

Building Bridges and Barricades

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Introduction

The Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) has been identified as a distinct brand of Christianity which has much affinity with the Yoruba cultural matrix. CCC on the other hand maintains its self-image as a Christian Church *sui generis* and vehemently refuses any connecting nexus with traditional religious thought and praxis. In our view, CCC cosmology is a synthesis of biblical belief, christian liturgical tradition and elements from Yoruba cultural milieu. This paper is concerned with situating Celestial Christianity holistically within the wider Yoruba religio-cultural context. It will examine whether and to what extent the Yoruba understanding of the cosmos has shaped CCC's worldview in their construction of ritual space. It also investigates their attitudes towards supernatural forces, and probes into how the members manipulate these forces in their church life and worship for individual and collective benefits.

CCC was founded in 1947 through the visionary experience and charismatic initiative of a Nigerian Yoruba, Samuel Bilehou Oschoffa. He was born and nurtured in Porto Novo (Benin Republic) in 1909. He claimed to have confronted his first traumatic experience while marooned in the mangrove forest in Toffin, a village in the Garvie area of Dahomey (now Republic of Benin) in his quest for timber for his lumber trade. As he was praying there he heard a voice saying *Luli Luli Luli* which the same voice instantly translated as "The grace of Jesus Christ". It was this spiritual experience on May 23, 1947 that transformed him and also made known his calling. Within three years of its emergence, the subsequent movement had spread to other parts of Dahomey and beyond to neighbouring Nigeria where it made its most profound impact. It has today transcended geo-ethnic and cultural boundaries, thus earning its re-christening as the Celestial Church of Christ "Worldwide". Several parishes (branches) have been established in other African countries such as Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, and in Europe, America and Canada. The membership all over the world now runs into several millions.

Yoruba Cosmology

The Yoruba understanding of the world is the kernel of their religious thought and praxis. It is pertinent here to briefly examine the complexity of Yoruba cosmology in order to appreciate in what ways it influences CCC thought and attitudes about the world, and especially their belief in and attitudes towards supernatural entities. Abimbola (1994: 116) has shown that Yoruba cosmology is a profound and coherent thought system codified in *Ifa* literary corpus. Yoruba religious cosmology is also basically structured in their creation myths, praise songs, sayings and other symbolic utterances. The polarization of the cosmos is a germane feature for a proper understanding of their way of thinking. Yoruba cosmology divide the world into *orun* and *aye*. *Orun* refers to heaven/sky as the abode of the spiritual entities while *aye* implies the world/earth of human habitation¹. *Aye* is in a sense a sacral entity because it also serves as a centre for the dramatization of *ebora* (spirit beings). They still operate within it even though they belong properly to the other realm. They are able to transmute between the two domains to accomplish their various assignments.

In Yoruba thought, the cosmos is believed to be the creation of a Supreme Being called *Olodumare/Olorun*, who is seen to be immanent and transcendent at the same time. He brought lesser spiritual powers into being and charged them with specific functions. *Aye* is delineated as a space occupied by two 'pantheons' of paranormal powers, *orisa* and *ajogun*, both involved in a timeless and sustained competition for its domination. The *orisa*, also known as *irinwo 'mole ojukotun* (four hundred supernatural powers of the right), are by their nature benevolent to human beings so long as their precepts are jealously guided and kept. Some of the major *orisa* are *Orisa nla*, *Orunmila*, *Ogun*, *Shango*, *Osun*, *Oya*, *Yemoja*, *Ori* and *Esu*. They are interested in blessing human beings with all the "good things of life" (Cf. Hallgren 1988). Their wrath may however be incurred when human beings fail to keep their precepts or when they are not adequately propitiated.

The *ajogun* or *igbaa 'mole ojukosi* (two hundred supernatural forces of the left), are seen to be inherently malevolent and as such are preoccupied with the total annihilation of humans and their work. Due to this anti-human nature of these forces, human beings try to avoid them at all cost. Through proper propitiation of the benevolent powers, humans believe they are protected and secured from the machinations of the evil powers. Yoruba people often revert to divination through the *babalawo* (traditional diviner and medicineman) to know the source, nature and remedy for their misfortunes. The most prominent among them are the eight *ajoguns* literally 'warlords'. They are *Iku* (death), *Arun* (disease), *Ofo* (loss), *Egba* (paralysis), *Oran* (literally big trouble), *Epe* (curse), *Ewon* (imprisonment), and *Ese* (a generalized name for all other human afflictions). Other malevolent forces are *aje* (witches), *oso* (sorcerer), *emere* (water spirits), *abiku* (born to die children). It is this basic 'polemic' interest that gives birth to conflict between the two spiritual domains (Abimbola 1994: 104ff.).

