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Letsema: Communion ecclesiology in action

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This article compares a Setswana philosophy of community self-upliftment and self-reliance, known as *letsema,* with communion ecclesiology. The intention is to contribute towards the decolonisation of theology project. The objectives are to enlighten theologians that African philosophies are vital in decolonising theology and that these philosophies of *botho* or *ubuntu* enhance understanding of ecclesiology from the African perspective. A literature review, starts with a philosophical definition of *letsema* and make a comparison of *letsema* and communion ecclesiology, showing how the two are complementary and can work symbiotically to decolonise theology in Africa. *Letsema,* like communion ecclesiology is voluntary, non-hierarchical, goal-oriented, and purposeful. Communion ecclesiology is the *perichoretic* mutuality of the triune God with those who are called out to be a *koinonia* of participants in the Kingdom of God. Acts 2:42–47 express the essence of communion ecclesiology. African communities are religious; therefore, using any epistemology to enhance religion is accepted and appreciated. Religion runs deep in the veins of Africans. *Letsema* is indeed a communion ecclesiology in action (Ac 2:42–47) (the togetherness [*homothumadon*] of the church) - the community that coherently lives together with the trinitarian God, expressing its identity through doctrine, prayer, eucharist, sharing, and embracing each other indiscriminately.

Contribution: Through the interdisciplinary approach, this article engages socio-history, philosophy, anthropology, theology, and psychology to express the importance of African philosophies in the processes of decolonising theology. The *Letsema* concept is communion ecclesiology in action and the two can work symbiotically to decolonise theology.

Keywords: *letsema*; community; communion; participation; ecclesiology; theology; *ecclesia*.

Introduction

In this article, the argument is made that *letsema* is one of the concepts that can be employed in theology to contribute towards peeling away the layers of colonial posturing, which is decolonisation. This reality is expounded by Jenkins (2002) in his book, *The next Christendom: The coming of global Christianity*, namely that the centre of gravity of Christianity continues to move from the northern to the southern hemisphere. So, the decolonisation of theology is a pressing project and can be effectively undertaken through African philosophical concepts, proverbs, idioms, and sages.

Understanding *letsema*

Letsema in Sesotho languages (Setswana, Sepedi, Sesotho) is a word for voluntarily working together. The concept exists since time immemorial among many Africans, especially the Batswana people of Southern Africa. It is a self-mobilisation of the community to work together to build a house for a member of that community, clear the forest for cultivation, or commonly work together in a field (cultivation, clearing the forest, weeding, or harvesting). *Letsema* occurs when people come together to work for a common purpose. It is a collective effort towards a shared vision by which the community was aiming not just for equality, but for self-sustenance. Resane (2017:99) says *letsema* means 'coming together with others for others'.

Letsema indicates voluntary participation

Letsema is not compulsory participation, but voluntary. The former General Secretary of the United Nations, Kofi Anan, (in Lyons & Wearing 2008:27) captured *letsema's* voluntarism by accentuating that it occurs when 'people from all walks of life and strata of society … made the choice to serve their fellow men and women whether at home or abroad'. The community leader, after receiving a request, calls for *letsema* and community members respond voluntarily. The unwilling member is not punished or sidelined for non-participation. The philosophy of *botho* or

ubuntu as a priori is an innate sense in individuals that always prods people to participate. Twala (2004:188) confirms that 'Individuals also responded enthusiastically to calls for community meetings, as they felt a strong sense of belonging and ownership of their communities.' It is rare to hear that someone does not participate in *letsema,* unless it is under some tangible circumstances such as sickness, disability, or some pressing personal circumstances. Self-offering springing out of deeply embedded *botho* or *ubuntu* of helping each other, is a driving force. Lebeloane and Quan-Baffour (2008) state that:

> The voluntary spirit among Africans made people sacrifice their time to assist fellow community members to undertake various projects. Indeed, one does not have to be your family member or a relative to get help from you. (p. 44)

This teaches us that the historical African communities were composed of altruistic individuals, who voluntarily formed corporate bodies to address social menaces such as poverty, unemployment and maladies that were negatively impacting the quality of human lives.

Letsema is a joyful adventure; hence, during the project, there are songs, dances, food, humour, and homemade beer that only the elderly could take. It is a joyful activity with expressive freedom, as people share the tasks. The inevitable joy expressed through songs and dances becomes a glue that bonds the community towards unity and strength. Resane (2018:2) points out that 'The *letsema* concept can be used to express cooperation or strength in unity.' This means that through *letsema,* togetherness (a sense of belonging) is enriched. Participants do not feel coerced or under compulsion. This improves the self-image of those assisted and increases joy for those working towards the goal of *letsema*.

