

## HERESY, APOSTASY AND ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Many studies observed that the Church involvement in ecclesiastical architecture for a number of decades amounted to apostasy and heresy. Other studies have also noted that architecture has augmented and has become an impetus to the aspirations and purpose of Christianity. This study examined apostasy and heresy in the Church and how they have affected the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. The three phases of ecclesiastical architecture development were considered. Since this study is theoretical and historical in nature, qualitative methods in form of literature, unstructured interview and non-participant observation were adopted to gather the data. The analysis was done through description and content analysis. The findings of this study showed that, in Nigeria, architecture created identity for the Church, registered the Church's presence at every location, exhibited the wealth of the Church, encouraged the poor of hope and announced the Church to the world. This study concluded that the issue of apostasy or heresy was not associated with the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. Rather architecture has contributed to the aspirations and purpose of the Church.

**KEYWORDS:** Heresy, Apostasy, Ecclesiastical Architecture, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

The recognition accorded Christianity by Emperor Constantan in the Roman Empire days created room for ecclesiastical architecture emergence. Since this emergence, its development has transcended many periods of styles as each epochal period borrowed from the preceding styles to found another until the Renaissance period. The precursors of modern architecture soon got fed up with the precedence and aspired for development. They also lost confidence in the Renaissance and the theories that supported it.

Since then, a number of studies have identified various determinants of ecclesiastical architecture ranging from theology with liturgy, existing materials with current architectural style, free expression of styles with the knowledge of the "masters" and to moving with time like the Evangelical ways. On the other hand, some studies also observed that elaborate investment in ecclesiastical architecture as was being done was not scriptural and therefore amounted to heresy or apostasy. Those studies in this school of thought claimed that the Church has no business erecting church buildings because they see it as a theological heresy and apostasy as the Bible does not assign such responsibility to the Church.

One form of apostasy is generally "a wilful defection or revolt", a formal disaffiliation from, or abandonment or renunciation of, a religion by a person or a group of persons. Heresy generally means any provocative belief or theory that is strongly not in consonance with established beliefs or customs (Brom, 2004; Wikipedia, 2015). In the context of this study which is the second form of apostasy based on the Christianity platform, apostasy is intended not to include an entire denial of the faith of Christianity but falling away from some key and true doctrines of the Bible accepted by many

Churches. Heresy denotes the formal denial or doubt of a core doctrine of the Christian faith as defined by one or more of the Christian Churches.

The aim of this study was not to establish the scriptural facts about the subject matter but to examine apostasy and heresy in the Church with a view to identifying how they affected the trends in the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. Adeboye (2009) noted three phases of ecclesiastical architecture development in Nigeria and this study examined the effect of apostasy and heresy in the context of these three phases. Since this study is theoretical and historical in nature, historical, literature, unstructured interview and non-participant observation methods were adopted to gather the required data. Analysis was done by description and content analysis.

## STUDY AREA

There were many reasons that could account for choosing Lagos State, in the Southwest Nigeria, as the study area. A number of studies have noted that Lagos State is the cradle of Christian in Nigeria and inadvertently pioneered ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria (Anderson, 2002; Adekunle, 2007). Hildebrandt (1981), Akinsemoyin and Vaughan-Richard (1976) and Freeman (2006) established that the Missionaries arrived Badagry in Lagos in 1845 before proceeding to other parts of Nigeria erecting the first storey building in Nigeria. Lagos was arguably one of the most Christian religious cities in the world having a long history of the activities of Independent African Churches.



Source: <http://nigerianfinder.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/map-of-lagos-state.png>

Figure1: Map of Nigeria Showing Lagos

Figure 2: Map of Lagos State

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There was a theory within the Christian community that contended that the early church met exclusively in private homes, not in the type of public facilities that are in contemporary time and that the use of modern “church buildings” was in violation of the biblical pattern. It also went to say that Church groups were supposed to be “families.” Therefore, in order to preserve the atmosphere of intimacy, the Christian groups ought to remain small as families live in “homes.” The theory supposed that the “house church” arrangement constituted “a binding pattern” for the New Testament service. Jackson (2015) observed that no matter how sincere this new trend of constructing church buildings may be, it was terribly misguided. It noted that the church did not begin as a small unit in someone’s house as the minimum was 3,000 disciples in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

Strom (2008) in reviewing the secrets of the early church noted that church buildings were not in the Bible and that this new concept of erecting church buildings was another invention of man claiming that searching through the entire New Testament from beginning to the end there were no mention of them at all. The study observed that it was only after two centuries, when the Church was slowly giving way to apostasy and deception that church buildings began to appear.

