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From gadgets towards community: communion ecclesiology and *botho* as tools for crossing the digital divides

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Abstract

South Africa is a divided racially, religiously, economically, politically and digitally country. Gadgets become personal and humans gravitate towards them instead of towards each other where *botho*[1] can be experienced. Technology has negative and positive impacts on the community. This article provides some practical steps from theological perspective for citizens to cross the digital divides. It is here recommended that *botho* be interpreted through communion ecclesiology lenses. To do this communion ecclesiology and *botho* will be elaborated, compared, and contrasted. Through the literature review and social media, these two tools are presented as a solution towards divided communities of faith. The findings are that the digital divides can be overcome through theological reflections, self-offering, and robust engagement with communities. The contribution made by this article is that communality cannot be bought. Becoming a spiritual community comes through self-denial and crossing the digital divides – being incarnationally present on the cutting edges of communities.

Keywords

gadgets; technology; communion; community; botho; ecclesiology; digital divide

1. Introduction

The article addresses the digital divide that affects the communities that are already dividing culturally. It points out that people are attracted to the gadgets though they possess no emotions for deeper connection with

1 *Botho* (Sotho) is an equivalent of *ubuntu* (Nguni) and the author prefers to stick to Sesotho or Setswana version which is *botho*.

humans. These gadgets are always mutating, demanding more knowledge and skills in order to cope with competitive markets. To make communities compatible with these markets, it is suggested that there be a review of *botho* and communion ecclesiology. To address the digital divides caused by extensive usage of the gadgets, the article suggests theological reflections, self-offering, and robust engagement with communities. It is hereby concluded that theologians should be technologically advanced in order to be incarnationally present on the cutting edges of communities.

Travel by train and watch when it pulls into the platform and observe how people seated on the waiting benches are glued to their smart phones. Enter a minibus taxi and greet people and see how many will respond as many of them are fixing their eyes on their cell phones. The same experience is encountered in the bus. Walk around the transit or waiting halls in the airports and see how many people are glued to their gadgets – cell phones or laptops. The same experience is when you enter the doctors' waiting rooms, standing in any que in offices, in the supermarkets, banks or in the leaving rooms of the households. Nürnberger (2016:15) agrees that "these gadgets can become addictive." People have become attached to the gadgets than to each other. A gadget is commonly defined as a small device or machine with a particular purpose. It is sometimes called an appliance, device, widget, or a contraption. Gone are the days when community news was passed verbally as people exchanged pleasantries. Bearing in mind that African greeting is not just "Hi" but an exchange of life circumstances and experiences in general. This is the reason many African greetings are in plural forms such as *Dumelang,*[2] *Sanibonani,*[3] *Re a lotšha,*[4] *Molweni,*[5] etc. These are the opening opportunities for people to exchange information about their personal lives, including spouses, children, livestock, cultivated fields, current community affairs, weather etc. These laborious pleasantries create platforms for community development and enhancement, as communication bonds community and ideas or suggestions to intervene are presented.

2 Setswana and Sesotho.

3 isiZulu.

4 Sepedi.

5 isiXhosa.

2. People are divided

It is generally known that "technology is the great revolution in which the modern world is involved" (Torrance 1965:275). It has become part of human identity, interactions, and ideas formations. Its machineries instigate and propel people's imagination and wisdom – what is known as Artificial Intelligence. Currently there is a public clamour about ChatGPT, which is an online tool that uses artificial intelligence to respond to questions and queries in the same way a human would. The Artificial Intelligence (AI) uses it to answer simple questions like "how long would it take to drive from Johannesburg to Cape Town", to very complicated queries such as writing a speech, essay, or even an academic thesis of postgraduate level. People have even shown that it can answer tests and write exams such as those used by legal professions to admit attorneys. Knowledge-based work, such as research and report-writing, is also under threat from Artificial Intelligence. This brings the use of ChatGPT (and Artificial Intelligence) into question regarding ethics. All these techno-scientific gadgetries leave cosmos with "the worldview embedded in quantum mechanics" (O'Murchu 2021:10).

