

Technological Advancement and the Task of the Church in the Virtual World

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Abstract

In the recent past, technological advancements have impacted how Christian ministry is done. Internet connectivity and various media platforms have presented opportunities and challenges to the church. With the influx of multiple technology gadgets and tools, the church can utilise these means to proclaim the gospel. Also, the digital platform offers an opportunity to live out Christian values and influence the virtual world. The (virtual) church can impact digital spaces by propagating ethical practices. God's plan for the church, whether physical or virtual, as a community of true believers is to be patterned after the likeness of Christ and then influence the world and reconcile humanity back to God. Therefore the church ought to develop strategies to instil morality in cyberspaces. The literature-based approach study focused on the challenges and opportunities the church faces in a digital age and its role in proclaiming the gospel and being salt and light.

Keywords: Church, Virtual World, Morality, Digital Church, Digital Culture, Great Commission

Introduction

The world has experienced rapid technological advancements in the recent past. As a result, technology has dramatically impacted every area of life in the 21st Century, in every part of the world, whether villages or cities. Dreyer rightfully points out that,

The daily life of people is characterised by connectivity. The Internet, computer networks, social media, television and radio networks, and cell phones are part and parcel of our daily existence, hyper-connectivity, and networked society. It is not possible for the majority of people, even in remote areas, not to be connected in some way. People are connected to total strangers with whom they never had any



physical contact. People connect via networks in virtual reality. For many, virtual reality and digital connectedness have become more important than any physical reality or relationship.¹

The use of digital technology significantly increased during the Covid-19 lockdown period, as people had to look for alternatives to remain connected. Digital connectedness is an aspect that will continue to influence how people live, play, and work in the twenty-first Century, “the strength of the Internet lies in participation, interaction, non-synchronous (not real-time) and synchronous (real-time) communication, and a mixture of words with sight and sound. The Internet provides an equidistant world that enables instant responses. It is the true medium for the Global village.”²

In modern times the church has had no option but to embrace digital technology. Boaheng argues that the church’s use of media technology for ministry results from society’s growing digital environment and the need to reach all people with the gospel.³ In addition, technologies like the Internet offer a starting point to connect with church members and the outside world. In the same vein, Jansen argues that adopting media, social, and office technology has helped to carry the church into an age of efficiency.⁴

The Bible highlights technologies from the advent of clothing for Adam and Eve (Gen 3:7, 21), the tower of Babel (Gen 11), and the designs and the crafts involved in the shaping of priestly vestments and instruments, the Tabernacle, and the temple and all its furnishings (Exo 35:4–40:33; 1 King 5—7), writing of letters and books to convey God’s revelation in the Old and New Testament, the use of print technology in 16th Century to print Bible translations, among others.⁵

Positively, technology (media- audio, visual, and social media) enhances life and creates solutions for problems. It provides an avenue of communication and expressing oneself. With the recent increase in technological advancements, the church has an opportunity to embrace technology for worship, reaching out to the world, and office work. Technology can impact how

¹W. A., Dreyer, “Being Church in the Era of “Homo Digitalis,”” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40(1), 3, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v40i1.1999>

² Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. *Media and Technology: The Rainbow, the Ark & the Cross*. (Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 48, 2005), 12.

³ Isaac Boaheng. “A Theological and Ethical Reflection on Digital Ecclesiology from an African Perspective,” *Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Journal (SHE Journal)*, 3(2), 2022, 484. DOI: 10.25273/she.v3i3.14086

⁴Aaron T. Janzen. “Technological Advancement in the Church: Its Effectiveness in Improving Worship and Church Functions,” (2019). <https://firescholars.seu.edu/honors/123>

⁵Alexander Chow. “What has Jerusalem to Do with the Internet? World Christianity and Digital Culture,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, Vol. 47(1), 2023, 24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23969393221101349>



worship services are conducted, outreach ministries are conducted, and how an office is run using user-friendly apps and tools to record and broadcast sermons and other Christian programs. Further, the church can create websites and social media pages and use radio, podcasts, digital apps, and television to reach a broad audience.

