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The Rise of the Digital Neighbor: A Theoretical Concept for Mission Renewal in the Digital Age

Introduction

Mission in the twenty-first century is largely an urban experience. Since mission is always relational, an underlying concern is how does God and those Christians who engage in mission with him connect with and transform communities. Missiology has attempted to answer such enquiries by conceptualizing in terms of bounded, more or less homogeneous groups of people who are organized around linguistic/cultural people groups, geographical location (i.e., islands, villages, downtown cities, inner cities, suburbia), and religions (i.e., Buddhism, Islam, unreligious/Secularism). However, with the technological revolution, particularly digital and mobile communication technologies in the last decades, these well-defined boundaries have either collapsed or become porous, allowing continuous global cultural crisscrossing. In this new global condition, it has been noted that missiological thinking focused on groups and locality becomes less important as more of the world becomes embedded in the global informational culture (Bolger 2007:188).

This paper deals with shifts in the concept of neighborhoods and communities. I propose that the field of social network studies is useful to aid missiological considerations in contemporary global societies. Furthermore, I argue for the thesis that current social shifts require mission studies to move from notions of homogeneous or quasi-homogenous geographically bounded groups, neighborhoods, and communities towards giving attention to the networks of networked individuals—the digital neighbor. The underlying question addressed is, How does this redefinition of community foster mission renewal in the digital age? Answering this question supplies rudimentary material to build a theoretical concept of mission based on a new identity, place, and modes of relationships in a digital-technological-saturated age.

In the first section, I will explore two social network concepts: a network society and networked individualism. They will ground the conversation describing contemporary global society. The second section will probe contemporary shifts in notions of neighborhood and community. In the third section, I will ask, "Who is my neighbor?" in the digital age, using the analogy from the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. In addition to social science and theological considerations, I will add a missiological dimension to help redefine and expand the concept of neighbor by expanding it to include one's digital neighbor. The conceptual frame of the digital neighbor provides resources for missiological development and engagement in the digital age.

Contemporary Society as a Network Society

One of those in the forefront of thinking about the global urban society in the twenty-first century is the Spaniard sociologist Manuel Castells. In his trilogy *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (1996:55; 2000a; 2004c) he argues that the rise of the *Network Society* is a new global social structure. He defines a *Network Society* as "a society whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies" (2004a:3). The difference between contemporary society and previous ones is not the presence or absence of networked social structures, but the presence and mediation of computers within economic and social relationships. Following Kuhn's notion of paradigms (1962), Castells points to the emergence of a new digital information/communication paradigm impacting the contemporary network society. Together with previous revolutions in transportation and communication, computer mediated communication technologies provide the means for the reshaping of human interaction in which time and space are redefined. Unpacking this definition and exploring key elements of social networks will clarify their usefulness in missiological thinking. The task is to better define social structures, networks, nodes, flows, and information/communication.

The largest frame in his definition is the social structure in which people are organized in relation to production, consumption, reproduction, experience, and power—all of it happening within and codified by culture (Castells 2004a:3). Such structures vary according to cultures, meaning that although certain common characteristics are observed, social structures are multiple. In other words, different societies will have equally valid ways of organizing themselves. In general, contemporary societies exist in tension between local and global forces with all being influencers and influenced.

The next level of organization within a given social structure is the network, which refers to the many—*ad infinitum*—relationships within each social structure. Networks are clusters of relationships. Each network has a collection of nodes that interconnect the networks. Therefore, a network is a set of interconnected nodes.

The node is central to understanding the model (figure 1). Nodes hold the social network web together. In practical terms, a node is an actor (Hanneman and Riddle 2005) that can be a person, organization, government, stock exchange, national council of ministers, student, a clandestine lab, Christian denomination, a local church, to name a few. Nodes vary in value, increasing or decreasing according to their ability to absorb additional relevant information and process it effectively. Yet, independent of their value, all nodes are important for the performance of the network and can be reconfigured, deleted, or added to according to constant changes of power within the network. Each social context will have a variety of types of nodes, some unique, others more general.

The work of the network is to process flows, which are streams of information or communication circulating between the channels that connect the nodes. Once basic networks—as in figure 1—are connected through their flow of information/ communication, a complex web of social network relations emerge (figure 2). The larger circles in figure 2 indicate the most important nodes in which and through which information is stored and processed. The larger flows (curved connections) also inform the larger traffic of information/communication being exchanged. Networks are dynamic in nature. They are open structures, with no center, constantly changing, and innovating (Castells 2000b:501). With different levels of awareness, most urban dwellers are embedded in a variety of network types as people participate in a digital-base connected society.