It has depersonalized people living in and as a community. It is sad that the implication here is that humans may be likened to mere machines (Gbadamosi 2022:1). People are no more dependent on others for advice, guidance, directions, or decisions. Machines have taken over those roles. Indeed, as Cole-Turner asserts: "Technology's allure is captivating, mesmerizing us with the latest gadgetry" (2000:100). News and entertainment are exchanged between humans and machines. People are divided and distanced from each other due to personal attachment with and to the gadgets. A sense of community and communality is negatively affected by the digital divides racially, economically, spiritually and politically. The gadgets carry and impart enormous volumes of ideologies that readers imbibe, and many become gullible, consequently influencing their thinking and ideological formations. Friendships across the racial and cultural divides are fostered technologically. Gadgets should enhance our togetherness rather than promoting disintegrations and proliferations. Unfortunately, gaps of inequalities are widening instead of narrowing, due to technologies at hand. Closeness and togetherness expressed in this article as *botho* and communion ecclesiology are at stake.

The economic gap between the haves and the have-nots keeps widening. This is quantified by continuous debates about the digital divides around the issues of lack of access to computers as well as high speed broadband; and the lack of knowledge about gadgets and other digital technologies (Gould 2015:60). The lack of access to high-speed broadband is a proof that the cost is too high for the less financially viable people. It is true that the device (iPhone) "have lifted many out of poverty and wildly enriched a few" (Volf 2015:33), though people on the lowest economic rank are left behind. The prevalence of smartphones intensifies this economic digital divide. The competitive market continues productions of fashionable gadgets and portals in order to be visible and invisible, for knowledge and popularity, and for integrating us into the community. Currently some communities are physical while others are entirely virtual, which means that virtual communities are "created, gathered, developed, and sustained exclusively online" (Gould 2015:30). Digital divides are spatially real.

Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and entrepreneurial spirit has turned communities into some form of commodity. People come together not for life enhancement but for commercial purposes or gains, because gadgets widen the distance between people, creating self-centeredness. Office corridor chats of connecting with each other are substantially limited. Virtual meetings are the order of the day, leaving physical office space empty as people can now work from home or anywhere. It is true that the "entire societies are markedly dependent on technology for communication, transportation and the rest" (Clapp 1996:189). Verbal exchange of ideas is not about the quality of life as in African pleasantries, but cannibalistic motives of seeking the price tags from each other.

3. Gadgets possess no emotions?

Although technology in areas of worship was escalated during the COVID-19 lockdown (2020-2021), there is still some sense that humans appreciate human connectedness above technology. One argument is that since there is a human element behind gadgets, emotions can still be invoked. Another argument in contrast is that machines cannot play mediatory role among people as people connect with people at a deeper level, for there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the

man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). This tension is addressed by Resane (in Mudimeli 2022:71) that:

> For the older generation, technology or online preaching is without emotional connection, while for the younger generation, there is a human factor behind every machine, therefore tune in emotionally even through technology.

The fundamental reality to reckon with is that technology is a way of life. Good or bad, it remains part of universal existence. I associate myself affirmatively with Ronald Cole-Turner (in Stackhouse, Dearborn & Paeth 2000:100) that:

> Technology's reach is unbounded, affecting everything from how we make war or love or art or wealth … There is no place to hide from technology, no inner sanctuary of the self-left unmanipulated, no part of creation untouched.

