myth" of the digital native/digital immigrant divide and instead theorizes a divide between those who conceive of technology as a tool that more easily enables the individual to accomplish a real-world task and those who believe technology has little to no bearing on the analog world (p. 7). Newton proposes that instructors have the responsibility to help students understand technology—especially smartphones—as a tool that can facilitate study habits (e.g. note-taking and oral processing), collaborative intellectual exchange (e.g. backchannel conversations during class via shared notes), online research and identification of reference works, and the production of new knowledge and resources through nontraditional assignments (p. 7-8).

In the second chapter, Dr. David Kneip (Assistant Professor of Church History, Abilene Christian University) describes how and why he utilizes student-created podcasts for knowledge assessment. Kneip compares student-created podcasts to assignments that employ "guided discovery," a pedagogical strategy through which students discover information by creating a content-rich product via a series of activities that are designed by an instructor (p. 20). For Kneip, student-created podcasts benefit both the student and instructor. The assignment enables students to practice delivering reflection and analysis about religion orally, and Kneip argues that most students will be asked to talk—not write—about religion in their lives beyond college. The orality of podcasts also forges a more intimate relationship between student and instructor than the written word; Kneip describes how he is able to develop a personal—and even pastoral—relationship with students in a large course by listening to the tone and tenor of their voices (p. 25). By assessing the substantive and affective aspects of each student's podcast, Kneip can more fully understand how students personally connect with course readings, including "Christian scriptures," and he can offer a meaningful response. Kneip helpfully concludes the chapter with specific tips for incorporating podcasts into the curriculum.

In the third chapter, Dr. Renate Hood (Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor) briefly reviews literature showing that student response systems can positively impact the classroom environment by (1) increasing student motivation, (2) facilitating classroom interaction, and (3) decreasing reticence to discuss contentious issues related to religion, ethics, or the self (p. 34). Hood describes different types of response systems used by educators, including physical devices (e.g. clickers or zappers) as well as web-based systems. All of these systems enable instructors to gauge instantly whether students

understand course content. Perhaps more importantly, effective use of student response systems can decrease student anxiety about discussing religion-related subjects, which are often seen as divisive or deeply personal. By offering students an anonymous mechanism for sharing their opinions or knowledge about religion-related issues, instructors can engage students on behavioral, emotional, and cognitive levels (p. 37).

Dr. Kristy Slominski (Instructional Assistant Professor of Religion, University of Mississippi) continues the discussion about student response systems in Chapter 4, focusing specifically on the use of clickers in traditional face-to-face classrooms. After briefly reviewing research and personal experience related to the benefits and challenges of combining traditional educational strategies with clickers in any classroom, Slominski provides a superb, convincing description of how and why she uses clickers to enhance the academic, non-confessional religious studies classroom in particular. She lists nine specific uses for clickers, the most significant of which are: (1) to get to know students through multiple choice questions at the beginning of a course and (2) to offer opinions about controversial topics without the fear of personal reprisal. By converting personal opinions about controversial topics into analyzable, anonymized data points on a screen, Slominski is able to clearly differentiate between the confessional study of religion and the academic study of diverse devotional assertions of belief.

In Chapter 5, Rev. Kyle M. Oliver (EdD Candidate, Teachers College, Columbia University) explains how a digital approach to "pedagogies of contextualization," which are often used in clergy education, can benefit both the academic and devotional study of religion (p. 57). Oliver focuses on the digital encounter with religious sites as a student-centered learning tool that "extends rather than substitutes…our pre-Internet experience of place…because it allows us to ground our thinking in everyday experiences of hybrid spatiality" (p. 59). Instructors should frame student exploration of religious sites through digital tools according to three key principles: Digital tools and spaces (1) offer "selective and socially constructed representations" of key sites; (2) enable users to make meaning actively through virtual, personal exploration of religious sites and inter-personal interaction with other users; and (3) require a set of digital skills and dispositions for a meaningful virtual experience (p. 61-63). Oliver concludes by reviewing and evaluating tools for digitally exploring religious sites, including resources related to virtual reality (e.g. Google Expeditions, Sites in 3D); audio, video, and conventional photography (e.g. Sacred Destinations, Folkways, YouTube, Flickr); and the creation of digital geographies through the curation and annotation of various media on a single site or platform like Google Earth.

