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CENSING in Worship?

*A Biblical and Historical Narrative of the Use of Incense
in the Worship of the Holy Church*

Moran Mor Athansius Yohan Metropolitan

Faith and Tradition Series

CENSING IN WORSHIP

Faith and Tradition Series

(English)

by

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20 March 2018

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Produced by

Liturgical Commission authorised by the Metropolitan

Published by

Believers Eastern Church Synod Secretariat

St Thomas Nagar, Thiruvalla - 689 103, Kerala, India.

www.bec.org

Printed in India

Price: ₹ 40.00

“O God, who accepted the gifts of Abel,
the sacrifices of Noah and Abraham, the incense
of Aaron and Zachariah, accept from the hands of
us sinners this incense for a sweet fragrance and
forgiveness of our sins and those of all your people.
For you are blessed and to you belongs glory,
to the Father with your only-begotten Son and
your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit,
now and for ever, and to the ages of ages.”

The Divine Liturgy of
James the apostle and brother of the Lord.

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INTRODUCTION



I think it's quite reasonable for me to say that, for the past fifteen years I have diligently given myself to reading, studying and researching on the faith and practice of the early (orthodox) church, leading up to the unfortunate separation of the western church from the east in 1054. Until then, there was only one church which held on to the teaching of the apostles and the orthodox fathers.

The pure orthodox church can be best defined in a single word—worship. If someone were to ask you to describe the Old Testament worship in the tent or the temple, how would you answer them? The

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meticulous detailing of things inside, the incredible colours used, the unbelievable architecture on display, the elaborately designed priestly dress code and the heavenly chanting (as one might hear at the monastery in Athos) all come together to create a feeling of an awesome environment, one charged with the sense of entering into another world. You can describe it as beautiful *worship*.

Thus, for me, worship is not just a man's brilliant lecture from the Bible or a choir singing to entertain an audience, but it is worship of our Holy God, who is the audience.

Reading the following scriptures tells us about the significant elements of this holy, beautiful worship;

Let my prayer be set before You as incense,

The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.¹

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four

elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.²

Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.³

Just because certain religious groups use incense in the worship of their deities, it does not mean that the use of incense should not be part of authentic worship of the true and Holy God. There are also people who say, one can worship without incense. I agree. It is also true that one can worship without using words, wearing clothes or having a building to gather! The point is that we should strive to do the best we can to make our worship both biblical and beautiful.

In this brief book, I seek to explain the meaning and reason why for the last two thousand years, the Holy Church has used

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incense in worship. Believers Eastern Church seeks to make its worship beautiful, by the use of incense as an integral part of worship, for the glory of God.

¹ Psalm 141:2; ² Revelation 5:8; ³ Revelation 8:3–4

CHAPTER ONE

AS IT WAS FROM THE BEGINNING

*The world of relativity has its limits,
the world of imagination is boundless.*

—Jean Jaccques Rousseau, 1712–1778



“Incense in Christian worship? No way!

This is heathen and idolatrous!” This is the thundering and angry response given by many Protestant and evangelical christians, especially those influenced by the western church.

All of us would agree that using some form of incense is common and an integral part of religious ceremonies all over the world.

So, the question is, why does Believers Eastern Church, which claims to be pure

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in faith and truly orthodox, use incense in worship? Are we not also doing what other religions do in their worship? Good question.

I ask for you to please bear with me and read through this booklet with an open mind as we search the Holy Scripture and go back into the two thousand plus years of the Holy Church's faith and worship.

To begin with, let me ask you a question. Have you heard of counterfeit money? Whether in India, Nepal or Europe, all nations face this never-ending crisis of people printing and circulating counterfeit money. I am told that counterfeit money that is created is often so similar to the real one that even the highly trained bank people are sometimes unable to detect them. But the point of what I'm saying is this—an imitation or counterfeit currency note is made only because real money exists!

Imagine that you go to a colony where thousands of people who are affected by a dreaded sickness live. If you had a chance,

you would not even go near them; infact you cannot even stand the sight of these people. But then you notice that they are eating the same rice you eat at home. Would you now say, “I cannot eat rice anymore because those sick people are also eating the same rice?” That would be an absolutely foolish conclusion to make!

If you still are not convinced, let us look at this from a different angle. Just because the followers of other faiths offer prayers and praise in their places of worship, do we as Christians reject prayer and praise in our worship? We don't! Similarly, just because people who hold to a different set of beliefs from us use incense in their worship, should not make us reject the use of incense in worship altogether!

