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DIGITAL THEOLOGY

A Computer Science Perspective

ERKKI SUTINEN
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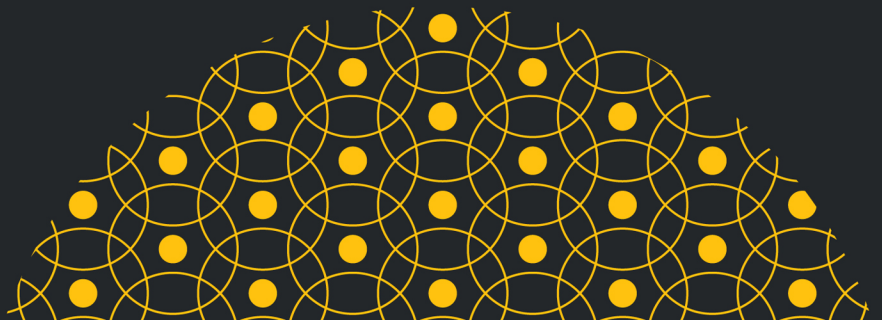

DIGITAL THEOLOGY

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DIGITAL THEOLOGY: A COMPUTER SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Refers To	Further Information
ACM	Association for Computing Machinery	https://www.acm.org/
AR	Augmented reality	
CDIO	Conceive, design, implement and operate in engineering education	http://www.cdio.org/
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019	https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019
ERP	Enterprise resource planning	
FOI	Freedom of information	
GPU	Graphics processing unit	
ICT	Information and Communication Technology	
ICT4D	Information and Communication Technologies for Development	https://ict4d.org.uk/ https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/ICT4D-Information-and-Communications-Technologies-for-Development
IoT	Internet of Things	
IT	Information technology	
ITU	International Telecommunication Union	https://www.itu.int/
MOOC	Massive open online course	
OGD	Open government data	https://okfn.org/
RDI	Research, development and innovation	
SDG	Sustainable development goal	https://sdgs.un.org/

STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (education)	
STEAM	Science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (education)	
T4	Theology for	
UN	United Nations	
VR	Virtual reality	
W3C	World Wide Web consortium	https://www.w3.org/
XR	Extended reality	

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FOREWORD

The Covid pandemic which began in early 2020 has changed our view of the world in many ways. It is a reminder of our vulnerability in the face of the natural world and a time of deep sadness for many people. But it also accelerated a change in the way that churches interact with the digital environment. Broadcasting of services on the web became the norm rather than the preserve of mega churches. Small groups no longer met over tea and biscuits in the living room of a house but over Zoom and the constant refrain of 'you are on mute'. Pastoral conversations were offered by church leaders on digital platforms and the guardians of faith and order had to consider whether communion could be done online.

These questions of mission, liturgy, community and discipleship have been talked about for over a couple of decades by digital enthusiasts and by those who have been excluded from church life on grounds of accessibility. But for many in the church these questions were not seen to be central to our understanding of the mission of God in the world. Many were quick to skim the surface using the technology of the web to advertise the church coffee morning or to provide cheap broadcast videos to support various ministries. Few people took seriously the complex texture and potential of this digital space and what we could learn about human nature and agency. Only a small number of prophetic voices engaged with the theological questions of what we could say about God in all of this – where we could see in the Athens of the digital environment the presence of the 'unknown God' and 'that the God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands' (Acts 17:23–24).

This would have been a prophetic book even if the pandemic had not happened. With the pandemic and the lessons we need to learn from it, the book has urgency and even more importance. Its authors take us through the emerging field of digital theology with passion and expertise. Indeed any emerging field needs this type of book to inform, guide, critique and point forward. They combine academic rigour with accessibility. But this is far from just an interesting read. It is an exciting manifesto for the digital theologian,

the digital congregation and the Christian who wants to live the Lordship of Christ in everyday life which is now so digital.

It is essential that Christians, church leaders and church structures do not sleep walk or be catapulted into a very different world without identifying that God is already present and at work. However, we have got into it, the gift of the digital environment can and should be used for the glory of God.

David Wilkinson
St John's College, Durham University
June, 2021.