

MORAL IMPERATIVES AND SACRED TIME: ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON TARDINESS, PUNCTUALITY, AND SPIRITUAL COMMITMENT IN OJOO ALABA, LAGOS CHURCHES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the ethical, theological, and socio-cultural dimensions of punctuality and tardiness in Christian worship, focusing on churches in Ojoo Alaba, Lagos, Nigeria. Time is seen as a sacred gift in Christian ethics, and being on time demonstrates spiritual discipline, respect for God, and social duty while chronic tardiness has traditionally been seen as a symptom of declining reverence for religious rites and a possible danger to congregational order. Using literature from theology, African Christian studies, sociology, and practical theology, the study examines how moral obligations cultural orientations and urban realities influence worship attendance patterns. The findings reveal that while tardiness is shaped by structural issues like traffic congestion, financial obligations, and difficulties with public transit, as well as culturally flexible African notions of time, timeliness acts as a visible indicator of spiritual dedication. Contemporary Nigerian worship practices such as extended praise sessions and dynamic preaching further accommodate hybrid attendance patterns, implying that tardiness does not always indicate lessened devotion. The literature's ethical and theological insights highlight the need for pastoral techniques to strike a balance between congregants' daily circumstances and moral obligations in order to promote spiritual discipline without alienating members. The study concludes that punctuality in Ojoo Alaba churches functions as a moral, spiritual, and social marker of commitment yet is moderated by urban, cultural, and socio-economic constraints. In complicated metropolitan environments, integrated pastoral measures, such as flexible scheduling, educational programs, and contextual support, can increase communal worship, promote respect for sacred time, and improve spiritual participation. This study adds to the current conversation in African Christian ethics and practical theology by emphasizing the relationship between spiritual devotion, cultural context, and moral responsibility.

Keywords: punctuality, tardiness, sacred time, spiritual commitment, Nigerian Christianity, urban worship

Introduction

In Christian religious thought, time is more than a chronological measurement. It is a sacred dimension through which believers encounter God and participate in divine purpose. Time is understood as a gift given to humanity and as a framework within which moral duty and spiritual devotion are expressed, from the biblical story of creation to the rhythms of Christian prayer (Eliade, 1959; Smith, 2013). The scripture encourages believers to live sensibly and meaningfully by emphasizing the moral use of time on numerous occasions. The idea that time should be used in ways that show respect for God and dedication to spiritual development is reflected in Paul's admonition to "redeem the time" (Eph. 5:16). Consequently, in Christian communities, making time for prayer, worship, and fellowship becomes a theological significance that connects daily living with sacred devotion (Bradshaw, 2002; Wepener, 2015).

Christian worship has always been structured around deliberate schedules of sacred time. Throughout the early ages of the church, Christians have gathered for community prayer, education, and sacramental celebration at predetermined times. These occasions were not accidental; rather, they were deliberate manifestations of group devotion that represented the conviction that devoting time to God has spiritual value (Bradshaw, 2002; Gifford, 2015). According to Paul F. Bradshaw, the church's conception of discipline and reverence in communal life was closely linked to the formation of organized worship practices (Bradshaw, 2002). Early Christian communities affirmed that conscious participation and communal responsibility were essential for spiritual commitment by setting aside specific times for worship. Within this framework, punctuality gradually became associated with faithfulness, responsibility, and reverence. Rather than being merely a matter of convenience or social etiquette, being on time for worship signified solidarity with the gathered community and readiness to encounter God (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Smith, 2013).

However, consistent tardiness in houses of worship has often been interpreted as a threat to social order and a possible indication of a decline in religious practice. In many modern congregations, tardiness during worship sessions persists despite these long-standing religious practices. It is common for members of different Christian denominations to arrive following the start of opening prayers, praise sessions, or scriptural readings. Worshippers occasionally join at the offertory or in the middle of services. Despite being widespread, these trends pose more general concerns about how contemporary Christians view sacred time and the moral duties associated with group worship (Gifford, 2015; Ukah, 2016). Adam (2004) and (Eberle) (2014) also suggested that conventional notions of discipline and devotion may be reshaped by shifting social conditions, cultural interpretations, and urban lifestyles.