So, what is the point, you ask? Very simple. The use of incense in the worship of God Almighty should not be rejected only because people of other faiths use it.

Incense and Worship in the Scripture

The use of incense in worship has been one of the most common elements in the worship of God throughout human history.

We read in the First Testament (Old Testament) that, the almighty, holy God instructed His people that they must use incense in their worship, and He gave them detailed descriptions on how the incense must be made and how and where they must use incense in their worship of the Holy God.

We see in the book of Exodus that God instructs Moses:¹

You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood.

Take sweet spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, and pure frankincense with these sweet spices; there shall be equal amounts of each. You shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the perfumer, salted, pure, and holy. And you shall beat some of it

very fine, and put some of it before the Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. But as for the incense which you shall make, you shall not make any for yourselves, according to its composition. It shall be to you holy for the LORD. Whoever makes any like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people.²

Later on it's made clear that burning incense was not to be done once in a while, but at least twice a day:

Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it. And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement; once a year he shall

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make atonement upon it throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD.³

This practice which started during the time of Moses, continued during the time of Samuel,⁴ King David⁵ and his son King Solomon.⁶ By the time it was mentioned in the book of Isaiah, the moral situation among God's people became so bad that the prophet sharply rebukes the people who offered only worship externally by saying, "Your incense is detestable to me."⁷ What's more interesting is that the New Testament starts off with the angel Gabriel appearing to Zechariah, the high priest, while he was offering incense in the Temple.⁸

Yet, maybe the strongest reference to the use of incense would be in a prophecy in the book of Malachi, referring to incense being offered in the Messianic Age by everyone:

"My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord."⁹

But wait a minute you say, the verses mentioned above are talking about the worship of the living God by the people of Israel under the Old Covenant. Yes, you are right. But let me ask you again, do you think the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament?

For example, in his vision of God, Isaiah describes how as the angels sang, “Holy, Holy, Holy”, the doors shook and the temple in heaven was filled with incense.¹⁰ Yet, move forward eight hundred years and in the book of Revelation,¹¹ the Apostle John describes how the angels in heaven held bowls full of incense and how the heavenly Temple was filled with incense smoke. Are you surprised to see the same worship pattern is found both in the Old and New Testament? Those who do not think incense is part of worship will be surely in for a surprise when they get to heaven!

A fundamental assumption made by a lot of Christians is that Jesus came to abolish the Old Testament. But Jesus Himself clearly

said:

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”¹²

This false assumption has led some to practice a sharp discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments, while the Holy Church has always seen a strong continuity between the two. This in turn has led many to ignore the Old Testament teachings on worship as *old*. Here I would also like to mention that the use of the words ‘Old’ and ‘New’ has created a misconception; the word old often being understood as referring to something which is no longer relevant. It’s unfortunate that these words are used now, while the early church used the words ‘First’ and ‘Second’ Testament which automatically denotes a continuity, instead of Old and New Testament.

An examination of the gospels also show Jesus’ adherence to the Old Testament pattern of worship. Jesus was in the habit of attending the synagogue services¹³ and

observing the great Jewish festivals at the Temple like the Passover.¹⁴ Like Jews throughout history, Jesus looked forward to the Passover meal.¹⁵ As the Messiah, Jesus Christ took the Jewish forms of worship and filled them with new content and meanings. The early church took the Jewish synagogue and Temple pattern of worship and made them centred around Christ.

The point is, in the worship of the Almighty, we should embrace those elements which help us to worship with our whole being, so long as these elements don't violate or contradict the Holy Scripture. Just because something is not mentioned or commanded in the Second (New) Testament, does not mean that we should not follow the First (Old) Testament instructions—as long as it is not forbidden or taught differently by the apostles or by the holy traditions of the orthodox fathers of the church.

The living God who made us in His image invites us to gather to Him and we are told,

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“In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”¹⁶ And that as we worship Him, gazing upon Him, we are changed into His likeness.¹⁷

While the roadmap of worship is explained to us in the Holy Scriptures, the fundamental aspects of historical Christian worship include three things:

First: *Order*—the reason why the Holy Church from the very beginning embraced liturgical worship. Liturgy is the structural framework, it is shape and design. It is invariable. This is like the blueprint of the building. Order in worship is like the skeleton in the body. If all the bones are taken out of the body, what is left? God is the God of order.¹⁸

Second: It includes *ritual*—where in worship we use our voices to sing, pray and offer our praises, etc.

