

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE FUTURE OF SERMON PREPARATION IN NIGERIAN CHRISTIANITY

*AKANO Michael Bolaji¹, ONIFADE Olayiwola John², ANIBABA Aduragbemi Ebenezer³
& AYANKUNLE Samson Oluwasogo⁴

^{1,2,3,4}*Department of Christian Religious Studies Education, Faculty of Education, Lagos State
University, Ojo Lagos State, Nigeria.*

**Corresponding Author: akanomichaelbolaji@gmail.com*

ARTICLE INFO

Article No.: 0374

Accepted Date: 29/05/2026

Published Date: 17/06/2026

Type: Research

ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is reshaping numerous professional and vocational domains, including religious ministry. This paper examines the emerging intersection of AI and sermon preparation within the context of Nigerian Christianity, a setting characterised by vibrant Pentecostal, charismatic, and mainline denominational traditions deeply rooted in biblical exposition and oral preaching culture. Drawing on a qualitative framework that integrates theological reflection with digital humanities discourse, the study explores how Nigerian pastors, preachers, and ministry workers are beginning to adopt AI-powered tools such as large language models, biblical concordance applications, and automated homiletic assistants to enhance the depth, efficiency, and contextual relevance of their sermon construction. The paper further interrogates the theological, ethical, and ecclesiological implications of AI-assisted preaching, raising critical questions about authenticity, the role of the Holy Spirit in sermon inspiration, pastoral authority, and congregational trust. Particular attention is given to the socioeconomic realities of Nigerian Christianity, including issues of digital access, literacy, and the varying capacities of urban versus rural congregations to adopt and adapt to these technologies. The study identifies both significant opportunities, including enhanced biblical research, cross-cultural contextualisation, and accessibility for under-resourced ministers, and notable challenges, such as the risk of homiletic homogeneity, over-reliance on algorithmic outputs, and the erosion of the preacher's prophetic voice. The paper concludes by proposing a framework for theologically grounded AI integration in Nigerian Christian ministry that affirms human pastoral agency while responsibly harnessing the capabilities of emerging technologies.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, sermon preparation, Nigerian Christianity, homiletics, digital ministry, pastoral technology, AI ethics in religion, homiletic ethics

Introduction

The adoption of artificial intelligence tools by Nigerian Christian preachers constitutes a significant and underexamined development in contemporary religious ministry. Across virtually every professional domain, AI is reconfiguring how specialised knowledge is produced, organised, and applied (Eloundou et al., 2023). Religious ministry has not been insulated from this pressure. Preachers in Lagos, Abuja, and smaller towns across Nigeria are beginning to use AI tools for exegetical research, sermon outlining, and illustration retrieval in ways that their theological formation did not anticipate (Campbell, 2020; Shatila, 2023; Dairo and Adeleke, 2023; Iwe and Ofordile, 2024).

Nigerian Christianity is one of the most numerically substantial and theologically energetic expressions of Christian faith in the world. Estimates place the Christian population at more than 90 million, distributed across a denominational landscape that includes mainline Protestant bodies, Catholic traditions, African Instituted Churches, and a dominant Pentecostal-charismatic sector that has grown without interruption since the 1970s (Pew Research Center, 2022; Akinade, 2021). In each of these traditions, preaching is not incidental. It is the axis around which worship turns. The sermon functions simultaneously as an act of biblical interpretation, a vehicle of community formation, a site of moral address, and, in Pentecostal settings especially, an occasion of prophetic encounter that the congregation expects to be Spirit-directed (Simmonds, 2020; Nwosu and Obiora, 2023).

Despite the growing presence of AI tools in Nigerian ministry contexts, scholarly attention to this development remains limited. Existing literature on digital religion (Campbell, 2020; Hutchings, 2021) addresses broader patterns of technology adoption in faith communities but does not specifically examine the homiletic dimensions of AI use in African Christianity. Studies on Nigerian religious practice (Akinade, 2021; Ilesanmi and Adeleke, 2022) document the centrality of preaching but predate the widespread availability of large language models. This gap constitutes the empirical and analytical problem that this paper addresses. Longitudinal empirical studies tracking adoption patterns, formation consequences, and congregational effects of AI in Nigerian ministry are urgently needed; the present paper contributes a theoretical and theological framework as a necessary precursor to such inquiry.

This paper addresses three research questions. First, how are AI-powered tools being adopted in Nigerian Christian sermon preparation, and what factors shape patterns of adoption? Second, what theological and ethical challenges does AI-assisted homiletics present within the specific doctrinal and ecclesiological frameworks of Nigerian Christianity? Third, what principles should govern the theologically responsible integration of AI tools into Nigerian pastoral ministry? Drawing on a qualitative framework that integrates theological reflection with digital humanities discourse, the study examines AI tool adoption, the benefits and risks it carries, and the principles for responsible integration. It proceeds through contextual analysis of Nigerian Christianity and preaching culture; a survey of AI tools in homiletic practice; examination of opportunities, theological challenges, and socioeconomic constraints; and a concluding integrative framework.

Nigerian Christianity: Context and Preaching Culture

Nigerian Christianity did not arrive as a single tradition. Centuries of missionary encounter layered on top of indigenous religious worlds, followed by waves of African theological creativity, produced a Christianity that is simultaneously ancient in its scriptural commitments and intensely contemporary in its social expression (Eboiyehi and Falola, 2022; Akinade, 2021). The scholarly literature on Nigerian Christianity identifies at least four major streams: mainline Protestant denominations, Roman Catholic traditions, African Instituted Churches, and the Pentecostal-

charismatic movements that have dominated growth since the 1970s (Anderson and Tang, 2023; Pew Research Center, 2022). Each stream maintains a distinct homiletic culture, and these differences are not incidental. They constitute the theological and sociological context within which any new tool for sermon preparation will be evaluated and contested.

