




# Faith, Culture and Community: Toward A Redefinition of African Christian Identity in the Context of AI

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## Abstract

From time immemorial, faith, culture, and community have maintained a symbiotic relationship, a pattern that also characterises the spread of Christianity worldwide. In Africa, the three worked together to promote the growth of Christianity through the imposition of mono-faith, deculturation, and de-communisation of Africans into mission centres. Faith was shaped by the multilayered cultural values that each community encountered and embraced. The three continued to face different challenges that also kept redefining Christianity throughout its history. This paper aims to address critical questions about the place of faith, how culture shapes communities, and how communities are shaped, unshaped, or reshaped by Artificial Intelligence to redefine Christianity. This desk research employed a techno-theological framework analyse how AI has rebranded and redefined faith, culture and community. The paper acknowledges that African Christianity made many strides that shaped its identity. Still, AI remoulded faith, culture and communities, leading to a different understanding of the future of African Christianity. The research contributes to postcolonial theological discourse by offering a framework for understanding how African Christians might navigate between maintaining faith, cultural preservation, and community adaptation while simultaneously embracing AI as a new, future-defining force.

**Keywords:** Faith; Culture; Community; African Christian identity; Artificial Intelligence

## Introduction

The interplay between faith, culture, and community has shaped the development of Christianity over the centuries. Studies on Christianity show that the religion has been, from its very inception, a cross-cultural and diverse religion (Lloyd, 2017). In Africa, Christian faith was expressed in different contexts shaped by various cultural communities. These communities provided a platform for Christianity to gain its unique multicultural and polyvocal texture as a world religion (Butterworth, 2022). Several historical and theological factors support the view that Christianity reached Africa from its earliest stages (Latourette, 2005; DeRouchie, 2022). Unfortunately, this pride was destroyed by the Islamisation of Egypt, Ethiopia and Libya, which were centres of Christianity (Harris, 2007; Adeoye, 2024). Other parts of Africa that did not have the privilege of receiving the first form of Christianity remained religious, worshipping God, who was known in many languages, including *Mwari*, *Mu-ari*, the Zimbabwean Shona for "He Who Is What He Is" (Exodus 3:14).



Christianity in Africa spread to different communities through the imposition of mono-faith, deculturation, and the de-communisation of Africans into mission communities that were new to their way of life (Mujinga, 2017, p. 52). According to Duncan (2003, p. 5), "the mission station was a centre for the orphans, the aged and the disabled who found a refuge, so did the accused of witchcraft, girls seeking to escape the husbands the parents had decided upon for them and the widows seeking to avoid the obligation to marry the deceased husband's brothers". Mission stations were to serve as settlements of Christian example to the rest of the pagan world. "They were also centres of morality, havens for dissolute criminals and the ne'er-do-wells" (Banana, 1991, p. 66). The faith that was planted in African spirituality did not fully control their lives because their culture and communal life remained central to their identity. Faith, culture, and community continued to grow together, as it was not easy to separate them. People's culture defines faith, and a community defines culture. Although faith, culture and community endured many challenges that shaped, reshaped and unshaped their identity, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) redefined their meaning (Oke, 2025, p. 337). According to Oyebanji *et al* (2017, p. 25), "AI presented a new identity of Christianity to a technological, scientific and individualistic faith. Dorobantu (2024, p. 88) further argues that "AI has the capacity to alter the way we live and think, some see AI as a danger to Christianity or other religions. The question is, could the Christian imaginary envisage a future where robots develop their own religiosity and *robotheologies*?" Any attempt to answer this question will respond to how AI has shaped, will shape, or eventually unshaped faith, culture, and communities.

This paper aims to address critical questions about the place of faith, how culture shapes communities, and how communities are shaped, unshaped, or reshaped by AI. Using a desk research methodology, this techno-theological research analyses how AI has rebranded and redefined faith, culture, and community, and, at the same time, redefined the identity of African Christianity. It argues that whereas African Christianity has made many strides that have shaped its identity over time, AI is pushing faith, culture, and community from a scientific vantage point, redefining the future of African Christianity as more technological and globalised. The paper begins by presenting the theoretical framework and the methodology used to gather the literature for this research, and then provides the research background. It also explores African understandings of faith, culture, and community. The discussion on how AI has impacted faith, culture and communities will also be undertaken. The paper will conclude by challenging African Christianity to navigate between maintaining faith, cultural preservation, and community adaptation while instantaneously incorporating AI as a tool shaping the future of the world.

