



## The Church, Digital Technology and Media: A Biblical Reflection on Romans 8:19-23

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### ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to shed light on the author's perspective as far as the interplay between the church especially in Ghana, digital technology, and media is concerned. The study was done mainly through literary activity in existing sources from Biblical and materials on technology and media. It employed such methodological tools as descriptive and theological in discussing the subject at hand. It briefly looked at the basic meaning of the church. It then continued by highlighting what technology and media are and discussed how the church, especially in Ghana, can use them in these contemporary times. Through some biblical passages, the study demonstrated that technology and media are part of God's creation. However, since technology and media are products of human ingenuity and natural resources, they like other creations as Paul argues in the selected passage (Rom. 8:19-23), are also subject to the present corruption of the creation as a result of sin or futility. In other words, technology and media are not excluded from the effects of humanity's fall into sin. They are also groaning from the pain of sin and waiting eagerly for their redemption from the bondage of decay.

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### INTRODUCTION

Technology and media are topics of interest that need to engross the church's attention. The relationship between the church, technology, and media appears to have been naturally designed and therefore imposes a responsibility on religious scholars to understand and see how the whole relationship can be managed or nurtured. According to Stephen V. Monsma,

We must understand technology in order to live responsibly before the Creator because, although most of us are not directly involved in doing technology, we are all consumers of the fruits of technology and live in a society suffused with modes of thought shaped by technology. To understand technology, we need to be aware of it, comprehend its nature, and recognize the role it plays in culture.<sup>1</sup>

As Monsma says, not all people may be technologists or have the technological minds to create or invent new machines and tools. However, all people, including those in the church, in one way or

<sup>1</sup> Stephen V. Monsma, *Responsible Technology: A Christian Perspective*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1.

another are enjoying “the fruits of technology” or are making use of products resulting from technological inventions and innovations. The church, in pursuing its core objective of reaching out and making disciples of all nations, cannot rule out technology and media due to their significance in spreading information and bringing people together from different walks of life. The danger though is, when the church places itself at the mercy of technology and media, allowing them to dictate, shape, or readjust its focus instead of using them for the achievement of its purposes and for the general well-being of society.

This paper attempts to explain the interaction between the church, technology, and media. It focuses on what the church is, and also highlights the meaning of technology and media, and then discusses some possible ways the church can make good use of technology and media, especially in these contemporary times. The study reflects on Romans 8:19-23 and thus reveals that technology and media are also part of God’s creation.

### What is the Church?

The church in its earthly existence and yet-to-be-experienced heavenly state will continue to be both a social and a spiritual entity or being.<sup>2</sup> The New Testament (NT) writers are conscious of this dual nature of the church as it is reflected in their writings. For instance, John and Paul try to alert the early church on the need to always keep in mind the dual nature of the church. John records what appears to be the eternal emblem of the church in John 13:33-35. For John, loving others based on Christ’s sacrificial love for mankind is a sign that humans are Christ’s disciples. Then again, Paul shows the importance of supporting one another in the spirit of love (cf. Gal. 6: 1-10). This defines the character and ethos of the church. Again, all the keywords such as *kahal/Qahal*,<sup>3</sup> *ekklesia*,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Pablo-George I. Emedi, *The Local Church as an Agent of Social Transformation in a Poor Community: A Practical and Methodical Approach*, (Magister Artium Dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2010), 17.

<sup>3</sup> This is a Hebrew word usually used to denote the church in the Old Testament. According to Robert B. Girdlestone, “It properly signifies an assembly or assemblage, and is applied to all sorts of gatherings, whether for war, for complaint, for listening to instruction, or for any similar purposes.” (See Robert B. Girdlestone, *Old Testament Synonyms*, [Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Pub. Inc., 2001], 228). He continues to argue, “Besides **Kahal**, an assemblage, there is another word ... in the O.T., with almost the same width of meaning...” (Girdlestone. *Old Testament Synonyms*. 231), and this, without doubt, is *Adah*. However, Girdlestone holds the view that there is some slight difference between the two words because “Whilst **Kahah** generally refers to the *representative* gathering, **Adah** often signifies an informal massing of people.” (See Girdlestone, *Old Testament Synonyms*, 231). As regards how these two Hebrew words are used in describing the church, Kevin Giles has also expressed his opinion thus,

In earlier parts of the Old Testament, *qahal* clearly means virtually the same as *ekklesia* in classical Greek. It speaks of Israel, or some group of people, actually in assembly. The key word used in the early parts of the Old Testament for Israel as God’s covenant people, as an ongoing community, is *edah*, which is translated by synagogue...*qahal* is a synonym of *edah*, and refers to Israel as the covenant community. (See Kevin Giles, *What on Earth is the Church? A Biblical and Theological Inquiry*, [London: SPCK, 1995], 24).