However, in the context of African Christianity, the relationship between time and social life presents additional layers of complexity. Many African societies have historically operated with a fluid and event-oriented understanding of time, in contrast to the rigid clock-oriented system associated with Western industrial modernity (Mbiti, 1969; Hall, 1983). In African religious thought, time is often perceived through meaningful events rather than precise chronological measurement, as noted by John S. Mbiti (Mbiti, 1969). This cultural orientation often prioritizes social interaction and relational engagement over strict adherence to schedules. These perspectives continue to influence attitudes toward punctuality in institutional settings such as churches, even while reinforcing communal solidarity. Consequently, the spread of Christianity in Africa has involved ongoing negotiation between indigenous temporal frameworks and biblical teachings on discipline and order (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013; Wepener, 2015). This interaction has produced

diverse worship patterns across the continent, combining culturally shaped participation rhythms with structured liturgical practices.

Nigeria provides an especially important context for understanding these issues. Nigeria is a major centre of contemporary Christian activity and has one of the largest Christian populations globally. Churches across the country are known for vibrant worship practices, strong congregational participation, and deep spiritual engagement. However, Nigerian Christianity operates within complex social realities shaped by religious plurality, economic hardship, and rapid urbanization (Gifford, 2015; Ukah, 2016). These factors influence both worship behaviour and the organization of church life. Lagos, Nigeria's largest city and economic hub, provides a compelling context for examining patterns of punctuality and tardiness in Christian worship. The city is characterized by intense commercial activity, demanding work schedules, and persistent traffic congestion with a population exceeding twenty million. The long commuting times and unreliable transport systems often make strict punctuality difficult in daily life (Ukah, 2016). Consequently, churches in urban settings operate within structural constraints that shape attendance and participation. These realities are particularly evident in Ojoo Alaba, a busy urban corridor where residential areas intersect with markets, transport hubs, and educational institutions. Churches in this area serve diverse groups including traders, civil servants, students, artisans, and professionals whose lives are shaped by economic pressures.

Although many congregants still demonstrate strong religious commitment in as much as late arrival at worship services is common, with some missing key elements such as scriptural readings, hymns, and opening prayers. This recurring pattern raises important ethical and theological questions such as if worship is understood as a communal encounter with the sacred, what moral responsibilities do believers have regarding punctuality, does persistent tardiness result primarily from structural constraints, or does it also reflect challenges in spiritual discipline and how do church leaders and congregants interpret sacred time within the realities of urban life? These questions encourage deeper reflection on the relationship between cultural practices, moral obligation, and lived religious experience (Mbiti, 1969; Gifford, 2015).

Thus, Christian ethics provides an important framework for addressing these challenges. Christian ethics places strong emphasis on virtues such as accountability, self-control, stewardship, and respect for social obligations (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Hauerwas, 2001). According to this perspective, time is a resource entrusted by God and should be used carefully and purposefully. Beyond individual productivity, the moral dimension of time management includes devotion to worship and awareness of communal responsibility (Bradshaw, 2002). It also suggests that being on time for worship can be understood as a moral act that reflects reverence for God and the gathered faith community. However, ethical reflection must also account for social realities shaping human behaviour. Urban life in cities like Lagos involves transportation challenges, economic pressures, and competing social commitments that complicate strict punctuality (Adam, 2004; Eberle, 2014). Therefore, ethical evaluation of church attendance must balance individual responsibility with structural constraints.

