





Understanding the Use of Information Communication Technology from the Church's Missional Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The growth in science and technology in the 21st Century has deeply affected Christian ministry in many ways. Christian ministry, with its foundation in the Bible, can be well achieved with the help and use of a higher level of technological know-how as we have in this era, and the call by Jesus Christ to send the Gospel to the world is a call to technological inventions and usage. The emergence of communication technologies has brought a boost in Christian evangelism, using technology to easily reach the world with the Gospel using technologies such as television and radio broadcasts, print media, computers, and digital space. However, more must be done regarding the connection between digital space and Christian ministry. Therefore, this study sought to identify and discuss the practical connection between Christian ministry and technology. It emphasizes the urgent need for digitalizing Church ministry, provides a comprehensive understanding of technology from the church's missional perspective, and identifies practical ways to engage with technology in its mission. This study is non-empirical research. Data were collected from existing publications and analyzed thematically. The main argument of this study is that Christian ministry can only be entirely successful by considering effective engagement with digital space. The study discovered that the rapid development of communication globally has influenced and affected the church's mission, evangelism, and communication. It also found out that any institution, including the church in the 21st Century, that refuses to engage ICT in its activities effectively may cease to exist within the next ten years. This study contributes to the ongoing theological and missiological discourse on digital ecclesiology.

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INTRODUCTION

The mandate of spreading the Gospel to the world's nations is unachievable without using modern ICT tools. The world has become connected with the use of ICT tools, so to reach the world in any way, one cannot eliminate the use of ICT. Although ICT has negative and positive influences, Christians can leverage the advantages of ICT tools in fulfilling the Word of Jesus Christ by reaching the world with the Gospel. Jesus did not specify the exact means by which Christians should reach the world. From this point of view, Christians must use every positive way to make this mandate a reality. The use of ICT

tools is not against the will of God because it is God who gave humankind this wisdom, knowing perfectly that a time is coming when humanity will need such wisdom to establish his will.

ICT has become an influential tool that Christian churches and denominations have taken advantage of to spread the gospels of Christ globally. ICT has influenced communication so much that any institution, including the church, that decides to reject it or does not correctly engage it may fail to achieve its global reach. Every aspect of human life today is influenced by digitalization, and ministry can only effectively carry on with ICT. Technology has been an applicable and effective tool for spreading the Gospel because we are in the age of ICT. The church is expected to invest in ICT infrastructures for efficient ministry strategically. However, many churches have not seen or appreciated the significance of ICT in Christian ministry. Those who understand the usefulness of ICT in communication and ministry need to use it more effectively. There also seems to be a disconnection between Christian theology and technology.

This situation has led this study to identify and discuss the practical connections between theology and technology through a dialogue with some relevant literature on the subject matter. This study contributes to the ongoing theological and missiological discussions surrounding digital ecclesiology. The article used a non-empirical research methodology and a secondary source of data collection. With the above brief introductory notes, the paper sets out to define relevant terminologies.

Definition of Terms

Communication

"Communication is a complex and evolving process involving exchanging information through various mediums, including speaking and writing."¹ It encompasses understanding, sharing, and meaning, beginning with exchanging information" through a standard system of symbols, signs, or behavior."² The communication process consists of key components: sender, medium, recipient, feedback, context, and intervention.³ Sharing, imparting information, and shaping the world through its dynamic nature have always been the fundamental goals of communication. Gamble and Gamble predicted that as society becomes more diverse, practical communication skills will be essential for addressing challenges and "fostering mutual respect and ethical fairness."⁴ Now, the world has become a global village, and this culture confirms the realization of this prediction. In today's digital age, communication has increasingly shifted to digital platforms.

Communication and Information Communication Technology

ICT encompasses various implements and methods "used to transmit, store, create, share, or exchange information, including computers, the Internet, broadcasting technologies, and telephony."⁵ According to Aririguzoh, "These technologies have revolutionized communication, enabling faster and more efficient exchanges of ideas and closer collaboration across distances."⁶ The evolution of communication technologies across different ages - from oral and print to electronic and Internet stages is characterized by its predominant form of communication technology.⁷ The Internet, as an "information superhighway," connects millions of users, allowing vast amounts of information to be accessed via computers or mobile devices, thus shaping contemporary communication and interaction.

Historical Development of the Engagement of Technology in Christian Ministry Globally

Nearly two millennia old, the church was birthed immediately after the Pentecost. However, certain Christian worship practices, such as preaching, disseminating the Gospel, and conducting sacraments, have remained constant. Also, the use of technology in church communications has proved to be so vital that it cannot be overlooked. "Technology is a culture-making activity where humans exercise freedom

¹ Judy C Pearson and Paul Edward Nelson, "Understanding and Sharing: An Introduction to Speech Communications," (*No Title*), 1994.6.

² Pearson and Nelson, "Understanding and Sharing: An Introduction to Speech Communications."8.

³ T.K. Gamble and M. Gamble, *Communication Works*, 5th ed. (McGraw: Hill Companies, Inc., 1996).4.

⁴ Gamble and Gamble, *Communication Works*.6.

⁵ UNESCO, "Qingdao Statement: Strategies for Leveraging ICT to Achieve Education 2030" (Paris: UNESCO, 2017).

⁶ S. O. Aririguzoh, "Human Integration in Globalization: The Communication Imperative," *Nigeria Journal of Social Sciences* 9, no. 2 (2013): 118-41.

⁷ Aririguzoh, "Human Integration in Globalization: The Communication Imperative."

and responsibility."⁸ Schuurman contends that worship reflects the traditional setup and environment in which people find themselves, including the architecture, language, economy, aesthetics of worship, and music style, which have all been influenced and shaped by the surrounding culture to one extent or another—the role of technology in propagating the Gospel, especially with the intervention of the Gutenberg Printing Press.⁹ Apart from the printing press, churches use technology in mediums such as radio, television, and digital-social media to reach millions of people.