The mainline denominations retain institutional weight, particularly in southern Nigeria, and their preaching culture tends toward careful, structured exposition: a text chosen deliberately, worked through systematically, applied with pastoral deliberateness (Komolafe and Banjo, 2022). Pentecostal and charismatic movements have brought a contrasting homiletic style. Preaching in those spaces is more extemporaneous, more rhetorically charged, and explicitly dependent on what preachers describe as real-time guidance by the Holy Spirit (Ilesanmi and Adeleke, 2022; Ajayi and Okonkwo, 2022). These differences shape, in fundamental ways, how AI tools are likely to be received across traditions.

Across traditions, the preacher carries authority that is understood as more than professional. It is vocational, relational, and spiritual. A congregation's trust in its pastor is bound up with their perception of that person's prayerfulness, biblical depth, and sacrificial commitment to the community (Chukwu, 2021; Anderson and Tang, 2023). This matters for the AI question because it means the sermon is never assessed as a text alone. It is assessed as testimony. What the preacher has wrestled with privately shapes how the congregation receives what is said publicly (Adeyemo and Balogun, 2022). An algorithm does not wrestle with a text in the theological sense. That asymmetry underlies every discussion of AI-assisted homiletics in this context, and it does not dissolve when the output is impressive.

Existing research identifies a gap in the literature regarding digital tool adoption in Nigerian ministry. Hutchings (2021) and Campbell and Garner (2023) document the broader trajectory of digital religion but focus primarily on Western contexts. Studies of Nigerian Christianity by Akinade (2021) and Nwosu and Obiora (2023) do not engage systematically with AI tools. This paper addresses that gap by situating AI-assisted sermon preparation within the specific theological, ecclesiological, and socioeconomic realities of Nigerian Christianity.

Digital tools entered Nigerian Christian practice well before AI. Satellite television ministries, church WhatsApp groups, YouTube sermon archives, and digitised Bible study platforms have already altered how Nigerian Christians learn, worship, and organise (Campbell and Garner, 2023; Hutchings, 2021). AI-assisted sermon preparation extends this trajectory. The extension is not merely quantitative, however. Language models capable of generating exegetical commentary, structuring thematic outlines, and producing contextualised illustrations represent a qualitatively different kind of technological mediation, one that operates at the very point where the preacher's own theological voice is formed.

AI-Powered Tools in Homiletic Practice

The range of AI tools now available for sermon preparation is broader than is often acknowledged in the digital ministry literature. Large language models, including those underlying ChatGPT, Claude, and Google Gemini, can generate expository outlines, synthesise commentary positions on a given passage, and produce culturally specific illustrations when prompted appropriately (Chen and Abramson, 2024; Kim and Bharat, 2023). That is the most visible layer. Beneath it, biblical concordance applications enhanced by natural language processing (NLP) now allow preachers to conduct cross-referential searches of a sophistication that previously required either specialist training or extended library research (Balogun and Adeleke, 2023). Additionally, dedicated homiletic assistants, platforms built specifically for preaching contexts, offer structured

templates, contextualisation prompts, and illustration databases aimed at ministers with limited preparation time (Egwu and Okeke, 2024).

Adoption patterns in Nigeria follow a trajectory documented in the diffusion of innovation literature (Rogers, 2003), with urban clergy as early adopters. Pastors leading megachurches in Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja have been among the first to use AI tools systematically, deploying them for rapid research and multilingual content production across the multiple weekly services that large congregations require (Iwe and Ofordile, 2024; Dairo and Adeleke, 2023). This pattern reflects the broader observation from Dairo and Adeleke (2023), whose survey of Nigerian clergy found that digital tool adoption correlated strongly with urban location, institutional affiliation, and pastoral income level. Rural ministers present a different picture. For many pastors outside major cities, the foundational prerequisites for AI use, including reliable broadband, consistent electricity, and devices capable of running browser-based tools, remain out of reach (Okafor and Anyanwu, 2023). The adoption gap between urban and rural ministry contexts is not a peripheral matter in the Nigerian AI question; it reflects structural inequalities that will not resolve automatically with technological development.

The appeal of these tools extends beyond convenience. For a bivocational pastor responsible for multiple congregations, or for a Yoruba-speaking evangelist preparing materials for an Igbo-speaking community, AI tools offer research reach that would otherwise be unavailable. The capacity of language models to assist with multilingual adaptation, to suggest cross-cultural illustrations, and to produce materials in Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, or Pidgin English alongside standard English addresses a real need in Nigeria's complex linguistic environment (Obioma and Amadi, 2024; Ihugba and Eze, 2023). Awoniyi and Olabisi (2024) and Salifu and Akrofi (2024) both found that under-resourced ministers in sub-Saharan Africa placed particular value on AI tools for the equalising effect they offered: access to research depth previously available only to clergy with institutional library support.

