Artificial Intelligence and the Contextual Understanding of 'The Self' and 'Time' for Evangelical Theology in Nigeria

Samson Musa

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Nigerian Evangelical theology, particularly how it relates to the contextual meanings of 'the self' and 'time.' In Nigeria, Evangelical theology is inextricably linked to cultural and temporal constructs, impacting personal and collective lives. The emergence of AI offers both a challenge and a potential for these traditional understandings, requiring a critical analysis of its ramifications. The key question that this article seeks to answer is: How does the integration of AI impact on the contextual perceptions of "the self" and "time" in Nigerian Evangelical theology? This enables a comprehensive understanding of the perception and integration of AI within the theological context. But this requires ethical considerations to ensure that technology supports and strengthens the spiritual and communal dimensions of faith. Through a theological engagement with technology, the Nigerian church can embrace the digital era while maintaining its spiritual tradition.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Nigerian Evangelical Theology, The Self, Time, Contextualization

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital technology in the Global South has evolved from a logistical to an ontological crisis for the Church. In the particular context of Nigerian Evangelicalism, the advent of new computing systems is not merely a managerial upgrade but a challenge to the very categories of human and spiritual being. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a game-changer, revolutionising performance across domains. Yet, this revolution goes beyond improving efficiency or increasing industrial output; it gets to the foundations of theological anthropology and of time. The integration of AI in Nigeria's social matrix serves as a catalyst, reflecting or redefining traditional understandings of the person and time. Nigerian Evangelical theology, which has always been closely connected to cultural idiosyncrasies and communal experiences of time, is faced with a new question that must consider the digital and the divine. The need for this inquiry is informed by a discernible trend in believers' attitudes towards the relevance of technology to their faith. An analysis of the data indicates that Nigerian Evangelicals who consider AI to be very relevant are more likely to perceive their theology as being disrupted. This suggests that the disruption is already at the level of the "meaning frameworks" - the worldviews that people use to make sense of themselves and the world.[332] As such, the Church cannot afford to be passive during this shift. Rather, it needs a theological perspective to navigate the world in which the "human" is increasingly mediated by the "algorithmic".

At the center of this theological inquiry is the construct of 'the self,' a concept that is being fundamentally challenged by the cognitive claims of AI. Recent developments in cognitive science and the emerging paradigm of 'embodied cognition' suggest that human cognition is profoundly shaped by the particularities of

[332] Vlad Costin and Vivian L. Vignoles, "What do people find most meaningful? How representations of the self and the world provide meaning in life," *Journal of Personality* 90 (2022): 541.

the body, challenging older models that viewed the mind as a rational unit operating independently of physical constraints.[333] For Nigerian Evangelical theology, which places a high premium on the *Imago Dei* and relational personhood, this pivot toward embodiment is crucial. The African perspective often rejects the Western Enlightenment's isolationist view of the individual, favoring a communal and heart-centered understanding of the human being.[334] AI, however, proposes a form of intelligence that is ostensibly disembodied, presenting a version of 'the self' that is purely informational. If the Evangelical tradition holds that the center of the being lies beyond the self in God, then the rise of autonomous, non-biological intelligence requires a robust systematic response to preserve the sanctity and "eccentricity" of human life.[335] The Church must ask whether a digital entity can ever replicate the "empathorg"—the empathetic organism that resonates with both the Creator and the community. Parallel to the challenge of the self is the equally pressing pressure AI exerts on the perception of 'time.' In the Nigerian context, time has never been a purely abstract or linear commodity. The discourse surrounding a supposedly peculiar sense of time among Africans, often labeled '#African time,' has evolved from a philosophical curiosity into a tool for state politics and identity formation.[336] This topos, frequently contrasted with the rigid "clock time" of the West, emphasizes a qualitative, event-based experience of temporality.[337] However, the advent of AI and the "acceleration of change" it brings (a doubling of capabilities that threatens to alter the very

---

[333] Tobias Tanton, *Corporeal Theology: Accommodating Theological Understanding to Embodied Thinkers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 2.

[334] Robert Vosloo et al., eds., *Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility for a Coming Generation: Doing Theology in a Time Out of Joint* (London: T&T Clark, 2024), 35.