## **Conceptual Framework and Methodology**

This paper employed a techno-theological conceptual framework to discuss the paradoxical relationships among faith, culture, community, and AI. The techno-theological framework entered the scholarly arena in the twenty-first century to demonstrate the urgent need for an intermutually conversational relationship between theology and science (Dyer, 2011). According to Ugboh (2023, p. 59), "techno-theology is an interdisciplinary definition from innovative leadership, socio-religious transformation, transformational leadership, anthropological studies, strategic leadership, scenario thinking/planning, technological disruptions, digital transformation and church sustainability". In a world of excessive reliance on technology for theology, techno-theology is the algorithm necessary to understand humanity's role in a technological age through the matrix of the imago Dei (Passini, 2020). This techno-theological research used desk research methodology to analyse data from theology, technology (AI in particular) and the African philosophy of Ubuntu. Descriptive analysis will assist in analysing data for this study. A techno-theological framework will benefit this study by reminding theologians that technology is a



multifaceted reality. It is not merely the tools and machines we use, but also the skills and processes with which we use them, the attitudes, culture, and social structure that also enhance theology. (Herzfeld, 2022).

## The Background of the Research

On August 19-21, 2025, CORAT Africa, which is a Christian organisation whose objective is to enable effective leadership, management and accountability of Churches, Church-related bodies and Christian organisations in a Christian and professional way, and the International Leadership University held the Kanisa Bora Summit, had a joint conference in Nairobi, Kenya. The Summit ran under the theme "Rooted in Faith: Empowering Leadership and Stewardship for a Thriving Church in Africa." The Summit aimed to explore and strengthen the role of faith-based leadership and stewardship in shaping a dynamic, resilient, and impactful church across the African continent (CORAT Africa, 2025). The Summit also offered a platform for reflection, dialogue, and collaboration on how Christ-centred leadership can address contemporary challenges, promote integrity, and foster holistic development within both ecclesial and societal contexts (CORAT Africa, 2025). The Summit was running under the following thematic areas namely "The church's role in rebuilding foundations for nationhood in challenging times, Re-imagining the church in a digital/AI driven world, Intergenerational mentorship and succession, Leadership and Governance for resilient churches, Faith, culture and community: redefining the African Christian identity, Christian education in schools and communities, the care of Church leaders: Balance, boundaries, and retirement and Investment, asset management and fundraising: The sustainability task of Church and Church run organisation (CORAT Africa, 2025). The Summit was designed for academics, administrators, educators, researchers, university students, church leaders, and other Christian community stakeholders, and I was one of the key presenters sharing on *Faith, culture and community: redefining the African Christian identity*. The paper received positive comments, including the need to ground the research in the context of Artificial Intelligence. These comments necessitated the use of the techno-theological framework to analyse the relationships among faith, culture, community, and AI. The need to embrace theology and AI explains why this paper took a different dimension from the one presented at the Summit.

## Theological Foundations of Faith

The word faith has various meanings for different people, making it challenging to precisely define it (Hellwig, 1990, p. 3). According to Marková and Gillespie (2007, p.223), "the word faith is derived from a Latin word *fide* which means both trust and belief." The Greek noun *pistis* (faith), verb *pistos* (faithful) and adjective *pistevo* (to believe) appear many times in the Bible. It occurs 458 times in the International Version, 389 times in the New King James Version, 378 times in the New American Standard Bible and 521 times in the Good News Bible. Whenever the word 'faith' is used, it describes a relationship of trust between humans and God or other divine beings (Hellwig, 1990, p. 3). Theologically, the word "faith" derives its meaning from the Bible. For example, Hebrews 11:1 states that, "*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see*". The writer of Hebrews describes faith as an action demanded by God from Individuals. In the Old Testament, faith is presented as a verb rather than merely a noun (Hellwig, 1990, p. 3). The word faith conveys confident assurance or trust in the reliability, consistency, and good intentions of the other (Din, 2013, p. 74). In the context of humans' relationship with God, faith involves a confident assurance that God is the provider of all good things and that God desires salvation for all God's creatures (Saint Mary's Press, 2010).



In the Old Testament, the covenantal bond was the believer's expression of faith. God initiated the covenant, and believers responded in faith, actively obeying God's word and trusting in the Lord to fulfil the promises of God. For example, in Genesis 15:6, Abraham "believed in the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith". Abraham's faith stands out as a model for the New Testament (Din, 2013, p. 74). Throughout the New Testament, the period of the Church Fathers, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and into the Modern Era, faith has been central to religion. Many scholars from various disciplines have explored faith as a universal and relational concept (Newman, 2004, p. 102). For Fowler (1986, p. 275-276), "Faith is the process of constitutive knowing, underlying a person's composition and maintenance of a comprehensive frame of meaning, generated from the person's attachments or commitments to centres of supraordinate value". In the Gospels, Jesus taught that faith is the prerequisite for the relationship between humanity and God (Matthew 4:18-22). Apostle Paul also taught that "When the world seems to be falling apart, our faith stands secure on the rock-solid, trustworthy promises of God and His Word" (2 Corinthians 4:18). Theologically, faith begins with God. It is the gift of God, not the result of any human effort or achievement. God initiates the relationship between Himself and humans by revealing Himself to them (Romans 1:19-20). From the definitions presented above, faith serves as a conduit that connects humanity to the deity.