Historically, it has been observed that the church has primarily embraced these technological changes to enhance worship services and to reach out to many people,

Into the 1980s, the sound systems used in congregations were often just speakers, a few microphones, and a small sound mixer in the pulpit. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, developing sound systems in movie theaters began to shape how sound could be made in worship spaces. Moreover, in the late 1990s, the increasing number of worship bands with their electronically amplified sound and multiple vocalists made necessary a more complex sound board (or mixing console)... Since then, a good sound system has become foundational, and the mixing console – now more likely to be digital and not analog- has become a spatial fixture across contemporary worship.⁶

Today advanced sound systems and technology has revolutionised worship. Also, the social media platform opens many possibilities for the church to reach beyond its physical boundaries. The modern church has utilised diverse technological tools for church ministries; as Allen-McLaurin observes,

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 them again, and now, some churches are using digital technology to live-stream their services.⁷

As a result, the church has enhanced its ministries to its members and the world. With the increased use of technology in and outside the church, the church has a significant role in addressing the challenges in the digital space by promoting Christian moral values. The

⁶ Swee-Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 47.

⁷ 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 (April 2015): 45, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=100936363&site=ehost-live&scope=site>



following section examines the church's meaning and function to determine its role in the digital space.

The Nature & Function of the Church

I. The Nature of the Church

The Greek word *ekklēsia* is a compound word (*ek*, “out,” and *kaleín*, “to call”) as found in Mathew 16:18; 18:17; and Acts 19:32, 39. It refers to those called out (of the world) to belong to God. It is a translation of the Hebrew *qāhāl* in the Septuagint, which denotes the congregation or people of Israel, primarily as gathered before the Lord. The church is construed in terms of unity (oneness of the body of Christ), sanctity (holiness of the church), catholicity (the universal nature of the church), and apostolicity (the heritage and faith foundations based on the prophets and apostles).⁸

Thus, the term *ekklēsia* refers to a gathered community of believers who profess their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. While quoting Baptist Ideals, Howse et al. (1969, 3) write, “The church, in its inclusive sense, is the fellowship of persons redeemed by Christ and made one in the family of God.”⁹ Apostle Paul's opinion of the Corinthian Christians is that they were the church of God, sanctified in Christ Jesus and called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ayandokun defines the church as “a called-out group of people who have been baptised, living and growing in the Holy Spirit, fellowshiping together and fulfilling the purpose of God as designed in the Holy Scriptures. This constitutes witnessing (Matt 28:19–20) and social responsibility to the community to expand God's kingdom here on earth.”¹⁰ It noted that the church's nature is divine, with a mandate for humanity to fulfil His plans. One may argue that this definition fits the digital church because it is a virtual community of believers fellowshiping together, but there is more than that.

The church is a spiritual organism with a life composed of people who have had a spiritual rebirth. Jesus charged his disciples, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to

⁸ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, et al, eds., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. 1: A - D* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1995), 694.

⁹W. L. Howse and W.O. Thomason, *A Dynamic Church: Spirit and Structure for the Seventies*. (Nashville: Convention Press, 1969), 3.

¹⁰Esther O. Ayandokun, *A Manual on Educational Administration in the Church*. (Gloryline Christian Publications, 2016), 3.



obey everything I have commanded you...” (Matthew 28:19–20). Also reiterated in Acts 1:8, “And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Apart from being saddled with continuing the church mandate, power was equally given for influence and enablement. Thus, Jesus promised, along with the Great Commission to carry out the mission of reaching the whole world with the ministry of the church. Christianity was to become a transnational and transcultural community. Different qualities aren’t cancelled inside this community but set inside the higher integration of everyday confidence.¹¹ The mission is the errand believers today are to achieve. He gave his disciples an Extraordinary Commission.¹² Therefore, ministering to the world is an essential mission of the church, and the world needs transformation, and the church stands a better chance to bring in the needed transformation.