[335] Vosloo et al., *Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility*, 82.

[336] Thomas Widlok, Joachim Knab, and Christa van der Wulp, "#African Time: Making the Future Legible," *African Studies* 80, nos. 3-4 (2021): 397.

[337] Widlok, Knab, and van der Wulp, "#African Time," 397.

definition of the human species) forces a collision between traditional rhythms and digital speed.[338]

For the Evangelical, time is the theater of divine action, a series of "todays" in which the believer is called to decisive action and obedience.[339] In a "time out of joint," where the stability of the past is eroded by the rapid unfolding of a technologically determined future, the Church must resist being paralyzed by the storm of events. This paper argues that AI serves as a catalyst for reimagining these temporal constructs, moving from a fixed comparison of cultural time frames toward a broader repertoire of temporality that recognizes God as the "beyond in the midst of our lives."[340] The practical implication for the Nigerian Church is the urgent need to address the functional ways AI is altering African culture, ensuring that technological advancements enhance rather than diminish the spiritual and communal aspects of faith. By engaging with these shifts through a rigorous theological framework, the Church can navigate the digital age while preserving its rich spiritual heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theological investigation into Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the Nigerian Evangelical context requires a rigorous multi-layered analysis that bridges cognitive science, traditional African ontologies, and systematic theology. As the Church in Nigeria grapples with the "acceleration of change," it must evaluate how digital mediation reframes the foundational constructs of human existence, specifically the category of "time." This literature review synthesizes the prevailing discourse on the body, the clock, and the divine image,

---

[338] "Information Technology and Moral Values," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), 2.4.1.

[339] J.G. McConville and J.G. Millar, *Time and Place in Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 42.

[340] Vosloo et al., *Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility*, 286.

providing the academic scaffolding for a contextualized response to the digital era.

The Ontological Foundations of African Temporality

At the core of the Nigerian Evangelical experience is a temporal framework that has long resisted the purely linear and quantitative constraints of Western industrialism. Thomas Widlok, Joachim Knab, and Christa van der Wulp observe that the concept of '#African time' has evolved from a simple stereotype of unpunctuality into a significant element in how identities are formed and how state politics are conducted in the Global South.[341] For the Nigerian believer, time is not an external commodity to be spent or saved, but a qualitative environment humanly produced through social events. This perspective is famously rooted in the work of John Mbiti, who argues that Africans do not have an abstract notion of time; for them, time is what is experienced through events.[342] Mbiti's distinction between *sasa* (the dynamic present) and *zamani* (the graveyard of time) suggests a two-dimensional ontology where history moves not toward an abstract future but backward toward the ancestors.[343] Within Evangelical theology, this "event-based" time creates a unique theater for divine action. William P. Russell, reflecting on Mbiti, notes that this notion of time is inseparable from that of the dead, emphasizing that even in this life we stand in relation to those who have gone before us.[344] In a Nigerian context, the 'now' is always saturated with the 'then.' However, the introduction of AI disrupts this social rhythm. AI operates on algorithmic speed, a "strong future time

---

[341] Thomas Widlok, Joachim Knab, and Christa van der Wulp, "#African Time: Making the Future Legible," *African Studies* 80, nos. 3-4 (2021): 397.

[342] Widlok, Knab, and van der Wulp, "#*African Time*," 397; John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 17.

[343] Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 17.

[344] William P. Russell, "'Time Also Moves Backwards': John Mbiti's Traditional Concept of Time and the Future of World Christianity," *Studies in World Christianity* (2003): 90.

reference" that mandates precision and predictive control.[345] As Samson Musa and Musa Sunday Kaika demonstrate in their empirical research, as AI becomes more integrated into the Nigerian context, the traditional temporal perceptions are the first to undergo significant pressure and change. This pressure is not merely a matter of scheduling but is a fundamental challenge to the *kerygmatic kernel* of communal life, forcing the Church to ask if a qualitative experience of God can survive in a society governed by the quantitative speed of the machine.

