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Examining Church Divisions from a Biblical Lens: Case Study of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church.

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Abstract

This research examines church divisions within the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, employing a biblical lens to explore the theological, historical, and socio-cultural factors underlying fragmentation. Drawing on scriptural principles of unity, love, and reconciliation, the study investigates how internal conflicts, leadership struggles, and differing interpretations of doctrine have contributed to schisms within the church. A case study methodology is applied, integrating biblical exegesis, qualitative data, and historical analysis to highlight both the causes and consequences of division. The research further assesses how biblical teachings on unity in Christ and the early church's response to conflicts can offer models for healing and reconciliation within the Cherubim and Seraphim Church. Ultimately, the study argues that a return to scriptural foundations provides a pathway for addressing internal crises and fostering sustainable unity in the contemporary African church context.

Keywords: Church Divisions, Cherubim and Seraphim, Biblical Unity, Ecclesiology, Reconciliation, African Christianity, Church Conflict.

1. Introduction

Church divisions, however, are not new, and they continue to be one of the greatest obstacles to Christian unity and witness in the world. From the earliest disputes witnessed in the Acts of the Apostles and Pauline epistles (Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13) to the Great Schism of 1054 (Meyendorff, 1989) and the Protestant Reformation (MacCulloch, 2003), the story of the Christian Church has been scarred by controversy and division. These splits typically result from a complex interaction of theological disputes, leadership wrangling, cultural issues, and spiritual pride (Walls, 1996). While doctrinal disagreements are proffered as the causes, power, ambition, and socio-cultural issues are equally potent (Gifford, 1998). In this connection, the occurrences of church splits in African Indigenous Churches such as the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church require closer scrutiny, particularly from a biblical perspective.



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The Cherubim and Seraphim Church, which is one of the oldest African-initiated churches in Nigeria, was established in 1925 under the spiritual auspices of Saint Moses Orimolade Tunolase and Christiana Abiodun Emmanuel (Peel, 1968). Founded upon charismatic spirituality, prophetic visions, and African cultural expression, the C&S movement rapidly grew to become a significant phenomenon within Nigerian and West African Christianity (Kalu, 2008). However, despite its promising beginning, the church was soon torn apart by internal crises that led to the emergence of a number of factions, each claiming continuity with the original vision. These crises, which were occasionally doctrinal but more frequently founded upon leadership struggles or gender relations (Ojo, 1988), have had long-lasting implications for the unity, growth, and theological consistency of the C&S Church.

It is the purpose of this research to examine these cleavages from a biblical worldview, and more specifically the Christian principles of reconciliation and unity as presented in Scripture. The New Testament, and Jesus' teaching as well as the epistles of Paul, place a strong emphasis on unity within the body of believers as a demonstration of the transformative power of the gospel (John 17:20-23; Ephesians 4:1-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13). By analyzing both the historical and contemporary schisms in the C&S movement from the perspective of these biblical principles, the study aims both to uncover the theological and sociocultural reasons for fragmentation and to propose biblically grounded roads to unity.

Further, this study will also examine the impact of these divisions on the spiritual well-being of the church, its public witness, and its internal mission. It will also give consideration to recent efforts at unification, including the formation of the Cherubim and Seraphim Unification Church of Nigeria (C&SUCN) (Ajayi, 2017), and consider the potential for scriptural principles to guide healing and reunification. Ultimately, this paper aims to contribute to the broader conversation on church unity in African Christianity by offering a case study that combines theological reflection with historical and sociological analysis.

Historical Background of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church

Origins and Founding (1925)

The Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C&S) started in 1925 in Nigeria amidst an explosion of Africaninitiated Christian movements that sought to indigenize Christianity in local African cultures and religious experiences (Peel 2000; Kalu 2008). The origin of the church is intimately connected with the spiritual experience of Moses Orimolade Tunolase, a Yoruba man from Ikare in today's Ondo State, and Christiana Abiodun Emmanuel, a young Anglican girl who was reported to have received visions of celestial beings (Ayegboyin & Ishola 1997; Alana 2004).

