

Unity Lost, Truth Pursued: The Fragmented World of Christianity

Preface

This work is not an attack on any church, denomination, or movement. It is a report, a reflection, written from the perspective of a Catholic who seeks understanding rather than judgment. The Christian landscape in Nigeria is vast, dynamic, and deeply spiritual. Across the nation, churches rise on every street, each claiming a special calling, revelation, or divine mandate. While this energy testifies to a people passionate for God, it also reveals a deeper fragmentation that has marked modern Christianity.

The purpose of this work is to observe, understand, and compare, to trace how the various branches of Protestantism have grown, shaped doctrine, and influenced faith practice among millions of Nigerians. From the white garments of the Cherubim and Seraphim, to the global expansion of The Redeemed Christian Church of God, the missionary legacy of Foursquare Gospel Church, and the spiritual militancy of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, each represents a different response to the same Gospel message.

This is not a study of theology alone, but of context, how culture, history, and the human search for divine power have sculpted these churches into what they are today. The Catholic faith, from which this analysis is written, provides a vantage point of continuity, one that remembers the early Church, apostolic tradition, and the vision of unity under one Christ. Yet this same faith also recognizes the sincerity and zeal found within the Protestant spirit.

It is within this balance, between truth and charity, faith and inquiry, that this book begins.

Chapter One: The Roots of Unity

"That they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us." —John 17:21

Unity was not a later idea of the Church; it was Christ's own prayer before the Cross. His desire was that the body of those redeemed by His blood would remain one, not merely in name but in faith, spirit, and truth.

The early Christians understood this unity as a sacred trust. St. Cyprian of Carthage declared:

"He can no longer have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother."

To the early Fathers, division was not progress; it was a wound. The Church, they believed, was one body animated by one Spirit, as St. Paul wrote:

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism." —Ephesians 4:4–5

But through time, the body began to fracture. At first through heresies, then through political and cultural boundaries, and finally through full divisions in doctrine and authority. Each break carried away a piece of the whole, yet all still claimed to bear the same Christ.

St. Augustine, who lived and taught on African soil, foresaw the danger of such fragmentation:

"Schism is a greater evil than heresy; for heresy corrupts doctrine, but schism wounds charity."

The ancient Church, the one of the apostles, martyrs, and councils, saw itself as a communion rooted in truth, governed by love, and expressed in one confession of faith. It was not bound by region or race but by shared belief and continuity of teaching.

In our day, especially in Nigeria, that unity feels distant. The name of Christ is preached everywhere, yet seldom with one voice. Churches arise in great number, each with passionate devotion, powerful prayer, and a deep hunger for God, yet also with contrasting doctrines, practices, and spiritual emphases.

From the prophetic chants of the Cherubim and Seraphim, to the organized Pentecostalism of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the missionary roots of Foursquare Gospel, and the militant prayer spirituality of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, one encounters the same Scriptures interpreted through different eyes, and the same Spirit invoked with differing expectations.

This book does not seek to judge these movements, but to observe them, to ask what they reveal about faith in our time, and how their rise reflects both the strength and the fracture of modern Christianity.

The vision is not of one institution reclaiming the rest, but of a return to the mind of the ancient Church, where truth was not measured by numbers or emotion, but by communion, discipline, and shared understanding.

As St. Ignatius of Antioch reminded the early believers on his way to martyrdom:

"Where Jesus Christ is, there is the universal Church."

That remains the measure still, not the multitude of altars, but the unity of faith. To recover that unity, in spirit, in truth, and in witness, is the quiet hope behind this report.

Chapter Two: The Rise of Fragments

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." — 2 Timothy 4:3

The story of modern Christianity in Nigeria cannot be told without acknowledging its passion. It is a story of revival, prophecy, and fire, but also of fragmentation. What began with one message now manifests in many forms, each claiming divine origin, each promising the true expression of the faith once delivered to the saints.

1. The Cherubim and Seraphim Movement

Founder: Moses Orimolade Tunolase (1879–1933)

Founded: 1925, Lagos, Nigeria

Mission and Evolution:

The Cherubim and Seraphim movement was among the first indigenous churches in Nigeria, blending Christian liturgy with African spiritual expression. Its founder, Moses Orimolade Tunolase, was a man of deep spirituality, reputed for visions, healings, and prophetic gifts.

