

Church Adaptation Strategies to Secularisation in Nigeria: A Comparative Study of Abuja and Lagos

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the strategies employed by churches in Nigeria – particularly in Abuja and Lagos – in responding to the challenges of secularisation, a process that reduces the societal significance of religion. As secular ideologies and materialist values reshape public consciousness, churches must adapt to remain socially relevant, especially among youth increasingly disengaged from traditional worship. Using a qualitative research design, this study integrates focus group discussions, participant observations, and secondary literature to explore how churches adopt innovative worship practices, digital technologies, and community engagement programs. Data were analysed using thematic analysis and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), allowing for in-depth interpretation of institutional and individual responses. Findings reveal that churches in both cities are implementing a multifaceted strategy: digital tools to attract younger audiences, community service programs to enhance public trust, and theological revisions to address ethical issues like inclusivity, social justice, and ecological responsibility. These adaptations have led to increased engagement, a stronger sense of belonging among congregants, and expanded the churches' social roles. The study contributes to existing literature by offering a holistic understanding of church responses in a non-Western context. It highlights how the synergy between worship innovation, community service, and theological flexibility enables churches to survive and thrive in a secular environment. This research offers practical implications for church leaders, policymakers, and scholars interested in the evolving role of religion in society. The originality of this study lies in its integrated approach to secularisation and adaptation within African urban religious institutions, providing insights often overlooked in Western-centric research.

Keywords: Church adaptation; Community service; Digital engagement; Nigeria; Secularisation.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti strategi yang digunakan oleh gereja-gereja di Nigeria-khususnya di Abuja dan Lagos-dalam menanggapi tantangan sekularisasi, sebuah proses yang mengurangi peran sosial agama. Ketika ideologi sekuler dan nilai-nilai materialis membentuk kembali kesadaran publik, gereja harus beradaptasi agar tetap relevan secara sosial, terutama di kalangan anak muda yang semakin menjauh dari ibadah tradisional. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan diskusi kelompok terfokus, observasi partisipan, dan literatur sekunder untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana gereja-gereja mengadopsi praktik-praktik ibadah yang inovatif, teknologi digital, dan program pelibatan masyarakat. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis tematik dan analisis fenomenologi interpretatif (*interpretative phenomenological analysis*), yang memungkinkan interpretasi mendalam terhadap respons kelembagaan dan individu. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa gereja-gereja di kedua kota menerapkan strategi multifaset: alat digital untuk menarik audiens yang lebih muda, program layanan masyarakat untuk meningkatkan kepercayaan publik, dan revisi teologis untuk mengatasi masalah etika seperti inklusivitas, keadilan sosial, dan tanggung jawab ekologis. Adaptasi ini telah menghasilkan peningkatan keterlibatan, rasa memiliki yang lebih kuat di antara para jemaat, dan memperluas peran sosial gereja. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur yang ada dengan menawarkan pemahaman holistik tentang respons gereja dalam konteks non-Barat. Penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana sinergi antara inovasi ibadah, pelayanan masyarakat, dan fleksibilitas teologis memungkinkan gereja untuk bertahan dan

berkembang dalam lingkungan sekuler. Penelitian ini menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi para pemimpin gereja, pembuat kebijakan, dan cendekiawan yang tertarik dengan peran agama yang terus berkembang dalam masyarakat. Keaslian penelitian ini terletak pada pendekatannya yang terintegrasi terhadap sekularisasi dan adaptasi dalam lembaga-lembaga keagamaan di perkotaan Afrika, yang memberikan wawasan yang sering kali diabaikan dalam penelitian yang berpusat pada Barat.

Kata Kunci: Adaptasi gereja; Pelayanan masyarakat; Keterlibatan digital; Nigeria; Sekularisasi.

1. Introduction

Secularisation has become one of the primary forces shaping contemporary cultural and religious landscapes. The process whereby religious institutions, beliefs, and practices lose their social significance shifts society's focus towards materialism and worldly interests. Data indicate that more than 30% of individuals aged 18–29 are not affiliated with any religion (Zuckerman, Galen, & Pasquale, 2016), while in Church in Nigeria, 60% of young people aged 18–35 report alienation from traditional religious practices (Akpanessien, 2015). The impact of secularisation is not only evident in the decline of individual participation, but it also transforms the role of the Church in public discourse, reduces its moral authority, and challenges its relationship with state institutions (Kühle, Schmidt, Jacobsen, & Pettersson, 2018)—particularly in the context of issues such as gender equality and reproductive rights (Chambers & Peter, 2015).

Research on secularisation and religion has been conducted from various perspectives, with a predominant focus on Western countries. Based on the review of existing literature, research can be categorised into three main areas. The first category is dominated by classical secularisation theory. Classical secularisation theory posits that modernisation leads to a decline in religiosity, asserting that as societies become more economically developed and scientifically oriented, the influence of religion diminishes in both public and private spheres (Bruce, 2003). This idea was notably advanced by Max Weber, who described modernisation as the "disenchantment of the world," replacing supernatural beliefs with rational explanations (Taft, 2015). Studies show that economic modernisation is associated with a decline in church attendance, though this does not necessarily lead to a decline in personal belief (Hirschle, 2013). The process of rationalisation and differentiation further diminishes religion's societal role (Pérez-Agote, 2014), and higher levels of human security are linked to lower religious involvement (Pettersson, 2006). However, the theory faces challenges, particularly in non-Western contexts, where modernisation does not always lead to secularisation. Economic growth may even increase religiosity in some regions, such as post-communist or Christian-minority countries (Kusano & Jami, 2022). This suggests that secularisation is not a universal process and varies across cultural contexts. Therefore, while classical secularisation theory offers valuable insights into the decline of religion in modern societies, its global applicability and its relevance in African contexts, especially Nigeria, require further investigation.

The second category explores the impact of secularisation on churches and worship practices, with numerous studies highlighting how churches in Western countries have adapted to secularisation by integrating contemporary elements into their worship services. For instance, churches have incorporated modern worship music, multimedia presentations, and interactive approaches to attract younger generations (Berger, 2002; Brunce, 2013). These studies indicate that churches must innovate to maintain their relevance in a secular society. Churches in Europe and North America have adopted modern practices such as the use of technology in worship, with some focusing on creating more engaging, dynamic services to counter declining church attendance and religious practices (Hirschle, 2013). In addition, churches have prioritised family and marriage pastoral care as a strategy to address secularisation by promoting the domestic church (Fiałkowski, 2024). However, most of this research has been centred on Western contexts, and there is a noticeable gap in understanding how churches in developing countries, particularly in Africa, implement similar strategies. The adaptation strategies

employed by churches in non-Western contexts like Nigeria, where religious traditions are deeply rooted, require further investigation to comprehend the nuances of adaptation within diverse cultural and social environments.

