

Heidi Campbell, ed.

Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. xi + 272, £21.99, ISBN: 978-0415676113 (pbk).

In editing this book, Heidi Campbell has drawn together a global range of scholars, offering a core text to define and offer historical context on the development of the field of 'digital religion'. Within the introduction Campbell pinpoints how 'digital religion' has emerged from disciplines such as theology, sociology, and media studies, and identifies how the subject has gained credibility. Scholars are identified as having moved from excitement at this 'new thing', to the digital becoming a part of everyday life to be analysed, to understanding what the lived 'reality' of digital religion is. The three academic waves that Campbell identifies here—the descriptive, the categorical and the theoretical—are echoed throughout the rest of the book, as we understand how 'digital religion' has matured as a field of study.

Following the introduction, the book continues in three sections. Part I covers themes in the study of religion and new media in the areas of ritual, identity, community, authority, authenticity and religion. Part II offers a range of thematic case studies, two for each of the themes identified in the previous section. These cover a wide spectrum of religions, including Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Christian and New Age, offering colourful insights from across all corners of the globe. Part III takes a reflective turn as theory, theology, and ethics are considered before Stewart M. Hoover pulls readers back to consider the essential questions about how we talk about the digital, how we should think about it, the particularities of the digital, and how digital religion is fundamentally about 'people using technologies to live out the spiritual' (p. 268).

Charles Ess (Professor in Media Studies, Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo) describes this as a watershed publication in the field, and it should certainly be an early port of call for those planning to work in this area. The book both celebrates and challenges previous research in the field, highlighting suggestions for further research, recommending further reading in each chapter, and offering discussion questions after each case study where readers may be less familiar with the specific contexts. It will be useful for academics and students in the field, and it may also be useful for those in religious organizations who are looking to go a little deeper into the theory behind their practice. Stephen Garner offers a particularly pertinent challenge for theologians when concluding his chapter, that far too much of this work is done in retrospect, rather than reflecting on and in practice (p. 262). Having observed a number of reflective Christian bloggers, Paul Emerson Tuesner highlights that we must be aware that whilst academic

theological discourse clearly excludes many voices, blogging also requires a certain level of education and access to resources, and therefore are given increased weight in contemporary debates (p. 187).

Many debates within the area of faith and the digital age are reduced to simplistic levels, and this text reintroduces us to the layers and questions of meaning. We are asked to consider what is specifically digital, whether we are in a digital age, how online and offline religion interact, and to reengage with the complex factors affecting religion, faith and spirituality in a digital age. The debates are not reducible simply to technology or digital as factors, but need to draw on sociology, history, culture and theories of practice. Kerstin Raddde-Antweiler highlights how conversations in the 1990s highlight notions of 'virtual' and 'real', with the online not 'constituting tangible reality', has impacted upon what has been understood later (p. 94). Having worked largely within Christian contexts, the material drawn from other religions is particularly helpful in understanding where the core methodological and ethical questions lie. This book has offered new questions to think about, new books for the bookshelves, and material for presentations and academic papers. It is an invaluable read for those seeking to understand this field, offering first words, rather than last words.

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