Aye, the human habitation constitutes the playground for these opposing spiritual powers and by extension a complex dwelling place for human beings. *Aye* could also mean 'life' or the 'act of living'. It is understood in this sense as a kind of struggle or *ajo* (journey) by human beings in this

¹ We must note here that Yoruba people do not make a any strict distinction between sacred and profane domains as both are seen to be intricately intertwined.

world to realize their *ori* (destiny) on the one hand, a struggle to repair a bad *ori* or sustain a good *ori*. Yoruba people have a holistic view of 'being' as comprising *ara* (physical body); *emi* (breath) and *ori* (inner or spiritual head) spiritual mien, respectively. *Ori* as the spiritual aspect of humans, serves as a significant nexus between human beings and the ethereal world. There is a tradition that everyone makes a choice of his/her own *ori* prior to birth. It is chosen by kneeling in front of *Olodumare/Olorun*. In this sense, *ori* (as the principle of predestiny) is the most important *orisa* as far as human welfare is concerned (Abimbola 1976: 137, 142). But however important *ori* might be, Yoruba religious thought recognizes free will. A good *ori* is a potential for success, but *ese* (the principle of struggle and self-help), and *iwapele* (good character) among other things, are prerequisites to make the potential bear fruit. A bad *ori* can be altered through a divination act and the offering of *ebo* (sacrifice) to the appropriate *orisa*.

CCC Understanding of the Cosmos

Oschoffa's inaugural vision and other visionary experiences which followed through him and some of his earliest followers both suggest the shaping of the CCC view of the world and the role of paranormal agencies in it. Oschoffa claimed to have received a 'divine' commission on 29 September 1947 to found a church. As he explained,

... while I was praying in my house with some visiting friends, I saw a strong ray of light rather like that from the headlamp of a car. I then saw a winged being whose body was like fire and whose eyes were tiny flying towards me behind the beam of light. As it approached me, the beam of light shortened until the being stood about a yard from me. This being then proceeded to say to me : God wishes to send you on an errand of preaching to the world. Many Christians there are who, during their lifetime, when confronted by problems and difficulties of this world they seek after fetish priests and other powers of darkness for all kinds of assistance. On their death, they think they are Christians, but they are no longer Christians because Satan has left his mark on them. For this reason, such people after death, cannot see Christ. God wants to send you to the world on a mission of preaching and exhortation, but the world will not believe you. To assist you in your work so that men may listen to and follow you, miraculous works of the holy divine healing will be wrought by you in the name of Jesus Christ. These works of divine healing and God's spiritual mark on you will testify to the fact that God sent you (*CCC Constitution* 1980, p. 7).

The vision revolves around the mission against 'Satan', 'fetish priests' and other 'powers of darkness' in the world. It also shows that God's benevolent power as portrayed in the message was to be used to counter the power of Satan and the other mischievous forces.

The naming of the movement was believed to have "come down from Heaven by divine revelation" through one Alexander Yanga, who was at the time undergoing spiritual healing under Oschoffa. At the end of seven days trance he wrote the name originally in French as *Le Christianisme Céleste*. It was later rendered as *Eglise du Christianisme Céleste* translated in English as "Celestial Church of Christ". In Gun language the new movement is referred as *A gun wiwe olon ton* and in Yoruba as *Ijo Mimo ti kristi lati orun wa*. The latter are literally translated as "the Holy Assembly of Christ from Heaven". The above confirms CCC belief in the uniqueness of their church as "heavenly" since the visionary experiences and the content of such revelations were linked with *orun* (heaven). Celestial members hold the belief that their church was existing in *orun* prior to its descent to *aye*

(earth). Thus, deriving its ethereal name directly from heaven, the church claims to be an extension or a branch of the mother church, 'the celestial in heaven above' that was specially sent down through Oschoffa to be established on earth. They believed that God sent down this "heavenly" church to the world thus also making CCC a "heavenly" place on earth. A bridge was therefore built connecting *orun* and *aiye*.