The third category deals with the use of digital technology in worship and church community engagement, which has become increasingly prevalent in Western countries to enhance congregational participation through live streaming and social media (Campbell, 2020; Pegram, Brunson, & Braga, 2016). Churches in these countries have adopted digital platforms to stay connected with their congregants, particularly during the pandemic. However, despite the widespread use of digital technology, there is limited research on how churches in developing countries, particularly in Africa, are incorporating digital tools as part of their strategies to adapt to secularisation. Further research is needed to examine how Nigerian churches are using digital technology to engage younger generations and maintain their relevance in the face of secular influences.

While much research has explored secularisation from the perspectives of classical theory, changes in worship practices, and the use of digital technology, the majority of these studies focus on Western contexts. In-depth research on how churches in developing countries, particularly in Nigeria, are adopting strategies to adapt to secularisation remains limited. This study aims to fill this gap by further exploring how churches in Nigeria, through innovations in worship, digital technology, and social service initiatives, strive to remain relevant and maintain congregational engagement amidst the growing process of secularisation.

This study argues that churches in Nigeria adopt a combination of innovative worship practices, digital technology, and social service initiatives to remain relevant and encourage greater congregational involvement in the midst of a growing secularisation process. This argument is supported by the theory of religious innovation (Bruce, 2003), which states that religious institutions must evolve in response to social change in order to maintain their influence. In addition, with reference to Max Weber's concept of 'world disillusionment' (Taft, 2015), it is said that the adoption of modern styles of worship and the integration of digital platforms enable churches to connect with younger generations who are increasingly disengaged from traditional religious practices. Further arguments state that churches in Nigeria can counter secularisation by strengthening their role in community service, offering a more holistic and inclusive approach that suits their congregations' social and existential needs. Through this approach, churches in Nigeria can face the challenges of secularisation while maintaining a strong and active presence in the community.

2. Methods

This study examines the strategies employed by churches to adapt to secularisation (the process by which religious institutions lose social significance), focusing on how religious institutions modify their practices, beliefs, and community engagement in response to declining religious affiliation and the growing influence of secular ideologies (worldviews that prioritise non-religious perspectives) (Dora, 2018). The unit of analysis consists of church members, leaders, and congregants, as well as church-based initiatives aimed at engaging secular populations. By focusing on these groups and initiatives, this study aims to uncover diverse perspectives and strategic responses from different denominations and roles within faith communities.

A qualitative research framework was adopted to examine the complex interactions between churches and secularisation. This approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of human behaviour, experiences, and social phenomena through subjective narratives and lived experiences (Kaufmann, 2007). The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for capturing the nuanced responses of churches to secularisation, enabling an understanding of institutional strategies and individual faith experiences. This study employs thematic analysis (a method of identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data) and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to investigate underlying patterns within church responses.

This research integrates primary and secondary data to comprehensively understand the topic. Primary data is collected through in-depth focus group discussions and participant observations in

selected church communities. Secondary data includes literature reviews, religious reports, sociological studies, historical documents, and cultural analyses. These sources provide insights into broader patterns of *secularisation* and historical shifts in church engagement strategies. Combining primary and secondary data strengthens the research's validity, allowing for a balanced interpretation of firsthand experiences and contextual frameworks from existing literature (Kitcher, 2011).

This study employs multiple qualitative methods to capture diverse perspectives. The focus group were guided to include questions related to faith retention, secular outreach, and theological adaptation. Focus group discussions are facilitated to compare perspectives across different age groups and denominational backgrounds, allowing for collective reflection on the effectiveness of various church strategies. Participant observation within church settings provides direct insights into worship practices, community outreach programmes, and theological discourse in response to *secularisation*. To maintain data integrity, discussions are transcribed verbatim, with data stored securely in compliance with ethical research guidelines.

Thematic analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) are employed to interpret qualitative data systematically. The thematic analysis involves generating initial codes to identify key features in the data, searching for recurring themes, refining and naming themes to ensure clarity and summarising findings in relation to research objectives. *IPA* focuses on how participants make sense of their experiences, involving a "*double hermeneutic*" (a dual interpretative process where the researcher interprets participants' interpretations of *secularisation* and religious adaptation). The *constant comparative method* (a qualitative analysis technique that continuously compares new and existing data) is applied to refine emerging concepts through iterative coding and ensure *reflexive analysis* (a self-aware approach acknowledging the researcher's positionality and potential biases).

3. Results

Understanding Church Responses to Secularisation

This study reveals how churches in Nigeria, particularly in Abuja and Lagos, are adapting to the challenges posed by secularisation (the process by which religious institutions lose their societal significance). Documenting adaptation strategies and observing religious activities, several key patterns have emerged regarding changes in worship practices, theological beliefs, and community engagement.

Churches across different regions are making efforts to adjust their worship formats to remain relevant to their congregations, particularly younger generations. In Abuja, church leaders have begun incorporating modern elements into traditional services. Contemporary music, multimedia presentations, and interactive sermons have become integral parts of worship, aiming to enhance congregational engagement. Meanwhile, in Lagos, some churches are blending entertainment elements into their services, particularly in *megachurches* (large churches with thousands of attendees that incorporate mass media and high-energy services), which adopt dynamic and vibrant worship models to attract larger audiences.

Theological approaches within churches are also evolving, reflecting shifts in responses to social issues and modern ethical values (Ammerman, 2013). In Abuja, some church leaders have shown openness to reinterpreting theological teachings to align with contemporary ethical demands, such as inclusivity and social justice. This approach allows churches to maintain their relevance amid rapid social transformations. Conversely, in Lagos, some churches continue to uphold traditional theological teachings but increasingly emphasise messages of love, acceptance, and community solidarity, striking a balance between classical doctrines and modern societal dynamics.

