



EXPLORING THE THEOLOGY OF HEAVEN IN HYMN 696 OF CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST (CCC) AS A LITURGY FOR CONSECRATION AND CONSOLATION AMONG TRAUMATIZED CHRISTIANS

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Abstract

The quest for consolation and hope, particularly in chaotic periods, is a recurring concern in Christian theology and worship. This paper examines the theology of heaven through cultural study of Hymn 696 of Celestial Church of Christ (CCC). The promise of eternal salvation, peace and rest in biblical Prophecies of heaven is placed in dialogue with Hymn 696, a liturgical song that is uniquely inspired within the Yoruba religious-cultural hermeneutical milieu of the CCC. Hymn 696 of CCC provides the primary data. Exegetical and historical-critical method was used in the interpretation of the Hymn. Using cultural hermeneutical framework, the paper reveals how the biblical imagery of God's eschatological triumph resonates with the consolatory function of Hymn 696, which assures believers of divines presence and ultimate rest beyond earthly affliction. It shows that Hymn 696 offers a universal message of eschatological hope, reinterpreting this hope in African Christian context as an immediate source of solace in personal and communal crisis. Bridging biblical eschatology with African liturgical expression, the paper suggests a contextual theology of heaven that is not only a distant eschatological promise but also a lived spiritual resource for resilience, consecration and consolation amid present day social, political and existential crisis.

Keywords: Theology of Heaven, Hymn 696 of CCC, Liturgy, Traumatized, Christians



Introduction

In many countries of the world where Christians are faced with killings, displacement, poverty and cultural clashes, people long for enduring hope and consolation (Bible Hub, 2004). The theology of heaven is a vital impetus for global Christian hope, especially in the context of distress, suffering and chaos. Hymn 696 of Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), which emerged from the African (Yoruba) cosmological world view but grounded in biblical theology and with similar theme of divine comfort and heavenly assurance, offers liturgical consolation and eschatological hope in time of despair. Hence, this paper develops an indigenous theology of heaven that transcends cultural boundaries, offering a model of liturgical consolation in this time of personal, corporate or national crisis. The study reveals that this theology not only preserves the richness of local traditions but also contributes to a global Christian theological discourse of hope, justice and consolation.

Conceptual Exploration of Traumatized Christians and Theology of Heaven

Traumatized Christian communities, as employed in this work, are the groups of believers or congregations who have collectively experienced deep emotional, psychological, spiritual or physical pain due to events that disrupted their faith, security or sense of God's presence. These traumas often result from war, terrorism or persecution, ethnic or religious violence, natural disasters or pandemics, church abuse scandals or leadership betrayal, forced displacement or poverty and loss of members through violence or tragedy. The trauma affects not just individual life, but worship practices and theological outlook (Becky, 2023). Such trauma can appear in several interconnected forms: physical, emotional, spiritual or social. Physical trauma can occur like bodily harm or death suffered by members due to conflicts or disasters as a result of church attack or burned. Emotional trauma has to do with grief, fear or depression affecting the faith communities due to loss of family members in communal clash. Crisis of faith, questioning God's love or justice, asking 'Where is God in our suffering', is a spiritual trauma. Social trauma involves breakdown of trust, community bond or social identity due to displacement of Christians because of violence. From a theological point of view, trauma shakes the core of Christian faith: hope, trust and worship. Members may feel abandoned by God, struggle to worship authentically due to pain or disillusionment and need spiritual comfort and consolation from God's promise of restoration, as observed in Isaiah 25:8-9. This is why contemporary theology must engage trauma theology to help restore faith and worship in Christian communities where pain has distorted the experience of God's presence. In other words, theology and worship can play healing role by reinforcing themes of comfort, hope and restoration, encouraging lament and honest expression of pain before God, promoting collective remembrance and forgiveness, creating restorative liturgies such as prayers, songs and communion, and rebuilding trust in God and in one another. Thus, Hymn 696 of CCC's eschatological message provides a divine model, reassuring traumatized Christians that God's presence is not absent in suffering, and worship can be a channel of healing (Karen, 2023). Examples of traumatized Christian communities are found in Nigeria, where churches in Middle Belt or Northeast are affected by Boko Haram or Banditry. In South Sudan and DR Congo, Christian villages are destroyed in wars; Christian congregations are displaced in Ukraine. Christians are experiencing Post-Genocide trauma in Rwanda, where reconciliation is being sought after national trauma. Post-COVID Christian communities globally are facing loss, fear and isolation (Tania, 2024).