<sup>4</sup> The Greek word *Ekklesia* is commonly used for the Hebrew word *qahal*, from *ek* (“out of”) and *kaleo* (“summon,” “invite,”) or “call”, hence the literal meaning of *ekklesia* is “call out” or “the called-out.” (See James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources*, [MI, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co. 1976], 189). According to Giles, “In classical Greek, *ekklesia* was the word used of the citizens of state in assembly. It was an abstract noun that spoke of those actually gathered. When the people went home, the *ekklesia* ceased to exist.” (Giles. *What on Earth is the Church?* 24). This implies that when *ekklesia* is used in its secular or ordinary sense, it can mean the actual gathering of people and upon dispersion, it ceases to exist (cf. Acts 19:32; 39; 41). Applying this same understanding to the church means that the church is only an *ekklesia* when it becomes a collective force. Besides, it is believed that the *ekklesia* in ancient times was usually composed of freed citizens excluding slaves. It was the assembly of freed Greeks who were called together to deliberate upon the affairs of their community. C. S. Dudley and E. Hilgert affirm this by saying, “It was the name of the city council in the Greek city-states, where all male citizens were “called out” to assemble for the business of the community.” (See C. S. Dudley and E. Hilgert, *New Testament Tensions and the Contemporary Church*, [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 14), See also Solomon O. Ademiluka. “1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 in light of women and church leadership in Nigeria”. In *Verbum Et. Ecclesia*. (38):1 Pretoria (2017). Accessed from <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v38i1.1672>). When Jesus made that pronouncement that He would build His church and the gates of Hades could not destroy it, He may be very conscious of the fact that this church

*sunagoge*,<sup>5</sup> and *koinonia*<sup>6</sup> used to define the church in the NT attest to a large extent the dual nature of the church. Ironically, it is not as though one element were set up against the other, rather the two are intertwined to promote harmony and this harmony is what holds the church together and beautifies it both internally and externally.

The church is a microcosm of simple yet complex, visible yet invisible, and earthly yet heavenly relationships.<sup>7</sup> Though it is reckoned as being composed of saints (*hagios/hagioi*, “the holy ones, the separated ones, or the consecrated ones”), there seem to be traces of sin in its daily operations. And this is not to suggest that Jesus did a perfunctory work in terms of delivering humanity from sin. The continued occurrence of sin in the operational space of the church is still a mystery being battled with. From a human point of view, human redemption is sometimes seen as a complete nuisance. Most people outside the church are baffled by the sight of a Christian living either sporadically or perpetually in sin. Church folk, occasionally do join these baffled individuals in their confusion and even try to criticize rather harshly. But, the early apostles especially John and Paul seem to have appreciated the reality of sin lurking around believers, though they differ sharply as to how they both see and interpret it.

This contrast between John and Paul can perhaps be explained that while the former appears to be patient with the whole process of elimination of sin from the earthly existence of the church because he sees it more as a gradual process, the latter seems to be totally impatient with the elimination process of sin from the earthly life and operations of the church. For Paul, the elimination process must be immediate and rapid and the church is not only delivered from sin but more importantly, it is dead to sin. However, he does not wish to countenance any resemblance of sin in the midst of his people (Rom. 6:1-3). But John prefers to look at the eradication of sin through the lens of a *Parakletos* (Comforter) (Jn. 14:16; 1 Jn. 2:1-2) who intercedes for the believer in his/her daily struggles with sin. And yet again, John is even more patient to hope that this whole process may or may not linger on until Christ

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coming into being would only be composed of those He had already set free from the shackles of sin and death (cf. Jn. 8:32, 36).