Beyond their role as places of worship, churches are increasingly serving their communities through various social programmes and partnerships with other organisations. In Abuja, many churches are stepping beyond their traditional roles and actively launching social service programmes, including food aid, mental health support, and housing assistance for the homeless. These initiatives strengthen the church's image as a socially responsible institution and enhance congregants' sense of

belonging. Churches in Lagos exhibit a similar pattern of social engagement, with a focus on large-scale outreach programmes that target urban populations, such as health fairs and educational workshops (Bengtsson, 2008).

Churches increasingly leverage digital technology to stay connected with their congregations and attract new members. In Abuja, church leaders reported that using social media platforms, online worship services, and digital community forums has helped them expand their reach and maintain connections with those unable to attend in person. In Lagos, the shift towards digitalisation has been particularly effective in attracting younger individuals who are more accustomed to online interactions. Many churches have adopted technology to offer virtual services and online prayer groups.

Measures of church success are shifting from merely counting attendance figures to assessing broader social impact. In Abuja, churches experiencing a decline in physical attendance do not perceive it as a setback but as an opportunity to develop innovative strategies for retaining congregants through more dynamic community experiences. Similarly, churches in Lagos are moving away from simply tracking attendance numbers and are instead focusing on evaluating their social impact and community engagement levels. This shift reflects a broader understanding of church relevance in an increasingly secularised era. The percentage of churches in Abuja and Lagos that adopted the strategies described earlier can be seen in Figure 1.

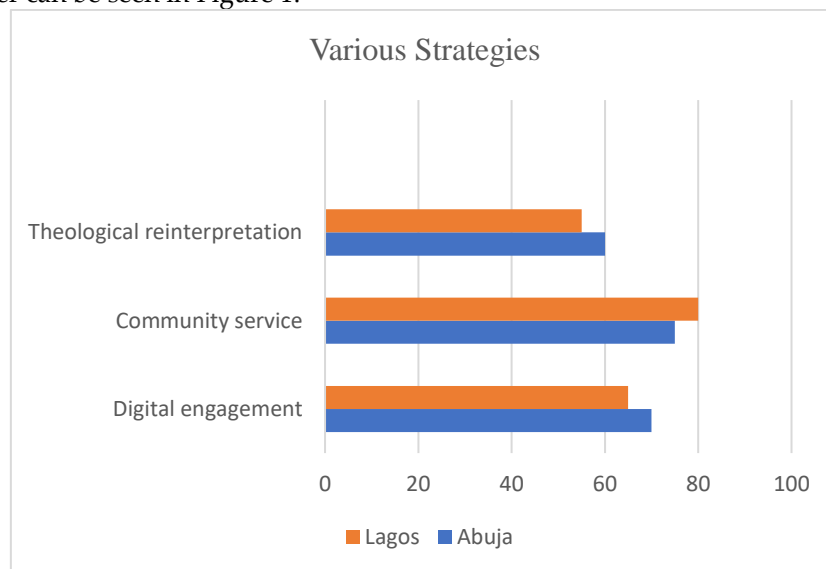


Figure 1. Charts Illustrating Church Strategies by Region (Nigeria)

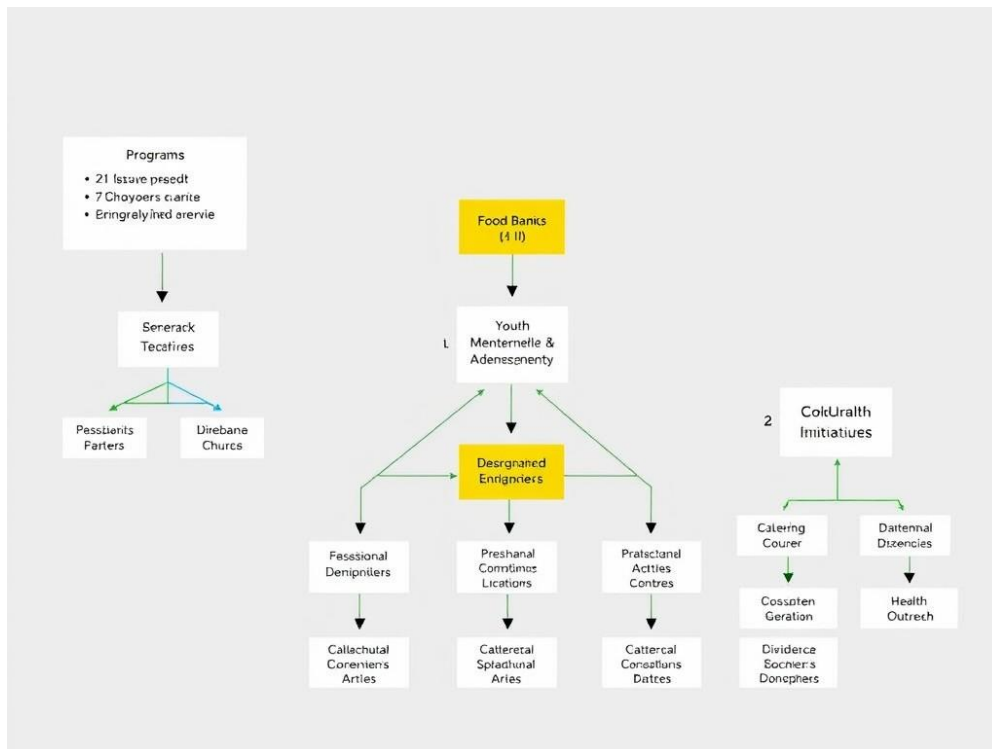


Figure 2. Social Service Programs

Figure 2. provides an overview of the various social service initiatives undertaken by churches in Abuja and Lagos. These include food banks, youth mentorship programmes, and health outreach initiatives. The figure highlights how different churches and denominations actively engage with their communities, address social issues, and reinforce their role beyond religious functions.