The Impacts of Printing Press on Christian Ministry

Johannes Gutenberg employed chemistry and cutting-edge mechanical technologies research to invent his printing machine in 1445. Crompton posits that this invention facilitated the vast production and distribution of the Bible across Europe, rapidly increasing literacy and new Christian converts. While printing had existed for several centuries, this movable type of printing introduced a revolution. Gutenberg's Bible was the first book printed.¹⁰ Gutenberg started printing forty lines per page, which increased to forty-two lines per page instead of thirty-six lines per page in earlier Bibles written by scribes.¹¹ Due to the ability to fit more lines per page, the Gutenberg Bible limited the number of production materials, such as paper and parchment. Gutenberg produced 180 copies of pamphlets, 150 Bibles, and 3000 vellums, compared to the scribes who had been using three years to produce a single Bible. The Bible became available, and the price was reduced for many people due to fast production and decreased materials.¹²

The Bible was considered one of the most significant sacred commodities before the development of the printing press. The church would chain their Bibles to their pulpits to prevent their theft. With the invention of the printing press, a new world was born, with many people getting access to books to read. The printing press became one of the most influential mediums globally. The hand was used to write literature, and only the elites and the privileged had access to it, especially clerks and monks. "This situation gave monopolistic control over texts written on papyrus or vellum and stored in the libraries of monasteries and cathedrals. Hence, the printing technology effectively democratized access to the Bible."¹³

The culture of dependency on religious leaders for knowledge and interpretation of religious literature was limited.¹⁴ People could form their opinions concerning the Bible's intellectual, philosophical, and theological discourses and their faith through reading due to the higher literacy level. As a result of this power shift from the religious authority to "common people" between the 15th and 16th centuries, the literature became more accessible and inexpensive to print and manageable costs. Christians also took advantage of this cutting-edge technology; the Catholic Church printed ordinances, indulgences, and anti-Islamic crusade propaganda during the late 1400s and 1500s using the cutting-edge printing press.¹⁵ Christians considered the printing press a gift from God to advertise Christianity.¹⁶ As a result of this revolution, social movements such as the Renaissance and religious discourse at the time emerged from the church's authority "to laying the groundwork for the Protestant Movement."¹⁷

Martin Luther was one of the significant Protestant figures who spread a deeper understanding of the Bible to the people in the 16th Century and challenged the *modus operandi* of the Catholic Church. However, despite his love for the church, he also had his reservations regarding the sale of indulgences that "every sin must be absolved either here on earth or after death in a state called purgatory before one could go to heaven."¹⁸ To share his theological understanding," he posted his

⁸ Derek Schuurman, "Technology and the Biblical Story," *Pro Rege* 46, no. 1 (2017): 4–11.

⁹ Schuurman, "Technology and the Biblical Story."

¹⁰ Richelle McDaniel, "The Spread of Knowledge via Print," *History of the Book: Disrupting Society from Tablet to Tablet*, 2015, 29–41.

¹¹ McDaniel, "The Spread of Knowledge via Print." 29, 32.

¹² McDaniel, "The Spread of Knowledge via Print." 30.

¹³ Vejas Liulevicius, "The Social Impact of the Printing Press, Wondrium Daily," 2020.

¹⁴ McDaniel, "The Spread of Knowledge via Print."

¹⁵ Jared Rubin, "Printing and Protestants: An Empirical Test of the Role of Printing in the Reformation," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 96, no. 2 (2014): 270–86.

¹⁶ Rubin, "Printing and Protestants: An Empirical Test of the Role of Printing in the Reformation."

¹⁷ Liulevicius, "The Social Impact of the Printing Press, Wondrium Daily."

¹⁸ McDaniel, "The Spread of Knowledge via Print." 27.

Ninety-five Theses to the door on October 31, 1517."¹⁹ Although Luther intended to address church issues conventionally, it went viral through scholarly debate with other theologians. Europe dramatically turned between 1517 and 1520; the Theses were printed, swiftly circulated and translated from German into other native languages.²⁰ Crompton averred that Hans Luffe of Wittenberg printed at least 300,000 copies. He also translated and published the Bible in German.²¹

Moreover, the Protestant Reformation also produced the King James Bible. The print was a perfect medium for Luther's message – *sola scriptura* or "scripture alone." To him, reading the written Word directly from the source of authority makes everyone responsible for salvation and how to walk with God. William Tyndale translated the Bible into English, printed it, and distributed it to many people in the early 1500s.

Gutenberg's contribution to Christianity was not limited to the printing of the Bible; other religious kinds of literature were produced, such as pamphlets that spoke of "a papal proclamation calling for a Crusade against the Turks as retaliation for Constantinople. He printed indulgences to raise funds for the Crusade against the Turks."²²

Radio and Television

Religious media has gradually developed with technological transformations, as have other areas of communication. For example, developments in electronic technology, such as sound recordings, promoted the free flow of information. Religious music and sermons were stored and transported in the 1800s.²³ Radio and television have been among the early contributors to mass media and affected religious beliefs and communication. The emergence of electronic media has revolutionized Christian communication, radio and Television, text messaging, email, and Internet websites. Ward observed that many churches now depend on electronic media to disseminate information.²⁴ Although existing tools, such as the telegraph and telephones, are suitable for synchronous information delivery, they are ineffective in reaching many people simultaneously. The radio then emerged to help target a larger audience, which occurred after World War I. Churches first used it to broadcast Divine services on Sundays, gospel music, hymns, and Bible studies.²⁵

Radio was the most inexpensive information delivery medium compared to other mass media. Comparatively, it has advantages in terms of accessibility and cheapness over other mass media, such as television and magazines. Churches have multiple radio stations that cater to different people. Television ministry also reaches millions of people, and many churches have television stations today to disseminate the Gospel message to wherever the people find themselves. In 1900, the introduction of radio also brought successive, great waves of technology worldwide. After a few years, radio began to be used commercially, and Christians realized it could be a viable way of evangelism and communication. Globally, the radio still maintains its position as one of the appropriate tools for communication and evangelism in the church's life today. The introduction of FM stations has made it easier, more affordable, and more accessible. In Ghana, for instance, it is assumed that every nine out of ten households has access to radio sets.²⁶

In addition, around 1957, Billy Graham began Worldwide Pictures to complement his Billy Graham Crusade Organization. According to Janzen, television emerged in the 1930s, and the churches capitalized on it to reach people with the Gospel.²⁷ However, Christian television stations were established about twenty years later. The 1990s and 2000s experienced more incredible changes in technology. Swee-Hong and Lester assert that this period changed "from solely audio within the church

¹⁹ Mcdaniel, "The Spread of Knowledge via Print."29.

²⁰ Mcdaniel, "The Spread of Knowledge via Print."32.

²¹ Mcdaniel, "The Spread of Knowledge via Print."32.

²² Liulevicius, "The Social Impact of the Printing Press, Wondrium Daily."

²³ Thomas A Wikle, "Technology and the Changing Geography of Religious Media," *The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices and Politics*, 2015, 3751–64.