<sup>5</sup> As has already been intimated, the Greek word *sunagoge* corresponds to the Hebrew *adah* or *edah*. Etymologically, *sunagoge* is derived from *sun* (“with’ either ‘along with’ or ‘in addition to,’””) and *ago* (“to fetch,” “carry away.”). Incidentally, this is what birthed the English word “synagogue.” James Hope Moulton and George Milligan say that it is “‘a drawing together’ or ‘a collecting,’ ‘a gathering’ of things... of persons.” (See Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, pp. 7, 600).

<sup>6</sup> Giles contends that “The Greek noun *koinonia* is... often translated ‘fellowship,’ but whereas the English word brings to mind first of all convivial relationships, the Greek carries the meaning of ‘participation’ or ‘to share in.’” He further says that the meaning of *koinonia* “is built on a root that means ‘common,’ and it is used to denote many kinds of sharing: sharing with others in suffering (2 Cor. 1.7; Phil. 3.10), in giving money or possessions (Rom. 15. 26; 2 Cor. 8. 4, 9.13), in the gospel (Phil. 1.5), in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10. 6), etc.” (Giles. *What on Earth is the Church?* p. 16). Finally, Giles believes that there is a close link between *koinonia* and *communio*. He says,

The Latin *communio* is an acceptable translation of this New Testament word *koinonia*, for – like the Greek – its root alludes to that which is held in common, but the Greek word could also be translated equally well by the Latin *participatio* (participation). The problem, and the benefits, of adopting the translation *communio* is that, unlike the Greek noun it translates, it has both abstract and concrete force. It can be used to speak of the relationship that Christians have with Christ and with each other, and of the social reality called the church. In the latter case, *communio* (communion) is used as a synonym of *communitas* (community). (Giles. *What on Earth is the Church?* p. 16).

Therefore, to him, the church is the community of Christ. This new community is able to embrace and accommodate diversity and at the same time a unity of relationships. If we are deluded into thinking that the church is made up of individuals who are disunited or disjointed just because we all belong to different cultural or ideological systems, then we cannot ever make the church come together and work together in the spirit of divinely knitted oneness. As Giles has earlier opined, we ought to see the church more as a community and it is worth adding that we need to see the church as a community with a common origin, language, identity, purpose, vision, etc. Creating needless social stratifications or a caste system to permanently keep some at a superior level and others at the lowest level may exile God from the church. Instead, a healthy doctrine of equality, pluralism, and inclusionism, among others may probably go a long way to strengthen the very foundations of the church.

<sup>7</sup> Emedi. *The Local Church as an Agent of Social Transformation in a Poor Community: A Practical and Methodical Approach*, 20.

comes at the end of Time when it will be finally dispensed with. Meanwhile, Paul is not eternally adamant because he turns round to address the inevitability of the believer's struggle with sin (cf. Gal. 6:1). Therefore, both of them perfectly agree on the point that the believer will continue to battle his/her way through sin till he/she attains maturity (cf. Phil. 3:12-15).

### **Technology and Media in Perspective**

Technology and media are closely linked together and cannot be separated from each other. Technology and media, without doubt, have advanced collectively from print media to publications, radio, television, film, social networking, social bookmarking, wikis, video clips, mashups, and mobile phones among others. Technology is believed to be the mother of media or that which creates media, which means that media exists and thrives on the shoulders of technology. This is to say that it is virtually impossible today to talk about technology without talking about media and vice versa. To briefly pick on technology, it is derived from two Greek terms, *technē* (art, skill, craft, or means by which something is made) and *logos* (word or discourse). Thus, in the Greek context, technology meant the study of “‘art, skill, or craft’ for ‘making or doing’ something.”<sup>8</sup> D. W. Gill defines technology as “... the products of inventors and engineers: telephones, computers, refrigerators, automobiles, electric lights, water purification plants, compact disc players, and so on.”<sup>9</sup> This definition coupled with the ancient Greek understanding of the term suggests that technology does not only refer to the study of techniques, but also the tools. Technology can simply be defined as the technique for the creation of machines and tools to solve problems with the aim of improving or enhancing the living condition of people within a society. But it must be stated clearly here that technology is not only a contemporary product. People throughout the ages have used techniques and tools to meet their social needs and aspirations, and the church is no exception. Gill says, “All groups of people have had such ‘know-how’ and techniques for meeting their needs and desires – for building houses, making clothing, farming and animal husbandry, and preparing food. Other techniques helped them in making decisions, governing themselves, communicating with others raising children, and worshiping God.”<sup>10</sup> During the prehistoric or stone age, stones were developed and used as a technological tool. Ron McGivern indicates,