Third: Often the most important aspects in our worship are the *ceremonial*. This includes

the various things which God Himself tells us in His Word that we must do—such as the celebration of Eucharist, certain gestures like bowing our heads, symbols, crossing oneself, censing, etc. These visible things we do are the means for us to experience the reality of God and worship Him with our God-given senses.

Now let's move onto the subject of the use of incense in our worship in the Holy Church.

Incense in Early Church Worship

Did the early church (especially the church in the first three centuries) use incense in their worship? If so, do we have a record of it? These are perhaps some of the more important questions we must answer based on the early church history.

For the modern mind, after the printing press was invented, *history* is often thought of what is printed with footnotes, or in other words, what has been written down in print.

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But we must remember that, majority of history has been handed down in different ways—sometimes in the form of handwritten documents such as the hand copied Bible texts, etc., inscriptions or drawings found in the caves or catacombs, or sayings or songs which have been passed on. Just to give you an example, we get much of the information as to what the dress code for people during those times was and whether women covered their heads during worship, simply from pictures they drew on the side of the catacombs.

It's also good to keep in mind that the people who made up the first church were all Jewish converts. And it is unthinkable that they changed overnight and threw away all that they knew about worship from the First Testament.

Another crucial piece of history we must keep in mind is the intense persecution the early church had to go through. It was so widespread that if at all the early church, in

some places, did not use incense in worship or make any obvious sounds, signs, smell, etc., it was meant to protect the people of God from being persecuted. Even today, there are countries that I know personally where people have their worship services after midnight, behind closed doors of their homes, with no loud singing or anything that would give any clue that there is a church gathering for worship.

Yet, the Liturgy of St James, the oldest Christian liturgy dating back to the first century church in Jerusalem, contains many references to incense. For example, the prayer of the incense at the beginning is as follows:

Sovereign Lord Jesus Christ, O Word of God, who didst freely offer Thyself a blameless sacrifice upon the cross to God even the Father, the coal of double nature, that didst touch the lips of the prophet with the tongs, and didst take away his sins, touch also the hearts of us sinners, and purify us from every

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stain, and present us holy beside Thy holy altar, that we may offer Thee a sacrifice of praise: and accept from us, Thy unprofitable servants, this incense as an odour of a sweet smell, and make fragrant the evil odour of our soul and body, and purify us with the sanctifying power of Thy all-holy Spirit: for Thou alone art holy, who sanctifiest, and art communicated to the faithful; and glory becomes Thee, with Thy eternal Father, and Thy all-holy, and good, and quickening Spirit, now and ever, and to all eternity. Amen.

Apart from this, the Liturgy of St Mark, used in the Patriarchate of Alexandria and among the Coptic churches, as well the Liturgy of the Blessed Apostles (this liturgy dates back to the third century Edessa and is in use among the Syrian Christians) contains multiple references to incense.

But we know that after freedom for the church was given by Emperor Constantine, from fourth century onwards, there is plenty

of documented proof for the use of incense in church worship. For almost one thousand years, the orthodox faith and practices that the Holy Church held on to and passed on had the use of incense as an integral part of worship.

Until the western church separated from the eastern church, there was only one church; and even then, the practice of using incense continued without any change, even to this day, in the churches that follow the eastern tradition. Then why should we deliberately choose to deny the historical church and its worship?

¹ Exodus 30:1; ² Exodus 30:34–38; ³ Exodus 30:7–10;

⁴ 1 Samuel 2:28; ⁵ 1 Chronicles 28:18; ⁶ 2 Chronicles 2:4;

⁷ Isaiah 1:13; ⁸ St Luke 1:8–11; ⁹ Malachi 1:11; ¹⁰ Isaiah 6:4;

¹¹ Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4, 15:8; ¹² St Matthew 5:17;

¹³ St Mark 1:21, St Mark 3:1, St Mark 6:2; ¹⁴ St Luke 2:41;

¹⁵ St Luke 22:15; ¹⁶ Psalm 16:11; ¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 3:18; ¹⁸ *Come Let us Worship* by Dr K.P. Yohannan Metropolitan, p. 92, 93

CHAPTER TWO

THE MEANING OF INCENSE

*There is boundary to man's passions when they act from feelings;
but none when they are under the influence of imagination.*

—Edmund Burke, 1729–1797



Anyone who cares to study the history of the Holy Church will agree that incense has been used in Christian worship to symbolise both the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit and more importantly, the prayers of the people of God, rising to heaven.¹ Yet, there is so much more that it symbolises.

