

## CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE

### IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF SOME SELECTED CHURCH BUILDINGS

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#### ABSTRACT

As each epochal period of ecclesiastical architecture manifested its own characteristics to exhibit its own time, this study investigated the characteristics of modern ecclesiastical architecture in Nigerian between 1980 and 2010 with a view to identifying how the previous epochal period transformed to the period under study. The study area was Lagos State in Nigeria because of a number of reasons. The area pioneered the emergence and development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigerian and arguably the cradle of Christian evolution and growth in Nigeria. It is one of the Christian religious cities in the world having a long history of Independent African Churches. Since this study is historical in nature qualitative research methods were adopted to gather data and also for the analysis. Three Church facilities were selected for this study through random sampling spread across the study area. The study discovered that the period was characterized by high increase in church building stock, functionality and simplicity inspired the designs, creative open floor plans were adopted, materials usage was honest as they were not hidden, roofs had bold lines, windows were primarily for ventilation and lighting and established materials were blended with new materials and new technologies. It noted that there was a departure from the characteristics of the early period in Nigeria. The study concluded that this outcome could form a basis for assessing the characteristics of the future epoch.

**KEYWORDS:** Characteristics, Modern Architecture, Ecclesiastical Architecture, Nigeria

#### INTRODUCTION

The emergence of modern ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria is not without a route in some influencing factors that have built up over one and a half centuries ago. Ecclesiastical architecture has to do with the religious architecture in connection with the Church. Some terminologies have been ascribed to the word Church at different times like Mission and Ministry. Some are denominational and some are interdenominational. Adeboye (2009) noted in a study of the trends in ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria that the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria has transcended three phases starting with the early period where most of the Churches were foreign established. The second phase was as a result of transformation to indigenization of the leadership of the Churches and the beginning of the emergence of African Traditional Churches while the third phase became the period of evolution of indigenous Pentecostals and African Traditional Churches with Pentecostal Churches taking the lead. The architecture of each period showed different significant characteristics in an attempt to showcase its own epochal time. The first phase which was the early period was between 1845 and 1930, the second phase was between 1930 and 1980 and the third phase spanned between 1980 and 2005. This period between 1980 and 2005 could then be classified as the modern ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria.

The main objective of this study was to identify the characteristics of modern churches in Nigeria. This becomes important because it will help to identify the transformational characteristics of the previous epochal periods to the modern period with a view to identifying the transformation period. As this study is explorative, qualitative and historical in nature, the data were collected by qualitative methods using fieldwork non-participant observations in case study, some literatures were reviewed and unstructured interviews were conducted to collect the data. Three church facilities that were constructed during the period under the study were selected for this study. The choice of the facilities was based on random sampling and the spread across different major denominations that contributed to the development of modern ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. Analysis was done by descriptive method. In this study, the word Church and church appeared and the meaning should not be misinterpreted. The word Church with capital “C” refers to the body of Christ while the church with first small “c” is meant by the ecclesiastical building.

Lagos was the study area because of a number of reasons. Lagos State is described as the cradle of Christian evolution and growth in Nigeria (Anderson, 2002; Adekunle, 2007). The early Church Missionary Societies made several attempts to enter Nigeria and could not but eventually record its first success into Nigeria through the town Badagry in 1845. From there, they proceeded to other parts of the country (Hildebrandt, 1981). Pioneering ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria, the study area had the first church building erected in Badagry in 1845 (Hildebrandt, 1981; Akinsemoyin and Vaughan-Richard, 1976; Freeman, 2006). Lagos State could be considered the best place to carry out this type of study because it is arguably one of the most Pentecostal and perhaps Christian religious cities in the world having a long history of Independent African Churches (Anderson, 2002).

The nature of Lagos, being one of the metropolitan mega cities, gives an impetus to the flourishing of the spread of religious activities particularly Pentecostalism, as it constitutes a major impact in the development of modern ecclesiastical architecture and Pentecostalism is considered an urban phenomenon (Anderson, 2003). The structure of Lagos which is cosmopolitan in nature accommodates the influence of every Nigerian tribe (Census 2006).

