

## CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, LITURGY AND ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Many studies have identified theology and liturgy as part of the predominant determinants of ecclesiastical architecture. This study examined the trends in the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria with a view to identifying how and why theology and liturgy have affected these trends during the three phases of the development of this architecture. Since this study is theoretical and historical in nature, qualitative methods in form of literature, non-participant observation, unstructured interview and case study were employed to gather the data and analysis was done by description and content analysis. This study selected one church building of the same denomination across the three phases of development for progressive analysis and Lagos State was chosen as the study area because of many of her contributions to the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. This study discovered that architecture of the Church gave denominational identity and at the same time expressed their mode of theology and liturgy. This study noted that space hierarchy and building materials were theologically and liturgically selected. This study concluded that theology and liturgy were primarily predominant in determining ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria across the three phases because they found their expression and augmentation in architecture.

**KEYWORDS:** Theology, Liturgy, Ecclesiastical Architecture, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

The historical process that led to the emergence of ecclesiastical architecture was not without a number of determining factors. After the Church adopted the Catacomb and private houses secretly based on functional purpose, Emperor Constantan had to intervene by recognizing Christianity for the Church to have an architectural identity. In the fourth century, Constantine and his Church planners required an architecture that had meaning in the Roman world and any totally new architectural form from precedence would not have been as effective as architectural forms that carried the established meaning (Hopkins, 1995). The development of ecclesiastical architecture underwent kaleidoscopic changes exploring different styles of architecture for many decades. Many different studies have identified a number of factors that were predominant in determining these styles for the church designs. Theology and liturgy were among these predominant determinants and some of the studies noted that erecting church buildings even amounted to heresy and apostasy.

Some studies refer to theology as discourse with reasoning concerning the deity, utterances with sayings or oracle, concerning the rites and duties of public religious observation, word or message, teachings about the essential nature of God, an account or record of the ways of God which simply refers to the Bible, the study of religious ideas and teachings, a system of theoretical principles or ideology, and an attempt to understand God. In the context of this study it included the study, learning and discussion of Christian beliefs and liturgy. Public worship, daily activities, communal response to the sacred, the often expensive offers of service to the people, standardised order of events observed during a religious service, participation of the people in the work of God, work of the people, public service, and the principal act of worship are among many definitions adduced for liturgy but in the context of this study, liturgy embraced all aspects of activities often

carried out in and around the church building in any day with the participation of the majority of the Church members.

This study therefore examined the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria with a view to identifying how theology and liturgy have affected it. Having spread Christianity to Nigeria in 1845 by some Mission Groups from England, the early Church found it expedient to patronize architecture to achieve some of her hope and aspirations. Adeboye (2009) identified three phases of ecclesiastical architecture development in Nigeria between 1845 and 2005. As denominations evolved after the foreign established Churches as part of development with the emergence of African Independent and Pentecostal Churches, the theology and liturgy began to vary from denomination to denomination. In the light of these, one denomination was considered for this study selecting one church building from each phase for case study. Since this study is theoretical and historical in nature, qualitative methods in form of unstructured interview, literature and non-participant case study were employed in collecting data while content analysis and descriptions were adopted for the analysis.

Lagos State was considered the study area because of its contribution to the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. It is arguably the cradle of Christianity in Nigeria and being one of the metropolitan mega cities in the world its nature gives an impetus to the spread of religious activities because the practice of Christianity has become an urban phenomenon (Anderson, 2003)

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Many studies noted that theology and liturgy should be considered as the predominant determinant of ecclesiastical architecture. Kieckhefer (2014), Huyser-Honig (2007), McNamara (2015), Leonova (2006) and a number of other studies are among this school of thought. Many Christian religious leaders, church architects, authors and researchers noted that the theology of each denomination ought to determine their architecture. Fairchild (2007) 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 which their architecture expressed. It was noted that some Christians worshipped with little ceremony while some with elaborate ritual and some made use of statues and paintings but some did not. Thus, churches varied in appearance, having been planned to suit one or another kind of religious practice without compromising their theology or liturgy.