Letsema is not hierarchical

During l*etsema*, there are no democratically elected or self-appointed leaders. *Letsema* is unstructured and undocumented. It is not politically enforced, or class-based. It is the initiative of *almal gaan saam*. People are self-motivated and synergistically work towards a goal. Members' equality is observed by the exertion of all efforts into the task voluntarily. However, duties are undertaken with separation by gender or age. Men take full responsibility for physical engagement to ensure the completion of the project. Although women may fully participate, depending on the type of the project, they also get involved physically. Weeding, harvesting, winnowing, et cetera are duties that are undertaken mostly by women, although these do not exonerate men. Young girls take care of the smaller children, while some mothers busy themselves with food preparations. Older men and women do the limited physical tasks but are part of the project to visualise tasks and most importantly, to provide wisdom. Young boys work side by side with able men, sometimes as helping hands (*spanner boys*), where mentoring takes place, and the younger ones learn from the older ones by observation and participation. The owner of the project becomes a full participant unless there are some limitations; hence, the Setswana proverb that says *letsema le thata ka mong* [the project succeeds through the owner's participation]. *Letsema* is not a spoon-feeding mechanism, but a self-sustaining task of uplifting another member of the community. This is confirmed by Magesa (1998:227), namely that 'good company implies community, that is, the establishment and maintenance of harmonious relationships among people'.

Letsema is goal-oriented

One common definition of l*etsema* attests that '*letsema* is when a group or a team of people come together in order to achieve a common goal or a purpose' (Mochotlhi 2010). This agrees with Resane (2017:99) that '*Letsema* is when the Batswana … need to come together to empower themselves toward a common goal or objective.' Therefore, there are clear goals for any *letsema.* Good examples as stated above can be a complete house or cattle kraal, cultivation of the field, sowing and harvesting, construction of houses, barns, livestock pens, et cetera. Each participant knows the goals and works together with others towards these goals.

In African communities, due to their communality character, no one stands (as there are no leaders, except *Kgosi* or *Induna* who calls for *letsema)* and stipulates goals (since the project is known). This maximum participation of the community has the potential to contribute towards the prevention of crime, alcohol abuse, drugs, Gender-based Violence, teenage pregnancy, et cetera.

Letsema has a purpose

The main purpose of *letsema* is to uplift each other towards self-sustenance, eradicate poverty, empower each member with a sense of togetherness or belonging, and promote equality among members of the community. Springing out of *botho* or *ubuntu, letsema* enhances the proverbial expression that a person is a person because of the people (*motho ke motho ka batho*). Indeed, *letsema* is based on the belief that your neighbour's problem or success is yours too. At the end of the day, the project owner feels the sense that he is not on a journey of life alone. *Hy is ook 'n mens deur ander mense*. In its original intention*, letsema* is a 'communal spirit, a cultural value that drove community members to assist each other' (Lebeloane & Quan-Baffour 2008:44). The consequent feeling is that a person will feel worthy, loved, cared for, and valued, making *letsema's* purpose to be the restoration or enhancement of self-worth.

Regarding self-sustenance, *letsema* plays a crucial economic role and provides communal stability. The line between the 'haves and have-nots' is very thin, if not invisible. Through *letsema*, the community carries itself towards self-reliance, unshackling itself from the social malady known as dependency syndrome, as participants engage in helping the poor towards food security. Through *letsema* initiatives, the

community gets empowered to declare the erstwhile Bophuthatswana President, Lucas Manyane Mangope's slogan: *Re na le rona* [we are with ourselves]. This statement engrosses the ideal sense of self-reliance, where communities believe in themselves, and that they have the capacity to achieve the best through themselves. People perpetually participating or promoting *letsema,* become enhanced with selfhood and sense the inner ability to accomplish basic needs of life without any external assistance or intervention. They become proactive and realise their capacities. Therefore, *letsema* encourages a community 'to fight and overcome the attitude some people have, namely that they are entitled to receive free goods and services without any effort on their part' (Sowetan, 28 October 2002).