In its early days, the church emphasized holiness, prayer, visions, and strict moral conduct. Its members, clothed in white garments, saw themselves as a chosen company called to worship God in purity and power. The white garment symbolized holiness and separation from sin, a visual theology born from local culture and biblical imagery.

Over time, internal divisions gave rise to many branches, such as the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim and the Holy Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim. Each retained the white garment identity but differed in leadership and spiritual emphasis.

The movement's strength lay in its ability to connect the Christian message to the African soul. Yet its weakness emerged in its internal fractures, a mirror of the larger Christian divide. Still, it remains one of the most enduring indigenous Christian traditions in Nigeria, its influence echoing in many later Pentecostal expressions.

2. The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)

Founder: Rev. Josiah Akindayomi (1909–1980)

Founded: 1952, Lagos, Nigeria

Mission and Evolution:

Born from a vision said to have been divinely revealed, Josiah Akindayomi established the Redeemed Christian Church of God with a simple covenantal mission: to take as many people to heaven as possible.

Originally influenced by the Aladura prayer tradition, the RCCG emphasized holiness, spiritual discipline, and separation from worldly corruption. In 1981, after Akindayomi's passing, leadership passed to Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye, a mathematics lecturer at the University of Lagos, marking a new era for the church.

Under Adeboye's leadership, the RCCG became one of the most expansive and organized Pentecostal bodies in the world. With its annual Holy Ghost Congress, global parishes, and vast influence in education and politics, it has become a symbol of Nigerian Pentecostal success.

Yet the church's evolution also reveals a broader shift in modern Christianity, from small gatherings of prayer and holiness to massive institutions where faith meets global administration. Its message of salvation and prosperity resonates widely, yet some worry that the simplicity of early holiness movements has given way to systems of hierarchy and spectacle.

3. The Foursquare Gospel Church

Founder: Aimee Semple McPherson (1890–1944)

Founded: 1923, Los Angeles, U.S.A.

Introduced to Nigeria: 1955, by Rev. Harold Curtis and Boyejo Family

Mission and Evolution:

The Foursquare Church was not born in Nigeria but was planted through missionary efforts from America. Founded by Aimee Semple McPherson, an evangelist known for her dramatic preaching and radio ministry, the movement proclaimed a fourfold gospel: Jesus as Saviour, Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, Healer, and Coming King.

In Nigeria, the first Foursquare Gospel Church began in the mid-1950s through the work of Rev. Odunaike and others who had contact with American missionaries. It was formally organized under the leadership of Rev. Harold Curtis and later Rev. Boyejo.

Unlike purely indigenous movements, Foursquare sought to preserve doctrinal order while adapting to local culture. Its emphasis on sound biblical teaching, Holy Spirit empowerment, and evangelism made it a training ground for many future Pentecostal leaders in Nigeria.

As years passed, however, even within Foursquare, internal tensions and splinter groups emerged, a familiar rhythm in the story of Nigerian Christianity. Still, the church remains respected for its balance of theology and Pentecostal experience.

4. Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM)

Founder: Dr. Daniel Kolawole Olukoya (b. 1957)

Founded: 1989, Lagos, Nigeria

Mission and Evolution:

The late 1980s saw a new surge of spiritual consciousness in Nigeria, a time when deliverance, spiritual warfare, and prayer mountains began to define religious life. In that context, Dr. D.K. Olukoya, a molecular biologist turned preacher, founded the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries.

His message centered on aggressive prayer, deliverance from demonic oppression, and the reality of spiritual warfare. With slogans like "Prayer is the key to power," MFM attracted thousands seeking freedom from ancestral curses, witchcraft, and spiritual attacks, issues deeply resonant within African cosmology.

The church's style, marked by militant prayers, midnight vigils, and "die by fire" chants, became both its strength and its controversy. To many, it was the embodiment of faith that confronts evil without compromise. To others, it reflected a Christianity more focused on conflict than communion.

Nevertheless, MFM has grown into one of the largest prayer movements in Africa, with international branches and a global deliverance school. It represents the latest expression of an evolving Nigerian Christianity: fervent, confrontational, and ever-expanding.

Conclusion

Each of these movements, Cherubim and Seraphim, RCCG, Foursquare, and MFM, tells a different story of the Christian search for God within Nigeria's soil. Their founders were men and women of deep conviction, responding to the spiritual hunger of their time.

Yet together they reflect a paradox: one Christ, many voices; one Gospel, many interpretations. Their growth reveals a vibrant faith, but their divisions remind us of the prayer still unanswered: "that they may all be one."