²⁴ Wikle, "Technology and the Changing Geography of Religious Media."

²⁵ Wikle, "Technology and the Changing Geography of Religious Media."

²⁶ Ghana Statistical Service, "Ghana Statistical Service Report 2021," 2021, www.hardly.ward@statista.com.

²⁷ Michael Janzen, "Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 71, no. 2 (2019): 133–35.

to audio and visual."²⁸ Churches are reaching millions of people through television. Sims argues that this achievement would not have been possible without the aid and support of technology.²⁹

Digital Media

In the 21st Century, communication has been tremendously influenced by digitalization. Unsurprisingly, many religious organizations engage social media platforms to reach their members and non-members "by announcing upcoming events and sharing with the audience specific information concerning the gospel and church activities."³⁰ Several positive impacts have resulted from the integration of digital media in church-related activities, including spiritual, economic, and social development and increased numerical strength.

Christian spirituality is begun, developed, and enhanced through the following means: evangelism, conversion, baptism, preachings, prayers, teachings, exhortations, giving, fasting, Bible studies, and discussions. Almost all these church activities require mass media tools such as tracks, pamphlets, public address systems, and effective use of the Internet to win souls. Churches worldwide are capitalizing on the mass media, especially radio, Television, and digital platforms, to build the spirituality of their audience.

Also, the proper and effective engagement of mass media ensures a realization of the church's mandate. Today, many churches use the mass media to raise funds to improve the economic lives of their members. Furthermore, the role of mass media in church growth cannot be underestimated; it plays a significant part in numerical growth. Churches across the globe are using the mass media to "sell" their church to billions of people through books, journals, and digital and compact discs. Lastly, the church has improved its social development due to its relevance, acceptability, accessibility, and popularity. Ecumenism has been a success due to the contributions made by the mass media. It has improved social interaction among members of various denominations within a community. Mass media has been the preferred tool, often used to create awareness and to publicize church programs.

Technology in the 21st Century Ghana Church

Janzen explains that the church no longer concentrates on the audio quality in service but has begun to develop the visual aspect of worship, such as overhead projectors (OHPs), slide projectors, and advanced instruments that have started to remodel the way and style of worship.³¹ This technological advancement has improved the worship service. The availability of sophisticated tools such as soundtracks and laptop computers has enabled good sounds and pre-recorded sermons. Music, dance, and drama ministries have been superb with CDs and MP3 recordings,³² even without church musicians. Sermon presentations have also been dramatic, with video clips and PowerPoint presentations, especially for those who may be visual learners. Sermons on CDs, DVDs, and social media platforms can be available for those who could not attend the service due to some reason or work schedules. Members and non-members can quickly join the live service through live streaming. Undoubtedly, the use of digital technology in worship has positively impacted the church.³³

Theology and Communication

The word "theology" is a combination of the words "*Theos* (God) and *Logos* (a word about or study of), which means studying God."³⁴ According to Erekson and Shumway, technology provides the mode for effectively communicating the Gospel to humanity and efficiently organizing the church's operations.³⁵

²⁸ L. Swee-Hong and R. Lester, *A History of Contemporary Praise and Worship: Understanding the Ideas That Reshaped the Protestant Church* (Grand Rapid: Baker Academic, 2017). 14.

²⁹ B. D. Sims, "The Effect of Technology on Christianity: Blessing or Curse," Broadman Publishing, 2009, 6. https://www.dbu.edu/friday-symposium/schedule/archive/_documents/the-effect-of-technology-on-christianity.pdf.

³⁰ Derick McKinney, *Social Media in the Church* (University of Arkansas, 2014).12.

³¹ Janzen, "Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now." 12.

³² Janzen, "Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now."

³³ Lisa M Allen-McLaurin, "Let Me Post This Praise on Facebook: Questioning the Use of Digital and Social Media in Worship," *Liturgy* 30, no. 2 (2015): 45–51; Janzen, "Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now."9.

³⁴ Thomas Erekson and Steven Shumway, "Integrating the Study of Technology into the Curriculum: A Consulting Teacher Model," *Journal of Technology Education* 18, no. 1 (2006): 27.

³⁵ Erekson and Shumway, "Integrating the Study of Technology into the Curriculum: A Consulting Teacher Model."23.

Effiong sees theology as the "scientific study of God and the relations between Him and the creatures."³⁶ It is a sense of curiosity about the world and human experience. Theology attempts to interpret the meaning of the world by answering life's questions regarding purpose in life. It simply tries to make sense of human lives.³⁷ Tarimo defines theology as studying God and his relationship with his creation. Hence, theology includes examining all of creation in the light of the Creator.³⁸

Communication has always been theological. Eilers argues that its origin is a theological idea premised on biblical revelation, which expresses the Christian comprehension of God and the universe.³⁹ Biblical theory of communication begins with the principle that "communication is an inner structural principle of theology for at the center of all theology is the notion that the God revealed by Christ is a communicating God."⁴⁰ Furthermore, communication is viewed as an interactive process where a sender puts a message across to the receiver with a particular medium.⁴¹ Fore shares a similar view, elaborating that communication, in itself, is a concept that reveals an aspect of the nature of God: sharing, commonality, interdependence, and gift.⁴²

Communication as one of God's Attributes

God's nature is many-faceted; one key element is as a communicator. God is a communicative God, as evidenced in creation. God, by nature, is a communicator and "is deeply rooted in his nature, and he imparted this nature to humanity after creation."⁴³ God desires deeply to communicate with humanity. According to Jorgensen, the fundamental link between creation and communication is:

"Being created in God's image means we were built for relationships and communication. That means I am created for dialogue: God's communication with man is a conversation. This is the primary theme in all of Scripture: God continually seeks man out to talk with him, from the story of Eden until the proclamation of the new heavens and earth. In the same way, the concept of covenant is based on two-way communication."⁴⁴

God communicates through the Bible

The Word communication is not explicitly found in the Scriptures, but the Bible presents an account of God's communication with nature. It is God's interaction expressed in human culture. "Biblical concepts such as logos—the word—revelation, prophecy, incarnation, church, the Gospel, and icons are forms of communication."⁴⁵

In the Book of Exodus, God is seen dialoguing with humanity by writing on two tablets of stones (Exodus 3:6). In this sense, the Bible is considered a God's self-communication in a written document. The Bible is God's Word and not human's (2 Pet. 1:19-21), but humankind's role was a response to God's divine initiative. The Bible contains realities God revealed and is written through human agency. The communication process, therefore, involves God and humanity.

