



# Traditions and innovations in the liturgical music of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church (Ayo ni o) Lagos state

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## Abstract

The liturgy of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church (Ayo ni o) Lagos State, Nigeria, is characterised by various worship activities such as prayer, reading of the bible, ringing of the bell and singing, to mention few, and scholars have noted music to constitute a greater part of it. While some aspects of the church's worship rites are considered rigid and fixed, modernisation and technology continue to redefine some of its religious practices, especially liturgical music. Much of the studies on the church focused on issues surrounding traditions, the liturgy, and musical practices. However, little is known about the recent changes and continuities that have attended the church's liturgy. This study seeks to deconstruct the existing tradition in the liturgical music of the C&S movement against the backdrop of newly introduced innovations. It further investigates agents of innovation and the attendant reactions of the members to the change. The theory that informs this study is transformation leadership. The researcher used incidental sampling to interview key church members in Lagos districts. In addition, participant observation was also employed. Data were subjected to content analysis. The study argues that despite newly introduced innovations, some of the old traditions in the liturgical music of the church are still practised and maintained.

## Introduction

Christian missionary activities in Nigeria and their various worship practices and expressions characterised by theological bias date to the 1840s. Doctrinal policies were introduced, considered foreign to African Christians, such as singing hymns without body movements and employing the Organ as the only musical instrument during worship. In line with the foregoing, Vidal (1986) explained that the liturgy of the mission churches comprised of Introit, Versicles and Responses, chanting of Psalms and Canticles, recitation of the Collects, prayers and hymns. While retaining common features among themselves in the individual churches adopted differing approaches to worship and Christian practice. In this way, each church redefined, designed and operated its theology and practices of what Christian worship entails. There are substantial studies (Ojo, 1998; Ayegboyin & Ukah, 2002; Ositelu, 2007) on the emergence, theology and practices of African indigenous churches (AICs) including Christ Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim Church, The Church of the Lord (Aladura) and the Celestial Church of Christ. While the churches remain strong in their Christian beliefs, their practice of Christianity largely reflected their cultural practices. The



cultural practices are found in employing a musical liturgy rooted in traditional African practices while retaining significant characteristics of imported European liturgy. Faseun (2008) explained how music was employed in Christian liturgy. He pointed out that the practice at the inception of Christianity was that Christians were made to sing Christian songs. Later, with liberalisation, English hymns and chants were introduced. The purely English hymns and chants gave way to their vernacular translations to bring the religion closer to the people.

The Cherubim and Seraphim Church is one of Nigeria's most prominent indigenous churches. It started as a prayer group in Lagos in 1925 under the leadership of Prophet Moses Orimolade Tunolase and by the 1960s, it metamorphosed into the organisation known today. During its formative stage it became riddled with jealousies, disputes and breakaways, characterised by splinter groups going their different ways. The urge to remain far away from controversies, disputes and trivialities that hindered progress led to the formation of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church (Ayo nio) in November 1927, when a group comprised of the late N. E. Coker, S.A. Adekoya, S.O. Kalejaiye, E.O. Ajayi, D.A. Aina, C.A. Shofarasin and J.T. Agboola started worshipping at a residence belonging to one Mrs. Adebisi in Ibadan Street, Kaduna.

Like other African indigenous churches, the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church (CSMC) has features that differentiate it from the mission churches. A common feature is the African mode of worship, which employs singing, clapping, dancing and stamping of feet. Most of the songs performed are usually in the Yoruba language. At the church's inception, spontaneous compositions accompanied by 'ringing' bells and drumming were employed. The Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church (CSMC) introduced Western musical instruments and incorporated various musical activities into her liturgy to modernise it. In this regard, the main aim of this study is to examine traditions and innovations in the liturgical music of the church guided by the following research questions. What are the standing traditions in C&S Movement Church? What is the newly introduced innovation(s) and their reasons for the innovations? Who are agents of innovation and how did members respond to the newly introduced innovation(s)?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is informed by the transformation leadership theory, first proposed by Burns in 1978. The theory was used in his research on political leaders. He employed the theory to distinguish leaders with strong motivational relationships with their followers and subordinates. Korejan and Shahbazi (2016) explained that transformational leaders seek to create ideas and perspectives for new paths of growth and prosperity for organisations. This is done through developing commitment, passion and loyalty among mobilised managers and staff in organisations by providing necessary capabilities for new directions and reaching higher and ideal performance peaks. In the context of the liturgical music of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church (CSMC), the focus of this study, the level of innovations and embraced changes in both spiritual and music leadership of the CSMC, differs from one branch to the other. The choir masters are key drivers in the church's growth strategies. Upon recognising their environmental (church members) musical needs, they promptly facilitated appropriate recodification of the church's liturgical music, significantly improving its worship service and growth.

