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DIVISION AMONG CHRISTIANS IN 1 CORR: 10-16: IMPLICATION FOR THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study, titled "Implications of the Division in 1 Corinthians 1:10-16 for the Contemporary Church," examines the enduring relevance of Paul's exhortation for unity in addressing modern ecclesiastical divisions. The study aims to investigate the underlying causes of division within the contemporary Church, which remains fragmented along doctrinal, cultural, and socio-political lines, undermining its witness and effectiveness. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines exegetical analysis of 1 Corinthians 1:10-16, theological examination of Paul's teachings, and qualitative research through case studies, oral interviews, and interviews with church leaders. The study provides insights into the historical and theological context of Paul's message, analyzes the root causes and effects of church divisions, and proposes practical steps for fostering unity based on biblical principles. The findings underscore the continued significance of Paul's call for unity and offer actionable solutions for mitigating divisions within today's Church.

Keywords: *Division, Unity, Ecclesial, Exegesis*

INTRODUCTION

The First Epistle to the Corinthians, authored by the Apostle Paul, addresses various issues plaguing the early Christian community in Corinth, a bustling, diverse city in ancient Greece. One of the primary concerns in this letter is the division within Τὸ Σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (To Sōma tou Christou) that is the body of Christ, as highlighted in I Corinthians 1:10-16. Paul's exhortation for unity and his denunciation of factionalism are critical for understanding the dynamics of early Christian communities and the perennial challenges of maintaining ecclesial harmony. The context of Corinth, known for its cosmopolitan nature and myriad of philosophical and religious influences, further complicates the communal life of the early Christians, making Paul's call for unity even more imperative.



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In contemporary times, the Church continues to grapple with divisions that threaten its mission and witness. These divisions manifest in various forms, from doctrinal disputes and denominational splits to cultural and political differences. Understanding the implications of Paul's teachings in I Corinthians 1:10-16 offers valuable insights for addressing these modern challenges. This study seeks to explore these implications, drawing parallels between the early church's experiences and the contemporary church's struggles, and offering recommendations for fostering unity in the body of Christ.

The city of Corinth, located in ancient Greece, was a major center of commerce and culture during the time of Paul. Known for its wealth and diversity, Corinth was a melting pot of different religions, philosophies, and social practices. The early Christian community in Corinth mirrored this diversity, which often led to internal conflicts and divisions. Understanding the socio-political and cultural background of Corinth is essential for interpreting Paul's message in I Corinthians. Sources for this section include historical texts on ancient Corinth, archaeological findings, and scholarly analyses of the city's social and cultural environment.

Historical Background

Corinth was strategically located on the Isthmus of Corinth, connecting mainland Greece with the Peloponnese. This location made it a bustling hub for trade and travel, attracting a diverse population (Furnish 12). The city's affluence was evident in its architecture and public buildings, which included temples, theaters, and markets. However, this prosperity also brought social stratification and moral challenges, as evidenced by the notorious reputation of the city's licentiousness and decadence (Meeks 44).

Social and Cultural Environment

The social fabric of Corinth was characterized by a mix of Greeks, Romans, and immigrants from various parts of the empire, leading to a pluralistic society. This pluralism extended to religious practices, with numerous temples and shrines dedicated to a variety of gods and goddesses (Gorman 67). The early Christian community in Corinth had to navigate this complex religious landscape, which often influenced their beliefs and practices.

Internal Conflicts Divisions in the Early Church: Causes and Effects

The internal conflicts within the Corinthian church were multifaceted, involving issues of leadership, morality, and theological differences. The divisions mentioned in I Corinthians 1:10-16 highlight the tendency of the congregation to align themselves with different leaders, such as Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter), and Christ. These factions likely reflected deeper social and cultural divisions within the community (Murphy-O'Connor 103).

The early Christian church faced numerous challenges that led to divisions, including doctrinal disputes, cultural differences, and leadership conflicts. This section explores the causes and effects of these divisions, drawing on historical records, patristic writings, and secondary sources. Understanding the nature and impact of early church divisions provides a foundation for analyzing how similar issues manifest in the contemporary Church. Key sources include historical texts, writings of early church fathers, and modern scholarly works on early church history.

1. Doctrinal Disputes

Doctrinal disputes were among the primary causes of divisions in the early church. Issues such as the nature of Christ, the role of the Law, and the interpretation of Scripture led to significant conflicts. For instance, the Arian controversy, which questioned the divinity of Christ, caused widespread division and was addressed by the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325 (Gonzalez 112). Early church councils often convened to resolve such doctrinal disputes and establish orthodoxy.