During the time of persecution, faith gave the persecuted community the conviction to take Christianity from Jerusalem to the Gentile world. The movement of Christianity to these new frontiers presented faith as a product of resilience, as it helped the early church withstand the test of time. The movement of Christianity to the new world was also a response to Jesus' instruction in (Acts 1:8). This instruction saw Christianity moving to the gentile frontiers. It intermingled with the Graeco-Roman Culture (Ofori, 2022, p.32). According to Ofori (2022, p.32), "Christianity settled among whom the Jews referred to as the uncircumcised ". The intermingling of Christianity and Greek philosophy redefined the religion. During the fourth and fifth centuries, Christianity spread across Europe and its tenets were further diluted. The history of Christianity reveals that it survived at the level of the empire, where bishops also controlled empires (Latourette, 2005).

During the Patristic Period, Tertullian defended faith against philosophy through his dictum, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" (What has faith to do with philosophy) (Blackwell Publishers, 2008, p. 10). Later, Augustine taught about "*fides qua*", the faith by which believers believe (Morgan, 2021, p. 6). For Augustine, "this faith is the instrument that opens the soul to that necessary divine aid" (Kennedy, 2014, p. 275). The understanding of faith changed during the Medieval period. The medieval philosophers regarded faith and reason as possible sources for genuine wisdom and knowledge. Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033–1109) defined "theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding)" (Gill, 2021, p. 1). According to Kaplan (2022, p. 3), by faith seeking understanding, Anselm meant that faith is "both the content of things believed—the oneness of God, the incarnation of the Son, and that this incarnate Word was raised on the third day—and the mode of knowing by which one acquires this knowledge". Whereas faith refers to common-sense knowledge and daily reasoning (Marková & Gillespie, 2007, p. 223). The meaning of faith was further dissected in light of the known definition during the Reformation Period. The Catholic Church began selling indulgences as a means of salvation in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, mainly to fund the Crusades. This was basically the remission of temporal punishment in Purgatory for sins already forgiven through a confession (Latourette, 2005). This action contrasted with faith as common sense and knowledge; faith was redefined as unthinking, and a lack of knowledge, and people were coerced into having it. Martin Luther objected to the act and taught that "Christ alone is the Saviour" (Kolb, 2014, p.72). Luther's understanding of faith culminated in the theology of justification by faith, which, for him, was not merely faith alone, but true doctrine and life itself (Griffin, 2017).



"The Enlightenment Period integrated faith with reason, seeking 'reasonable belief' through science and scripture. The period also challenged the traditional faith's authority, viewing it as superstition" (Stuart, 2020, p. 351). The period redefined culture and turned communities into an unfamiliar environment where their traditional beliefs had to be scrutinised. The period had an impact on faith and culture (Fowler, 1988, p. 29). In the nineteenth century, Europe was secularised, and this also gave rise to a secularised faith that was transported to Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Oceanian cultural communities.

### **Towards the Definition of Culture**

Just as with faith, the term 'culture' has many meanings and dimensions, and there is no single, universally agreed-upon definition among scholars, as they differ in their understanding of the subject. For Oduyoye and Vroom (2003, p. 23), "culture is a way of being and thinking, encompassing the activities, attitudes, and worldviews that people constitute, as well as the differences that exist between one group of people and another". Culture is gathered and carried in language, symbols, rituals, dress, and is expressed in religious belief. According to O'Callaghan:

We live off culture, culture feeds us, it carries us along, it makes communication possible, we hand it on to other people, to different generations, through words, gestures and actions. It expresses and communicates our identity, as well as that of the people we interact with. It is what we have in common; in fact, culture is what makes the 'we' possible. Culture is inseparably both content and mediation (2017, p.26).

The "we" component of culture is expressed in the African concept of Ubuntu. For Mbiti, being human means, 'you are because we are and because we are, therefore you are' (Mbiti 1970:141; Adeate 2023, p. 2). Mbiti's adage of Ubuntu describes his idea of Afro-communitarianism, which emphasises the importance of the individual and community in thinking about social existence in African thought. The term Ubuntu is known in various African cultures. In IsiXhosa, it is called *botho*; in the Zimbabwean language Shona, it is called *hunhu*; while in IsiNdebele and IsiZulu, it is called *umuntu*. "The word Ubuntu in its various forms defines personhood that is linked to religion, thereby making religion and Ubuntu the two sides of the same coin because they both form the communitarian ethics, discourses on identity and the uniqueness of pan-African ideology" (Onyebuchi, 2018, p. 1). As a public discourse, Ubuntu has gained recognition as a peculiar form of African humanism, encapsulated in the following Bantu aphorisms, such as *Motho ke motho ka batho ba bang* (IsiXhosa), *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (IsiNdebele and IsiZulu), and *Munhu munhu panevanhu* (Shona, Zimbabwe), loosely translated to mean (a person is a person through other people). Ubuntu is thus the symbol of African faith, defined by oneness, culture, and communality.