Hence, this study investigates the phenomena of tardiness and punctuality in churches in the Ojoo Alaba neighbourhood of Lagos, with emphasis on the moral and spiritual implications of time management in communal worship. The study examines how churchgoers understand sacred time, how social and cultural factors shape attendance behaviour, and how Christian ethics may guide spiritual discipline in congregational life. It contributes to broader discussions in practical theology and Christian ethics concerning the relationship between moral responsibility, cultural practice, and communal worship (Ukah, 2016). Although organizational efficiency is important

and church punctuality is not merely administrative but it involves deeper questions of reverence, commitment, and sacred value. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink how Christian communities can foster a renewed understanding of the moral and spiritual significance of time in worship within the lived realities of Ojoo Alaba churches.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and contextual research design to investigate the phenomena of punctuality and tardiness in churches within the Ojoo Alaba neighbourhood of Lagos, Nigeria. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on understanding meanings, interpretations, and lived experiences surrounding worship attendance rather than quantifying behavioural patterns. The study is grounded in contextual theology, which emphasizes that religious beliefs and practices must be interpreted within their socio-cultural and lived environments thereby allowing for an integrated analysis of theological ideals and urban realities in shaping worship behaviour (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013; Wepener, 2015). It is further informed by sociological theories of time orientation (Hall, 1983) and African conceptions of temporality (Mbiti, 1969), which provide interpretive lenses for understanding attendance behaviour in religious contexts. The study relies primarily on documentary and textual analysis of relevant theological, sociological, anthropological, and African Christian studies literature. The materials analysed include peer-reviewed journal articles, theological texts, and scholarly works on sacred time, Christian ethics, urban religion, and cultural conceptions of time. These sources were purposively selected based on their relevance to the subject of worship attendance, moral imperatives, and time consciousness in religious practice. Data analysis was conducted through thematic content analysis, focusing on recurring themes such as sacred time, moral responsibility, cultural time orientation, urban structural constraints, and spiritual commitment. This interpretive process involved identifying patterns in the literature and synthesizing them to explain how theological and sociocultural factors interact in shaping worship behaviour. The study is contextually situated in Ojoo Alaba, Lagos State, Nigeria which is a densely populated urban corridor characterized by commercial activities, residential settlements, and transport networks. Churches in this area serve a diverse population including traders, artisans, students, civil servants, and professionals, making it a relevant setting for examining the interaction between urban life and religious practice. The research adopts an interpretive methodological stance, which enables the integration of theological reflection with sociological analysis in order to understand how worshippers negotiate sacred time within the constraints of urban living. Since the study is based entirely on documentary and textual sources, no human participants were involved, and therefore no field data were collected. However, academic ethical standards were observed through proper citation and acknowledgment of all sources used. A key limitation of the study is its reliance on secondary data, which means that findings are interpretive and theoretical rather than empirically derived from fieldwork or interviews.

Conceptual Clarification

The conceptual basis for a relevant interpretation of attendance patterns in church services is provided by terms such as sacred time, moral imperatives, punctuality, tardiness, and spiritual dedication. These are not merely descriptive terms but carry significant theological, ethical, and social implications within Christian communities. The concept of sacred time is one of the most important ideas in this study. In Christian thought, sacred time refers to periods set apart for communal worship, spiritual reflection, and encounter with the divine. Unlike secular time, it is regarded as belonging to God and therefore demands reverence and intentional participation (Eliade, 1959; Gifford, 2015). The biblical tradition affirms that time is part of God's created order

and should be used appropriately (Ecclesiastes 3:1), an idea operationalized through structured worship, liturgical calendars, and communal prayer rhythms (Bradshaw, 2002; Wepener, 2015). In order to comprehend worship practices, religious scholars emphasize the distinction between sacred and ordinary time. Mircea Eliade conceptualizes sacred time as a qualitative transformation of ordinary time through ritual participation, enabling believers to enter a transcendent reality (Eliade, 1959). Contemporary liturgical and African theological scholars expand this understanding by showing how sacred time continues to be experienced dynamically within modern African Christian worship contexts (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013; Wepener, 2015). From this perspective, worship gatherings are not merely scheduled events but spiritually charged moments of divine encounter. Participation in such moments therefore carries both theological and moral weight. Consequently, punctuality becomes more than an administrative requirement rather it reflects reverence for divine presence and commitment to communal worship (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Smith, 2013).