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2. Effects of Early Church Divisions

The effects of early church divisions were profound and long-lasting. Doctrinal disputes often resulted in the establishment of creeds and the canonization of Scripture, shaping the theological foundations of Christianity (Pelikan 104). However, these divisions also led to the formation of heretical movements and schismatic groups, which the church sought to counter through apologetics and pastoral care (Ehrman 78).

3. Historical Records and Patristic Writings

Historical records and patristic writings provide valuable insights into the causes and effects of early church divisions. Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* documents the struggles of the early church, highlighting key events and controversies (Eusebius 91). The writings of church fathers such as Augustine, Irenaeus, and Tertullian offer theological reflections on unity and the dangers of division (Brown 64).

4. Denominational Splits

Denominational splits are a significant form of division within the contemporary Church. These splits often arise from theological disagreements and differences in church governance. For instance, the split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church in 1054, known as the Great Schism, was rooted in both theological disputes and political tensions (Chadwick 67). More recent examples include the fragmentation within Protestantism, where differing interpretations of Scripture and doctrinal issues have led to the formation of numerous denominations (Noll 143).

5. Doctrinal Disagreements

Doctrinal disagreements continue to be a major source of division in the contemporary Church. Issues such as the interpretation of biblical texts, the role of women in ministry, and differing views on sacraments have led to significant conflicts. For example, debates over same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ inclusion have caused divisions within major denominations like the Anglican Communion and the United Methodist Church (Pew Research Center 2019).

Implications of Early Church Divisions for Modern Christianity

Recent studies and reports provide insights into the current state of church divisions. The Pew Research Center's 2019 report on religious beliefs and practices highlights the ongoing fragmentation within Christianity and the challenges of maintaining ecclesial unity in a pluralistic society (Pew Research Center 2019). Similarly, Barna Group's studies on church attendance and denominational loyalty reveal shifting patterns that reflect deeper underlying divisions (Barna Group 2020).

Drawing parallels between the early church and the contemporary Church, this section explores the implications of early church divisions for modern Christianity. It considers how Paul's teachings in I Corinthians 1:10-16 can inform current efforts to address disunity within the Church. Key areas of focus include the importance of theological foundations for unity, the role of leadership in fostering cohesion, and practical steps for reconciliation and dialogue. The section will draw on contemporary theological reflections and practical case studies to provide insights into fostering unity in the Church today.

1. Impact on Mission and Witness in Contemporary Church

The divisions within the contemporary Church have significant implications for its mission and witness. Fragmentation can undermine the Church's ability to present a unified message and engage effectively with broader society. As Volf notes, "A divided church struggles to embody the reconciliatory message of the Gospel" (Volf 212). Additionally, internal



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conflicts can distract from the Church's primary mission of evangelism and social service, reducing its overall effectiveness (Stetzer 131).

2. Theological Foundations for Unity

Paul's teachings in I Corinthians 1:10-16 emphasize the theological basis for unity, highlighting that Christ is not divided and that believers should be united in mind and purpose. This theological foundation remains crucial for addressing modern church divisions. As Wright notes, "The unity of the Church is grounded in its shared faith in Jesus Christ and the common participation in the Holy Spirit" (Wright 214). By reaffirming core theological tenets, contemporary churches can find common ground despite differences.

3. Role of Leadership

The role of leadership in fostering cohesion is another key implication of early church divisions. Paul's emphasis on viewing leaders as servants and co-workers (1 Cor. 3:5-9) can guide modern church leaders in promoting unity. As Keller observes, "Leaders must prioritize the spiritual health and unity of their congregations over personal agendas or theological minutiae" (Keller 121). Effective leadership can mitigate conflicts and build a more unified community.

4. Practical Steps for Reconciliation and Dialogue

Practical steps for reconciliation and dialogue are essential for addressing contemporary church divisions. Drawing from Paul's example, modern churches can adopt practices such as open communication, mutual respect, and collaborative problem-solving. Volf suggests that "reconciliation requires a commitment to listening, understanding, and addressing the underlying issues that cause division" (Volf 198). Practical initiatives like ecumenical dialogues, joint worship services, and collaborative community projects can help bridge divides.

5. Contemporary Theological Reflections

Contemporary theological reflections offer insights into the application of Paul's teachings to modern church divisions. For instance, Moltmann's theology of hope emphasizes the eschatological vision of unity and reconciliation, encouraging churches to work towards this future reality in their present contexts (Moltmann 175). Similarly, Newbigin's missional theology highlights the importance of a united witness to the world, arguing that a divided church undermines its mission (Newbigin 94).