Muller (2006) further defines culture as the activity through which men and women influence the environment in which they live (community), with their physical and spiritual powers (faith) partially changing it while, at the same time, developing themselves as individuals and members of the community. The definitions presented above synergise faith, culture, and community into a compounded relationship. This definition sets culture at the centre of community life. This point was buttressed by Nangoli, who alludes to that.

culture denotes the language people speak, how they behave, live, relate to one another, dress, worship their God, take care of their own, marry for reproductive purposes, name and baptise their children, care for the



elderly, bury their dead and generally anything that distinguishes them from other people of the world (1986, p. 6).

According to Malinowski (1944, p.1), "culture includes artefacts, goods, technical processes, ideas, habits, and values". In this definition, culture has three main aspects: the material, the ethical, and the intellectual. In summary, culture refers to the ideas, habits, and values of a community. Schreiter (1980) synthesises the definitions provided by Nangoli and Malinowski by placing culture at the core of the community's identity. In line with the scope of this paper, faith, culture, and community cannot be separated, as communities shape their ideas through oral traditions, literature, beliefs/rituals, and actions, which define culture. Culture is inherited, undergoes change and modification, and is transmitted from generation to generation (Malinowski 1944). This transmission process also redefines the cultures of those communities.

The study on the history of African Christianity reveals that the religion suffered due to the arrival of missionaries who viewed Christianity as an extension of European culture, and anything that did not conform to European standards was discarded. Christianity survived in different cultures and communities. First, Christianity emerged as a sect within Judaism as an apocalyptic, messianic group within Second Temple Judaism in Roman Judaea during the early 1st century CE, founded by the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. It was like an undercover religion and took advantage of the Jewish culture to grow (Latourette, 2005, p.32). When Christianity came to Africa during the nineteenth century, it was riding on the wings of colonialism as a colonial partner. Instead of evangelising, the missionaries pacified the Africans and condemned everything that was African (Schreiter 1980). African culture was cyclical, with villages arranged in circles and houses built in the same pattern, as a testament to the unity of the African people. However, the missionaries demonised this way of life and created mission centres. This missio-cultural confrontation led to the formation of African Indigenous churches. These churches were founded on a balance of Christianity and culture, and they became a source of hope for the future of the African inculturated Christianity.

### **Understanding the Term Community**

According to Cobigo, Martin and Mcheimech (2016, p. 183), "the term community dates back to the Greek philosophy era but changes with the evolution of human interaction and behaviour." For Aristotle, a community is a compound of parts that share functions and interests (Miller, 2011). In the nineteenth century, the German philosopher and sociologist Fernand Tönnies defined community as a society represented by individuals' close social ties, such as family, friends, and neighbours (Tönnies, 1957). Cobigo *et al.* (2016, p. 184) confirm that the word 'community' does not have a single meaning, and by 2009, over 100 definitions had been identified and analysed in academia. The three scholars summarised definitions from different academic fields, as presented below.

A community is a territorial dimension, as in the case of neighbourhood... is a small group of friends... represents those left in the community..., a community is a development of the bond between groups of people or a feeling of unity with one's co-workers... Cabigo, et al (2016, p. 188)

The common feature of a community is people, meaning that the word community continues to change depending on the specific group of people that has gathered. These people, whose characteristics are diverse, also shape a culture and faith that are diverse, based on individuals'



lived experiences. With the dominance of science, politics, and economics in rational discourses, and the increasing relevance of technology, the ideology of globalisation and the attitudes of consumerism and materialism are eroding the significance of religious beliefs, practices, values, and institutions in human life and communities (Aguas, 2019).

The understanding that a community is composed of people who share the same values, beliefs, and worldview (Bettez, 2013, p. 45) synthesises faith, culture, and community into a composite relationship. In the twentieth century, the meaning of faith shifted, from a culturally grounded, communally oriented definition to one shaped by globalisation. The three most significant forces of globalisation are Christianity, the economy, and technology (Ilesanmi, 2023). The three forces of globalisation mentioned have an impact on faith, culture, and community because the phenomenon has created new communities whose faiths conflict and cultures contradict. Globalisation has made former strangers into neighbours, as they negotiate their faith, redefine culture, and, at the same time, create a new community far removed from their past lives. The universalism and globalism in the praxis of Christianity or the diffusion of Christ's messages across the world, as explicitly stated authoritatively in the Bible, can be referred to as the globalisation of Christianity or the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of the global church in the praxis and diffusion of Christianity across the globe (Ilesanmi, 2023).

