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# EVOLUTION AND DEMISE OF CHURCH ARCHITECTURE FROM ANCIENT TO PRESENT TIME

# The Case of Catholic Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam Churches in Tanzania

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**Abstract:** The study examined the evolution and demise of church architecture from ancient to the present time in terms of architectural elements, features, forms, design and construction. Catholic Church architectural patterns and features existed in a certain defined order but gradually began to decay, and slowly becoming less impressive. This study critically examines the forgotten treasures of church symbolisms, forms, features and elements that include various iconographic images that often times were distinctive and selfaffirmative. Besides, interpretation of religious meanings, church architecture still needs to uphold the common iconography while striving to balance the duality between local and universal spiritual meanings expressed by the church architecture. Research data for this study were collected from 105 church leaders through participants' observation, interviews, discussions, and documentary review. Research findings revealed that church architecture used various elements that signified the true identity of Christian beliefs and culture. The goal is to question the contemporary church architecture through extensive field surveys, literature review including reflection on relevant theories to provide the background for empirical observation of church architecture on the ground and analysis of the lost elements that have no proper definitions in today's church architecture. The discussion has focused on church typological analysis by contextualizing the historical architectural designs values. The study recommends the present Catholic Churches to renew the forgotten treasures from the antiquity to classical architecture that enabled the church to stand as a landmark, visibly in rural and urban built morphologies. The study concludes that church architecture uses various architectural features to communicate with God in proper manner of massiveness of the building structures or simple structural and architectural elements that are embraced with the contemporary churches.

**Keywords:** Evolution, Demise, Church, Architecture.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture has been changing throughout the ages and everything has remained historical especially the Church architecture. This study is an attempt to explore linkage that

brought about the demise of church elements, forms, structures and space from ancient time as observed by St. Joseph Cathedral (figures 1 and 2) to the present Dar es Salaam church architecture. Changing architectural landscape of churches in Tanzania has been observed to undergo kaleidoscopic transformation to different styles (figures 3 and 4). The study is justified on a number of reasons. From period to period, different characteristics of the church buildings showed some significant changes that made them epochal. Firstly, from classical antiquity, the Roman-Greek, and early Christian, Medieval, Renaissance and baroque to Neo classical period [1]; [2]; [3]; [4]; [5], there have been an attempt to classify a significant number of epochal trends from the origin of church architecture to the present time. Before the emergence of modern Churches in the late nineteenth century, the church buildings transformation spanned from Antiquity period to Renaissance. Many factors were identified to have been responsible for the death of church elements and changed drastically taking up different architectural spatial forms, identity, and space and in styles [6].



Figure 1: St Joseph Cathedral in Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam Expressing Gothic Architecture Source: Rimisho's Field study 2018



Figure 2: The Interiors of St. Joseph Cathedral in Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam Source: Rimisho's Field study 2018

Secondly, faith was another engine of the Holy Spirit to the adherence of the Gothic revival. Each religion produces its own supreme architectural form that best expresses its ethos and spirit. [3], Renaissance architecture, in so far as it sought inspiration from heathen temples of ancient Rome was to be dismissed as pagan. Only Gothic represented the full flowering and ideal embodiment of the Christian faith [5]. Therefore, with all these, the increased number of the believers to settle in various dioceses with technological know-how managed to discover the new era from the old to benefit from opportunities, which were either missing during Byzantine to neo classical periods [4]. Tanzania, particularly in Dar es Salaam church architecture was not spared in this similar changes since its evolution from 1868 up to 2018 almost hundred and fifty (150) years ago when Germany missionaries arrived and settled in Bagamoyo for the first time. Hundred and fifty years termed as a jubilee for the spread of Christianity in the whole of Tanzania initiated by His Eminence Cardinal Polycarp Pengo who is also the Archbishop of Dar es salaam. He declared this year 2018 as jubilee year of Gospel Evangelization, which was brought about by the missionaries in Tanzania. This study, therefore has examined the characteristic changes that led to the death and evolution of church architecture from ancient to present time in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.



Figure 3: Tabata Catholic Church in Dar es Salaam: A Radical Change from Gothic Church Architecture Source: 2018 Field Survey



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Figure 4: Tabata Catholic Church in Dar es Salaam: A Paradigm Shift from Gothic Interior Architecture Source: 2018 Field Survey

#### 2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Dar es Salaam City because of many reasons. Dar es Salaam City is a place that can be considered as the cradle of Christian evolution in Tanzania, particularly the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam and her parishes. The early Church Missionary Societies succeeded in entering Dar es Salaam through Bagamoyo town in 1868 before they proceeded to other parts of the country (Tanzania). It is a place that Germany Missionaries brought about Gothic style architecture in Dar es Salaam because the first Church building St. Joseph Cathedral was erected in Dar es Salaam in 1889. The Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam was announced as the Apostolic Prefecture of Southern Zanguebar by Pope Leo XIII on November 16, 1887, and promoted to the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Zanguebar on September 15, 1902. Pope Pius X as the Apostolic Vicariate of Dar-es-Salaam renamed it on August 10, 1906, and elevated it to the rank of a metropolitan archdiocese by Pope Pius XII on March 25, 1953. The nature of Dar es Salaam city, being one of the metropolitan megacities in the Africa, gives an impetus to the flourishing of the spread of religious activities particularly as Christianity is considered an urban phenomenon [7]. [8] Rimisho et al (2018) stated that church buildings as symbols of house of God are buildings invested with meaning in a very fundamental way, one in which in most cases - the physical form, or structure, is intentionally arranged and ordered to create a specific reference, or convey and embody specific ideas. The question that we must consider is: to what extent Church buildings have been thought as permanent structures, or if churches were thought as objects of permanence and flexibility in the world.