Though technology is limited when coming to emotional connectedness, yet possesses some enormous capacity to destroy, construct or shape life; it is to be embraced with cautions. In 1957, Pope Pius XII welcomed the new technologies coming into being through films, radio, television etc. yet appealed to the Church to exercise "vigilant care" of these new media.[6] Recently in 2015, Pope Francis offered a concern regarding media and digital world. He applauded the media for intensive sharing of knowledge and affections, shielding humanity from direct contact with pain, fears and the joys of others. The Pope called for loving shepherding and encouraged: "Efforts need to be made to help these media to become sources of new cultural progress for humanity and not a threat to our deepest riches."[7]

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6 The 1975 encyclical *Miranda Prorsus* (On Mass Communication) by Pope Pius XII. [Online]. Available: https://www.vatican.va/contentpius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_08091957_miranda-prprsus.html [Accessed: 27 June 2023].

7 Pope Francis comments briefly on the media in the 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, (On Care for One Common Home), 1.IV.46-47, 1.V49; [Online]. Available: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encilica=laudato-si.html [Accessed: 27 June 2023].

4. Gadgets are mutating and are here to stay

Technological advances come in shapes, sizes, and forms. Gadgets come in different forms and are becoming widely used for a wide range of purposes. They are readily available as gifts for any occasion. The huge hard computer is now a small gadget with all information in a cell phone, a watch or a pen. One can order them online with service providers such as Takealot, Amazon, Loot etc. and receive them within twenty-four hours delivered at the doorstep. These can be safely stored in a pocket, handbag, or small briefcase, therefore becoming accessible anytime and anywhere at will. This makes information readily available, and the globe visually accessible. These gadgets are created with the sole intention of overcoming the challenges and difficulties of daily life. They make impact as ideas are implanted in the existing gadget – what is commonly known as *Apps*. Gadgets can be upgraded so that new tools can be modified to improve utilization or implementation of the new ideas. They shape the known world and change the culture. This is what is called digital transformation, and it keeps the gadgets on board, transforming cultures and enhancing globalisation. "Digital transformation is the increased use of digital technologies to create or alter customer experiences, business processes, and culture to meet the demand of the market" (Nkwei, Rambe & Simba 2023:2). However, the more the availability and accessibility of the gadgets, the less the experience of communality. Human connection is now facilitated through the gadgets.

5. Technology and theology: Positive contributions

Culturally, people cannot be divorced from technology. Daily they move fluidly between online and offline, using gadgets to make calls, emails, video chats and virtual meetings. Jared L. Jones correctly puts it that "we have become bifurcated beings. We are constantly in two (or more) places at once. We're located wherever our bodies happen to be, and we're also connected to someplace else."[8] There is no doubt that technology made some positive contribution in Christendom, especially in areas of church administration and evangelism. Indeed "Technology has given Christianity

8 The Communion of Saints in the Digital Age | Modern Reformation [Online]. [Accessed: 23 January 2024].

a voice to reach a world-wide audience. Historically there have been advances for Christianity when there have been advances in technology."[9] The *online-church* and *digital church* are a current catch-all terms for interactions between believers through internet technology. The church is historically noted for taking advantage of new technologies to reach more people than ever before. Digital evangelism is famous in spreading this message of hope, love, and salvation. This is accomplished through radio, television, internet platforms such as YouTube, blogging, Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, et cetera.

Church administration through modern technology brings the costs down and allows communication to reach the maximum of participants. The internet speed simplifies communication and improves the articulation of the church corporate image. It is through modern technology that churches are able to articulate their visions, missions, core values, etc. This is highlighted by Gould (2015:105) that these gadgets ensure "that who we are and what we believe is conveyed clearly, consistently, and coherently." Church activities promotions are feasible and are always punctual in reaching the intended audience. Volf (2015:33) asserts that "From just about anywhere, you can connect with people everywhere." In agreement with Nürnberger (2016:64); "In technology, efficiency is a norm" making reachability and accessibility at the highest expedition.

COVID-19 lockdown restrictions (2020-2021) observed the highest online church attendance in history. Lockdown sparked a proliferation of creative uses of technology to sustain the ecclesiality of the church without physical attendance in traditional venues of worship. The gadgets enhance the meaning of the church that it is not a particular place or structural building, but a physical people even when connected digitally, because the gadgets are the "tools for communicating faith and building community in between worship services and committee meetings" (Gould 2015:107). The conservative churches that were irresolute technologically were forced to adapt, comply, and experiment the online worship. These modern technologies direct and influence human relationships, practices, and worship.

