

## Use of Social Media by Deirdre Good

Deirdre J. Good

Biblical Theology

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. I've used blog posts and discussions to develop course materials. I use Facebook and Twitter regularly and I blog infrequently. I'm presently co-editing a volume on theological education and I use Google chat for regular consultations with authors writing for the volume. For teaching online I presently use Moodle and Zoom.

I began to use the web & bible software in classroom teaching in the 80's as an early adopter at the seminary where I taught. I was the first member of the Faculty to exploit online technology, even before the communications infrastructure was fully able to support timely delivery of course materials. One course I taught offered resources in how to teach the Bible in congregational settings. In this course, students prepare and are videotaped conducting parish Lenten programs using learner-based teaching techniques. When I began to teach online with Blackboard and then Moodle, I either made my own podcasts to accompany written materials or commissioned professional file makers to film short segments on course materials supplying course content. Teaching an *Introduction to Koine Greek* course online was one of the most challenging courses I've developed and probably not one of the most successful. In this regard, a seminary with limited technological resources is very different from a large research university. In 2010 I successfully applied for an Online Course For Theological Faculty Teaching Online from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion to adapt introductory courses for online delivery and to learn more about online delivery methods.

We used social media to promote and report on a hybrid course on Matthew's Gospel I taught with a colleague in the Fall of 2016. With a nearby church as a community of accountability, the weekly class brought together parishioners

and seminarians from all degree programs. Classes blended online discussions between the two communities as a way of deepening and expanding learning and formation. Questions from congregants often drove discussions: "Who is Jesus in Matthew?" asked a parishoner in a class on Matthew's birth narrative. Classroom and church were a two-way street. We explored and recorded embodiment as part of the fabric of acted biblical interpretative methods and as productive of meaning. The parable of Matthew's wheat and tares came alive in new ways as embodiment produced congeniality and connection among the younger students and the older parishioners. We understood the interconnectedness of opposites, the commonalities and differentials in seemingly distinctive destinies – and we enjoyed being together. By abandoning the value judgments implicit in the parable, we can joyfully say that the joint class itself was such an enactment. For class assignments later in the semester, students visited parishioners and taught Matthew through interpretative dialogue to parishioners as engaged participants. Students also participated in worship at the parish church using an Advent passage from Matthew. Three days later both groups reprised that experience in the seminary Chapel which involved a recorded "mannequin challenge" to embody the message of the selected passage. In these ways the class also explored and developed understandings of oral pedagogies, oral interpretative methods, and the diversity of expressiveness that oral communication allows. Altogether, these were experiences that knit a community of learners and secured an environment of shared production of knowledge and meaning.

We studied Matthew as literature, theology, and the addressing of a marginalized, emergent community, straddling an old story even as it began its own version of that story, and all in an imperial context. Our interpretative maneuvers moved between Matthew's ancient historical and literary contexts and its analytical relevance to issues today. Conjoining the biblical studies classroom with a congregation added unaccustomed dimensions for both groups. The adventurousness of the academy was offered reality checks in translatability and relevance by the presence of a community of accountability. Parishoner study participants found themselves stretched and their understandings enhanced by classroom conversations. Studying Matthew in this way enables us to enact its past as though present and unfolding. We

straddled an old story, perceived its new versions, and created pathways for ongoing exploration.

Elizabeth Drescher claimed prematurely in 2014 that social media saved General Theological Seminary (<https://medium.com/the-narthex/did-social-media-just-save-general-seminary>). Although the majority of the faculty including me departed from that institution within the year, her point was well taken. While we had no exceptional social media skills, we were able to use social media to inform interested parties about the evolving 2014-15 seminary controversy primarily because we believed that our issues needed to be aired in public. In addition, faculty colleagues at other institutions started a petition to support us that thousands of faculty across the world signed, whilst other colleagues and friends started a fund to support us financially when the Board accepted our (untended) resignations. Others stepped forward to help, for example in creating a website preserving information about and documents relating to events of that year (see <http://www.safeseminary.net/>).

Although we left the seminary, use of social media helped to create, explain and publicize issues at stake in our particular situation that we have come to see now as part of far broader and ongoing crises in theological schools and seminary education across the country. We are considering publishing materials on crises in seminary education that will bring the most benefit to everyone who has gone or is going through particular theological school and seminary catastrophes across the country.

I am presently on the advisory committee of **American Values, Religious Voices** ([valuesandvoices.com](http://valuesandvoices.com)). “American Values Religious Voices: 100 Days. 100 Letters” is a national nonpartisan campaign that brings together scholars from a diverse range of religious traditions to articulate core American values that have grounded our nation in the past and should guide us forward at this time of transition. For the first 100 days of the new administration, we will send a one-page letter to President Trump, Vice President Pence, Cabinet Secretaries, and Members of the House and the Senate. The letters offer insight and inspiration drawn from the collective wisdom of our faith communities and their sacred texts.” Prof Andrea Weiss conceived the project. There are now over 2,000 subscribers. The campaign is on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @ValuesandVoices and will be published as a book.

I spend several hours each day searching for and improving online course materials even as courses are underway and this time includes use of social media. In a recent temporary position, I was able to draw on skills of reference librarians in the excellent university library that helped to educate me and expand teaching resources and my online publications.

If I were to recommend three things to scholars considering using social media, they would be the following:

1. Get training from your IT department, your local library, and your local Apple store to expand your awareness of online research, social media resources, and other technological possibilities.
2. Do not hesitate to ask for help and information from younger colleagues.
3. Go regularly to conferences on technology & social media.
4. Apply for workshops and funding to develop your technological and social media skills.

Deirdre J. Good is Theologian in Residence at Trinity Wall Street and was Academic Dean at General Theological Seminary. In 2016-7 she was Interim Associate Academic Dean at Drew Theological School. She was Professor of New Testament at General from 1986-2015, and prior to that served as the chair of the religion department at Agnes Scott College, as well as on the religious studies faculty at Valparaiso University. She is a graduate of The University of St Andrews, Cambridge University, Union Theological Seminary, and Harvard University Divinity School, where she completed her doctoral studies. She is the author of many scholarly articles and the author and co-author of numerous books, including *Jesus' Family Values*, *Jesus the Meek King* and *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother*. While she is an American citizen, she grew up in Kenya where her parents were missionaries. Deirdre Good blogs occasionally at [notbeingasausage.blogspot.com](http://notbeingasausage.blogspot.com), is an avid Facebook and Twitter user (@good\_deirdre), and occasional Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Google+ user.