## STUDY AREA

Lagos State is one of the states in the south-western part of Nigeria with an estimated population of 9,019,534 (2006 census) covering an area of 3,577 square kilometres with twentytwo per cent (22%) of the coverage as lagoons and creeks.



**Source:** Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia

**Plates 2.1 & 2.2: Location of Lagos State**

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The historical process that led to the emergence of modern ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria could be compared with the movement in modern architecture which had no biological nature of certainty to happen and impossible to avoid. It had no clear beginning that could be pinpointed with specific precision. Modern ecclesiastical architecture emerged after the evolution of modern architecture. It has been observed by many authors that the quest for modern architecture was as a result of a number of disposing causes and strands of ideas (Curtis, 1987; Mallgrave, 2005; Benevolo, 1972). It all began with this idea of making progress as a sign of development because 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 because many new ideas began to emerge. Industrial revolution also had its own influential toll which supplied new materials and provided new methods of construction in form of new solutions and new patronage. New problems that evolved suggested new forms and there was an attempt, by many of the precursors, to destroy the existing works of art (Curtis, 1987 and Benevolo L, 1972).

Fletcher (1996) observed that before modernism, each style of ecclesiastical architecture relied on the preceding style for development as each age of church development inevitably modified the art it inherited in its effort, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, to express the outlook of that age. Thus, one style generally evolved from the preceding by a series of gradual changes. The ripple effects of fragmentations of the Church into different denominations at various times produced another new ecclesiastical architecture. Disputes and differences between the Eastern and Western Churches of 1054, the Reformation of 1529 and Pentecostalism of 1900 were examples. Each style showed its distinct characteristics and determinants which were usually more than one and the characteristics determined the identity of each style. As the characteristics began to change, the style developed into another one. Each style exhibited its own factors of predominant characteristics and factors of determinants even when these factors were similar to those of other styles. The characteristics of each style reflected in the building forms (plan, structure, and elevation), materials and internal arrangements and decorations of the building. The factors of determinants were in form of spatial needs, sociological (identity), religious tradition (liturgical and theological), historical, political, climatic, geological and technological.

Nigeria is no exception in this quest for modern ecclesiastical architecture as Colonial and Brazilian labour force pioneered the modern movement in construction industry in Nigeria and the Church was one of the first patrons. Godwin (2005) and Adeboye (2014) noted that the early Churches in Nigeria were initially dominated by foreign established missions from Europe as indigenous ones were yet to evolve. Gothic style, for a long time, dominated the landscape during that period and it was characterised by its usual strong exhibition of verticality, pointed arches, rib vaults, flying buttresses, large stained glass windows, ornaments and pinnacles (Scott, 2006; Branner, 1961). Construction methods, expertise and financing relied heavily on foreign supply with little or no local input. Construction materials were imported and the church buildings were more of foreign monuments rather than the current industrial or make-shift. Nigerian cultural, geographical, geological, climatic, existing religious and social factors were not major considerations in the design at the beginning. The characteristics of those early church buildings were significantly at variance with the current trends (Hildebrandt, 1981; Freeman, 2006).

Adeboye (2014) observed that the first transformation of ecclesiastical architecture was noticed around 1930 as against the early period which was characterized by Gothic designs imported from Europe. Godwin (2005) also observed that the early periods of transformation was the period of Nigeria political transition from colony to sovereignty. This could be considered as a period of graduating from political dependence to independence, which started after the acceptance of the principle of self-determination by the colonial power. It was also noted that globalization influence had always remained a factor that could not be ignored in development because if a country had to be influential in world affairs she had to understand the need for interdependence and how to interact with her neighbours worldwide.

By 1954, it was becoming obvious that the dramatic changes which were leading to an independent Church were being actualized. It was all about training-local manpower which could develop nationhood which was eventually agreed to be 1st October 1960. Thus, Nigeria began to move from Dependence to Independence which brought about indigenization in the Church administration. By the late 1940's already the transition to more advanced building construction in most ecclesiastical buildings had commenced, but the technology was largely foreign and inspired by construction in other tropical countries. By this time the Church had already thought of expanding its mission work to Lagos from Badagry which was a stable environment where construction could flourish. Afro-Brazilians became the backbone of the building industry in Nigeria and master mason and craftsmen were able to build some of the churches like the Lagos Catholic Cathedral in 1897 (Akinsemoyin, and Vaughan-Richards, 1976). All these early church buildings were mainly Catholic and Anglican denominations as Pentecostal and African Independent Churches were still unknown in Nigeria ecclesiastical architecture vocabulary.