The self-identification of CCC as "the last ship/vessel/boat for salvation"² best exemplifies the fusion of this-worldly and the other-worldly orientations in their understanding of *igbala* (salvation). The member's reference to their church as the last ship for salvation is made manifest both in spoken words as well as in their well-established hymn repertoire as examples of their songs have shown.

Yoruba Version

Okò igbala ikehin

Okò igbala

Okò igbala ikehin ni Ijo Mimo

Eni ti ko ba wonu *Okò* na

Yio rii sinu bu omi

(*Yoruba Hymn Number (Y.H.N.) * author's translation / English Version (E.V.) 142*)

English Version

The *last ship* for salvation (*italics* emphasis mine)

The *last ship*

The *last ship* of salvation is Celestial Church

He who fails to enter the *last ship*

Will sink into deep water

E yin Jesu, E yin Jesu
Fun '*Jo kehin* to so kale
(*Y.H.N. 330 / E.V. 13*)

Praise ye Jesus, praise ye Jesus
For the *last church* he descended...

E yin Jesu, E yin Jesu
Fun '*Jo kehin* to so kale
Nipa agbara eje Jesu
Ni Baba fi gbe kale
... Awon *Aje* tiri tiju ...
Awon *oso* tiri idame
Esu wariri o subu
Niwaju agba Ijo yi
(*Y.H.N. 330 / E.V. 13*)

... Praise ye Jesus praise ye Jesus
For the *last church* He descended
By the power of Blood of Jesus
... That the Father founded it...
The *witches* are all confounded
The *wizards* are all confused
Devil trembles even crumbles
... Before the power of this church...

CCC sees itself as possessing the instrument of power with which it will cleanse and purify the other churches and the world in general. We can also perceive in CCC an attempt at bridging heaven with earth both figuratively and practically. While recognizing the essence and urgency of these other-worldly salvational goals, "life everlasting",

2 The concept of "vessel" is known within Buddhism - *yana* being a vehicle, vessel, raft, boat or ship that conveys people across the sea of life. However, its description of the "ship or vessel" as "last" makes it new and different from the sense in which it is understood from within the Buddhist tradition.

"the final judgement"³, they also do not fail to emphasize God's redeeming action in this world, the specially ordained mission of the church to attend to all existential problems of life in this world through prayer and ritual effort. Odeyemi⁴ aptly describes CCC as "the embassy of heaven on earth ... members are seated in heavenly places even though they still move about physically on earth ... That is why the church is 'Celestial' and not 'terrestrial' ".

There is a congruence between Yoruba religious thought and the CCC worldview in their belief in the reality of *ajogun*, *aje*, *oso* and other malevolent forces. These forces are seen as the enemies of humans. Misfortunes and unnatural problems which befall members are given spiritual explanations. Strange illnesses, incurable diseases, barrenness, premature death, joblessness, and all other predicaments that confront human beings, or obstruct individual and collective progress are attributed to the malevolent powers. Seen as spiritual problems therefore, members also strive to procure spiritual panacea. No case is accepted as useless or totally hopeless. Members do not stop at getting spiritual explanations for whatever happens around them or any misfortune that befall them, they advance to seek 'prediction' and 'control'. While the general attitude towards *ajogun*, *aje*, *oso*, *emere*, *abiku* has remained essentially the same in both worldviews, what has changed in the CCC worldview is the medium and nature of control of these human foes.

In the traditional Yoruba setting, people resort to divination through the *babalawo* (diviner and traditional medicine-man) for explanation and prediction of events. *Ebo* (sacrifice) is prescribed to appease the spiritual beings, to avert an impending danger, or to control and prevent the evil forces from wrecking havoc on people. CCC now attempt to cope with these enigmatic forces through *eto adura* (prayer-ritual), prophecy, visions and dreams which are in their proper language referred to as "spiritual messages". It is through effectual prayers that CCC gain access to heaven, and attracts the attention, power and action of *Jehovah* (God), *Jesu Kristi* (Jesus Christ), *Emi Mimo* (the Holy Spirit) and *malaika/angeli* (the angelic forces) against the mischievous forces that parade this world. The 'word of God' (Bible) is no longer only the 'word of life' , but a reserve of spiritual ammunition in order to disable the adversary. *Ajogun*, *aje* and *oso* will now "tremble under the holy power of this church" and they cannot enter the "ship for salvation".