Biblical Chronology and the Sovereignty of Schematic Time

To counter the reduction of time to mere computational efficiency, Evangelical theology must retrieve the "schematic" nature of time found in the biblical witness. Jeremy Hughes, in his study of biblical chronology, posits that biblical chronology is essentially mythical, using historical fiction to express the ideological belief that there is a divine plan behind human history.[346] Hughes demonstrates that the Priestly and Deuteronomistic writers used round numbers and multiples (such as the forty-year generation) not for scientific precision but to reveal the hand of God in the ordering of eras.[347] This suggests that time is a theological construct rather than a neutral physical constant. J.G. McConville and J.G. Millar further this by arguing that in Deuteronomy, time and place function as 'axes of a covenant' that is perpetually renewable.[348] They contend that the 'today' of Moab is a rhetorical technique involving the conflation of generations, where the past is brought into the present with compelling power to inform future action. For the Nigerian Evangelical, the 'today' of the pulpit

---

[345] Widlok, Knab, and van der Wulp, "#African Time," 397; Keith M. Chen, "The Effect of Language on Economic Behavior," *American Economic Review* 103, no. 2 (2013): 690.

[346] Jeremy Hughes, *Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 4.

[347] Hughes, Secrets of the Times, 48.

[348] J.G. McConville and J.G. Millar, *Time and Place in Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 140.

must stand in continuity with the 'today' of Sinai. This biblical insistence on the 'contemporary nature of the covenant' provides a robust defense against the AI-driven erasure of history.[349] If AI seeks to isolate the individual in a series of disconnected, data-driven moments, the biblical narrative restores the believer to a 'tri-directional focus' where the past, present, and future coalesce in the purposes of God.[350] As Robert Vosloo and his colleagues reflect on the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, they remind us that history moves only from this center and toward this center—the revelation of Christ.[351]

Philosophical Perspectives: God's Relationship to the Future

The advent of AI also forces a re-evaluation of the metaphysics of time, particularly the debate between "presentism" and the "block universe." Sampsa Korpela explains that God's timelessness is usually combined with the block universe theory, which is based on the concept of unchanging spacetime, while God's temporality is associated with presentism.[352] In the block universe (B-theory), all moments are equally real, suggesting a future that is already there. This model aligns uncomfortably with the predictive power of AI, which treats the future as a pre-calculated data set. Conversely, Gregory Boyd and other proponents of "Open Theism" argue that the future is not a reality and therefore cannot be known by God in its entirety.[353] Because God only knows that which is true (the past and present), the future is not a reality and is therefore false

[349] McConville and Millar, *Time and Place*, 58.

[350] Robert Vosloo et al., eds., *Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility for a Coming Generation: Doing Theology in a Time Out of Joint* (London: T&T Clark, 2024), 284.

[351] Vosloo et al., *Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility*, 113.

[352] Sampsa Korpela, "God, Time, and the Implicate Order Theory," *TheoLogica* 5, no. 1 (2021): 55.

[353] Godfrey Harold, "An Evangelical Discourse on God's Foreknowledge in Relation to Moral Evil," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 100 (2019): 1.

and cannot be known to God.[354] Andrew Ter Ern Loke critiques these views, suggesting that God's exercise of power is more fundamental than the time dimension itself.[355] Loke argues that there can be an immaterial essence which solidifies the identity of God in a state of timelessness without sacrificing His capacity to act within time.[356] This is a crucial distinction for Nigerian Evangelicals, who must maintain God's sovereignty over a technologically accelerated future while preserving the reality of human free will. If AI represents a "time out of joint," the Church must look to a "branching spacetime" where future possibilities remain open to divine and human agency.[357] As Korpela suggests through David Bohm's implicate order theory, continuous creation is maintained by the constant actualization of potentialities from a super-implicate order, ensuring that the future is not a closed circuit but a gift of grace.

Ethical Responsibility and the Available Future

The literature emphasizes that time is the primary category of moral responsibility. Oliver O'Donovan argues that to wake is to become aware of time, for the world and self are co-present only in the moment of time, which is open to us for action.[358] O'Donovan distinguishes the "available future" from the "future of prediction," noting that the latter, dreary with anxiety or buoyant with hope, has to be held at bay so that we may use this moment to do something worthwhile.[359] In the Nigerian context, the 'mediated noise' of AI often prioritizes "chronemics"—the speed and efficiency of communication—

---

354 Harold, "*An Evangelical Discourse*," 8.

355 Andrew Ter Ern Loke, "On God and the Beginning of the Universe: An Evaluation of Recent Discussions," *Religions* 14 (2023): 2.