Within this framework, punctuality represents respect for sacred time and commitment to communal worship, while tardiness may suggest competing priorities or structural limitations. However, these behaviours are shaped by both ethical expectations and socio-cultural realities (Hall, 1983; Mbiti, 1969; Adam, 2004). Edward T. Hall distinguishes between monochronic and polychronic time orientations, explaining how different cultures prioritize either strict scheduling or relational flexibility in time management (Hall, 1983). Similarly, John S. Mbiti argues that African temporal consciousness is largely event-based rather than strictly clock-based, with emphasis on relationships and communal engagement (Mbiti, 1969). Recent African urban religious studies further show that these cultural orientations continue to influence worship behaviour in rapidly modernizing cities (Ukah, 2016; Gifford, 2015). Understanding this interaction is essential for interpreting attendance patterns in contemporary Christian contexts.

The concept of moral imperatives is closely related to sacred time. Moral imperatives are ethical duties that guide human behaviour in accordance with accepted moral and spiritual standards. In Christian ethics, these imperatives emerge from Scripture, tradition, and communal moral expectations. Core virtues such as stewardship, discipline, accountability, and loyalty shape how believers engage with time and worship obligations (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Hauerwas, 2001). Time is therefore understood theologically as a divine trust that must be managed responsibly, similar to material and spiritual gifts (Bradshaw, 2002; Smith, 2013). From this perspective, punctual participation in worship becomes a moral expression of obedience and reverence for God. The concept of punctuality refers to the practice of arriving or performing duties at the appointed time. In institutional settings, it signifies discipline, reliability, and respect for structure. In religious contexts, however, punctuality takes on deeper theological meaning because it directly affects participation in communal worship. Full participation in worship enables engagement with prayers, hymns, scripture readings, and liturgical actions that shape spiritual formation. Sociologically, understandings of punctuality are influenced by cultural time systems. Edward T. Hall explains that societies differ in whether they adopt rigid monochronic time systems or flexible polychronic ones, shaping expectations about timeliness and attendance (Hall, 1983). These differences are particularly significant in African urban churches where global and local temporal logics intersect (Adam, 2004; Ukah, 2016).

Tardiness, the opposite of punctuality, refers to arriving after the appointed time for an event or obligation. In many institutional contexts, it is interpreted as lack of discipline or disregard for structure. In worship settings, it may disrupt liturgical flow and reduce full participation in key spiritual moments. However, urban sociological studies emphasize that tardiness is often shaped

by structural conditions rather than moral failure alone. Factors such as traffic congestion, transportation challenges, and demanding work schedules in cities like Lagos significantly affect attendance patterns (Eberle, 2014; Gifford, 2015). Therefore, a balanced analysis must integrate both individual responsibility and systemic constraints. Spiritual commitment refers to the degree of devotion individual's show toward their faith through worship, prayer, service, and moral conduct. Christian tradition emphasizes communal worship as essential for sustaining faith, as believers are encouraged not to neglect gathering together (Hebrews 10:25). Contemporary practical theology further highlights that participation in worship contributes to identity formation and spiritual discipline (Smith, 2013; Wepener, 2015). In this study, punctuality and attendance patterns serve as observable indicators of spiritual commitment. While punctuality may reflect intentional preparation and reverence for sacred time, persistent tardiness may reveal tensions between spiritual ideals and socio-economic realities. Understanding these patterns provides insight into how believers negotiate faith, culture, and urban life in everyday practice (Ukah, 2016; Gifford, 2015).

Literature Review

In the domains of theology, sociology of religion, and African Christian studies, scholarly discussions on punctuality, discipline, and participation in Christian worship have grown significantly (Gifford, 2015; Ukah, 2016). These discussions focus on how religious communities structure worship practices and how believers interpret moral obligations within communal religious life. Issues such as timeliness, tardiness, and the ethical use of time are increasingly studied because they reflect deeper patterns of spiritual commitment, cultural orientation, and ecclesial organization. Understanding these concerns requires engagement with theological interpretations of sacred time, sociological theories of time perception, and African contextual reflections on Christian practice.