Moses Orimolade was greatly renowned for his healing ministry, prophetic gifts, and deep prayer life. He preached a revival of biblical-based holiness, spiritual discipline, and charismatic worship as well as African spirituality (Ojo 2006). Abiodun, nevertheless, fell into a trance during a 1925 Corpus Christi procession in Lagos and claimed to have seen angelic beings instructing her to help Orimolade in spreading a new religious movement (Alana 2004; Peel 2000). Their marriage led to the birth of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, named after the celestial beings in Isaiah 6:2 and Ezekiel 10:1–22, symbolizing divine worship, purity, and revelation (Adogame 2004).



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Core Beliefs and Practices

The early C&S Church was preoccupied with holiness, visions, prophecy, healing, and angelic worship, in both biblically and African spiritually acceptable forms (Ojo 2006; Adogame 2004). Worship practices were:

White robes, symbolizing purity and imitation of God.

Candles and incense, recalling Old Testament temple worship (cf. Exodus 30:1-9).

Prayer mountains, fasting, and visions.

Prophetic utterances and healing sessions.

Though deeply biblical, the church's practices resonated with African cosmologies, especially in the visions, dreams, and spirits (Peel 2000). The C&S Church actively rejected syncretism in its underlying theology but retained communal African worship forms such as drumming, dancing, and communal prayers (Ayegboyin & Ishola 1997).

Growth and Early Influence

From 1925 until the early 1930s, the church expanded rapidly across southwestern Nigeria Agege, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ondo, and Ijebu-Ode due to its healing ministry and spiritual power (Peel 2000; Kalu 2008). Its message attracted those alienated by colonial missionary churches. The C&S Church was the first of the African Indigenous Churches (AICs) to gain national recognition and served as an inspiration for subsequent spiritualist movements such as the Celestial Church of Christ and Church of the Lord Aladura (Adogame 2004; Ojo 2006).

Early Schisms and Fragmentation

There were tensions, particularly regarding gender roles and spiritual authority, between Orimolade and Abiodun Emmanuel. While Orimolade preached discipline and humility, Abiodun's angelic visions and charisma attracted large followings. In 1929, an official split resulted in two organizations: The Holy Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church (led by Orimolade) and The Cherubim and Seraphim Society (led by Abiodun) (Peel 2000; Alana 2004).

Subsequent divisions occurred in the early 1930s:

1930: Ezekiel Davies founded the Praying Band because of governance disputes.

1930–1932: Christianah Olatunrinle led the Western Conference, and A.B. Lawrence founded the Holy Flock of Christ Church.

1933: After Orimolade's death, rivalry between Abraham Onanuga and Peter Omojola led to a new group Eternal Sacred Order of the C&S (Mount Zion) (Adogame 2004; Ojo 2006).

These splits were driven by issues of prophetic authority, legitimacy of leadership, and succession (Peel 2000).



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Propagation and Fragmentation (Post-1933 to Date)

After 1933, further groups split off, including:

C&S Movement Church (from the Northern Conference, 1941).

Eternal Sacred Order, Praying Band, Society, Movement, and Holy Order. These were the five principal branches (Kalu 2008; Adogame 2004).

A charismatic culture which equated visions with authority led to constant splintering. In the words of one commentator, "to start one's own branch is as easy as winking the eye get for yourself the gift of vision and prophecy your parlour becomes the Cathedral Church" (Ojo 2006).

Global Expansion and Contemporary Status

The C&S Church has since spread to the UK, USA, and West Africa, where it provides cultural continuity for African diaspora Christians (Adogame 2004). Despite denominational splits, all the groups lay claim to spiritual descent to the 1925 revival.

Unification Efforts and Recent Developments

In 1999, the Cherubim and Seraphim Unification Church of Nigeria (C&SUCN) was formed to foster cooperation between branches (Adogame 2004). The 2024 Annual Conference at Ugbonla, Ondo, was themed "Marching Towards New Glory" and emphasized increased social and political engagement. In May 2025, the Lagos Chapter launched a permanent secretariat, an indicator of heightened institutional coherence. Meanwhile, in April 2025, C&SUCN began a centenary celebration, including revivals, community projects, and diaspora evangelism. However, internal disputes continue. Similarly, in March 2025, the church leadership publicly condemned unapproved practices like "tongue-to-tongue" ordination, reasserting doctrinal control (Peel, 2000).

