

SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CELESTIAL MODE OF WORSHIP¹

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INTRODUCTION

The Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), as the name implies, is a *heavenly* church brought down to earth. This is well captured in **Hymn 79** as follows:

*Worship ye the Lord in this holy church
It is a holy church from our Heavenly Father
We pray the Lord come to redeem us sinners
And count us amongst Thy chosen ones*

Accordingly, the CCC mode of worship was descended from heaven. Paragraph 94 of the Second Schedule of the CCC **Constitution** asserts, “*All forms of worship in the Celestial Church of Christ are entirely as revealed by the Holy Spirit.* This includes the setting of the altar and the seats therein, the number of candles used for the various types of services and the seating arrangement” (p. 30). In fact, the Pastor-Founder of the CCC, Rev. Samuel B. J. Oschoffa, claimed that at the Makoko (Lagos) Harvest Thanksgiving Service, Jesus Christ Himself appeared to him and said, “All your services of worship in the church are acceptable unto the Father” (p. 19).

Most Celestians assert the above as the key, if not the only evidence that the CCC’s mode of worship is indeed descended. However, unless such claims can be verified from a reliable source, they remain mere assertions, which can be embellished by fanatical adherents or rejected by skeptics. Can we simply rest our faith in the spirituality of CCC *modus operandi* on human recollection of past events as recorded in the constitution of the church?

The Scripture, the Word of God as recorded in the **Holy Bible**, is the only credible source that God has made available to Christians [**Deut. 29:29**]. In deed, any church that professes the name of Jesus must ensure that its doctrine can be tested against the Scripture for the following reasons, among others:

- All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for *doctrine*, for proof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness [**2 Tim. 3:16**].
- The Law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms are mainly about Jesus and He is their fulfillment [**Luke 24:44**].

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- Jesus came in flesh to fulfill the Old Testament [**Matt. 5:17**] and to prepare us for His Second Coming as King and Judge [**Matt. 25:31-46; Jn 5:22**]. That is why Jesus Himself has told us that the Scripture cannot be broken [**Jn 10:35**].
- Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith [**Heb. 12:2**]

This paper will assess the doctrine of the CCC against the word of God. One cannot cover every aspect of the CCC mode of worship. Therefore, this paper will focus on the most obvious (but greatly misunderstood) aspects, such as:

- (a) The structure of the church
- (b) The mode of dress
- (c) The items used for worship
- (d) A typical worship service (Sunday)

PURPOSES OF PRESENTATION

1. At Bethel, Jacob woke up and said, “God is in this place and yet I did not know it” [**Gen. 28:16**]. After this presentation, it is my hope that worshippers will wake up from their ignorance and lukewarmness to realize the power of God in this church.
2. A full grasp of the scriptural foundation of the CCC mode of worship will build self-confidence and greater faith by Celestians, especially when sharing and fellowshiping with other Christians.
3. *The CCC is a God-fearing church, not a user-friendly one.* The new knowledge will assist erring members to return to the path of reverence for God and true worship. This is well captured in **Hymn 54**:

*Worship, worship the Lord our God
Worship, worship the Lord our God
Our only Father
May the Lord show the world Heaven's glory
That the whole world may all be trembling
Under this great power. Amen*

THE SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CCC

All of the practices and doctrines of the CCC were revealed by the Holy Spirit through various prophets. For instance, on 5th October 1947, a prophetess filled with the Holy Spirit, illustrated the seating arrangement in the CCC with oranges (see the CCC **Constitution**, p.30). More revelations came through other prophets in the church, such as those through Mawunyon, the first anointed prophet of the church (p. 25 of the **Constitution**). By the time the church was five years old, the following features of its structure and practices had been established:

- There is an altar area surrounded by seats for church elders. On the altar is a candleholder with 7 stands. The altar is located to the East.

- The choir stand is to the right of the altar area.
- The rest of the church is arrayed such that females sit on the left (North) and the males on the right (South).
- There are entrances from the West, South and North in the area outside of the altar zone.
- Worshippers wear white garments (*soutana*) but are not allowed to wear shoes when in their *soutanas* and inside the church.
- Incense, candles, holy water, palm fronds and perfumes are used in worship and rituals.
- Worshippers pray with their heads bowed to the ground.