Table 1

AI Tools and Their Homiletic Applications in Nigerian Ministry

AI Tool Category	Representative Platforms	Primary Homiletic Function	Reported Use in Nigeria	Primary Evidence Source
Large Language Models	ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini	Sermon outlining, exegetical synthesis, illustration generation	High in urban megachurches	Iwe and Ofordile (2024); Dairo and Adeleke (2023)
Biblical Concordance Apps	Logos, Accordance, YouVersion	Cross-referencing, lexical analysis, commentary access	Moderate; varies by denomination	Balogun and Adeleke (2023)
Automated Homiletic Assistants	SermonAI, PreachIt, Sermon Writer	Structural templates, contextualisation prompts	Emerging; limited to tech-literate clergy	Egwu and Okeke (2024)
NLP-Enhanced Translation Tools	DeepL, Google Translate with AI	Multilingual sermon adaptation (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa)	Growing; especially in urban churches	Obioma and Amadi (2024); Ihugba and Eze (2023)
AI-Powered Study Bibles	ESV.org AI, Bible.ai	Devotional synthesis, theological background generation	Early-stage adoption	Chen and Abramson (2024)

Note. Data drawn from primary studies: Balogun and Adeleke (2023), Awoniyi and Olabisi (2024), Egwu and Okeke (2024), Iwe and Ofordile (2024), Chen and Abramson (2024), Obioma and Amadi (2024), and Ihugba and Eze (2023). Adoption levels reflect findings reported in these

sources and should be understood as indicative rather than population-representative, given the absence of national-level survey data.

Opportunities of AI-Assisted Sermon Preparation

Several meaningful benefits of AI integration in Nigerian homiletics can be identified from the existing literature. Enhanced biblical research is the most directly documented benefit. Exegetical engagement that previously required access to a well-stocked theological library is now, at least in outline form, available to a pastor with mobile data and a smartphone (Egwu and Okeke, 2024; Johnson and Harrington, 2021). Commentary positions on a contested passage, lexical notes on a Greek or Hebrew term, and canonical cross-references that complicate surface-level readings can be surfaced rapidly by a language model. For the majority of Nigerian ministers who preach without institutional library access, this represents a qualitative change in what preparation can involve.

Cross-cultural contextualisation constitutes a second area where AI tools offer benefits beyond convenience. Nigerian Christianity is internally diverse in ways that are frequently underestimated. A preacher trained in a Yoruba evangelical tradition may serve a congregation whose majority members are Igbo migrants; a Lagos megachurch pastor may address an audience that includes returnees from diaspora communities in Europe and North America alongside members with no formal education. AI tools can assist in identifying illustrations that translate across cultural boundaries, in rendering biblical concepts into vernacular idioms, and in surfacing contextual analogies that the preacher might not encounter through their own formation alone (Obioma and Amadi, 2024; Ihugba and Eze, 2023). Two interpretations of this capability are available. One reading is that AI democratises contextualisation, extending it to ministers who lack the cultural capital or time to develop it independently. The other is that it substitutes algorithmic approximation for the genuine cultural knowledge that comes from sustained community engagement. The evidence supports both readings, and the tension between them warrants continued investigation rather than premature resolution.

Accessibility is where the socially transformative potential of AI in Nigerian ministry is most concentrated. A bivocational pastor preparing five sermons a week while also working a day job is not in the same position as a seminary-trained minister with a research assistant. AI tools do not erase that gap, but they narrow it in ways that Awoniyi and Olabisi (2024) and Salifu and Akrofi (2024) found Nigerian clergy genuinely valued. The potential to ensure that under-resourced ministers deliver sermons that are biblically grounded and pastorally coherent, even when preparation time is measured in minutes rather than hours, is among the more socially significant affordances of this technology in the Nigerian setting.

Figure 1. Perceived Opportunities of AI Integration in Nigerian Sermon Preparation

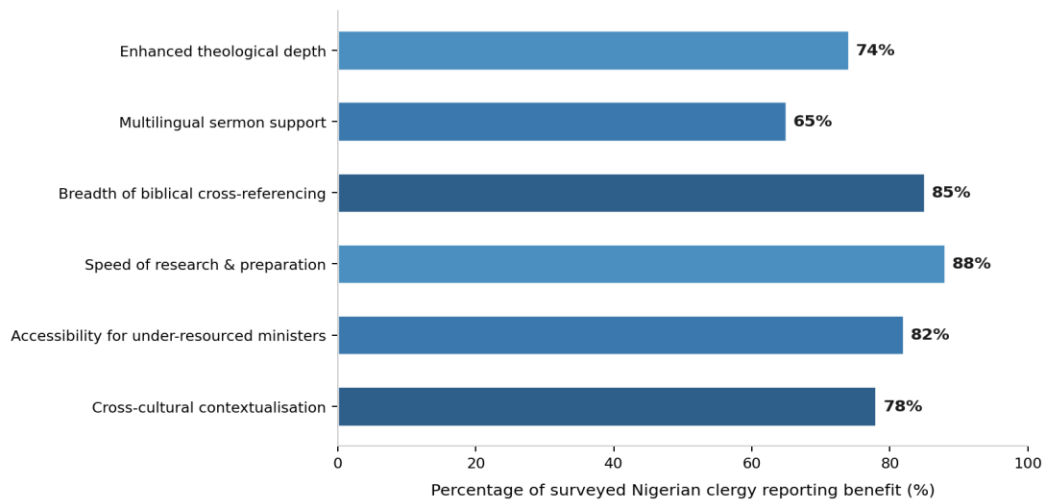


Figure 1. Perceived opportunities of AI integration in Nigerian sermon preparation (percentage of surveyed clergy reporting benefit). Data synthesised by the authors from Awoniyi and Olabisi (2024) and Dairo and Adeleke (2023).