Despite the wide influence of the network society concept, an important critique has been raised concerning excessive attention given to digital technology (Giddens 1996). British sociologist Frank Webster charged it with technological determinism (2006:123). Castells has recognized such criticism and made significant efforts to declare explicitly his rejection of technological determinism and the notion that technology cannot be view as independent from social contexts (2004b:xvii). However, his very definition of a network society—"networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies"—seem to allow such a critique. Observation and empirical research suggest that a contemporary network society is not limited to computer powered and mediated relations (Campbell 2005, Campbell and Lövheim 2011, Lenhart and Madden 2007, Wellman 2001b). Offline relations are also constitutive of a network society in which online and offline are not perceived as separate realms, rather they are complementary as an online-offline reality.
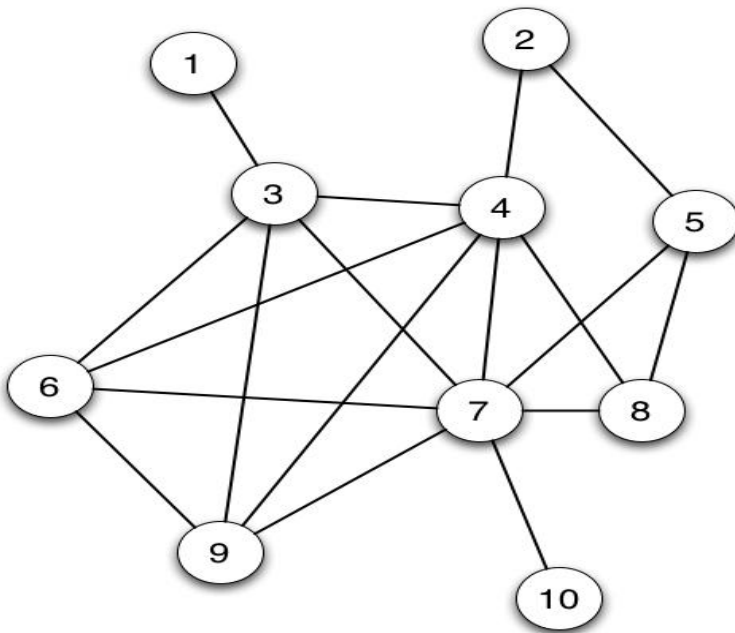
Figure 1. Basic network of nodes.

With these qualifications, I find in Rainie and Wellman a complementary concept that is helpful to zoom in to a network society to the level of relationships in which mission engagement happens. They suggest that the technological development of computer-communication networks has contributed to the rise of what he calls network individualism (Wellman 2001a:2), which is the new social operating system within a network society (Rainie and Wellman 2012). They argues that society has experienced a shift from the household and workplace as primary units of activities to the individual as a unit of activity within a network.

This shift has been afforded by the deployment of digital and wireless technologies. In other words, home and workplace used to be the portal of communication through which individuals were contacted. With the rise of digital and wireless networks, the home and work place gave way to the individual as the portal of communication. Nowadays a home phone number has mostly lost its function, having been replaced by personal, individual cell phone numbers.

Figure 2. Social network constellation. Taken from http://geocachinglibrarian .com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/MLA-out-degree.png.

> It is almost a given in our society that people will have a cell phone number. Recent Pew Research reveals that 84% of American house-hold own at least one smartphone and some 18% are considered "hyper-connected" households, with 10 or more online connected de-vices. Over half of all households no longer own [a] landline/home phone connection. (Olmstead 2017)

The technologies referred to by Wellman are encapsulated in the con-cept of new media described by Heidi Campbell, scholar of new media, religion, and digital culture, as "that generation of media which emerges on the contemporary landscape and offers new opportunities for social interaction, information sharing, and mediated communication" (2010:9). Following Campbell, I will use new media to refer to a variety of inter-woven contemporary communication technologies and devices such as the Internet, social media, smartphones, streaming, online gaming, virtual reality, the web, etc.

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Through the diffusion of new media, the individual assumes a new level of centrality in a network society. Again, it is not the case that complex social networks are anything new, but the advent of new media allows them to be "the dominant force of social organization" (Wellman 2001a:2). While the concept is useful, Wellman's choice of calling it network individualism can be misleading. Individualism is an excessively loaded word. It communicates the notions of social withdrawal and lack of collaborative intention. The problematic nature of the term, individualism, can be perceived in the conversational work by Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Itō, and Danah Boyd, in which the term creates the following reactions: Boyd asks, "How do we engender public-good outcomes when our tools steer us towards individualism?" She continues, "The notion of 'networked individualism' . . . is super convenient, but it is also seriously narcissistic." In response to her comments, Jenkins calls the concept "paradoxical" and "oxymoronic" (Jenkins et al. 2015:22).