Haft (2005) in examining the power of religion in architecture and culture also observed that religious heritage was not only the faith and tradition passed down through the generations but also the magnificent artistic and architectural works that embodied them. Noting that if shrines' paintings, relief, and engravings suggested highly organized rituals connected with fertility, the afterlife, and worship of the Mother goddess and Processions were a feature in the cult temples, particularly during festivals, so free movement was required in liturgy and religious tradition through and around the church sanctuary to influence its architectural form. So, theology should be the ultimate of expression in the church design. It was also noted that from the dawn of history to the Mid-Victorian age the building of temples and churches was the highest form of architectural expression. The great buildings of Egypt were temples; the great buildings of the Middle Ages were cathedrals. The most beautiful buildings in Nigeria even in colonial days were churches. Theological meaning which was predominant found expression in architecture.

Mies van der Rohe's perceived that constructing a factory in form of a temple or vice versa was tantamount to telling a lie and could disfigure the landscape (Mackertich, 2001). The quest for an architecture that always desired new forms, material and technology to augment theology was to build a closer relationship between the worshippers and their creator (Padey, 2004). It was observed that this was achieved during Gothic era because man's desire to detach himself

from earthly matters and approaching God was a force that made him to create structures of lightness, knowledge, intuition and faith which were fused to create the material expression of an idea through man's genius. The thing that kept the religious architecture of the Middle Ages great and vital through many centuries was its constant quest for new means of theological expression. The function of the Church was primarily one affecting the spiritual and emotional side of man and the Gothic churches achieved a high emotional quality because of their scale, honesty of structure and natural materials.

Walker (2002) observed that religion in Australia cried for symbols which were to express theology in ecclesiastical architecture in form of being full of life, joy, peace and power. The architecture of a Church should therefore, never be merely traditional but it must express the reality of God as expressed in the theology and liturgy. Bringink and Droppers (1995) noted that 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. Barrie (2001) identified that all buildings, both secular and religious, are powerful meaningful cultural artifacts that embody a society's values and beliefs noting how mythologies, beliefs, and rituals are intertwined with religious architectural expression. Through form, surface, space, and ritual sacred architecture occupied an intermediate position in the world that is both physical and symbolic. Theology expresses that sacred architecture that mediates between the earth and heaven since architecture is a potent symbolic vehicle for personal exploration.

Whitlock (2001) identified architecture as an intermediate space between earth and the heavens and referred to this luminal space as "the datum of architecture." The Catholic Encyclopedia (2005) noted too that spaces have theological symbolic meanings citing the the architecture of some traditions where roof was believed to symbolize charity, which covers a multitude of sins; the floor symbolized the foundation of faith and the humility of the poor. The theology of any space could define the functional requirement and the requirement in turn determines the function as in what makes nave different from lectern, alter or narthex, for example, is simply theology. Plan forms, for example, have a way of symbolizing spirituality. An architectural space has both form and function and in both, it could represent values. It could also house aspirations and as a great dynamic space with its shape and rhythms the dynamism could be seen (Eller, 2006).

Hottovy (2002) noted that the church building should play a primary integral sacramental role in the liturgy as the structure or design of the church building was neither a secondary consideration nor simply a functional shell to protect the worshipping community from the environmental elements but a primary custodian of architectural heritage of the Church. The study observed that the organic development of liturgy had a direct influence on the direction the architectural heritage of the Church took and this principle became a paradigm and model for the organic development of architecture and art, which were also steeped in liturgy. It noted that as the liturgy could be revised, so, too, architectural design could be adjusted otherwise, liturgical architecture could not properly fulfill its role because in the history of the Church, the 'old' and the 'new' were always closely interwoven as the 'new' grew out of the 'old,' and the 'old' found a fuller expression in the 'new.

VanDoodewaard (2012) too observed that architecture could help God's people by creating an environment that encourages and facilitates true worship as it is an expression of theology and the theology will direct the church. Theological with liturgical convictions and church architecture are inseparable. Observing Pagan places of worship for example, one could see typically dark places and the window-less Aztec temples, the after-sunset Druid ceremonies, the dark interiors of Buddhist temples were all architectural expressions of a spiritual reality. Roman Catholic Churches too, for example, often placed (and still place) the font at the back of the sanctuary, reflecting their theological and liturgical position that baptism is required in order for "entrance" into the church. If the preached word is the most important aspect of public worship, and therefore the sanctuary's architecture, Reformed Protestantism recognized that

biblically, the sacraments are the second most important aspects. So, because the word is indispensable, the pulpit as the architectural manifestation of the word must make its indispensability architecturally clear” (Bruggink & Droppers, 1965)