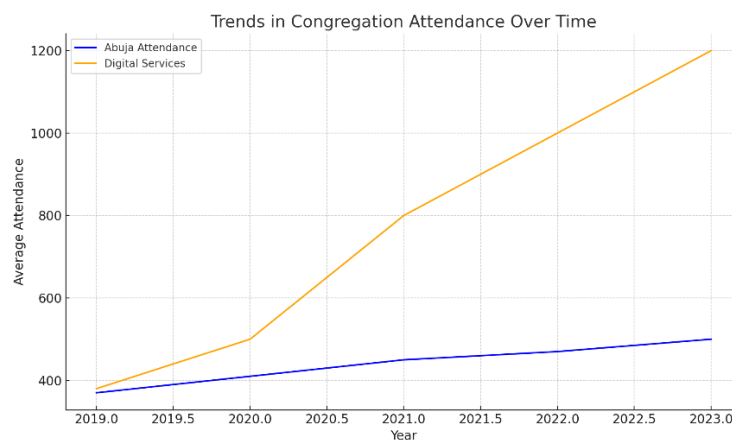


Figure 3. Trends in Congregation Attendance Over Time

Figure 3 presents the trends in congregation attendance over time in Abuja, comparing it with the implementation of digital services. The graph shows two key data series: one for physical attendance in Abuja (in blue) and another for digital services (in yellow) from 2019 to 2023. The data reveals an overall decline in physical attendance during the early years, suggesting the impact of secularisation, as fewer individuals engaged in traditional worship services. However, as digital services were introduced, there was a noticeable rise in engagement. The increase in digital attendance, particularly starting in 2021, highlights how churches have leveraged digital platforms like live streaming and online prayer groups to maintain connections with their congregants during times of physical distancing or for those unable to attend in person.

In contrast, physical attendance in Abuja gradually increased, particularly as community outreach programs and innovative worship practices began to take root. This suggests that while secularisation may have initially hindered in-person participation, community-focused strategies such as food distribution, educational workshops, and social service efforts have significantly stabilised or increased physical attendance in some churches. The graph also illustrates regional differences between Abuja and Lagos. Churches in Lagos, particularly large urban megachurches, exhibit a quicker recovery in attendance due to their strong digital presence and modernised worship formats. These churches have successfully integrated both physical and digital services to cater to a broad audience, including younger individuals who prefer the convenience of online services.

This figure underscores the importance of adaptive strategies in mitigating the effects of secularisation, demonstrating how churches that embrace digitalisation, community involvement, and flexible worship approaches are more likely to retain and engage their congregations.

Table 1. Summarising Church Responses by Location

City	Denomination	Strategy Adopted	Effectiveness (%)
Abuja	Pentecostal	Community Service	78%
Lagos	Anglican	Digital Engagement	82%
Abuja	Catholic	Theological Reinterpretation	65%
Lagos	Baptist	Community Service	75%

Table 1 summarises the various strategies adopted by churches in Abuja and Lagos and their effectiveness in responding to secularisation. The table shows that churches have implemented different approaches depending on their denomination and location. In Abuja, Pentecostal churches have prioritised community service, achieving an effectiveness rate of 78%, while Catholic churches in the same city have focused on theological reinterpretation, with a slightly lower effectiveness of 65%. In contrast, churches in Lagos have also taken distinct approaches: Anglican churches have emphasised digital engagement, proving to be the most effective strategy with an effectiveness rate of 82%, while Baptist churches have adopted community service, with an effectiveness rate of 75%. These findings indicate that while community service is widely adopted in both cities, digital engagement appears to be particularly effective in Lagos, especially among the Anglican denomination.

Summarising responses of churches in Abuja and Lagos, detailing specific strategies adopted and their effectiveness in retaining or growing congregations and featuring key insights from church leaders in Abuja and Lagos that encapsulate their experiences and perspectives on secularisation. In Abuja, we've seen that our community service initiatives help the needy and strengthen our church family. Utilising digital platforms in Lagos has opened new doors for us, enabling us to connect with the youth in ways we never imagined (Pegram et al., 2016). This tailored approach highlights the specific responses of churches in Nigeria, providing a clearer understanding of how they are adapting to secularisation in both Abuja and Lagos.

Many churches in Nigeria, particularly in urban areas, have reported a decline in physical attendance (Burgess, 2020). However, rather than perceiving this as a crisis, churches are using this shift as an opportunity to expand their social roles. Community engagement, digitalisation, and theological reinterpretation have emerged as key strategies in navigating secularisation. While traditional church attendance may be declining, engagement through digital platforms and social initiatives is increasing, demonstrating that churches are evolving in response to societal changes.

The study revealed several key patterns in how churches are adapting to secularisation. Churches that embrace digital strategies, such as live streaming and social media engagement, report higher levels of interaction and congregation retention, particularly among younger demographics. By expanding their online presence, these churches can maintain connections with members who may not attend services in person while also attracting new audiences (Campbell, 2020).

Another noticeable trend is the increasing focus on community service initiatives. Churches implementing programmes such as food banks, educational support, and mental health services tend

to attract younger individuals seeking meaningful, purpose-driven engagement beyond traditional worship settings. These initiatives strengthen the church's social role and create a more profound sense of belonging among congregants.

While maintaining traditional theological foundations, some churches adapt their messaging to emphasise inclusivity and social justice. This approach allows them to preserve core doctrines while remaining relevant in a rapidly changing social landscape. These churches are successfully bridging the gap between tradition and modern expectations by addressing contemporary ethical concerns and fostering a sense of community solidarity.

The findings indicate that digitalisation and community service are critical for churches seeking to remain relevant in an increasingly secular world. Churches embracing digital platforms can reach broader audiences, particularly younger individuals prioritising convenience and accessibility. Meanwhile, social service initiatives fulfil immediate community needs and enhance the church's role as a proactive and compassionate institution. This shift suggests that the traditional measure of church success—attendance numbers—is no longer the sole indicator of religious engagement. Instead, churches are redefining success in terms of impact, community involvement, and digital reach.

Identifying Church Adaptation Strategies

This section directly responds to the primary objective of this research, which is to identify and analyse the strategies employed by churches in Nigeria—particularly in Abuja and Lagos—in adapting to the growing influence of secularisation. As secular ideologies and materialist worldviews increasingly shape public consciousness, churches face mounting pressure to remain socially relevant, especially among younger generations who are gradually disengaging from traditional religious practices.

This study identifies a range of adaptive strategies employed by churches in Nigeria, particularly in urban centres like Abuja and Lagos, in response to the challenges posed by secularisation (the process by which religious institutions lose societal significance) (Casanova, 2007). Through comprehensive documentation of various initiatives, three key areas of adaptation have emerged: community engagement programs, innovative worship practices, and theological revisions.