In my view, the strength of Wellman's argument is weakened by the use of loaded terminology. Yet, further exploration through his work reveals that his emphasis is on the shift towards a society largely influenced by individual agencies through direct access, at any time or place, to information and communication. Not just access, but also the ability to interact in terms of consumption and production within networks. Wellman has referred elsewhere to network individualism as "individualized networks" (Wellman 2001b), which seems preferable. In addition, he declares explicitly that this new world is not the world of "autonomous and increasingly isolated individualists. Rather, it is the world according to the connected Me, where people armed with potent technology tools can extend their networks far beyond what was possible in the past" (Rainie and Wellman 2012:19). In short, people are functioning more as connected individuals and less as group members.

In this section I have described what I believe is a valid and helpful way to explain contemporary global society as a network society permeated by the power of new media. Digital-mobile communication technologies have created such a social transformation that urban conglomerates such as Los Angeles, Tokyo, Dubai, São Paulo, Beijing, London, Beirut, Nairobi, Manila, Tehran, and Lagos allow people to function in online-offline networks. This is the milieu in which Christian mission is engaged. With this set of concepts, I next ask the question, How does such a reality reshape notions of community and neighborhood?

Shifts in Notions of Community and Neighborhood in the Network Society

In 1979 Wellman published an important article entitled *The Community Question* in which he examines the sociological concern for declining

community in neighborhoods in North America. He researched a group of 845 adult residents of East York, Toronto. He suggested that most sociologists researching urban contexts were functioning within a paradigm that took neighborhoods to be local areas marked by physical boundaries, much as missiologists do, as pointed above in the introduction. Communal interaction and sentiments in the old system were measured, assuming that an urban population's primary ties were organized by geographical locality. Consequently, when studies reported a decline of primary ties within certain neighborhoods it drove the logical conclusion towards the notion of community decay. Wellman, however, took a different approach that informed by the concept of social networks through which attention was given to relationship ties instead of solidarities. The data revealed an alternative reality. "The great majority of East Yorkers' intimate networks are not organized into local solidarities. Few have more than one intimate who resides in their own neighborhood" (1979:1214). Such a conclusion led Wellman to describe a new emerging—at the time—conceptualization of urban social arrangements. He proposed that while neighborhoods are still important, community has moved beyond geographical boundaries and the physical neighborhood is only one aspect of a person's community. The data suggests a "ramified, loosely bounded web of primary ties, rather than a aggregation of densely knit, tightly bounded solidary communities" (1216). These "networks of networks connects individuals, clusters, and collectivities in complex ways" (1226). It is also important to notice that Wellman's conclusions are pre-digital new media.

What was happening in the 1970s in the urban scene and detected by Wellman's research, was, in great measure, the impact of the transportation revolution and widespread ownership of family/personal cars that facilitated mobility beyond geographical neighborhoods.[1] Another factor working in tandem with increased mobility was the technological revolution with household telephones. In the 1960s over 40% of Americans had no telephones in their homes; however, by 1990 that figure dropped to 5.2% (United States Census Bureau). This allowed for speedy and expansive communication beyond geographical boundaries. Both technologies are responsible for the spatial expansion of intimate networks from a particular geographical neighborhood to metropolitan webs and beyond. By the 1970s, Wellman reports that telephone contacts were more frequent between intimate networks than in-person contacts (1979:1213).

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[1] US government data suggests that between the decades of 1960s and 1980s, the number of households owning three or more vehicles grew from 2.5% to 17.5% of the population. In the same period, the percentage of Americans who owned at least one vehicle grew from 78.5% to 87.1% (Oak Ridge National Laboratory, 2019, Tennessee).