Just as the availability of digital technology shapes how we live today, the creation of stone tools changed how premodern humans lived and how well they ate. From the first calculator, invented in 2400 BCE in Babylon in the form of an abacus, to the predecessor of the modern computer, created in 1882 by Charles Babbage, all of our technological innovations are advancements on previous iterations. And indeed, all aspects of our lives today are influenced by technology. In agriculture, the introduction of machines that can till, thresh, plant, and harvest greatly reduced the need for manual labour, which in turn meant there were fewer rural jobs, which led to the urbanization of society, as well as lowered birthrates because there was less need for large families to work the farms. In the criminal justice system, the ability to ascertain innocence through DNA testing has saved the lives of people on death row. The examples are endless: technology plays a role in absolutely every aspect of our lives.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear from McGivern's explanation that technology throughout the centuries has had a tremendous influence on every area of human society. As indicated earlier, technology has made human life very simple in that it reduces the amount of work that has to be done with physical labor, and work can be done easily. Aaron T. Janzen affirms this when he opines,

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<sup>8</sup> D. W. Gill, “Technology”. In William A Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (eds.), *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*, (Illinois: IVP Academic, 2008), 870-874 (870).

<sup>9</sup> Gill, Technology. In Dyrness and Kärkkäinen (eds.), *Global Dictionary of Theology*, 870.

<sup>10</sup> Gill, Technology. In Dyrness and Kärkkäinen (eds.), *Global Dictionary of Theology*, 870.

<sup>11</sup> Ron McGivern, “Media and Technology”, available at <https://opentextbc.ca/introductiontosociology2ndedition/chapter/chapter-8-media-and-technology/>

The whole purpose of technology is to help create solutions to problems and enhance life. Humanity is always trying to improve the quality of life and to lessen the burdens that weigh upon it. As such technology is always advancing with human ingenuity. Technology is an expansive theme that is intertwined in every area of human life. Technology is seen in each and every life path to varying degrees. It has permeated the human condition and thus changed it. Life is no longer confined to specific morality issues, nor have religious beliefs gone unaffected. Technology comes in many forms and is both seen and goes unseen in everyday life. When used correctly it becomes a natural part of the scenery of life. Technology at its base function can create brand new levels of productivity and quality of life.<sup>12</sup>

Janzen appears to be saying that technology has influenced human life so much that it has permeated through every facet of life including religion, morality, and productivity. However, human cultures, ideals, and aspirations have shaped the creation and use of technology to meet societal needs. Sazali Abdul Wahab et al., drawing from other scholars define technology as a physical element including "... products, tooling, equipment, blueprints, techniques, and processes..."<sup>13</sup> They again posit that technology does not only comprise the physical element but also the informational component. For them, this informational part "consists of know-how in management, marketing, production, quality control, reliability, skilled labor, and functional areas."<sup>14</sup> The authors in strengthening their position on technology, explain that the term has two primary components namely, (1) "knowledge or technique" and (2) "doing things."<sup>15</sup> They thus further state that "Technology is always connected with obtaining certain results, resolving certain problems, completing certain tasks using particular skills, employing knowledge and exploiting assets... The concept of technology does not only relate to the technology that embodies the product but it is also associated with the knowledge or information of its use, application, and the process in developing the product..."<sup>16</sup> The definition clearly shows that technology involves, (1) the manufactured products, (2) the purpose for manufacturing the product, (3) the process of the manufacturing, and finally (4) the knowledge or technique for their use. Concisely, technology deals with what and how things are created and used.