Theological scholars have provided an important foundation for understanding time in relation to worship. In Christian thought, time is regarded as a divine gift that should be used responsibly in service of God and community (Eliade, 1959; Smith, 2013). The Apostle Paul's instruction to "redeem the time" (Eph. 5:16) reflects a moral imperative for intentional and disciplined use of time in spiritual life. This scriptural orientation has historically shaped Christian attitudes toward worship participation and communal religious responsibility (Bradshaw, 2002; Wepener, 2015). Liturgical studies emphasize that Christian worship has always been structured around organized patterns of time. Paul F. Bradshaw explains that early Christian communities developed fixed patterns of prayer and worship tied to specific hours and days, reflecting a theology of disciplined communal devotion (Bradshaw, 2002). These structured practices reinforced the belief that time dedicated to worship carries spiritual significance and should be treated with reverence and intentionality. Contemporary studies further highlights that such structured worship continues to shape Christian identity and practice across global and African contexts (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013; Wepener, 2015). The concept of sacred time has also been extensively examined in religious studies. Mircea Eliade conceptualizes sacred time as a qualitative transformation of ordinary time in which ritual participation enables believers to experience a transcendent spiritual reality (Eliade, 1959). In this view, worship is not merely a scheduled activity but an encounter with the divine that requires reverence and preparedness. Within this framework, punctuality may be interpreted as a symbolic expression of respect for sacred time and recognition of the spiritual weight of communal worship (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Smith, 2013).

Christian ethical thought also contributes to discussions on time and discipline. Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasizes that Christian discipleship is expressed through disciplined patterns of life that reflect obedience to God, including faithful participation in communal worship (Bonhoeffer, 1955). From this perspective, punctuality becomes an outward manifestation of inward devotion and moral commitment. Contemporary ethical theology similarly highlights that spiritual discipline is not only individual but also communal, shaping the order and integrity of worship life (Hauerwas, 2001; Gifford, 2015). Sociological perspectives, however, demonstrate that perceptions of time are culturally conditioned. Edward T. Hall distinguishes between monochronic and polychronic time systems, where some cultures emphasize strict scheduling while others prioritize relationships and flexibility (Hall, 1983). These differences influence how religious communities interpret punctuality and institutional expectations. Sociological research further shows that time-related behaviour is shaped not only by culture but also by structural and environmental conditions such as transportation systems, employment patterns, and urban organization (Adam, 2004; Eberle, 2014).

In African contexts, studies on time consciousness provides further insight into religious behaviour. John S. Mbiti argues that African time perception is largely event-based rather than strictly chronological, meaning that time is experienced through significant communal and social events rather than clock-based measurement (Mbiti, 1969). This orientation influences religious participation patterns, where relational engagement may sometimes take precedence over strict adherence to schedules. African Christian studies further show that the encounter between missionary-introduced liturgical structures and indigenous temporal worldviews has produced hybrid worship practices that combine structure with flexibility (Ukah, 2016; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). Within Nigerian Christianity, studies have shown the dynamic interaction between spiritual enthusiasm and socio-economic realities. Churches in Nigeria are widely known for vibrant worship practices and strong congregational participation, yet attendance patterns often reflect broader urban and economic conditions (Gifford, 2015; Ukah, 2016). Rapid urbanization, particularly in cities such as Lagos, has introduced challenges such as traffic congestion, long commuting times, and demanding work schedules, all of which affect worship attendance behaviour. Consequently, punctuality in worship cannot be understood solely as an individual moral issue but must be interpreted within broader structural realities.

Despite these challenges, theological and pastoral writings continue to emphasize discipline in worship participation. Practical theology scholars argue that punctual attendance enhances the coherence and flow of worship services, enabling full participation in liturgical elements such as prayers, hymns, scripture readings, and sermons (Wepener, 2015; Smith, 2013). However, pastoral scholars also emphasizes the need for sensitivity to socio-economic conditions that shape congregants' lived experiences, especially in urban African contexts where structural constraints are significant (Ukah, 2016). However, the literature shows that punctuality in Christian worship is shaped by the interaction of theology, culture, ethics, and social structure. While theological traditions emphasize discipline and reverence for sacred time, sociological and African studies highlight the influence of cultural time orientation and urban constraints. These factors combine in Nigerian contexts to produce complex worship attendance patterns that resist simplistic moral interpretation. This study builds on these scholarly discussions by examining how these dynamics manifest in churches within Ojoo Alaba, Lagos, thereby contributing to ongoing debates in practical theology and sociology of religion. Lastly, the ideas of sacred time, moral obligation, tardiness, punctuality, and spiritual commitment offer a comprehensive framework for comprehending church attendance behaviour. These ideas emphasise how theology, culture, and

life experience interact to shape Christian practice and provide a framework for analysing how believers in urban Nigerian environments manage sacred time in the face of daily reality.