He Is Among Us

True worship of the church is not something we start or end; but we are joining in the worship that is going on, non-stop in

heaven.² Therefore, when the people of God gather, we must realise that we are entering into the presence of God, especially when we see the altar and the Holy Sacrament of Eucharist, which remind us of the very presence of Christ among His people.

In the First Testament, we find that the children of Israel were led by the presence of God, visibly seen as the pillar of cloud.³ And now when we worship, being invited to enter into God's presence with our whole being (including our five senses), the smoke from the incense helps create the same sense of feeling in us. Incense, rising as a cloud, allows us to visibly engage ourselves using our sense of sight and smell, assuring us that the presence of God is with us. No wonder God instructed His people to use incense; it was to help them to enter into God's world from the earthly realm.

Incense also speaks of the presence of someone who is important or worthy of our attention. In ancient times, incense was

used to sweeten and purify the air before an important visitor, like the ruler of the country, came to visit the community or a family. In our worship, Jesus is not present in flesh; we cannot see Him and touch Him as it was when He lived on earth. But now the aroma of incense reminds us to be aware of His holy presence.⁴

As I mentioned earlier, incense in worship speaks also of the prayers of the people of God.⁵ And without question, incense has become a significant means of symbolising the relationship between the people of God and the throne of God.⁶ It unites the entire people of God.

Knowing God and becoming like Christ⁷ is a continuous journey into the very presence of God, to be transformed by His holy energies. As we continue to experience with our body, soul and spirit, the invisible presence of God through our physical senses, it becomes a way of surrender for us to be changed and to partake of His divine nature.⁸

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Here's something to think about! When the people of God gather to worship, they are doing so at the invitation of God: "My people, gather unto Me."⁹ And as we respond to that invitation and gather to worship the Holy Trinity, we are changed or transformed by our gazing into Him, without *our* efforts.¹⁰ So, involving our five senses in worship—by kneeling, falling prostrate, making the sign of the cross, bowing, smelling the incense (imagining our prayers rising into His presence) and seeing the smoke (the visible cloudlike form of the incense) all helps us to join and experience the heavenly worship along with the saints and angels in heaven.

These visible elements in worship elevates us from the human realm to the eternal world. Now you can begin to see the importance of incense and other visible things we do to enter into God's presence. While living on earth, we are now able to enter into His holy presence through these God-ordained means, and by His invisible means of grace, be transformed inside out to become more

like Him whom we worship.¹¹ It is God responding to change us by the Holy Spirit in response to our obedience in doing what is pleasing to Him.

No wonder you hear so many testimonies from history, where during the worship service, the use of incense has helped people not only to physically feel the presence of God, but also to quieten their hearts to worship God and shut out all other worldly voices that often distract them from concentrating in the worship service.

Mystery Revealed

It is important to understand that all of God's dealing with us humans is a mystery. It is beyond our natural human understanding. For example, when Jesus told the paralysed man to get up and walk, the Pharisees (the religious, logic-oriented, literal theologians) could not handle it. So Jesus responds by asking a question—"Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven [invisible],' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed

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and walk [visible]?”¹² Do you get the point? This man was sick and dying due to sin, and for Jesus to speak healing into his life, it included the forgiveness of his sins. But the Pharisees could not see the sacred invisible part of the command—so Jesus had to spell out—“Your sins are forgiven.”¹³

So is the case with using incense in worship of the Holy Church. Human logic and reasoning often cannot figure it out. But as we enter into the mystery of God we realise that it is beyond our own logic and reasoning, which is bound by time and space. So when we say the censing is the prayer of His people going up to heaven, it should be understood as part of a mystery that our minds don't quite understand. There we say, “Let God be true and every man a liar.”¹⁴

Just as the bread and wine are elements we use for the Eucharist, incense is another element that helps us to enter into the mystical realm of God and worship Him.¹⁵ The bottom line is this: We are human beings living in the flesh in this fallen world,

and things that God instituted to help us to worship Him has to do with His invitation to involve our whole being, all our senses in entering into worship. And incense without doubt is a sacred element that helps us to enter into a spiritual atmosphere through our sense of smell and sight. This is part of sacramental life; that is all our life belongs to Him. All activities reflect we are living this life of *theosis*.¹⁶

We Are God's Incense

St Paul says that we are God's incense—His gift, both to Himself and to the world.¹⁷