Even then, they were often just two houses joined together. It was not until after 300AD, when the church fell into Roman apostasy that "cathedrals" began to emerge. The misleading part was that, in the minds of most people, "church" meant first a building, probably something else second; but seldom did "the Church" stand for anything other than a building. The study concluded by advocating a wall-less open-air church as church buildings did not appear until when the church was slowly given away to what could be described as apostasy and deception because the enclosed space was unscriptural.

Armstrong, (2008) also noted that building temples and expensive structures could amount to a waste of resources and it promotes the Church drifting to materialism and worldliness. Parsons, (2001) also noted that the Church of Christ could not be a building because it was the sanctified people of God, the Christians that the word was being referred to. Claiming that church building is the "house of God", "a holy place", the Bible teaches no such thing. There was no record in the New Testament that the Christians ever built a church building. A church building was not a temple. The Christians are the temple of God. The early Church possessed no buildings and carried on the gospel work for a great many years without erecting any building (Loosley, 2010; Loosley, 1989). Snyder (1979) too observed that the church's greatest period of vitality and growth until recent times was during the first two centuries after Christ. In other words, the Church grew fastest when it did not have the help or hindrance of church buildings. The study claimed that Jesus' ministry was mostly in the open air, so also the ministries of the disciples (MacArthur, 2008).

It has been argued that the theological significance of places of worship is an acquired quality. Cunningham (1999), for example, noted that a church building was not the essential basic element in Christian worship. The study supported this theory that the first Christians often worshipped in the open air or in various enclosed spaces of no theological significance, and that the symbolic definitions associated with sacred space only developed very slowly. Terry & Craig (2011) noted that God did not long for a temple made with human hands, no matter how elegant it may be, because the highest price that could be paid for a place to reside has already been paid.

Ferguson (2008), on the other hand, disagreed with that other school of thought and noted that there was a requirement for church buildings because as the church grew, it needed to accommodate a joint assembly and special functions, such as daily Bible teaching, baptisms, and the distribution of gifts to the poor which required readily available facilities. Special buildings also gave the Church a visible sign of permanence. Ratzinger (2005) also observed that since the critics of church building erection agreed that there should be a meeting place, it showed that they considered that the place was only functional and not sacred which should not be.

Collins (2015) too noted that comparing the privately owned houses where the Church began in the first four centuries with the modern residential houses was a misnomer. This was because the early privately owned houses were larger and they were to accommodate nuclear with extended family members, slaves and business activities while the modern houses are just private residences for nuclear families. Worship in the former was considered formal while the worship in the modern residence will be considered informal. The size of the early Church was comparatively small but the closest equivalent to an ancient house church is a modern Church. With the current population explosion in the Church due to the effect of evangelism, the early theory may be out of place. Church assemblies could no longer perch on people's private facilities as this may not honour such an assembly. Ecclesiastical architecture provided architectural clues that told hidden stories expressing the liturgical, functional and spiritual symbolism of a church building (McNamara, 2011)

Dietsch (2002) observed that architecture is an important part of people's lives helping to shape the natural environment. It has constantly evolved to reflect the accomplishment of civilization in all concepts of the world as it has the capacity to record cultural, social, religious and political ambitions in three dimensions for future reference. The structure and style of a building is usually related to a particular period of history that are self documenting. Architecture possesses a wider range of cultural significance than just being merely useful because it permanently records aesthetics tastes, material resources, religious, political and social aspirations of a civilization. Just merely observing architecture could point to the people who built it. The examples that abound include the Great Pyramid outside Cairo which conveyed the ancient Egyptians' belief in immortality.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The foreign Missions pioneered ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria as the church buildings became a necessity after Christianity was established. The idea of erecting church buildings was influenced by their Mission stations in Europe where Christianity had taken root and ecclesiastical architecture had been practiced for many centuries. The initial pattern of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria simply followed precedence according to established tradition in their parent station because the Missionaries came with the idea of the gospel packaged with that of ecclesiastical architecture. The initial concept of ecclesiastical architecture was that each church building served as a landmark to register the Missions' presence at every location covered and to test their acceptability in the area because the phobia for slave trade was still with the people. Their sustainability indicated acceptance. There was also the need for territorial identity and definition of a common place where their converts met as private houses could hamper development. As the Mission relied on foreign fund from Europe, accountability was required to establish progress. Church buildings were the easiest to point at as evidence of their spending and investments. There was also the need to augment the preached words as architecture had a way of expressing theological and liturgical meanings. Gothic architecture became the pioneering style and it was able to convey the expected message of that time.