Understanding the definition of a church makes it clear that it is not limited to the local church to determine its nature. Alvin elaborated, “The church derives its character from its head, Jesus Christ, and there is a givenness about the church... God’s nature and the Christian gospel have already determined the goals and objectives toward which the church should be moving...”¹³ Understanding of Scriptural concepts and the essential nature of the church is highlighted in three ways:¹⁴

First, the church is God’s chosen community: this concept is based on God calling Israel his chosen community. It sees the church as God’s chosen community in that: the church is of God; it was chosen to make known God’s love; and from the outset, the church was a community of persons, the people of God”¹⁵ The idea of the church is God’s original conception. For that, the church is considered God’s chosen community. In affirmation, God says, “Yet now hear, O Jacob, my servant; and Israel whom I have chosen...” referring to Israel as His chosen community (Isa 44:1).

Likewise, Peter, referring to the community of faith, writes, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” This understanding

¹¹Neil Ormerod and Shane Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church*, Ecclesiological Investigations, v. 6 (London ; New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 13.

¹²Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 25. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=630808>.

¹³L. J. Alvin, *Foundations for Purposeful Church Administration*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 28.

¹⁴Ibid., 38.

¹⁵L. J. Alvin, *Foundations for Purposeful Church Administration*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 39.



reveals the church as God's chosen community through which God's love is revealed. Revealing the love of God through the ministry of the church should not be done as work involving a few individuals alone but in a way that the whole body assists by saturating the community with the realities of Christianity and the message of the gospel.¹⁶ A community of God is chosen for service by reconciling the world to God.

Second, the church is the body of Christ. Paul speaks of the church as "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his blood" (Acts 20:28). This is seen in God giving up His beloved Jesus Christ to die as a remission for man's sin. By his death, humanity is reconciled to God as the body of Christ. The NT imagery of "the body of Christ" is significant (1 Cor 12, Eph 4). Also, "the nature of the Christian church has been determined by Christ who is its head, and by his gospel which it is called to proclaim."¹⁷ The church is the body through which the Spirit of Christ continues His work.

Third, the church is a fellowship of the redemptive love of God. Alvin asserts that it has to do with the matter of relationships. The relationship of God to man, man's relationship to God, and man's relationship to fellow man.¹⁸ A communion exists between those who live in a personal relationship with God. This love relationship involves "...the God who speaks to them and calls forth their trustful response- the communion of the faithful."¹⁹ Morality is emphasised as an individual moral act apart from the larger context of one's existence. The relationships are thereby made possible through God's Spirit incorporating human beings into the body of Christ through faith and baptism, reviving and fortifying them for Christlike living. It is considered a divine and human reality, explaining the relationship between God and human beings as "their common partaking in God's own life whose inner-most being is communion." The word of Jesus in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life," expressly bolsters the concept of God's fellowship of redemptive love.

¹⁶G. A. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*. (SP Publications, 1984),77.

¹⁷Alvin, 43.

¹⁸ Ibid., 53.

¹⁹*The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*. (Geneva: Faith and Order, 1998), 9.



II. The Missional Function of the Church

Having discussed the nature of the church, it is crucial to look at its function. Jesus gave him the Great Commission. He commissioned his followers to go into all nations to teach people to obey the teachings of Jesus, and those who believe are baptised. Jesus Christ gave them the power and authority needed for their service. The power given is to accomplish the ministry Christ gave to the church. The gifts distributed by the Spirit are to be used for service (Eph 4:11–13). The task should not involve a few individuals alone but a collective effort to ensure a fulfilled ministry.²⁰ The church has a whole has been commissioned to reach men with the gospel of Christ.

The church's ministry "is the vocation of the whole church to be the servant of God's design."²¹ Therefore, it is at all times the duty of the church to serve the world in all places. God's plan for the church as a community of true believers is to be patterned after the likeness of Christ and then influence the world and reconcile the human race back to God. The church's significant influence over society is a ministry worth fulfilling; otherwise, the church will become influenced. Jesus directed his disciples, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). Christ sent disciples to the world to teach and influence the world with the principles of the kingdom of God. The church must not see the world as an enemy but demonstrate love toward the world if it is to influence. Grudem argues, "The church has the example of Jesus who did not attempt to heal only those who accepted him as Messiah. Instead, when great crowds came to him, 'he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them (Luke 4:40).'"²² Having looked at the nature and function of the church in the world, we now turn to the challenges that emerging digital technology present on the understanding of the church.