As indicated above, technology creates media and thus interacts with each other. Media deals with all print, digital, and electronic means of communication. Mark Douglas avers, "The term *media* refers to a wide range of instruments used in mass communication, including newspapers, books, magazines, radio, television, cinema, audio recordings, video games, and the ever-expanding resources of the internet (e.g., the world wide web, email, and social networking sites)."<sup>17</sup> He continues to posit that the "...instruments of mass communication... are inherently connectional; they bring those responsible for their creation, production, distribution, regulation, and use into contact with one another, regularly placing them at cross-purposes with one another. And all this occurs within larger sociocultural...systems that shape and are shaped by the media and its uses..."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Lawrence Terlizzese has highlighted the main difference between mass media and social media. He contends,

Any media that uses two-way communication as opposed to one-way communication is *social media* rather than *mass media*, such as TV, radio, and print which deliver a message to a mass audience. Mass media is not personal like the telephone or letter writing; it is directed to the crowd or to a particular niche in the crowd that does not

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<sup>12</sup> Aaron T. Janzen, *Technological Advancement in the Church: Its Effectiveness in Improving Worship and Church Functions*, (Southeastern University, FireScholars, 2019), 2. Available at <https://firescholars.seu.edu/honors>

<sup>13</sup> Sazali Abdul Wahab et al., "Defining the Concepts of Technology and Technology Transfer: A Literature Analysis", *International Business Research* 5 (1), (2012), 61-71 (62).

<sup>14</sup> Wahab et al., "Defining the Concepts of Technology and Technology Transfer: A Literature Analysis", 62.

<sup>15</sup> Wahab, "Defining the Concepts of Technology and Technology Transfer: A Literature Analysis", 62.

<sup>16</sup> Wahab, "Defining the Concepts of Technology and Technology Transfer: A Literature Analysis", 62.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Douglas, "Media, Ethical Issues of", In Joel B. Green (Gen. Editor), *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: BakerAcademic, 2011), 517-518 (517).

<sup>18</sup> Douglas, "Media, Ethical Issues of", 517.

allow for the audience to talk back, with some exceptions. Mass media is not social because it does not permit a conversation with its audience. Social media, such as social websites like Facebook, Twitter, and the new YouTube Social TV website, allows for dialogue and two-way communication between speaker and audience. It is dialogue rather than a monologue. Social media use is not limited to just the popular websites. Any form of electronic communication involving computers and cell phones is part of the social media revolution because these technologies offer the individual the ability to respond.<sup>19</sup>

What basically emerges from his argument that is interesting is not the distinction he has outlined between social media and mass media but the fact that either of the types he speaks about involves the sharing of information between people. These people may come from diverse backgrounds but communication or media brings them together for a common purpose. Like the church, the collective interest of the people is what principally fuels the media.

There are quite a number of things that bring the church, technology, and media into the same arena in order to share a common platform and mutual benefits. Thus, the church cannot exclude itself from the technology and media space and exists on its own as an island. Also, technology and media cannot serve their true purpose if it intentionally ignores the church from its operations. The two work together or are like identical twins whose functions and survival depend upon each other. This may be doubtful because technology and media can sometimes exert a negative influence on the church, but that is purely an issue of abuse rather than one of coexistence or mutual benefits. There is a need to look beyond this cloud of pessimism and strike a healthy balance between the church, technology, and media. If technology and media will ever be wholly purged off or shielded from any immoral tendencies it may largely depend upon the way the church interacts with it. But if the church is indifferent towards technology and media, then they will continue to decline and spread-out information that will destroy society as a whole. So, in safeguarding technology and media through proper purging and monitoring, posterity is being protected. A society that is fed with the wrong information will be adamant about the Gospel and become a tool in the hands of the devil.