### **Methodology**

Through participant observation in five selected branches of CSMC in Lagos State (Oko Oba, Sabo, Itire, Ewutuntun and Ibereko branches), several worship services were observed. I interviewed four choir masters, one elder and three youths. I selected these branches because of accessibility and being good representation of the church in terms of music. I observed the various innovations introduced



into the liturgical music of the church and also the old musical traditions that were retained. Library and other archival materials supplied the secondary data for the study.

### **Traditional Features in the Liturgy of the Church**

The Cherubim and Seraphim order of worship was developed by its founder, Moses Orimolade, at the church's inception through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Despite many secessions of Cherubim and Seraphim unification, they all employ the same worship pattern except at very peculiar or special programs. C&S Movement Church runs the same activities daily, weekly, monthly, and annually. For example, the 'protection' service is usually held on Wednesdays in all the churches and the vigil service comes up every Saturday afternoon. There is also a general daily observance of prayer at noon in all branches of CSMC, even when other services are ongoing. Worship elements common to these services are prayer, scripture reading, singing with instrumental accompaniment, offering collection, preaching and announcement. The music employed during Sunday Service does not permit hand clapping accompaniment to songs, the prevalent use of Yoruba language communication during worship, the pattern of worship is majorly an inherited tradition from its founder and the church embraced various aspects of traditional culture peculiar to the local community. For example, singing of hymns, bible reading, and chanting are worship rituals commonly found in mission churches. Removing shoes, burning incense, wearing white garments and using candles, to mention a few, are the traditions and cultures adopted in the liturgy. Also, women undergoing monthly circles are not allowed to participate in the liturgy but are permitted around the church premises.

### **Liturgical Music of Cherubim & Seraphim Movement Church (CSMC) and Traditions**

Traditions in the liturgical music of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Movement in this study are examined through the lens of the mission's order of worship or liturgy. Available CSMC Order of Worship shows that music permeates its liturgy. Every Sunday service in CSMC is marked with a thanksgiving session. The processional hymn announces the commencement of the service for the day. Brennan (2018) explained how the worship leader leads the procession from the back auditorium while congregational members join. The Introit hymn inviting the Trinity to the day's service is performed with the congregation kneeling. This is followed by an opening hymn to declare the service open. Every Sunday, Thanksgiving service in all C&S churches usually features singing a Thanksgiving hymn to praise and glorify God. After the Bible reading, the choir leads the congregation to chant 'Gloria'. Another hymn is sung before the sermon, to prepare the minds of worshippers for exhortation. Immediately after the sermon, a hymn to usher the preacher back to his seat is sung, followed by prayers. Other activities of the liturgy are offertories, the vesper and lastly the recessional hymn.

The mid-week services follow the same pattern as described above but without processional and recessional hymns. In all its branches, the church employs its denominational hymn book as the main liturgical source of music. The hymn book includes hymns for adoration, praise, Christian life, birth and death of Jesus Christ, forgiveness, and mercy to mention a few. The hymn book is a compilation of mission church hymns, composed hymns by spiritual leaders and prominent composers in Cherubim and Seraphim Church.

Hymnal stanzas dedicated to the Trinity are rendered with solemn tunes usually without drumming. Harvest Thanksgiving services are celebrated annually in various branches and are usually held after all the 'Bands' anniversaries for the year. Danceable hymns and composed songs by members are performed during harvest Thanksgiving services. Band members are led to the altar for thanksgiving and prayers with customised banners and accompanied by hymns not meant for dancing during



anniversaries. After prayers led by the spiritual leader, the choir renders choruses or composed songs selected for the anniversary.

### **Innovations in the Liturgical Music of Cherubim & Seraphim Movement Church (CSMC), Lagos**

The liturgy of African Indigenous churches seems very rigid, complex and not easily adaptable to changes. However, new modes of worshipping God, characterised by observable differences from church to church and denomination to denomination, have recently become a feature of the African Indigenous Churches. Arguably, churches are not immune to new innovations, given the enhanced patterns or modes of worship evolving globally. As pointed out earlier, CSMC has 'inherited' liturgical traditions reflected in its worship patterns. The church in diverse areas embraced new ideas in its liturgy, music, more women actively involved than previously allowed, and the creation of youth church, to mention a few. Emielu (2018) opined that changes or innovations in a musical tradition represent a form of continuity as people deviate from the norm to create additional space for music-making and appreciation. In the same vein, Faseun (2008) pointed out that music in churches in Nigeria yielded to the modern trend, reflecting changes in the musical taste of worshipers. In tandem with both authors' assertions, various innovations that have crept into the liturgical music of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church are discussed below.