God chose the Bible as a medium to communicate with humanity. Hence, the "Thus says the Lord" expression shows God interacting through the life and testimony of the prophets through his intervention. As an oral tradition, the Bible records all divinely revealed communication from God, "written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20: 31; 2 Tim. 3:16 -17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 3:15-16).

³⁶ J.E. Effiong, "Theology and Information Technology," *Methodist Journal of Theology (MEJOTH)* (Sagamu, Ogun State: Methodist Theological Institute, 2015). 165.

³⁷ William F Fore, *Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values, and Culture* (Augsburg Publishing House Minneapolis, MN, 1987), 40.

³⁸ F. Tarimo, "The Analysis of the Social Media among the Youth in the Catholic Diocese of Moshi and the Implications for Youth Faith Sharing," 2020, <https://collected.jcu.edu/mastersthesis/15/>.

³⁹ F.J. Eilers, "Communication Theology: Some Considerations," FABC Office of Social Communications, 2011, <http://www.fabc.org/offices/osc/docs/pdf/>.

⁴⁰ Eilers, "Communication Theology: Some Considerations."2.

⁴¹ Joseph Palakeel, "Theology and the Technologies of Communication.," *Media Development* 58, no. 3 (2011), 37.

⁴² William F Fore, "A Theology of Communication," *Religious Education* 82, no. 2 (1987): 231–46.

⁴³ Mickey L Mattox, "Faith in Creation: Martin Luther's Sermons on Genesis 1," *Trinity Journal*, 2018. 201.

⁴⁴ Mattox, "Faith in Creation: Martin Luther's Sermons on Genesis 1."201.

⁴⁵ Jose Punamadam, "Biblical Understanding Of Communication : Rev Jose Punamadam," <https://marthoma.in/>, n.d.

Old Testament Understanding of Communication

In the Old Testament, the characteristics of God's communication are found. The "Word of Yahweh" is a predominant expression of God communicating with humans. God reveals himself in the Bible through his words, deeds, and presence. The presence of the law and the prophets indicates God's everlasting presence of God's divine communication.

The migration of the people of Israel from Egypt to Canaan and the establishment of the covenant between God and the people are God's revelations in humankind's history. From a biblical perspective, God initiates divine communication. The book of Genesis 1:3 presents that God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them (Gen. 1:3). The earth was without order and form. Amid the darkness, God uttered the first Word, the divine communication. 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). This sentence is God's first communication that dispels darkness.

Revelation is Communication

The Bible's communication is based on a historical revelation. Revelation is God's self-communication in human terms, an ascertainable historical fact in the Bible. In the Old Testament history, God is infinitely superior to humans' thoughts, speech, and vision. God communicates with humanity through dreams, omens, divination, and other signs and symbols like thunder, rain, and fire (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10; 1 Sam. 15:23). These are channels of God's revelation. Revelation is the interpersonal communication of God with humanity. God is the God of communication; he communicates through different channels. Jesus is presented in the New Testament as the medium and message of God's communication. According to John 1:4, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. In him was life, and life was the light of man".

God's love towards humanity was conveyed in the incarnation, a sign of language of his love, his love in action, and his desire for a cordial relationship with humanity. In the strict sense, Jesus Christ, the Word, becoming flesh, is an act of God communicating his unquenchable love for humanity. "Incarnation is a divine communication event in a definite human environment, an expression of communication."⁴⁶ God communicates to us as we think about Him and His Word; as we read or study, we dictate upon, hear, read, and memorize His Word. Essentially, God intended to use the capabilities of his Word, nature, and senses to communicate the essence of himself to his creation. Thorp considers it the Transaction model of conveying a message; thus, God is the sender, the content is his infinitely glorious nature, and the creature" by the receiver.⁴⁷ In Psalm 96: 7-12, the created order declares the glory of God.

The Spoken Word

God communicates his true identity, nature, and character to humanity. God had spoken to some privileged men and women in the past and present to his people and all nations. He dialogues with the seers, prophets, leaders, and preachers, who show his intent to his people through visions and dreams (Num. 12:6) and mouth-to-mouth (Numbers 12:8). God's spoken Word or voice is divine communication. All scripture is "God-breathed." "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Humans are connected to the ultimate truth found in Christ through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:12-15). "For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature have been seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). However, through the intricate details and magnificent beauty of all that God has made, we can "hear" his voice. "The heaven declares the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day, they pour forth speech; night after night, they reveal knowledge (Ps. 19:1-2).

⁴⁶ Z. R. Thorp, "Communication & Theology: The Communicative Nature of God in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards" (Stephen F. Austin State University, 2013).17

⁴⁷ Thorp, "Communication & Theology: The Communicative Nature of God in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards."19.

Through Prophets

The Lord God reveals himself through the prophets' deeds, actions, and missions in the Old Testament. God transmitted his message through his prophets. The Prophets' words, first orally and then written, were preserved. These were the sources of transformational change and the inspiration for liberation. Although the world is constantly changing, God's commandments never change. New circumstances and unique challenges are brought in different periods. God does not want his people to go through the challenges alone; therefore, he guides them through his prophets. Although God has different communication methods, the prophets are the most recognized means of communication. Prophets. The priests in Israel were regarded and recognized as representatives of the people before God, and the prophets as God's official representatives before the people of Israel. He contends that priest calling was hereditary; God specifically called the prophet. A prophet is someone God has called to guide the entire world. Indeed, everything the Sovereign plans to do is revealed to the prophets before executing the plans; nothing he does is hidden from them (Amos 3:7). The prophets receive direction from God to help people navigate challenges and situations.

God communicated to his people mainly through the prophets. For instance, God channels his warnings through them to the people. Their *Modus Operandi* was to rise early in the morning to present the message to them because he had compassion for the people (2 Chron. 36:15). T. Housel Johnson, in his *A Prophet Among You*, listed the "eight reasons why God preferred using prophets to "some dramatic attention-getting device such as writing on the clouds or thundering out his will every morning" or dawn."

- i. The prophets prepared the way for Christ's first advent.
- ii. Prophets, as the representatives of the Lord, made the people aware that God valued human beings enough to choose "men and women to represent him.
- iii. The Prophets were responsible for a continual reminder of God's instruction.
- iv. Messages accomplished the same purposes through the prophets as personal communication from our Creator.
- v. The right walk with God and the transforming grace of the Holy Spirit could be accomplished in human life were demonstrated by the prophets.
- vi. The prophets' presence tested the people's attitude toward God.
- vii. Prophets assisted in the plan of salvation, for God has consistently used a combination of the human and the divine as his most effective means of reaching lost humankind.
- viii. The contribution to the written Word is the result of the outstanding product of the prophets.