Contextual Analysis

Understanding the ethical implications of punctuality and tardiness in Christian worship requires attention to the specific social and cultural environment in which worship takes place. The lived experience of believers is often shaped by local realities that influence how religious practices are carried out while theological reflections emphasize discipline and reverence for sacred time. In the case of churches located in the Ojoo Alaba area of Lagos, patterns of punctuality and tardiness cannot be separated from the broader urban context, economic activities, and cultural perceptions of time that characterize daily life in the community. Ojoo Alaba is located in one of Lagos's busy metropolitan corridors, which are characterized by a high level of business activity, crowded residential areas, and intricate transportation systems. The region links a number of significant commercial and transit lines that connect commuters, workers, and traders to various areas of the city. Ojoo Alaba serves as a hub for both communal life and economic survival, much like many other neighborhoods in Lagos. As a result, local churches serve congregations made up of people whose everyday lives are influenced by challenging financial obligations and erratic urban circumstances. A significant portion of church members in this area are traders, artisans, students, civil servants, and small-scale entrepreneurs who operate within a highly competitive economic environment. Market activities often begin early in the morning and may extend late into the evening. Church schedules often conflict with weekend commercial activity, especially for traders. Despite the fact that many Christians show a great dedication to going to church, these financial constraints occasionally have an impact on when they participate in worship. Some worshippers may plan to leave their homes early in order to attend church, but last-minute household or commercial commitments cause them to be delayed. The Lagos transport system is another significant factor affecting Ojoo Alaba churches' punctuality. The city's extreme traffic jams and erratic commuter patterns are well-known, the locals frequently rely on public transit, including tricycles, buses, and commercial motorcyclists, which don't always follow set schedules. This causes even people who intend to arrive early for worship to experience delays due to traffic bottlenecks, detours, or lengthy wait times for available transportation. In many urban churches throughout Lagos, tardy patterns are often caused by these structural issues.

In addition to economic and transportation factors, cultural perceptions of time also influence how worshippers approach scheduled church services. In many African communities, time is often understood in relational and event-oriented terms rather than strictly in mechanical or chronological measurements. John S. Mbiti noted that traditional African concepts of time emphasize the occurrence of events and communal participation rather than rigid adherence to the clock. This cultural orientation sometimes encourages a flexible interpretation of starting times for social gatherings, including religious services. Within church settings, this may lead some members to perceive the beginning of worship as a gradual process rather than a precise moment. Despite these contextual influences, churches in the Ojoo Alaba area generally maintain official schedules for their worship services. Sunday services often begin with structured activities such as opening prayers, congregational hymns, praise and worship sessions, scripture readings, and sermons. Many church leaders emphasize the importance of punctual attendance in order to preserve the spiritual flow and order of these services. When members arrive late, they may miss important liturgical elements that contribute to the collective experience of worship. For instance, arriving after the opening prayer or praise session may prevent individuals from participating fully in the communal preparation for the sermon and other spiritual activities.

Observations within several churches in the area suggest that patterns of lateness often occur during the early stages of worship services. While a small number of members typically arrive before the official start time, a larger portion of the congregation gradually enters the church within the first thirty minutes of the service. In some cases, worshippers may arrive even later, sometimes during the sermon or shortly before the offertory segment. Although this pattern has become somewhat normalized within certain congregations, it occasionally generates concern among church leaders who view punctuality as an important aspect of spiritual discipline. Clergy and church administrators in Ojoo Alaba frequently address the issue of tardiness through sermons, announcements, and pastoral counseling. Some pastors emphasize that punctuality reflects respect for God and the worshipping community. They encourage members to prepare for Sunday services in advance by organizing their domestic activities and transportation plans in ways that support early arrival at church. Others adopt a more pastoral approach by acknowledging the realities of urban life while still encouraging gradual improvement in attendance habits.

