

Theologians and Philosophers Using Social Media: Advice, Tips, and Testimonials

Thomas Jay Oord, *editor*

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Reviewed By

Jonathan C. Roach
*Stratham Community Church,
Stratham, New Hampshire*

This massive edited volume contains ninety-one essays from philosophers and theologians around the world and explores how they use social media and technology. The volume contains an amazing lineup of authors who represent a wide array of disciplines from Biblical studies to systematic theology as well as various faith perspectives and approaches. They range from the well-known theological and philosophical superstars, Richard Rohr, Miguel De La Torre, Kwok Pui Lan, and Amos Young, to recent graduates, and nearly everyone else in between.

The concept of social media is used in its broadest sense in this volume. It refers not only to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube-type platforms but also to blogs, apps, personal websites, podcasts, online journals, webinars, online education platforms, and specific web-based products and sites. The editor, Thomas Jay Oord, explains that “social media now plays a key role in generating ideas, networking, crowd-sourcing, private or classroom discussions, research, project publicity, personal branding, journaling, event organizing, and more. Some use their presence on social media to generate speaking or writing opportunities. Others do ministry, pursue activism, or create digital content in ways previously unimagined” (3).

Oord argues that he “conceived of this book as a way for contributors to reflect on their practices and theories and as a source of advice on how thought [sic] leaders use social media and technology collectively” (4). He asked the contributors to respond to six questions in their essays and left it up to them whether to understand these questions as general guidelines or specific requests. The questions, which he lists on page four, are broadly framed what, how, and why questions that deal with subjects including platforms, approaches, insights, time management, and recommendations.

The 432 pages, after the editor’s Introduction, contain hundreds of excellent insights and recommendations from the contributors that provide a window into the usage and impact of social media in this day and age. In general, the essays are well-written, insightful, and thought provoking. The content encourages theologians and philosophers to reflect upon their usage of these platforms and consider both their message and their medium. As Deirdre Good writes, “social media has changed our world. In terms of scholarship and teaching, we are limited only by what [we] can imagine would enhance pedagogy or what we can actually bring about” (161). From the academic pursuit of high-quality online teaching to Nathan Hamm’s quest to do good theology in 140 characters (188), this volume has something about nearly everything technological in the philosophical and theological worlds.

The vision and scope of this volume is outstanding; unfortunately, it reads more like raw data than a polished well-edited tome. The contributors provide rich content, but much of the work of interpreting this volume is left to the reader. It suffers from a lack of organization and editorial interpretation. Rather than grouping the essays into sections that share common perspectives or explore similar issues, the essays are simply presented in alphabetical order. This challenges the readers to make sense and draw connections between the various themes and styles of the various authors. In this volume, it is hard to see the trees for the forest. The powerful lessons are hidden because this book lacks a strong editorial voice to guide and mentor the reader through these mazes of ideas and complex realities. This volume needs an expanded introduction, periodic editorial interpretation to draw out vital insights and connect ideas, and an epilogue where the editor empowers readers to draw conclusions and challenges them to reflect upon their practices and approaches.

Despite these weaknesses and although this content will become dated quickly, this is a valuable text. It is a vital subject for recent graduates who will be entering teaching or ministry and will help them prepare for their teaching and ministerial methods as well as empower them to fully consider their use of social media—whether a plaything or an important tool. Also, mid-career and even elders in these fields will benefit from reflecting upon these subjects through the lenses of their peers. This volume might be hard to digest, but it is an important subject, and this is data worth considering.