Theological Challenges Related to Digital Ecclesiology

The rise of digitality has raised new questions on understanding the church and its functions. Technology has significantly altered the way we live, play, and work. One of the questions is whether the "virtual church" is the "true" or "real" church.²³ Is it possible to think of the digital body of Christ? Some have argued that there is a need to reimagine the church and ecclesiology.

²⁰Getz, 77.

²¹Faith and Order, 41.

²² Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Grand Rapids, Mich: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 868.

²³ Chow. "What has Jerusalem to Do with the Internet? World Christianity and Digital Culture," 24.



Indeed, the traditional understanding of the church as a community of people in a certain location needs to be reconsidered.

As observed, technology is an excellent tool for ministry. The church should not avoid, limit or discard technological innovations. However, technology should complement (not replace) the use of analogue space for ministry.²⁴ It should mediate Christian ministry. Technology should be allowed to function in a supportive manner because some aspects of Christian worship, like the ordinances (Baptism and the Lord's Supper), would be hard to conduct online.²⁵

Likewise, Christian physical fellowship remains critical for oneness and interpersonal relationships. Some aspects of worship that can easily be carried out online, like preaching, should be made interactional.²⁶ Annette argues that a virtual church where members create an avatar is not a church because there is no connection with the real issues in the world to which God calls the church.²⁷ The media should not be left to stand on its own, "The fact is that Jesus preached to 5,000 people and nurtured a small group of 12 disciples. He calmed the sea and cooked breakfast for his disciples. He spoke with authority in healing the sick and raising the dead. In contrast, Christian media today often stays in the virtual or mediated world with minimal interpersonal contacts facilitated."²⁸ The two modes can work together in a complimentary version, "Interpersonal ministry brings credibility and the human relationship to the media ministry. Interpersonal ministries include psychological counseling, group activities, rally events, and education programs. Interpersonal ministry can acquire stories for media distribution. The two reinforce each other."²⁹ We should be able to evaluate the effectiveness of online technology from time to time.

Apart from the theological dimension, there is also an ethical dimension to that digitality.

²⁴ Boaheng, 480.

²⁵ Potgieter Annette. "Digitalisation and the Church –A Corporeal Understanding of Church and the Influence of Technology," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, 2019, Vol 5, No 3, 563. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2019.v5n3.a26> Online ISSN: 2413-9467

²⁶ Ibid., 563.

²⁷ Ibid., 572.

²⁸ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 9.

²⁹ Ibid., 9.



Ethical Challenges in Digital Spaces

Technological innovations also have a negative side. Generally, technology that is not controlled could precipitate major catastrophes and evil,

For instance, the development of the atomic bomb and the destruction of millions during the Second World War. The technologically advanced 20th Century had been the evillest of all centuries. Since the First World War, approximately 220 million people were butchered in countless wars and ethnic cleansings using weapons of mass destruction. All this was made possible by technology, communication networks, powerful computers, and satellites. Digital technology enriches humanity in terms of communication and daily life; it also creates an environment in which crime, human trafficking, sexual slavery, political extremism, and dehumanising isolation flourish.³⁰

In embracing technology, we should mitigate the challenges that come with it. Klaus Schwab has argued that the Fourth Industrial Revolution (predominantly shaped by digitisation and networking) will change what we do and who we are.³¹ This realisation should cause us to “reflect on the human condition, faith as well as the nature and calling of the church within a radically new context.”³² Janzen rightly cautions that the inclusion of technology into the church sphere goes beyond just the ease of its use. It must be determined if technology harms the calling of the church.³³