There are some clear similarities between these features of the CCC and those shown to Moses and the temple built by Solomon [see **Ex. 25:8; Heb. 9:1-10**]. For example, the CCC temple faces the East, the direction of Jerusalem. In Scripture, God commanded Ezekiel to “set thy face toward Jerusalem and drop thy word toward the holy places” [**Ezek. 21:2**]. Daniel [**Dan. 6:10**] and Jonah [**Jon. 2:4**] were known to look toward the holy temple in Jerusalem when they prayed. Recall that God had promised Solomon that all prayers offered in that temple will be answered because His eyes and ears will be there “perpetually” [**2 Chron. 7:12-16**]. Even till date, the Jews still go to the Wailing Wall, the relic of the temple, to pray when they are in desperate need. However, as Jesus has said, as long as you worship God in spirit and in truth, where you face or where you go may not be relevant [**Jn 4:21-24**]. But, *once God commands you to do something in a particular way, the general rule no longer applies*. That is why Jesus Christ has said, “whosoever shall do the will of God the same is My brother and My sister, and mother” [**Mk 2:35**].

In addition, those on holy ground are forbidden by God to wear shoes, as we have seen in the cases of Moses [**Ex. 3:5**] and Joshua [**Josh. 5:15**]. The white garment is a symbol of the redeemed that are perpetually on holy ground [**Rev. 7: 13-17**]. It is, therefore, not surprising that God has commanded Celestians in *soutana* and worshippers inside the church to remove their shoes.

These parallels are a mere tip of the iceberg. It will be necessary to go into a more detailed analysis of worship in Heaven, as described in the Scripture, to provide a broader contextual base for an understanding of the CCC mode of worship.

Worship in Heaven

The Layout of the Temple (see sketch below)

(a) God Himself sits on the throne [**Is. 6:1; Rev. 4:2**]. In the midst of the throne is the “Lamb [Jesus Christ] as if it had been slain” with seven horns and seven eyes “which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth” [**Rev. 5:6; see also Zech. 4:10**]. The 7 Spirits of God are listed in relation to the “Branch” from the “stem of Jesse” [Jesus Christ] as follows [**Is.11: 1-2**]:

- i. *The Spirit of the Lord*
- ii. *The Spirit of Wisdom*
- iii. *The Spirit of Understanding*
- iv. *The Spirit of Counsel*
- v. *The Spirit of Might*
- vi. *The Spirit of Knowledge*
- vii. *The Fear of the Lord*

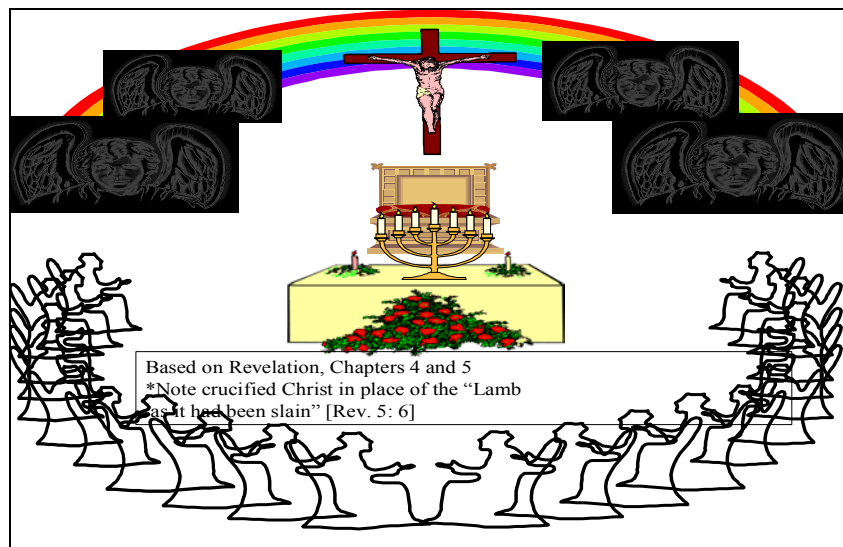
(b) There is a golden altar before the throne [Rev. 8:3]. Seven lamps of fire are burning before the throne “which are the seven Spirits of God” [Rev. 4:5]. Since the 7 angels standing before the throne got the fire for the incense from the altar before the throne [Rev. 8:5], it can safely be assumed that the 7 lamps of fire are on the golden altar. Since they also are the seven Spirits of God, the seven lamps *signify the presence of Jesus Christ on the golden altar as well as on the throne.*