Part II includes four chapters that detail how instructors can enrich traditional education by extending the learning experience beyond the walls of the classroom using technology. In Chapter 6, Dr. Rob O'Lynn (Assistant Professor of Preaching and Ministry, Kentucky Christian University) draws on personal experience to describe how an instructor can utilize specific social media platforms—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Wikipedia, Pinterest, Evernote, YouTube, Vimeo, Tumblr, and Google+—to enhance students' learning experiences. While O'Lynn recognizes that colleagues might dispute the classification of some of the aforementioned platforms as social media, he contends that digital citizens who utilize these platforms all exhibit three defining characteristics: Digital citizen social media users are (1) relational, (2) willing to share content with a community generously, and (3) preoccupied with social influence, not personal image. It is the instructor's job to teach students *what* to communicate in terms of content about religion and *how* to communicate as digital citizens on various "hot media" platforms (p. 79).

Dr. Brooke Lester (Assistant Professor of Hebrew Scripture and Director of Digital Learning, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary) extends the analysis of social media in higher education in Chapter 7. Lester adopts a different approach from O'Lynn: Instead of dividing the chapter by social media platform, Lester outlines how instructors might use social media differently in distinct learning environments, and he concludes by offering a reflection about the social and ethical implications of social media use. Instructors in traditional face-to-face courses, blended courses, and connected courses might rely on social media to varying degrees. Nevertheless, all instructors must learn to leverage social media in order to create community and facilitate inter-personal encounter. Simultaneously students must avoid the dangers of excessive self-disclosure and personal harassment, which are perils that are prevalent on both centralized and decentralized social media platforms. To minimize risk and maximize social learning oriented toward the production of "shared artifacts," instructors should carefully match social media use with the learning objectives of the course (p. 93).

In Chapter 8, Dr. Anthony Sweat (Assistant Professor of Church History, Brigham Young University) introduces the what, why, and how of blending learning. Sweat briefly describes the historical factors that led to the creation of blended learning courses, which combine face-to-face instruction with online education. He admits that studies are inconclusive about the efficacy of blended learning courses. Nevertheless, Sweat advocates for blended learning courses based on his own positive experience transforming a traditional, face-to-face religion course into a "flipped" or blended learning course. Sweat recorded 140 videos for students to learn course content outside of class, and he then reconfigured in-person class time to focus on the higher- order thinking skills named in Bloom's taxonomy. After implementing the flipped model for the first time, Sweat surveyed students about the efficacy of the course videos and in-class sessions. Chapter 8 concludes with student feedback data, which Sweat hopes will help readers to design their own courses effectively.

Chapter 9 is unique in this volume, because it describes an unsatisfactory experience with tech-enabled religious studies instruction. Dr. Christopher Heard (Associate Professor of Religion, Pepperdine University) and Dr. Steven V. Rouse (Professor of Psychology, Pepperdine University) describe how they utilized gameful learning strategies—i.e. "the use of games and gamelike activities for learning"—in a biblical studies class (p. 127). In designing their online, interactive fiction assignment-games, Heard and Rouse drew on earlier literature reviews that identify key game design principles and mechanics that positively affect learner attitudes and motivation. Heard and Rouse decided to test whether students would self-report more motivation for, engagement with, and learning from gameful (rather than traditional) assignments. After surveying students, Heard and Rouse found that students felt no greater motivation for or engagement with the gameful assignments, and students felt that they learned more from traditional assignments. The study is a helpful reminder that careful implementation of tech-enabled learning strategies will not necessarily yield better learning outcomes.

The final section of the book includes four chapters about expanding the classroom and, in some cases, re-conceiving the entire educational experience using technology. In Chapter 10, Dr. Gerald L. Stevens (Professor of New Testament and Greek, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) offers a simple but important idea: videoconferencing software enables instructors to invite guest lecturers into a class relatively easily and at little to no cost. Stevens narrates how and why he invited a New Testament scholar based in Turkey to speak with students in his Pauline studies class in Louisiana. Students were able to ask questions of the presenter in real time, and Stevens attributes an increase in class attendance

to the promise of interactivity with a guest from another country. Stevens identifies a few videoconference platforms available, including BlueJeans, and he encourages instructors to minimize their own costs by finding out whether their home institution has purchased a license for a specific platform.