Undoubtedly, the digital culture has also come with challenges and risks that the church should not turn a blind eye to. The use of the Internet has also come with its misuse and abuse. The digital culture is not necessarily fashioned after Christian faith affirmations; therefore, there are areas in which Christians and the church must be aware. First is the moral decadence in the online “streets” or digital spaces. Digital spaces contain false information (misinformation and disinformation), obscene materials, bullying, hate speech, malicious comments, propaganda, character assassination, and cybercrimes.³⁴ It is easy for a Christian to lose moral integrity in such sites if caution is not exercised. Christians using these sites must be trained to discern true from false. They must be equipped to live out their faith in a space where sinning is a click away. It has been argued that moral degradation has been enhanced by the nature of cyberspace “partly because of the anonymity, openness, and independence one enjoys in using media technology.

³⁰ Dreyer, 3.

³¹ K. Schwab. *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Crown Business, (New York, 2016), 1.

³² Dreyer, 1.

³³ Janzen, 16.

³⁴ Boaheng, 490; Read also: Alan G Padgett, “God versus Technology?: Science, Secularity, and the Theology of Technology,” *Zygon* 40, no. 3 (September 2005): 578.



The lack of supervision and responsibility for one's action online makes people cross their moral boundaries.”³⁵

The second challenge is false teachings, preachings, and prophecies. Many false teachers use digital platforms to propagate their false teachings to unsuspecting audiences.³⁶ Many internet users are sometimes tempted to think that what is popular is true or those who command a huge following are credible preachers. The site can give its users a false sense of identity, “Media is powerful, especially the mass media. Media celebrities can be very famous. Tele evangelists are prone to fall because of the glamour of media power. Without the integrity of personal living, media loses its credibility.”³⁷ The church has a role to guide believers on how to “test spirits.”

Third, the lack of control over internet use can also lead to addiction. It can make believers unproductive as modern digital technology has much to offer, including gaming. With the emergence of the virtual world, people can relate to the different world ends to perform most activities without physical contact or environment. Mitchell et al. added, “The ubiquitous availability of high-speed internet access has encouraged huge interest in cybernetic worlds like Second Life and World of Warcraft, both in terms of user gaming and a new technological platform for global virtual collaboration.”³⁸ Technological advancement now allows for access to every detail of life. This is inclusive of foreign ideas as may be obtainable. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, virtual worlds are “images, sounds, and text used by a computer to create a world where people can communicate, play games, and pretend to live another life.”³⁹ The virtual world has undoubtedly turned the world system into a global community. This communicates that even learning is not limited to the physical environment. There are many more to the virtual world yet to be unveiled.

In addition, theological positions are mainly not declared; “Theology that is immediately accessible can also be disastrous. Online theology can give someone with bad theology a high platform. Someone can speak to the masses without the needed firm foundation. Those who

³⁵ Boaheng, 490.

³⁶ Ibid., 490

³⁷ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 9.

³⁸ J. M. Alanah, John D. M, Dawn O., and Deepak, Avatar, People and Virtual Worlds: Foundations for Research in Metaverses. *Journal of the Association for Information System*, 10(2),(2009),n.p. doi:10.17705/1jais00183

³⁹ Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.



sanction who is reputable cannot do so within the online format.”⁴⁰ Fourth, the nature of the online environment, with all manner of sites and advertisements, can distract believers from worshipping in this space.

The negative aspects of emerging technologies are a worrying trend that should be addressed. In quoting Clare, White has this to say about the decline of moral standards: “Under the impact of science, conviction has lost its social consultant. Under the impact of technology, family life has disintegrated. The automobile, the radio, TV, etc., have destroyed parental control over the young.”⁴¹ This is, in no small measure, a significant consequence.