(c) Four Living Creatures, the Cherubim [Ezek. 1:5-14] and the Seraphim [Is. 6:2; Rev. 4:8], are in the midst of and round about the throne. They are the leading praise singers [Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8].

(d) There is a rainbow around the throne [Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 4:3]. Could this be to remind God of His everlasting covenant with Noah not to again destroy mankind by flood [Gen. 9:8-16]?

(e) Round about the throne are 24 seats on which are sitting 24 elders clothed in *white robes* with crowns of gold on their heads [Rev. 4:4].

(f) The congregation consists of angels and an uncountable multitude of saints from every race and nationality *all arrayed in white robes and carrying palms in their hands* [Rev. 7:1-9].



The Worship ‘Service’

(a) The Cherubim and the Seraphim lead off the adoration and worship with “*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts*” [Is. 6:3] or “*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty*” [Rev. 4:8]. Other frequently heard words are “*Alleluia*”, “*Praise our God*”, and “*Amen*” [Rev. 19:1-6]. As soon as the Cherubim and the Seraphim raise their praise, the 24 elders fall *on their faces*, casting their crowns before the throne, and worship God [Rev. 4:10; Rev. 19:4], with songs in honor of God [Rev. 4:11] and Jesus Christ [Rev. 5:12-13].

(b) Much *incense* is offered with the prayers of the saints *upon the golden altar* before the throne [Rev. 5:8; Rev. 8: 8-9]. Incense is also regarded as “the prayers of the saints” [Rev. 5:8].

(c) The worship goes on *interminably* [Rev. 4:11; Rev. 7:15]. It is so awesome a sight. For example, Isaiah who had a vision of God’s entourage broke down spontaneously, confessing his sins [Is. 6:5] and John did not know when he knelt before an angel—twice! [Rev. 19: 10; Rev. 22:8].

Implications for Worship on Earth

The following remarkable pairings should be noted:

- The throne and the altar
- The Lamb and the 7 Lamp Stands
- Prayers and incense
- Cherubim/Seraphim and the choir
- Elders/saints and true worshippers

God Almighty and the Lamb are on the throne but the 7 lamp stands are on the altar. Remember that they also represent the 7 Spirits of God, which are on Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. *Therefore, the altar is a visible image of the throne* [Ex. 20:24] and Jesus Christ is present on the altar when the 7 lamp stands are burning.

The incense goes with the prayers of the saints [Rev. 8:4]. At the same time, incense is called the prayers of the saints [Rev. 5:8]. *Therefore, incense is a visible image of efficacious prayers* [Ex. 30:7-10].

All the worshippers that are saints (i.e., human beings who came from the earth) wear white garments. Believers who had survived great tribulation and are now washed in the blood of the Lamb [Rev. 7:14] wear the garment. *Therefore, the white garment is a visible image of redemption and the righteousness of believers* [Rev. 19:8].

The pattern of the temple and mode of worship given to Moses by God are in consonance with heavenly worship [Ex. 25: 8; Heb. 9:1-10]. The major differences since Christ’s earthly mission are as follows:

- i. Instead of animal sacrifices, the Lamb “slain from the foundation of the world”

[Rev. 13:8] is on the throne. The New Covenant has substituted the Holy Communion, instituted by Christ Himself, in place of animal sacrifice [Lk 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25].

ii. The veil covering the Holy of Holies has been torn, with Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross. So, there is now a sea of glass (which is very transparent) between the throne and the rest of the temple.