Dempsey (2015) noted that architecture, painting, sculpture, and decoration all worked together in the Baroque style to create a unified emotional expression meant to impress. Protestant iconoclasts destroyed Catholic imagery. Baroque churches, then, was believed to represent the architecture of rhetorical expression and persuasion. Rhetorical devices such as emotionalism, provocation, and alienation were designed to provide the viewer with a sense of immediate experience.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Catholic and Anglican were among the few denominations that existed at the emergence of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. There was a need for a space to preach the gospel to the new converts. The Anglican at Badagry found an organic environment under the ‘Agia’ tree in Badagry before a site was located where the first traditional church structure was erected with local materials like bamboo walls and thatched roof. Further quest for development later led to the construction of St. Thomas Anglican Church, Badagry which was built in 1845 in Gothic style. It became the first church in Nigeria pioneering ecclesiastical architecture. That early period which was the first phase had no precedence to borrow from except the knowledge acquired in the country from where the Mission groups came. The quest for development led expansion of mission work to Lagos which was then the federal capital of Nigeria.

Gothic style was characterized by its usual strong focus on verticality, pointed arches, rib vaults, flying buttresses, large stained glass windows, ornaments and pinnacles. Gothic had been arguably the most spiritual style that brought theology and liturgy to elevate the soul of man towards his God. Gothic was believed to fulfill the aspirations of the Church theology and liturgy. Church buildings were similar even when the denominations were different because they all adopted varieties of Gothic. The Church attached theological meanings to all the characteristics of Gothic. The height was to point the worshippers heavenward and the buttresses appeared to dart and sweep around the building giving a sense of movement and of grandeur. The cross-shaped plan was to remind one of the cross on which Christ died and gargoyles were to wade away evil doers giving protection to those in the cathedral. In a world marked with fear and superstition, these gargoyles in form of creepy creatures undoubtedly encouraged many to seek solace and safety inside a church or cathedral- protected from the demons and ghouls which roamed outside. The pulpit, altar, and font witnessed to the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Ghost). The ascending and descending stained glass windows contained in the nave were meant to portray symbolically the ladder to heaven.



Source: Field Study in 2007

**Figure 1: Holy Cross Catholic Cathedral, Catholic Mission Street, Tafawabalewa Square, Lagos (First Constructed in 1897 but Re-Constructed in 1932)**

The second phase of ecclesiastical architecture development witnessed a gradual departure from absolute Gothic because of the emergence of many denominations especially the African Independent Churches and the early formation of Pentecostal Churches coupled with industrial development which brought about new materials and construction methods. The period was full of the activities of interdenominational campus Fellowships, amplification of the theology of holiness message and emphasis on biblical inerrancy. While theology and liturgy were still given expression as influenced by precedence, some cinema houses, warehouses, disused houses, uncompleted buildings, hotels, multi-purpose halls, open spaces and any possible adoptable spaces became worship centres. This was with the notion that any location or place could be adopted for theological and liturgical activity. The Anglican and the Catholic Church buildings still had a flavor of Gothic because of their affiliation with their parent bodies in Europe. The Pentecostals and African Independent Churches had different theological and liturgical emphasis. Construction industry in Nigeria which had been mainly dominated by the Brazilian work force began to engage indigenous materials and labour.



**Source:** Field work in 2013

**Figure 2: St. Denis Catholic Church, Bariga, Lagos. 1925**

The widespread of Pentecostal and African Independent Churches dominated the third phase with their theology and liturgy permeating other denominations. The theology and liturgy of the third phase showed significant differences from the early period. Church growth and gospel teaching became the main focus of the Church and mega Churches emerged making American definition of mega Church, population of two thousand, become inappropriate for the Nigerian situation because more than fifty percent of the Churches would have been considered mega. Many church buildings began to take form of lecture theatre and long span roofing emerged looking like industrial buildings because there was the need to accommodate the surging congregation. The identity of some buildings without the cross sign on them could be mistaken for commercial, industrial or any other public buildings. In some cases structural elements had to be introduced on the façade of the buildings for theological meanings. It was observed that there was rivalry in architectural patronage among the Churches as each encouraged the other to invest in ecclesiastical architecture. Some Churches dealt into building schools for sustainable theological and liturgical spread.



Source: Field work in 2013

**Figure 3: Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Oke-Afa, 2001-2003**

## CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that while church buildings appeared differently in forms at different times, the theology and liturgy of each denomination predominated particularly in the interior. Space hierarchy and selection of materials were not compromised with the theological and liturgical attachment of the Church; for example hanging of the cross sign on the buildings was a constant phenomenon.

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