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9 https://www.dbu.edu/friday-symposium/schedule/archive/_documents/the-effect-of-technology-on-christianity.pdf [Online]. [Accessed: 24 January 2024].

6. Community is integral to *botho*

Theology's relevance is based on construction from below. Justice to any theological discussion regarding community, especially ecclesiology starts from human experiences. This experience for African people is in their history, culture, and contemporary situation (Healey & Sybertz 2012:49). The same notion is expressed by Cone (2018) from a liberation theology point of view that theological engagement is essentially historical (having to do with economics, politics, and the sociality of human existence), cultural (evil societal structures), experiential (troubled and oppressed), and doctrinal (scriptural in dealing with human misery in an ethical way). In other words it is a theologising mutating towards conclusions by making the connections between the culture and the daily experiences of the people. It is therefore a participatory theology. Sociability and relationships as part and parcel of daily life by individuals and the community and are central to moral and ethical imperatives (Magesa 1998:65). Inter and intra human relationships are the central core of *botho*. Mbiti (1969:108-109) tries to clarify this by coining it as "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am." This is hashed out by Sindima (in Birch 1990:144) that "we cannot have personal identity without reference to other person." Togetherness is a hallmark of *botho* in the same way as it is in communion ecclesiology. Nobody was created for individualism. Isolationism is unAfrican and incongruent to *communio*. People find meaning in and with each other, what Twesigye (1987:109) calls "quintessence of authentic humanity." In other words, human communality reaches and experiences authenticity in togetherness. Therefore, life is living "together with people, other creatures, and the earth" (Sindima in Birch 1990:146). The individual's life is a shared life. An individual does not live for self, but within the community. In other words, individuals in a community look to community for self-understanding, which is "the logical product of shared understandings. Shared understandings are the bedrock of a community's cultural capital" (Coetzee & Roux 2003:323). This is sagely expressed in the Setswana *bagaetsho* or the isiZulu *bakithi*. It is not just my people but "us as of the same stem or root" as we belong to each other together." Apart from *bagaetsho* (my community) a "person would no longer have the means of existence" (Mulago in Dickson & Ellingworth 1969:139), there is no authenticity of life. Indeed, Opoku (1978:483) is correct that "Life is when

you are together, alone you are an animal." One can deduce that *botho* is togetherness, communion, and humanness, as is stipulated by Lessem and Nussbaum (1996:72) that it is about how one relates to people and that "it is an essential ingredient in the character of a person." *Botho* values human relationships above technological advances that try to take human spaces to satisfy human's deep desires to connect with other humans, as is seen in Artificial Intelligence space. Machines have some limitations as they do not possess emotions, though they have the power to ignite emotions into actions. Technology is limited when coming to human emotional connectedness, but possess power to incite, inspire and instigate human actions. Regardless of its impersonal composition, it possesses power to induce human conflicts, something that is pointed out by Pimay and Riyadi (2023:4) that:

> Interaction on social media that uses technology has prevented emotional ties. People are free to express themselves on social media at any time. What then emerges is a positive response and a negative response, which in the end creates a conflict or even becomes a legal issue.

The same notion is expressed by Brueggemann (2009:17) that "the offer of technological solutions to relational problems is an encompassing temptation among us." Technology can lead us into temptation but can hardly deliver us from evil.