Through Angels and Dreams

God created angels and spiritual beings to serve him, though they were made higher than humans. One of the critical agents through whom God reveals his will are angels. They are simply messengers of God; through them, God communicates with humanity. Angels are included in descriptions of all God created (Ps. 148:2; Col.1:16). Horton suggests that the angels' ability to communicate in human language and affect human life in other ways is essential to their biblical role.⁴⁸ Kayembe argues that depending on the needs of mortals and according to the will of the Lord, angels communicate with mortals in various ways, such as visitations, a voice, thoughts, feelings, dreams, visions, and other means.⁴⁹ For instance, an angel of God spoke to Jacob in a dream (Gen 31:11), and similarly to Joseph (Matt. 1:20, 2:13, 19).

Ryrie writes, "Angels have been involved in communicating and revealing the meaning of truth, which the church benefits from today" (Dan. 7:15-27; 8:13-26; 9:20-27; Rev.1:1; 22-6' 8).⁵⁰ God spoke through dreams to some people in the past, but even then, it was rare. Hebrews 1:1-20 indicates that God's primary communication today is through Christ through the Bible. Additionally, the Bible exhorts Christians to guard against spirits that attempt to mislead through paranormal activities (1 Jn. 4:1). Most dreams are naturally part of the sleeping state, and the Bible talks of the fleeting and unreal.

⁴⁸ David Horton, *The Portable Seminary: A Master's Level Overview in One Volume* (Baker Books, 2018).121.

⁴⁹ C.V. Kayembe, "Is God Trying to Speak to You through Angels?," 2019,4. <https://www.charismanews.com>.

⁵⁰ Charles C Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Moody Publishers, 1999).152.

God's Love and Relationship

According to the 17th Century philosopher-theologian Jonathan Edwards, the beauty of God is love, and love is relationship. The divine nature and act of God is his love and beauty essence. Rishmawy argues that God knows "himself and standing forth in a distinct subsistence or person in that idea," there proceeds a purest act, and an infinitely holy and sweet energy arises between the Father and Son; "the love and joy is mutual, in mutually loving and delighting in each other."⁵¹ Proverbs 8: 30, "I was daily his delight, always rejoicing before [him]."⁵²

Edwards sees the beauty of God as indistinguishable from the love of God. Considering the essence of God as love demands relationships, one must recognize that relationships require communication. Love involves mutual interaction, affection released from the source, and the comprehension of the love of one another, which is reflected in the perichoretic communication of the Trinity. When God contributes to this intrinsic relation, he consents within himself.

God created humanity for communication; as Powell (cited in Schwarz) argues, the chief, coherent conceptualization of the purpose of God creating the world points towards the nature of God as communicative, from the perichoresis of the Trinity, highlighting the communication of the persons of God, and extending to the externalization of the inherent value of the glory of God.⁵³ Thorp contends that looking through the lens of the communication between the persons of the Godhead brings about investigating how God communicates with himself.⁵⁴

Theology of Digitalization/ICT

There is a biblical worldview approach to everything.⁵⁵ In this sense, it is expedient to identify how the biblical worldview applies to the use of social media in the context of technology. The Christian worldview unmasks technology's illusion of neutrality. According to Myers, "Technology is never passive."⁵⁶ In his book *Technology: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Postman argues, "New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think and alter the character of our symbols."⁵⁷ And they alter the nature of community: the arena in which thoughts develop."⁵⁸ Postman reverts much power to technology and creates the impression that technology has power over humankind. Meanwhile, humanity has the right to allow technology to control their lives. Generally, pictures of mobile phones and computers come to mind when discussing technology with communication.

On the other hand, McGivern argues that technology is not a mere creation of modernity.⁵⁹ In the Stone Age, stones and fire were also some technologies. Just as computers and phones have shaped how humans live today, the creation of stone equipment also transformed how humans lived in the past. According to Myers, "We make out technologies, and they, in turn, make and shape us."⁶⁰ Effiong further observes that the dilemma of adopting Information Technology has become an issue of concern to theologians due to the subject of moral ethics and the Christian faith.⁶¹ Theologians have the task of answering whether God has a hand in technology or whether it is one of the devil's strategic devices to achieve its mandate. For instance, Postman argues that new technologies redefine the old. He laments that we do not even notice, "embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly than another," but this view seems too extreme.⁶² New technology will likely

⁵¹ Derek Rishmawy, "Scripture Says More Than You Think: Edwards's Exegesis of Mutual Love," <https://derekzrismawy.com/>, May 21, 2017.

⁵² Derek Rishmawy, "Scripture Says More Than You Think: Edwards's Exegesis of Mutual Love."

⁵³ Mark E. Powell, "The Trinity: The Central Mystery of Christianity by Hans Schwarz," *Theology Today* 76, no. 2 (July 26, 2019): 176–77, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573619848324d>.

⁵⁴ Thorp, "Communication & Theology: The Communicative Nature of God in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards."4.

⁵⁵ Jeff Myers, *Understanding the Culture: A Survey of Social Engagement* (David C Cook, 2017).145.

⁵⁶ Myers, *Understanding the Culture: A Survey of Social Engagement*.154.

⁵⁷ Neil Postman, "The Judgment of Thamus," *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, 1992, 3–20.

⁵⁸ Effiong, "Theology and Information Technology."167.

⁵⁹ R. McGivern, "Chapter 8. Media and Technology," 2016, <https://opentextbc.ca>.

⁶⁰ Myers, *Understanding the Culture: A Survey of Social Engagement*.167.

⁶¹ Effiong, "Theology and Information Technology."162.

⁶² Postman, "The Judgment of Thamus."13.

become that norm; it does not mean the previous generations- telegraph and telephones- are forgotten, but rather acknowledge the old and accept the new.

Nartonis (cited in Postman) vehemently disagrees with Postman. According to him, the user controls technology as a tool rather than the tool controlling the user.⁶³ The various technologies do not act independently; they work according to the dictates of man. Televisions, for example, do not gratify man instantly; man, instead, gratifies himself by watching the television. Postman's view may have a specific basis, but he does not pay much attention to the power of man to choose regarding the influence of technology.