Theology of heaven is the branch of Christian theology that studies the nature, meaning and purpose of heaven as the ultimate destiny of believers and the fulfillment of God's promises. It brings biblical revelation, church traditions together so as to explain what heaven is, why it matters and how it shapes faith and life. Considering its biblical foundation, heaven is described in old testament (psalms 11:4; is 66:1) as God's dwelling place (Brown, 2023). Heaven is also portrayed as the realm of divine sovereignty and holiness. In prophetic texts, like Isaiah 25:8-9, heaven is envisioned as the place where death is swallowed up and sorrow is replaced with joy (Waddle, 2024). In the new testament, heaven is revealed more fully as the eternal home for believers (John14:2-3), the seat of Christ's reign (Hebrew 8:1) and the future reality of the new Heaven and the new Earth (Rev.21-22) where God dwells with humanity (Ramdy 2020). In different cultural settings, heaven is interpreted in many ways that meet the needs of people. African Christianity sees heaven as a place of ultimate peace and freedom from ancestral curses and reunion with loved ones. Liberation theology claims that heaven in spires hope for justice and dignity in the face of opposition. In global theology, heaven is considered intercultural, experienced in symbols, languages, music and rituals across nations of the world. The theology of heaven is not just about 'where we go after death', but it is about the fullness of life in the presence of God, the healing of creation and the eternal fellowship of all believers. It offers consolation in times of suffering, motivation for holy living and hope for the ultimate victory of God's loved ones over death (Greg, 2025).



Historical Origin and Doctrinal Beliefs of Celestial Church of Christ (CCC)

Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) was founded by Samuel Bilewu Joseph Oshoffa (Ayegboyin and Ishola, 1997). He was born a Methodist, served as a ward to a Methodist catechist and finally became a choirmaster in a Methodist Church. He attended a Methodist Primary School but missed narrowly an opportunity to continue his formal education in a Seminary. He received his divine call on May 1947 when he was lost in the forest for three months. He lived like a hermit, depending only on honey, water and praying more fervently in the forest. Oshoffa received God's Direction that he had been chosen as a World-wide Evangelist. The first miracle to confirm his call was performed on his way out of the forest on a young man named Kudiho at Agange, a village near Port-Novo. This man was at the point of death but was healed just by laying of hand. This news traveled to Port-Novo even before he arrived and a lot of people were waiting for him. He likewise raised his nephew from the death and healed as many patients as were referred to him (Ayegboyin and Ishola, 1997). On September 29, 1947 while Oshoffa was meditating with some well-wishers in his house, he witnessed a divine appearance of an angel bathed in intense light standing in front of him. The angel delivered God's message to him which led to his call (Agbaje, 1995). Ayegboyin and Ishola say the Lord used Alexander Yanga who was undergoing spiritual healing to name the Church during his seven days trance as "Celestial Church of Christ." For about thirteen days, Oshoffa could not sleep; he was seeing visions, part of which was the form the church would take. The church spread quickly and witnessed the influx of members from the mission churches into the CCC Port-Novo. After the proclamation of the church through divine revelation, the followers began to identify themselves as Celestians. The rank Pastor was uttered and conferred on Oshoffa by an angel. Another miracle which brought him to limelight was performed at Grand Popo, a town near the border of Benin and Togo. The town was eroded by sea. The divine order asked Oshoffa to request for an egg which represents the earth and a needle, representing the sea. He then pierced the egg with the needle and threw both into the sea. After a short prayer, the sea miraculously receded and stopped at the exact place where the egg had landed (Agbaje, 1995).