Letsema, if initiated and properly carried out, contributes enormously towards poverty eradication. It enables individual community members to increase production; thus, avoiding the starvation of community members. People who invite *letsema*-tasks are always those who are not economically viable, except when it is to be done for the chief. Through *letsema*-projects the basic needs such as housing and food security, can be realised and reached. Members of the community do not see any demarcation line between the poor and the rich. During *letsema,* food is provided and shared equally, bearing in mind that in most cases, the very volunteers are the ones who also provide this food, although the owner may provide more than any other, since *letsema le le thata ka mong*. Through l*etsema*, livestock well-being for better food production is guaranteed and secured, and provision of food from the *letsema-worked* fields is ensured.

Letsema and communion ecclesiology

Like *letsema*, communion ecclesiology is a voluntary participation

Communion ecclesiology is basically the *perichoretic* mutuality of the triune God, together with those who are called out to be a communion, a *koinonia* of participants in the kingdom of God. Jenson (1999:224) defines communion ecclesiology as follows: 'Because the identities of the triune God are mutually one God, and because believers assemble with the Son before the Father and in their Spirit, these believers are one.' This is a mysterious identity instigated by the fact that the church is a sacrament of the trinitarian *koinonia,* based on the church's origin, model, and goal. Communion ecclesiology is expressed from the early days of the apostolic church as demonstrated from the Day of Pentecost (Ac 2) and is fully expressive of *letsema* in verses 42–47. Here one observes *ēsan proskarturountes* [They continued steadfastly]. According to the Bible commentator, Barnes (1979:56): 'They persevered in, or they adhered to.' For them, the substance of faith was the apostles' doctrine, which was deemed as 'authoritative because it was the teaching of the Lord communicated through apostles' (Bruce 1956:79). As *koinonia,* they devoted themselves, which gives an idea of commitment to each other. They were partners, 'sharing in common interest' (Robertson 1930:37). Members of *ecclesia* were called out and voluntarily opted to be followers of Christ without any compulsion or coercion. These people responded positively to the question in Acts 2:37, 'Brothers, what shall we do?', to which the answer was: 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Ac 2:38). Practical response occurs in Acts 2:41 when those who accepted the message got baptised. This was the voluntary response due to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. True believers (*koinonia*) feel no obligation to follow the communion rudiments such as participation in studying God's word (apostles' doctrine), prayer, fellowship, eucharist, et cetera. The initiation into the *koinonia* automatically seals the experience with *homothumadon* [togetherness, one accord, one mind or one spirit] mentioned in Acts 2:42. Resane (2017) highlights the fact that:

> Africans experience growth when they cluster together. Growth is impossible without others. One's being, identity, meaning and integrity are solely dependent on the contribution of others. (p. 98)

Individualism is swallowed into fellowship where members feel united to the bigger something. No belonging, no growth; no community, no identity. This is confirmed when in unison we declare: 'I believe in communion of saints' as a confession every Sunday in a Christian Church. In the words of Macchia (2004), being part of this, *koinonia* means:

> I want to grow up in Christ with you, I want to play with you, laugh with you, cry with you, pray with you, share with you, study with you, and grow with you, and I hope you want the same. (p. 95)

The church is *communio fidelium*, where everyone's participation proceeds from faith in freedom and equality, based on the *charismata* received by everyone in the church to perform activities such as *kerygma*, liturgy, and *diaconia* (Van den Ven 1993:93). This is an unusual commitment to serving one another. The prevailing spirit is *ultra posse nemo tenetur* [No one is obliged to do more than he can]. Each person has a role to play in the c*ommunio*. Moltmann (2012) is correct that:

> A Christian ethics must be neither abstract nor rigorous but must take into consideration what the person can do 'as far as he can', and what is objectively possible for him. (p. 74)

Doing things for oneself disappears, and consideration of others emerges as a virtue in the new membership. This new membership is not classified, stratified, segregational, or even divisional. It is seen as God's purpose 'to bring together in unified community the many rival groups of human beings, whose differences are typified by the division between Jews and Gentiles' (Macquarrie 1997:140). This is done by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit, and this resuscitates the spirit of voluntarism which builds towards servant leadership. In *letsema*, the tribal leader announces the project and voluntarily people devote themselves to the implementation and the undertaking of the project. Bruce (1956:81) correctly notes that '[*t*]he

community was organized along the lines of voluntary type of association called a *haburah,* a central feature of which was the communal meal'. This is emphasised by the fact that *ecclesia* is the covenant people of God summoned in faith. Van den Ven (1993:91), by highlighting a famous reformatory theologist, Rudolph Sohm, reiterates that 'belonging to the church is only the work of the Spirit, as the church itself is only the creation of the Spirit'. The people who belong are not under constraint but are in the unity that involves and creates the room for personal freedom, that is, communicative freedom based on the freedom of the gospel where members do not take an option of withdrawal, but that of freedom to belong and love (Smith 2007:283).

