

Transformation after Early Ecclesiastical Architecture in Nigeria (1845-1980)

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Abstract: *Transformation in ecclesiastical architecture had always been noticed from its evolution as each epoch tried to express its own time. This study examined the characteristic factors that led to the transformations from the early period of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria to the second phase of its development. The study area was Lagos because it was the cradle of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria and its nature being one of the metropolitan cities in the world encouraged the spread of Christianity which is adjudged to be an urban phenomenon. Since the study was explorative and historic in nature, qualitative research methods were adopted. The findings showed that early Churches in Nigeria were established by foreign missionaries and the administration and construction of their church buildings including financing and supply of labour with materials depended largely on foreign input. The second phase witnessed indigenization of the foreign established Churches and the establishment of African Independent and Pentecostal ones. The patronage of local input in terms of labour force and supply of materials was becoming obvious.*

Keyword: Transformation, Early, Ecclesiastical, Architecture, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Evolution of ecclesiastical architecture dated back to AD313 with House Church and Catacomb emerging as the first meeting places for Christians. The emergence of ecclesiastical architecture was not without initial problems because of precedence. The initial idea of the precursors of ecclesiastical architecture was to borrow from precedence which they did before carving an identity for the Church at every stage of its development. Subsequent quest for development and the desire for expression of each time, denomination and location resulted in many forms of ecclesiastical architecture transformation that evolved (Fletcher, 2001). Similar trends have been replicated on Nigeria architectural landscape as the church buildings have undergone kaleidoscopic changes transforming into styles since the evolution of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria.

From period to period, different characteristics of the church buildings showed some significant changes that made them epochal. Craven (2006) and Palmes (1975) tried to classify a significant number of epochal trends from the origin of ecclesiastical buildings to the contemporary period into five (5). Before the emergence of modern Churches in the late nineteenth century, the church buildings transformation spanned from basilica period to renaissance. Many factors were identified to have been responsible for these differences and changes in styles.

Nigeria ecclesiastical architecture was not spared in this similar transformation since its evolution and development up to 1980. Two phases of development were identified during this period and this period was significant because it formed the period of gradual departure from precedence to an identity of its time. The period was classified as the first transformation from the first phase of ecclesiastical architecture to another evolution and development in Nigeria. Adeboye (2009) had classified ecclesiastical architecture development in Nigeria between 1845 and the

period the study was carried out in 2005 into three because the changes observed in the trends were significant. It was observed that the first phase was between 1845 and 1930, the second was 1931 and 1979 and the third was between 1980 and 2005. Although there have been many studies on Church evolution and development in Nigeria, very few have critically examined the characteristics of this transformation of their buildings. This study, therefore examined the characteristic changes that led to the transformation of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria from first epochal period to the second phase. Since the study is explorative and historical in nature, qualitative methods in form of nonparticipant case study and unstructured interview were adopted for collection of data with secondary data obtained from literature and unstructured interview. The analysis was by description and explanation.

2. The Study Area

This study was conducted in Lagos State because of many reasons. Lagos State is a place that can be considered as the cradle of Christian evolution in Nigeria. The early Church Missionary Societies succeeded in entering Nigeria through a town called Badagry in 1845 before they proceeded to other parts of the country (Hildebrandt, 1981). It is a place that pioneered ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria because the first church building was erected in Badagry in 1845. The nature of Lagos, being one of the metropolitan mega cities in the world, gives an impetus to the flourishing of the spread of religious activities particularly as Christianity is considered an urban phenomenon (Adeboye, 2013). Lagos' cosmopolitan structure accommodates the influence of every Nigerian tribe (Census 2006) and Lagos in Lagos State was the first capital of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Lagos had a population of 9,019,534 (2006 census) and an area of 3,577 square kilometres including twenty two per cent (22%) of lagoons and creeks.



Plate 2.1: Map of Nigeria showing Lagos State

Source: Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia



Plates 2.2: Map of Lagos State

Source: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

3. Ecclesiastical Architecture Development in Nigeria

The process of ecclesiastical architecture evolution and development in Nigeria did not begin until the end of the famous transatlantic slave trade when the coming of the early missionaries from Europe to Badagry introduced Christianity to Nigeria in the mid-19th century (Hildebrandt, 1981; Freeman, 2006).

There was the need to show the footprint of their achievement by building an ecclesiastical structure and the easiest they had was to transfer the culture of church building already practised in Europe which they were already familiar with to the new location. This warranted their locating a space to preach the Bible. An environment which was organic in nature was created for the church building under the 'Agia' tree in Badagry and the Church meetings continued there until a more befitting location was identified where the first traditional church structure was erected with bamboo walls and thatched roof reflecting the African vernacular architecture. The quest for development later led the building of St. Thomas Anglican Church, Badagry built in 1845 in Gothic style and it became the first church building in Nigeria thereby pioneering ecclesiastical architecture (Adekunle, 2007).