The second phase of ecclesiastical architecture development in Nigeria witnessed a gradual departure and transformation of the leadership of the Mission established Churches to the indigenous Nigerians because of the indigenization decree. There was also the impact of globalization in Church development especially the evolution of new materials and construction methods. There was the spread of Pentecostalism coupled with the emergence of African Independent Churches. Many devotees of Christianity had the notion that they were serving their God by contributing to the erection of church buildings by contribution money and free labour as developing or improving private houses could make public identity to the facilities difficult to establish. The acquisition of church building stock was considered an improved economic status of the Church and a long time investment. As many denominations began to evolved, each one struggled to create own permanent presence through architecture because that was the easiest option during a time of low telecommunication like that. Architecture therefore enjoyed more patronage.

Although there was still a flavour of Gothic characteristics in church buildings, there was a gradual departure from this style. Non-Pentecostal churches facilities still dominated the landscape as few Pentecostal Churches existed but Ministries like The Redeemed Christian Church of God (1952), Deeper Life Ministries (1971) Church of God Mission (1973) and the Living Faith World Wide (1981) already existed. Pentecostal architecture was uncommon because most of them were just emerging in form of house fellowship or rented halls and their theology and liturgy were centred on

evangelism, faith, holiness and gifts of the Holy Spirit that did not economically support church buildings. Local input in the design and construction of church buildings began to enjoy some levels of patronage as foreign inputs were still noticed. Some building materials were still being imported but as the style of ecclesiastical architecture began to shift from Gothic towards liberality, that encouraged free expression of styles and the use of current materials.

The third phase witnessed unprecedented high rate of ecclesiastical architecture stock. Places of Christian worship sprang up virtually dominating every street of the study area and competed with one another although many of them did not rise to the level of architecture. The theology and liturgy of the period gradually changed and were mainly centred on evangelism and prosperity messages with associated activities. This inadvertently empowered the Church economically to invest in ecclesiastical architecture. Local input in the design and construction of church buildings enjoyed maximum patronage and independency in some cases. Only few foreign building materials were adopted for construction as local building materials enjoyed full patronage because industrial revolution developed new materials locally.

The styles of ecclesiastical architecture were determined by factors like existing building materials and current architectural styles, free expression of styles and the knowledge of the “Masters”, moving with time like Evangelical way but all carrying theological and liturgical meanings. Few of the church buildings still exhibited a flavour of Gothic that had laid precedence. This new architecture showed little or no ornamentation or ancient art as the use of modern industrial materials and adoption of theatre form floor plan were dominant. Mega-Church, an American new vocabulary in ecclesiastical dictionary and theatre architecture, emerged. Ecclesiastical buildings in form of industrial buildings sprang up as large spans became a major requirement. Many Churches with their Church leaders individually and collectively became economically so empowered that they could compare with any other business enterprise in Nigeria to the point that they were rated among the richest either in Africa or in the world. Faith Tabernacle, for example, was acclaimed the largest church auditorium in the world as acknowledged by the Guinness Book of World Records in January 2008.

The Churches in Nigeria have not only patronised architecture for their church buildings but in their investment in the educational sector. Some of them have not only built Primary/Secondary Schools but have also built universities. Living Faith Church, for example, has built two high ranking universities but is already building additional two universities. Whether these are in consonance with the Bible or not is for another study.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although there have been no noticeable agitations or studies associating the development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria with apostasy or heresy, architecture has played a significant role in shaping ecclesiastical environment in Nigeria as the nation ranks among the best in the development of ecclesiastical architecture in terms of number and cost. The wealth of the Church is more evident in its architecture as building construction is one of the most capital intensive ventures.

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