The interrelationship between globalisation as a new culture and a hybrid space of faith and Christianity is what Ilesanmi (2023, p. 6) refers to as "global salvation, Christian globalisation, or *Christoglobalisation*, because Christianity, as a religion, is deeply rooted in and interwoven with globalisation". Globalisation creates a world that is a global village, and the net effect of this international community is boundaryless migration, geopolitics, the technologisation of religion, the spread of diseases, for example, HIV and AIDS, Covid-19, the dilution of faith, the creation of new communities, and the birth of hybrid cultures. Faith is now defined by global thinking as Christians continue to meet from various ecumenical spaces, such as the All Africa Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches. These spaces undermine the understanding of communal faith due to their diversity.

### **Faith, Culture, Community and African Christianity**

Having defined faith, culture, and community, it is essential to discuss them alongside African Christianity to determine the extent to which their relationships shape them. To start with, it is a historical fact that Africa is home to two Abrahamic religions, namely Christianity and Islam, as well as its traditional religions. The presence of the three religions shows that African faith was never uniform, although all three share a belief in a monotheistic God. This faith shaped African culture, unlike in Islam, where religion and culture are intertwined. Countries with Christianity as their predominant religion have suffered from dual religious affiliation: ATR being the religion of birth and culture, and Christianity as the religion of conversion and deculturation. Whereas Christianity struggled to attract Africans to its modernity, packaged in social amenities such as schools and hospitals during the colonial era, ATR remained the major faith of African communities because it also emphasised hierarchical monotheism (Mbiti, 1980, p. 827). Before the arrival of the missionaries, Africans were already religious. They had faith in their God, known by many names, such as Mungu, Mulungu, Katonda, Ngai, Olodumare, Asis, Ruwa, Ruhanga, Jok, Modimo, Unkulunkulu, and many others (Mbiti, 1980, p. 817). For Mbiti, these were not empty names; they defined the African faith and African culture. To this, Gashaw (2017) confirms that, before the colonisation of Africa, Africans lived as communities defined by their culture and faith.



This composite relationship among religions led Africans to a common belief in Musikavanhu, in the Zimbabwean Shona language (the Creator), as the supreme being. The worship of this God was a source of pride among African cultures and communities. The missionaries presented Western culture instead of the Gospel of the incarnate Jesus (Toren-Lekkerkerker & Zendingraad, 2013, p. 81). This misinterpretation of Christ and the Gospel he represents was worsened by how the missionaries presented whitised Jesus of their pigmentation (Mujinga & Masvotore, 2025, p. 1).

The European culture was regarded as the starting point for faith and culture that defined new communities and also shaped the meaning of Christianity in Africa. The missionaries condemned African culture and traditions as barbaric, demonic, devilish, superstitious and foolish. They also used pejorative terms such as paganism, primitive, animism, fetish, idolatry and heathen (Idowu, 1973, p. 110). The net effect of the missionary behaviour demonstrates that Christianity was transported as a potted flower that was not allowed to flourish in the African culture and African communities. Instead of assimilating with African culture, Christianity condemned its recipients as outdated. According to Schreier (1980, p.4), "embracing Christ and his message in Africa meant rejection of African faith, culture and communal values. Africans were taught that their ways of life were deemed defiant or even evil and had to be set aside if they hoped to succeed". These interpretations of the African religious life were challenged by John Mbiti, who began his book *African Religions and Philosophy* with the words: Africans are notoriously religious" (Mbiti, 1969, p 1). Bolaji Idowu further stressed that, "Africans are in all things religious" (1973, p.1).

The missionaries incorporated Africans into their Western culture, taking advantage of the colonial environment that favoured them (Pobee, 1976, p.2). In their effort to reintroduce Christianity to Africa, they deculturated and divided the African people (Asamoah & Kpalam, 2023, p. 1). The use of the word reintroduction of Christianity in this paper concurs with Mbiti, who argues that "the missionaries who introduced the gospel to Africa in the past 200 years did not bring God, instead, God brought them, for the God described in the Bible is none other than the God who was already known in the framework of our traditional African religiosity" (Mbiti, 1980, p. 817).