In Chapter 11, Dr. Phyllis Zagano (Adjunct Professor of Religion, Hofstra University) describes her experience creating a Massive Online Open Seminar (MOOS), a sub-category of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs). Unlike blended learning courses, MOOCs are run entirely online. Zagano acknowledges criticisms and concerns about the depth of the online learning environment and the potential financial cost of creating such a course, but she nevertheless decided to create a non-credit bearing, exam- and paper-free online seminar about the ordination of women in some Christian denominations. As a free course available to individuals beyond a single institution, Zagano considers the course to be a public service that provides access to education not otherwise available. Zagano describes the process by which she and her colleagues designed and facilitated the course, including the procedure for moderating discussion boards, in order to provide a template for others interested in this teaching model. Survey results indicate that students enjoyed the course, thanks in part to the moderated discussions and the ability to replay course materials. The data and anecdotal experience offered by Zagano suggest that online learning holds promise for humanities courses, whereas conventional wisdom advocates primarily for online courses in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.

Charlotte Heeg (PhD Candidate, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary) created an entirely different kind of tech-enriched course for an academic biblical studies group, which she describes in Chapter 12. Heeg narrates how she struggled to engage a small community of congregants in dialogue through critical interpretation of the Bible until she introduced students to videos of various scholars discussing their research. These videos model the type of dialogue she seeks to encourage among students, and the videos also provide material to which members of the Bible study can respond. The conversational tone of the videos encouraged Heeg's interlocutors to speak more freely, but they also set up unrealistic expectations about the tone used by scholars in formal academic writing. Nevertheless, the use of pre-recorded videos can engagingly introduce students to new vocabularies and the concrete application of scholarly modes of analysis.

In the final chapter of the volume, Dr. John Hilton III (Associate Professor of Ancient Scripture, Brigham Young University), Dr. Kenneth Plummer (Teaching and Learning Consultant, Brigham Young University), Dr. Ben Fryar (Managing Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, Brigham Young University-Idaho), and Dr. Ryan Gardner (Professor of Religious Education, Brigham Young University-Idaho) provide the results of a study that measures student learning outcomes in a single course offered to some students solely online and to other students in person. The researchers ask whether online-only education negatively affects students' self-reports of religious and spiritual growth compared to in-person education. Hilton et al surveyed 789 students in twenty-one sections of a general education, introductory religion course at a private religious university. Six sections of the course were offered at a distance, and fifteen sections were offered as traditional face-to-face courses. Hilton et al found that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean learning outcome scores of the distance and face-to-face sections of the course. However, the highest-rated face-to-face section "significantly outperformed" the lowest-rated distance section, and the gap in performance between the two was wider than the gap between the highest-rated distance section and lowest-rated face-to-face section (p. 199). Hilton et al do not dwell on this particular finding, though it might entrench some instructors' suspicions

that learning opportunities are limitless in face-to-face courses whereas distance education offers new opportunities for instructional inefficacy. This study provides novel insight into the effects of distance education on affective student learning outcomes.

Teaching Religion Using Technology in Higher Education reveals key strengths of technology in the religious studies or religious education classroom while also acknowledging technology's limits (e.g. Chapter 9) and dangers (e.g. Chapter 7). A primary strength of technology is its ability to foster relationships between the instructor and the student in post-secondary education, and between students. Social media, for example, is inherently relational (Chapters 6 and 7). By encouraging students to use social media, instructors can extend course discussions beyond the walls of the physical classroom. This additional student-to-student and student-to-instructor contact time can nurture deep mutual appreciation and understanding between all members of a classroom community. In addition to social media, instructors can use other forms of technology to increase and enrich existing contact hours. Podcasts (Chapter 2) transform assignments from impersonal, written essays to deeply personal oral reflections and reports. The blended learning model described in Chapter 8 is the example par excellence of using technology to maximize the relational potential of in-person contact hours by reserving class time for higher order thinking skills and person-to-person conversations.