Mandal rightly said, “In the virtual world, defining acts such as murder or sex crimes has been problematic.”⁴² The virtual world has taken captive many and thrown them into what seems to be the mental entanglement of virtual reality. Appetite for fantasies has consumed mental energies and increasingly prevented many from experiencing a “healthy thought life”⁴³ (White 1986). By implication, misusing what the virtual world offers is the underlying factor causing problems. Mental entanglement with the virtual world negatively shapes moral reasoning, resulting in an inability to sound moral judgment. However, despite the contributing factors to the decline in morality, as Smedes asserts, “Still, morality is what God expects, not just of saints and heroes, but of all common folks.”⁴⁴ Correct moral living is what every individual needs to teach, regardless of whether one is a Christian or not. Morality always indicates what is right and wrong in behaviour (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). Thus it is considered of interest to explain the social behaviour of individuals that live together in groups.

The Church as the Moral Compass

In this context, the church has a role to play in cyberspace. First, it has the function of creating content that is based on truth to counter false teachings. It can influence society by creating Bible-based content that can transform people’s lives who may not come to a physical church. Second, the church has a role in equipping believers to discern false teachings.

⁴⁰ Janzen, 16.

⁴¹ Ibid., n.p.

⁴² Sharmistha Mandal. “Brief Introduction of Virtual Reality & Its Challenges.” *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research* 4, no. 4 (2013): 304-309.

⁴³ White, Jerry. *Honesty, Morality & Conscience*. Colorado: Navpress, 1986, n.p.

⁴⁴ L. B. Smedes, *Mere Morality: What God Expects from Ordinary People*. (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), viii.



Third, the church has a role in guiding on online Christian ethics. It can provide guidelines on these matters. It equips its members with an understanding of how to live authentic Christian lives and Christian values online. It can equip its members on the impact of modern technology and the reality that “virtual words have staying power.”⁴⁵

The church should not shy away from this modern technology. Asamoah-Gyadu writes, “In the case of these African Pentecostal and charismatic churches, it is a digital space where a theology of dominion can be practiced. It is a digital arena of spiritual warfare, in which God’s presence can sanitise and diffuse the influence of Satan, and the Christian can take authority, in Christ, to dominate and influence.”⁴⁶

In addition, the church needs to translate digital space into sacred space.⁴⁷ This means influencing trends in the digital culture. As of essence,

The church needs to understand the true meaning of being church (salt and light), of expressing the gospel (holistic and redemptive) and of being in the world (people in culture and context). The church is a people called out by God from darkness into light. They are also sent back into darkness to serve as salt and light. The marketplace is where Christian witness is called for. Christian media should aim to make the gospel known in the marketplace.⁴⁸

Is it possible to redeem the secular media towards Christian values and moral virtues? We should not lose hope, “we need to communicate propositional truth, relate culturally, develop community through relationship building, use stories, and be concerned for the oppressed. We need to communicate Christ in culturally relevant and sensitive ways.”⁴⁹

The Moral Inculcation in the Virtual World

As a body of Christ with a divine mandate, the church has a special responsibility to undertake. The church has an excellent opportunity to contribute to the formation of men and women that will, in turn, impact their generation and even generations to come.⁵⁰ The nature of the church emphasises the need for balance between being and doing as a factor for moral inculcation.

⁴⁵ Annette, 272.

⁴⁶ 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 (December 2007): 228.

⁴⁷ Chow, 27.

⁴⁸ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 37.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁰ S. A. Kolawole, *Interplay of Being and Doing: A Critical Factor for Success of A Theological Educator*. In G. O. Olaniyan (Ed.), *Raising Kingdom Ministers for Christ Through Theological Educators* (pp. 47-62). (Ibadan: Baptist Press, 2017), 47.



Establishing the proper order and precedence of overdone is important, adding, “To do otherwise is to court danger and disaster.”⁵¹ The church should come to fill her irreplaceable place for moral restoration since it has both the task and the tangible response.