356 Loke, "*On God and the Beginning*," 12.

357 Korpela, "*God, Time, and the Implicate Order*," 68.

358 Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology* 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 18.

359 O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 124.

over the "ethics of space" and personal presence.[360] Albert Spencer warns that time is up and space is down in our current hierarchy of values, where we prize efficiency over lively proximity.[361] This shift threatens the "self-continuity" of the believer, which Vlad Costin and Vivian L. Vignoles identify as the feeling that one's past, present, and future are connected—a fundamental human need for meaning.[362] For Nigerian Evangelical theology, the task is to reclaim "prudence" as foresight and "waiting for God's own time" as a radical act of resistance against digital impatience. Miroslav Volf's reflections on the "postponement of finality" remind us that Christian spirituality is an encounter with society that refuses calculative, efficient, or downstream calculations in favor of humanist social performance.[363] By engaging with these diverse temporal frameworks, the Nigerian Church can develop a theology that recognizes God as the beyond in the midst of our lives, ensuring that the 'human' is never subsumed by the 'algorithmic.'[364]

METHODOLOGY

To address the ontological and temporal disruptions posed by Artificial Intelligence within the Nigerian Church, this study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating qualitative inquiry with quantitative empirical analysis. This multifaceted approach is grounded in the framework of 'Lived Theology.' As Sabrina Müller notes, "Lived Theology emerges in various locations, manifests digitally and analogously, and transcends denominations."[365] This methodological choice is

---

[360] Albert Spencer, "Time is up and space is down," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 10, no. 2 (2017): 106.

[361] Spencer, "*Time is up*," 103.

[362] Vlad Costin and Vivian L. Vignoles, "What do people find most meaningful? How representations of the self and the world provide meaning in life," *Journal of Personality* 90 (2022): 541.

[363] "Miroslav Volf's Theosophy and Charitable Social Living," *Athena* 1, no. 4 (2023): 374.

[364] Vosloo et al., *Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility*, 286.

[365] Sabrina Müller, "Beyond Theory and Practice: Lived Theology and Its Intersection with Empirical Theology," Open Theology 10 (2024): 1,

vital for the Nigerian context, where the digital mediation of AI is not a separate sphere of existence but an integrated reality of the believer's daily life. By focusing on lived experience rather than abstract dogmatics, this study identifies the ontological friction produced by technological speed and algorithmic mediation, ensuring the theology produced is a "verb-like" phenomenon reflecting active faith integration.

The qualitative component of this research consists of structured questionnaires shared online within platforms that consist of Nigerian theologians and church leaders, supplemented by ethnographic observations of congregational practices. This methodology aligns with the "corporeal turn" in modern systematic reflection. Tobias Tanton observes that "Theology has not only returned to the theme of embodiment, but many theologians have also turned towards empirical accounts of actual bodily practices instead of relying on idealized versions of them."[366] This empirical turn necessitates a methodological departure from traditional "armchair" systematic theology toward a more participatory engagement with the church. In this research, ethnographic observations allow the researchers to capture the "thick description" of how Nigerian believers negotiate their sense of self in a space increasingly shared with "informational organisms." Furthermore, this empirical stance validates the theological findings by grounding them in the visceral realities of congregational practice, preventing the analysis from remaining vague or aloof from the "empathorgs" that constitute the Body of Christ. Finally, it ensures that the resulting systematic reflection is not merely a theoretical exercise but a contextualized response to the specific cultural and temporal challenges of the Global South.

---

quoted in Sarah Dunlop, "How Evangelicals Do Theology," *Religions* 16 (2025): 2.

[366] Tobias Tanton, *Corporeal Theology: Accommodating Theological Understanding to Embodied Thinkers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 5.