St Paul applies the metaphor to us Christians, when he says that we are the aroma of Christ unto God. During worship, the altar and the elements used for service are censed to purify it as they are holy. But it does not end there; the one who does the censuring walks through the aisle (or the center of the church) and censes the entire congregation, to symbolise that the people of God are holy. In other words, we cense the faithful because we

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acknowledge the fact that they are made in the image of God,¹⁸ being transformed into the likeness of Christ¹⁹ and because they are the temples of the Holy Spirit.²⁰

In response, when censed, the faithful make the sign of the cross, reminding themselves of these realities and that they are in a process of becoming more and more like Christ, by partaking in His divine nature.²¹

So, when we worship, we cense the altar, all the elements which help us in worship and the people of God, knowing that the living God is the audience and our object of worship. The use of censing, unites heaven and earth in worship.²² True worship is the coming together of the transient with the imminent and church triumphant with the church on earth, to worship the One who sits on the throne. With the many symbols, rituals and actions, our very life is elevated into a higher plane of worship. The censing, the sweet smell and smoke all make this real for us and helps to enter into authentic worship.

Finally, it is absolutely important for us to understand that worship is not merely a mental exercise. It is meant to involve our whole being, all our senses. The detailed description for worshipping God handed down to His people is clear evidence of this.²³ There, as we read in the book of Revelation, worship is seen in dozens of physical manifestations including: falling prostrate, raising hands, singing, censuring and so on. So let us acknowledge that this is our God-given privilege to express our worship and prayer to Him in a way for us humans to enter into the mystical world of worship along with the saints and angels in heaven.

¹ Exodus 30:34–38, Psalm 141:2, St Luke 1:10, Malachi 1:11, Revelation 8:3–4, ² Isaiah 6, Revelation 4, 5; ³ Exodus 13:22, Exodus 40:34, St Luke 9:34–35, Acts 1:9; ⁴ Ephesians 5:2; ⁵ Psalm 141:2, St Luke 1:10; ⁶ Revelation 8:3–4; ⁷ Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18; ⁸ 2 Peter 1:4; ⁹ Genesis 49:10; ¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:18; ¹¹ 2 Peter 1:4; ¹² St Mark 2:9; ¹³ St Mark 2:5; ¹⁴ Romans 3:4; ¹⁵ Revelation 8:3–5; ¹⁶ 2 Peter 1:4; ¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 2:15–16; ¹⁸ Genesis 1; ¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 3:18; ²⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:19; ²¹ 2 Peter 1:4; ²² St Matthew 18:20; ²³ Exodus 26, Exodus 30:7–10, Leviticus 1

CHAPTER THREE

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES OF CENSING

Imagination is the eye of the soul.

—Joseph Joubert, 1754–1824



Censer or thurible is the instrument used for burning incense in Christian churches. The censer used in Believers Eastern Church belongs to the tradition of the Antiochian See of the Holy Church. It has two portions, an upper and lower portion, suspended by four chains which has 72 beads on them. There is a bowl inside the censer which contains the burning charcoal and the incense is placed on top of this. Incense (a sort of tannin taken from a tree found in the Middle East) then burns to

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produce an aromatic, white smoke which rises up. Censing is the practice of swinging the censer towards something so that the smoke from the burning incense goes in that particular direction.

As one does the act of censing, it would be good to remember the symbolic meanings behind it.

- The top portion of the censer indicates heaven and the lower portion refers to earth.
- The incense itself, in the Christian tradition, represents priesthood.
- The burning charcoal in the bowl represents the Holy Spirit.
- The unburned charcoal in the lower portion of the bowl represents the human sinful situation.
- The smoke which rises from the burning of the incense represents the prayers of the faithful rising up to the heavens.¹

- The white smoke rising from incense also denotes the purity and peace of God.²
- The fragrance of the incense has a spiritual meaning—that a believer should spread the fragrance of love and goodness while faced with difficulties and painful experiences in Christian life. In fact, the early church had even accepted the fragrance and its medicinal effect.
- According to the Scriptures, offering of incense speaks of God’s glory, power and holiness.

The ‘how to’ of Censing

- Placing the incense on top of the burning charcoal inside the censer is a privilege given only to a priest. This is because incense always represents priesthood.
- The main celebrant (an episcopa/bishop or priest) is the one to add the incense to the burning charcoal within the censer during every service. If a priest is the

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main celebrant while an episcopa is also present, the priest should take blessing from the episcopa before adding incense into the burning charcoal.