Like during the *letsema*, participation is a joyful event for *ecclesia*. The meeting event is carried out with joy accompanied by singing, dancing, humorous storytelling, et cetera. 'They have the same subjects of conversation, of feeling, and of prayer, or they have communion in these things' (Barnes 1979:57). Acts 2:46–47 tells us:

> [*T*]hat Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with **glad and sincere hearts**, praising God **and enjoying the favor** of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Joy is one of the marks of faith. As Bruce (1956:81) comments: 'Within the community, there was a spirit of rejoicing and generosity.' Partakers of the faith element are consequently bestowed with unspeakable joy. This is correctly captured by Moltmann (2015:24), '[*i*]f God is present, the people sing and dance and are carried away by joy. They eat and drink and celebrate the festival of life.' When God is in communion with his people, there is an eradication of gloom. Spiritual and emotional ecstasy accompany the people of joy. The breaking of bread suggests that this was the significant element of celebration (Bruce 1956:79). Participation of faith 'bestows additional joy in the participation of even our ordinary pleasures' (Barnes 1979:58). This notion of festival eccentricity is highlighted by Marshall (1998) that:

> [*T*]he joy that characterises these gatherings was no doubt inspired by the Spirit (13:52) and may have been associated with the conviction that the Lord Jesus was present with them (cf. 24:35). (p. 85)

This points to the reality that the *communio* is characterised by aspects such as openness, equality, and reciprocity of the relations in the community and their extensiveness, closeness, and depth (Van den Ven 1993:93). The joyous celebration cannot be experienced in isolation because a human is never an individual. A person is a human being in the 'social network of giving, listening and speaking, experiencing and touching, recognizing and being recognised, a human being becomes a person' (Moltmann 2012:160). This is a celebration *par excellence*!

Like *letsema*, communion ecclesiology is not hierarchical

Ecclesiologists agree that participative ecclesiology is a strong antonym of hierarchical ecclesiology, which is always either pyramidal or structurally vertical with layers of authority. Participative ecclesiology takes cues from *perichoresis* whereby the members of the Trinity dwell together in unity and harmony without the distinction of any hierarchy. There is no hierarchy within the Trinity. God as the Trinity 'envision God as the dynamic, living, engaging community of the three' (Kärkkäinen 2014:320). Trinity is a communion of love (Johnson 1993:222) wherein we find mutual relationality and friendship (Kärkkäinen 2014:321). In this kind of togetherness, there is no hierarchy, as each member's identity is ingrained in other members due to mutual relationality. Communion theology avoids tritheism which promotes both modalism (lack of personal distinction in the one Godhead); and subordinationism (subjecting of the Son and Spirit to the Father) as the patristists were arguing (Shelton in Green 2010:42). In communion theology, the emphasis is thinking of one God existing as Father, Son, and the Spirit in unity, existing as a mutual community in synergy, moving and living harmoniously with each other. 'The Father shares his entire being with the Son and the Spirit' (Kärkkäinen 2014:271). The bottom line is that there is no hierarchy within the Godhead, but the real authority in the church stems from the Spirit leading to the realisation or conclusion that the church is essentially a pneumatocracy, and not an autocracy, aristocracy, or bureaucracy (Van den Ven 1993:91).

African communities' structures are not pyramidal but lateral, emphasising relationality, mutuality, and voluntary participation. Human participation and solidarity are the essential aspects of the enhancement of life (Magesa 1998:55). A human being is regarded as intimately related to other humans, God, and the entire creation (Nyamiti 1973:20). Joining forces for mutual help empowers the community with the richness of life, and as Moltmann (2012:66) points out: 'Helpful initiatives are not ordered from above but come into being at the grass roots.' This reflects communion; hence, when *letsema* is called for, the entire community responds without any hierarchical processes to ensure compliance or maintain law and order. Each member of the community innately knows his or her role and therefore immerses in it without any sense of coercion or compelling. Here, participation means growth, which is progress towards the *teleios* [maturity] and *pleroma* [fullness] of Christ.