Chapter Three: The Distance Between Altars: A Doctrinal Comparison

"Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." — Jeremiah 6:16

Every age of Christianity claims to follow the truth, yet not every age holds the same shape of faith. The ancient Church, guided by Scripture, apostolic succession, and the witness of the Fathers, held a faith unified in its essentials: one baptism, one Eucharist, one episcopal authority, one interpretation guarded by the whole.

In modern Nigeria, however, faith has grown in another pattern, spirited and fervent, but often unmoored from the discipline that once preserved unity. This chapter compares the pillars of ancient Christianity with the doctrines and practices now prominent in the major Protestant movements, to show not condemnation, but how far the river has run from its source.

1. Authority and Interpretation

The ancient Church understood authority as apostolic, a faith handed down through the bishops who succeeded the apostles. St. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote in the second century:

"It is within the power of all, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world." — Against Heresies, Book III

Scripture was not isolated; it was interpreted through the Church's living tradition. No believer stood alone with the Bible; every text was read in light of the faith confessed by the entire body.

In contrast, many modern Nigerian churches center authority on the individual revelation of the founder, the "man of God" whose visions, prophecies, or anointing often carry more weight than creedal continuity. The Cherubim and Seraphim rely heavily on visionary authority. The Redeemed Christian Church of God acknowledges divine covenants given to its founder. Mountain of Fire elevates prophetic interpretation and spiritual insight.

The shift is profound: from apostolic succession to personal revelation. Where the early Church said, "What have you received from the apostles?", today's question has become, "What did God tell the founder?"

The danger is not in revelation itself, but in isolation, for truth uncontested by the ancient community risks becoming private conviction mistaken for divine command.

2. The Nature of the Church

For the Fathers, the Church was not an organization but a mystical body, one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. St. Cyprian wrote:

"The Church is one, which is spread abroad far and wide into a multitude by an increase of fruitfulness; even as there are many rays of the sun, but one light."

Unity was therefore a mark of divine origin. Division was evidence of human weakness.

By contrast, many Protestant movements in Nigeria see the Church as an assembly of believers, often independent, self-governing, and denominational distinct. This model allows spiritual energy and local adaptation, but it fractures the visible unity that once defined the Christian identity. Thus, Nigeria now holds tens of thousands of registered churches, each sincerely calling on Christ's name, yet often unaware that their multiplicity itself is foreign to ancient understanding.

The early Christians knew no denominational titles, only the Church gathered around the bishop, the altar, and the Eucharist. To them, a "church" without communion was an orphaned body.

3. The Sacraments and Worship

In the ancient faith, the sacraments were the visible signs of invisible grace, Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Confession, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the Sick, rooted in Scripture and universally practiced. The Eucharist was central: St. Ignatius of Antioch called it "the medicine of immortality."

Modern Nigerian Protestantism, however, often reduces the sacraments to symbols or ordinances. Many Pentecostal groups recognize only baptism and communion, and even these are often treated as reminders, not mysteries. Some movements, such as MFM, emphasize prayer and deliverance services over sacramental life.

Worship has also evolved: ancient liturgies built around Scripture, creed, and Eucharist have been replaced with extended praise sessions, prophetic declarations, and deliverance chants. While these express genuine zeal, they risk replacing the ancient rhythm of worship, Word, Sacrament, Communion, with emotional intensity and spectacle.

In the ancient liturgy, the heart of worship was not man's fervor, but God's mystery.

4. Salvation and Grace

The early Church taught that salvation was a lifelong journey of cooperation with grace, faith expressed through works of love, obedience, and participation in the sacraments. As St. James wrote:

"Faith without works is dead." — James 2:26

Today, salvation is often presented as a single confession, a verbal formula: "Say this prayer and you are saved." While sincere, this reduces the mystery of salvation to a transaction. The Redeemed and Foursquare churches, influenced by evangelical theology, emphasize "personal salvation experience," often detached from sacramental grace. Others equate deliverance from spiritual attacks with salvation itself, confusing liberation with conversion.

The Fathers never saw salvation as instant but as growth. St. Augustine described it as "a process of being healed by the divine physician." To depart from that view is to lose sight of the pilgrim nature of faith.

