



Christian gathering and the digital ecclesia: A post-COVID-19 reading of Hebrews 10:25

**Authors:**Daniel Sakitey¹ Ernest van Eck¹ **Affiliations:**

¹Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Daniel Sakitey,
dksakitey@gmail.com

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This article is a post-coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) reflection on the phrase *mē egkataleipontes tēn episunagōgēn heautōn* [not forsaking our own gathering] in Hebrews 10:25. The writer of Hebrews warned members of his faith community against the ethos of absenting themselves from their own meetings, citing the eschatological consequences of such a habit. The author's choice of *episunagōgē*, which is the object of the neglect, may have been influenced by the unhealthy relationship between 1st-century Christianity and Judaism, especially its place of worship – the synagogue [*sunagōgē*]. In translating *episunagōgē* into Ewe, translators chose *fufefewo* [places of gathering] and *takpewo* [places of meeting]. However, *fufefewo* and *takpewo* are Ewe renditions of *sunagōgē* and not *episunagōgē*. These Ewe renditions reinforce the traditional Christian understanding of *episunagōgē* as a place of worship. Employing a combination of exegetical and mother tongue hermeneutics as its methodologies, the article chronicled how the traditional interpretation and application of Hebrews 10:25 throughout the epochs of Christianity, was challenged by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and makes recommendations for the future of Ewe-Ghanaian ecclesiology which is the focus of this article. The COVID-19 pandemic that devastated the economy of nations and human lives also disrupted Christian worship, it temporarily locked down churches, and compelled them to celebrate Easter – the most important event on the Christian calendar – virtually. This ecclesiastical experience, which deprived Ewe-Ghanaian worshippers of their freedom of fellowshiping together and put to the test their conservative ecclesiology, exposed the church to a new paradigm in its liturgical life and ministry. This article, therefore, views the digital worship space as the new normal in Ewe-Ghanaian ecclesiology and recommends that the church in Ghana must integrate digital worship into its liturgical culture and invest into digital infrastructure that would serve the liturgical needs of its members both at home and abroad.

Contribution: The article contributes to the academic knowledge on the interpretation of Hebrews 10:25, re-emphasising the importance of context sensitivity in biblical hermeneutics in African Christianity.

Keywords: Christian gathering; Christian liturgy; Ewe translations; COVID-19 pandemic; digital ecclesia.

Introduction

This article interprets Hebrews 10:25 in light of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that locked churches down and prevented them from gathering to observe the most essential activity in its liturgical calendar – Easter. A pre-COVID-19 reading of the text exhorts the 1st-century Christian community to be physically and regularly present at church meetings in order to prevent what the writer of Hebrews feared might happen to them – apostasy and its consequence of missing out on the *Parousia*. Apparently, in the author's faith community, the undue delay in the second coming of Christ has led to the waning of the faith, hope and love of some members of the community. Thus, the warning not to forsake the assembly [*mē egkataleipontes tēn episunagōgēn heautōn*] was one that sought to guard members of the community against defection from the faith they profess as they await the *Parousia*. The church has throughout its epochs emphasised the importance of Christian gathering and measured the commitment of its members by how they frequent their church. Those who are habitual absentees are perceived as lacking commitment. The traditional Christian understanding of *episunagōgē* as a place of worship is further reinforced in all four existing Ewe Bibles, where translators replaced *episunagōgē* [the act of gathering] with *sunagōgēn* [Jewish place of meeting]. What happened

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during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, has challenged this traditional understanding of *episunagōgē* and makes the case that in-person Christian gatherings could be affected by natural phenomena such as the outbreak of epidemic diseases, which may force churches to consider virtual gatherings as an alternative to physical assembly. This article reflects on how an Ewe-Ghanaian church exercised its faith by taking advantage of digital technology to commemorate Easter during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article employed a combination of exegetical and mother tongue hermeneutical approaches to explore how the early Christian interpretation of Hebrews 10:25 was challenged by the outbreak of COVID-19 (Ekem 2007:77; Fee & Strauss 2003:23–31; Harris 2002:111,114–115; Kuwornu-Adjaottor 2012:11–15; Porter & Clarke 2007:3–18). Based on the experience of virtual services during the pandemic, where the Eucharist was administered virtually and offerings collected through digital platforms such as mobile money and electronic banking, the article came to the conclusion that the digital worship space is the new normal in Ewe-Ghanaian Christian ecclesiology. It then recommends that the church in Ghana would have to reconfigure its liturgical structures to leverage on the prevailing digital environment and create a sustainable worship space as an alternative to the traditional system of worship.