If we were to move this church in Heaven down to earth *this moment*, here is what we would see:

*The throne and the angels would be invisible to our naked eyes
We would see the altar with the 7 lamp stands on it
The whole church would be full of smoke from the incense
The worshippers would all be in white garments
When prayers were called, the worshippers would all fall on their faces
bowing towards the altar on which would be the 7 lamp stands*

That, in essence, is the Celestial Church of Christ. Note that in place of the golden crowns, the elders attach golden frills to their loins. This is because male worshippers on earth are enjoined not to cover their heads during worship [1 Cor. 11:4].

Being representative of God's throne, the altar can be considered sanctified (i.e., set apart as holy). Whatever touches a sanctified altar is considered sanctified [Ex. 29:37]. Under the Old Covenant, inanimate objects (such as the tabernacle and its decorations) were sanctified and in turn imparted sanctification to whoever touched them [Ex. 30:29; Matt. 23:17-22]. That was why God stayed the plague on the Israelites when Aaron burnt incense from the altar [Num. 17:42-48]. In the New Testament, handkerchiefs and aprons worn by Paul, a sanctified man of God who worshipped in the synagogue, were put on the sick that then became well [Acts 19:11-12]. *Any object can be so sanctified as the Holy Spirit wills.* Therefore, oil, perfumes, palm fronds, candles, crosses, incense, water, loins, handkerchiefs and any other objects used in the CCC, *as long as they are directed by the Holy Spirit*, are considered sanctified by God.

A TYPICAL SUNDAY IN THE CCC

There are over **20 services** conducted **in the CCC** (see p.31 of the CCC *Constitution*), grouped into:

- a) **Daily:** Morning Service at 5.30 am;
- b) **Weekly:** Sunday at 10.00 am, Wednesday & Friday at 6.00 pm, Prophet's Service on Thursday at 7.00 pm or Friday after Power Day Service, Service for those seeking God's mercy, Wednesday at 9.30 am, Service for Pregnant Women, Friday at 3.00 pm;
- c) **Monthly:** New Moon Service on the first Thursday of each month;

- d) **Annual:** Passion Week, Washing of Feet on Holy Thursday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Blessed Virgin Mary Day, 1st Friday of July, Christmas Service, End of Year Service, 31 December from 10.00 pm and
- e) **Occasional:** Marriage, Naming Ceremony, Burial Service, Baptism, Amissa, Foundation Laying, House/Church Dedication). Holy Communion is administered quarterly and at Christmas, End of Year, Holy Thursday and Marriage Services, etc.

However, the structure of all the services is fairly standard:

Procession → **Adoration** → **Confession of Sins** → **Thanks** → **Intercessory Prayers** → **Sermon** → **Thanks offering** → **Blessing** → **Grace** → **Recession**

I have chosen the 10.00 a.m. Sunday Service for illustration because it is the longest and most comprehensive.

(a) The Procession

Just as Isaiah [Is. 6:1-2] and Ezekiel [Ezek. 1:4-28] had the privilege to see the Procession of God, the CCC service begins with a similar one. Worshippers form very disciplined and awe-inspiring lines, all arrayed in *soutana* and some in outer robes in accordance with their church-given ranks. The choir leads, followed by the lower ranks of children (female and male), elders (female and male) and the seniors (female, then male), etc. [cf: Ps. 68: 24-25]. The hymn captures the essence of what is happening in the spiritual realm:

Jerih Moh Yamah (2ice)
The host of angels full of joy in Heaven
The host of angels (2ice)
They are praising God with joyful songs in Heaven

Soon, the elder with the incense burner approaches the altar to light the 7 candles, which represent the seven Spirits of God [Is. 11:2]. Then, the choir, representing the Cherubim and Seraphim [Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8], followed by the whole congregation, sings:

Yah Rah Sah Rah
Yah Rah Sah Mattah [2ice]
Kindle the Light
Divine from Heaven above [2ice]

This hymn was descended through Mawunyon who saw in Heaven a pot of incense being swung accompanied by the above song [CCC *Constitution*, Par. 83, p. 25]. The elder who has lit the 7 candles on the High Altar passes a lit candle to another elder to put at the West entrance of the church, a heavenly practice that you will find in **Ezek. 10:7**.