3 The other-worldly salvific goal is very well summarized in Y.H.N. 176 verse 2 (E.V. 15) which renders as: *Igbala ikehin na ti de / Kristi Jesu yio pada wa / Lati wa se 'dajo aiye* (The last period is approaching / Christ Jesus will surely return / To give judgement to all the world). The millenarian nuance expressed at the end of Oschoffa's vision is also reflected here. Cf. also Y.H.N. 668 verse 2 (E.V. 21 verse 2) which points out that: *Agogo kehin fere dun / Ti gbogbo aiye yio pe jo / Ta o pin fun Olukuluku / Gege bi ise owo re* (Time to sound last bell draweth near / That the whole world will congregate / To be paid compensations / According to works of their hands)

4 See S.O. Odeyemi, *The Coming of Oshoffa and the Birth of Celestial Church of Christ*, Lagos 1992. Pp. 136-137. This view was also expressed during my interview with him at his official residential quarters at the University of Lagos on August 27, 1996. He is a Senior Evangelist, and the Co-ordinator of CCC Central Bible Fellowship and Youth Programme. He is also a Professor of Chemistry and currently the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration), University of Lagos.

Yoruba Version

Baba pa lase lat'Orun wa
Ki gbogbo aiye si wariri
Fun 'Jo Mimo, *lat'Orun wa*
Ijo yi ni, yio we aiye mo
Aje, oso, yio wariri
L'abe agbara Mimo yi
Awon Angeli si kun f'ayo
Iyanu f'oko *ikehin*
Halleluya fun ise Oluwa
(*Y.H.N. 176 / E.V. 15*)

English Version

Father from Heaven authorises
That the whole world may all tremble
For Celestial Church *from above*
The fold to purify the world
Witches, wizards will all tremble
Beneath this new power Divine
Angels are filled with happiness
We marvel at this *last ship*
Halleluya for all the works of God.

Igba ironu de
Yara si Iye ainipekun
Oko kehin ti de
Kristi npe elese
Awon oniyemeji
Nwon yio gunle sebute ofo
Aje ko le woko no
Nwon yio gunle sebute ofo
Oso ko le woko na
Nwon yio gunle sebute ofo
(*Y.H.N. 286 / E.V. 74*).

This is the time to think
Make haste to everlasting life
The *last ship* has arrived
Jesus calleth sinners
Those people with doubtful minds
They will land upon empty harbour
Witches cannot board the ship
They will land upon empty harbour
Sorcerers cannot board the ship
They will land upon empty harbour

To establish and maintain contact with these 'heavenly' benevolent powers require a congenial ritual atmosphere. CCC gain access to heaven through prayer and rituals within the sanctified space of the church building called *Ile Esin* (Home of Worship) / *Ile Adura* (Home of Prayer); *Ile Aanu* (Mercyland); and the Celestial City, their 'New Jerusalem'.

CCC members believe that the malevolent forces could 'contaminate' the sacred space if it is not spiritually fortified and protected. In a sense, CCC could be seen as a church engaged in perpetual 'spiritual war' against satan, witches, wizards and sorcerers.

... Jesu Kristi Olugbala
Gba wa logun ajakaiye
Ran *Maleka* re sokale
Ka le bori *Esu* laiye
(*Y.H.N. 156 / E.V. 14*)

... Jesus Christ our Saviour
... Defend us from *earthly wars* ...
Send down the *heavenly hosts*
That we might *Satan* vanquish

They believe in the efficacy of their rituals as more than capable of dealing with this enigma. To therefore debar *ajoguns*, *aje*, *oso* and other malicious spirits from gaining access into their sacred vicinity, various forms of spiritual protection such as the sprinkling of 'holy' water, fumigation of

incense, use of lighted candles, jingling of bells, intermittent rendition of *Halleluyah* and spiritual songs were employed to put them on their heels. *Orin Isipaya Mimo* (CCC Spiritual Hymn Book) provides a whole array of hymns which eulogizes the cogency of the church against these paranormal agents. They claim to have successfully barricaded the evil spirits from their sacred space and members have been rescued from fear of attack.