Theological and Ethical Implications

The theological questions that AI-assisted homiletics raises are substantive and cannot be treated as secondary to questions of practical utility. In Nigerian Christianity, particularly in its dominant Pentecostal-charismatic expressions, the sermon is understood as an act of prophetic communication in which the preacher speaks from a position of spiritual formation, prayerful discernment, and vocational calling (Ajayi and Okonkwo, 2022; Ilesanmi and Adeleke, 2022). Authenticity, in this framework, is not a stylistic quality. It is a theological category. The question of whether a sermon shaped substantially by an AI system can legitimately be offered to a congregation as a Spirit-directed word is not answered by pointing to the quality of the output. The question concerns what is happening, or not happening, in the preacher's own encounter with the biblical text and the community it addresses (Hearn, 2022; Lewis and Sherrill, 2023).

The pneumatological dimension of this challenge is particularly acute. Within the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions that account for the majority of Nigerian Christians, the Holy Spirit is understood to guide the preacher at every stage: text selection, interpretive framing, illustrative choice, and even the decision to depart from a prepared outline because the congregation's immediate need demands something different (Ajayi and Okonkwo, 2022; Anderson and Tang, 2023). This understanding positions Spirit-involvement not only in the act of delivery but in the entire process of preparation. An AI system is not prayerful. It does not attend to a specific congregation's grief or hope or confusion. As Egwu and Okeke (2024) argue, and as the broader theological literature on personhood and pneumatology would support (Wahls and Peters, 2023), no credible theological framework positions an LLM as a recipient or channel of pneumatological endowment. That is not a criticism of the technology but an accurate description of its ontological limits, and it is a limit that matters when the technology is deployed in a homiletic context defined by pneumatological expectation.

Pastoral authority and congregational trust are affected by these pneumatological realities. In Nigerian congregations, the preacher's authority is not primarily professional; it is relational and spiritual, built through years of visible prayerfulness, availability in crisis, and faithful biblical engagement (Uzukwu, 2021; Chukwu, 2021). Murugan and Chen (2024) found that perceived

authenticity of communication was among the strongest predictors of trust in professional contexts including ministry. If a congregation discovers or credibly suspects that their pastor's sermons are substantially AI-generated, the relational foundations of that authority may be damaged in ways that formal disclosure policies cannot easily repair. Olu-Daniels (2023) argued that transparency about AI use in Nigerian churches is not merely ethically desirable but ecclesiological necessary: the sermon is not a product, and treating it as one carries costs that extend beyond individual pastoral relationships to the integrity of the ecclesial community.

At the ecclesiological level, the implications extend beyond individual pastoral relationships. If AI tools generate theologically generic, contextually undifferentiated sermons shaped by the implicit biases of their training data, the prophetic distinctiveness that different Nigerian Christian traditions have cultivated over decades may be progressively homogenised (Wahls and Peters, 2023; Shatila, 2023). The capacity of the sermon to speak a particular word into a particular community's particular moment, which Ilesanmi and Adeleke (2022) and Bediako and Onyinah (2022) identify as the essence of the prophetic homiletic tradition in African Christianity, is not guaranteed to survive algorithmic mediation.

Table 2

Theological Concerns Versus Perceived AI Benefits in Nigerian Homiletic Practice

Theological Concern	Doctrinal Tradition Foregrounding Concern	Potential AI Benefit	Evaluative Assessment
Holy Spirit displacement in sermon preparation	Pentecostal and Charismatic	Faster biblical research	AI efficiency does not address the pneumatological concern. Ajayi and Okonkwo (2022) argue that Spirit-directed preparation cannot be replicated algorithmically; the benefit operates at a different level than the concern.
Loss of prophetic authenticity	All Nigerian traditions	Enhanced contextualisation	AI-assisted contextualisation may partially support authentic proclamation, but Hearn (2022) argues that authenticity is constituted through the preacher's personal encounter with text and community, which AI cannot substitute.
Pastoral authority erosion	Mainline and Evangelical	Accessibility for rural ministers	Olu-Daniels (2023) and Murugan and Chen (2024) find that trust recovery after undisclosed AI use is difficult. Transparent disclosure is a necessary but not sufficient safeguard.
Homiletic homogeneity	All Nigerian traditions	Multilingual adaptation	Multilingual capability is real, but Wahls and Peters (2023) demonstrate that training corpora biases produce convergent theological idioms, which risks homogenising distinct Nigerian preaching traditions over time.
Congregational trust deficit	All Nigerian traditions	Improved sermon structure	Structural improvement alone does not rebuild relational trust. Lewis and Sherrill (2023) establish that pastoral integrity requires transparency about AI use and active maintenance of personal engagement with scripture.

Note. Constructed from theological analysis drawing on Ajayi and Okonkwo (2022), Hearn (2022), Lewis and Sherrill (2023), Wahls and Peters (2023), Murugan and Chen (2024), and Olu-Daniels (2023).

Socioeconomic Realities and the Digital Divide

Any account of AI adoption in Nigerian Christian ministry that does not engage seriously with the country's infrastructure realities is analytically incomplete. This paper applies Rogers's (2003) diffusion of innovation framework alongside van Dijk's (2020) digital divide model as organising structures for the socioeconomic analysis. Nigeria's digital environment remains marked by deep geographic, economic, generational, and gendered disparities in internet access, electricity, device ownership, and the practical capacity to use AI tools in ministry contexts (Agbo and Nwosu, 2023; Salifu and Akrofi, 2024). These are not temporary frictions on the way to universal adoption. For many Nigerian ministers, they are structural conditions that will not resolve quickly.