Wellman suggests that in 22 years, with the raise of new media, that networks have become the new dominant system of social organization in North America (2001a:2). He uses the metaphor of "little boxes" as the starting point to explain the social shift underway. The metaphor is taken from activist and songwriter Malvena Reynold's 1963 song in which she applies the expression to refer to the houses of American suburban middle-class. He incorporates the image to denote people who are socially and cognitively encapsulation in homogeneous unit groups. This is how Wellman describes people's lives within the conceptualization of the little-box social model:

> They work in a discrete work group within a single organization; they live in a household in a neighborhood; they are members of one or two kinship groups; and they participate in structured voluntary organizations: churches, bowling leagues. . . . These groups often have boundaries for inclusion and structured, hierarchical, organization: supervisors and employees, parents and children, pastors and church-goers, organizational executives and members. In such a society, each interaction is in its place: one group at a time. (2001a:1)

Figure 3 helps to explain how this historical paradigm shift happened or is happening. In the little-box social model, people used to visit each other through a door-to-door movement. Communities were limited to physical neighborhoods or villages and most relationships happened within such geographical constraints and rarely went outside them. Then, there was a transition to *glocalization*—local and global interactions. (Robertson 1995:25-44). Relationships transitioned from settlements (geographical neighborhood) to the household and workgroup as the primary units of activity, driven by transportation (family/personal cars) and communication marvels (home/work/ telephones). Already during this stage, it was noticed that "most North Americans have little interpersonal connection with their neighborhoods" (Wellman 2001a:4). Then with the rise of new media, a profound shift took place from Place-to-Place based relationships to Person-to-Person interactions (Wellman 2005:55). "It is I-alone that is reachable wherever I am" (Wellman 2001a, 5).

Throughout these transitions, geographically located neighborhoods became increasingly diminished in importance and influence as communities based on individual networks. Most readers will relate to this notion since the new media accounts and mobile numbers people use today are person-based and not place-based. This represents a significant shift in the nature of a community from one based on social networks of households and or workplaces to social network of individuals. Such person-to-person relationships are now globally based since this new

model of human relationships establishes connections from culture to culture in the network society (Castells 2000b:508).

Such a shift in conceptualizing urban communities and neighborhoods is underscored by a triple revolution of social network. First, people individually reach beyond the world of tight groups such as church and family. Second, the emergence of the Internet that has resulted in massive changes in the ways of production, consumption, and reproduction of information, content, and culture. Third, the mobile revolution, which communicates a sense of continuous presence and awareness of the network (Rainie and Wellman 2012:11, 12). Time and space are less important and so are bounded physical neighborhoods that are being replaced by communities of networks. This has huge missiological implications because of the changing nature of communities and neighborhoods.
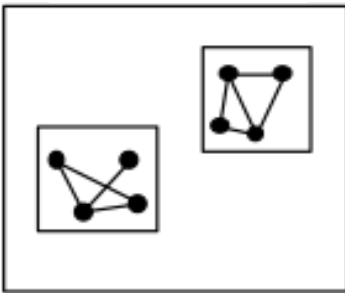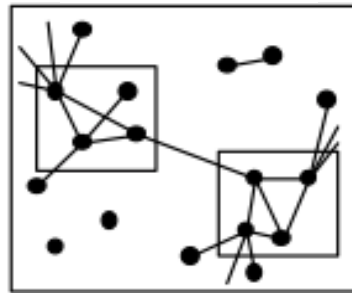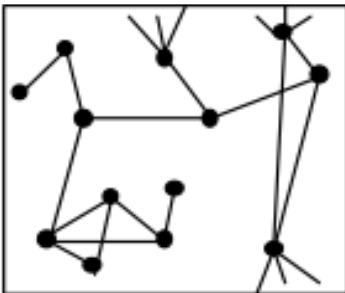

Figure 3. Three models of community and work social networks. Taken from Wellman 2001a:3.T

Wellman defines community "as networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity" (2001b:228). Notice that his view expands the notion of community to beyond neighborhoods. While this definition is helpful, I suggest that instead of separating community from local neighborhoods, it is more helpful to recognize that there is a change in the nature of neighborhoods and not just in the nature of community. In the past, a physical neighborhood encapsulated community while in the network society community encapsulates neighborhoods. My community becomes my neighborhood, as Rainie and Wellman assert: "The new media is the new neighborhood" (2012:13). New media is not just a new cyber*place*, but an extended place intertwined and entangled with daily life. The boundaries between online-offline are undefined.

My argument is that individual network communities contain neighborhoods that are fluid, allowing people within the network to take advantage of physical and cyber neighborhoods beyond their physical or cyber home neighborhood. Any community tie regardless of where it is located is an expansion of a person's own neighborhood. Physical neighborhoods continue to hold peculiar characteristics, but notions of exclusion and inclusion have become much more nuanced. Through individual networks, one's neighborhood has expanded, which also communicates an extended sense of belonging. Such an expansion is possible through the sharing of one's neighborhood and community with those within one's individual networks.