Churches in Abuja have increasingly established community engagement programs to address pressing local issues such as poverty and education. Many congregations have partnered with local organisations and government bodies to implement initiatives like food distribution and educational workshops. These efforts have reinforced the church's role as a vital community hub, with congregants reporting a stronger sense of belonging through participation in outreach activities. Similarly, in Lagos, several churches have launched youth mentorship programs aimed at providing guidance and support to young people (Shah, Stepan, & Toft, 2012). These initiatives strengthen the community and enhance the church's visibility and impact within urban neighbourhoods.

One notable example in Abuja is the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), which operates a monthly food relief program targeting internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the outskirts of the city, particularly in areas like Durumi and Garki. This initiative, launched in collaboration with local NGOs and health volunteers, not only provides basic necessities such as rice, beans, and oil, but also offers free medical check-ups and counselling services during distribution events (Burgess, 2020). These outreach efforts have been praised by community members and local leaders for their consistency and alignment with broader developmental goals, positioning the church as a key actor in social welfare provision.

In Lagos, community engagement has taken a more youth-oriented form. The Daystar Christian Centre, for example, has implemented the Daystar Skill Acquisition Programme (DSAP), which offers vocational training in tailoring, graphic design, photography, and digital marketing to unemployed youth. Since its inception, the program has trained over 2,000 young people and has led to the creation of hundreds of small businesses in Lagos suburbs like Ikeja and Surulere (Pegram et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the House on the Rock Church collaborates with private tech firms to run weekend coding bootcamps aimed at building tech skills among teens and university students. These programs not only

build capacity but also serve as a magnet for disengaged youth, some of whom later join church activities voluntarily after their involvement in training sessions.

The impact of these programs is evident in both cities, where churches report increased levels of volunteer participation, membership growth, and stronger communal ties. Focus group participants from Abuja shared that their involvement in food distribution and health outreach has deepened their sense of solidarity and spiritual purpose. Likewise, youth from Lagos described mentorship programs as “life-changing” and credited the church as a space that provides both moral grounding and tangible life opportunities. These outcomes reflect the broader trend identified in global research, wherein churches that assume a socially engaged role tend to sustain their relevance and rebuild trust within secularising societies (Ammerman, 2013).

Worship practices are also evolving to maintain relevance. Many churches in Abuja are experimenting with innovative worship formats by integrating multimedia elements, contemporary music, and interactive sermons. Technology is playing a central role, with churches increasingly using live-streaming services and social media platforms to connect with their congregations, particularly during times of restricted physical gatherings. Lagos churches have also adopted high-energy services influenced by contemporary cultural trends, attracting a broader and more diverse audience.

Another significant area of adaptation is in theological revisions. In Abuja, church leaders are engaging in doctrinal reinterpretations to align their teachings with modern ethical concerns, including social justice, inclusivity, and environmental stewardship. Many pastors emphasise messages of love and acceptance, actively working to create a more inclusive spiritual environment. A similar trend is observed in Lagos, where theological shifts focus on addressing societal issues and fostering inclusivity. This theological flexibility particularly resonates with younger congregants and challenges the perception of the church as disconnected from modern values.

Community engagement programs have become one of the most tangible and effective strategies for Nigerian churches to address the challenges of secularisation. As secular ideologies erode the centrality of religion in public life, churches are repositioning themselves as agents of social transformation by directly addressing the material and emotional needs of their communities. Rather than solely focusing on spiritual nourishment, churches are now actively involved in welfare-oriented initiatives that provide support in areas such as education, health, poverty alleviation, and mental well-being.

One striking example is the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja’s seven-year climate improvement programme, launched in June 2021 under the theme “*Care for our Common Home*.” At the event, Bishop Ignatius Kaigama (Personal Communication, June 21, 2021) emphasised the Church’s commitment to environmental justice and collaboration with the government, stating: “*We are interested in collaboration. We just hope that the government will return the gesture and embrace us. We must work together for beautifying the earth, for creating harmony and order in our society.*” Kaigama highlighted that while the Church continues to provide quality schools and clinics for the poor, it often faces undue interference and taxation, despite its long-standing mission of service: “*They forget that we have been doing this for years and our work is with the poor.*”

Reinforcing this perspective, Father Omokugbo Ojeifo (Personal Communication, June 21, 2021), during the Holy Mass marking the event, stressed the urgency of ecological responsibility, noting that environmental degradation might even be linked to global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. He urged parishes and institutions to promote practical ecological actions, including using renewable energy and reducing food and water waste: “*What matters are the little concrete actions that we take today... Parishes should be made to ask how they can promote renewable energies in their parishes and institutions.*” He also outlined seven themes guiding the diocese’s ecological engagement: “*Our response to the cry of the earth, our response to the cry of the poor, the ecological economy, the adoption of a civil way of life, ecological education, ecological spirituality and community engagement.*”

These initiatives reflect how theological and social commitments converge in the Church’s adaptation to modern challenges. By anchoring environmental advocacy within its community service mission, the Church in Abuja demonstrates a holistic response to secularisation—meeting both

existential and ecological concerns of the faithful, especially younger generations who increasingly demand moral engagement with real-world crises.

In Lagos, the Anglican Diocese of Lagos West has introduced seminars and Bible study series addressing gender equality, mental health, and social justice, deliberately opening theological discourse to include contemporary concerns. One notable initiative is the “Faith and Society” forum held quarterly at All Souls’ Church in Lekki, where clergy and lay members discuss topics such as domestic violence, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and economic inequality from both biblical and human rights perspectives. While maintaining doctrinal boundaries, these discussions foster openness and promote empathy within the congregation—contributing to what local clergy describe as “compassionate orthodoxy.”

This initiative has yielded measurable impacts on both congregational attitudes and public engagement. According to a report published by the Diocese of Lagos West Social Welfare and Advocacy Commission in 2022, participation in the “Faith and Society” forums has steadily increased, with attendance rising by 40% between 2021 and 2023. The forums have also influenced the development of pastoral guidelines aimed at equipping church leaders to respond empathetically to members facing issues such as depression, domestic abuse, and social exclusion. One clergy member shared that after attending the mental health series, “I now include affirmations about self-worth and hope during pastoral counselling, and more young people now approach us for spiritual guidance.”

In addition, All Souls’ Church has partnered with local NGOs such as Stand to End Rape (STER) and the Mental Health Foundation of Nigeria to deliver joint workshops on gender-based violence and emotional well-being. These programs reflect theological concern and demonstrate the church’s willingness to collaborate with secular actors to serve the broader community. Such partnerships break traditional boundaries between religious and civil society and highlight the church’s evolving role as a moral bridge-builder in Lagos’s pluralistic and often polarised urban environment.