7. *Botho* is integral to communion ecclesiology

These two perspectives (*botho* and communion ecclesiology) have community as the central core to their understanding. Life is a community, and community is experienced life; and as per Williams (2013:21), people share the same sense of humanity, and in this commonality people experience unity. Even Tillard (1992:27) affirms this that "humanity is not reality except within communion." Community in this context refers to "an ongoing association of men and women who have a special commitment to one another and a developed (distinct) sense of their common life" (Coetzee & Roux 2003:322). *Botho* as the African model of conscience achieves its function within the community and through communication (Bujo 2010:79). As a philosophy of life, it initiates a

better placement of communality within ecclesial dimension. Since *botho* is communality where people live together to derive meaning of life, ecclesiology is a communion where people live together for a common purpose of experiencing and fellowshipping with each other in the presence of the Triune God. That purpose is to find Christ, glorify him and enjoy him forever. The common thread between the two concepts is, according to Resane (2017:100) synergy, cooperation, symbiosis, and mutuality. Communion ecclesiology, like *botho* is when people enjoy being together and doing things together to express their connectedness, by mutual invitation to celebrate together, help each other, and praying for one another (Healey & Sybertz 2012:117). This is also highlighted by Mokhutso (2022:2) in "virtues of sympathy, compassion, benevolence, solidarity, hospitality, generosity, sharing, openness, affirming, availability, kindness, caring, harmony, interdependence, obedience, collectivity, consensus etc."

While *botho* emphasizes horizontal and lateral relationships (human-to-human), communion ecclesiology emphasises the balance of both horizontal and vertical relationships (human-to-human and God-to-human). This is emphasised by Williams (2013:132):

> As a human being is in a nexus of relationships, full humanity is when all the relationships are ideal. Full humanity is then not just expressed in the relationship to God, but also in other relationships.

This is further captured by Welker (2000) when he speaks of communion as the unity of reconciliation with God and reconciliation among human beings. This reconciliation leads to Tillard's assertion (in Flanagan 2011:95) that human communion is thoroughly charismatic in both its vertical and horizontal forms. According to Kasper (2004:52), *communio* is principally understood as a horizontal community of people emanating from their individual's desire for community, resulting in an association of partners who are in principle free and equal.

Like *botho*, communion ecclesiology is having and sharing something in common. It is the union, or a society and assembly of all believers who have something in common with each other, united by love. They "share in corporate worship, spiritual gifts, Christian graces, material goods, and mutual edification" (Ryken 2001:10).

8. Solutions: Proposed actions

8.1 Theological reflections

Theology needs to operate beyond transpersonal levels and transcends anthropocentric spheres of the past. All those living post-Corona pandemic will agree with Pimay and Riyadi (2023:1) that

> the penetration of technology into religious lives has led to new religious practices called virtual religious practices. At its most basic level, virtual religion has influenced religious communities, authorities, and identities.

Communion ecclesiology is an integral part of live-ness, especially for the people of Christian confession. Theological reflection on communion ecclesiology refers to the church as a community of people on a journey to God. "Wherever there is a supernatural togetherness and Spirit-directed movement, there is the church – a spiritual community" (Crabb 1999:21). Communion ecclesiology is a church eschatologically journeying together towards God. God is still working in the ecclesiastical community, and he may do so through any human invention or endeavours, such as the gadgets in our hands. Togetherness in Christ initiated technologically prompts some movement to Christ.

> The community of God, as it journeys to God, has all the resources within its members to keep us moving. We simply need to become a community, to get together as a joined and closely-knit body, to connect with one another (Crabb 1999:79).

This means the Christian community journeys in togetherness towards God, and on this eschatological journey, God is at work shaping and moulding this community. Gadgets can be employed to this task until we arrive. Communion ecclesiology is a spiritual community where members feel safe and enjoy safety with others. What keeps the communion together is an eschatological hope. The church as a pilgrim here on earth is both *ecclesia discens and ecclesia docens* (teaching and learning). The church teaches and learns through technology; hence technology enhances the community rather than dividing it. When *botho* is applied through the utilization of the gadgets, ethics remain intact, since "one cannot associate *Ubuntu* with aggression, disorder or chaos" (Broodryk 2007:138).