For example, I am writing this paper from Pasadena, California. At the same time, I am planning a trip to Brazil, with a layover in Bogota, Colombia. One of the nodes in my networks is a family in Bogota who will take me around to see the interesting places in their city while sharing their city, community, and neighborhood. Later, in Brazil, I will be staying in Juiz de For in the state of Minas Gerais. However, at some point during my trip, I will have to visit the U.S. embassy in the city of Rio de Janeiro, which is located some 90 miles from Juiz de Fora. While in Rio, another network node will provide our family a place to stay and will drive us to our appointments. All this while both our families enjoy each other's company and strengthen our proximity ties. That family will share their neighborhood as insiders in the city. They will also offer us added security, since the city of Rio de Janeiro is filled with urban criminals who especially target those perceived to be outsiders. Through that network, we will live as a sort of hybrid insider-outsider in the city.

My individual networks do not just provide support to solve problems, they also introduce me to their physical neighborhoods in which I am more or less accepted and included because of the reality of unbounded

community networks—networks maintained and expanded through online-offline relations.

Robert Sampson, analyzing networks, neighborhoods, and crime, suggests that physical neighborhoods are, in fact, connected and they should be conceptualized as nodes within a large network of spatial relations (2004:157, 158). In a world where the line between online-offline has become blurred, a neighborhood loses its geographically defined nature to become, together with someone else's community, part of a larger network. It has been argued that communities are about social relationships and neighborhoods are about boundaries (Wellman 1999:xii). Yet, in the network society, every edge and limit is porous; boundaries are permeable (Castells 2000c:696).

The permeability of current reality in the network society can be demonstrated through studies of online and offline relations. At first, researchers conceptualized the two as separate realms, each with their own communities and neighborhoods all neatly arranged. Nowadays, scholars consider them to be one (Lenhart and Madden 2007; Campbell 2005; Campbell and Lövheim 2011). It has been documented that online and offline, or computer-mediated relations and non-computer-mediated relations, are not two separate realms but expanded realities in which the offline informs online practices and also conversely (Wellman and Gulia 1999; Gruzd, Wellman, and Takhteyev 2011). It is not that face-to-face relations and information exchange have disappeared. On the contrary, offline relationships is a key element for the formation of online communities (Boyd and Ellison 2008).

How does all of this relate to the rise of the digital neighbor and mission renewal? The social shifts demonstrated in the discussion above underline the need to shift mission attention from bounded physical neighborhoods and groups of people to individuals in connected networked cultural contexts. Neighborhoods no longer restrict actors to a bounded physical space. Rather, today's neighbor is now the digital neighbor, who is both physically and/or digitally next-door in our networks. The next section explores the missiological dimensions of the rise of the digital neighbor and asks several questions. How does this shift inform mission? How does it foster renewal in mission? How is the mission of God taking place in contemporary hybrid global societies? What does faithful mission engagement looks like in this new setting?

The Digital Neighbor and Mission Renewal

The discussion so far has demonstrated the emergence of a new social reality in which physical and virtual realities are entangled and

are informing, forming, and transforming each other. Technological revolutions are reshaping the way people live. However, even more important, they are reshaping the way people relate to each other.

I believe that such a social shift stimulates missiological renewal through new challenges and opportunities as God's people seek to understand the mission of God and its implications in this new social context of the network society. Such renewal benefits the intellectual pursuit of missiological clarity and practical mission engagement by fostering possible innovations in mission theory, evangelism, social transformation and justice, mobilization, interfaith relations, ecclesiology, to name only a few.

In this article, I have taken the analogy from the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 in which a Jewish expert on the law asks Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?" How should one proceed in answering this question from a missiological perspective in view of the current network society? How does the network society expand our understanding of the mission of God? What are the insights that can assist missiological reflection and engagement?

Theologian Lynne Baab offers a springboard as she reflects on the parable's question within the context of technology and theology in the network society. She makes the case that while the expert of the law asked the question in an attempt to have Jesus define categories of people who would fit in the classification of neighbor, Jesus changes the argument to emphasize a category of actions or the actions of being neighborly. Therefore, our task, Baab suggests, is not to find out who is a neighbor so we can love them, but to figure out when and how to be a good neighbor (2011:111). While I affirm the proposition that there is a Christian responsibility to action as a good neighbor, it is also important for mission studies to move beyond recognizing that clarification or redefinition of the category of neighbor.

