

Digital Theology: A Computer Science Perspective

Erkki Sutinen and Anthony-Paul Cooper. *Digital Theology: A Computer Science Perspective*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2021. 140 pp. \$60.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781839825354.

Digital Theology: A Computer Science Perspective is a brief primer on the field of Digital Theology presented for a broad audience. There are five chapters that focus on particular topics in the field. Although the book seems to be written to be read in full, it is possible for a reader to jump into any chapter and glean useful information. The first two chapters provide an introduction to the field of Digital Theology, building upon four common definitions of Digital Theology. The authors suggest that the definitions tend to come from the fields of theology, sociology, or other humanity disciplines and the definitions have tended to focus more on the abstract or theoretical understanding of Digital Theology. The authors' goal is to provide a "complimentary" definition that does not negate what has come before. They write:

Digital theology is the field of study and design at the intersection of computer science and theology which:

- Applies theological thinking and ethics to the field of digital technology;
- Applies computational and design thinking, processes and approaches to the field of theology;
- Applies digital technology to the practice and study of theology;
- Facilitates meaning making of faith through digital expression; and
- Implements research approaches at the intersection of computer science and theology. (17)

Moving on from the definition of Digital Theology, in chapter three the authors ask why one would study Digital Theology. They provide 10 attributes of technology that lead to the study of technology in society as a whole. These range from technology's ubiquity, its increasing use of mobile technology, and artificial intelligence, among others. These 10 attributes are then correlated to their relevance to theology and computer science. A chart is provided (35) that lists all the attributes and the corresponding reason these are relevant to a study of Digital Theology. Each one of these issues is then discussed in depth and a case study is provided for each. Chapters four and five complete the book with a discussion of how to do research in Digital Theology, including ethical considerations of technology in chapter four and what the future of Digital Theology research may look like in chapter five.

As stated, this book is intended for a broad audience, and the authors imagine that in addition to an academic audience, it will be relevant for youth groups, church retreats, or church boards. The nature of the subject and the requisite background in both computer science or theology skews the book toward the academic side and away from a lay audience, particularly teenagers. Examples of this include the discussion of Paul Tillich's method of correlation (4) or Aristotle's view on causality (56). Grasping these ideas is not essential to understanding the argument of the book, but their inclusion elevates the discourse above an introductory level. The focus of chapter four, how to research Digital Theology, suggests the most natural audience for this book includes undergraduates and early graduate students. There is, for example, discussion of the differences between quantita-

tive and qualitative research, which is most appropriate for those who will be conducting this type of research in school or professional life.

The primary strength of this book is its focus on application and the practice of Digital Theology. As much as half of each chapter is dedicated to real life examples and the implications of the book's theoretical discussion. This is in line with the authors' definition of Digital Theology from chapter one, as "a field of scholarship rooted in practice" (9), and the practical nature comes most into focus in the final chapter with the call to action for others to research Digital Theology. The weakness of the book is its struggle to find the appropriate tone and level for all the stated intended audiences. Youth groups and church retreats may be similar, but the age differences require a different presentation. Similarly, undergraduate and graduate courses each may also need different aspects highlighted and discussed which is of course quite different than what a teenager needs. By attempting to write a book for everybody, they may have written one for nobody.

The authors do, however, provide a good overview of the basics of Digital Theology. I would recommend this book for libraries supporting undergraduate and graduate programs in theology and computer science. As this is an emerging field, this book can provide the needed context to engage the Digital Theology conversation moving forward. Although the presentation is dry at times, the book offers a complete conversation of the diverse areas of Digital Theology research with a particular focus on how this research can be applied practically.

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