5. Prophecy and Revelation

In the early Church, prophecy was a gift within order, always subject to testing by the community and bishops. St. Paul warned, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge." — 1 Corinthians 14:29

Modern Nigeria, however, has witnessed an explosion of individual prophecy, dreams, visions, and declarations that often guide entire congregations or national moods. The Cherubim and Seraphim began with prophetic dreams; MFM thrives on revelatory warfare prayers; many Pentecostal leaders proclaim "yearly words" as divine decrees.

While such experiences can inspire faith, they also invite confusion when detached from discernment. The Fathers would have asked not "Did you see?" but "Does it align with the deposit of faith?"

The ancient Church feared not the absence of revelation, but the excess of it without testing.

6. Spiritual Warfare and Deliverance

No Christian age has denied the existence of evil or the need for deliverance. Yet the ancient Church waged spiritual war through fasting, prayer, repentance, and sacrament, not chants of violence. The Desert Fathers saw demons as conquered through humility, not verbal aggression. Abba Anthony the Great once said:

"A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him, saying, 'You are mad, you are not like us.'"

In contrast, modern deliverance ministries in Nigeria have developed militant spiritual systems: warfare prayers, anointing sessions, and "holy ghost fire" battles. This reflects deep African spiritual consciousness, the sense of invisible conflict, yet it also departs from the early Church's quiet confidence in Christ's finished victory.

The ancient exorcists prayed, "Depart, unclean spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ." Today, one hears "Die by fire!" shouted for hours, a theology of combat more than communion. It is zeal without the temper of ancient order.

7. The Gospel and Its Purpose

At its core, the early Church saw the Gospel as the revelation of God's love and the transformation of the human soul. It was not about worldly success, but sanctity, not about gaining power, but sharing the Cross. Tertullian wrote:

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

In much of Nigerian Christianity today, however, the Gospel has become intertwined with prosperity, power, and personal breakthrough. To many, blessing is proof of divine favor. The Redeemed Church's vast economic structures, Foursquare's organizational strength, and MFM's emphasis on victory all express a Christianity shaped by achievement as much as by devotion.

The danger is subtle: when faith becomes a means to success, the Cross becomes ornamental. The ancient Church would remind us that the measure of grace is not prosperity but perseverance.

Conclusion

The contrast between the ancient and the modern is not simply theological, it is civilizational. From apostolic tradition to charismatic individuality, from mystery to experience, from communion to competition, the distance is wide. Yet beneath all this diversity lies a longing for the same Christ, the same Spirit, the same salvation.

The question that remains is not who is right, but what have we lost in our search for new revelation. For truth, once fragmented, is harder to gather again, but the ancient Church still calls across the centuries:

"Return not to us, but to the mind we once shared."

Chapter Four: The Lament for Lost Communion: Returning to the Ancient Anchor

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" — Psalm 133:1

In the dawn of the Church, when the Spirit descended like fire upon the apostles in Jerusalem's upper room, a single heartbeat pulsed through the Body of Christ. From the dusty roads of Galilee to the blood-stained arenas of Rome, believers asked one question: "What did you learn from your bishop?" The apostles' successors, those shepherds ordained to guard the flock, carried the faith unbroken, a sacred trust woven through councils, creeds, and communion.

Oh, how the ancient Church cherished this unity, for as Christ prayed before His passion, "That they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You" (John 17:21), so the faithful clung to one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Ephesians 4:5). But now, in Nigeria's vibrant yet fractured Christian landscape, a new cry echoes: "What did God tell your founder?" This shift, from communal tradition to solitary revelation, is the wound we mourn. This final chapter is no trumpet of triumph but a thunderous lament, a broad and simple plea, worrying for the ancient paths lost to the wilderness of self-interpretation.

The ancient Church was a tapestry of many threads—Jews, Gentiles, Greeks, barbarians—yet woven into one fabric by the Spirit. St. Clement of Rome, writing in the first century, urged: "Let us cleave to those to whom grace has been given by God, clothing ourselves with concord and humility." The faithful did not seek private visions but turned to their bishops, who stood in the line of Peter and Paul, asking, "What have we learned from those who walked with the apostles?"

St. Irenaeus of Lyons declared: "It is within the power of all, in every Church, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world" (Against Heresies, Book III). Scripture was not a solitary map but a lamp lit by the community, as St. Peter warned: "No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20). The question "What did you learn from your bishop?" bound believers to a shared truth, tested by councils like Nicaea, where bishops gathered to affirm one creed: "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty."