Mo bo lowo aiye ibi yi	I'm freed from Evil World (3ce)
Mo bo lowo idamu	I'm freed from confusion
A ti bo lowo gbogbo <i>aje</i>	We're freed from all <i>witches</i>
A ti bo lowo gbogbo <i>oso</i>	We're freed from all <i>wizards</i>
A ti bo lowo gbogbo <i>oso</i>	We're freed from all <i>sorcerers</i>
<i>(Y.H.N. * author's translation / E.V. 56)</i>	
E yin Kabiyesi, Olorun Alagbara	Hail the Majesty, the Lord Almighty
E yin Kabiyesi, Oba awon Oba	Hail the majesty King of all Kings..
Ti <i>oso</i> ba gberaga, ida Re yio parun	...If a <i>wizard</i> show off His sword will destroy him
Ti <i>aje</i> ba gberaga, ida Re yio pa won run	...If the <i>witches</i> show off His sword will destroy them
<i>(Y.H.N. * author's translation / E.V. 67)</i>	
...Ajagun segun ode Oru	Almighty conqueror in Heaven
E sokale ninu iponju wa	Descend in all tribulations
Angeli Oluwa, E sokale ni mimo julo	Angels of the Lord descend in all perfect holiness
Awon <i>oso</i> , awon <i>aje</i>	All the <i>wizards</i> and the <i>witches</i>
Awon <i>onisegun</i> , <i>olorisa</i> won yi wa ka	All <i>herbalists</i> and all <i>heathens</i> , they surround us
Angeli Oluwa, E sokale ninu iponju wa...	Angels of the Lord, descend in all our tribulations
<i>(Y.H.N. 459 / E.V. 149)</i>	
A ti te won mole, ati bori won	We have conquered satan, we have over-come...
<i>Esu</i> ko ni agbara lori Ijo Mimo	<i>Satan</i> has no power over Celestial
A ti te <i>aje</i> mole, ati bori won	We have conquered <i>witches</i> , we have over-come...
<i>Aje</i> ko ni agbara lori Ijo Mimo	<i>Witches</i> have no power over Celestial
A ti te <i>oso</i> mole, ati bori won	We have conquered <i>wizards</i> , we have over-come...
<i>Oso</i> ko ni agbara lori Ijo Mimo	<i>Wizards</i> have no power over Celestial
<i>(Y.H.N. 452 / E.V. 135)</i>	

As a result of the performative force believed to be behind the rituals, such songs are rendered during most rites such as consecration of a new house, motor vehicle, laying of foundation of a house, marriage, to prevent them from these malicious forces and to render such endeavours effective. Just as the evil spirits are believed to be terrified by the ritual symbols, the crucifix symbol placed diagonally on each entrance during worship poses both a natural and sacred barricade between the "heavenly" space on earth and any unwanted human or *agent provocateur* from the malevolent spiritual plane of the 'outside world'. It is a symbol of marginality dividing the sacred and profane domains. Thus, by chasing out and keeping the malevolent forces at arm's length, CCC members are able to coerce and manipulate them.

The *Ile Esin / Ile Adura* (House of Worship / House of Prayer) is open to members at any time of the day throughout the year. Different categories of services such as the Sunday, Wednesday and Friday Services are held weekly. Evening services are also held within these days, while morning services are held daily throughout the year. All the other services such as New Moon (Thursday Service), Naming, Marriage, Foundation Laying, Baptism, Pregnant Women, Barren Women, Amissa, Washing of feet and Holy Communion etc. fall within these days.

