

## **Exploration of the Predominant Determinants of Ecclesiastical Architecture in Nigeria**

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## **Exploration/Appraisal of the Predominant Determinants of Ecclesiastical Architecture in Nigeria**

### **Abstract**

As ecclesiastical architecture transformed from one style to another, a number of factors were identified to have influenced their development and many studies argued that one determinant or the other should predominate. Among these determinants five of them that influenced the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria were explored. These determining factors were classified as Existing Building Materials and Current Architectural Style, Basic Theology and liturgy, Free Expression of Styles and the Knowledge of the “Masters”, Moving with Time Like Evangelical Way, and finally Church Building is Heresy and Apostasy. As this study is theoretical and historical in nature, qualitative methods were employed to gather the data and the data were analyzed by description. This study found out that all these determinants were prevalent at different times during the three phases of the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. Two or more of these factors were identified determinants during the same phase. This study concluded that no particular factor predominated throughout the three phases of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Exploration, Predominant Determinant, Ecclesiastical Architecture , Nigeria

### **Introduction**

The process of the evolution of styles in ecclesiastical architecture was not without some difficulties as many conflicting interests attempted to predominate at different times. It was noted that the emergence of Christian worship centre determinant began with the requirement for functional spaces and the solution was found in Catacombs. They consisted of several underground galleries and chambers in a rectangular or grid plan with “Loculi” (recesses) which were cut in the walls, one above another, to receive the corpses with other spaces existing for circulation. Further development led to the adoption of secular basilicas for worship after which in 313AD Constantine and his Church planners needed an architecture that had meaning in the Roman world and any totally new architectural form would not have been as effective as the forms that carried that meaning (Hopkins, 1995; Fletcher, 1996). As a result ecclesiastical basilica thereafter emerged.

Consequently, many styles evolved borrowing from the precedence of earlier styles until the idea of modern architecture was muted. The precursors of modern ecclesiastical architecture

thought of making progress as a sign of development because as it was perceived, each epoch was expected to express its own time. There was also the loss of confidence in the previous traditions and some of the theories that supported them. From period to period, different characteristics of the church buildings showed some significant changes that made them epochal and were influenced by a number of predominant determinants. At some points in trying to differentiate one style from the other, there arose this long standing attempt to classify ecclesiastical architecture generally into styles by morphological characteristics in terms of periods, techniques, forms and materials (Palmes, 1975).

Many stakeholders in ecclesiastical architecture began to agitate for factors that should be predominant to consider in the design of the church buildings. Adeboye (2009) identified from a number of studies five major classifications of these factors that should be predominant considerations in the design and construction of church buildings. The study showed that they included the existing building materials and current architectural style, theology with liturgy, free expression of style exhibited by architecture “masters”, emerging denominations, and the notion that erecting church buildings could be considered as heresy and apostasy. Adeboye (2009) also identified three phases of the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. This study explored these five predominant determinants with a view to identifying how they have affected the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. Since this study is predominantly a theoretical research and historical in nature, qualitative methods in form of literature, unstructured interview and non-participant observation were adopted in gathering the data and analysis was done by description.

## **2.0. Review of Literature**

Eldar (2001), Fairchild (2007), Stroik (1997) Loosley (2008) and Shawnee (2005) are among many studies that have considered the factors of predominant determinants that have contributed to the forms and shapes of ecclesiastical architecture. The studies showed that as every Christian organization, be it Church, Mission or Ministry, determines how the church building should look like. Those studies noted that the church buildings should depend on but not limited to those factors as Winston Churchill (1874-1965) once noted that people shape their environment and afterwards their environment shape them as architecture has a profound effects on our lives..

## **2.1. Existing Building Materials and Current Architectural Style**

Eldar (2001), Dietsch (2002) and Garkavenko (2014) noted that the materials and the styles developed at a particular time or period should be given free expression of that time and period because it was identified that the design of many of the churches, monasteries, convent and shrines that marked sites associated with the earliest years of Christianity, was influenced by the existing building materials and methods with the styles current at the time of construction, as much as by the religious tradition of the individual Christian community. The studies advocates that this tradition should continue and they observed that differences in geographical location afforded the opportunity of variety of building materials and styles practised at that time of locations. For example, Western churches styles tended to have open high altar and the Eastern churches placed the altar behind an iconostasis. It was noted that in the early 1920s, the first British governor of Jerusalem made it a city ordinance to face all building in stone, even the public toilets.