The place in which Luke chooses to locate this narrative in his Gospel points to the importance of expanding the definition of the category of neighbor. Jews considered Samaritans worse than gentiles and the clarification of neighbor points to the mission of God beyond Israel and towards a global intercultural scope that includes gentiles and Samaritans alike. The disciples were Jews and shared similar views regarding non-Jews. This is reflected in Luke's choice to include Peter's words in the book of Acts: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation" (10:34, 35). If not for this clarification and expansion of "who is my neighbor?" the first century mission expansion would have been compromised and a significant part of the world's population would have been left out of the missionary efforts of the church—at least out of the church's missionary imagination. I argue, therefore, that

the current social shift also requires a redefinition and expansion of the category of neighbor to avoid the risk of mission blindness in which the *cyberplace* is dismissed as virtual and non-real or as a threat to "real" offline life.

In this context, Bosch raises an interesting point in conversation with theologian Mazamisa and his text *Beatific Comradeship* regarding the figure of the digital neighbor. He concludes that "it is not the 'human' [real] in Jewish society who takes pity on the man who has fallen among robbers, but the 'non-human' [virtual]" (1991:90). The "non-human" Samaritan was invisible to the disciples, as far as mission goes. If not for Jesus' redefinition and expansion of the concept of who a neighbor was, mission engagement by the early church would have been compromised.

I think it is fair to say that the same applies to the digital neighbor. If present day Christians do not recognize the need to relate and witness to the virtual/digital world, then their view of the kingdom of God is also compromised. In the same way the parable moved the neighbor beyond Israel's boundaries, so does the concept of the digital neighbor move present day Christians beyond physical bounded reality. Do those living in virtual reality stand in need of mission? Is God active in mission online just as he is offline? Does God reveal himself through hypertext? Is face-to-face witness a requirement for Christian witness? Is the digital neighbor human and real? These are just some of the many questions demanding missiological reflection in this age of the network society.

Heidi Campbell, scholar of Religion and New Media, and Australian theologian Stephen Garner have collaborated—or should I say networked—to produce one of the first attempts to construct a theological framework for understanding the intersection between new media and Christian theology. In *Networked Theology* (2016) they construct a frame to theologize about the digital, technological, and network society. Speaking of the digital neighbor, they focus the conversation around three fundamental questions. Who is my neighbor? Where is my neighbor? How should I treat my neighbor? I will use their frame but will move the conversation a little further by adding a missiological dimension to the discussion.

Who Is the Digital Neighbor?

Campbell and Garner suggest that a theological starting point is to see the neighbor as everyone because of humanity's common source. As a primary theological disposition, human beings are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28) and still reflect his likeness in human nature, in social relationships with God and others, and in their creative agency as co-creators with God. Furthermore, the Trinitarian God is a relational being, which makes humans relational at their core (2016:74).

In addition to the principle of humans made in and reflecting the image of God, missiology has also convincingly made the case of *missio Dei*. As part of his attributes, God's love and mission is part of a divine movement emanating from God to the world (Bosch 1991:390). The church, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, should also be moving towards the world. Unfortunately, the world and the neighbor are often taken to be the object of mission. Campbell and Garner suggest that the notion of being neighbor implies a kind of relationship that fosters well-being and nurtures life. Such relationships are only possible when God's people humanize the other, as indicated by Bosch and Mazamisa. In such a case, the neighbor is a subject in which an inherent worth is recognized and located, instead of the object of mission. This principle runs in two directions: Christians recognize the *self* as being a neighbor but also the *other* as neighbor (2016:77). Both the digital-Christian-witness neighbor and the digital neighbor have great worth because they are made in God's image. Any engagement in God's mission to people in networks must be rooted in this biblical position.

Today's Christianity is embedded and entangled in and with the network society; therefore, the digital neighbor must also be part of the focus of Christian mission. Studies have shown that Christian communities do not exist outside of the new reality of network societies. Christians are as networked as anyone else (Horsfield and Teusner 2007; Campbell 2005). To the extent that Christian mission engagement happens in the network society, the question as to who my neighbor is, is a question of identity of *others* but also of the *self*. Without capitulating to technological determinism, it is clear that new media is a force that shapes identity (Lövheim 2012) as part of the social cultural matrix (Horsfield and Teusner 2007:279). Although some fear that current realities are negative towards religious identities, studies indicate that the separation between online vs. offline, real vs. virtual, and physical vs. digital are artificial boundaries in the network society. Lövheim reports that religious identity online is not that different from the identity of the every-day life (2012:52).