Anderson (2002) noted that the process that led to modern ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria began with the development of second phase Church theology and liturgy derived from interactions between indigenous Pentecostal forms called the *Aladura* and, foreign denominational Pentecostal Churches from the United States of America (the Faith Tabernacle) and Britain (the Apostolic Church). Indigenous churches such as the Christ Apostolic Church (C.A.C) and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). This second phase of Church development witnessed the activities of interdenominational campus Fellowships. The Deeper Life Christian Ministry was a product of this phase, which was also characterized by an evangelistic fervor. Church of God Missions established by Benson Idahosa and The Living Faith Church by David Oyedepo were other examples. These and other Pentecostal churches of this period became increasingly intolerant not only of the mainline churches, which were considered 'cold' but also of the *aladura* churches for accommodating elements of traditional African religions. This phase encouraged house fellowship meeting places for congregations (Gaiaya, 2002).

Due to migration from other churches, modern Church carved a niche for itself as a religion of the lower and middle classes, as an urban phenomenon as it usually spreads from the urban to the rural areas. It is a movement that appealed more to the youth and women than to older men because in many Pentecostal congregations, women constitute up to two thirds of the total membership (Gaiya, 2002). Another observation about Pentecostalism and African Traditional Churches was their ability to provoke parallel reforms in other religious traditions. This has caused the growth of the Catholic Charismatic movement but more remarkable was the fact that even Muslim youth groups in southern Nigeria were becoming 'charismatic'. The NASFAT (NasirLahrFathi), for instance, organized night vigils, prayer camps, fasting, and prescribed rituals similar to those of Pentecostals (Bediako, 2000).

Adeboye (2014) observed that while the early Catholic and Orthodox/Protestant Churches were observed to attach liturgical and theological meanings to their architecture the modern Churches focus on worship of God with their architecture as mere shelter against environmental effects with visual connection and acoustic comfort. The early Catholic and Orthodox churches, for example, used the carvings around the entrance to announce the holiness of the sacred space inside but their modern churches have changed. The aisle was to draw one to the altar and the pews on either side was the gangway of a ship carrying worshippers to God. The altar, the holy heart of the building, was situated in a separate and sacred space. Anderson (2002) and Gaiaya (2002) noted that the modern churches are particularly attracted to the auditorium and theatre types of plan layout because of their scientific claims to acoustical and visual correctness, as well as the belief that the form of a building should be determined by its function. The development in other Churches manifested in the modification of altar, tabernacle and sanctuary which was a commonplace, and often a pulpit or baptismal font replaced the altar as a focal point. In fact, evolution of austere Churches often began to resemble commercial or industrial/factory buildings. Day Star and The Redeemed Evangelical Mission both in Lagos are good examples.

Ayuk (2002) noted that in contemporary church architecture, earlier Catholic and Orthodox/ Protestant Churches in Nigeria still believe in monumental structures that last long time while some modern Churches prefer temporary structures with the notion that no matter how new a church building was, it will soon become orthodox (meaning usual). Modern Churches, also, consider erecting these temporary structures with the notion that the world is a temporary abode and heaven is the permanent home. Therefore, cinema house, warehouse, disused house, uncompleted building, hotels, multi-purpose hall, open space and any possible adoptable space became common meeting places for Pentecostal churches. In fact, such meeting places outnumbered the Pentecostal church buildings and some of their buildings were arguably not necessarily architecture.

However, some modern Churches have built fantastic structures of long span arising from a motivation to drive soul-winning programs which bring in a large number of worshipers to the Church. With the widespread gospel of prosperity spreading like wide fire among the Pentecostals, there is the encouragement to erect buildings to augment the preached word (Bruggink and Droppers, 1965). The effect on architecture is the requirement for large span buildings with clear vision and exhibition of modern architectural taste.