For a long time, missionary Christianity dominated the religious landscape in most countries, interpreting African faiths, shaping African culture, and regulating African communities. Unfortunately, this missionary Christianity remained abstract and could not address the cultural and communal issues of Africans. This vacuum became a seedbed for Pentecostal Christianity, which also presented a new interpretation of faith, culture, and community. Pentecostal Christianity redefined faith, culture, and community by emphasising direct personal experience with the Holy Spirit, dynamic forms and robust social engagement (Wariboko, 2017). Faith for Pentecostal Christianity lies in its emphasis on the exceptional relationship with God and the active presence of the Holy Spirit. The African communities that had been defined by missionary faith embraced the new faith, which further crippled African culture. Speaking in tongues, prophecy, and divine healing were the supernatural experiences that defined faith and culture, thereby creating a community of faith (Wariboko, 2017). This Christianity also emphasised a new, holistic faith in which spiritual realities, miracles, and divine intervention divided Africans into pious and weak Christians. Pentecostal Christianity created a community of believers whose culture was divorced from the African daily living. This community emphasised holy living, rejection of blood relatives, personal sanctification, ethical transformation, Christian service and eschatological sermons and music. It centred on individual leaders/prophets, a departure from the missionary Christianity that had defined faith and culture as tenets of African communities. To demonstrate their new faith, Pentecostal Christianity introduced local music that blended cultural elements with modernity, media, digital technology, and live streaming. This approach pushed



African Christianity from the traditional centre of faith to a technologised Christianity which was foreign to the missionary churches (Mujinga, 2021a).

Over time, Pentecostal Christianity became formalised, leading to power struggles. For example, in Zimbabwe, the Apostolic Faith Mission became embroiled in leadership disputes (Chikwanha, 2022; Nhumburudzi, 2025), thereby creating another opportunity for newer religious movements, such as the United Family International, led by Emmanuel Makandiwa, among other breakaways (Mujinga, 2021b, p. 321). The dawn of the new millennium saw the emergence of newer religious movements in Africa as solutions to the socioeconomic, political, and spiritual challenges facing Africans. The dawn of New Religious movements redefined African understandings of faith as total dependence on the deity, as the leaders of self-styled churches presented themselves as deities (Hammer & Rothstein, 2012). To flourish, they used technology, which is why the techno-theological framework proved the best tool for describing the church amid different strands of technological dynamism

### **Locating AI within Other Technologies**

Theology has benefited from various technologies, such as radios, televisions, and the Internet. The Internet, dominated mainly by Google, produced several social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), which theology used to reach many and explain itself. In 2014, WhatsApp emerged as another way to enhance theology. (Nggebu, Buyung, & Wood, 2023, p 164). The trends changed with the coming of "AI through the introduction of ChatGPT in late 2022 along with Large Language Models. "(Trothen & Mercer, 2025, p. 141; Reed & Kennedy, 2025, p 313). According to Reach (2023), "AI gained momentum by providing quick answers to user enquiries compared to Google. Google, users have to go through multiple pages, whereas AI platforms can provide straightforward results." (Herzfeld, 2025). AI emerged with a bang that reminded some scholars of the Enlightenment era, when religion was overtaken by science (Peters, 2025, p. 17). Dan Brown cautioned that, "with AI, science will deliver a material transformation that our religious ancestors could only envision spiritually. Humanity is involved in something different; we are becoming a species -a fusion of biology and technology (Peters, 2025, p. 17). It is this relationship of theology and AI that this techno-theological research intends address.

### **Faith, Culture, Community and Artificial Intelligence**

From Biblical times, faith, culture, and community have coexisted with technology. For example, the building of the Ark by Noah, the Tower of Babel and Solomon's Temple demonstrate that technology existed since time immemorial. 2 Chronicles 26:15 states that, "*In Jerusalem he made machines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones. And his fame spread far, for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong*". The text demonstrates that technology has survived for centuries. In addition, Paul spread the gospel to different cultures and communities through letters and by travelling by sea, using the special technologies of his time. For a long time, faith and culture faced challenges posed by secularisation, the modern understanding of science and society, and the processes of urbanisation and the fragmentation of life (Van den Toren, 2003, p. 1). African communities that had built their faith on the foundations of their culture and communities are now defined by science and theology. The community of human beings has been expanded to include scientific beings (humanoids) (Dorobantu, 2022, p. 175). It therefore makes sense to broaden the discussion of faith, culture and community at the level of science (representing scientific communities -



humanoids) and theology. Herzfeld (2024, p 149) argues that "religion and artificial intelligence are now deeply enmeshed in humanity's collective imagination, narratives, institutions, and aspirations. Their predicament runs contrary to several narratives that engage with established discussions and the relationship between the technology and science and between the secular and the sacred".

