

## Book Review: Missio Dei in a Digital Age

Christina Belcher

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## Book Review: Missio Dei in a Digital Age

### Keywords

faith, technology, vocation

## Book Review: Missio Dei in a Digital Age

Kurlberg, J., & Phillips, P. (Eds.), (2020). *Missio Dei in a digital age*. SCM Press. ISBN 978-0-334-05911-0. Softcover, 274 pages.

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Being an eclectic reader, I initially considered this book for review in order to gain breadth into the impact of the digital age on the fabric of faith and mission. This topic is crucial for education in the Christian sphere of higher learning because it probes the foundations of our endeavors to connect life and faith through the lens of a Christian Education. It is also unique in seeing the mission of God within the mission of the university across a plethora of differing practices where mission is essential to existence.

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This book reminds the reader that tools change faith and practice, compelling a re-examination and pondering of how the digital age both drives and inhibits areas of faith and practice across many landscapes of work and life. This leads to a past and present appraisal of not only missional theology, but how faith can be shared on social

media, and how such sharing influences a public conception of God.

The chapters were originally presented as papers at a conference. These papers were then compiled by the editors into this text.

This book is divided into three sections:

- The first section deals with missiological perspectives.
- The second section addresses missiological practices.
- The third and final section considers the public theology of the common good.

Within these sections are 13 chapters, written by a variety of theologians and researchers who probe the significance of faith and mission across a variety of settings. The introductory chapter is well-crafted to contain and expound upon much of the content in this review in broad-brush terms. It provides an extensive collection of writings on mission and humans of faith, by a variety of professionals in myriad professions.

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The editors, Jonas Kurlberg and Peter Phillips, suggested in their thorough introductory section that digital theology is best understood as a structure that requires more imagination than technique. This understanding of technology focuses on changes in how we communicate, and whom we communicate with. There is a shift toward orality in a digital culture that presents unique opportunities, but also unique challenges.

This is not a new point of venture. Neil Postman, in his books, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1987) and *Technopoly* (1993), presented the impact of media on public and private discourse. He mused that spending hours looking at screens for no apparent reason other than their accessibility could be problematic.

Postman recognized that in this on-screen realm, one could encounter faith. This encounter would occur in the act of passing on traditions, which were convictions between authority and a person's character, when narrative was employed as a means to convey and clarify a message. He also warned that this process may enhance the vulnerability of children under the age of 18. Therefore, current review of these ideas from a culture critic such as Postman are once again quite timely.

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The conclusion for this book under review, when written in 2020, provided an invitation to engage a wider conversation about the impact and effect of mediatization. This book is about epistemology and philosophy as much as it is about media. The

tool is never the perpetrator of wisdom and mission, so technique is secondary to the epistemological and philosophical mind of the human engaging with a digitalized world.

As a public act of common sense, I think it is moving once again to recognize that there is more to life than a digital platform as a point of focus. Digital media does not adequately sum up what it means to be human in this time and place. The "me" rather than "us" culture may be in time for a shift.

This book does a fine job, across its 13 chapters, written by a variety of authors, of probing the reader to open up questions. Missiologically, the idols of our time are too self-centred to retain curiosity about the wonder and the reality of God.

## References

- Postman, N. (1987). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. Penguin Books.
- Postman, N. (1993). *Technopoly: The surrender of culture to technology*. Vintage Books.