8.2 Theo-tech dialogue is inevitable

Theology and technology should complement each other in order to extract or validate the ensuing *telos* or *hypothesis*. Torrance (1965:16) realised the importance of this theo-tech symbiosis when he stated that theology has:

> A mission to fulfil in the world of technology and art as much as anywhere else, and must engage in dialogue with all the masterful movements of the times if it is to be faithful to the Gospel entrusted to it.

For the mere fact that dialogue is critical in alleviating all forms of technophobia within ecclesiastical circles is a genuine call for dialogue. The narrativity of theology is its dialogical nature. Theo-tech dialogue is necessitated by the fact that "theology is a conversation, a discourse, a dialogue and a communication in matters of daily life experience and faith" (Lyimo in Wabanhu & Moerschbacher 2017:209; Orobator 2008:xi).

Theo-tech dialogue during theologising processes including pastoral duties can be adequately achieved through technical gadgets in public spaces. This is reinforced by Zsupan-Jerome (2014:26) that:

> Ongoing dialogue with digital culture and intentional flexibility around pastoral praxis serve professional ministers much more effectively than an overly defined and perspective approach, which can quickly become outdated if addressing particular media

It is through technology that theology can reach out into other social and natural sciences to enhance its eclectic claims and justify its interdisciplinary approach for epistemological validation. It is true that "a dialogical approach to social communication benefits the Church's fundamental task of evangelisation, as the digital culture continues to provide new methods and expressions for proclaiming the Good News" (Zsupan-Jerome2014:27). Dialogue allows the church to continue in exploring and assessing itself as to availability of gifts and limitations of itself. In other words, in the sensible argument of Torrance (1965:17) theo-tech dialogue "will help theologians to clarify their fundamental methods in the light of their own peculiar subject matter." Theo-tech dialogue provides wisdom about communication for the success of the church, community, and humanity at large.

8.3 Self-offering

In the foreword of Larry Crabb's monograph, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community* (1999), Eugene Peterson drives the point home that "We cannot buy or make community; we can only offer ourselves to become community" (1999:VIII). Communion ecclesiology and *botho* can be experienced through self-offering. Believers are a communion even if they choose not to recognise it. They are part of God's redeemed community regardless of their doctrinal, liturgical, or confessional differences. However, for both communion ecclesiology and *botho* to be fully realised, self-offering is an important initiative for the world to see that we are of a particular community. Johannine statement comes into play here that *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another* (John 13:34-35 NIV). Love for one another is bigger than the face value of emotional level. It is self-offering, which in some Christian terminology is called self-oblation. This self-oblation includes some elements of sacrifice, offering oneself to God in union with Christ's sacrifice of himself on the cross.[10] It is a devotional self-surrender to the glory of God, offering all that arises in the mind and rejects anything that is contrary to ecclesial precepts as laid out in the Bible. This is one's self-giving towards persecution for Christ's sake and self-denial. This was expressed by the Apostle Paul when he declared: *I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!* (Philippians 3:10-11 NLT).

Self-offering is almost unheard of within our Reformed tradition. We abhor giving up worldly possessions and pleasures to an extent that gadgets in our hands become instruments of indulging in iniquities. Self-offering is one of the factors that always drives my ecclesiological proclivity towards Roman Catholic theology. I am persuaded like Arima and Baloyi (2022:2) that:

> Religious communities typically uphold a way of life that emphasizes modesty and giving-up worldly possessions and pleasures. The

10 http://encyclopedia.uia.org/en/development/11809680#:~:text=Description%3A,or%20by%20inner%20self%2Ddenial. [Online]. [Accessed: 22 January 2024].

> pursuit of Christian perfection and God-contemplation have always been the goals of such a life (theologically defined as "perfect love").