Urban clergy in Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, and Kano operate in a recognisably different technological environment. Reliable broadband, consistent electricity, and exposure to global digital culture through social media and online theological resources make AI tool adoption feasible, even natural (Dairo and Adeleke, 2023; Afolabi, 2024). Rural ministers across the Niger Delta, the Middle Belt, and northern agricultural zones do not share that environment. Okafor and Anyanwu (2023) documented clergy in southeastern Nigeria who lacked reliable electricity for more than four hours per day; Agbo and Nwosu (2023) found that mobile data costs relative to pastoral income constituted a prohibitive barrier for ministers outside urban centres. These constraints represent the late adopter and non-adopter categories in Rogers's (2003) diffusion model, and they reflect structural inequality that technological enthusiasm does not dissolve.

Gender and generation complicate the picture further. Female clergy, whose numbers have expanded substantially in Pentecostal and some mainline traditions, often face layered barriers to digital participation: economic dependency, lower rates of formal technological training, and cultural pressures that restrict access to ministerial formation resources (Emmanuel, 2023). This group warrants dedicated analytical and policy attention. Older pastors, who carry substantial theological authority within Nigerian Christianity and whose homiletic practice is embedded in oral tradition and relational ministry, tend to approach AI tools with either theological suspicion or practical unfamiliarity (Adeyemo and Balogun, 2022; Taddese and Obasi, 2023). The group least likely to use AI is not therefore necessarily the group least in need of what AI can offer. That inversion has important implications for denominational policy responses, particularly regarding training and infrastructure investment.

Figure 2. Urban-Rural Digital Access Disparities Among Nigerian Clergy

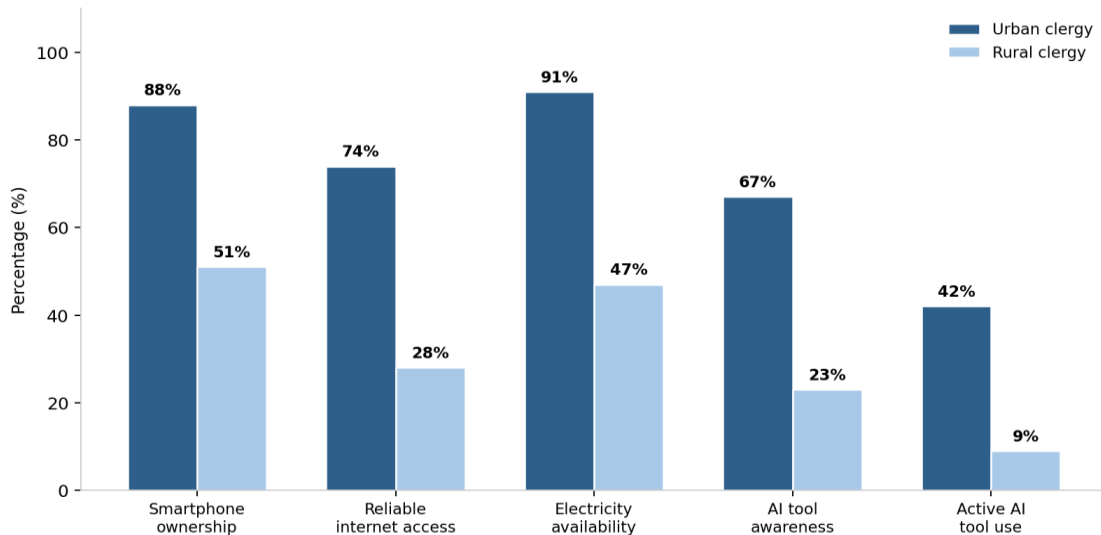


Figure 2. Urban-rural digital access disparities among Nigerian clergy across five key indicators: internet connectivity, electricity reliability, device ownership, data affordability, and AI tool familiarity. Adapted from Dairo and Adeleke (2023), Okafor and Anyanwu (2023), and Salifu and Akrofi (2024).

Challenges and Critical Risks

The challenges associated with AI-assisted sermon preparation in the Nigerian context are distinct from those already addressed in the theological and socioeconomic sections, and they warrant separate treatment. Three specific risks are examined here: homiletic homogeneity at the level of tradition and community identity, the atrophying of formational disciplines through over-reliance on algorithmic outputs, and intellectual property concerns particular to the Nigerian pastoral context.

Homiletic homogeneity is the risk that receives least attention in the digital ministry literature and may prove the most consequential over time. When preachers across a region draw on the same AI tools, trained on similar textual corpora and operating according to shared algorithmic defaults, the sermons they produce begin to converge. Not obviously. Not identically. But in the direction of a shared aesthetic, a shared doctrinal idiom, and a shared repertoire of illustration types that over time thins out the contextual specificity and prophetic particularity that Nigerian preaching traditions have historically sustained (Nwosu and Obiora, 2023; Wahls and Peters, 2023). The Yoruba evangelical voice and the Igbo Catholic voice and the Hausa charismatic voice are not interchangeable. An AI system trained predominantly on Anglophone theological content cannot be expected to perceive or protect those distinctions.