Furthermore, the nature of contemporary worship styles is another contextual element that shapes punctuality in Ojoo Alaba churches. Many Nigerian churches incorporate vibrant musical performances, extended praise sessions, and interactive preaching styles that create a dynamic atmosphere during worship. In some congregations, these lively elements may continue for an extended period before the sermon begins. Because of this, some worshippers perceive the early portions of the service as less critical than the sermon or prophetic prayers, leading them to arrive later while still expecting to participate in what they consider the central moment of worship. The structure of church programs may therefore unintentionally reinforce certain attendance habits. When services are perceived as flexible or extended, members may develop the expectation that arriving later will not significantly affect their overall participation. This perception can gradually weaken the collective sense of urgency associated with the beginning of worship services. Consequently, discussions about punctuality must also consider how worship structures and congregational expectations influence attendance patterns.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that despite their sporadic tardiness, many Ojoo Alaba devotees exhibit genuine spiritual dedication. Many members actively participate in choir groups, prayer meetings, Bible study sessions, and other church activities, and church attendance continues to be an important aspect of community life. Their participation demonstrates a sincere desire for social interaction and spiritual development. Therefore, the problem of tardiness emphasizes the intricate relationship between religious commitment and the practical realities of urban living rather than necessarily indicating a lack of faith or dedication.

From an ethical perspective, Ojoo Alaba's contextual realities show that religious timeliness cannot be assessed exclusively using impersonal moral standards. Rather, it needs to be viewed in the context of the larger framework of institutional practices, cultural attitudes, and social conditions that influence daily behaviour. Christian teachings place a strong emphasis on discipline and respect for sacred time, but pastoral solutions to tardiness must also show consideration for the congregants' actual experiences. This contextual analysis shows how theological beliefs about sacred time connect with the social dynamics of urban Nigerian life by placing the conversation inside the particular setting of Ojoo Alaba. Therefore, the patterns of timeliness and tardiness shown in these churches reflect not just individual decisions but also cultural orientation, financial constraints, transit realities, and changing worship traditions. Acknowledging these contextual elements offers a more impartial basis for assessing the moral importance of time management in Christian worship and for suggesting significant tactics that promote greater spiritual dedication within church communities.

Results and Discussions

The study reveals that punctuality in church attendance within Ojoo Alaba, Lagos, is best understood as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by theological expectations, sociocultural norms, and urban structural constraints, rather than a simple indicator of individual spiritual commitment. Three major patterns emerge from the analysis. First, the findings indicate a clear normative tension between theological ideals and lived realities. Christian teachings, as reflected in the works of Paul F. Bradshaw and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, emphasize disciplined participation in worship as an expression of devotion and stewardship of time. Within this framework, punctuality functions as a moral expectation tied to reverence for sacred time. However, the study finds that this ideal is not consistently attainable in the Ojoo Alaba context. Instead, punctuality operates more as an aspirational virtue than a uniformly practiced behavior. This suggests that equating lateness with weak faith is analytically inadequate and theologically reductionist. Also, the study identifies urban structural constraints as a decisive factor shaping attendance patterns. In a densely populated environment such as Lagos, issues such as traffic congestion, unreliable transportation systems, and economic pressures significantly affect worshippers' ability to arrive on time. This finding supports earlier observations by Mbiti that punctuality cannot be divorced from material conditions but shifts the interpretation of tardiness from a purely moral category to a contextually conditioned behavior.