Selection of case study area for this study has considered being an area with rich information and also where data can be collected with minimum time, money and effort. Moreover, the selection of Dar es Salaam city as a case study area was motivated by the fact that it can sufficiently inform on the *evolution and demise of church architecture*. Furthermore, Parishes are as many as 107 in archdiocese of

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Dar es salaam belong to catholic church where each parish is situated at least 7kms away from another parish boundary which sometimes allow the Christians to have access to another parish without much sweat in terms of walking, cycling or use of automobiles. Since the study is explorative and historical in nature, qualitative methods in form of case study and unstructured interview were adopted for collection of data. Secondary data and information were obtained from literature and unstructured interview. Major data collection tools used in this study included literature interviews. participant observation review. photographic registration. Collected data and information were then compiled, analyzed and reported to achieve intended research objectives. These research tools were found to be reliable in exposing the evolution and demise of church architecture in archdiocese of Dar es Salaam. This research employed case study strategy to explore issues surrounding the evolution and demise of church architecture in terms of design elements. It appears that some of the traditional or even religious church elements are now fading off and completely overlooked. See for instance figures 5 and 6 in comparison with figures 1 and 2. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of church elements because they build up church identity from ancient time to the current modern time. Looking back on it now, it is hard to imagine that we have lost our powerfully reality. The notion of leaving church elements which were so powerful in ancient time has led majority of people to lose the taste of the construction of church elements copied from old years that has dropped sharply. Society is made up of number of institutions-religious, economic, educational, and cultural values. With the growth of industrialization and urbanization in Tanzania, the dominance of church elements from ancient time shifted from religious institutions, i.e the church, to economic, and the emphasis moved from faith and ideals of service to personal ambitions and material success. This is where the faith element comes in. Alongside the economic prosperity there would appear to have been a decline in church architecture.



Figure 5: De Bufallo Church in Dar es Salaam with Contemporary Church Architecture of the Facades Source: 2018 Field Survey



Figure 6: De Bufallo Church in Dar es Salaam with Introduction of New Interior Architecture without Arches Source: 2018 Field Survey

#### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 The Historical perspective

Right from the early years of Christianity, the Catholic Church had distinctive architectural features that set it apart from other religious denominations worldwide. The concept of the supreme and infinite power of God taking care of the world and its inhabitants was at the very core of the architectural designs of the early church. With the influence of Western Culture and especially the Hellenistic Greek and places of Catholic worship were built to emphasize this concept of infinite power over finite human existence. The evolution and demise of church architecture from ancient to the present time should therefore reflect catholic theology and ecclesiology by reflecting the natural laws of church architecture. According to Catholic code of canon law, a church building is defined as a sacred building destined for divine worship (canon 214). The Catechism of the Catholic Church further reiterates the point by stating that "visible churches are not simply gathering places but signify and make visible the church living in this place, the dwelling of God with men reconciled and united in Christ. It is for this reason that architects aiming to achieve these objectives need to draw from the church in this way the catholic historical heritage of more than one hundred and fifty years of architectural design in Tanzania. Catholic churches of the past - grand and small, in large cities, small towns, and rural settings—must adhere to qualities of verticality, permanence and iconography [9]. Verticality inspires faithful toward the otherworld, permanence to outlast human finite life and iconographic to attract pilgrims to listen and hear the gospel. The permanence of the building structures aims to manifest that "the good news being delivered is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb.13.8). The architectural spatial transformation has to be conceived in theory and practice, and with firm foundation to endure and transcend space and time [9]. The evolution and demise of church architecture from ancient to the present time should serve generation after generation, transcend time and culture and must be constructed of durable materials. It must also contain in it a massing element. Buildings must be of significant mass, built with solid foundations, thick walls and allowing for generous

interior spaces. It is integral to both verticality and iconography to convey its iconic meaning. This also helps to engender the element of continuity. The continuity emphasizes the history and tradition of Catholic Church architecture, manifest in other way the permanence of the faith. However, in the last 150 years or so, the architecture of the church were now fading off slowly and slowly the elements which were of profound important in ancient time started to diminish and ignored by the present architecture in terms of the construction of the churches particularly in Dar es Salaam Archdiocese has been happening so quickly and in most cases, moving away from the traditional Catholic architectural design which for many years dictated both landscapes and landmarks of many neighborhoods in most Judeo-Christian world. Figures 7 and 8 show exteriors and interiors of Mwananyamala church building in Dare's Salaam with a godown-like-architecture. This church has lost many features and elements of the traditional church architecture. A worshipper raising his or her eyes to God shall unfortunately see a godown portal frames and not a church! Alas.