The ethos of abandoning corporate worship in Hebrews

Hebrews 10:25 is viewed as ‘the strongest indication of the concrete problem that Hebrews as a whole is designed to address’ (Attridge 1989:283,290; Long 2011:165–168). It is a warning not to forsake, abandon or neglect the assembly of the early Christian community [*mē egkatalēipontes tēn episunagōgēn heautōn*]. This warning is occasioned by the fact that it has become the ethos of some members of the worshipping community not just refusing to come to church, but actually abandoning the assembly (Westcott 1955:325). As to why they do not come to church, the author did not tell us. This has led to speculation among scholars with some postulating that the habitual absenteeism of these members of the worshipping community may be attributed to ‘indifference and apathy’ motivated by ‘fear of recognition by outsiders in a time of persecution, or by disappointment in the delay of the *Parousia*, or by some other acute concern’ such as ‘preoccupation with business affairs’¹ (Bruce 1964:253–254; Cockerill 2012:479; Ellingworth 1993:528; Lane 1991:290; Pfitzer 1997:144,146). The author’s fear was that this phenomenon poses a threat to ‘the corporate life of the congregation and almost certainly was a prelude to apostasy on the part of those who were separating themselves from the assembly’ (Johnson 2006:261; Lane 1991:290; Pink 2003:606,607,608). It is therefore axiomatic that the warning not to ‘forsake the assembly of one another’, as Pink points out, ‘was not mere occasionally absenting themselves from the Christian churches, but a deliberate, fixed and final

departure from them’ ... ‘a total and final abandonment of the public profession of Christianity is what is here warned against’ (Pink 2003:607,608). The phenomenon of apostasy is common in almost all New Testament writings, especially in the Pauline corpus.² It betrays the disappointment that characterised the unnecessary delay in the *Parousia* and its attendant loss of faith, hope and love among members of the Christian community. The habit of some members of the faith community abandoning or absenting themselves from the assembly has eschatological implications; such members and all who are tempted to join them stand the risk of missing the *Parousia* (Bruce 1964:255; Buchanan 1972:169–170; Cockerill 2012:480; Westcott 1955:326). Thus, by provoking each other to good works (*kala erga*, not *agatha erga*),³ that is, works that affect the lives of others through continuous exhortation of one another, the author is certain of his faith community not missing the *Parousia* (Brown 1982:187; Cockerill 2012:481).

There is so much importance attached to Christian assembly throughout the epochs of Christianity to the extent that when absenteeism from such gathering becomes the habit of church members, it raises concerns and questions their level of commitment (Ellingworth 1993:528). Thus, the level of commitment of church members is measured by their punctuality and regularity at church. The issue of habitual absenteeism continues to be an issue in African Christianity in general and Ewe-Ghanaian Christianity in particular. However, to consider such absenteeism as departure or abandonment of the public profession of one’s faith may be farfetched. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that plagued the world has challenged the traditional interpretation of selected Bible passages, including Hebrews 10:25, especially on the phrase, *mē egkatalēipontes tēn episunagōgēn heautōn* (literally, not forsaking the gathering of our own). The pandemic led to the imposition of restrictions on all forms of social activities, including Christian gatherings and challenged the church’s traditional understanding of *episunagōgē*, and forced it to accept virtual meetings as an alternative form of Christian gathering. It is this ecclesiastical experience from the perspective of the Ewe-Ghanaian worshipping community that this article brings to bear on the interpretation of Hebrews 10:25.

Ewe translations and theologies of *episunagōgē*

The Greek word used by the writer of Hebrews to render the assembly of his faith community is *episunagōgē*. The word appears on an ancient Greek stele as *tas episunagōgas* [the collecting] with its noun denoting the act of collecting ‘with little distinction from *sunagōgē* [synagogue]’ which meaning has evolved from assemblies, congregations, Jewish place of worship, liturgical meetings, to meeting places for Christians (Bromiley 1977:840–841,843). In the Septuagint, *episunagōgē* is used to describe ‘the eschatological gathering and restoration of Israel from

2. See 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 1:18–20; 2 Timothy 4:10.

3. The good works (*kala erga*) used here, suggests works that have effects on others and it is to be distinguished from *agatha erga* which is works that are essentially good (Westcott 1955:325).