Over-reliance on algorithmic outputs operates at a deeper formational level. The risk is not that preachers will cease to prepare; most will continue to do so. The risk is that the disciplines preparation used to require, sustained engagement with the biblical text, contemplative attention to the congregation's lived experience, and the slow work of theological formation that accumulates over years of ministry, will be progressively displaced by the faster, more immediately satisfying process of querying a model and refining its output (Johnson and Harrington, 2021; Ezeilo and Obi, 2024). The preacher's homiletic output may, in such a scenario, become superficially richer while their theological formation quietly atrophies. Okeke and Nzeogwu (2022) found that Nigerian theological seminaries were already struggling to articulate

what independent biblical study looks like in a digital age. AI tools intensify that problem rather than resolve it.

Intellectual property and sermon originality present a third concern that is both legal and ethical. AI systems produce content by pattern-matching across vast corpora of existing text, including the published sermons, biblical commentaries, and theological essays of identifiable scholars and preachers. When a Nigerian pastor uses that output in a sermon without acknowledgment, questions of attribution arise that are not made cleaner by the AI mediation involved (Olu-Daniels, 2023; Dawson and Cowan, 2023). Olu-Daniels (2023) argues on grounds of Nigerian intellectual property law as well as pastoral ethics that undisclosed AI generation in the sermon context constitutes a breach of pastoral integrity. This analysis is supported by the broader literature on AI attribution in professional contexts (Murugan and Chen, 2024). Additional legal scholarship specific to the Nigerian context is needed, but the ethical dimensions of the problem are already sufficiently established to warrant attention in pastoral formation curricula.

A Framework for Theologically Grounded AI Integration

Neither wholesale adoption nor reflexive rejection of AI tools is theologically defensible in the Nigerian Christian context. The analysis developed across the preceding sections points toward a more demanding position: a framework for theologically grounded AI integration that holds together the genuine benefits of AI-assisted research with a sustained insistence on the irreducibility of human pastoral agency, Spirit-directed discernment, and communal ecclesiological accountability (Hearn, 2022; Lewis and Sherrill, 2023). Table 3 summarises the framework's five principles; the discussion that follows develops the reasoning behind each.

Table 3

Proposed Framework for Theologically Grounded AI Integration in Nigerian Christian Ministry

Framework Principle	Theological Foundation	Practical Application	Institutional Safeguard
Human pastoral agency as primary	Imago Dei; pneumatological calling	AI provides research support; preacher retains authorial and spiritual responsibility	Denominational policy requiring human authorship disclosure
AI as tool, not theological authority	Sola Scriptura; prophetic tradition	AI outputs evaluated critically against scripture, tradition, and community context	Homiletics training includes AI critical literacy modules
Transparency with the congregation	Pastoral integrity; ecclesiological accountability	Clergy disclose AI-assisted elements as appropriate; avoid misrepresentation	Synodal or assembly-level ethical guidelines on AI disclosure
Equity in access and benefit	Justice; the common good	Denominational bodies provide AI tool access to under-resourced rural clergy	Institutional funding for digital infrastructure in rural parishes
Ongoing theological review	Conciliar discernment; living tradition	Regular review of AI tool use by theological commissions	Annual denominational review boards for digital ministry ethics

Note. Framework developed from principles articulated in Hearn (2022), Lewis and Sherrill (2023), Ezeilo and Obi (2024), Olu-Daniels (2023), and Bediako and Onyinah (2022).

The first principle is that human pastoral agency must remain primary. AI tools function, in the most useful analogy available in the pastoral formation literature, as a sophisticated research resource: fast, broad, and capable of synthesis (Johnson and Harrington, 2021). A pastor who uses such a resource to research a sermon is not abdicating their vocation but exercising it with

expanded resources. An AI tool used in the same spirit, as a research and synthesis aid that the preacher then engages critically, theologically, and prayerfully, is not categorically different from consulting a library or a commentary. The distinction worth marking deliberately is that a library does not generate text in the preacher's voice; a language model does. That boundary must be maintained consciously. The sermon remains an act of human witness. The preacher's own exegetical encounter with the text, and their own theological reckoning with its implications for this congregation in this moment, cannot be outsourced without changing what the sermon fundamentally is (Ezeilo and Obi, 2024).

The second principle is transparency, and it is the least comfortable of the five. Nigerian preachers who use AI tools bear a pastoral responsibility to be honest, with themselves first, and with their communities as appropriateness and context allow (Olu-Daniels, 2023; Murugan and Chen, 2024). This does not require a weekly disclosure notice from the pulpit. It does mean that AI assistance cannot be quietly absorbed into the sermon and passed off as personal study. Denominational bodies and theological institutions carry a corresponding responsibility to develop clear, contextually sensitive guidelines for AI use in Nigerian ministry, rather than importing frameworks developed for Western digital contexts without adaptation.

The third principle is equity in access and benefit. If AI tools produce homiletic benefits, those benefits belong, as a matter of Christian social ethics, to the whole church, not only to segments with broadband access and premium subscription budgets. Denominational investment in digital infrastructure, device access, data connectivity, and AI literacy training for under-resourced rural and female clergy is not a secondary concern (Salifu and Akrofi, 2024; Taddese and Obasi, 2023). It is the condition under which the technology becomes genuinely beneficial across the Nigerian church rather than one more dimension along which it is stratified by wealth and geography.