Wednesdays and Fridays were chosen for open air services and meditations. This is to avoid clash as the initial members were still going to their churches. These people later left their old churches and Oshoffa started having problems with the colonial government, due to the reports of his antagonist views. Since they could not stop Oshoffa, he was told to register with the Council of Protestant Churches in Dahomey which he declined. In order to ease the tension, Oshoffa left Dahomey for Agange in the Toffin District, where the church expanded to Nigeria through some fishermen who were Celestians. The first Church in Nigeria is Makoko and it is also the Diocesan Headquarters. Oshoffa was escorted to Nigeria by Moses Ajovi on March 3, 1951 and this arrival opened a new chapter in the history of the church (Agbaje, 1995). By 1982, almost every town and village had a parish of Celestial church. The arrest of a Lagos socialite Iyabo Olorunkoya in London for Indian hemp case drew national attention to the church for the first time. She allegedly defied the advice of a CCC prophet and travelled to London. This made people decided to know more about the church and benefit from prophesies, trances and visions of the church prophets. The use of Yoruba language in its worship and liturgical practices offered tremendous attraction to the church. With Oshoffa's charisma and the powerful gift of performing extraordinary miracles, the CCC grew far more rapidly in Nigeria than it had been the case of Port Novo. The church was duly registered under the land (Perpetual Succession) Ordinance, Cap on 24th November, 1958. The CCC established its International Headquarters in 1977 at Ketu in Lagos. Before Pastor Oshoffa died on September 10, 1985 he had worked relentlessly to make the CCC one of the fastest growing churches in the World. Members of the Church claim that they have close to 1600 branches world-wide (Ayegboyin and Ishola, 1997). Rev. S. B.J. Oshoffa, died in the early hours of September 10, 1985 and laid to rest on Saturday, October 10, 1985 in Imeko, Ogun State. They were members of Christian Association of Nigeria and Organization of African Independent Churches (Bada, 1996).

The Doctrinal Beliefs and Practices of CCC

The name of the Church, the tenets and mode of worship, and the service hymns of the Celestial Church are all revealed through the Holy Spirit. There are seven ordinances in the CCC: (i) baptism (ii) Holy Communion (iii) annual washing of feet (iv) annual convocation at Port-Novo now Imeko, Ogun State at Christmas Eve (v) annual Easter congregation at Makoko (vi) annual Harvest thanksgiving service (vii) Holy Mary's day. Good Friday is also important and members are to congregate at Makoko, the national headquarters for the event with fasting (Ajayi, 2015). The Church believes that Jesus Christ is the son of God and has completed the work of redemption. It is based on the Christian creed, the ordination of ministers and the sacraments. They believe in the infallibility of the scriptures as guide to the Kingdom of God and in the Holy Spirit as the enabling power of believers for divine life.



There are five ministries in the Church: pastor, prophet, evangelist, shepherd and teacher. Prophecy is especially important; some are visioners, dreamers or divine voice hearers. Their role is to make known the will of God. The hymns are especially important because they are composed by people inspired by the Holy Spirit. The church observed two sacraments: Holy Communion which is celebrated occasionally, baptism (new members are re-baptized while lay members follow continuous Bible teaching and education) and marriage. They place greater emphasis on holiness and total separation from anything that is considered evil. They believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has established the Celestial Church for the salvation of mankind and to cleanse the world from all satanic influences. To this end, the Church is clothed with enormous spiritual power, and miracles are a common feature (Bada, 1996).

Cornelius Abiodun Olowola is of the opinion that the church had dualistic belief on healing. Some illnesses have natural, physical causes, such as malaria, injuries, colds, appendicitis; others are unnatural and are caused by the spiritual agents of evil. They do not believe that the use of western medicine is against the power of God; hence, they encourage those who are suffering from natural causes to visit the doctors and benefit from modern medicine. The church will excommunicate any member who visit herbalist or use native medicine. Anyone who does this is believed not to have absolute belief in God and is therefore testing him. For spiritual or unnatural illness, the person is advised to come to the church for prayer before seeking medical attention. This is because the evil spirit needed to be driven away before modern medicine can do its work.