Pentecostal, having its root at Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1900 played a major role in transforming the liturgy and theology of Churches in Nigeria (Robeck, 1993). How this development in the revival in the Christian Church had bearing on architecture is for further investigation but there is a correlation between revivals in the Church and influence on the religious traditions and inadvertently its architecture (Wikipedia, 2005).

Modern churches vary so much in forms that many reasons could be adduced for their determinants. For example, some modern churches develop to auditorium type because they grew out of urban congregations' desire for heartfelt accessible and participatory worship. The sanctuary of Faith Tabernacle, Ota, acclaimed to be the largest church in 2007 Guinness Book of Records, focus the congregation attention on the liturgical centre of worship rather than on the fellow worshipers. Dissatisfaction with older forms of churches stemming from a new understanding of worship and community of the new liturgical ideal based on the early Christian precedent of the concept of "gathered church" led to some small circular buildings. "Noble simplicity" in design was promoted as those were the things that nourished the soul, kept the supple and pointed the congregation beyond themselves (Scott, 2006).

Mega Church evolved as a new theological vocabulary in modern Churches particularly in the United State. Although, Thumma (2001) defined it as a Church that has a congregation of two thousand or more worship attendees in a week, this may be redefined otherwise virtually all the Churches in Nigeria will be classified as mega. The architectural roots of this type of church lie in the multipurpose meetinghouses of the Protestant dissenters in colonial America. These Churches reveal the influence of commercial designs of office, parks and shopping malls.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The three selected church facilities were designed and built during the period under study.

During this phase of modern ecclesiastical architecture field study showed that there was the witness of unprecedented rate of ecclesiastical building stock. Places of worship sprang up speedily virtually dominating every street of the study area although many of them were converted land uses. The theology and liturgy of the period began to shift to prosperity message inadvertently empowering the Church economically to invest in ecclesiastical architecture. Local input in the design and construction of churches enjoyed maximum patronage and independency in many cases. Only few foreign building materials were being imported especially steel sections because local building material enjoyed maximum use.

The style of ecclesiastical architecture shifted from the celebrated Gothic to a period of the celebration of the 'Masters'. Few ones like the new Anglican Cathedral at Lokoja and the Ecumenical Centre at Abuja still celebrated the Gothic style elaborately even in the twenty first century. As the theology and the liturgy began to change, the architecture too changed to conform to the new found trends. An example was the space covered by person in the floor area during worship. The congregation were used to standing but when African tradition of worship was introduced, more spaces were required for dancing and other liturgy. This modern church architecture departed from ornamentation and ancient art as the use of modern industrial materials and adopting theatre form floor plan were introduced. Mega-Church as a new vocabulary in ecclesiastical dictionary and architecture emerged. Industrial ecclesiastical buildings sprang up as large spans became basic design requirement.

### **The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Living Waters Towers. Province 31. Badagry (2009)**

The church is one of the branches of a Pentecostal denomination; The Redeemed Christian Church of God located on the outskirts of Lagos at the border town of Badagry, off the Lagos- Badagry Expressway. Although the construction of the building was just getting close to completion at the time of the field work, its shape on plan was star. No theological reason was given for this. Many stair cases introduced made the vertical circulation to the upper gallery easy. Artificial lighting had to augment the natural lighting. There were no door carvings and absence of absolute art works. Interior floor levels were played with as the altar was elevated to a height of about one metre and the entire congregation floor was a gentle ramp sloping towards the altar.

The design was inspired by simplicity and functionality, bold roof lines, creative open floor plan, lines were straight rather than being curved and windows were basically to admit natural light. The building was a framed structure with construction materials which included concrete, hollow 'sandcrete' blocks and glass with some other materials that were left in their natural forms. The roof covering was constructed with long-span aluminum roofing sheets and steel roofing trusses. The curtain wall glazing was done in green frames with white mullion adding to the aesthetic quality of the

tower. The welcome approach of the Church has a stair with steel railings that leads to the interior of the church, the floor tiles is visible from the facade having a distinctive grey and whitish colour.