Congregants, especially youth and women, have expressed appreciation for these efforts. During a focus group discussion, a young female attendee noted: “Before, I thought the church wouldn’t understand what I was going through as a survivor of abuse. But these forums have made me feel seen and safe.” This testimony illustrates how theological adaptation—when grounded in empathy and contextual awareness—can foster a more inclusive and spiritually nourishing space, even within traditional structures.

Theologically, the Diocese has framed this openness not as a departure from orthodoxy but as a return to the radical compassion exemplified in the ministry of Jesus. In pastoral letters and Sunday homilies, clergy often refer to the concept of “truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) as a biblical foundation for engaging difficult social topics without compromising scriptural integrity. This approach allows the church to resist both rigid fundamentalism and uncritical progressivism, offering instead a model of *contextual theology* that resonates with contemporary ethical sensitivities while preserving the church’s core teachings.

Moreover, many Pentecostal churches in both Abuja and Lagos have adopted theologically progressive messaging in their youth ministries and social media content. For example, sermons streamed by The Elevation Church (Lagos) often frame biblical teachings around mental health awareness, personal empowerment, and forgiveness, reflecting a pragmatic and emotionally resonant approach to theology. Their popular sermon series “*Faith for Real Life*” (2022) attracted widespread engagement on platforms like YouTube and Instagram, especially from urban millennials and Gen Z Christians who often feel marginalised in rigid theological environments.

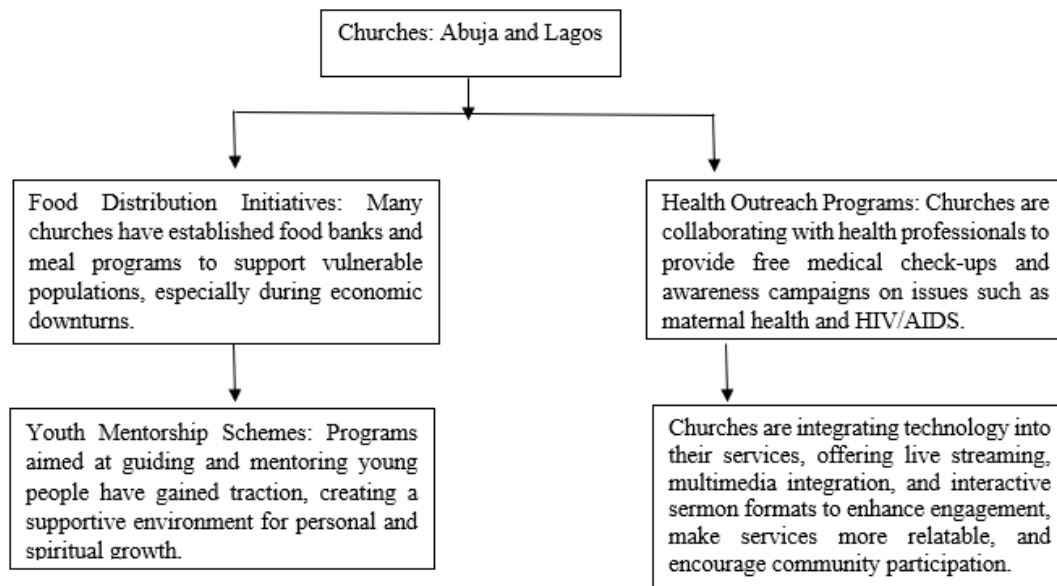


Figure 4. Social Service Programs and Worship Innovations

Churches in Nigeria are actively adopting community engagement programs, digital innovations, and theological adaptations to address secularisation. Many churches have implemented social service programs, mentorship initiatives, and digital worship formats, which have proven effective in attracting new congregants, particularly younger generations.

The study highlights several key patterns in how churches are adapting to secularisation (Chaves, 1994). Social service programs have reinforced the church's role as a community-oriented institution. By offering food assistance, educational support, and mental health services, churches enhance their public image and create stronger connections with their congregations (Paris, 2022).

Innovative worship practices that integrate technology and contemporary cultural influences have significantly improved congregation engagement, particularly among younger generations. Digital platforms have allowed churches to extend their reach beyond traditional physical spaces, ensuring continued interaction with members who may not attend in person.

Theological revisions have enabled churches to uphold their traditional foundations while adapting their messaging to address contemporary ethical and societal concerns. Striking a balance between doctrinal preservation and modern engagement has been crucial in maintaining relevance and fostering a more inclusive and socially responsive religious environment.

The findings indicate that digitalisation and community service initiatives are key to ensuring the continued relevance of churches in increasingly secular societies. Churches leveraging technology can engage a broader audience, particularly younger demographics prioritising accessibility and convenience.

Meanwhile, community-based initiatives enhance the church's role as a socially responsible institution, addressing local concerns while fostering a stronger sense of belonging among congregants. By embracing adaptability in worship practices and theological teachings, churches can successfully navigate societal shifts while maintaining their spiritual mission. These insights highlight that attendance numbers alone are no longer the primary measure of church success. Instead, modern churches assess their impact through engagement, social influence, and digital outreach.

Exploring the Impact of Church Strategies on Communities

The study explores the profound impact of various church strategies on communities, particularly in urban areas such as Abuja and Lagos, Nigeria. It uses a combination of survey results and in-depth key findings to reveal how these strategies foster a stronger sense of belonging and enhance engagement within congregations.

In Abuja, church initiatives focused on community engagement and social services have significantly strengthened the sense of belonging among congregants. Due to these programs, many individuals report feeling a deeper connection to their church and the broader community. Focus group participants emphasised that involvement in community service activities, such as food distribution and educational workshops, has reinforced their ties to the church and their neighbours. This engagement is particularly important in urban environments, where individuals often experience social isolation.

Churches in Lagos have adopted a similar approach, actively promoting inclusivity and diversity in their programs. The congregants respond positively when they feel accepted and valued, deepening their commitment to the church and its activities. Many individuals expressed that participating in community-driven initiatives enhances their overall connection to both the church and the wider society (O'Leary et al., 2022).