In all services, members are expected to wear *Aso Emi* (cloth of the spirit or spiritual garment), their white *sutana* or tunic which symbolizes purity. They believe that the *sutana* as a symbol of purity keeps the 'powers of darkness' away from those who put them on. Shoes are not to be worn into the *Ile Esin* and at all times the white *sutana* is worn both within and outside the church precinct. Sanctification of the church building and other ritual spaces is carried out prior to the commencement of any ritual. Candlesticks are lit at strategic locations, incense is fumigated within the premises, and 'holy water' is sprinkled in all nooks and corners of the space and on all participants. The procession into the church begins after prayers have been offered by the service conductor at the church entrance. Procession into the church is always associated with burning of incense while inviting the 'heavenly host' into their midst through the traditional *entrée* song:

Jerih mo yah mah	Jerih Moh Yamah
Jerih mo yah mah	Jerih Moh Yamah
Awon Angeli kun fayoy lorun	The host of angels full of joy in heaven
Awon Angeli, Awon Angeli	The host of angels, the host of angels
Won n'forin ayo yin Baba lorun	They are praising God with joyful songs in heaven

(Y.H.N. 1 / E.V. 1).

Each member is required to perform a purificatory ritual by touching the 'holy' water stoups hung at the door entrance and sprinkle it on him/herself or make a symbolic 'sign of the Cross' on his/her forehead as he/she enters the nave of the church. A tall wooden crucifix is placed diagonally on each of the entrance door after all have entered. When this is done, nobody is allowed to gain entrance until after some stages within the service⁵. This is expected to curtail human and spiritual traffic entering and going out of the church. It is believed that Satan and the evil forces are terrified upon sighting this symbol and as such cannot venture near the sacred space. The hymn for lighting candles at the altar and for call to worship⁶ are sung respectively followed by the ringing of bell three times and the recitation in unison of *Holy Holy Holy to the Lord of Hosts* at the end of each

5 During the early part of the service, the playing of all musical instruments with the exception of the organ is disallowed. This period which the *Oluso agutan* enters into the inner altar epitomizes also the activation of the 'heavenly host'.

6 The hymn for 'lighting candles' is rendered as: *Yah rah Sarah, Yah Rah Samahtah (2ce) / E tan fitila, Mimo lat' orun wa (2ce)*, in English: *Yarah Rah Sarah, Yah Rah Samahtah (2ce) / Kindle the light Divine from Heaven above (2ce)* (Y.H.N. 2 / E.V. 2). Y.H.N. 3 / E.V. 3 is sung in a kneeling posture calling members to worship: *Yah rah man, Hi Yah rah man / Yah rah man / Yahman / Yah rah man / Wa kalo s'odo Oluwa*, and in English as: *Yah Raman Hi Yah Raman / Yah Raman Yah Rah Yah Raman / Oh come unto the Lord*. The Yoruba hymns above each begins with phrases in esoteric language and ends with their meaning in Yoruba and in English versions respectively. For details on the origin and injunctions about Call to worship, See *Celestial Church of Christ Constitution*, *ibid.*, p. 25.

jingling by the congregation. Such ritual dramatization and fluidity is symbolically significant to the members. As a "heavenly" sacred space on earth, it is the belief of the members that the "heavenly hosts" - *Jehovah* (God), *Jesu Kristi* (Jesus Christ), *Emi Mimo* (Holy Spirit), *Angeli/Maleka* (angels) already exist or could be conjured to manifest themselves in their worship.

Baba wa ti mbe larin wa	Our Father who amongst us dwell
Mase je k'aju ti wa...	Let us not be put to shame...
Emi Orun sokale wa	Heavenly Spirit descend
Ko wa ba wa sise	And work with us we plead

(Y.H.N. 795 / E.V. 173)

The forces of the Holy Spirit are believed to come from the angels who are infinitely numerous. Four among them have the title of archangels and manifest through their disposition in the four cardinal directions, the situation of the world at the meeting point of the spiritual forces. Prayers were often done facing the four corners of the earth. *Halleluyah* is repeatedly shouted in unison seven times on each direction⁷. *Michael* is the 'chief archangel' under "the power of Jesus" who wields the *ida* (spiritual sword) that demolishes *ajogun*, *aje*, *oso*, the malevolent supramundane forces which populate the world. He is the angel of victory and the protector of the church. Due to his status and role among the hierarchy of angels, he is mostly invoked at the beginning of all prayers. Most prayers are started with the invocation *Jehovah*, *Jesu Kristi*, *Michael Mimo*, *Oga Ogun* (Jehovah, Jesus Christ, Holy Michael our captain). He occupies the east axis of the church. *Gabriel* is the angel of protection and benediction. He is also the angel of healing and of humility. He is believed to cure barrenness. His jurisdiction is the west. *Raphael* is the angel of force that resides on the side of the ocean in the south. He prevents all sort of ailments and health hazards. *Uriel* is the least invoked of the four archangels. He represents the angel of gift, and dwells in the north axis. He is called upon to activate and render potent private devotional prayers.