Evangelism and Technology

Evangelism comes from the same Greek Word for Gospel, *euangalion*, and literally, "gospel." It has to do with preaching, promulgation, announcing, or otherwise communicating the Gospel to share the message and teachings of Jesus Christ.⁶⁴ Donovan views evangelization as where the Gospel has reached, where the people are found, not where we would like them to be. He argues that a new church is established when the people respond to the Gospel.⁶⁵ Technology has been used as a mode of communication to spread the Gospel since the era of the New Testament.⁶⁶ The dissemination and interaction with the Gospel have become more manageable with the emergence of social media. Contemporary cultures have evolved due to technological advances that require Christian leaders to develop the most effective strategies to share the Gospel.

The engagement of social media by the world makes it necessary for the church to spread the Gospel. Social media has become an applicable channel or medium used by "individuals and organizations, and its popularity makes it imperative for the church also to take advantage of this phenomenon to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ."⁶⁷ It allows people to share feelings, content, thoughts, knowledge, relationships, and ideas.⁶⁸ Undoubtedly, social media allows evangelists to interact with many people online. It is one of the quickest means to get the Gospel to people on a larger scale. Gould posits that social media serves as a mode through which the Gospel can reach the community.⁶⁹ Using social media to evangelize, people can accept the message of salvation without being present physically at a church meeting or service.⁷⁰ Churches engaged in social media during the pandemic to disseminate the Gospel, reaching out to members and non-members.⁷¹

Reports from Hootsuite and "We Are Social" show that the number of people using the Internet has astronomically increased "over the previous year, with more than one million people coming online for the first time each day since January 2018."⁷² Bolu-Steve observes that internet users increased to 4.39 billion in 2019 compared to 3.66 billion in January 2018.⁷³ There are also 5.11 billion unique mobile users worldwide, up 100 million (2%) over 2018. According to the report, there were 3.48 billion social media users in 2019, with the global total growing by 288 million (9%) since 2018. According to the

⁶³ Postman, "The Judgment of Thamus."68.

⁶⁴ V. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).xiii.

⁶⁵ Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*.xii, xiii.

⁶⁶ P. White, Fortune Tella, and Mishael Donkor Ampofo, "A Missional Study of the Use of Social Media (Facebook) by Some Ghanaian Pentecostal Pastors," *Koers* 81, no. 2 (2016): 1-8.

⁶⁷ Justin Wise, "Social Media and Christian Ministry: Reaching the World for the Kingdom of God," *The Exchange*, February 21 (2014).26-27.

⁶⁸ David Meerman Scott, *The New Rules of Marketing and PR: How to Use News Releases, Blogs, Podcasting, Viral Marketing and Online Media to Reach Buyers Directly* (John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 28; Peter White and Cornelius J P Niemandt, "Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches' Mission Approaches," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 24, no. 2 (2015): 241-69.

⁶⁹ M. Gould, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in a New Way* (Collegeville, Minnesota, USA: Liturgical Press, 2013).x.

⁷⁰ J Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'Get on the Internet!' Says the Lord': Religion, Cyberspace and Christianity in Contemporary Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 13, no. 3 (2007): 225-42.

⁷¹ Richard S Vosko, "Liturgical Technology, Social Media, and the Green Church," *Liturgical Ministry* 20, no. 2 (2011): 91.

⁷² Simon Kemp, "Digital 2019: Global Digital Overview," <https://datareportal.com/>, January 31, 2019; B.A. Ntuli, D.W. Mncube, and G.M. Mkhasibe, "Partnership to Promote School Governance and Academic Experience: Integration of Remote Learning in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the UMkhanyakude District," *South African Journal of Education* 43, no. 1 (February 28, 2023): 1-10, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v43n1a2023>.

⁷³ F N Bolu-Steve, O P Oyeyemi, and I O O Amali, "Internet Usage and Academic Performance of Undergraduate Students in University of Ilorin, Nigeria," *Ethiopian Journal of Education and Sciences* 11, no. 1 (2015): 39-47.

report, "there are 3.26 billion people who use social media on mobile devices, with a growth of 297 million new users, showing a more than 10% increase year-on-year in January 2019."⁷⁴ According to the Global Social Media Statistics Research Summary 2020, social networks' popularity is still growing. Global Web Index research reveals that an average of 2 hours and 24 minutes are spent online by individual users daily on about eight social media sites. For many, it is now a daily part of life in Africa. Users from Africa are constantly signing up for social media, significantly influencing communication.⁷⁵ Hence, any church determined to achieve the Great Commission cannot afford to reject social media engagement in the contemporary world.

Social Media Influence on Church Communication

According to Rouse, the term 'social media' is multifaceted and has no single definition.⁷⁶ Van Dijck describes social media as platforms that enhance networking and facilitate communication.⁷⁷ Fuchs argues that social media networks are different from traditional media (newspapers/television), where one sender of information exists.⁷⁸ In simple terms, social media involves using online platforms to help users share information and other content online.

Social media also allows users to freely communicate without the barriers that hinder traditional communication lines established by various institutions.⁷⁹ As a new phenomenon, social media has become an applicable communication tool many televangelists and pastors use globally.⁸⁰ As Brown argues, different options have been made available to users with the emergence of social media technology.⁸¹ This is because the various technologies involved in the use of social media have one common goal: to allow users to communicate instantly with others. Such technologies enable users to connect, dialogue, build relationships, create, and share information. Thus, social media has emerged as the most helpful tool in communication and connecting people and societies, ensuring that users actively engage with one another despite the distance.⁸² Communication among individuals has changed due to various social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Zoom, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Skype, and other platforms that have changed communication. They are fast, easy to use, have a wide reach, and appeal to many. Beyond messages, these platforms allow photos and videos to be instantly shared and viewed across distances.⁸³

The wide use of social media has pushed churches to accept this medium to expand their audience.⁸⁴ Badmos comments that a church that uses social media platforms has more people attending services again. The advent of modern technology has provided the church with several opportunities to reach a more significant number of people with the Gospel globally.

Undoubtedly, social media dramatically influences public discourse in today's world. It is a key determinant of how one lives today, and religion is no exception. It has become one of the easiest and fastest means to simultaneously spread the Gospel to people on a larger scale. "For instance, Moyer and Suzanne observe that, within a short period, one can declare to the whole world, 'Christ died for your sins and rose from the dead.'⁸⁵ Similarly, Kgatle and Lim confirm that social media's influence can enable

⁷⁴ Simon Kemp, "Digital 2019: Global Digital Overview."