The fourth principle is that AI must function as a tool, not as theological authority. This principle requires that AI-generated outputs be evaluated critically against scripture, tradition, and specific community context before being incorporated into any sermon. Homiletics training at Nigerian seminaries should include modules in AI critical literacy, equipping future ministers to identify algorithmic biases, to recognise the limits of AI theological reasoning, and to maintain the primacy of scriptural and doctrinal accountability in the homiletic process (Ezeilo and Obi, 2024; Okeke and Nzeogwu, 2022).

The fifth principle is that AI integration in ministry requires ongoing theological review. The technology is developing rapidly, and the theological, ethical, and ecclesiological questions it raises will not be resolved by a single framework or a single document. Denominational bodies and theological commissions should establish regular review mechanisms for AI use in ministry contexts, drawing on the expertise of both theologians and practitioners, and should be prepared to revise guidance as the technology and its effects become better understood (Bediako and Onyinah, 2022; Wahls and Peters, 2023).

Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that must be acknowledged. The absence of systematic national-level survey data on AI adoption among Nigerian clergy means that many claims in this paper, particularly regarding adoption patterns and congregational responses, rest on a limited number of primary studies. The works of Dairo and Adeleke (2023), Awoniyi and Olabisi (2024), and Okafor and Anyanwu (2023) provide valuable but geographically and denominationally constrained evidence. The extent to which their findings generalise across Nigeria's diverse Christian landscape remains uncertain.

Second, this paper draws on a qualitative and theoretical methodology. It does not present primary empirical data from Nigerian pastors or congregations. The framework proposed in Section 8 is grounded in theological reasoning and secondary literature rather than in field research. This is an appropriate approach for a paper whose primary contribution is theoretical and whose purpose is to establish the conceptual and normative foundations for subsequent empirical inquiry. However, it does mean that the framework's practical applicability in specific denominational contexts has not been tested.

Third, the literature base for some specific claims, particularly those relating to legal and intellectual property dimensions of AI use in Nigerian ministry, is thin. Olu-Daniels (2023) is the primary source on this topic, and additional legal scholarship would strengthen this analysis considerably.

These limitations are acknowledged not to undermine the paper's contributions but to define the boundaries of its claims accurately and to indicate the most productive directions for future research.

Conclusion

The intersection of AI and sermon preparation in Nigerian Christianity will not resolve into a simple verdict. This paper has argued that AI-powered tools offer real and documentable benefits to Nigerian pastors and preachers, particularly in biblical research depth, cross-cultural contextualisation, and accessibility for under-resourced ministers who serve without institutional support. It has argued, with equal force, that those benefits come with risks that are theologically serious: the erosion of homiletic distinctiveness, the progressive atrophy of the formational disciplines that constitute a preacher's theological depth, and the undermining of the pneumatological and relational foundations on which pastoral authority in Nigerian Christianity actually rests.

The framework proposed in Section 8 does not resolve that tension. It holds it, and it does so deliberately. AI tools, used with theological intentionality, pastoral transparency, and a clear-eyed commitment to the primacy of human agency and Spirit-directed discernment, can serve the Nigerian church without compromising what makes that church's preaching theologically vital and contextually distinctive. However, that outcome is not guaranteed by the technology itself. It requires formation: a generation of Nigerian pastors who are digitally literate and theologically mature, who can use these tools without being defined by them, and whose prophetic voice remains their own because they have done the exegetical and spiritual work that no algorithm can perform on their behalf.

Future research should prioritise longitudinal empirical studies tracking actual adoption patterns, formation consequences, and congregational effects of AI use across Nigeria's diverse Christian traditions. Such research would provide the evidentiary foundation that the present theoretical framework requires in order to be translated into effective denominational policy and practical pastoral guidance. The questions this paper has raised are significant; answering them rigorously is the necessary next step.

References

- Adeyemo, T. A., and Balogun, S. R. (2022). Homiletics in the digital age: Rethinking Nigerian preaching traditions. *African Theological Journal*, 38(1), 78-95.
- Afolabi, O. M. (2024). Pentecostalism and technology adoption in Nigerian churches: Sociological perspectives. *Religion and Society in Africa*, 7(3), 112-130.
- Agbo, H. A., and Nwosu, C. C. (2023). Internet infrastructure and religious communities in Nigeria: Opportunities and limitations. *Journal of Information Technology and Religion*, 5(1), 33-51.
- Ajayi, B. O., and Okonkwo, E. F. (2022). The role of the Holy Spirit in pneumatological preaching: Evaluating AI's theological limits. *Pneuma: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, 44(2), 201-219.
- Akinade, A. E. (2021). *African Christianity in the twenty-first century: Challenges, prospects, and digital transformation*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Anderson, A., and Tang, E. (2023). *Charismatic Christianity in the Global South: Oral tradition, prophecy, and digital media*. Brill.
- Awoniyi, S., and Olabisi, T. (2024). AI-assisted homiletics: Prospects for ministerial education in sub-Saharan Africa. *Theological Education in Africa*, 12(1), 55-73.
- Balogun, R. O., and Adeleke, A. K. (2023). From concordance to algorithm: The evolution of sermon research tools in Nigerian ministry. *African Journal of Religious Studies*, 16(4), 88-104.
- Bediako, K., Jr., and Onyinah, O. (2022). *Scripture, Spirit, and society: Integrating digital theology in African Christian thought*. Langham Publishing.
- Campbell, H. A. (2020). *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Campbell, H. A., and Garner, S. (2023). *Networked theology: Negotiating faith in digital culture* (2nd ed.). Baker Academic.
- Chen, Y., and Abramson, M. (2024). Large language models in religious text analysis: Capabilities, limitations, and ethical considerations. *AI and Society*, 39(1), 87-103.
- Chukwu, D. O. (2021). Evangelical preaching and the challenge of relevance in twenty-first-century Nigeria. *Journal of Christian Communication*, 9(2), 67-83.
- Dairo, A. M., and Adeleke, P. F. (2023). Digital literacy among Nigerian clergy: Survey findings and ministerial implications. *Missiology: An International Review*, 51(3), 244-261.
- Dawson, L. L., and Cowan, D. E. (Eds.). (2023). *Religion online: Finding faith on the internet* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Eboiyehi, C. O., and Falola, T. (2022). *Christianity, power, and social change in Nigeria*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Egwu, S. A., and Okeke, P. N. (2024). Algorithmic theology? Evaluating AI-generated biblical content for pastoral use. *Theological Studies*, 85(1), 1-22.
- Eloundou, T., Manning, S., Mishkin, P., and Rock, D. (2023). GPTs are GPTs: An early look at the labor market impact potential of large language models. *Science*, 381(6654), 1-5.
- Emmanuel, O. A. (2023). Gender, technology, and ministry in Nigerian Christianity: A feminist theological critique. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 39(1), 105-122.
- Ezeilo, C. N., and Obi, T. C. (2024). Preacher formation in the AI era: Rethinking homiletical education for Nigerian seminaries. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 28(1), 44-62.