### **A Reflection on Romans 8:19-23**

The question that arises here is, how does the Bible see technology and media? The Scriptures reveal God to humans as Creator and Redeemer. This is to say that God is the ultimate source of all creation and redeemer of the fallen human world and all that there is in it. Genesis 1:27-28 stresses that God created humankind in his own image to have absolute authority and control over the earth. Thus, man and woman became the centerpiece of God's creation. This places a responsibility on humankind to take care of the environment and all created things. Beyond this, there are a few things one can deduce from the Genesis passage. That humankind is made in the image of God suggests that humankind shares with God many of his features such as his creative skill or ability. John H. Walton et al. affirm this by saying, "When God created people, he put them in charge of all of his creation. He endowed them with his own image. In the ancient world, an image was believed to carry the essence of that which it represented."<sup>20</sup> It can thus be inferred that humankind is blessed with God's creative ability because of God's image and likeness. In other words, humankind has the creative skill to create out of the resources that God has already created and made available. So God does not only call people to preach the Gospel but instead all of mankind's skills, intelligence, knowledge, and workmanship are sourced in God and therefore are for the benefit of serving Him (Exo. 31:1-5). Thus, to "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it..." is not only meant to procreate or populate the

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<sup>19</sup> Lawrence J. Terlizese, *Into the Void: The Coming Transhuman Transformation*, (Christian Publishing House & Probe Ministries, 2016), 51.

<sup>20</sup> John H. Walton Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2000), 29.

earth but to fill the earth with such developments as technology and media. Jeffrey L. Nyhoff and Steven H. VanderLeest sum up this thus,

Information technology uses human ingenuity with natural resources like silicon and copper to create powerful computing machine hardware. Humans also work within the medium of computer software to create programs that can control pollution emissions in automobiles, fly an airplane, predict the weather or the winner of an election, generate fantastic moving images for a film, simulate nuclear reactions, search the Bible in multiple languages for specific words, check a document for spelling errors, or generate medical images of the interior organs of a living person. Such human creativity is a product of God's grace.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, technology emanates from two perspectives, (1) "Human ingenuity" resulting from God's image and likeness in man and (2) "natural resources". All these are God's gracious gifts at humankind's disposal of which technology and media are a product. Gill adds to this when he says, "A Christian perspective begins by seeing the human technological impulse as rooted in people's being made in the image and likeness of God the Creator and Redeemer."<sup>22</sup> He further avers that, "As God imaginatively created the world, filling what was void, shaping what was formless and illuminating what was in darkness – so, in their own fashion, do God's creatures... It is in this perspective that Christians must first see the technological impulse."<sup>23</sup>

However, since technology and media are part of human culture, they cannot be free from the consequences of the fall of humanity into sin. In other words, just as humanity keeps battling with sin and its effects, technology and media cannot be separated from sin. In this era of technological advancement, people are using technology for evil purposes such as invading and manipulating life and creation, exploiting, killing, and destroying people. So, technology along with all other creatures as Paul indicates groans and waits eagerly to be redeemed from its bondage of decay (Rom. 8:19-23). Paul's words in this passage clearly bring to bear a number of things for reflection. One sees in the passage an interaction between creation and divine revelation. In other words, God's self-disclosure as well as his purposes are taking place within a sphere called the universe. And this interaction can be traced to Genesis 1:1 which says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (NIV).

Paul, in Romans 8:19-23, seems to draw our minds to what God has already been doing from the beginning of creation to an unknown time in the future. The passage highlights a number of words and phrases such as "creation", "children of God", "hope", "bondage to decay", "glory", "groaning", "firstfruits of the Spirit", and "redemption of our bodies". And these are things that speak directly to issues related to the creation as well as to the human body. Creation generally includes both living and non-living objects; it is the universe in its totality. Paul talks about the present sleaze of the created order as a result of futility or sin and also talks about the eschatological redemption of creation from corruption. The word "creation" is from the Greek *ktisis* and it refers to the act of bringing something into existence that has not previously existed. It is important to note that *ktisis* is mostly used in the NT to denote God's creative actions or activities. Yet, there are instances that *ktisis* is used to refer to things created on the basis of that creative action; the individual things that God created (Rom. 1:25; 8:39, Heb. 4:13), the believer who is a new creation or the state of being in Christ (Rom. 3:3, 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15) and the totality of all that has been created (Mk 10:6; 13:19, Rom. 8:22, Col. 1:15; 23, 2 Pet. 3:4).<sup>24</sup> Paul in Romans 8:19-23, appears to see creation in two ways; first, as a witness to what God is doing and second, as a participant in God's redemptive work. For Paul, the entire creation is groaning for the manifestation of God's children, and this groaning, for him, is tied to the expectation

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<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey L. Nyhoff and Steven H. VanderLeest, "Being Fluent and Faithful in a Digital World", Available at <https://cs.calvin.edu/activities/books/rit/chapter1/lesson2/creative.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Gill, "Technology", In Dyrness and Kärkkäinen (eds.). Global Dictionary of Theology, 872.