Source: 2014 fieldwork

**Plate 4.1.1: Approach View**

The interior of the church is approached by two brown Chinese double doors as against previous wood carvings, the Floor tiles are laid with cream and grey row successions. The Roof and walls of the interior are painted rendered with pop plaster and white paint giving it a rich, affluent and holy/clean feel. The altar was differentiated from the rest of the interior space with a cream background and two columns in ascension order on both sides; also the altar was raised to a height of and was adorned with cream like glazed floor tiles.

#### **The Guiding Light Church, Ikoyi, Lagos State (2000)**

Before this facility was occupied in 2000AD, although was finally completed in 2009, the Ministry occupied a tent of pneumatic structure with paver tiles for the floor finish. The structure which took the form of a rectangular design on plan with two interior court yards suited the functional requirement of the Church without any theological meaning. The auditorium was of seats capacity of 2000.

The process of the design was guided by simplicity and functionality putting the users at top priority. There was consideration for bold roof lines, creative open floor plan, lines were straight rather than being curved and windows were basically allowed to admit natural light. The standing roof structure used is a pitch roof covered with fibre glass roofing sheet and supported by steel roof trusses. This was easier to construct since the trusses were prefabricated and the structure was able to support the roof load, that is, transparent fibre glass roofing sheet. The materials used in the construction of the structure included concrete which was used to erect the framed structure of the church comprising of rectangular and circular columns, beams, and floor slabs. The columns were exposed and were used in connection with beams to form bays. Steel sections were used in prefabricating the steel truss members which supported the roof.



**Plate 4.2.1**



**Plate 4.2.2: Approach Entrance View**



**Plate 4.2.3: Approach with Left Side View**



**Plate 4.2.4: Structural Steel Roof Details**

**Source:** Plates 4.2.1-4 were 2014 field work

Poof plan showed steel roof members forming the hip of the roof and the fibre glass roofing sheet used as roof covering. Fibre glass roofing sheet was used for the roof structure and ceiling covering because of its light weight in comparison to the flat concrete slab. Glossy aluminium finish was used to clad the exterior surface of the structure and for the flashing on tops of the columns. Aluminum cladding was used to clad the structure's exterior and the columns leading into the entrance of the church.

An avenue of recessed columns were at the rear ends of the building, exposed columns in the auditorium whose tops are clad in aluminium sheets, beams, floor slabs and roof trusses supported the entire structure of the building. The auditorium was able to admit natural daylight using transparent fibre glass roof with spot lights being also installed into the fibre ceiling panels taking into considerations evenings and nights (with the moon as the active source of lighting) where worship services, meetings or vigils were held. Casement windows with glazing that could open admitted natural day light into church. The use of steps creating different levels in the auditorium aided viewing ability and reduces straining of the eyes as in a lecture theatre.

### **Saint Peters Anglican Church, Idimu, Lagos State**

The Anglican Church was one of the established Churches in Nigeria and it dated back as far as 1845AD. This facility under study was a branch of this Mission built in at Idimu Community in Lagos. The structure is oriented along the North and South axis in line with the site. The church's rectangular plan of the church expresses simplicity inspired by functionality in line with the current demand of the Anglican community.

The use of central aisles and the vestry aisles were in a cross pattern form which aided the free flow of the congregation through three doors provided. The building was framed using modular system with avenues of rectangular



concrete columns that were exposed and circular pipe columns that supported the eaves of the roof over the verandas. The roof trusses were of timber sections and covered with long span corrugated aluminum sheets. Casement window were basically used for ventilate and natural lighting.



Plate 4.3.1: Approach View



Plate 4.3.2: Roof Ceiling Showing Timber Trusses



Plate 4.3.3: Avenue of Concrete and Steel Pipe Columns



Plate 4.3.4: Concrete beam

Source: 2014 fieldwork

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The literature review and the field study showed that Church buildings were inspired by function mainly rather than form as postulated by Louis Sullivan that form should follow function. Simplicity in form and design was the order of the day and building materials and structural elements were exposed in natural forms without hiding them. Focus on materials was to blend the established ones with newer materials and new technologies. The buildings loved all elements linear with lines straight, bold and angled rather than curved with bold roof lines. Creative open floor plan with spaces divided on split levels was common. Buildings were usually framed with interior walls serving only as partitions instead of being load-bearing. Designs have been made to incorporate topography of the land.

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