1. William Lane posits that in the early 2nd century in Rome, people were preoccupied with the affairs of their businesses, a situation which may have accounted for the habitual absenteeism of some members of the author’s community.

dispersion' which helped shape the eschatology of the only two New Testament books where the term is used – Hebrews and Thessalonians (Bromiley 1977:842).⁴ The author of Hebrews' choice of *episunagōgē* may be informed by the unhealthy relationship that had existed between the primitive church and Judaism and its place of worship – the synagogue.⁵ This notwithstanding, *sunagōgē* became synonymous with the liturgical meetings and the meeting places of Christians. In other instances, the word was used together with *ekklesia* to mean gathering and congregation, respectively (Bromiley 1977:840–841).⁶

When translating *episunagōgē* into Ewe, the Ewe translators rendered it as *fufefewo* in the 1931 translation of the Ewe Bible [Biblia] and *takpefewo* in the 1990 translation of the New Testament in Ewe (Nubabla Yeye La) and 2006 (Agbenya La), and the 2010 translations of the Ewe Bible [Biblia]. Whereas *fufefewo* denotes places of gathering, from *fofu* [gather] and *fewo* [places], *takpefewo*, on the other hand, literally conveys the idea of places of joining heads together, from *ta* [head], *kpe* [join] and *fewo* [places]. Thus, *episunagōgē* is rendered *fufefewo* [places gathering] or *takpefewo* [places of meeting]. Although both terms suggest a place where people converge, the former is generic in meaning while the latter conveys a functional rendition. However, *episunagōgēn* is defined as 'the act of being gathered together or assembled' or 'the corporate body so formed', as compared to *sunagōgē*, which has evolved from being a Jewish place of gathering to a Christian meeting place (Attridge 1989:290; Bromiley 1977:837–840; Mounce 1993:210). Essentially, the Greek translation of *fufefewo* and *takpefewo*, is *sunagōgē*; *episunagōgē*, on the other hand, should be rendered *fufefo* or *takpekpe*. It appears Ewe translators, being conscious of the evolution of *sunagōgē*, chose to substitute *episunagōgē* with *sunagōgē*. But at the time Hebrews was written, the early Christians may have been driven out of the temple and the synagogues hence the author's choice of the secular term *episunagōgē*. On the meaning of *mē egkataleipontes tēn episunagōgēn heautōn*, Chrysostom, one of the patristic commentators, states in his homily on Hebrews that, '[the writer of Hebrews] knew that much strength arises from being together and assembling together' (Kebble NPNF V1-14:455). His proof-text exposition of Hebrews 10:25 points to the purpose of the *episunagōgēn* – to strengthen the faith community spiritually as it invokes the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the object of their worship. Moreover, the *episunagōgē* bring about unity, love and improved prayer life.⁷ These are examples of the *kala erga* [good works] that the

4. See 2 Maccabees 2:7f.; 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

5. The primitive church used *sunagōgē* to denote a building, and this is evident in the polemics of church fathers such as Justin the Martyr, Origen and Tertullian who view Jewish synagogues in a negative light, describing it as *oikos daimonōn* (house of demons) and *spēlaion tōn lēstōn* (cave of robbers) because of Judaism's imprecatory remarks against Christianity and its role in Christian persecution. Christians were warned against attending Jewish synagogues and those who disobeyed such warnings were excommunicated and anathematized (Bromiley 1977:837–839). The early church was also involved in the burning of synagogues. They attacked Jewish places of worship, influenced imperial legislation against the Jews, forbidding the rebuilding or repairs of their place of worship, and forcibly converted synagogues into churches (Bromiley 1977:839).

6. Post-apostolic fathers such as Ignatius, Dionysius of Alexandria, Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria, Justin the Martyr have all expressed these in their works, where Christians completely disassociated from the term but later found themselves adopting it (Bromiley 1977:840).

7. Chrysostom used the following texts to proof his point on the meaning and function of *episunagogen*: Matthew 18:20, John 17:11, and Acts 4:32, 7:5.

author of Hebrews encouraged his faith community to be practising in readiness for the *Parousia*.