These four *maleka* (archangels) are seen as the four angels who have considerable power over the 'world' (Cf. Y.H.N. 4; 259 / E.V. 96; 356; 477; 610; 617 etc.). Among the myriad of other angels which populate the "heavenly" space on earth, only two are named. *Jimata*, the angel of the water and of all within the waters, and *Jerimo Yamah*, who contemplates the light and the brightness of God. On the whole, *Michael* is believed to be charged with distributing works for the other angels "under the power of Jesus". It is for that reason that he is invoked at the beginning of each prayer. CCC Order of Service contains certain "holy" names which usually precede the readings from the Book of Psalms. The Yoruba meaning of some of these names are given as: *Eh-Yibah* (*Oluwa Alanu*); *Eli-Yah* (*Oluwa Olorun*); *Eli-Bamah-Yabah* (*Oluwa-Omo Emi-Michael*); *Agashadual* (*Oba Olusegun*); *Jehovah Jecho-Hirami* (*Oba Olubukun*) (see CCC Constitution, p. 31). These 'holy' names are invoked in order to invite the benevolent spiritual agents to partake in their ritual services.

⁷ The injunctions about praises facing the four corners of the earth were claimed to have been revealed through one Joseph Awangonu (Baba Martha). He claimed that he saw "a church without walls or roof but apparently with four entrances in the four cardinal directions, and as a bell rang, he saw people of all races running into the church from the four corners of the earth" (*ibid.* p. 26)

It is a common feature of their revival and other types of service where people come forward to give testimonies of their prior involvement in witchcraft or sorcery before becoming members. There are cases where public or private confessions are made by individuals who claim to be witches or wizards, but had to "surrender" to God in the "spiritual battle" that ensued from the effectual prayer of the members against the malevolent forces. When such confession is done by an individual, the victim is usually not ostracized from the religious community. Such a victim is made to undergo a ritual sanctification and a spiritual re-orientation in order to break completely the "umbilical cord" connecting the victim with the malevolent spiritual world.

*Abe abo*⁸ is the institutionalized protective period of seclusion and retreat within the sacred space. Since *Ile-Esin / Ile Adura* is believed to exist under the aegis of benevolent "heavenly" powers, it becomes 'a place to feel at home'. Members could sleep or remain indefinitely within the church premises during periods of prayer and fasting; as an escape from the torture of witches or sorcerers in the 'world' or when it is specifically prescribed by prophets or prophetesses as part of a ritual prerequisite.⁹

Personal belongings of members such as vehicles are also placed under *abe abo* for sanctificatory rites against theft, burglars and the evil forces who are believed to cause accidents or bring other forms of misfortune against the owner. Such an idea of protection is in keeping with Yoruba institution of the family compound. Sacred space within *Ile Esin* is thus altered to accommodate the physical participation of the devotee. This shifting space is not unconnected with the level to which CCC serves as a locus of human activity.

From within and outside the precincts of the constructed ritual space, CCC attempts to recreate the intimacy of Yoruba kinship tradition. *Ile* in ordinary usage means "home", "house". One's village or town is also referred as *Ile mi*. In a wider sense, it refers to the family compound housing the large extended family, the nerve centre of domestic life.

The family compound contains the shrine of the lineage's principal deity which protects the compound and enforces social norms, and it contains the graves of the lineage ancestors who favour their descendants with their blessings. 'Home', in this sense, is the locus of a person's spiritual allies and the locus of communal affection and support. Here, within the secure womb of kinship and supernatural protection, social conflicts and personal anxieties are mediated and resolved, and people help each other to cope in life. Here, too, are the graves and shrines that connect the people to the invisible other world (Ray 1993: 272).

Cele's *Ile Esin / Ile Adura*, their "heavenly home" on earth, is a re-enactment of a community which can function as substitute kinship grouping or whose typical social relationship is patterned after the blood kinship tradition.