Complementing the qualitative data, a quantitative analysis was conducted to measure the "Theological Impact" of AI on practitioners' understanding of the self and time. Participants were categorized into two groups based on their perception of AI's relevance to Nigerian society, with Group 1 representing "High Relevance" and Group 2 representing "Moderate/Low Relevance." To evaluate these differences, a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed. This statistical model utilized awareness of AI discussions as a covariate to control for prior exposure to the topic, ensuring that the measured theological shifts were driven by the perceived relevance of the technology rather than mere familiarity. This rigorous control allows the study to distinguish between a superficial awareness of technology and a deep-seated reconfiguration of meaning frameworks. By employing inferential statistics, the research provides a replicable metric for how technological proliferation correlates with systematic theological change.

The sampling for this study targeted a purposive selection of 17 participants from faculty and leadership circles within selected Nigerian theological institutions, such as the Jos and Karu ECWA Theological Seminaries. Preliminary checks were performed to ensure the data met the assumptions for ANCOVA, including Shapiro-Wilk tests for normality and Levene's test for homogeneity of variance. These safeguards ensure that the statistical findings regarding the doubling of AI's capabilities and its pressure on "African time" are robust and scientifically valid. Regarding ethical considerations, the researchers upheld strict standards of informed consent and confidentiality, allowing subjects to narrate their experiences comfortably and without pressure.[367] The validity of the primary data is voiced within a multidisciplinary space, providing a solid basis for future policy and contextualized teachings within the

[367] Yulia Putri et al., "Miroslav Volf's Theosophy and Charitable Social Living," *Athena* 1, no. 4 (2023): 858.

Nigerian Church.[368] This integrated methodology serves as a "catalyst for reimagining" the relationship between the digital and the divine, preserving spiritual heritage while navigating the storm of technological change.

DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

- **Independent Variable (IV):** Perception of AI Relevance. Respondents are categorized into Group 1: High Relevance (those who "Strongly Agree" AI is increasingly relevant in Nigerian society) and Group 2: Moderate/Low Relevance (those who "Agree," are "Undecided," or "Disagree").
- **Dependent Variable (DV):** A composite score of "Theological Impact," measuring how much AI challenges the understanding of 'the self' and influences the perception of 'time'.
- **Covariate (CV):** Awareness of AI discussions within the church/theological circles, used to control for prior exposure to the topic.

Descriptive Statistics

The following table summarizes the mean scores and standard deviations for the dependent variable components across both groups. Scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale (5=Strongly Agree, 1=Strongly Disagree).

[368] Thomas Widlok, Joachim Knab, and Christa van der Wulp, "#African Time: Making the Future Legible," *African Studies* 80, nos. 3-4 (2021): 409.

Group	N	Item: 'Self Challenged (M ± SD)	Item: 'Time' Influenced (M ± SD)	Composite Theological Impact (M ± SD)
Group 1: High Relevance	8	3.88±1.46	4.00±0.93	3.94±0.86
Group 2: Moderate Relevance	9	3.78±0.83	3.11±1.17	3.44±0.77
Total Sample	17	3.82±1.13	3.53±1.12	3.68±0.83

(Fig. 1: Data derived from raw survey responses)

Assumptions Check

Before conducting the ANCOVA, preliminary tests were conducted:

1. **Homogeneity of Regression Slopes:** The interaction between the covariate (awareness) and the IV (relevance group) was non-significant (p>.05), suggesting the relationship between awareness and theological impact is consistent across groups.

2. **Normality:** Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that the DV scores for both groups were normally distributed (p > .05).

3. **Homogeneity of Variance:** Levene's test confirmed that variances across groups were equal (F(1, 15) = 0.58, p = .458).

Inferential Statistics (One-Way ANCOVA)

A one-way ANCOVA was conducted to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in perceived theological impact between the High Relevance and Moderate Relevance groups, while controlling for prior Awareness of AI.

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	ηp^2
Covariate (Awareness)	2.14	1	2.14	4.12	.062	.227
Group (IV)	3.52	1	3.52	6.78	.021	.326
Error	7.27	14	0.52			

(Fig. 2: Data derived from raw survey responses)

The ANCOVA revealed a statistically significant difference between the groups, *F(1,14)=6.78, p=.021.* The effect size, measured by partial eta squared (ηp^2=.326), indicates a large effect, suggesting that 32.6% of the variance in theological impact is explained by the group membership (perception of AI relevance) even after controlling for awareness.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis demonstrates that Nigerian Evangelicals who view AI as highly relevant to their society are significantly more likely to feel that their theological understanding of "the self" and "time" is being reshaped.