- Once the incense is added, the censer may be handed over to the responsible person to do the censing. When the metropolitan is the main celebrant, a priest or deacon father should do the censing. When an episcopa or priest is the chief celebrant, a deacon father or lay leader may do the censing.
- When the censer is handed over by the main celebrant to the one who does the censing, the one receiving should receive it with both hands.

Occasions During Which Censing Is Done

Censing is done during the Divine Liturgy, the celebration of the Holy Communion, church building dedications, dedication

of a residence, shop or other buildings, ordinations, blessing of the Holy Myron, unction for the sick, etc.

In the above mentioned liturgical services, incense should be placed on top of the burning coals inside the censer during adoration of the Holy Trinity (kauma), reading of the gospels, prayers—the promeon and sedra and the proclamation of the Nicene Creed.

- At the start of the Sunday liturgy, censing is done by the chief celebrant facing the altar or thronos: first on the right side of the altar, then on the left side and lastly in the middle.
- Later, the censing is done facing the congregation: first on the right side (men's side), then in the middle followed by on the left side (women's side). After that is done, the one who does the censing turns (clockwise) again to face the altar, continues the censing.

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- At the beginning of the adoration of the Holy Trinity (kauma) and during the beginning part of the recital of the Nicene Creed, the chief celebrant may do the censing before handing it over to the lay leader. On all other occasions, the chief celebrant only places the incense on the burning charcoal, while the one assisting does the censing.
- Since the worshipping community is one with the body of Christ, they are worthy to receive the incense. As a sign of respect for the congregation, the lay leader or deacon father while doing censing facing them, bows before them acknowledging that they are the royal priesthood.³
- When the Gospel is being read, the one who does the censing should remain on the right hand side of the chief celebrant. He may continue censing facing the chief celebrant.
- When the Nicene Creed is recited, the person assigned to do the censing

should receive the censer from the chief celebrant and go down through the middle of the church, censing the congregation, the people of God, till the main entrance. Then he may return to the altar and continue the censing till the reciting of the Creed is over.

- When the person who is assigned to do the censing brings the censer near to the congregation, the people of God bow and receive it in respect.

Required Instruments for the Censing and Its Maintenance

- The various elements and instruments used for censing: the censer, incense, spoon, charcoal, tongs, etc. should be kept clean at a particular place assigned for it.
- Preparation of charcoal: charcoal should be prepared at least two hours before the service begins. In order to prepare it, first light a wick which has been dipped in oil inside the charcoal. Then dry coconut

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shells are placed around the flame. When the shell is half burned, cover it with a lid. Make sure that when it is burned, it does not turn to ashes. The flame should not be put out by pouring water on it. The charcoal left behind should not be thrown into a dust bin or on the ground. It should be covered under the sand.

- Cleaning of censer: the censer may be cleaned regularly using tamarind or husk. They are the best for getting maximum fragrance and smoke. These items are usually available in Christian bookshops or ordinary condiment (ayurvedic herbal) shops.

¹ Psalm 141:2; ² Isaiah 6:4, Revelation 8:4–5, 15:8;

³ 1 Peter 2:9–10

SUMMARY POINTS

You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.

—Mark Twain, 1835–1910



One: We acknowledge the whole Bible (66 books) as the full revelation of God. It is divided into First (Old) Testament and Second (New) Testament. The sacred worship of the Holy God described in His Word, whether First Testament or Second Testament, must be taken seriously.

Two: The use of censuring in worship is found in heavenly worship, as seen in the worship of the people of God in the First Testament and the worship described in the book of Revelation in the Second Testament.

Censing in Worship

Therefore, it is only reasonable that we incorporate censing in our worship.

Three: We don't start worship when we come to church. Worship is going on for eternity past¹ and we are joining in the worship along with the saints in heaven and all the angels, archangels, etc. The use of censing is part of the worship in heaven and we do it to reflect the link we have with the invisible church in heaven.

Four: Holy traditions that are handed to us by the apostles and orthodox fathers of the Holy Church includes the use of incense in worship; therefore we do it to symbolise the fact that we are part of the ancient church which is more than two thousand years old.

Five: The very atmosphere of the other world—the smell of the fragrance of incense, the cloudlike smoke rising from the burning of the incense, all reminds us that we are in the presence of Holy God and His saints. Therefore, we as a church, practice this as one of the ineffable elements in true worship.

¹ Isaiah 6