Analysis of Hymn 696 in Relation to Consolation for Traumatized Christian Communities

Hymn 696 of Celestial Church of Christ (CCC)

- Stanza 1: E wo Ile wura naa
 T'a pese fun Ijo Mimo
 Ile alayo, Ile ologo
 Ibi isimi ayeraye
- Chr: E mura a, e mura
 E mura fun 'le ologo
 E mura a, e mura
 E mura fun 'le alayo
- Stanza 2: Ipe naa n dun kikan
 Awon Maleka n yo
 Lati pade awon ayanfe re
 To sin pelu ife mimo
- Stanza 3: Eyin omo Ijo Mimo
 E wa ninu Isona
 Opo yi o jogun aye yii
 Yi o si padanu 'joba orun
- Stanza 4: Opo ni a bukun fun
 Ninu Ijo Mimo
 Won yi o jogun aye yi
 Won yi o jogun ijoba orun
- Stanza 5: Eyin egbe akorin
 E di amure yin
 Ka le korin lojo naa
 Nile wura, nile ologo

English Transliteration of Hymn 969 of CCC



1. Behold the house of Gold
That's prepared for Holy church
A house of joy, a house of glory
A place of eternal rest

- Chr: Be prepared, be prepared
Be prepared for the glorious house
Be prepared, be prepared
Be prepared for the house of joy

1. The call is continuous
The Angels are rejoicing
To meet with His beloved people
That worship with Holy love

2. Children of the Holy church (Celestial)
Be fervent and vigilant
Many people will inherit this world
But will lose heavenly kingdom

3. Many have received blessings
In this Celestial church
They will inherit this world
And will also inherit heavenly kingdom

4. All of you choristers
Tighten your loins
So we might all sing on that day
In the house of Gold and glory

Exegetical Analysis of Hymn 696 of CCC

Hymn 696 structurally has five four-line stanzas and the first line *E wo ile wura naa* 'Behold the house of gold' appears to be the foundational unit, the pivotal statement that functions as the theological, poetic and rhetorical center of meaning thereby inviting deeper exegetical exploration. Our text, Hymn 696, begins with imperative *E wo ile wura naa*. Here, the second person plural *E* 'you' functions as the subject of the imperative verb *wo* 'look' or 'behold', having *ile wura naa* 'the house of gold' as the object of the Yoruba sentence. The imperative phrase *E wo* 'behold' is best understood as an appeal, a polite directive and not a harsh command. Thus, the sentence carries a sober pragmatic force that signals respect, courtesy or social distance. *Ile wura* 'house of gold' in this context is used to describe heaven. In traditional Yoruba cosmology, the theology of heaven is rich, but layered, different from the strictly 'heaven vs hell' framework in various Western religious traditions. The traditional Yoruba people understand heaven as a continuum between the visible and invisible realms, rather than a distant, final destination. The general Yoruba name for heaven is *Orun*, which is believed not simply as far away paradise, but the spiritual realm that co-exists with the physical world (*Aye*). The two realms are interconnected and interdependent, not sharply separated (Fabarebo, 2026). To the Yoruba people, heaven is multi-layered, not a single homogenous place: *Orun Rere* (Good Heaven), *Orun Apaadi* (Heaven of Punishment) and *Orun Awon Baba Nla* (Realm of the Ancestors). *Orun Rere* is a realm of peace, harmony and fulfillment where righteous souls and honoured ancestors dwell. *Orun Apaadi*, not exactly 'hell' in the Western sense, is a place of consequence for morally deficient lives. *Orun Awon Baba Nla* is a highly significant 'heaven', where ancestors continue to exist, guide and influence the living (Adejube, 2017). However, the Yoruba Christians align themselves heavily with Biblical heaven, as observed in Hymn 696 of CCC. *Wura* 'gold' is figuratively stands for beauty or something that is precious in Yoruba philosophy. *Ile wura* 'golden or precious house' is prepared for Holy Church as seen in line two. In this context, the church basically refers to Celestial, meaning heavenly or divine. Theologically and linguistically, church represents the body of Christ, a