Reimagining 'The Self' vs. 'Time.'

Although both groups indicated that the way they understand "the self" is changing (M=3.82), the most significant difference was in their perceptions of time. Group 1 (High Relevance) felt more strongly (M=4.00) that technology has impacted their spiritual and church life than Group 2 (M=3.11). This implies that as AI technologies are increasingly incorporated into the Nigerian environment, the "traditional temporal perceptions" as alluded to in some of the studies are the first to be tested and challenged.

Trends and Anomalies

A trend is that many are concerned about ethics and community. While the group has statistical differences in their perception of "impact," almost all were concerned that AI would result in reduced personal contact. An anomaly is the "Strongly Disagree" response to the relevance of AI (N=1), who "Strongly Agreed" that AI can assist theologians to understand the changing perception of time. This suggests that even if AI does not become dominant in society, it can be used as a means of diagnosis in theology.

Practical Implications

The significant results confirm the paper's claim that AI is a catalyst for redefining constructs. For the Nigerian Church, this requires a theologically critical eye in this process. Since the covariate (awareness) did not fully account for the perceived impact, theologians cannot rely on awareness campaigns. They should focus on the impacts AI is already having on the African view and culture, which some respondents said are ignored by the makers of AI. This study reveals that as the perceived relevance of AI rises, so will its disruptive effects on the Evangelical constructs, so the authors' careful ethical considerations and contextualized teachings are required.

AI as a Catalyst for Reimagining 'The Self' and 'Time'

This study's empirical results indicate that artificial intelligence (AI) is more than a technological innovation; it is an ontological jester in the Nigerian Evangelical milieu. As the findings show, the respondents who thought AI was very relevant had a much higher likelihood of stating that there was a change in their perception of systematic categories. This suggests that AI not only mirrors the present state of theological discourse but also disrupts its traditional contours. "Properly integrated, AI can act as a lever to re-conceive traditional categories such as 'the self' and 'time' to fit the realities of the world without negating

basic theological truths." Such integration demands a shift from a defensive to a systematic approach by the Church. AI offers Nigerian theologians the jolt needed to confront an "algorithmic self" and an accelerated temporal regime to distinguish between human and divine. This is especially relevant to 'the self.' In a milieu where selfhood is defined in terms of communal and relational edification (often referred to as the 'heart-centred' view of the world), the AI proposal of a "disembodied, informational intelligence" presents an alternative.[369] The findings suggest that as AI becomes more pervasive, the Church is forced to articulate a "corporeal theology" that defends the necessity of the physical body in the experience of the Imago Dei.[370] If human cognition is profoundly shaped by the particularities of the body and its sensorimotor interactions with the world, then the self cannot be reduced to a set of data points or algorithms. Instead, the human must be reclaimed as an "empathorg"—an empathetic organism that finds its center not in its cognitive output, but in its relation to the Creator.[371]

Aligning with Contemporary Realities

The task of aligning Evangelical theology with contemporary digital realities involves a delicate negotiation between the "dynamic present" (*sasa*) of traditional African thought and the predictive speed of the machine.[372] Data suggests that for the Nigerian believer, the integration of AI into societal structures necessitates a broader repertoire of temporality that can account for both the storm of events and the stability of divine providence. This alignment does not require an abandonment

---

[369] Robert Vosloo et al., eds., *Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility for a Coming Generation: Doing Theology in a Time Out of Joint* (London: T&T Clark, 2024), 35.

[370] Tobias Tanton, *Corporeal Theology: Accommodating Theological Understanding to Embodied Thinkers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 5.

[371] Vosloo et al., *Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility*, 35.