In contrast to the relational potential of technology, instructors can utilize some types of technology to depersonalize—and even anonymize—student feedback in order to create a safe classroom environment. For example, student response systems (Chapters 3 and 4) enable teachers to solicit individual feedback from students in real time in order to instantly learn more about course participants, but this feedback is often anonymous. Under the cover of anonymity, students might be more likely to admit that they do not understand a course topic or have prior knowledge of a given issue. Students might more freely share controversial opinions about religion or a specific religious tradition when they may do so without fear of retaliation by the course instructor or fellow students. Surfacing controversial opinions can ultimately enrich classroom discussion, but a course instructor must be skilled in navigating difficult conversations and constructing brave spaces for learning.

Many instructors who actively foster relationships with students using technology also adopt a student-centered paradigm for teaching. By including students in the learning process via technology, instructors can adapt their lessons and assignments based on student feedback. Kristy Slominski captures this process clearly in her description of clicker use in Chapter 4. As powerful as it is for instructors to use technology to modify a course according to students' needs (i.e. to change how instructors teach), instructors should consider how to use technology to change how students learn. For example, asking students to use technology to create non-traditional learning artifacts can empower students to produce new knowledge, a skill that is of a higher order than skills related to the acquisition and synthesis of knowledge. Kyle Oliver (Chapter 5) describes how student-created annotated, digital maps of sacred sites offer "powerful contextual knowledge that can make the difference in how our students understand world religions—their own and others" (p. 72).

In order to design student-centered courses, some instructors consider how to use technology to create lessons and assignments that more closely match the types of knowledge acquisition and production that students will encounter outside a classroom setting. For example, outside of the academy students might be asked to talk about religion more often than they are asked to write about religion. Assignments that ask students to create podcasts provide an academically rigorous opportunity to practice speaking about religious subjects (Chapter 2). Summarizing and discussing readings about religion via social media also enable

students to consider how they might enrich digital conversations on platforms that they use daily (Chapters 6 and 7). Charlotte Heeg's experience using pre-existing videos of lectures by and conversations between religious studies scholars (Chapter 12) is also an excellent example of how instructors might model the way students can learn from, interact with, and rigorously analyze videos found online.

On a more prosaic level, efficient use of technology can lower the cost of high-quality education, thereby democratizing access to knowledge. Gerald Stevens describes how he successfully used technology to invite a distinguished scholar living halfway across the world to speak with his students for virtually no cost using videoconferencing software (Chapter 10). Phyllis Zagano went multiple steps further vis-à-vis tech adoption by creating a massive online open seminar (MOOS) in order to share research and writing about a niche academic topic with people around the world—including participants not otherwise enrolled in colleges or universities (i.e. those who might not otherwise have access to that knowledge) (Chapter 11). In Zagano's experience, the free MOOS was relatively affordable for her host institution, and its existence functioned as a public service. Moving forward, instructors at colleges and universities should think more deeply about how technology can cost-effectively improve the general public's access to leading edge theories and research.

While *Teaching Religion Using Technology in Higher Education* illuminates a number of ways that technology can strengthen instruction and learning, it must be noted that many of the authors teach religion; they do not necessarily teach *about* religion, as the name of the Routledge series might suggest. The volume did not fully consider the difference in learning outcomes that might be expected by instructors in a confessional versus academic setting. The American Academy of Religion's new guidelines—*What U.S. College Graduates Should Understand about Religion*—are still in a draft phase, but the version published in October 2017 takes pains to differentiate clearly between a "religious studies approach" which "provides students with tools to analyze religion from an academic perspective," and other approaches—including those that are faith-based, interfaith, experiential, consensus-based, and data-focused—that "depart from the academic study of religion" (Gallagher et al, 2017, p. 7). The volume should have directly addressed the difference in learning outcomes that might be expected by instructors in a confessional (religious) versus academic setting.