Garkavenko (2014) also observed that innovations of a series of material was the beginning of civilization and that it made sense that the history of architecture was also deeply engrained in technological developments of all times. Before the Great Schism of 1054 the Church was united in determining the characteristics of their buildings because the architecture was logically influenced by the Roman art because the ruins of Roman buildings provided the quarry for materials (Fletcher, 2001). Dietsch (2002) too noted that ecclesiastical architecture constantly evolved to reflect the accomplishments of civilizations in all corners of the world as it records the cultural, social, religious, and political ambitions in three dimensions. Each building represents the era in which it is built as the understanding of the symbolic meaning has related to the structure and style to a particular period in history.

## **2.2. Basically Theological and liturgical**

Huyser-Honig (2007), Torgerson (2007) noted that church building should not visually convey a message that contradicts the theology of communion or mass of a Church as its architecture and sanctuary design could inhibit or enhance a more full and communal Eucharist celebration. Fairchild (2007) also observed that at various times that many branches and denominations of Christian Church existed, no single type of church building predominated because the people adopted different religious traditions based on their theology and liturgy. Some Christians worshipped with little ceremony, some with elaborate ritual; some made use of statues and paintings, some did not. Thus, churches varied in appearance, having been planned to suit one

or another kind of religious practice dictated by its theology. Haft (2004) also observed in examining the power of religion in architecture and culture that religious heritage is not only the faiths and traditions passed down through the generations but also the magnificent artistic and architectural works that embody them. So, theology should be the ultimate of expression in the church design.

Mackertich&Mackertich (2001) noted Mies van der Rohe's perception which supports this claim that building a factory in form of a temple or vice versa is to lie and disfigure the landscape as each building ought to express its own theology. In considering the aspect of church architecture during the Gothic era, man's desire to detach himself from earthly matters and approaching God was a force that made him to create structures of lightness because knowledge, intuition and faith were fused to create the material expression of an idea through man's genius (Padey, 2004). Walker (2002) noted that the religion in Australia cried for symbols, which were to express theology, in ecclesiastical architecture (Padey, 2004). Any church that is interested in proclaiming the gospel must also be interested in its architecture because, year after year, the architecture of the church has a way to proclaim a message that either augments the preached word or conflicts with it (Bringink and Droppers (1995).

Barrie (2001) too agrees that all buildings, both secular and religious, are powerful meaningful cultural artifacts that embody a society's values and beliefs. Whitlock (2001) noted in examining the writing of Van der Laan, an architect turned Benedictine monk, that architecture is an intermediate space between earth and the heavens and referred to this liminal space as "the datum of architecture." Catholic Encyclopedia (2005) observed too that spaces have theological symbolic meanings. The theology of any space could perhaps define the functional requirement and the requirement in turn determines the function as in what makes nave different from lectern, altar or narthex, for example, is simply theology. Plan forms have a way of symbolizing spirituality. An architectural space has both form and function and in both, it represents values and also houses aspirations and as a great dynamic space with its shape and rhythms the dynamism can be seen (Eller, 2006).

### **2.3. Free Expression of Styles and the Knowledge of the "Masters"**

There is also this school of thought that observed that the opportunity should be given to each region or country to express their aspirations and desires which considered geological, climatic, social, historical and geographical locations. Stroik (1997) noted that the Church should not adopt

any particular style of art or architecture as her own rather, the style of the times from every race and country should be given free scope in the Church, provided it exhibits the reverence and honour due to the sacred buildings and rites.

The paper noted that the opinion that the reductivist buildings commissioned for Roman Catholic worship could have been the direct corollary of Church teaching, modern liturgical studies and contemporary theology may after all be that of the educated observers only. It concluded that current architecture of the church should not merely be the child of modern theology but should also be a child of the “masters” of Modernism like Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto, Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright

#### **2.4. Moving with Time Like Evangelical Way**

Some other studies observed that the design of church building should move with the trends. Kilde (2005) noted that the socio-economic and technological changes in the United States contributed to the rejection of the tradition of basilicas and central plans in church designs and that the development of the radical shift in evangelical Protestant and Pentecostal architecture with changes in worship style and religious mission influenced this rejection.