In short, the digital neighbor is both the Christian witness agent and the subject of God's mission. It is the *self* and the *other*. The digital neighbor is the one who interacts at some level within various communities. As Christian witnesses, God's people are called both to love the digital neighbor and to be a loving digital neighbor. A missiological concept of the digital neighbor insists that she reflects God's image, is part of God's community, and the subject of God's mission.

Where Is the Digital Neighbor?

In the network society, place has been reconfigured to encompass an online-offline continuum in which time and space have been redefined. Human experience in place largely determines our understanding of whom we are as well as our place in the world—where we belong. Boundaries play an important part in these human constructions. When place undergo such pervasive shift, it is only natural that what follows is disorienting, but hopefully also reorienting. The rise of the digital neighbor calls for renewed mission reorientation.

Campbell and Garner indicate that in the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus collapses the boundaries that defined identity and belonging. After all, it was the "outsider" who showed love to the Jewish ("insider") traveler (2016:79). The parable underscores the limited and limiting notion of place and neighborhood in human-constructed boundaries. In the network society, cultural and geographical boundaries are porous and are crossed daily. The digital neighbor lives in the online-offline reality of daily urban existence. It is into this reality that incarnation mission happens.

The Gospel of John says, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (NASB). The Message renders this text as "the Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." The missiological concept of incarnational mission as translation has something to say in this setting (Walls 1996:27). Beginning with Jesus, the missionary movement has been involved in translating the gospel message, for translation always happens as the gospel finds itself in a new reality or culture. This has been called the "translatability of the gospel" (Sanneh 2009:1). The digital neighbor exists in the network society in the expanded reality in which interpersonal encounter and experience happens—the social space of connection (Bolger 2007:189) or the space of flows (Appadurai 1996:33). If the incarnation of Jesus takes God's presence to every corner of human existence and activity, then God is present in the relational/informational flows. Incarnation also understands boundaries as porous since the spiritual becomes physical, crossing between realms. There is no limit to restrain the incarnation of the Word and his action in mission. Physical and digital boundaries collapse allowing movement amid various contexts.

Where is my neighbor? is a question that has at least two possible responses. First, the digital neighbor is at the heart of God. Humans find their original and perpetual location, value, and genesis in God. When Jesus disorients his listeners in the parable of the Good Samaritan he does so for the purpose of situating the essential place and value of people as

in the One in whom all find their center and source: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Second, the digital neighbor exists in the extended physical-digital world. The networked individual lives his life in a hybrid reality. The church is also embedded in the same hybrid reality in which it is called to be incarnated with Christ. It is in the midst of human activity in the relational flows that the church must witness and flourish, both offline and online. The communities of the church and its neighborhoods are the communities of the hybrid reality where Jesus and Christian witnesses are already embedded.

How Should One Relate to the Digital Neighbor?

If the digital neighbor—as both the Christian witness and the subject of mission—reflects God's image, is part of God's community, and is the subject of God's mission, then, the same rules of the kingdom that apply to physical relationships must apply to virtual ones since both are intertwined in continuity. Campbell and Garner, reflecting on the Deuteronomy commandment, conclude that love for the digital neighbor is inseparable from the love for God. Moreover, it "is worked out through a combination of orthodoxy (right belief), orthopraxy (right action), and orthopathy (right feeling)" (2016:84). The emphasis on the role of the emotional dimension in this conclusion is important.

Contrary to popular assumption, empirical research has indicated that in the network society people are not losing their social connections. On the contrary, at least in North America, people reported having more friends than in the past, both online and offline. Heavy online users had the most social connectivity in the expanded online-offline life (Wang and Wellman 2010). It was also found that there is no significant difference in social network interaction between people living in urban, suburban, or rural areas (Pew Research Center 2018). Hence, in general, relationships are not declining, only changing. Emotional attachment in the digital age is a reality.

Complementary to orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy, missiologists have suggested *orthopathos* as another dimension (Tan 2014; Sunquist 2013) helpful to move the conversation one step further. The concept of orthopathos seeks to focus attention on human suffering and the action of solidarity. It helps people to recognize human suffering in the digital realm. Suffering is readily associated with a physical experience, but not so naturally recognized in the digital arena. Suffering calls attention to minorities and marginalized who often experience poverty, exile, homelessness, voicelessness, despair, etc. Human suffering in the digital realm has not been fully articulated and many questions remain unanswered.

What does it mean to be digitally poor? What does homelessness look like in the network society? How is despair manifested in the physical-digital reality? What is marginalization in the digital age?