Legal Disputes

In 2017 Lagos High Court case attempted to resolve a leadership tussle between Apostle Abiola and Solomon Alao, reflecting the ongoing contest for spiritual authority (Vanguard News 2017, & 2018).

Summary: Division Dynamics and Current State

Initial schisms were largely attributable to leadership conflict, succession dispute, and gender issues.

Long-term fragmentation is driven by a culture of individual charismatic claims, ritual identity, and decentralized authority.

Unity endeavors especially C&SUCN have made structural progress (registration, secretariat, international events) but still suffer from tension, legal entanglements, and authority disputes.

The 2025 centenary gives new momentum for unity, yet the movement is still struggling with unresolved autonomy and doctrinal consistency.



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The Implication of Church Division in the C&S Church and the Universal Church

Adeoye (2025) averred that Church division, whether in the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) or in the universal Church of Christ, has grave implications that rub off on spiritual life, witness, mission, and theological integrity. This section examines the implications of such divisions from both an internal (C&S) and universal Christian viewpoint.

1. Spiritual Fragmentation and Doctrinal Confusion

Within C&S:

The plethora of splinter groups within the C&S movement each claiming exclusive legitimacy has resulted in theological inconsistency, doctrinal dilution, and identity confusion (Loko, 2023). While all groups share generally similar core beliefs (angelic worship, holiness, prophecy), they vary widely in worship practices, spiritual interpretations, and ecclesiastical governance. The consequence is a loss of collective theological depth and spiritual cohesion. This fragmentation weakens the sense of unity that Christ prayed for among His followers (John 17:21), creating barriers between believers and sometimes fostering competition rather than cooperation.

In the wider Church:

Divisions perplex new converts and outsiders. It contribute to doctrinal confusion. When groups emphasize differing interpretations of Scripture or elevate secondary issues to primary importance, believers may struggle to discern core truths of the faith. This can obscure the gospel message, weaken witness to the world, and foster mistrust among Christians. The Bible warns against such disunity:

"For God is not a God of confusion but of peace as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Aluko (2021) expatiates that, doctrinal disunity undermines the integrity of Christian teaching and opens the way to syncretism or heresy.

2. Tarnished Witness and Evangelistic Weakness

Among C&S:

Recurring schisms render the church unstable and quarrelsome, especially when conflicts of leadership or succession crises become publicly controversial. For example, court disputes over titles (e.g., Supreme Head) or church property reduce spiritual credibility. Aluko (2022) explains that, this pave for how church looks like "old-fashioned" or "factionalized" to most young Nigerians, and they move to Pentecostal or non-denominational movements.

In the worldwide Church:

Church divisions damage the credibility of the Christian message. When believers are seen quarreling or separating over differences, the world perceives the Church as inconsistent and divided, which tarnishes its witness to Christ's love and unity (John 13:35). Omoyajowo (1982) is of the opinion that, these divisions also create evangelistic weakness. To him, energy that could be spent on preaching the gospel



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and serving communities is often diverted to defending positions or criticizing other groups. As a result, the Church's message appears fragmented and less compelling, reducing its impact on those outside the faith. Meanwhile, it should noted that, disunity contradicts Jesus' prayer that believers would be one:

"May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me..." (John 17:23).

Division destroys the credibility of the evangelism enterprise by presenting a divided image of Christ to a watching world.

3. Duplication of Resources and Administrative Inefficiency

In C&S:

Each splinter group has its own conventions, church headquarters, seminaries, welfare programs, and even uniforms. Egbulam (2020) elucidates that, duplication wastes financial and human resources that could be shared for social outreach, education, or evangelism. To him, it also weakens bargaining power with government agencies or ecumenical councils. In addition, Loko (2023) asserts that, the divisions within the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church have led to multiple splinter groups establishing their own headquarters, clergy, programs, and projects, and allow the an assets such as, buildings, and personnel that could otherwise be pooled for greater impact to be wasted. Alana (2004) narrates more that, this creates administrative inefficiency, as each faction maintains separate leadership structures, policies, and activities. Instead of unified planning and coordinated evangelism, effort and funds are often wasted on parallel systems, weakening the overall mission of the Church.