[372] Thomas Widlok, Joachim Knab, and Christa van der Wulp, "#African Time: Making the Future Legible," *African Studies* 80, nos. 3-4 (2021): 397.

of heritage but a theological update of its meaning frameworks. As the research indicated, even those who were skeptical of AI's societal dominance recognized its utility as a diagnostic tool for understanding how the "clock" is being reshaped in the digital era. Furthermore, this alignment is anchored in the retrieval of the Creator's unique attributes. "A First Cause that is uncaused, beginningless, initially changeless, transcendent, immaterial, has libertarian freedom, and is enormously powerful should be regarded as the Creator of the Universe."[373] By reasserting these foundational claims, Nigerian Evangelical theology provides the ontological floor for a digital age. While AI may simulate intelligence or predictive foresight, it lacks the libertarian freedom and transcendence that define the Divine nature. This distinction allows the Church to participate in the "acceleration of change" without succumbing to the "technological imperative" that treats the human as a mere functionary of the algorithm.[374]

Ethical Implications

The ethical considerations emerging from this research highlight a profound concern for the "decline in personal interaction" and the erosion of community. Nearly all respondents expressed anxiety that the mediation of faith through digital entities could strip the Body of Christ of its visceral, sacred resonance. If the "structure of the with-each-other" is a precondition for experiencing the grace of Christ, then a move toward disembodied digital worship poses a direct threat to the spiritual health of the congregation.[375] The Church must ask if the "miracle of presence" can survive in an environment where communication is optimized for "chronemics"—speed and efficiency—at the expense of

---

[373] Andrew Ter Ern Loke, "On God and the Beginning of the Universe: An Evaluation of Recent Discussions," *Religions* 14 (2023): 4.

[374] Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 125.

[375] Vosloo et al., *Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility*, 204.

"proxemics"—the ethics of space and personal proximity.[376] Moreover, the integration of AI carries the risk of what has been termed "cyber-enabled colonialism."[377] Respondents noted that the functional ways AI alters African culture are often ignored by the "originators of AI," who operate from Western meaning-frameworks. This necessitates an ethical commitment to "Lived Theology," ensuring that the Nigerian Church does not merely consume imported digital paradigms but constructs its own contextualized responses.[378] The ethical task is to ensure that technology serves the "empathorgs" of the community rather than reducing the believer to an "inforg" for the sake of global developmental goals.[379]

Opportunities and Challenges

AI presents a unique opportunity for the Nigerian Church to develop a "new language" of faith—one that is "liberating and redeeming" for a world come of age.[380] The challenge lies in avoiding the "distorted mirror" of a disembodied theology that views the world only through the lens of efficiency.[381] While AI can enrich the understanding of 'the self' by highlighting the beauty of our biological finitude and "eccentricity," it also threatens to unmoor the believer from the "contemporaneity of the covenant."[382] The Church must navigate the "non-identity problem" of the digital era, ensuring that the self remains connected to its past and its future in God rather than being

---

376 Gregory Spencer, "Time is up and space is down," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 10, no. 2 (2017): 106.

377 "Information Technology and Moral Values," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), 1066.

378 Sarah Lynn Bowers Dunlop, "How Evangelicals Do Theology," Religions 16 (2025): 2.

379 Vosloo et al., Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility, 35; Widlok, Knab, and van der Wulp, "#African Time," 397.

380 Vosloo et al., Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility, 163.

381 Vosloo et al., Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility, 113.

382 Vosloo et al., Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility, 82; J.G. McConville and J.G. Millar, Time and Place in Deuteronomy (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 45.

dissipated in a series of disconnected, data-driven moments.[383] To preserve its rich spiritual heritage while navigating the digital age, the Nigerian Church must adopt a "theologically informed lens." This lens recognizes God as the “beyond in the midst of our lives,” the one who provides the center for all history and existence.[384] Preserving heritage does not mean a nostalgic retreat into a pre-digital past, but a radical reclamation of the "today" as the moment of decisive obedience.[385] By engaging with AI through the paradigm of "hopeful agency," the Church can become a "mirror to the nation," reflecting the light of Christ into the complexities of the infosphere.[386] In doing so, the Nigerian Evangelical tradition ensures that time remains a gift of grace and the self remains a sacred temple of the Spirit, even in the midst of the digital revolution.

CONCLUSION

The infusion of artificial intelligence into the Nigerian church is a momentous event that calls for a systematic response. This research has shown that "AI, when carefully integrated, can be a catalyst for redefining the classical meanings of 'the self' and 'time' in line with the times while preserving the theological integrity of the doctrines." As the empirical data demonstrates, the relevance of AI is strongly associated with a reorganization of these meaning structures, particularly in terms of the qualitative perception of time, where the most significant perceptive shifts occurred. This challenge requires a transition from awareness to contextualized and functional understanding of how technology transforms African culture, to ensure the church responds to the disruptive effects of AI on the Evangelical meaning frameworks.