community of people who believe in and follow Jesus Christ. Heaven, the house of joy, glory and eternal rest, is prepared as inheritance for the consecrated, committed and resilient believers. This accounts for the continuous clarion call to the traumatized Christians to endure trials and persecution as the angels are gladly anticipating to welcome them to their final home, as found in line one and two of stanza two. The Yoruba word Maleka, used in line two, is a cross-cultural linguistic borrowing from Arabic word Mala'ikah (Angel); however, the Yoruba generally refer to Angel as Angeli, which was borrowed directly from English and biblical angel. This typically shows a reflection of the influence of Christianity and Islam on Yoruba thought because in Yoruba perspective and language, the concept of an angel is not originally native. In other word, Maleka is a Yoruba adaptation of Arabic. In stanza three, believers are admonished to be watchful as many Christians can be detrimentally engulfed with worldly pleasure at the expense of their entering into heaven. However, many that are blessed in Celestial Church who can take precaution will inherit the earth and make it to heaven at the eschaton. The choristers, figurative triumphant Christians, are specifically encouraged to prepare themselves so as to replicate their earthly ministry in the kingdom of God.

The Relevance of Hymn 696 of CCC in Modern Global Theology

Hymn 696 of CCC offers a timeless message, transcending religious, cultural and geographical boundaries as addressing universal human experiences. It is a highly significant hymn, especially within the context of consolation, eschatology and hope of eternal life. It stands out in Christendom for its African Linguistic roots, prophetic origin, a cappella style, spiritual warfare focus and liturgical specificity. It embodies the CCC's unique blend of Christianity, prophecy and Yoruba spirituality, making it more than just a song - it is a spiritual tool. Hymn 696 is originally composed in Yoruba, like most CCC Hymns, though it has been translated into English and other languages for broader use. This reflects the enculturation of Christian it in Africa, expressing faith in an indigenous tongue while remaining biblically grounded.

Conclusion

This paper examined the theology of heaven in Hymn 696 of Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), revealing a profound liturgical resource for consecration and consolation, especially within traumatized Christian communities. In such circles marked by series of violence, displacement, socio-political instability, and deep emotional wounds, the hymn functions as more than a melodic expression of hope but serves as a theological anchor that re-orientes believers toward the eschatological promise of divine rest, renewal, and ultimate communion with God. The findings of this work reveal that as a consolatory liturgy, the hymn lifts worshippers into a sacred consciousness where earthly struggles are reframed through the lens of heavenly identity. The picture of eternal joy, divine presence, and the ultimate victory of God over suffering becomes a spiritual purification process which enables believers to recommit themselves to holy living and resilient faith. This consecration is not merely ritualistic, but transformative, empowering Christians to navigate trauma with a renewed sense of purpose and belonging in God's eternal plan. Besides, as a liturgy of consolation, Hymn 696 speaks tenderly to the existential plan of Christians who daily wrestle with loss, insecurity and social fragmentation. Its heaenly vision does not create escapism; rather, it provides a therapeutic theological space where grief is acknowledged, hope is rekindled and divine assurance becomes emotionally restorative. The hymn positions heaven as the ultimate site of joy and everlasting peace. Summarily, the theology of heaven in CCC Hymn 696 offers a holistic framework for spiritual resilience. It harmonizes eschatological expectation with present-day endurance, providing consecration that shapes moral character and consolation that restores the wounded soul. For traumatize Christians, this hymn remains a liturgical bridge between present suffering and future glory, reminding them that their stories are totally held within the redemptive narrative of God's coming kingdom.

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