In the universal Church:

Polley (2015) explains that, duplication of resources and administrative inefficiency work together with sectarianism and this has led to competing denominations planting churches across the street from one another, at times more interested in growth than in larger outreach. This has been called "competitive Christianity," with churches vying for members rather than collaborating to reach the unreached. Kalu (2008) said, rather than a unified strategy for evangelism and service, the Church's efforts are fragmented, reducing effectiveness and witness to the world. It was recorded that individual busy looking for funds, manpower, and infrastructure to accomplish overlapping projects instead of being combined for greater impact.

4. Leadership Crisis and Succession Wars

In C&S:

There have been recurring leadership crises in C&S since the death of Moses Orimolade in 1933. Multiple claimants to succession (e.g., Peter Omojola vs. Abraham Onanuga; Solomon Alao vs. Apostle Abiola) often turn controversies into court cases, public altercations, and media scandals. These distract from spiritual leadership and create a poor example of unity for younger ministers. Mabborang (2022) opines that, these succession wars deepen fragmentation, weaken spiritual focus, and divert time and resources away from evangelism and service, further diminishing the Church's unity and public witness.

In the wider Church:



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Succession disputes over leadership have spawned identical conflicts in other denominations (e.g., Anglican-Episcopal conflicts, Catholic-traditionalist groups, CAC and others) (Adeyanju, 2024). When pastoral offices are politicized, the biblical paradigm of servant leadership is compromised (cf. Matthew 20:25–28). Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) can be sited as a major example. Jegede (2021) cited that, Christ Apostolic Church in Nigeria has experienced repeated leadership crises stemming from disputes over authority, doctrine, and administration since 1989. Conflicts among top leaders and regional blocs have led to parallel leadership structures, court cases, and splinter groups. These crises have weakened unity, diverted a lot of resources, and reduced the Church's effectiveness in propagation of the gospel and social impact, tarnishing its public image and credibility (Yerokun, 2025).

5. Hindrance to Unity and Ecumenism

Within C&S:

According to Aluko (2022), the C&S Unification Church of Nigeria (C&SUCN) has endeavored in earnest to unite the factions but not all branches are compliant. Some still reject joint statements of doctrine, others argue over who is to be in charge. The lack of a unified theological education retards clergy development and inter-fellowship development. Divisions within the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church have created rival factions with separate leadership, doctrines, and worship styles. David, Ogunwuyi, and Ogedengbe (2023) explains that this hinders unity, as mutual suspicion and competition reduce cooperation among the groups. It also weakens efforts at ecumenism, such as, ability to work with other Christian bodies, since a fragmented church speaks with many voices instead of one, making joint projects and mutual dialogue with the wider Church more difficult.

Within the Church universal:

Despite efforts like the World Council of Churches and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the majority of Christian groups remain divided. Denominationalism has a way of easily graduating to denominational pride, making reconciliation impossible. From the view of Renne (2009), this disunity stalls joint mission efforts, inter-faith dialogue, and global humanitarian partnerships. Divisions within the universal Church have produced numerous denominations and independent ministries with differing doctrines, worship styles, and leadership structures. It break down communion, as mistrust and rivalry reduce cooperation among Christians. It also obstructs ecumenism, such as, the movement toward mutual understanding and joint action. Church splits weaken the sense of unity Christ intended and create competing interpretations of Scripture.

6. Emotional and Relational Wounds

Within C&S:

Division tends to divide families and communities. For instance, people could be in different camps of the same church, and there could be tension when the family gathers or when there is community worship. The loyalists could decline attending events organized by the competing branches, fueling bitterness. Amasuomo (2014) analysis that divisions within the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church often tear apart long-standing friendships, families, and mentor-disciple relationships. Members feel betrayal, loss, and mistrust when leaders or congregations split. These divisions leave emotional wounds,



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such as, bitterness, discouragement, and disillusionment and strain relationships among believers, making reconciliation and cooperation more difficult and weakening the Church's sense of community and love.