Recall that the 7-lit candles represent the arrival of Jesus Christ on the altar [**Rev. 4:7; Rev. 5:6**]. Therefore, as soon as the candles are lit, the worshippers go down on their knees and sing three times:

Yah Ramah Ih Yah Ramah [2ice]
Oh come unto the Lord [2ice]

The jingling of the bell three times follows that. Each time, the worshippers say, with their faces to the ground:

Holy, Holy, Holy to the Lord God of Hosts

[**Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8**] followed by the singing of

Oh Christ my King
I will worship Thee
My Power and my Light
Thou Most Holy, Holy, Holy
[3 times]

Now, you can see how important it is to come to church on time, and certainly before the jingling of the bell. Why should you arrive after the dignitary (Jesus Christ) and His entourage are already seated? It is disrespectful [Habakkuk 2:20; Zech. 2:13]

(b) Confession/Sanctification

Like Isaiah [**Is. 6:5**], the congregation is led by the service conductor to confess their sins, beginning with Psalm 51, and to pray for sanctification, beginning with Psalm 24. Note that the use of psalms in worship and in the church is well documented in Scripture [**2 Chron. 29: 30-31; Ps. 95: 2; 1 Cor. 14: 26; James 5:13**]. After the prayers, a song of forgiveness follows. This pattern is in accord with God's requirement [**Is. 1:16-18; 1 Jn 1:8-9**].

(c) Thanks

Paul says that we should make our requests known to God with thanksgiving [**Phil. 4:6**]. The Psalmist asks us to offer thanksgiving to God so that He may answer us in the day of trouble [**Ps. 50:14-15**]. That is what the congregation does next with Psalm 118, followed by a prayer and song of thanks.

(d) Intercessory Prayers

In **1 Tim. 2: 1-3**, Paul has laid down the principles of public worship as follows: "I exhort, therefore, that first of all, *supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks*, be made *for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority*." In the CCC, intercessory prayers begin with "Three Members' Prayers", preceded by

the service conductor reading the royal **Psalm 72**. A male elder prays for “Spiritual Power and Progress.” A female elder follows with prayer for “Victory and Protection” for the congregation and the nation and its leaders. A male elder leads the third prayer for “Blessing and God’s Favor”. Then, a song for the power of the Holy Spirit is rendered. The last part of intercessory prayers is called “Silent Prayer” [**compare: 1 Sam. 1:13**] where each individual worshipper is given the opportunity to make his/her personal prayer requests directly to God. A prayer of agreement is led by the service conductor [**compare: 1 Sam. 1:17**], preceded by reading Psalm 20. A song of praise rounds up this section of the worship.

(e) The Word

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God [**Rom. 10:17**]. Two readings, one from the Old Testament and a related one from the New Testament are made. Two songs (stressing Evangelism and Faith respectively) are rendered in-between the two readings and the announcement before the sermon. The Apostles’ Creed precedes the sermon. **1 Jn 4:1-3** enjoins us to test the spirits. The true spirit accepts that Jesus came in flesh. The Creed contains that affirmation. Therefore, reciting it *before* the sermon is to remind the worshippers that the Spirit of God should guide both the preacher and his listeners.

(f) Thanks offering

First, several collections are taken (such as offering, building fund, tithe, etc.). This is followed by thanks offering. The emphasis is on cheerful giving [**2 Cor. 9:7**]. Like Solomon and his congregation of old [**1 Kgs 8:65-66**], Celestians enjoy offering thanks to God. They sing and dance cheerfully. There can be several rounds of offerings by groups and individuals who want to thank God for His deeds or promises to them. Items used include worship items (such as incense, candles and perfumes) or consumables (such as sugar, salt, fruits, etc), as the Holy Spirit leads them.

(g) Blessing and the Grace

The 7th worship song is on blessing or promise. Then, a closing prayer is led by a female highest in rank, followed by the Grace [**2 Cor. 13:14**], said by the Shepherd (leader) of the Parish, or the male highest in rank. Then, the congregation chants 7 *Alleluias* to the 4 corners of the church in the following order: East-West-South-North [**cf.: Ps. 75:6**].