Sovik (1973) noted that a theology of adaptability should be adopted like the Pentecostals and that the church building should become a ‘community service center.’

Although this concept might be difficult to achieve in Mega-Churches one important theological expression of modern Pentecostal churches is the shift toward making the church more than a place of worship as many churches focus their architecture to revolve around families (Shawnee, 2005). On the other hand, Shawnee (2005) advocates the theology of identity by explaining how worship is a critical part of most Pentecostal churches and this worship includes the music, prayer, message, and offering.

#### **2.5. Church Building is Heresy and Apostasy**

Many studies are of the line of thought that flamboyant church buildings should not be encouraged and that the Church has no business erecting church buildings because this constitute theological heresy and apostasy as the Bible did not assign such responsibility to the Church. Strom (2004) noted that church buildings are not in the Bible and that they were another invention of man. When the Church began to slowly give way to apostasy and deception that church buildings

evolved. The study concluded by advocating a wall-less open-air church as church building did not appear until apostasy and deception crept in.

Loosley (2003) too observed that the early church possessed no buildings and carried on its work for a great many years without erecting any. Snyder (2003) noted that the church's greatest period of vitality and growth until recent times was during the first two centuries. The synagogues were never "Christian" buildings but they were part of the Jewish system. It has been argued that the theological significance of places of worship is an acquired quality that a church building is not the essential basic element in Christian worship (Cunningham, 1999).

### **3.0. Findings and Discussion**

Despite the presence of more than one Mission established Church in form of denominations in Nigeria during the first phase of ecclesiastical architecture development, the period was characterized by Gothic style with its usual strong focus on verticality, pointed arches, rib vaults, flying buttresses, large stained glass windows, ornaments and pinnacles. There was no precedence to borrow from except the knowledge acquired at the country from which the Missions came from. Major construction works, materials and financing relied heavily on foreign input as building materials had to be imported. The imported building materials and the Gothic style that were still being celebrated in ecclesiastical circle long before this period in other parts of the world found expression in the buildings. Gothic became the most celebrated and was arguably the most spiritual style that brought theology and liturgy to elevate the soul of man towards his God. Gothic was considered to fulfill the aspirations of the Church theology and liturgy and at the same time celebrating the materials with the style current at that time.



Plate 3.1. Holy Trinity Church, Ebute Ero, Lagos (1912-1929) Exterior view showing the tower and Gothic windows Source: Field work in 2005

The second phase of ecclesiastical architecture development witnessed a gradual transformation of the church buildings because of indigenization of the leadership of the Churches and the evolution of African Independent Churches with the early formation of Pentecostal Churches. While theology and liturgy were still given expression, free expression of style and the knowledge of the “Masters” were beginning to manifest. As some cinema houses, warehouses, disused houses, uncompleted buildings, hotels, multi-purpose halls, open spaces and any possible adoptable spaces became worship centres, ecclesiastical architecture drifted also to towards moving with time like the Evangelicals. The Anglican and the Catholic church buildings still had a flavor of Gothic because of their affiliation with their parent body in Europe.



Plate 3.2: Dominican Chapel, Ibadan, Oyo, Nigeria Source: Field work in 2014  
The form of the chapel structure is a lot of symbolism and architectural abstractionism

The third phase witnessed unprecedented exhibition of free expression of style with adoption of the knowledge of the “Masters” and complete moving with time. As Church growth and gospel teaching became the main focus of the Church, the church buildings in form of lecture theatre and long span emerged looking like either a lecture theatre or an industrial building. The identity of some buildings without the cross sign on them could be mistaken for commercial, industrial or any other public buildings. Some structural elements had to be introduced for theological meanings.



Plate 3.3: The Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM) Headquarters, Gbagada, Lagos State 2005-2011  
Source: Field work in 2014

#### **4.0. Conclusion**

This study concluded that all the five determinants were exhibited in the three phases of the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria but at different times. Not one of these factors was identified as a sole determinant during the same phase as two or more combined to form the style of ecclesiastical architecture. This study concluded that no particular determining factor entirely predominated alone throughout the three phases of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria.

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