#### **1. Hymn**

Hymn singing involves congregational participation and is usually led by the Music Ministry. Since inception and going by established tradition, all stanzas of the hymns in the CSMC are sung during service. Still, singing two stanzas from a specific hymn number is recently followed or alternated by the choir switching to choruses or one of the self-composed songs as observed during the Sermon and Recessional session. Oftentimes the first and last stanzas of the hymns are sung, unlike the former tradition when the choir and congregation sing the entire stanzas. Mr. Sunday Solomon said "switching to *Alujo* with heavy instrumental accompaniment is now a new norm in my church". The essence of this, according to him, is to make the liturgy livelier and shorten the length of the hymn.

#### **2. Chants**

This is another type of music chanted in the CSMC liturgy. It is a style of singing 'prose translation' of the Psalm, Canticles, and other similar texts. There are three major types of chants employed in the liturgy.

"THE GLORIA"

Apostle Creed

Te-deum Laudamus

i) The 'Gloria' is chanted after the Bible reading at every service, followed by the Apostles Creed. Te-deum Laudamus is always chanted on New Year's Day and at the end of forty days of fasting. The new trend in 'Gloria' chanting is the fusing of hymn tunes for Gloria, although not all church branches embraced this innovation.

#### **3. Evolution of praise and worship session**

From inception, the church's liturgical music was strictly based on the compiled four categories of hymns in the C&S hymnals. Loko (2016) and Adejube (2020) described praise and worship music as songs usually performed immediately after the opening prayer or at the beginning of every liturgy in all Pentecostal churches. 'Choruses' are the significant type of songs employed in Praise and Worship sessions. They are spontaneous short songs performed often in different languages expressing Praise, thanksgiving, and other Christian doctrinal teachings. They are used to complement hymns in worship, and their functions are reflected in their texts. Praise and Worship session in the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church liturgy is a newly introduced musical innovation. It is performed



after the opening prayer, just before the prayer of thanksgiving. Including Praise and Worship choruses and other self-composed songs is one of the innovations that crept into the church. Kemi Osho said that in all CSMC youth churches, processional or recessional hymns are not observed. Therefore, members of the CSMC youth churches are not led in or out via processional or recessional hymns from the church before or after services. Church service starts with Praise and Worship after the call to worship.

#### **4. *Western musical instruments and female instrumentalists***

Musical instruments play vital roles in the liturgy of the church. They function as accompaniment to singing and other musical performances. The CSMC started with a few traditional musical instruments, such as *Agogo* (bell), *Sekere* (rattle), *Apepe* (clappers), and *Akuba* (drum), among others. Recently, the prevalent use of Western musical instruments dominated the instrumentation; Bass and Rhythm Guitar, Saxophone, Trumpet, Clarinet, Flute, and keyboard, among others, were seen being played in the various church branches visited. The types of musical instruments used vary from branch to branch. The determining factors for the variations are the availability of funds and instrumentalists. Most branches provided avenues for training their youths on the available musical instruments. A prominent innovation is that more women were found to play musical instruments in the church actively. Women play both traditional and Western musical instruments of their choice without restrictions. The church now has versatile women drummers, trumpeters, and saxophonists. However, despite major roles attributed to women in the liturgy, as pointed out in this study, they are not allowed into the church when on monthly circles.

#### **5. *Employment of popular music styles***

Popular music styles feature prominently among the Pentecostal churches. These were genres of music that were originally forbidden in churches, especially mission churches. The CSMC Churches are conversant with *Woro* styles in singing of hymns, but other popular music styles have also crept into the church. Forchu (2009) highlighted a diverse array of popular music styles such as *juju*, high life, *fuji*, *akukon'egwu*, *apala*, reggae, funk, gospel, makosa, hip-hop, afrobeat, country, disco, *waka*, Congo, jazz, disco, rhythm and blues.

All the popular music styles are now adapted and performed in the church's liturgy, and the singing of hymns employs *juju*, highlife, reggae, and funk styles. Slangs that characterised each genre of music also feature prominently. For example, code-switching, as found in hip-hop music and other slang, is now commonly used in the liturgical music of the church.