(h) Recession

The recessional hymn as well as the order of departure is the same as the processional discussed earlier. The service conductor leads the prayer and gives the grace. Then, just as Joshua and his troops shouted to bring down the walls of Jericho [**Josh. 6:20**], the whole congregation chants 7 *Alleluias* to the 4 corners of the world as has just been done inside the church. Thereafter, worshippers go silently into the church to make a final bow towards the altar, as if to say to the Lord, “bye for now!” That is the end of

the day's service.

MATTERS ARISING: SOME FREQUENTLY USED WORDS DURING WORSHIP

In the box below, I have provided scriptural references, where available, for some of the popular prefixes to prayers during worship. Here, I want to specifically address the use of *Jehovah, Jesus Christ, Holy Michael* to prefix every prayer.

In civil society, there is what is called "protocol." When you make a speech, there is an introductory part, which is not part of the speech. But, if you don't begin with it, you are considered rude. We begin with the highest in rank in the audience and round up with "Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen." Thereafter, you go into your prepared speech. *During that occasion, every speaker repeats the protocol, even if in varying degrees! Do we have a spiritual equivalent? After all, a prayer is a speech to God.*

In the CCC, the Holy Spirit has revealed that the spiritual protocol *during CCC worship* consists of "Jehovah, Jesus Christ and Holy Michael." There is strong scriptural support for this (note the words in **bold**):

- (a) **Jesus Christ** Himself says "whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the **Son of man** be ashamed when He shall come in **His own glory** and in **His Father's** and **of the holy angels**" [Lk 9:26].
- (b) Talking of His return, Jesus says "but of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the **angels** which are in heaven, neither the **Son** but the **Father**" [Mk 13:32].
- (c) The risen Christ who appeared to Apostle John in the island of Patmos says, "He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment and **I** will not blot his name out of the book of life but I will confess his name before **My Father** and before **His angels**" [Rev. 3:5].
- (d) Paul writes to Timothy, "I charge thee before **God** and the Lord **Jesus Christ** and the **elect angels**..." [1 Tim. 5:21]. The elect angels, also called archangels are Michael, leader of the warring angels [Dan. 10:10-21; Dan. 12:1; Rev. 12:7], Gabriel, head of the messengers [Dan. 9:21; Lk 1: 11-38], Raphael, head of the helpers [Tobit 3:17], and Uriel, head of the angels that minister understanding to believers [2 Esdras 4:1] {Tobit and Esdras are among the Apocrypha books included in the Roman Catholic Bible}.
- (e) Just as every human being has a guardian angel [Matt. 18:10], so does every church have an assigned angel [Rev. 2: 1, 8, 12, 18]. As a warring church, the guardian angel of the CCC is Michael.

Just as a speaker is able to use an introductory protocol to draw his audience's attention, a worshipper can draw God's attention by using a spiritual protocol. Blind Bartimaeus drew the attention of Jesus, in spite of the great noise, when he addressed Him as "Son of David" [Mk 10:47-49].

CONCLUSION

The CCC is in deed a spiritual church that has been descended from heaven, and its doctrine is deeply rooted in Scripture. Therefore, the claims of the Pastor-Founder, Rev. S.B.J. Oschoffa, are true revelations from God and His Christ. Knowing the spiritual significance of everything done in the church enhances our respect for and fear of the Lord. It also facilitates our prayers being answered [**Prov. 15:29**].

Alleluia!

Some Frequently Used Words during CCC Worship

Alleluia-Praise God [Rev. 19:1-6]; Hosanna-Save now, we beseech Thee [Matt. 21: 9, 15; Ps.

118:25]; Ebenezer- Rock of help [1 Sam. 7:12]

Eli Bamah- God of High Places [Ezek. 20:29; Is. 2:2]

Eyiba-Lord of mercy

Eliyah- Lord of Heaven

Agashadual- King of victory

Jehovah Jecho Hirami- King of blessing

El Beraca Bered Eli- King of blessing, we hail Thee

A note about the author

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