In the worldwide Church:

Church splits often create long-lasting emotional wounds. Members feel betrayed, lose their friends, and experience spiritual burnout. In other cases, splits give rise to cult-like churches with low accountability and high manipulation. In the end, the Church loses some of the closeness and love it is supposed to show to the world.

7. Biblical and Theological Implications

Church Division is contrary to New Testament teaching on unity:

1 Corinthians 1:10-13: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?"

Ephesians 4:3-6: "Make every effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit..."

John 17:20-23: "That they may be one as we are one..."

Theologically, division represents a failure to realize the implications of the Trinity, where unity and diversity co-exist in harmony (perichoresis). It is also contrary to the eschatological expectation of one united Church (Revelation 7:9). The Bible portrays the Church as one body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-27) and calls believers to maintain "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Church divisions therefore contradict Scripture's call to unity and love, and weaken the Church's witness to the world (John 17:21). Splits distort the doctrine of the Church (ecclesiology), instead of reflecting God's oneness and reconciliation in Christ, a divided Church sends a mixed message about the gospel. Divisions also risk elevating secondary issues over core truths, leading to doctrinal confusion and a diminished sense of the Church as Christ's visible body on earth.

Conclusion

The Cherubim and Seraphim Church is a significant emblem of African-initiated Christianity, both in spiritual intensity and cultural relevance. However, its history of fragmentation beginning with the leadership struggle between Moses Orimolade and Christiana Abiodun Emmanuel has had lasting consequences. They include doctrinal confusion, evangelistic loss of credibility, leadership squabbles, and spiritual splits. The proliferation of factions, driven to a large degree by personal ambition, vision-based individualism, and challenged leadership, continues to operate against the corporate witness and mission of the C&S Church. Examining church divisions from a biblical perspective shows that disunity runs contrary to Christ's prayer for oneness among His followers (John 17:21). In the case of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, repeated splits have produced leadership crises, duplication of resources, weakened evangelism, and emotional wounds among members. From a biblical lens, such divisions call for repentance, reconciliation, and renewed commitment to unity in Christ, so that the Church can reflect God's love, speak with one voice, and fulfill its mission more effectively. Divisions are purely against the teachings of Christ and the apostolic summons to unity in the Body of Christ. Scripture passages such as John 17:21, 1 Corinthians 1:10, and Ephesians 4:3–6 urge the Church to



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maintain unity through humility, love, and shared doctrine. The C&S movement, if it is keen on reclaiming its prophetic and spiritual mandate, must prioritize reconciliation, doctrinal clarity, and biblical leadership.

Recommendations

Biblical Literacy and Theological Education

- 1. All C&S groups should invest in low-cost, contextualized theological education for their clergy and laity. A shared doctrinal curriculum rooted in biblical theology and Christian ethics can reduce fragmentation.
- 2. Empower the Body of Unification (C&SUCN)

The Cherubim and Seraphim Unification Church of Nigeria should be made stronger to function more effectively as an administrative and spiritual unifying organ, with clear roles, conflict-resolution mechanisms, and representative leadership inclusiveness.

3. Establish a Council of Elders and Mediators

There should be an inter-branch, cross-generational council of elders to mediate disputes and ensure leadership transitions are smooth. This may prevent successive succession crises and promote biblical servant leadership models.

4. Foster Joint Worship and Revival Efforts

Organizing regular inter-faction revivals, youth camps, and national days of prayer can promote unity, revival, and appreciation of one another.

5. Establish and Formalize Governance Models

Each faction should update and adopt governance models that promote openness, accountability, and biblical leadership. Formal structures can discourage opportunistic splits and create organizational trust.

6. Encourage Repentance, Reconciliation, and Forgiveness

The members and leaders must acknowledge the historical hurts and offenses and pursue healing through honest conversation and forgiveness from one another. This is in line with Jesus' insistence on unity and reconciliation within the Church.

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