⁷⁵ Nobert Jere, Ndahafa Mungonena, and Anicia Peters, "Social Media Usage in Africa and Its Ethical Implications," in *Proceedings of the First African Conference on Human Computer Interaction*, 2016, 263–66.

⁷⁶ M. Rouse, "What Is Social Media?," 2016, <http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/social-media>.

⁷⁷ José Van Dijck and Thomas Poell, "Understanding Social Media Logic," *Media and Communication* 1, no. 1 (2013): 11.

⁷⁸ Christian Fuchs, "Digital Prosumption Labour on Social Media in the Context of the Capitalist Regime of Time," *Time & Society* 23, no. 1 (2014): 97–123.

⁷⁹ Cornelius J P Niemandt, "A Network Society, Social Media, Migration and Mission," *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 41, no. 1 (2013): 30.

⁸⁰ Brian Markley, "Effects of New Media on Youth Ministry," *Senior Honours Theses, Paper 126* (2015),6; H.M. Sudaryati, "Social Media Influence of Spiritual Discipline of Students (Rating of Participants of Training 2016 Religious SMA Catholic, Teachers)," *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 2017, 450; White, Tella, and Ampofo, "A Missional Study of the Use of Social Media (Facebook) by Some Ghanaian Pentecostal Pastors."

⁸¹ M. Brown, *Learn to Use Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn: The How-To-Guide*. (Vook, Kindle, 2001),89.

⁸² Kiran Bala, "Social Media and Changing Communication Patterns," *Global Media Journal: Indian Edition* 5, no. 1 (2014).2.

⁸³ Markley, "Effects of New Media on Youth Ministry."6.

⁸⁴ K. Badmos, "Effect of Social Media on the Church. Annual Conference," 2014,4 <https://www.scrip.org>.

⁸⁵ Lisa M. Moyer and Suzanne Enck, "Is My Grief Too Public for You? The Digitalization of Grief on Facebook™," *Death Studies* 44, no. 2 (February 1, 2020): 89–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2018.1522388>.

the message of the church to "reach beyond the congregation to interacting with people outside the church." It has facilitated communications that required printouts to be transitioned into digital versions.⁸⁶ Furthermore, social media has made it feasible to combine verbal sermon presentations with visual communication through PowerPoint. Social media can create a virtual church community where prayers, support, and testimonies are shared and exchanged.⁸⁷ Christianity itself is a religion rooted in the community. Jesus declared that God is present when two or three gather (Matt. 18:20).

Various social media platforms have specific advantages. WhatsApp and Zoom, for instance, can be valuable in delivering information to a particular group of people who form a WhatsApp group. Furthermore, information meant for the broader public could be quickly shared outside of a church group among friends and families. These platforms translate the church from communing only within the confines of a building to an online community.⁸⁸ Twitter allows churches to interact with their readers, who can be part of the congregation or otherwise. This could be through tweeting prayer requests, bible verses, encouraging quotes, sermons, sending and updating news, and messages tailored towards a specific audience.⁸⁹ Instagram is a platform that can grab an audience's attention through pictures. Churches can use visual posts to engage the congregation and increase their programs' visibility. Facebook serves as a platform for advertising prophetic churches and a display of posts by the churches.⁹⁰ Kgatle describes "social media platforms such as Facebook as a stethoscope and a megaphone, enhancing the church's ability to listen to its congregation and proclaim the word of God," respectively.⁹¹ Zoom video conferencing platform makes religious services more accessible and keeps religious communities connected, especially during the pandemic. Social media has also become a means for worshippers to form and maintain healthy relationships. Members feel safe and welcome even though they are not in a public space and do not have to spend much on public transport, a barrier to some worshippers.⁹² The engagement of the platforms is considered a cost-effective means of reaching out to people. One characteristic of prophetic churches is media and social media.⁹³

Social networking is crucial for recruiting and retaining church members [especially the youth].⁹⁴ It promotes connectivity among members as well as non-members. It also gives much room for social engagement.⁹⁵ Brubaker and Haigh that using social media during worship has increased the number of worshippers.⁹⁶ Pillay also observes that the use of social media in the church has made it possible for people from different backgrounds to join churches without any issues.⁹⁷ However, Brink and Detterman argue that the time for worship will always be done within a context.⁹⁸ How worship is done determines how the good news is received across various cultures. However, social media eliminates the need to have physical meetings, sermons, announcements, news, and other information

⁸⁶ Mookgo S Kgatle, "Social Media and Religion: Missiological Perspective on the Link between Facebook and the Emergence of Prophetic Churches in Southern Africa," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39, no. 1 (2018): 1; Audrey Lim, "Effective Ways of Using Social Media: An Investigation of Christian Churches in South Australia," *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 1 (2017): 25-28.

⁸⁷ Robert Glenn Howard, "Digital Jesus: The Making of a New Christian Fundamentalist Community on the Internet," in *Digital Jesus* (New York University Press, 2011).45.

⁸⁸ Gould, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in a New Way*, 9; C Weisgerber, "Social Media & the Church: What Can Facebook, Twitter, & YouTube Offer Your Church?" 8 (PowerPoint Slides] Retrieved from [http://www. slideshare. net/corinnew ...](http://www.slideshare.net/corinnew...), 2013).

⁸⁹ McKinney, *Social Media in the Church11*; L. Hunter, "Twitter for Churches: Key to Social Media Success," 2013, <https://laurenhunter.net>.

⁹⁰ Kgatle, "Social Media and Religion: Missiological Perspective on the Link between Facebook and the Emergence of Prophetic Churches in Southern Africa."5.

⁹¹ Kgatle, "Social Media and Religion: Missiological Perspective on the Link between Facebook and the Emergence of Prophetic Churches in Southern Africa."7.

⁹² Sue Bennett, Shirley Agostinho, and Lori Lockyer, "The Process of Designing for Learning: Understanding University Teachers' Design Work," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 65 (2017): 125-45.

⁹³ Gabriel Faimau and Camden Behrens, "Facebooking Religion and the Technologization of the Religious Discourse: A Case Study of a Botswana-Based Prophetic Church," *Online-Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 11 (2016). 68.

⁹⁴ Everton. S. F., "Networks and Religion: Ties That Bind, Loose, Build up and Tear Down," *Journal of Social Structure* 16, no. 1 (2015).1.

⁹⁵ The Conversation, "How Social Media Is Changing the Church," <https://theconversation.com/africa>, May 5, 2016.