<sup>23</sup> Gill, "Technology", In Dyrness and Kärkkäinen (eds.). Global Dictionary of Theology, 872.

<sup>24</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 456-457.

or the liberation from the power of corruption or the bondage to death, decay, frustration, and the future participation in God's glory with his children. Thus, Paul talks about the suffering of creation in the context of the future or eschatological hope for all creation. Paul likens the groaning of creation to the "pains of childbirth" leading to a glorious new world. "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed" (v. 19), because at that time creation "itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay" and will be transformed to share in "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (v. 21).

So, creation is not watching what is unfolded as just spectators but sees what is unfolding as moving towards its own redemption. Talking about redemption, the Apostle Paul uses it in reference to the completion of God's saving work in believers. Thomas R. Schreiner says, "At the conclusion of history the bodies of believers will be redeemed... God's saving work will be completed, and the fullness of redemption will then be the portion of those who have put their faith in Christ."<sup>25</sup> Paul's discussion in Romans 8:19-23 means that redemption of humanity in the final consummation is not separated from the redemption and transformation of creation which includes that which humankind has created such as technology and media. That means that if a person's redemption is something that has been accomplished by Jesus' sacrifice, then this hope for creation's redemption and participation in God's glory has likewise been catered for by Christ's sacrifice. Paul seems to have a deeper understanding of what took place in Genesis where the creation of humanity was never separated from the creation of the universe. So, religion/faith and technology are not opposed to each other; they are twin disciplines with different approaches but with a common purpose that focuses on human existence and establishes a universe and its originator. While faith uncovers the originator of the whole universe, technology uncovers the universe created by God. In other words, faith starts from God to creation while technology starts from creation to God.

An issue of interest is how the Greek word *ktisis* is translated in the Akan (Asante)<sup>26</sup> text. *Ktisis* is translated as *abode* in Asante which simply refers to "creature, creation"<sup>27</sup>; perhaps it includes creation for both God and human beings. It is from the words *bo* and *ade*. *Bo* among several usages denotes "to create, give rise to, originate; to institute, ordain from the beginning."<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, *ade* refers to a "thing, substance... an inanimate object... vessel, instrument... property, possession..."<sup>29</sup> Thus, *abode* for the Akan could mean that which is ordained from the beginning or created by God or a thing or substance which is created by human beings.

About a hundred years ago the Akan knew that *abode* is God's property but may not have known about mobile phones, televisions, laptops, projectors, microphones, Whatsapp, Instagram, and Twitter, etc. Yet, the Akan may be hopeful that in the future whether near or distant there will be improved technology to make human life better. So, the advent of these new technologies and media may not surprise the *nananom nsamanfoɔ* (ancestors) because they knew that all these are part of *Onyankopɔn abode* (God's creation). Because God created humanity with the necessary abilities to create and even gave humanity material resources, the Akan in their primal conceptualization knew that one-day human beings could create the things that are seen today. The Akan thus has a yearning for future discovery or development.

### **The Church, its use of Digital Technology and Media: The Way Forward**

This section looks at some positive ways the church can make use of digital technology and media for the benefit of its mission here on earth. First, it is an indisputable fact that digital technology has expanded the physical and social space of the church. The church can therefore seize upon this to

<sup>25</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: BakerAcademic, 2008), 367-368.

<sup>26</sup> The Asante is one of the dominant Akan ethnic groups in Ghana, West Africa.

<sup>27</sup> J. G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi)*, (Basel: The Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, 1933), 34.