#### **6. *Invitations of gospel guest ministers***

Invited gospel or guest ministers were not permitted in the initial church activities and other worship patterns of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church but have now become a common feature in the church. Gospel guest ministers are invited during revivals, special programs, prophetic services, anniversaries, choir festivals and church annual harvests. During church service, invited gospel guest ministers' performances are allotted time. Most often, they 'minister in songs' during Praise and Worship, thanksgiving sessions and before sermons to usher the preacher to the altar. All the music leaders interviewed explained that gospel guest ministers are not necessarily CSMC. However, some are invited from other secession of the C&S or other branches.

#### **7. *The use of prompter/projector***

Since its inception, Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church service has been characterised by the position and posture of a Song leader or 'Prompter', who is often a woman. 'Song leader or Prompter' is also called 'Song Herald'. According to Brennan (2018), two or three women in the choir act as Song Herald by announcing each hymn line before the congregation sings it. She further explains that



'reading lines' out facilitates full congregational participation in singing among members who cannot read or without hymnals. Even in branches with literate members, they still follow the dictates of each line of every stanza of hymns during congregational singing. Recently, prompters/song heralds have been less predominant in the church's tradition. Television screen projectors feature prominently in all the church halls, projecting all activities of the liturgy, music, and lyrics of all the hymns.

### **8. Employment of other Nigerian languages**

The mode of communication in CSMC is mainly the Yoruba language. All liturgical music was performed in the Yoruba language. Still, with the other musical styles, the church now enjoys hymns and other songs in languages such as Igbo, Efik, Hausa, Egun, Edo and English.

### **Why innovations?**

Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church allowed innovations in the liturgical music of the church despite their unique and rich mode of worship. Implicitly from interviews carried out in the field, there are quite underlining factors leading to the innovations in the CSMC discussed in the study under three subtitles.

#### **1. Retainment of church members**

The rapidly increasing number of Pentecostal Churches in Lagos caused several people to leave the CSMC. Youth members, mostly children of church leaders, started migrating to identifiable new churches. As a quick response to stop the mass movement of youths, the church leadership established vibrant and lively youth fellowship chapels armed with the freedom to introduce new patterns of worship but not shift away from the church pattern of worship. In an interview, a chorister in the Badagry branch of the church expressed gratitude to the church's leadership for providing a platform to worship God innovatively while retaining specific traditions peculiar to the church.

#### **2. Creating a new approach to church growth**

Despite the rapid growth experienced by the church, there are activities lined up to reach the unreached through robust worship patterns. Apostle Segun Faseyitan, a choirmaster in the CSMC Itire branch, explained, "One method we employ to evangelise is by embracing popular music genres enjoyed by people within and outside the church". In all the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, the worship pattern embraced the use of *juju*, *fuji*, *highlife*, *hip hop*, *reggae*, and many other popular music styles.

#### **3. Competitive advantage**

One of the factors that drew many young church members to Pentecostal Churches was the competitive advantage in the area of worship patterns, especially the genres of music employed during services. This projected Pentecostal Churches to be positioned ahead of other churches. In the realisation of this, the C&S Church Movement made concerted efforts at both spiritual and social levels by embracing various music genres that are suitable and acceptable for worship, such as *fuji*, *juju*, *reggae* and *hip-hop*. This made the Church popular within and outside Nigeria and attracted a host of researchers visiting the church to study the church's liturgical music. Vicki Brennan, an anthropologist's research started in 2001, culminating in a published book, "Singing Yoruba Christianity: Music, Media, and Morality" (2018).

### **Agents of Innovation**

In evaluating new changes in the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church liturgy, three identifiable parameters, Spiritual and Music Ministry Leaders, Church Choir, and Youth through environmental impact, promoted and enabled innovation grows in the liturgical music of the church.



### **1. *Spiritual and music ministry leaders***

The choristers in the five churches visited are directly under the leadership of Choir Masters/Mistresses and the Spiritual head. Spiritual leaders approved or sanctioned all activities in the music ministry of C&S. Thus, Choir masters provide regular reports of all music ministry activities to the shepherd in charge. As explained in the theoretical framework, transformational leadership encourages innovation. The spiritual leaders gave Choir masters a free hand and opportunities to source suitable songs for liturgy. Music leadership via choir masters encourages innovation and allows creativity to determine the arrangement of songs in the liturgy and how they are performed. For example, the choir can use reggae style for hymns in one service and render the same hymn in highlife style in another service considering the service mode.