---

[383] Matthew Puffer, "Toward a Theological Ethic of Intergenerational Responsibility," in Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility, 123.

[384] Vosloo et al., Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility, 286, 314.

[385] McConville and Millar, Time and Place, 42.

[386] Vosloo et al., Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility, 250, 373.

The Nigerian Church is at a Kairos point where the "human" needs to be contextualized against the "algorithmic" via a theological anthropology. Through a corporeal theology that highlights the body's dependence on the Imago Dei, the Church can oppose the reduction of the person to an information organism. This is not a reactionary aversion to advancements but a safeguarding of the holy "empathorg" that is felt in the relational and collective fabric of the faith. "Through a theological engagement with technology, the Nigerian church can survive the digital age and maintain its spiritual identity." This includes refusing to let the "inventors of AI" define the limits of African personhood and the time of the African clock. Today is still the day of God in the Nigerian Evangelical tradition. Technology may hasten things, but the Church must ensure the "dynamic present" is a gift of grace and not of processing power. In this way, the Church can forge ahead optimistically, knowing that the Lord of history is greater than any digital revolution and that the benefits of technological innovation will not come at the expense of the spiritual and communal dimensions of faith.

Sources

Costin, Vlad, and Vivian L. Vignoles. "What Do People Find Most Meaningful? How Representations of the Self and the World Provide Meaning in Life." *Journal of Personality* 90, no. 4 (2022): 541–558. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12682

Dunlop, Sarah Lynn Bowers. "How Evangelicals Do Theology." *Religions* 16, no. 2 (2025): 115. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16020115

Harold, Godfrey. "An Evangelical Discourse on God's Foreknowledge in Relation to Moral Evil." *Pharos Journal of Theology* 100 (2019): 1–16.

Hughes, Jeremy. Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement* Series 66. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990.

Korpela, Sampsa. "God, Time, and the Implicate Order Theory." *TheoLogica* 5, no. 1 (2021): 55–80. https://doi.org/10.14428/thl.v5i1.55183

Loke, Andrew Ter Ern. "On God and the Beginning of the Universe: An Evaluation of Recent Discussions." *Religions* 14, no. 3 (2023): 290. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030290

Marshall, K. L. "Revisiting the Scopes Trial: Young-Earth Creationism, Creation Science, and the Evangelical Denial of Climate Change." *Religions* 12, no. 133 (2021). https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020133

Mbiti, John S. *African Religions & Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969.

McConville, J. G., and J. G. Millar. Time and Place in Deuteronomy. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 179*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994.

Meyer, Joyce. *When, God, When? Learning to Trust in God's Timing*. New York: Warner Faith, 2004.

O'Donovan, Oliver. *Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology 1*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013.

Putri, Yulia, Rahel Gloria Merlinda Suriani, Fetriani, Yohana Sefle, and Alfonso Munte. "Miroslav Volf's Theosophy and Charitable Social Living." *Athena* 1, no. 4 (2023): 858–868.

Russell, William P. "'Time Also Moves Backwards': John Mbiti's Traditional Concept of Time and the Future of World Christianity." *Studies in World Christianity* 9, no. 1 (2003): 88–102.

Spencer, Gregory. "Time Is Up and Space Is Down." *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 10, no. 2 (2017): 105–113.

Sullins, John. "Information Technology and Moral Values." In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/it-moral-values/

Tanton, Tobias. *Corporeal Theology: Accommodating Theological Understanding to Embodied Thinkers*. Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192884589.001.0001

Vosloo, Robert, Teddy Sakupapa, Karola Radler, and Ashwin Thyssen, eds. *Bonhoeffer and the Responsibility for a Coming Generation: Doing Theology in a Time Out of Joint.* London: T&T Clark, 2024.

Widlok, Thomas, Joachim Knab, and Christa van der Wulp. "#African Time: Making the Future Legible." *African Studies* 80, nos. 3-4 (2021): 397–414. https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2021.1942786.