Whereas the American Academy of Religion argues that the aim of the academic study of religion "is not to defend or promote a specific religion but to understand and describe religion in contextual and cross-culturally applicable terms" (Gallagher et al, 2017, p. 6), a number of authors in *Teaching Religion Using Technology in Higher Education* actively seek to affect students' religious lives. A majority of the volume's authors are men who teach at higher education institutions affiliated with specific Christian denominations, and their classes are designed to strengthen the personal religious and spiritual lives of their students.[3] Chapter 13, for example, presents original research about a class at Brigham Young University-Idaho that is explicitly designed to affect the "spiritual outcomes" of students enrolled in a general education course. This significant, yet unacknowledged skew toward Christian confessional education might also have an effect on the relationship between the uses of technology and desired learning outcomes, because non-Christian confessional instructors might utilize technology for different ends. For example, religious educators from strongly communitarian traditions may be more interested in leveraging technology to shape

[3] One noteworthy exception is Kristy L. Slominski, who actively reflects on the learning outcomes associated with the academic study of religion in a public, secular institution and how the use of technology—especially clickers—can increase the likelihood of students achieving those outcomes (Chapter 4, especially p. 44-47).

the student-as-member of a religious community rather than the student-as-individual believer. By devoting more attention to the difference between learning outcomes related to students' personal affective relationship with religion and students' ability to demonstrate rigorous analytic skills, the authors might have more clearly shown whether the use of technology is more useful for one learning objective or the other.

All of the authors in this volume teach at institutions of higher education in the United States, and it is reasonable to analyze their learning objectives in light of guidelines about the study of religion produced by the leading American professional association for religious studies scholars. However, educators in some other countries do not differentiate as clearly between academic and confessional objectives for the study of religion (see EuARe, 2016). The inclusion of scholarly perspectives from outside the United States might have offered different lenses for analyzing the benefits and dangers of the use of technology to teach about religion—not only for the specific learning objectives of religious studies but also for the relevance and value of higher education in general. On a separate note, educators in countries with unreliable access to high-speed Internet and limited ownership of up-to-date computers or smart phones might have different perspectives about the opportunities or challenges of integrating technology into the classroom. Nevertheless, the volume contributes to international research about technology and education by offering tools and best practices that can be used and/or evaluated by scholars worldwide.

I recommend *Teaching Religion Using Technology in Higher Education* to higher education religious studies faculty members interested in strengthening their courses using technology. The volume is certainly appropriate for instructors such as myself who teach blended learning or online-only courses. It may be more appropriate for faculty members who wish to enrich traditional face-to-face courses by extending student-centered instruction and learning beyond in-class hours. Readers should be aware of the bias of authors toward confessional religious education—as opposed to the academic study of religion—though the tools and tips the book's authors provide are often useful for those who teach *about* religion. In fact, the advice and original research presented by the authors included in this volume may be useful for instructors outside the field of religious studies. In particular, the research on affective learning outcomes summarized in Chapter 13 has implications for instructors throughout the academy. In this regard, the volume may spark an inter-disciplinary and inter-field conversation about the opportunities and challenges presented by the use of technology in higher education writ large.

Despite recommending this book to colleagues who teach about religion in higher education, I end with a note of caution. The use of social media and other forms of technology has played a critical role in producing—or at least exacerbating—an era of hyper-polarization and mis- and dis-information. Our current social and political reality should temper any tendency to glorify technology as a "panacea," as Hilton acknowledges in his introduction (xi). Yet the volume does not fully consider the potentially harmful side-effects of technology in education. For example, how might extending the classroom beyond in-class hours strain the time and energy of faculty members who are already overburdened by the demands of administration and publication? Do assignments that require the use of social media aggravate some students' unhealthy addiction to technology and the validation provided by producing posts for the quantity of likes and not the quality of content? How might it affect the mental health of students and social dynamics of a classroom when instructors use clickers that allow students to share anonymously their views about religion—some of which may be deemed hateful or offensive by others? The volume's contributors demonstrate how the use of technology can benefit the learning process, but new research might more deeply examine

the legitimate concerns raised by scholars who fear the potential academic, social, psychological, or religious side-effects of technology on teachers and students.

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