Like *letsema*, communion ecclesiology is goal-oriented

The text of Acts 2:42–47 shows that communion ecclesiology is a partnership that involves participation or cooperation with the common goal of the work for the gospel, as they contributed to the needs of the poor among themselves (Ac 2:45). Part of the secret is in Acts 2:44 where they *shared everything in common*. They sold their property to deal with

the economic inequality that was probably the culture of capitalism of the day. In other words, 'they held all their property ready for use for the common good as it was needed' (Robertson 1930:39). People sold their possessions so that the proceeds might be used to help the needy. Each person held his or her goods at the disposal of the others whenever the need arose (Marshall 1998:84). Distribution or sharing according to one's needs is an example that stresses the *letsema* concept of the community that pursues self-sustainability. The goal is clear, there should be a proportionate equitable share, so that there is no economic disparity within the *koinonia.* Communion ecclesiology is demonstrated by the *perichoresis* of the trinitarian God, where all members are equal and work together towards a common goal, which is the salvation of the lost humanity. The motive behind *sharing everything in common* and *selling their* property is highlighted by Moltmann (2012:158): 'Anyone who lives a divinely filled life has no need for the ambiguous securities which possessions and property give him.' The goal was sharing for the benefit of all, and the sense of security in the community, where 'individuals become rich, rich in friends who can be trusted, rich in mutual help, rich in ideas and powers, rich in the energies of solidarity' (Moltmann 2012:159).

Like *letsema*, communion ecclesiology has a purpose

There is an adage within the ecclesiastical circles that the church gathers to scatter. Ideally, the church gathers for liturgical and confessional purposes as a way of strengthening itself for missional purposes in the world. In *koinonia,* there is a sense and experience of sharing (fellowship), desire to learn (steadfast in apostles' doctrine), participation in the Lord's Supper, and prayer. Continuing steadfastness leads to both qualitative and quantitative growth; hence, *each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved* (Ac 2:47b NLT). The purpose of *ecclesia* is exhortation and expansion. Its calling in the world is *synodality* and *missionality. Synodality* speaks of the involvement and participation of the whole church in its life and mission (Resane 2023:2), while *missionality* is the quality of being incarnational or missional in the world. In a better way, communion ecclesiology is life, while missionality is the extension of communal life to the outsiders, because 'the living God is also capable of community and is communicative. God's living power goes out of God self and seeks the thirsty souls of men and women' (Moltmann 2015:24). Believers enjoy being together (*koinonia*) and doing things for God together (*missionality*). Christological perspectives about the church are saltiness, light and being a leaven in the world. God's incarnational love is exerted communally and missionally because *Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples* (Jn 13:35 NLT). This is highlighted by Resane (2016:367): 'The *letsema* concept in the Setswana culture best explains the biblical principle of ''one another'whereby mutual caring support becomes the marks of *ecclesia*.' Missionality is the barometer of communality, hence 'active commitment to missions is often a thermometer of a church's spiritual temperature' (Hulbert 1986:7).

Just as *letsema* is a community outreach, communion ecclesiology missionally reaches out to the world. In diverse partnerships, *ecclesia* reaches the world yearning for transformation into the character of Christ. The *raison d'etre* for the missionality of the church is expressed by Hulbert (1986:7): 'The inexpressible horror of final, eternal separation from God constitutes a compelling reason for missions.' The apostolic church of Acts was a missional church and its missionality resulted in some remarkable qualitative church growth. Marshall (1998:86) notes: 'A final comment notes that the evangelistic activity of the church continued daily.' *Communio,* as God's covenant people receive God's blessed promises, and are the carriers of God's message (Smith 2007:217).

Appreciating the convergence points

In arguing for synthetic analysis of l*etsema* as ecclesiology in action, the larger part of the narrative is socio-historical and therefore can be situated within disappearing cultural anthropological epistemologies. With historical cultural praxis on tenterhooks, due to Western individualism and capitalism domineering the postmodern societies, it will sound impossible to regain the implementation of *letsema* as African theological epistemologies. This notion is enhanced by the current *status quo* mentality that Western morality, sometimes associated with Church morality, 'underlines the right of personal consciousness to such an extent that responsibility towards the community is not sufficiently taken into consideration' (Bujo 2010:186). Even *ecclesia* is under the duress of individualism and capitalism, and for centuries, these ideologies have been entrenched in the human *psyche. Letsema* and communion ecclesiology are psychologically becoming an oxymoron, when considered as invaluable contributions to enhance Christian faith. The bottom-line question is: 'Is it possible to embrace and engrain *letsema* into communal theology to express the *koinonia's* 'togetherness', 'one another' and 'sharing' principle?' The call for humanity to return to historical-cultural practices seems to be an attempt to purchase a farm in the city centre. But the truth remains: 'Life is mutual aid' (Musoke 2018:25). Without community mutual help, the community becomes vulnerable to disintegration, if not total annihilation. Individualism works in conflict with the spirit of *letsema,* something pointed out by Moltmann (2012:160): 'If a person is individualized, he is atomized and turned into a being without relations.' Community is the source of strength for individuals, who cannot afford to surge through life journey as isolationists.