Christian liturgical traditions

Christian liturgy (Greek *leitourgia*) has evolved from its secular usage as public service to its religious usage as service to God (Ernest 1994:378–384; Kittel 1967:215–229; Krouse 2007:777). The Septuagint translators rendered it as public worship of Israel. In the New Testament, however, it carries a variety of meanings such as public sacrifice in the temple, a collection for the poor, sacrificial service for others or for mission. The author of Hebrews also used the term to mean the heavenly worship or ministry of Jesus and Mosaic worship (Ernest 1994:382; Krouse 2007:777).⁸ The verbal forms include 'communal prayer in preparation for missionary ministry', 'collection for the poor' or 'sacrifices of the Mosaic Law' (Krouse 2007:777).⁹ Another noun form of the term, which appears in New Testament writings, is *leitourgos*, and it is rendered variously as public minister, public servant or cultic priest (Krouse 2007:777).¹⁰ Thus, liturgy, in the Christian sense, is service, ministry, worship, offering, sacrifice. The orthodox Christian traditions understand liturgy as either 'the sanctification of man through God and service of man towards God in Christ' or 'salvation given by God primarily in the word of Scripture' ... and:

[A]n interaction between word and cult which is expressed in different word form ... ranging from biblical reading and sermon, song and prayer, the word in the form of bread and wine ... (Kranemann 2023:7)

Liturgy is understood in Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions as 'a spirit-led event; individuals are to experience themselves as being taken hold of by the Spirit of God' (Kranemann 2023:9). Liturgical elements such as 'glossolalia and prophecy, as well as healing prayer and falling down in religious ecstasy (slain in the Spirit)', have become part and parcel of Christian worship in popular Christianity. Even more challenging to all these liturgical traditions is the introduction of digital worship occasioned by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. The idea of virtual worship service and celebration of the Eucharist virtually was hitherto not conceivable by any liturgical tradition. It has shaken the foundation of Christian worship and challenged the traditional understanding of Christian liturgy. The church would therefore have to come to terms with the reality of the virtual worship space and be responsive by developing a liturgical model for it.

Ewe-Ghanaian corporate worship and the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic

The Ewe-Ghanaian Christian liturgical life is organised around 52 lectionary weeks divided into six liturgical

8. See Luke 1:23; 2 Corinthians 9:12; Philippians 2:17, 30; Hebrews 8:6, 9:21.

9. See Acts 13:2; Romans 15:27; Hebrews 10:11.

10. See also Romans 13:6; Philippians 2:25; Hebrews 1:7; 8:2.

seasons, from Advent to Trinity. The current liturgy is a revision of the 19th-century German missionary liturgy (Sakitey 2018:143). Published in 2016, it serves the Ewe Christian community in Ghana and Togo, replacing the rigid missionary liturgy originally published in 1877 by the German Protestant Church. This earlier liturgy was translated into Ewe by North German missionaries and their native students (Sakitey 2018:142). It was revised 50 years later and practised for 89 years until 2016, when the new edition was published. A typical Sunday worship service in the missionary liturgy, for instance, comprises hymns, prayer, sermon and benediction. The liturgy forbids singing of local Ewe-Ghanaian choruses, clapping of hands, drumming and dancing (Sakitey 2018:143). It was not until the leadership of the church was handed over to the natives, coupled with pressure from Pentecostalism and Charismatism in the latter part of the 20th century, that the use of local and contemporary music was introduced into the liturgical life of the church. Currently, the church holds two services every Sunday in urban areas with the first starting at 7:00 and lasting for about 2 h. It is held in English for the second generation of Ewe-Ghanaian Christians who are gradually losing touch with their mother tongue and for those who, by virtue of their busy work schedules, would prefer early morning and a short service to the elaborate and long one. The second service, which is held in the mother tongue (Ewe), starts at 9:00 and lasts for about 3 h except on the day of the Eucharist, baptism and special occasions such as fundraising, anniversary celebrations, commissioning and ordination of pastors, which may last for about 5 h. Children are not left out in these church services as their service runs concurrently with that of the adults. The order of service for the adults begins with a procession of choir and clergy and ends with recession (Liturgi 2016:102; Sakitey 2018:142–144). The church service is led by a liturgist who leads the congregation to sing, pray and read the lections to prepare the hearts of the congregants for the homily. When it comes to offertory, bowls are placed in front of the chancel, and congregants queue to give amid the singing of local choruses accompanied by traditional drumming and dancing, and the waving of handkerchiefs. The liturgy of the Sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist) is participatory with call-and-response formula interspersed with drumming and singing. The elements of the Eucharist are blessed and received in queues with bare hands. The cups used for the communion wine are washed and reused in subsequent communion services. During Baptism, hands are placed on the candidates while blessings are being pronounced on them. Every church service ends with intercessory prayer, followed by the Lord's prayer, benediction, closing hymn and recession. The socialisation that follows after the end of the church service is characterised by all kinds of meetings, transactions, shaking of hands, embracing, buying and selling, sharing, making new friends and visitations, etcetera. It is against this backdrop that one would agree with the writer of Hebrews and Chrysostom on the important role of gathering in the liturgical life of every community of faith, that is, encouraging each member of the faith community to be strong spiritually, remain united, love one another and pray together.