⁹⁶ Pamela Jo Brubaker and Michel M. Haigh, "The Religious Facebook Experience: Uses and Gratifications of Faith-Based Content," *Social Media + Society* 3, no. 2 (April 25, 2017),15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117703723>.

⁹⁷ Jerry Pillay, "COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible," *Transformation* 37, no. 4 (2020): 266-75.

⁹⁸ Emily Ruth Brink and Paul Detterman, *Wise Church: Exploring Faith and Worship with Christians around the World* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013).35.

that can be made available online. The implication is that social media offers opportunities and may present challenges.⁹⁹

Effects of COVID-19 on Churches

COVID-19, a highly infectious respiratory disease,¹⁰⁰ originated in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.¹⁰¹ It rapidly spread across the globe in 2020, leading to widespread lockdowns imposed by political leaders to mitigate the virus's transmission. These measures restricted large gatherings and limited movement, with physical distancing protocols introduced to prevent close interactions that could facilitate the spread of the disease. Noncompliance with these measures resulted in the cancellation of religious services. The pandemic fundamentally altered every aspect of human existence, challenging established norms.¹⁰² Churches worldwide have "experienced lockdown due to the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic."¹⁰³

Undoubtedly, the lockdown significantly impacted the church's activities, particularly its methods of evangelism. The world has changed since the onset of the pandemic, compelling the church to adopt alternative worship practices.¹⁰⁴ Any church that resists adapting to this "new normal" faces a heightened risk of extinction. The COVID-19 pandemic and social media have changed how the church is perceived and its identity within the community. This situation has propelled "churches into a revolutionary way of thinking and being."¹⁰⁵ With the cooperation of their members, church leaders have developed new methods to ensure uninterrupted worship.¹⁰⁶ Many churches transitioned to online services to reach their congregants, making virtual worship the norm for numerous congregations. During the lockdowns, churches organized online services, allowing members to participate from their homes.

Consequently, the use of the Internet for church services and meetings has become widespread, with many individuals now preferring this mode of worship.¹⁰⁷ Afolaranmi notes that social media has become crucial for disseminating information globally.¹⁰⁸ The alarming rate of social media challenges the perspective of scholars who define the church solely by its physical structure. It has acted as a vehicle for relocating the church to where the people are. Statistics indicate that individuals spend significantly more time on social media than in physical gatherings. As a result of this attitude, all social media platforms have become essential for spreading information.¹⁰⁹ The pandemic has also underscored the necessity of disseminating the Gospel on a broader scale to unbelievers and individuals of other faiths, as many grapple with issues beyond human comprehension, offering hope through social media.¹¹⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacts sacraments' administration within various religious traditions, particularly Christianity. With the onset of lockdowns and social distancing measures, churches faced unprecedented challenges in maintaining their sacramental practices, such as Holy Communion and Baptism. Traditionally, these sacraments are administered by authorized clergy in communal settings, fostering a sense of community and shared faith among congregants. However, the need for physical distancing led many denominations to reconsider their approaches to administering sacrament. For instance, some churches began to explore alternative methods, such as pre-packaged communion elements, to facilitate participation while adhering to health guidelines.¹¹¹

⁹⁹ Mark Hearn, "Color-Blind Racism, Color-Blind Theology, and Church Practices," *Religious Education* 104, no. 3 (2009): 272.

¹⁰⁰ Yan-Rong Guo et al., "The Origin, Transmission and Clinical Therapies on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outbreak—an Update on the Status," *Military Medical Research* 7 (2020): 11.

¹⁰¹ Lo'ai Alanagreh, Foad Alzoughool, and Manar Atoum, "The Human Coronavirus Disease COVID-19: Its Origin, Characteristics, and Insights into Potential Drugs and Its Mechanisms," *Pathogens* 9, no. 5 (2020): 331.

¹⁰² Pillay, "COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible."

¹⁰³ Adebayo Ola Afolaranmi, "Towards the Possibility of Internet Ministry as an Alternative Pastoral Ministry in Nigeria during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *International Journal of Information Technology and Language Studies* 4 (2020): 12–26.

¹⁰⁴ Pillay, "COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible."

¹⁰⁵ Pillay, "COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible."

¹⁰⁶ Afolaranmi, "Towards the Possibility of Internet Ministry as an Alternative Pastoral Ministry in Nigeria during the COVID-19 Pandemic." 164.

¹⁰⁷ Valerie E Crumpton, "The Church Has Left the Building: A Leadership Perspective of Online Church versus Traditional Church," 2018, 4, 11-21.

¹⁰⁸ Afolaranmi, "Towards the Possibility of Internet Ministry as an Alternative Pastoral Ministry in Nigeria during the COVID-19 Pandemic." 164.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel A González-Padilla and Leonardo Tortolero-Blanco, "Social Media Influence in the COVID-19 Pandemic," *International Braz j Urol* 46, no. Suppl 1 (2020): 120–24.

¹¹⁰ Pillay, "COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible."

¹¹¹ Pillay, "COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible."

In the Methodist Church Ghana, the Presiding Bishop authorized all ministers to administer the Eucharist, reflecting a shift in traditional practices to accommodate the new realities imposed by the pandemic. Similarly, Pope Francis permitted priests in the Roman Catholic Church to celebrate Mass independently, allowing for greater flexibility in worship during lockdowns.¹¹² The pandemic has also prompted a broader theological reflection on the nature of the church and its sacraments. As worship moved online, congregations grappled with questions about the church's visibility and the essence of community in a digital age. The "priesthood of all believers" gained renewed significance as members engaged in worship and sacramental life outside traditional church buildings.¹¹³

CONCLUSION

As churches transitioned from the traditional medium to the use of ICT, they found new ways to connect with members and evangelize to the world; demonstrating that ICT is essential for reaching the world in the 21st Century. This shift has led to reevaluating traditional worship methods, with many congregations now favoring digital platforms for their services. The pandemic also caused a change in how worship is conducted and transformed the church's identity and role within the community. The study found that today's church cannot ignore ICT in its goals of building up believers and reaching the world. Embracing ICT is no longer optional; it is a determining factor for the survival and relevance of the church in an increasingly digital world, highlighting the need for innovative strategies that leverage technology for effective ministry. Technology is ideally the medium to win souls across the globe for Christ.

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¹¹² C. White, "Pope Francis Approves Further Restrictions on Latin Mass to Ensure Adherence to Vatican II," 2021, 243 <https://www.ncronline.org>.

¹¹³ Pillay, "COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible."

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