Much later in 1852, the Anglican Missionaries soon brought with them to Badagry a two storey prefabricated timber house from Sierra Leone although a similar house was built in Lagos and another one in Ibadan two years later. This form of construction of storey pre-fabricated building was dictated by the concept of creating a status for the missionaries because of racial discrimination flavour of which was still prevalent in the Church. The alternative was mud/ thatch since the brick construction was comparatively expensive. The model became a prototype for the first set of

colonial buildings described by Mary Kingsley (13 October 1862 – 3 June 1900) as "abominations" because of their noisy roofs and open verandas (Godwin, 1999).

Godwin (2005) also observed that one of the periods of transformation of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria was the period of Nigeria transition from colony to sovereignty, from dependence to independence, which started after the acceptance of the principle of self determination by the colonial power which was muted in the 1940's. The politicians who were at the forefront were mainly concerned not only with '*westernising*' the society but also with re-kindling ancient cultures to justify and give validity to what came to be known as "Nigerianisation" in ecclesiastical architecture.

By 1954, it was not immediately obvious that the dramatic changes which were leading to an independent Church and "new" country so to say were being wrought on a daily basis, and it was only later Nigerians and Colonials were known better that the enormous size, scope and the short time frame of the "Independence Project" began to be understood. It was all about training-local manpower in the myriad of activities which could develop nationhood and to have them up and running by a date which was eventually agreed to be 1st October 1960. Thus, Nigeria moved from Dependence to Independence which brought about indigenization even in the Church administration.

As an indication of the dearth of construction industry professionals in Nigeria on the ground at this time, there was only one Nigerian architect in 1954 who was then an employee in the Western Nigeria Development Corporation. Many other Nigerians were still graduating from schools of architecture in the UK and US. 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. While these early buildings were being designed it was inevitable that questions should be raised as to the validity of a "foreign" approach in the face of the differences in cultural background of Nigerians and the foreign professionals who were designing and constructing the buildings. This led to a confusion in people's minds-which has persisted and has created a division between those supporting traditional culture, almost to the point of isolation, and those who have abandoned those values in favour of the international culture. Somewhere in between were those who have a sneaking feeling that neither is right and that to get it right there must temper our credulity of both with objective analysis of their trends and relevance to our needs.

By the time the Church thought of expanding its mission work to Lagos, a stable environment where construction could flourish had begun in 1863. Afro-Brazilians became the backbone of the building industry in Nigeria and master mason and craftsmen were able to build the Lagos Catholic Cathedral in 1897 (Akinsemoyin, and Vaughan-Richards, 1976). All these early church buildings that were constructed were non-Pentecostal as Pentecostal and African Independent Churches were still unknown in Nigeria.

Ayuk (2002) noted that Pentecostalism was one of the prominent factors that caused inadvertently transformation in ecclesiastical architecture not only in Nigeria but also in developed world because it was one of the interventions in the development of Christianity and Pentecostalism is a form of a renewal movement in Christianity that places special emphasis on a direct personal spiritual experience. Although, Christianity certainly existed in Nigeria and some assemblies from Europe had pioneered ecclesiastical architecture the evolution of Pentecostalism and African Independent churches brought about their own style of church buildings (Anderson, 2001).

Pentecostals and African Independent churches were 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 (Anisimoy, 2004).

In contemporary church architecture, some Catholic and Orthodox/ Protestant Churches in Nigeria began to transform despite their believe in monumental structures that last long time. Some Pentecostals prefer temporary structures with the notion that no matter how new a church building is, it will soon become orthodox (meaning usual). The Pentecostals, 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 outnumber the Pentecostal church buildings and some of their buildings are arguably not necessarily architecture (Anisimoy, 2004).

However, some Pentecostals 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. The effect on architecture is the requirement for large span buildings with clear vision and exhibition of modern architectural taste (Gaiya, 2002).

4. Findings and Analysis

These findings were the outcome of the case study and the interviews coupled with documentation of the building characteristics of each of the two early phases of ecclesiastical architecture emergence and development as the period under study.

4.1 Phase One of Church Building Development

There were only very few Christian denominations that were in existence at that period because Catholic, Anglican and Baptist which dominated the landscape with the style of their architecture than any other denomination were among the first set of missionary societies that sprang up in England, Scotland and the continents of Europe and North America to establish missionary work in Africa. It was towards the end of this first phase that Pentecostal and African Independent Churches began to evolve. The main concept behind Church buildings construction at that period was to show that their mission work had spread to a particular area. Mission work administration was initially controlled by foreign missionaries and priests. The Anglican Churches developed a tradition for floor plan of design where a hierarchy of sacred spaces was approached by ascendancy. Building approach was made by the main entrance to the General (Congregation) from where Holy (Ministers including the Choir) was ascended and then to the Holy of Holies (Altar) following the design concept of the Old Testament tabernacles. The congregation sat at the General area; the Ministers with the Choir stayed at the Holy area while the altar was the Holy of Holies. Their designs strictly followed their liturgical consideration and it became the determinant of their church design plans. Principal churches were allowed to take rectangular or circular floor plan forms and were called Cathedrals while other smaller churches could adopt any shape. The circular form carried the theological symbolic meaning of the unending love of God towards man. The period was characterizes by Gothic style with its usual strong focus on verticality, pointed arches, rib vaults, flying buttresses, large stained glass windows, ornaments and pinnacles

Although waves of modern architecture had swept through Europe and America during the period architectural design styles were characterised mainly by different forms of Gothic. Gothic style had already become the norm of ecclesiastical architecture and was synonymous to church buildings. It was considered a true representation of ecclesiastical architecture. The period was characterized by this Gothic style with its usual strong focus on verticality, pointed arches, rib vaults, flying buttresses, large stained glass windows, ornaments and pinnacles.