The impact of COVID-19 on Ewe-Ghanaian corporate worship

The COVID-19 pandemic that hit the world in the last quarter of 2019 affected the economies of nations and disrupted the liturgical calendars of churches, including the Ewe-Ghanaian church. Ghana recorded its first case of the virus on 12 March 2020, resulting in the imposition of a ban on social and economic activities, including church activities, on 22 March 2020. This was followed by the imposition of a partial lockdown on Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi on 30 March 2020 for two weeks. It was not until 05 June 2020, when churches were allowed to re-open their doors with a hundred (100) members in attendance, a worship duration of an hour, and the observation of all COVID-19 protocols.¹¹ The worship time was, however, extended to 2 h with an unlimited number of members in attendance from 01 August 2020. For the first time in the history of the church in Ghana, a ban was placed on church activities for 20 out of the 52 weeks of the church's liturgical calendar (Nsiah & Mensah 2023:6–8; Evangelical Presbyterian Church 2021:14,66). Again, this is the first time in the church's liturgical life where all church activities, especially regular Sunday worship service and the celebration of the Eucharist, were temporarily suspended. Corporate worship, where believers gather in magnificent church buildings and worship amid singing, drumming, dancing and socialisation, came to an end abruptly. The Easter season, which commemorates the passion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and were scheduled to take place from Good Friday (10 April 2020) to Easter Sunday (12 April 2020), occurred during the lockdown, and compelled the church to observe them for the first time in its history, virtually (Asamoah-Gyadu 2020:1,27,44,62). This disruption in our communal worship practices was experienced by the Christian worship community all over the world, creating what Roszak and Orłowski describe as a liturgy of distance (Roszak & Orłowski 2024:38–53). The euphoria that greets the celebration of Easter – the most important event on the Christian calendar – was shattered by the global pandemic. The corporate faith of worshippers was put to the test with many Christians questioning the sovereignty of God. Thus, the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian community could not fathom why the Sovereign God should allow the powers that be to lockdown church activities and imposed restrictions on the celebration of Easter which is the fulcrum around which the Christian faith revolves (Aryeh & Molob 2023:4). During the pandemic, lives were lost, hopes dashed and the faith of many began to wane. Although congregants were eager to worship together, it was absolutely impossible. The pandemic also impacted the general administration of the church; the church's finances dropped significantly, affecting the living conditions of church agents and their families. It also impacted the economic lives of church members and their households, especially the poor and needy (Osei et al. 2021:342; Osei-Kuffour et al. 2022:10–12). It was also during this period that private burials were introduced into our

¹¹The COVID-19 protocols include social distancing, handwashing, use of alcohol-based hand sanitisers and wearing of face masks (see UNFPA Ghana, 2020:x).

liturgical vocabulary. The extravagant expenditures that used to characterise the organisation of funerals in our part of the world gave way to private burials under the supervision of public health officials. The number of months the dead spend in the mortuary before interment, with its attendant profligate expenditures, became a thing of the past. Bereaved families were compelled to allow public health officials to take over the burial of their loved ones who passed on as a result of the Covid-19 virus. This form of burial is reminiscent of biblical burial practices, where the dead were wrapped in cloth and buried in less than 24 h after their demise.¹² This burial form compromised the dignity that is accorded to the dead and challenged our belief in the afterlife. On the other hand, the fear of death and the uncertainties about our eternal state shifted the minds of many from temporal life to eternal life. Thus, the reality of the *Parousia* dawned on everyone during the lockdown, and the exhortation by the author of Hebrews to his faith community not to forsake their own assembly and focus on *kala erga* activities as they await the *Parousia* became relevant to the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian life.