Interpretation of I Corinthians 1:10-16

I Corinthians 1:10-16 is a critical text that addresses the issue of divisions within the Corinthian church. Paul begins by appealing to the Corinthians in the name of Jesus Christ to agree with one another and avoid divisions. He emphasizes the importance of being united in mind and thought (1 Corinthians 1:10). This appeal is grounded in the theological belief that the church, as the body of Christ, must reflect unity to effectively witness to the world.

1. Critique of Factionalism

Paul's critique of factionalism is evident in his rhetorical questions: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:13). These questions are designed to highlight the absurdity of the Corinthians' divisions. By focusing on human leaders rather than Christ, the Corinthians were undermining the very foundation of their faith (Wright 153).



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Paul's reference to his limited involvement in baptizing the Corinthians (I Corinthians 1:14-16) further underscores his point. Baptism, as a sacrament, signifies incorporation into the body of Christ, not allegiance to a particular leader. By minimizing his role in baptizing, Paul emphasizes that their primary allegiance should be to Christ alone (McGrath 218).

2. Theological Basis for Unity

The theological basis for Paul's appeal to unity is grounded in the doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ. In later chapters, Paul elaborates on this metaphor, describing the Church as a body with many parts, each with its unique function but all essential to the whole (I Corinthians 12:12-27). This metaphor underscores the interdependence of believers and the importance of maintaining unity amid diversity (Fee 78).

Paul's emphasis on unity also reflects his understanding of the Gospel. The message of Christ's death and resurrection is a unifying force, breaking down barriers between different groups and creating a new, unified community in Christ. This unity is not just a theoretical ideal but a practical necessity for the Church's mission (Wright 256).

3. Theological Themes in I Corinthians 1:10-16

Several key theological themes emerge from I Corinthians 1:10-16 that are vital for understanding Paul's perspective on church unity and division. These themes include the centrality of Christ, the call to unity, the role of leadership, and the nature of the church as the body of Christ.

4. The Centrality of Christ

One of the most significant theological themes in this passage is the centrality of Christ in the life of the Church. Paul's rhetorical questions in verse 13—"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?"—underscore the absurdity of the divisions based on allegiance to different human leaders. These questions highlight that Christ alone is the foundation of their faith and unity (Wright 153).

Paul's emphasis on Christ crucified and risen is a recurring theme in his letters, signifying the core of the Christian message and identity (I Corinthians 2:2). The centrality of Christ means that all members of the church must align their allegiance to Him rather than to human leaders. This Christocentric focus is critical for maintaining unity, as it reorients the community's identity and mission around Jesus, who is the true head of the Church (McGrath 204).

5. The Call to Unity

The call to unity is another prominent theme in I Corinthians 1:10-16. Paul urges the Corinthians to "agree with one another" and to be "perfectly united in mind and thought" (I Corinthians 1:10). This appeal reflects Paul's broader theological vision of the church as a unified body, a vision he elaborates on in other parts of his writings (I Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:1-6).

Unity, for Paul, is not merely the absence of conflict but a positive and active state of being that reflects the oneness of God and the reconciled nature of the Church in Christ. This unity is grounded in shared beliefs, values, and mission, and it manifests in practical expressions of love, cooperation, and mutual edification (Volf 98). Paul's call to unity is thus a call to live out the reconciled relationships that are at the heart of the Gospel.

6. The Role of Leadership

Leadership plays a crucial role in fostering or hindering unity within the Church. In I Corinthians 1:12, Paul addresses the divisions caused by factions aligned with different leaders: "I follow Paul," "I follow Apollos," "I follow Cephas," and "I follow Christ." These divisions indicate a misplaced focus on human leaders rather than on Christ (Fee 56).



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Paul's response highlights the need for leaders to model humility and servant leadership. Effective leadership in the Church involves pointing people to Christ and fostering a sense of collective identity and mission. Leaders are called to serve the community, facilitating unity rather than promoting their agendas or factions (Keller 210). This servant leadership is essential for maintaining the unity and health of the church community.

7. The Nature of the Church as the Body of Christ

Paul's metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ, though more fully developed in I Corinthians 12, is implicit in his appeal for unity in I Corinthians 1:10-16. This metaphor underscores the interdependence of believers and the importance of every member contributing to the body's overall health and function (McGrath 214).

The body metaphor emphasizes that diversity within the Church is not a threat to unity but a necessary aspect of it. Each member has a unique role and function, and the unity of the body is maintained when each part works harmoniously with the others. This understanding challenges the Church to embrace diversity while striving for a deeper unity rooted in Christ (Wright 256)..