Tan argues that orthopathos needs to be a bridge to integrate the gospel's orthodoxy to the orthopraxis of human action as mission engages the digital neighbors in daily life encounters (2014:150). Orthopathy (right feelings) and ortopathos (solidarity with suffering) are also functions needed in human interactions with the digital neighbor. To locate the digital neighbor at the heart of the Trinitarian God is to locate the digital neighbor in Christ for Christ's experience is one of suffering and glory (Sunquist 2013). Solidarity and participation in the suffering of the digital neighbor bridges and integrates orthodoxy and ortopraxis in mission. Loving God and the digital neighbor are inseparable concepts. Orthodoxy, orthopraxy, orthopathy, and orthopathos collaborate to inform and shape mission engagement in the network society.

Such a framework helps people recognize that God is just as present and active in the virtual world as he is in the physical world. Psalm 139:7 (NLT) says, "I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! Just as the network society has forced people to recognize a new reality with community existing with porous and permeable boundaries, so it is with the notion of sacred places. The new media-saturated contemporary society must be recognized as a realm where God is present and active. The extended online-offline is a holy place where God is active in mission. Salvation is the theme of the Good Samaritan parable and offers a backdrop for understanding the Christian responsibility towards the digital neighbor. Actions of salvation in mission are expected in networked interactions. They can be as casual and superficial as driving by the digital neighbor's house on the way to work, saying hello at the elevator, exchanging small talk about the weather, seeing posts on Snapchat, reading a comment of a friend of my friend on Facebook, or receiving messages on Hangout or WhatsApp groups. In the network society all God's people are called to join Christ's mission in our networks and neighborhoods for the glory of God.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been threefold. First, to introduce social networks as valuable conceptual frames for missiological reflection. They offer a new panorama of social reality to focus mission studies on relationships between networked individuals instead of groups and geographical locations. Second, to call the attention for the need to take technology, particularly new media, seriously in missiological theory, strategy, and

practice. Third, to build on one of the first attempts to provide a theological response to technology and society—namely networked theology—by adding a missiological dimension to the conceptualization of the digital neighbor. This provides a workable resource for mission renewal in the digital-technological-saturated age.

In the network society, willingly or forcefully, lives are so integrated and connected with new media that computer mediated human interactions often occur unconsciously and with little reflection—much like a cyborgian existence. Digital technology and human life coexist in extension. Siri and Alexa are no longer science fiction. Missiological reflection must happen within this new social reality. The theoretical concept of the digital neighbor has the potential to foster renewal in three main areas. First, by creating new missiological identities. The digital neighbor is both the self and other; the Christian witness both engages in mission and is the subject of God's mission. This perspective has consequences for one's self-image, actions, and interactions within individual networks. Second, by creating a new missiological orientation concerning place or location. Mission engagement is not online or offline but on works in the expanded hybrid network society. It is not here or there, but everywhere. The missiological emphasis must shift from place-to-place to person-to-person. The individual agent, the digital neighbor, and his/her relationships are the new focus of attention in mission engagement. Third, by creating new missiological actions or engagement one becomes conscious of the expanded reality and begins to devise responses to the new challenges and opportunities. The expanded reality offers expanded perspectives. From these new areas, missiological imagination and work will need to focus on new research agendas, theories, strategies, and practices.

Bolger (2007) suggests a mission approach focused on practices that bind people in time and space as a viable way of doing mission in the digital age. The model presented above believes that practices are encapsulated within relationships in the space of flows. The digital neighbor holds the potential to provide a conceptual image to bind people in relationships in which practices take place.

This article does not seek to answer all the questions raised. However, it intends to point to exciting possibilities shaping the missiological agenda, research, and practice in the network society. I offer the following questions as possible paths for further missiological research.

1. How does the rise of the digital neighbor influence social power dynamics?
2. How does the digital neighbor concept reshape the church's community engagement?

3. How should the digital neighbor concept reframe pastoral missiological training?
4. How does the digital neighbor concept affect mission engagement with people of other faiths?
5. What does incarnational mission look like in the network society?
6. How can churches articulate its location as extended hybrid entities?
7. What are the principles of missiological ethics in the network reality?
8. What are the implications of sacred places in the extended hybrid network society?
9. What does mission mean in a technologized and media-saturated world?
10. What does it mean to be a missionary in a network society?
11. What is the *mission Dei* in a network society?
12. What are the new tools and systems of oppression in the network society that need to receive missiological attention if justice is to be served?
13. How does the concept of the network society change the notion of the poor? Who are the poor in the network society?

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