Modesty in this context refers to smartness and being on the cutting edges of the culture yet remaining unreservedly connected to God. Worshippers of the Triune God have their feet lifted yet remaining firmly grounded. They are geared to the times but remaining anchored to the rock (Christ). They pursue the path of contact without contamination (Lutzer 1980). Communion members offer themselves, allowing themselves to be enmeshed in the trinitarian God, who is "the source and fulfilment of human communion thus serves as the fundamental theological standard of social communication" (Zsupan-Jerome 2014:49). This self-offering is to "see the Trinity as an ascetic community of self-sharing with the other" (Augustine 2019:48) where members encounter radical hospitality marked by unconditional love for the other.

8.4 Robust engagement with communities

Technology should not dampen the importance of community lifestyle. There is a widely accepted agreement that "communicating to relate with others and bring them toward community and communion is a quality that is highlighted anew by the digital context" (Zsupan-Jerome 2014:13). Technology should not become a barrier to human relations and interactions. Although technology helps enormously towards worshipping God and communicating with each other, community relatedness brings a deeper meaning and a sense of fulfilment when people are together as a community. People worship better together within the community. Christian community receives providences and blessings of God through no other means than through members who intimately know God and each other in a corporate community. Crabb (1999:8) correctly points to this that "A *connecting* community, where each member is joined together in dynamic spiritual union, is a *healing* community." Gadgets are limited when coming to healing. Community is where people find healing. Concentration onto the gadgets contributes towards digital divides but turning to the community where one rediscovers self, is where emotional and psychological healing is. Inevitability remains that "integration of diverse empowering resources becomes the new theological horizon"

(O'Murchu 2021:13). To rehash Crabb's (1999:11) words: It's not easy, but it's worth it:

> A central task of community is to create a place that is safe enough for the walls to be torn down, safe enough for each of us to own and reveal our brokenness. Only then can the power of connecting do its job. Only then can community be used of God to restore our souls.

People feeling isolated and lonely, detached, and distanced from others find solace in and through the gadgets. It's unfortunate that the forces of technology pull people away from the local toward the centralized, away from particular communities toward the abstract "global community" (Clapp 1996:190). This creates a need of having an interactive, constructive mode of communal discourses in the public arena, because communion culture is both participatory and dialogical. The robust community engagement through the gadgets as often done through virtual meetings, online responses, assessments, and interactive preaching and teaching is a modern inevitability, therefore should be guarded so not to enhance the digital divides.

Ecclesia is a phenomenon of togetherness, therefore should continually be on the cutting edges of humanness. Engagement is integration, which is the opposite of isolation. Members of ecclesia cannot exist in isolation; they live in community (Palmer 2015:121). A strong sense of community (*botho*) escalates engagement which may be initiated and actioned with gadgets. People find identity not in individual attributes, but in the group (Williams 2013:1), and it is within the group that technology could be advanced.

Conclusion

Gadgets are handy instruments that make information readily accessible and available at any given time and space. They operate in cosmological space where humanity is divided racially, politically, economically, and religiously. Although humans are intimately attached to the gadgets, these are the machines that cannot communicate emotionally at a deeper level of human needs, hence communality as the route to go for identity and meaning. Gadgets mutate i.e. continue to take new and different formats and shapes and had become part of spatial reality. In order to address the digital

divide created by technology in its modern space, communion ecclesiology and *botho* come into play to enhance humanness and the meaning of life. The practical solutions to this digital divide are the theological reflections to be undertaken by the *ecclesia* to embrace technology for its mission in the world, the importance of theo-tech dialogue in bringing understanding of the role of technology, self-offering where believers are to avail themselves and open up to the new innovation. Finally, there is a need for robust community engagement, so that technological ignorance can be alleviated.

Technology is important in the church for evangelism and administration. Maximum influence and efficiency are the positive achievements through technology. The bottom line is technology can advance communion ecclesiology and *botho*, but should safeguard its integrity, since it is neither a foe nor merely a friend. Communion ecclesiology and *botho* can restrain technology, but still redeem it for the good purpose of the advancement of God's kingdom in the cosmos. There is no doubt that technology has "given us the means to overcome unnecessary and counterproductive limitations" (Nürnberger 2016:91).

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