<sup>28</sup> Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi)*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi)*, 69.



enlarge its mission base. Instruments of mass media such as TV, radio, print media, etc. are increasingly being used to propagate the Gospel in many parts of the world. This is in keeping with the mandate of the church, that is, to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20). This command to the disciples is also a command for Christians today. But as Janzen opines, since

... the Church community has grown and metamorphized, the way that the Great Commission is brought to fruition has changed. The Church is a key part in helping the spiritual growth of its congregants. The Church is a place for newcomers to have an honest experience with the Lord and a place for continual spiritual feeding for those who have been followers for an extended period of time. The Church's duty is first and foremost to honor God and usher in His presence. The way that this is done has changed throughout the years and it is in the best interest of God's people to move in the right direction for the Church.<sup>30</sup>

Second, the church can make use of media to bring about the needed moral excellence in the wider society. Today, communication channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and Instagram, among others, have become an avenue for socialization. Social media, without doubt, is one of the usual agencies of socialization, rivaling the roles of parents and the family, peer groups, teachers, religious leaders, and cultural norms operating within a given local community or nation.<sup>31</sup> This is evident in the way people now share their thoughts and views on social media platforms regarding issues that have to do with morality and so on. Thus, the church can make use of this opportunity to advance its moral values in the wider society. Jane D. Brown highlights that the media is influencing the behavior of people and Christians are no exception.<sup>32</sup> However, media presents a great opportunity for communicating Christian moral values and therefore the Christian needs to turn his or her attention to the positive use of media.

Third, sermons, hymns, liturgies, etc. can be uploaded on CDs, YouTube, Vimeo, and Instagram for easy accessibility by church members as has been the case for some time now. Lisa Allen-McLaurin in discussing how technology has impacted the life of the church says,

The use of digital technology has become standard in worship services. For decades now, churches have played CDs and MP3 recordings in worship, to enhance music, dance, and drama ministries, and to fill in when musicians are not available. Video clips and PowerPoint presentations are used to help ministers drive home the sermonic focus, especially for those who may be visual learners. They are also used to lend a contemporary feeling to worship, saving us from using hymnbooks or worship bulletins. Services are recorded and made available on CD and DVD for those who might want to view it again, and now, some churches are using digital technology to live-stream their services. If you can't get to the church, the church comes to you. Many, if not most of us, would agree that the use of digital technology in worship has positive aspects and results.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, sermons and hymns among others can go viral through the use of the mediums mentioned above thereby contributing to enhancing Christian evangelism and discipleship making.

Last but not least, the church can use social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter; Instagram, what-ups, etc. to enhance the regularity and quality of interpersonal interactions between church members. Thus, the social media tools mentioned above allow the church to create online small groups

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<sup>30</sup> Janzen, *Technological Advancement in the Church: Its Effectiveness in Improving Worship and Church Functions*, 16.

<sup>31</sup> George Gerbner, Lawrence Gross, M. Morgan, and Nancy Signorielli, "Growing up with Television: The cultivation perspective", In J. Bryant and D. Zillman (eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1994), 17-41.

<sup>32</sup> Jane D. Brown, "Mass Media Influences on Sexuality", *Journal of Sex Research* 39 (1), (2002): 42-45 (42).

<sup>33</sup> Lisa M. Allen-McLaurin, "Let Me Post This Praise on Facebook: Questioning the Use of Digital and Social Media in Worship", *Liturgy*, 30 (2), (2015): 45-51 (45).

for its members, which helps them regularly to check and follow up on their members and improve their interpersonal relationships.

## CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed the relationship between the church, technology, and the media and how the church can positively make use of them today. The paper explored what the church is, and it was revealed that the church is the community of Christ with the mandate to make disciples of all nations. However, it became clear that the church does not operate in a vacuum. The environment within which the church is situated is filled with many technological and media advancements. By this, one can say that the church (or faith/religion) has other siblings, some of which are technology and media. Thus, the paper discussed what technology and media are and it was discovered that technology and media are part of God's created order. That means that faith, technology, and media are not opposed to each other. So if there should ever be any opposition as is sometimes seen then this arises as a result of the way religion, technology, and media are interpreted. The opposition witnessed between religion and technology or media is a human product borne out of prejudice imposed on an ecosystem designed by God. And this may not be different from the way Apostle Paul approached the subject at stake as highlighted above. In other words, since technology and media are part of God's creation, they are part of the consequences resulting from humanity's fall into sin and they like other creations eagerly wait for their total redemption. The Church needs to take advantage of technology and media for the benefit of its mission here on earth.

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