Contrast this with Nigeria's teeming altars, where the question has become, "What did God tell your founder?" The Cherubim and Seraphim, born from Moses Orimolade's visions, chant prophetic dreams. The Redeemed Christian Church of God follows Josiah Akindayomi's divine covenant, expanded by Pastor Adeboye's global mission. The Foursquare Gospel, though rooted in missionary order, adapts to local leaders' revelations. Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries thrives on Dr. Olukoya's warfare prayers, each "die by fire" a cry of individual insight.

These founders, men and women of fervent faith, have kindled Nigeria's spiritual fire, yet their visions, unchecked by the ancient community, scatter the flock. St. Paul's plea rings unheeded: "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Oh, how we mourn this shift! The ancient Church feared self-interpretation as a thief in the night, stealing the unity Christ died to forge. St. Cyprian of Carthage wept: "He can no longer have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother." To the ancients, division was a wound, schism a greater evil than heresy, for as St. Augustine, that African sage, warned: "Heresy corrupts doctrine, but schism wounds charity."

Bishops, not founders, were the stewards of truth, their voices harmonized by the Spirit's guidance. When Arius preached a lesser Christ, the bishops at Nicaea answered not with new revelations but with the faith once delivered. When schisms threatened, councils like Chalcedon reaffirmed one Church, one altar, one Eucharist—"the medicine of immortality," as St. Ignatius of Antioch called it.

But in Nigeria's churches, where thousands of denominations bloom like wildflowers, each founder's vision becomes a new altar, each revelation a new doctrine. We ask not "What did your bishop teach?" but "What did your founder see?", and the river of faith splinters into streams.

This lament grows louder in Nigeria's context, where spiritual hunger runs deep, rooted in Yoruba oracles, Igbo cosmologies, and Hausa mysticism. The ancient Church, too, embraced cultures—Greek philosophy, Roman order—but always within the bounds of communion. Nigeria's churches, from Cherubim's white-robed purity to MFM's militant prayers, reflect this cultural fire, yet their self-interpretation fractures the Body.

The prosperity of RCCG, the warfare of MFM, the order of Foursquare, the visions of Cherubim—these are not errors but expressions, yet they drift from the ancient anchor. "Thus says the Lord: 'Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls'" (Jeremiah 6:16). The ancient paths, guarded by bishops, were paths of rest, not rivalry; of communion, not competition.

Hear the thunder of loss! The early Church was no perfect Eden, yet its unity was its witness. "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35), Christ declared, but Nigeria's altars, though fervent, often stand apart, their love divided by doctrine, their witness dimmed by discord.

St. Basil the Great mourned: "The one hope of our calling is extinguished, the bond of love is broken." In the ancient Church, bishops gathered the faithful around one table, one creed, one hope. Today, Nigeria's founders build new tables, each claiming divine mandate, yet the question "What did God tell your founder?" breeds not unity but multiplicity. St. John Chrysostom warned: "Nothing so provokes God's anger as the division of the Church." Oh, how we worry for the old ages, when the faithful asked, "What did you learn from your bishop?" and found in the answer a shared song of salvation.

Yet, even in lament, hope glimmers. The ancient Church was not a relic but a living body, and its voice still calls across the centuries. Nigeria, with its millions lifting hands in worship, can lead the return. Imagine the thunderous restoration: Cherubim's prophets joining Foursquare's teachers, RCCG's pastors kneeling with MFM's prayer warriors, all asking, "What did we learn from the apostles' successors?"

The ancient Church offers no rigid institution but a spirit of communion, as St. Paul urged: "Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Let us erase the pride of self-interpretation, that thief who whispers, "Your founder's vision is enough." Let us mourn, but let us also act, seeking the ancient paths where bishops, not founders, guide the flock to one fold.

This is the epic call: to weep for the fractured Body, to worry for the lost communion, but to pursue the truth that unites. "The Church is one," St. Cyprian proclaimed, "though she be spread abroad, and multiplies with the increase of her progeny." Nigeria's churches, vibrant as they are, need not remain fragments. Let the question return: "What did you learn from your bishop?" Let the answer resound: "The faith of the apostles, the love of the martyrs, the unity of Christ's Body."

As the Psalmist sings, "The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad" (Psalm 126:3). Let Nigeria's gladness be its reunion, its altars joined in one thunderous hymn: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8). Unity lost, truth pursued—may it lead us back to the ancient anchor, where the Church stands one, unbroken, eternal.