### **2. *The church choir***

The choir plays a vital role in the church's music ministry and often comes up with different innovations to encourage positive change in the department. In all the churches, the choir sings virtually at all church programmes. Their renditions go a long way in the spiritual and social lives of the congregation. Gifted songwriters are given opportunities and creative avenues to compose their songs. Still, songwriters laid no claim of ownership to any song as most of the songs were rearranged at choir rehearsals. Though not all the composed songs are accepted, sometimes a part of one song is added to another different song, a system called *Cut and Paste*. The choir explores widely accepted short choruses during praise, worship, and thanksgiving songs from other churches that are rearranged and suitable for the C&S liturgy. The music ministry has recorded and released music on CDs, YouTube and other online streaming platforms propagating the gospel of Christ and lifting the glory of C&S Movement Church. Examples are the Surulere District Headquarters at Sanya and Oko-Oba King's Land District Headquarters at Agege, among other districts.

### **3. *Youth Through Environmental Impact***

The emergence of Pentecostal churches and interdenominational fellowship in all Nigerian institutions evolved with various contemporary gospel songs, transforming church's liturgy from solemn to lively. Youths from CSMC, through their interaction with other youths in school fellowships, experienced patterns of worship quite different from that of CSMC. Most Senior Apostle Pastor Adenibi Micheal, a choirmaster in Oko Oba branch, observed that many youths in the church were lured away from the church either through invitations as guest instrumentalists or worshippers by friends and being influenced by various contemporary gospel songs. The ripple effect contributed to innovation in the liturgical music of CSMC. Youths unable to leave CSMC worked towards improving liturgical music through the youth fellowship and choir ministry.

### **Reactions to the Innovations**

Given the well-established tradition, the innovations experienced mixed reactions from young and old church members. Most Senior Apostle Idowu Gbenga, an elder in the Ibereko branch, said, "I am uncomfortable with how the hymns were rearranged for liturgy. He noted the need to return to the old tradition of singing hymns during service. Most Senior Apostle Pastor Adenibi Micheal also said emphatically in an interview, "I enjoy the old tradition of church members singing hymns and self-composed songs in all the church services. Three of the church elders interviewed were not opposed to the blend of the church's old and new liturgical music. Lady Apostle Kemi Osho, a choir mistress in the Ewutuntun branch, asserted, and I quote, "Personally, I don't see anything wrong in blending both the new and old musical practices to glorify God.

In an interview, Adeyemi Olajide, a choir member and a youth, said, "I prefer the old tradition of the church liturgical music because it uplifts my spirit compared to the innovations that have been



brought into the church liturgy". He further said that apart from the Praise and Worship Session, other innovative aspects brought into the liturgical music of the church were unacceptable because of their secular nature. Youths and teenagers interviewed embraced the new pattern of liturgical music that accommodates popular music styles. Mr Micheal Solomon and Mr Daniel Daramola are members of the Youth Fellowship and choristers in the Ibereko branch; they both emphasised that the creation of the youth fellowship provided opportunities to develop new ideas that aided the fellowship's growth spiritually and numerically.

### Conclusion

Traditions and innovations in the liturgical music of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church (Ayo ni o) Lagos State, Nigeria, is the focus of this paper. Various identified worship rites such as prayer, reading of the bible, ringing of the bell, hymnal prompter, liturgical music and other musical performances, clapping of hands and stamping of feet, among other sundry religious activities where modernisation and technology continue to redefine. Using incidental sampling and guided by the theory of transformation leadership, the study points out the importance of Spiritual and music leaders and their symbiotic roles in evolving liturgical music that best enables the congregation from different backgrounds and socio-economic classes for the church while ensuring non-decline in the spiritual growth and numerical strength of church members. Both old and new musical practices of the CSMC continue to function appropriately in manners accepted and recognised among leaders and congregations. The prompter still reads out texts of hymns in tandem with television-screen-projected hymn lyrics as the congregation sings. Given the innovation, the youth ministry has remained free and vibrant in the church's spiritual and existing liturgical music.

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**Appendix: Oral Interviews**

**Names**

Most Senior Apostle Adenibi, Micheal  
Most Senior Apostle Idowu, Gbenga  
Senior Apostle Biodun, Shomade  
Lady Apostle Kemi Osho  
Apostle Segun Faseyitan  
Brother Adeyemi Olajide  
Brother Daniel Daramola  
Brother Sunday Solomon

**Venue**

C&S King's Land, Oko Oba, Lagos  
C&S Ibereko, Badagry, Lagos  
C&S Sabo, Yaba, Lagos  
C&S Ewutuntun, Lagos  
C&S Itire, Lagos  
C&S Ibereko, Badagry, Lagos  
C&S Ibereko, Badagry, Lagos  
C&S Ibereko, Badagry, Lagos

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