

Ryan M. Panzer. *Grace and Gigabytes: Being Church in a Tech-shaped Culture*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020. 16. 184 pages. \$16.

Ryan M. Panzer is clear about the purpose of this book, namely, to understand what it means to tell God's story in a culture shaped by digital technology. In other words, Panzer does not want to provide church leaders and ministers with yet another how-to guide, but to help them consider the underlying values in a tech-shaped culture so that they can minister in a way that ensures that the Gospel is heard. Since the author is a trained theologian with a background in the tech industry, he is in a position to do so. Throughout the book, he stresses the urgency for the church to align with the profound cultural reorientation caused by technology, in particular, the four core values of a tech-shaped culture: *questions, connection, collaboration, and creativity*. However, churches should not align with everything in tech-shaped culture. According to Panzer, they should also function as a counter-culture by extending God's grace into digital spaces, for example, providing virtual experiences of a grace-filled Sabbath, modeling a mindset of humility and empathy that sees to the whole person, and curating content that nurtures spiritual life.

Since it is a question of culture and values, Panzer underlines that it is not necessary to involve much technology in the ministry. It can be high-tech, low-tech, and no-tech as long as it includes the core values. The important thing is the churches' approach to people accustomed to a tech-shaped culture. For example, the traditional learning practices of the church (memorizing statements and doctrine by heart without questioning) clash with a culture that values learning by collaboration and asking questions, in which multiple answers reside side by side. Instead, the church must listen to people's questions before humbly presenting its own answers. An important part of Panzer's argument is that technology should be integral to church life. Online practices are not a replacement but an extension of what the churches are already doing. To this reader, this perspective is one of the strengths of this book. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches found ways to be online churches. However, being an (exclusively) online church is not the same thing as being a hybrid church where online and onsite practices are an integrated whole. In the post-pandemic context of this reader, where churches struggle to combine the best of their online experiences with their old, onsite ways of being church, an easy-to-read and accessible primer such as *Grace and Gigabytes* is a valuable contribution.

As indicated, this book is about ministry in general. However, someone with a specific interest in preaching will find many interesting things to ponder. The author is Lutheran, and, as such, he finds the Word and the Sacrament central to the church being church. The logical consequence for him would be to make (at least) the Word accessible through live-stream. There are no excuses. Panzer writes, "To not stream the worship service is to block those on the other side of the screen from having the encounter with the grace of God" (70). Likewise, the values of a tech-shaped culture connect to the teachings of the priesthood of all believers and humans as the *imago Dei* of God the creator. Consequently, the clergy must stop monopolizing the pulpit and encourage laypeople to preach and tell their faith stories. A reader use to the discussions in the field of homiletics could thus find this book engaging and thought-provoking.

Coming from a scholarly discussion that for at least five decades has promoted interactive dialogue, listening to the parishioners' questions before humbly offering answers, and including the voices of others, a homiletician might also wonder whether these values are solely tech-shaped, or if there are other societal changes that encourage such values in contemporary

culture. To what extent media shapes religion and culture, and religion and culture shapes media is also debated in fields such as digital religion or digital theology. In addition, these scholars also debate if we ought to speak about a singular digital culture or multiple digital cultures since the use of technology tends to differ depending on the cultural context. If this reader were to wish for anything more from this book, it would have been a more thorough discussion of the concept of “a tech-shaped culture” that is so central to the book’s argument.

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