Importation of major building materials like bricks, iron and timber was common and they were from Europe and America. Financial supports to fund construction were mainly sourced from the parent bodies of the Churches in Europe and America. The church building capacities were usually small comparatively with a maximum sitting capacity of 500 worshippers. The contemporary liturgical parlance of Mega churches was still strange on the landscape. Vehicular parking spaces were not usually provided except for the Priests because only few Church members could afford to own cars at that time.

The church construction period was usually longer than the contemporary time. For example, a church building could last say up to a minimum of ten years. This was due to irregular financial support from the parent bodies in Europe and it took long time to import building materials.



Plates 4.1.1: External views of The Cathedral Church of Christ, No. 29 Marina, Lagos (1925-1946) field study picture in March 2008



Plates 4.1.2: Entrance approach view of the reconstructed structure in 1932 (fieldwork picture 2007)

4.2 Phase Two of Church Building Development

At the end of the first phase, transformation had already begun to show in the characteristics of the church buildings even when they were of the same denomination. This period was a bridge between the early ecclesiastical architecture and the beginning of the contemporary period. The category of Churches in this phase was built between 1930 and 1980. The leadership of Mission Churches had already begun to gradually change to the indigenous ones from the foreign Bishops and Priests. More foreign Mission groups like the Presbyterian Missions were encouraged by the achievement of their predecessors and began to establish centres in the country. Some African Indigenous Churches like "Aladura" also saw the need to begin to make collaborations with other Churches and Missions outside the country. The interaction between the indigenous associations and the foreign denominational mission stations gave rise to the evolution of Pentecostalism.

Although a flavour of Gothic characteristics in some of the church buildings were still noticed even when combined with some other styles, for example, the bell tower took a long time to disappear from the adopted styles. There was a gradual departure from elaborate celebration of Gothic because it was more expensive to build and it required longer time to build. Facilities of indigenized foreign Mission and few African Indigenous Churches dominated the landscape. Some of the prominent Pentecostal Churches

that emerged during this period were The Redeemed Christian Church of God (1952), Deeper Life Ministries (1971) Church of God Mission (1973) and the Living Faith World Wide (1981). They developed the style of house fellowship system of assembly and rented halls. Their theology and liturgy were centred on evangelism, faith, holiness and gifts of the Holy Spirit that did not encourage much church buildings investment as not much financing was required to start a Church. Local input in the design and construction of church buildings began to enjoy some patronage although foreign inputs were still noticed. Some building materials were still being imported from United Kingdom and America. Free expression of styles of ecclesiastical architecture and knowledge of the "masters" began to shift from the Gothic style.

The determinants of transformation included the quest for development and loss of confidence and dissatisfaction with the preceding styles and theories that supported them because they were alien to the tradition of the people. The emergence of over twenty holiness denominations between 1895 and 1905 and subsequent rapid multiplication of denominations practicing various religious theology and liturgy also played some roles. Others are the practice of different religious traditions, astronomical growth in congregation population, regionalism in cultural and political interests, and globalization.

With the emergence of numerous distinct groups in the Church, the development of diverse beliefs began to vary widely by culture and place. Traces of modern ecclesiastical architecture began to show as it became part of the idea of modern architecture that was muted in the late nineteenth century because the church was a good patronage of architecture.



Plate 4.2.1: External View from North East of Methodist Church, Yaba, Lagos (1965) field study picture across the dual carriage road in March 2008



Plate 4.2.2: Presbyterian Church Yaba (fieldwork picture 2007)

5. Conclusion

This study noted that the early Churches were established by foreign missionaries and the leadership was therefore dominated by foreigners. Local input in the leadership and the construction of the church buildings was very low making the domination of foreign input inevitable. Construction period of church buildings was long as construction depended on financing by the parent Churches in Europe and America which came in trickles. Workforce also depended on foreign contributions. Church capacity was small as Christianity was still at its nursery stage in Nigeria. The second phase of development witnessed involvement of local participants as they established African Independent, Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches. Indigenization of foreign established Churches witnessed leadership change and this gave room to accommodation of African culture and tradition which affected the architecture of the Church. Local input in labour force increased as local and international training increased the level of local workforce. Less emphasis on monumentality of buildings began to diminish because functionality became more important in structure design. The study deduced that liturgy, theology, global influence and local environment affected the evolution and development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria.

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Author Profile

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