8. The Church as the Body of Christ

Paul's metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ is central to his understanding of unity. In I Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul elaborates on this metaphor, describing the Church as a single body with many parts, each with its unique function but all essential to the whole. This imagery emphasizes the interdependence of believers and the necessity of each member's contribution to the health and function of the Church (Fee 78).

The metaphor of the body also highlights the diversity within the Church. Paul acknowledges that believers come from different backgrounds and have different gifts, but he insists that this diversity is a strength rather than a weakness. The unity of the body is not uniformity but a harmonious functioning of diverse parts working together for a common purpose (McGrath 218).

9. The Dangers of Division

Paul views divisions within the Church as a serious threat to its integrity and mission. In I Corinthians 1:10-16, he addresses the specific issue of factions aligned with different leaders, but his concern for unity extends beyond this immediate context. For Paul, divisions undermine the Church's witness to the world and its ability to live out the Gospel message of reconciliation and love (Wright 256).

Divisions also reflect a deeper spiritual problem: a failure to recognize Christ as the true head of the Church. When believers align themselves with human leaders or factions, they risk losing sight of their primary allegiance to Christ. This misplaced focus can lead to conflicts, power struggles, and a fragmentation of the community (Moltmann 67).

Practical and Theological Responses to Division

Paul offers both practical and theological responses to the issue of division. Practically, he urges the Corinthians to focus on what unites them rather than what divides them. This includes emphasizing shared beliefs, values, and mission, and fostering a culture of mutual respect and cooperation (Volf 104). Paul's call to be "perfectly united in mind and thought" (I Corinthians 1:10) suggests that unity requires intentional effort and a commitment to working through differences constructively.

Theologically, Paul grounds his appeal for unity in the person and work of Christ. By reminding the Corinthians that Christ is not divided and that their primary allegiance is to Him, Paul reorients their focus and identity around the central figure of their faith (Wright 153). This Christocentric focus is essential for overcoming divisions and fostering a deeper sense of unity within the Church.



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Implications for Contemporary Church Life

The implications of Paul's perspective on unity and division are significant for contemporary church life. First, they challenge the Church to prioritize unity and work actively against divisions. This involves addressing underlying issues such as doctrinal differences, leadership conflicts, and cultural tensions that can lead to fragmentation (Newbigin 95).

Second, Paul's teachings emphasize the importance of focusing on Christ as the center of the Church's life and mission. By maintaining a Christocentric focus, the Church can navigate conflicts and differences more effectively, fostering a spirit of reconciliation and mutual understanding (Volf 110).

Third, Paul's critique of factionalism underscores the need for humility and servant leadership within the Church. Leaders are called to point their congregations to Christ and to model the unity and selflessness that Paul advocates (Keller 220). This requires ongoing formation and accountability to ensure that leaders remain focused on their primary mission.

1. The Role of Leadership in Promoting Unity

Leadership is a critical factor in promoting unity within the Church. Paul's critique of factionalism highlights the dangers of personality cults and the need for leaders to model humility and servant leadership. Effective leaders point their followers to Christ and foster a sense of collective identity and mission (Keller 220).

Paul himself exemplifies this type of leadership. He downplays his role in baptizing the Corinthians (I Corinthians 1:14-16) to emphasize that their primary allegiance should be to Christ, not to him or any other leader. This humility and focus on Christ are essential qualities for leaders who seek to promote unity within the Church (Fee 56).

2. Implications for Christian Doctrine and Practice

The theological themes and Paul's perspective on unity and division in I Corinthians 1:10-16 have profound implications for Christian doctrine and practice. These implications extend to the Church's understanding of its identity, mission, leadership, and the practical steps necessary to maintain unity within the Christian community.

3. Unity and the Identity of the Church

Paul's teachings in I Corinthians 1:10-16 emphasize that unity is integral to the identity of the Church. The Church is not just a collection of individuals but a cohesive body united in Christ. This understanding has significant doctrinal implications, particularly in ecclesiology, the study of the Church's nature and structure.

From a doctrinal perspective, unity is a reflection of the Trinitarian nature of God. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct yet perfectly united, the Church is called to reflect this divine unity in its communal life. This Trinitarian model challenges the Church to embrace diversity within unity, recognizing that different gifts, traditions, and expressions of faith can coexist harmoniously within the one body of Christ (McGrath 204).

4. The Mission of the Church

The Church's mission is deeply connected to its unity. Jesus' prayer for his followers in John 17:21—"that they may all be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me"—highlights the missional impact of unity. A divided Church undermines its witness and credibility in the world.