Regardless of the technological hurdles that faith, culture, and community have encountered over the years, "AI is a driving force in reshaping their direction" (Oke, 2025, p. 337). There are several ways that AI has reshaped faith, culture and community. For example, "the emergence of AI intensified the use of AI tools to keep families together and, at the same time, created new communities defined by hybrid cultures" (Vince, 2021, p. 1; Ojuola, 2024, p. 1485). Given the effects of being global citizens (Quayyum & Jaccheri, 2025), most families have scattered around the world and, as a result, have lost their communal, faith-based, and cultural identity. AI has created a new community that is redefining faith and culture in these global spaces. "This cyberspace is not only a vacuum in interplanetary space, but also a sacred space where faith is shared as a product of intercultural discussion" (O'Leary, 1996, p. 78). Moreover, AI has necessitated the establishment of automated spiritual counselling services, enabling people to receive spiritual guidance without human contact. "AI-powered systems such as virtual religious assistants, automated sermon generators, and machine learning-based religious education tools have impacted how religious teachings are disseminated, and spiritual engagement occurs" (Oke, 2025, p. 337).

In Africa, AI has reshaped the way faith, culture, and community are understood as tangents of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is the anchor that joins African communities. However, this compounded unity has been diluted by AI, as science has produced scientific beings (humanoids) that are not elected by God (Ripple Solutions, 2025). Whereas humanoids can perform most of the duties that humanity can, they are not faithful, cultural, or communal beings. God's election of humans is based on their unique relationship with God. This unique relationship is the basis of faith, which brings communities of faith into being. Given that humanity survives as a community, AI has replaced traditional cultural and communal families with "cybercommunities that give comfort to the harsh real world pursuing the playful heights of modernity" (Wang, Haines & Tucker, 2013, p. 75).

In the cybercommunity, the realities of life are filtered through AI, presenting an idealised world far removed from everyday life. Such a community also produces a cyber culture whose tenets are shaped by the widespread use of computer networks, AI, entertainment, and business (Vicente & Amaral, 2020, p. 430). It cannot be disputed that the opportunities and challenges posed by AI have a detrimental effect on religious, cultural, and community engagements. For example, "spiritual leaders are relying on digital platforms and AI tools to connect with followers, organise religious events, and make administrative decisions (Oke, 2025, p. 338).

As AI becomes more embedded in religious institutions, it will inevitably alter traditional religious practices, leading to new forms of spiritual interaction, religious outreach, and decision-making frameworks" (Oke, 2025, p. 338). AI has created a faster world than the Internet did. Whereas print, radio or even TV have been very impactful, their failure to provide prompt responses compared to AI, whose answers are readily available gives AI a competitive advantage over the other technologies (Putrawan, 2025) faith, community, and culture fear that chatbots could become viable substitutes for therapists, pastors, or friends (Herzfeld, 2024, p. 148). However, Herzfeld warns that modern AI and transhumanist dreams have a possible return route to the ancient Gnostic heresies—disembodied, elitist, and ultimately dehumanising" (Herzfeld, 2024, p. 148). This section has presented a serious challenge to technology and theology, as well as to



faith, culture, and community, as they grapple with AI. This techno-theological crisis was expounded upon by Putrawan (2025), who argues that "the results show that AI has the potential to expand accessibility and multiculturalism in religious interpretation, although challenges remain regarding ethics, spiritual authenticity, and the authority of AI in religious contexts." The question that begs an answer in this techno-theological study is whether African Christianity will maintain its identity in the context of AI.

### **Redefining the African Christian Identity in the Context of AI**

The word redefining entails a process of reevaluation, reformulation, revision, or redoing. The identity of African Christianity in the context of AI reminds us that we cannot reverse time, nor can we return to the African Christianity of yesteryears; instead, we have a new form of Christianity characterised by cyberspace. Cyberspace, migration, and globalisation have produced a hybrid community and a hybrid Christianity (Mujinga, 2025). Moreover, the re-culturation of African cultural communities would be ideal, but the global citizen phenomenon is not coming to an end anytime soon; rather, it is worsening (Bhargava, 2006). Global communities, connected by technology, now define culture rather than local communities that previously did so. AI has become an instructor in African culture, as Africans learn about their culture in cyberspace. (Mujinga, 2025). The biggest challenge in an AI-driven world is that Christianity is no longer a religion of personal encounter and conversion as before; every decision, whether in theology, economics, or education, is made in the global space. Unfortunately, some global citizens in these spaces never lived in a traditional cultural community but have only experienced a globalised culture and have in mind an "imaginative African traditional culture", which does not address the roots and pride of Africans.