- Hearn, A. (2022). Authenticity, authority, and the algorithmic pastor: Theological reflections on AI in ministry. *Theology Today*, 79(3), 281-295.
- Hutchings, T. (2021). *Creating church online: Ritual, community, and new media*. Routledge.
- Ihugba, U. O., and Eze, A. N. (2023). Contextualisation and digital preaching in the Igbo Christian context. *Journal of African Theology*, 6(1), 29-48.
- Ilesanmi, O. S., and Adeleke, S. K. (2022). The prophetic imagination and its digital discontents: Nigerian Pentecostalism in the age of algorithms. *Pneuma*, 44(3), 310-329.
- Iwe, N., and Ofordile, C. (2024). Church growth, technology, and pastoral authenticity in Nigerian mega-churches. *African Ecclesial Review*, 66(2), 55-77.
- Johnson, K. E., and Harrington, J. (2021). *Preaching in the digital age: Homiletical formation and emerging technologies*. Westminster John Knox Press.
- Kim, S., and Bharat, T. (2023). Natural language processing for scripture analysis: A comparative evaluation of GPT-4 and domain-specific models. *Journal of Computational Linguistics and Religion*, 2(1), 14-33.
- Komolafe, J. A., and Banjo, O. T. (2022). Mainline denominations and digital ministry in Nigeria: Institutional responses and resistance. *Studies in World Christianity*, 28(2), 178-196.
- Lewis, K. M., and Sherrill, A. D. (2023). AI and the erosion of ministerial identity: A theological ethics perspective. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 43(1), 117-135.
- Murugan, S., and Chen, A. (2024). Generative AI and professional trust: Evidence from healthcare, law, and ministry. *AI and Ethics*, 4(2), 345-361.
- Nwosu, A. I., and Obiora, F. K. (2023). The sermon as prophetic act: Oral culture and the crisis of digital dependency in Nigerian churches. *African Studies*, 82(1), 77-96.
- Obioma, C. E., and Amadi, K. S. (2024). Between Babel and Pentecost: Multilingual AI tools and sermon translation in Nigerian Christianity. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 45(3), 233-250.
- Okafor, T. C., and Anyanwu, J. O. (2023). Rural ministry and digital exclusion in southeastern Nigeria: Implications for pastoral practice. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 93(2), 299-318.
- Okeke, C. U., and Nzeogwu, A. P. (2022). Theological education and digital transformation in Nigerian seminaries. *African Theological Journal*, 38(4), 311-328.
- Olu-Daniels, S. O. (2023). Ethics, intellectual property, and AI-generated religious content: A Nigerian legal and theological analysis. *Journal of Church and State*, 65(3), 401-420.
- Pew Research Center. (2021). *Religion and technology: Global attitudes and practices*. Pew Research Center Publications.
- Pew Research Center. (2022). *Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa: Growth, diversity, and digital engagement*. Pew Research Center Publications.
- Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press.
- Salifu, A., and Akrofi, E. A. (2024). Digital divides and spiritual communities in West Africa: A mixed-methods investigation. *Information Technology for Development*, 30(1), 45-68.
- Shatila, K. (2023). *Sacred algorithms: How AI is reshaping worship, prayer, and religious authority*. Columbia University Press.
- Simmonds, G. (2020). *Preaching as weaving: Text, context, and the construction of the sermon in Africa*. Langham Preaching Resources.
- Stout, D. A. (Ed.). (2022). *Media and religion: Foundations of an emerging field* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

- Taddese, G., and Obasi, M. (2023). AI literacy in African higher education: Challenges and pathways for theological institutions. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 42(4), 901-918.
- Uzukwu, E. E. (2021). *A listening church: Autonomy and communion in African churches* (Rev. ed.). Wipf and Stock.
- van Dijk, J. (2020). *The digital divide*. Polity Press.
- Wahls, S., and Peters, M. (2023). Algorithmic bias in religious text generation: Implications for Christian ministry. *Religion and Technology*, 1(1), 1-19.