Paul's emphasis on unity calls the Church to prioritize reconciliation and peace-making as essential aspects of its mission. This involves not only addressing internal conflicts but also promoting justice and reconciliation in the wider society. By



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embodying unity, the Church can more effectively fulfill its calling to be a light to the nations and a sign of God's kingdom on earth (Wright 256).

5. Leadership and Servanthood

Leadership within the Church must reflect the principles of humility and servanthood that Paul advocates. Leaders are not to be the cause of divisions but are to foster unity by modeling Christ-like humility and service. This has practical implications for how leadership is understood and exercised within the Church.

Effective church leadership involves prioritizing the well-being and unity of the congregation over personal ambition or factional interests. Leaders must be trained and encouraged to view their roles as servants of Christ and His Church, committed to guiding their communities toward greater unity and collective purpose (Keller 210).

6. Doctrinal Clarity and Flexibility

Maintaining unity within the Church requires a balance between doctrinal clarity and flexibility. Paul's teachings encourage the Church to hold firmly to core Christian doctrines, such as the centrality of Christ and the Gospel message, while allowing for diversity in secondary matters.

This balance is crucial for fostering an inclusive community where different perspectives and traditions can coexist. The Church must discern which issues are essential for faith and which allow for a diversity of opinions and practices. By focusing on shared beliefs and values, the Church can navigate differences constructively and avoid unnecessary divisions (Newbigin 95).

CONTEMPORARY CHURCH DIVISIONS IN NIGERIA

Today, Nigeria is conglomerated with different church denominations with diverge doctrines and traditions. "The kind of Christianity which the Portuguese sought to spread to West Africa was the Catholic variety, developed in the culture of Western Europe and which in particular embodied the cultural values of Iberian Peninsula. Conversion, according to the Portuguese, was by implication the adoption of a particular pattern of daily life. Their focus was the transformation of great area of Africa into faithful but carbon copies of Portugal" (Olerewaju 85). Thus Christianity spread through every nook and cranny of Nigerian society as churches and schools are built to facilitate the rapid spread of the good news of the kingdom in Nigeria. As asserts by Felix E. Enegho, "the conversion of his territory (Oba of Benin) to Catholic faith was not the main aim of Portuguese expeditions in the fifteenth century, it constituted a very integral mission which became so imperative to the king. The priests that came from Portugal to meet with the Oba of Benin kingdom had with them letter of accreditation. The missionary never intended to settle in Benin and reside among people, learn their language and customs and then convert them to Christianity. Their intention was to convert the Oba (King) and make him pass a decree, making the Catholic faith the religion of the kingdom (18). It was just like a British colonial politics of indirect rule system, whereby traditional rulers were used by the colonial masters to rule their own native people. As church continue to spread in Nigeria so did controversy and argument continue to arise in the body of Christ.



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In Nigeria today, there is high level of disunity among Christians especially between the Catholicism and Pentecostalism. The division led to the creation of the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON), a conservative Anglican movement that distanced itself from the Episcopal Church. Some Anglican congregations also left their national churches to join more conservative Anglican bodies. This crisis has weakened unity within the Anglican Communion, as some provinces continue to push for full LGBTQ+ inclusion while others threaten further separation.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the study provided a comprehensive analysis of the implications of division in the contemporary church, grounded in the theological reflections and practical strategies discussed. The chapter explored the various dimensions of division, from leadership and theological perspectives to practical steps for reconciliation.

The input from oral interviewees has enriched this analysis, highlighting the importance of clear vision, effective conflict management, and the modeling of forgiveness by church leaders. Theological insights have reinforced the biblical and historical foundations for unity, while practical strategies have offered actionable approaches to addressing division.

Challenges and opportunities in implementing these strategies have been identified, emphasizing the need for continuous evaluation and adaptation. The chapter concludes with a call for further research and the exploration of innovative approaches to fostering unity in the church.

Overall, Chapter four underscores the complexity of division within the church and the multifaceted approach required to address it effectively. By integrating leadership insights, theological reflections, and practical strategies, the chapter provides a holistic understanding of the dynamics at play and offers a roadmap for navigating and overcoming division.

The research work draws together the insights from the entire thesis, emphasizing the central role of unity in the Church's mission and identity. The study of I Corinthians 1:10-16 has revealed that division is not a new phenomenon but has been a challenge for the Church since its inception. Paul's appeal for unity, grounded in the shared faith in Christ, remains highly relevant for addressing contemporary church divisions.



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