There are many ways to imagine African Christian identity in the context of AI. First, African Christianity has already moved into the digital space; the only way to grow is to have digital disciples (Hunt, 2019). Although much research is on the global north (Hunt, 2019; Dunlow, 2021), the digital space has become a common platform for young people. Writing on the Indonesian experience, Darmawan, Tanhidy, and Doma (2024, p. 1) argue that "discipleship is the method that can be used to help youths spiritually grow, but these youths are frequently found on social media". To attract digital disciples, AI-powered tools could be used to enhance Christian education, discipleship, and outreach programmes in Africa. Through this way, it is possible to redefine Christianity beyond the four corners of the church and the pulpit. Digital disciples are global disciples who can embrace African faith as an advanced faith that remains relevant in the scientific space. Digital disciples are not confined to space and time; they are everywhere, every time, and can also watch the digital church after it has finished and comment on the digital space.

Second, the church in Africa must take advantage of cyber-church communities seriously. The cost of living in Africa is very high, and people spend most of their time struggling to fend for themselves. AI envisions African Christianity with online platforms that supplement traditional church gatherings, especially in areas with limited access to physical churches. Online church is related to digital evangelism (Mooney, 2021), but it also maintains membership, reduces the cost of travelling to churches, and limits the time required for gathering. Although gathering brings together the real community that Africa craves, the online church creates a more diverse community, as others who might not be members of that local church can join. Third, the future of African Christianity involves AI-driven theological reflection, in which theological answers are generated instantly by AI rather than other technological tools. (Oyebanji *et al.*, 2025). AI could



aid biblical studies, theology, and sermon preparation, helping African Christians engage more deeply with their faith.

Fourth, the emergence of AI compromised Africans' ethics and values. The African church has an opportunity to use the same AI to remould African integrity, which was once defined by culture and how people lived in different communities. Lastly, mission and evangelism in Africa have been affected by many factors, including globalisation, Covid-19, and the continent's sociopolitical and economic landscape. After the Covid-19 pandemic, many churches experienced a severe decline in membership. AI could facilitate new forms of mission work, such as online evangelism, Bible translation, and outreach to unreached communities. The four proposed approaches will assist African Christianity in growing both as an in-person church and a cyber-church that uses AI to structure itself.

The above-mentioned proposals do not go without their own challenges. First, most of the people in Africa have no access to AI. This scenario has divided the African society into the rich and the poor. AI evangelism has the potential to attract the youth and the rich who value privacy and time management. The less privileged rejoice in gatherings because they cannot afford other means of financing luxurious gatherings. The church becomes a social space, and the church for the less privileged majority remains one that cannot fulfil its financial mandate. Second, African culture is both diverse and sensitive. AI systems may need to be designed with cultural and theological sensitivity to serve African Christian communities effectively. Third, growing the church through AI has theological implications, as questions about human identity, the soul, and salvation that African Christians might need to address theologically might be drowned out by multiple teachings, some of which are not genuine.

Theologians need to keep a watchful eye on the impact of AI on African theological anthropology, Imago Dei, and rationality. To justify this point, although AI will continue to shape the way theology is practised in Africa, the African philosophy of Ubuntu defines what it means to be human. For generations, it has shaped African faith, culture, and community. The major weakness of AI is that it is not divinely elected, rational, or relational, although humanoids do most of what humanity can do. AI produces programmed machines, while society and theology produce individuals with free will, love, empathy, and lives that can be traced. This makes the humanoid short either as a social or a theological being. The paradox remains: humankind was created in the image of God, while AI is a product of experimentation. There is a distinction between imago Dei and AI that should not be confused with humanity's ability to create a humanoid. Humanity does not owe its existence to AI but to God, and the future of theology in Africa remains in God's hands.

## **Conclusion**

In concluding this paper, it was evident that the relationship between faith, culture and community is inseparable. The three survived together for a longer time. The communities and cultural backgrounds of people had shaped their faith. The church in Africa received European culture, which Pentecostalism and new religious movements later diluted. The twenty-first century has seen a church defined by cyberspace, as the world is a global village. This global village has connected people politically, socially, economically, and religiously, and AI tools are the agents of these communal relationships. The paper described the benefits of AI and how these benefits can shape the future of the church in Africa. It also warns of the potential challenges posed by a church of the rich and by the youth being divorced from the church of the poor. The future of the African church owes more to AI, and the church is therefore challenged to redefine faith from cyberspace,



redefine the culture of global citizens, and interpret the international community, as these are the realities that faith, culture, and community are facing.

Although this study is very critical, it is overstretched from the early church to the twenty-first century. It addresses theological issues of faith, culture, and community from biblical times, the patristic period, and other periods in the history of Christianity. This overstretchedness has the challenge of leaving some critical issues unattended and is a limitation. For example, future research can examine faith, culture, and community and conduct another techno-theological study of their relationships and impacts on AI. In addition, the meaning of theological training in the context of AI also needs further research. When AI can provide theological answers, what is the future of theological seminaries remains as one of the critical questions for future studies to consider.

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