The implication is that ethical evaluations of punctuality must account for systemic limitations rather than focusing exclusively on individual responsibility. Furthermore, the findings highlight the role of African cultural time orientation in mediating attitudes toward punctuality. Therefore, drawing on insights from John S. Mbiti and Edward T. Hall, the study finds that many congregants operate within a polychronic and relational understanding of time, where social interaction and event significance often take precedence over strict schedules. Within this framework, lateness is not necessarily perceived as disorderly or disrespectful but as part of a flexible engagement with communal life. This cultural orientation partially explains why tardiness does not automatically diminish perceived spiritual commitment within these churches. Apart from these three core patterns, the study also finds that contemporary worship practices reinforce flexibility. Extended praise sessions, interactive liturgies, and non-linear service structures create an environment in which late arrival does not entirely exclude participation. This produces a functional accommodation of tardiness, where inclusion is prioritized over rigid enforcement of time boundaries. While this enhances accessibility and participation, it also raises critical questions about whether the symbolic significance of sacred time, as articulated by Mircea Eliade, is being diluted in practice. Critically, the findings suggest that punctuality should be re-conceptualized not as a binary moral indicator (devoted vs. undisciplined) but as a graduated and context-sensitive expression of commitment.

Spiritual dedication in Ojoo Alaba churches is more accurately reflected through active participation, consistency in attendance, financial support, and involvement in communal ministries, rather than punctuality alone and this has significant implications from an ethical and pastoral perspective. A rigid insistence on punctuality risks alienating congregants whose lateness is structurally induced, while excessive flexibility may weaken the discipline associated with sacred time. The study therefore argues for a balanced, contextually responsive approach and such an approach would integrate theological teachings on discipline with practical realities by promoting time consciousness through teaching, while also adopting flexible and inclusive worship structures. Generally, the study has demonstrated that punctuality in urban Nigerian churches is a negotiated practice, shaped by the intersection of belief, culture, and environment.

Hence, recognizing this complexity allows for a more nuanced ethical framework that upholds the value of disciplined worship without ignoring the lived realities of congregants.

Conclusion

The study of spiritual devotion, tardiness, and punctuality in Ojoo Alaba churches highlights the intricate relationship between cultural conceptions, ethical responsibilities, and urban realities. Tardiness often arises from socioeconomic pressures, transportation challenges, and culturally flexible understandings of time while punctuality emerges as a moral and spiritual indicator of commitment thereby reflecting reverence for sacred time and collective worship traditions. The findings reveal the need for pastoral interventions that integrate theological ideals with practical realities and demonstrate that the ethical reflections on worship attendance cannot be separated from the lived experiences of congregants. Churches can strengthen spiritual commitment, enhance communal cohesion, and sustain meaningful worship practices within the dynamic urban context of Lagos by promoting awareness of sacred time, providing contextual support, and encouraging disciplined yet compassionate participation. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single neighbourhood in Lagos and its reliance on secondary literature rather than primary empirical fieldwork, which may restrict the generalizability of its findings

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Church leadership should adopt flexible and context-responsive scheduling strategies, such as staggered service times or brief grace periods at the commencement of services. This approach acknowledges the realities of urban life including traffic congestion and occupational demands while maintaining the integrity of corporate worship. By doing so, churches can improve attendance without compromising the value of disciplined participation.
2. The Clergy should implement structured teaching initiatives through sermons, Bible studies, and workshops that emphasize the theological and ethical significance of punctuality. Drawing on insights from scholars such as Paul F. Bradshaw and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, these programmes should frame punctuality as an expression of reverence, stewardship, and spiritual discipline. This will help cultivate internal motivation rather than mere external compliance.
3. The Church committees and volunteer groups should establish support systems such as organized transportation, carpooling arrangements, or coordinated travel plans for members. These initiatives directly address structural barriers to punctuality and demonstrate communal care, thereby reinforcing both participation and a sense of belonging within the church.
4. The Pastoral leaders should encourage congregants to adopt practical time-management habits, including early preparation and intentional planning for worship attendance. Through counseling and regular guidance, members can be supported in aligning personal routines with spiritual commitments, thereby fostering a culture of responsibility and readiness.
5. Pastors and church leaders should adopt a balanced approach that upholds punctuality as a spiritual ideal while remaining sensitive to the socioeconomic and cultural realities of congregants. Such an approach avoids rigid judgment and instead promotes an inclusive environment where punctuality is encouraged as a meaningful expression of devotion, rather than enforced as a purely administrative requirement.

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