Ile Aanu (Mercy land) represents another important sacred space of the CCC. Every parish is expected to have a Mercy land built next or close to the church building. It is an encased space that

8 Olayiwola described this elsewhere as "spiritual incubation". See his treatment of this feature in Christopher Steed & David Westerlund, (ed.) *The Triple Religious Heritage of Nigeria*, Uppsala 1995. p. 59.

9 I have observed during my field work that in big towns or cities often characterized by congestion, dearth of parking lots, armed robbery, theft, burglary, and general insecurity to lives and property, some members prefer to park their motor vehicles within church premises, the "heavenly" vicinity believing that as sacred barriers to the 'world', burglars and car snatchers cannot have access to them.

is either walled, fenced or demarcated with blocks and stones. It is usually floored with beach sand and has a well dug within the sacred space. Members often undertake spiritual activities on this enclosure because of their belief in the overwhelming presence of angelic forces there. Two rituals which are conducted at the Mercy land are the service for prophets, prophetesses, dreamers (incubators), visionaries and "seekers" of spiritual power on the one hand; and the washing of the feet and Holy Communion¹⁰. Water is obtained from the sacred well in the Mercy land. Such 'holy' water is believed to be potent, and thus used for prophylactic and therapeutic functions.

The 'Celestial City' on 'earth' located at Imeko, represents a juxtaposition of sacred space in which *Igbo-Ifa* (the parcel of land on which it is sited was the sacred forest of *Ifa*, Yoruba deity of divination) was usurped and transformed from Yoruba religio-cultural matrix (traditional sacred space) into another sacred space, a Celestial City called 'New Jerusalem' (Cf. Revelation 21: 1-2). Members believe that with the descent of the Celestial City 'from heaven', they have succeeded in chasing out or creating spiritual barricades with the traditional *orisa* and the malevolent powers that hitherto occupied it.

The choice of *Igbo-Ifa* as the Celestial City ... was in agreement with God's word that His own people shall destroy high places of unholy worship ... (Deut. 12: 1-3) ... That place no more belongs to *Ifa* but our Lord Jesus the Christ ... It is God's ordination being designed through man to remind each and everyone of us (Celestians) that this world is not our home, that we have beyond the blue sky a beautiful home ... (Okunlola, p. 15-16)¹¹

This is believed to be modelled and based on the Celestial City above which contains many 'apartments or mansions' (Cf. John 14: 12). "As we have so many apartments to serve various purposes in the 'Celestial City below', so we have in the 'Celestial City above', called Paradise" (Okunlola, p. 17). It has become an extension of "heaven on earth" where members throng to seek spiritual power, healing, security and answers to their various existential problems¹².

It has been shown in this paper that Yoruba cosmology influenced the CCC in the construction and shaping of their sacred space. Both worldviews share the belief in the reality of benevolent and malevolent paranormal forces. The attitudes towards these forces remain essentially the same. What has changed in the case of the CCC is the transformation of what constitutes the benevolent powers on the one hand, and the medium of control of the evil forces on the other. CCC gains access to heaven through prayers, prophecy, visions and dreams, and elaborate rituals within the various sacred space as opposed to divination and sacrifice in Yoruba cultural matrix. Through the performative force of ritual speech and action, the benevolent powers are invoked and attracted to protect members against the machinations of the malevolent forces bent on visiting havoc on human beings. Thus, a bridge is built linking members with the benevolent powers while barricades are

10 See *CCC Constitution*, *ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

11 In my personal interview with Olatunji Akande, Senior Evangelist and Personal Secretary to the Pastor (at the CCC International Headquarters, Ketu-Lagos on September 17, 1996) he points out the import and symbolism of this sacred place when he remarked that "the mere mention of the name 'Celestial City' reminds us (Celestians) that we have no permanent place in this world as such, we must be up and doing in our journey to the 'Celestial City above'.

12 I witnessed the 10th Remembrance Anniversary Memorial service of the Late Pastor S.B.J. Oschoffa held at the Celestial City in October 1995. Here the church authority gave a stern warning to members who were engaged in the removal of *terra cotta* tiles and beach sand from Oschoffa's mausoleum to desist from such attitudes. Such members believe that such objects removed from this sacred ground were charged with potency capable of protecting, curing or healing them.

constructed to ward off the malevolent forces from their sacred space and from contact with members.

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