Morality is “primarily concerned with questions of right and wrong, the ability to distinguish between the two, and the justification of the distinction.”⁵² The task of the church in moral inculcation in the virtual world is a ministry opportunity. Indeed, it is an avenue through which the ministry of the church can be vastly spread through well-planned publicity campaigns and encouraging church members to spread the word of God. To fulfil the ministry,” the church must identify within her immediate community areas that can be tapped for ministry without decay.”⁵³ Any identified decay in the world should be seized as a ministry opportunity for the church to fulfil its ministry. Many ministries are surfacing through which the church can fulfil the Great Commission. The Great Commission instructs the Christians to move outward and make disciples by teaching them faith and initiating fellowship; therefore, as a trending issue needing substantial redress, moral inculcation in the virtual world becomes the church’s task.

To minister to the virtual world, it is paramount for the church to be fully involved in exploring the blessings of virtual reality. With this, the church can reach the nooks and crannies of the world to teach morality in God’s way. The word “inculcation” connotes “teaching,” which is the task of the church according to the Great Commission, “teaching them to obey everything...” (Matt 28:19–20). The following are suggested church tasks in moral inculcation in the virtual world.

First, human beings are imitative. What people see and hear tends to shape them. And the ideal one to exemplify morality is the church. The church must place ideal examples of their conduct and character in exploring the use of the virtual world to teach morality. Every care must be taken as redeemed persons so that nothing immoral is found in them.⁵⁴ The task of moral inculcation should first be on being examples of morality. The world must see the church as a worthy example worth emulating to teach morality.

Second, it is the church’s task to ensure that young people’s willpower is developed. The apostle Paul penned some words sympathetic to those dismayed at the failure of willpower to

⁵¹Kolawole, 48.

⁵²Rae, 12.

⁵³Ayandokun. *A Manual on Educational Administration in the Church*, 7.

⁵⁴Mangal, 127.



effect meaningful change. Thus Paul understood that as strong as our willpower may be, it is not enough to overcome all the temptations or keep our lives honouring the Lord (Rom 7:15,19). Willpower plays an essential role in sound moral reasoning. The decision of young people is the byproduct of their reasoning ability. It reflects Mangal's thought: "There is a perfect correlation between will and the character."⁵⁵ Developing strong willpower in young people avails much in guiding them against giving in to pervasive thoughts promoting a lack of morals. Hence, having learned to live a moral lifestyle, there will not be any act of moral indulgence.

Third, a person's perspective on life largely determines his attitude and behaviour. The strength of morality suggests the values and goals one upholds. The church should teach worthy ideas about life to teach morality. The church is a tremendous advantage in contributing to the formation of men and women that will positively affect the world.⁵⁶ In a similar vein, the task of developing worthy ideals about life necessitates the teaching of a sound biblical injunction. Any value promotion must not negate the authoritative word of God.

The fourth task is socialisation. Proper socialisation initiates good moral values. The saying "life begets life" means that the correlation between social development and moral inculcation is inseparable. Social development always helps one act according to society's norms and values. And it is an awareness of exemplary character.⁵⁷ Therefore, the reasons for Christians' socialising should be taught and guided adequately in all spheres of life. This will build against immoral infiltration and help reach other people for influence.

The final one is the need for political involvement. The church was commissioned to "go," but there is a need to break any boundary hindering the fulfilment of the task. There is a need for the church to be involved in government affairs and other decision-making arms of the world. It will help legislate against promoting illegal practices like porn, demonic video games, prostitution, gambling, drugging, etc. This is the most effective and productive way to fulfil the church's ministry and teach morality as representatives of God in every sector of human life. The church is called "...the salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13b); the saltiness of morality must be preserved.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Kolawole, 48.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 48.



Conclusion

The world has evolved with the emergence of virtual reality. A world of technology is pulling everything with speed. It was an advancement that brought about ease to every human endeavour in every sphere, yet with relative challenges, one of the products being moral decadence. Using Christian ethics as a panacea, the issue of moral decadence gradually jeopardising human society was addressed in line with the emergence of the virtual world. The digital platform offers an opportunity to live out Christian values and influence the virtual world. The (virtual) church can impact digital spaces by propagating ethical practices. Therefore the church ought to develop strategies to instil morality in cyberspaces. The study suggested ways in which the church can influence virtual world. The church should not shun these spaces but embrace them as opportunities for ministry.

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