Innovative worship practices have also played a crucial role in increasing engagement within congregations. In Abuja, participation has seen a noticeable rise due to these new worship strategies. Survey data suggests that congregants are more likely to attend church activities when the worship experience is dynamic and interactive (Mueller, 2023). Many respondents highlighted that multimedia elements and interactive sermons capture their attention and encourage more active engagement in discussions and faith-based activities.

In Lagos, churches have successfully integrated digital technologies such as live streaming and social media interaction, further enhancing congregational engagement. Many congregants appreciate the ability to connect with church services remotely, which has been particularly beneficial for those who may otherwise feel discouraged from attending in person. The adoption of these digital platforms has broadened church reach and provided new ways for individuals to participate in worship and community events (Stanley & Gilzene, 2023).

Collaborations with local organisations have also emerged as an effective strategy for strengthening churches' roles within communities. In Abuja, partnerships between churches and local organisations have led to the implementation of social service programs that benefit both members and non-members. These collaborations have fostered goodwill and demonstrated the church's commitment to addressing critical local needs, further solidifying its reputation as a caring and socially responsible institution (Unruh & Sider, 2005).

A similar trend is evident in Lagos, where churches have formed strong networks of support through partnerships with local groups and institutions. These collaborations have reinforced the church's position as a central hub for social connection and assistance, fostering a shared sense of responsibility and collective action among community members.

The findings from this study underscore the transformative impact of church strategies on communities in Nigeria (Christoffersen & Warburg, 2016). By fostering a heightened sense of belonging and increasing engagement within congregations, churches in both Abuja and Lagos are revitalising their internal dynamics and enhancing their roles as vital contributors to societal well-being. These strategies demonstrate that when churches actively engage with their communities and embrace innovative practices, they can create a more inclusive, connected and supportive environment for all. This research highlights the importance of adaptability and responsiveness in maintaining the relevance of churches in an ever-evolving societal landscape.

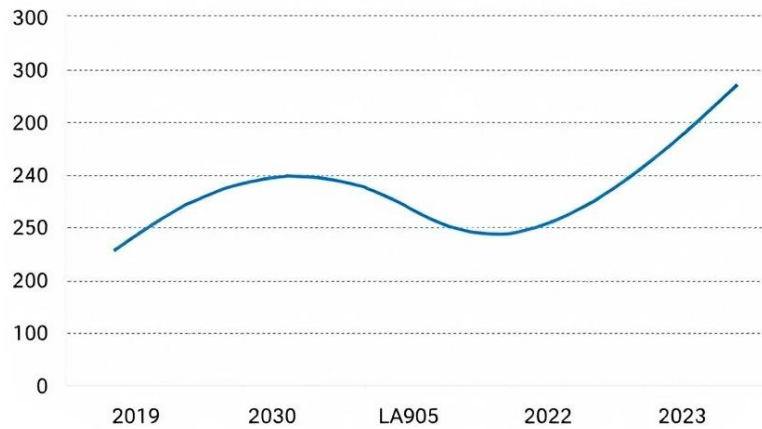


Figure 5. Graph of changes in church attendance in Abuja and Lagos

Figure 5 shows the changes in congregation attendance in Abuja and Lagos churches from 2019 to 2023. The peak attendance was around 300, followed by a decline to around 220 due to the pandemic. In 2021, attendance began to recover with digital engagement strategies, rising to 250. In 2022, community service initiatives led to further growth, reaching 280. In 2023, continued engagement through innovative worship practices resulted in an average attendance of about 320. The graph shows a positive correlation between new strategies and congregation attendance recovery.

Table 2. Congregant Satisfaction Levels

Satisfaction Aspect	Very Satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Neutral (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Very Dissatisfied (%)
Overall Worship Experience	45%	35%	15%	4%	1%
Engagement in Community Programme	50%	30%	10%	7%	3%
Use of Technology in Worship	40%	30%	20%	8%	2%
Inclusivity and Acceptance	55%	25%	10%	7%	3%
Opportunities for Participation	48%	32%	12%	6%	2%

Most congregants reported high levels of satisfaction with their overall worship experience and community engagement programs, indicating that the churches’ strategies have positively influenced their sense of belonging and participation. Inclusivity and acceptance received the highest satisfaction levels, emphasising the importance of creating a welcoming environment within the church. Adopting innovative church strategies has resulted in a remarkable 30% increase in congregation participation over the past two years. This shift underscores the effectiveness of these approaches in enhancing engagement among church members.

Many congregants have expressed that their involvement in community-based programs has fostered a deeper sense of connection to both the church and their local community. These initiatives address social needs and create opportunities for meaningful interactions among members, reinforcing communal ties. Strategies that focus on social inclusion have been pivotal in building trust among congregants. By actively promoting a welcoming and inclusive environment, churches have made members feel valued and accepted, strengthening their commitment to the church community.

These identified patterns emphasise the critical role of community-based approaches in maintaining the relevance of churches in an increasingly secularising world (Demerath, 2007; Dobbelaere, 2003). As congregants feel more connected through community involvement, churches can cultivate a supportive network that fosters loyalty and belonging. This connection is essential at a time when individuals may seek spiritual fulfilment outside traditional frameworks. The focus on social

inclusion enhances individual satisfaction and builds a cohesive community that can withstand external challenges. Trust among congregants is vital for the church's resilience and ability to adapt to societal changes. The findings highlight that innovative, community-oriented strategies are beneficial and essential for churches aiming to thrive in contemporary society. Such approaches ensure that churches remain vital and relevant, reinforcing their role as community-supporting pillars.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide a detailed examination of how churches in Abuja and Lagos, Nigeria, are responding to secularisation. This process diminishes the social influence of religious institutions. The research shows that churches are adjusting their worship practices, theological frameworks, and community engagement strategies to remain relevant in an increasingly secular society. Expressly, churches in Abuja have incorporated contemporary music, multimedia presentations, and interactive sermons, while churches in Lagos have adopted dynamic, high-energy worship styles and digital engagement strategies. These adaptations are coupled with social service initiatives, which are becoming central to the church's role in the community. Notably, churches that embraced digital platforms and social outreach programs showed positive outcomes regarding congregation engagement, particularly among younger generations.