The digital ecclesia: A new paradigm in Ewe-Ghanaian corporate worship

On Sunday, 22 March 2020, when the ban on all social and economic activities, including Sunday church service, was announced by the President of the Republic, it became obvious that the corporate worship life of the Ewe-Ghanaian church was going to be affected, and so it would have to prepare to embrace the new normal. Some congregations had already created social media (Facebook) accounts as an evangelisation tool to increase visibility and numerical strength prior to the imposition of the ban on all forms of social gatherings. These congregations were initially not tech savvy, but they quickly had to organise themselves in readiness for the new liturgical life – virtual service – since the two existing church services, which were being held at 07:00 and 09:00, had folded up due to the pandemic. Information about the virtual service was disseminated through all social media platforms created by the various congregations. When church members woke up on Sunday morning, they washed down, dressed up, had breakfast, took their Bibles and hymn books, sat in front of their phones or computers, and participated in the online worship service. The elaborate liturgical order, which used to run for hours, has given way to an abridged one which runs within an hour. Those who could not participate in the live online service watched recorded versions at their leisure. Audio recordings were also made available for members who do not have smartphones. For the first time in the life of the church, the offertory was collected electronically, that is, through electronic banking and mobile money transactions. Those who could not give through electronic means brought their offerings to the church premises in person. During the Eucharist, packed and sealed communion wine and wafers were distributed to church members on the eve of the Eucharist and administered online on the day of the

Eucharist. These were the innovative ways the church assembled its members for fellowship until the COVID-19 restrictions were finally lifted from the 21st week of the liturgical year. The traditional way of baptism also changed from affusion or aspersion to the spraying of water on the candidates. The most important events on the Christian calendar – Good Friday and Easter Sunday (10 April and 12 April) – were completely locked down and observed virtually. The pandemic shaped the church's corporate prayers and sermon delivery. Health and healing became the main themes in almost every prayer topic and homily (Aryeh & Molob 2023:5–6). The physical health of everyone became so vital that messages of material prosperity were no longer relevant. All sermons delivered throughout the period focused on themes of encouragement, persistence, perseverance, love, hope, faith, kindness, eternal life, et cetera. This unpleasant ecclesiastical experience, occasioned by a global pandemic, and denying church members of fellowshiping in person, did not only challenge the church's traditional worship form, but also exposed it to an innovation in its liturgical life and pastoral care. It also challenged the church's conservative ecclesiology and introduced it to a new paradigm in ministry. Thus, COVID-19 questioned our traditional understanding of Hebrews 10:25 and makes a case that Christian gatherings could be impacted by natural phenomena such as outbreaks of epidemic diseases. The article then views the digital worship space as the new normal in a post-COVID-19 ecclesiology and recommends that the church in Ghana, in particular and Africa as a whole must reconfigure its liturgical structures to leverage the digital environment and create a sustainable virtual worship space as an alternative to the traditional system of worship. The implications are that the church would have to embrace a new time management culture to reduce long hours spent in worshipping God, adopt an electronic offering (E-Offering) system and teach its members, especially the working population, to pay tithes monthly through their bank accounts and mobile money wallets. Furthermore, some church activities such as weekly Bible studies and prayer and other church meetings would have to be organised virtually to increase participation in order to save time and other resources.

Conclusion

The interpretation of the Judeo-Christian scriptures has always been driven by the context of the various authors and their faith communities. The context within which the writer of Hebrews used the phrase *mē egkataleipontes tēn episunagōgēn eautōn* is the habit of absenteeism that has bedevilled the author's faith community and its dire eschatological consequences. The author of Hebrews' choice of the secular term *episunagōgē* in place of the religious, *sunagōgē*, may have been informed by the fact that at the time of writing to the Hebrews, the Christian community had dissociated itself from Judaism and everything that had to do with its place of worship – the synagogue. This notwithstanding, the term *sunagōgē* has evolved from its initial meaning as a Jewish

12. See Acts 5:6,10; Matthew 27:59; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53; John 11:44, 19:40.

place of worship to a Christian place of meeting. The translation of *episunagōgē* in all existing Ewe-Ghanaian Bibles as *fufefewo* and *takpefewo*, changes the meaning from *episunagōgē* to *sunagōgē*. Ewe translators may have been conscious of the evolution of *sunagōgē* from exclusively a Jewish place of worship to a liturgical meeting place of Christians, which may have influenced their rendering of *episunagōgē* as *fufefewo*. The experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic that shut church doors and denied its members access to their places of worship have challenged the Ewe-Ghanaian church's traditional understanding of 'gathering' or 'church' and exposed it to what this article refers to as the digital ecclesia. This article argues that, based on the experiences of the pandemic, during which Easter and the Eucharist were celebrated virtually, the church must develop an ecclesiology that responds to this new paradigm of corporate worship. The church in Ghana and Togo should integrate digital worship into its liturgical culture and invest in the necessary digital infrastructure to meet the liturgical needs of its members both at home and in the diaspora. As a result, the church will need to adopt electronic giving methods (E-offering) and extend virtual services to include weekly Bible studies, prayer and other church meetings to enhance participation and inclusiveness.

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