The practice may seem impossible, but the attitude may be possible. Ontological emphasis on the concept facilitates implementation or praxis. The mindset should be geared towards *letsema* and communion ecclesiastical attitudes to steer the community towards participative self-empowerment. *Ecclesia* as a pilgrim community should embark on a socio-political theology journey to realise that privatism in faith is

erroneous. Doing things together is a way to go. As we say in the Setswana proverb: *mabogo dinku a thebana* [Hands are like sheep, they help each other], emphasising that there is some strength in unity. Indeed, 'living according to our nature which is communal and fraternal good, the opposite is bad' (Musoke 2018:68). For Africans, even so, *ecclesia* isolationism is heretic; therefore, not compatible with communion theology which calls for participation rather than sectarian options. Healey and Sybertz (2021) capture that:

> Africans feel strongly that people are called especially to a life of community, participation and sharing. God reveals himself in and through the community. (p. 129)

Christian theologians in the mainstream still struggle to reflect on socio-political issues due to theological conservatism and sectarianism of isolationism and individualism. Pinnock (in Schaeffer 1985:311) refers to evangelicals in this category of struggles as 'like a turbulent river which turns this way and that and contains several strong currents'. Theology in Africa is always swimming against the tides. There are cultural clashes that seem impossible to navigate, but through decolonisation processes that situate African philosophies in the centre, this can be passable and doable.

However, theologically many of us are convinced that the true gospel speaks to the whole of life and that its social implications are inevitable and inescapable. Involvement is not an option or an alternate. It is a must, but the underlying question is, how? 'The issue today therefore is what kind of involvement and what sort of action is required by the Bible?' (Pinnock 1985:312). So, gone are the days to disincline from practical involvement. In Africa, the centrality of religion in public life is an indisputable inevitability and reality. De Gruchy (in ed. Haddad 2015) drives the point home that:

> To acknowledge the ubiquity of religion is an important phenomenological and empirical task and to fail to do so because of some prior ideological judgement, is a scientific error. (p. 260)

African social scientists and analysts from all walks of life 'never tire of reminding us that religion runs deep in the veins of Africans' (Orobator 2008:14). This assertion can be realised by returning to the apostolic *koinonia* of embracing the cultural accommodation that even the 19th-century theologians and philosophers inclined. It is clearly expressed by Neuhaus (in Schaeffer 1985) that:

> Intellectually, they were inclined to accommodate; socially, they were eager to contribute. Accommodation was the fact, and contribution was the hope. (p. 297)

Religion was found in all spheres of their lives. From this, one can see that intellectual and socio-cultural engagement enhances our theological understanding, as it is expressed in this presentation of how *letsema*, as a socio-cultural practice, complements communion ecclesiology, and how the two derive wisdom from each other. After all, 'The African experience can contribute new insights to the communal model of church' (Healey & Sybertz 2012:129), because human freedom is achieved when the community dimension is integrated into one's life (Bujo 2010:79).

Conclusion

Letsema is a clear object lesson of community in action. It is a system that enhances social cohesion and the economic self-upliftment of the community. In its original setting, it thwarts dependency syndrome, as communities were taking initiatives voluntarily to lift members from abject poverty, and gives people a sense of worth and identity. It destroys a demarcation between the poor and the rich, and enhances self-reliance. *Letsema* and communion ecclesiology work symbiotically to make theology understandable in the African setting.

Letsema is indeed a communion ecclesiology in action, as is demonstrated by the apostolic church in Acts 2:42–47. *Koinonia* or *communio* is the togetherness (*homothumadon*) of the church – a community that coherently lives together with the trinitarian God, expressing its identity through doctrine, prayer, eucharist, sharing, and embracing each other indiscriminately. It is like *letsema* where community members exist for each other and share a life in solidarity with each other. *Letsema* and communion ecclesiology complement each other; and for one to understand the other, one must know the other. *Letsema* remains a project propelled by *botho* or *ubuntu* contributing towards the decolonisation of the theology project.

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