The results of this study support the argument that churches in Nigeria are adopting a multifaceted approach to navigate the challenges posed by secularisation, as detailed in the Introduction. Secularisation, manifested in declining physical attendance at traditional worship services, is countered by integrating innovative worship practices, digital technology, and social service initiatives. These strategies are pivotal in maintaining church relevance and encouraging greater congregational involvement. The success of community service programs in Abuja, such as food aid and educational workshops, reflects a broader social trend of increased social responsibility, where churches become central to community well-being beyond religious activities. This approach aligns with Bruce's (2003) theory of religious innovation, which posits that religious institutions must adapt to social changes to remain influential. Similarly, the focus on digital engagement in Lagos, primarily through online worship services and social media, directly engages younger populations more accustomed to virtual communication. This is consistent with Max Weber's concept of 'world disillusionment' (Taft, 2015), where the shift towards modern, dynamic worship formats enables churches to maintain relevance in an era where younger generations are increasingly disengaged from traditional religious practices. The findings suggest that by embracing these modern tools and methods, churches in Nigeria effectively engage with younger demographics, meet their social and existential needs, and counter the effects of secularisation. This innovative approach, combining technological, social, and theological adaptations, highlights the churches' ability to remain active and influential in the face of secularising forces.

Our study contributes to existing literature on secularisation by presenting a more integrated and proactive approach to how churches in Nigeria respond to secularisation. Previous research has highlighted the importance of worship innovation in maintaining congregational involvement, particularly in Western contexts (Harding, 2022; Riley, Carlile, Galbraith, & Kelley, 2020). These studies focused primarily on the role of modern worship practices such as contemporary music and multimedia presentations. While our findings align with these studies, particularly regarding the need for worship innovation, our research extends the conversation by demonstrating that Nigerian churches are not solely relying on worship changes. Instead, they combine digitalisation, community service initiatives, and theological adaptations to address secularisation. This multidimensional strategy sets our research apart, highlighting the synergistic relationship between these approaches.

In addition, while studies like those of Plekon (2021) and Johnsen (2021) focus on the shift toward service-oriented church roles in response to secularisation, our findings indicate that secularisation can also serve as a catalyst for internal renewal. Churches in Nigeria, particularly in Abuja and Lagos, have found that combining social outreach programmes with digital platforms can maintain and strengthen congregational engagement. This contrasts with previous work that has predominantly treated

worship innovation, community service, and digital engagement as separate rather than interconnected strategies.

Furthermore, while much of the existing research focuses on secularisation's impact in Western societies, where technological integration in worship is prevalent (Campbell, 2020; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020; Pegram et al., 2016), our study reveals that churches in Nigeria are similarly adopting digital tools, but with a distinctive focus on balancing these tools with community engagement and theological shifts. This combination of technological innovation and social responsibility within a religious context is relatively underexplored, marking our research's novel contribution to the broader secularisation studies field. By focusing on the Nigerian context, we provide insights into how churches in non-Western societies are using digitalisation and community service not just as reactive measures but as proactive strategies for spiritual and social growth.

The results of this study underscore the importance of flexibility and innovation in the church's response to secularisation. While secularisation may have diminished traditional attendance figures, it has not led to a complete disengagement from religious practice. Instead, churches are shifting from mere places of worship to active community centres that engage with social issues. This shift aligns with the broader trend of religiosity being adapted to meet the evolving needs of society, as discussed in previous research on the role of religion in modern times (Ammerman, 2013). The findings also highlight that churches can maintain their relevance by focusing on social inclusion and community engagement, both of which are becoming crucial in today's social landscape.

Furthermore, the rise of digital engagement within churches, particularly in Lagos, speaks to the growing intersection between religion and technology. This trend provides a way to engage younger audiences and serves as a necessary tool for churches to sustain their relevance in a digital age. The increasing focus on social services highlights the church's expanding role as a socially responsible entity, reaffirming its place within communities, especially in urban centres like Abuja and Lagos.

The positive outcomes observed in the churches that embraced digital engagement and community service initiatives suggest that adaptation is essential for churches to thrive in a secular environment. While beneficial, the shift towards community service also presents challenges in terms of resource allocation and the ability of churches to sustain these programs long-term. The increasing reliance on digital platforms also raises concerns about accessibility, particularly for congregants without reliable internet access. However, these adaptations can create a more inclusive environment where individuals are spiritually and socially engaged.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that churches in Nigeria continue to embrace digital tools and community engagement initiatives to strengthen their relevance in a secular world. Church leaders should consider allocating resources to improve their digital infrastructure, ensuring that all congregants, particularly younger generations, can engage with church activities virtually. Furthermore, churches should continue to foster partnerships with local organisations to expand their community service efforts, thus further solidifying their role as social pillars in society. Policies that support churches in providing social services—such as food security, mental health support, and educational programs—should be encouraged, as they contribute to the broader social fabric. Lastly, theological revisions that reflect contemporary ethical concerns, such as inclusivity and social justice, should be prioritised to ensure that church teachings remain relevant in a rapidly evolving social landscape.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that secularisation, far from merely leading to a decline in religious affiliation, can also trigger a process of positive transformation within religious institutions. Specifically, churches in Nigeria, particularly in Abuja and Lagos, are employing a combination of adaptive strategies—such as innovative worship practices, community engagement programs, and theological revisions—to counter the challenges posed by secularisation. These strategies have resulted in increased congregational involvement and have strengthened the social role of churches, highlighting a paradigm shift away from traditional measures of success, such as attendance figures,

towards a focus on social impact and digital engagement. The integration of modern technologies, including digital platforms for worship and the growing emphasis on community service, has allowed churches to engage with younger, digitally-savvy generations while simultaneously addressing pressing social needs within their communities.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its holistic approach, which integrates worship innovation, community service, and theological adaptations. Unlike earlier studies that isolated these factors, our research shows how they can work synergistically to rejuvenate religious institutions, making them more relevant and socially engaged in a secularising world. This novel perspective provides valuable insights for church leaders, policymakers, and religious institutions aiming to strengthen their position in an increasingly secular society.

However, this study does have limitations. The research focused primarily on churches in urban centres in Nigeria, with a limited sample size and a focus on specific denominations. Additionally, while qualitative methods offered in-depth insights, the study's findings may not be fully generalizable across different cultural and geographical contexts. Future research should consider cross-cultural studies, including a more extensive and diverse sample, and explore the long-term impact of digital engagement and community service initiatives. More comprehensive quantitative analyses and interfaith comparisons could further illuminate how various religious groups adapt to global secularisation.

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