Figure 7: Mwananyamala Church in Dar es Salaam with a Godown-like Architecture Source: 2018 Field Survey



Figure 8: Interior Verticality of Mwananyamala Church in Dar es Salaam with Portal Framed Structure - a Godown-like Architecture

Source: 2018 Field Survey

# 3.2 The Contemporary Church Architecture in the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam

The ancient church architecture has sometimes been referred as a clash between conservative values and the

progressive ideologies than the church architecture wars occurring in the last 150 years [10]. Some scholars have squarely laid the blame of poor and sometimes ugly contemporary Catholic Church architecture on the misunderstandings that arose from the liturgical reforms of the second Vatican Council [11]. The misunderstandings arising from the liturgical reforms of the second Vatican Council has resulted to attempts to enculturate Catholicism in all aspects including church architecture from ancient to present Catholic Church buildings [12]. It has been argued that in the spirit of enthusiastic reforms, Catholic churches especially in Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam, apart from St. Joseph Cathedral was created with no reference to the past. The new wave of ideologically driven priests teamed up with modernist architects to create round churches, fan-shaped mass centers, multi-purpose worship spaces and utilitarian cement block boxes [10]. Evolution of church architecture of global catholic institutions morphed into new church buildings that looked like teepees, stranded space ships, or ice cream cones that had fallen upside down.

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Critics argue that things were made even worse by 'renovating' existing churches according to their progressive creed [10]. Traditional catholic architects have long believed that places of worship can and should take many forms. However, in the contemporary era, they argue, lack of integration between the architect and the faith community has increased significantly and at times resulted to negative consequences on catholic liturgical life. The Holy Sea has been the harshest critique of contemporary churches. Traditional catholic architects believe that unlike other Christian denominations like Protestantism, things like the altar and its location, the images, and ambiance are essential to Catholicism. However, modern architects have in recent years tended to focus on space, lines, light and sound as the most important components of church buildings. Such contemporary buildings have at best, appeared to be like museums, spaces that do not suggest prayer or meditation [13]. See also figures 7 and 8. It has been argued that church architecture has in recent years focused on pre-construction building material needs and costs than their significance to spiritual and liturgical life of the faithful. Essentially, places of worship should allow for contemplation, reflection and *meditation.* For centuries, the traditions steeped within each tradition have dictated the church architecture of the present time. The contemporary architectural has attributes of a universal, monotheistic and utilitarian type of religion and increasingly devoid of traditional Judeo-Christian arts and religious symbols. While these buildings should exhibit some common values especially those shared by Judeo-Christian heritage, they should also embody specific symbols and history of the Catholicism [14]. The iconography is frequently maintained, but is less emphatic when compared to the altar of a traditional Catholic Church in Rome, for example. Apart from misunderstandings brought about by the liturgical reforms of the second Vatican Council, global social-economic transformations especially in the western world have also contributed to the contemporary church architecture. In the US for example the dwindling number of catholic faithful has resulted into redevelopment plans for



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some of the old Catholic church buildings in places like New York and Chicago [15]. A shortage of priests joining the seminary, declining mass attendance, and the deferral of maintenance bills for churches that are in need of attention. Because of the amount of resources needed to refurbish and maintain some of these architectural landmarks, dioceses faced with shortage of faithful are opting to closure of potentially many Catholic Church buildings/parishes or consolidate. Closure of church buildings often culminates to a threat of building demolition for some of these important cultural and architectural icons. The sale and subsequent demolition of these spaces has become one of the biggest concerns for North America's Catholic Church buildings [15]. Consequently, the few remaining catholic faithful have to consolidate and sometimes opt for less flamboyant traditional buildings that are easy to maintain and oftentimes-multipurpose buildings [16]. In these situations, the death and evolution of church architecture is real and oftentimes results to negative consequences to traditional catholic architecture. The evolution and demise of church architecture in Tanzania and Dar es Salaam archdiocese in particular, can be better understood in light of the rich history of Catholic Church architecture, space availability and socio-economic changes. For many years, the architecture of present catholic parishes in the Dar es Salaam archdiocese has been heavily influenced by liturgical directives from the Holy Sea, western donor support, and unlimited available space.

A better understanding of the evolution of the parishes built environment in Dar-es Salaam archdiocese is important for better city planning and also service delivery. With the decline of western support for Catholic Church institutions, buildings and also the liturgical directives to imbue local cultures into the catholic practices including art, the architectural elements in Dar es Salaam has increasingly moved away from the traditions of catholic architecture into more secular, multi-purpose, building materials-oriented and more space utilitarian architectural designs. The dwindling of Christian faithful in Western countries have resulted to limited resources to support evangelical activities including building projects overseas. Dar es Salaam archdiocese is one of many dioceses in Africa and other developing countries whose architectural church elements continue to be affected. With most parishes buildings environment remaining idle and some dioceses forced to demolish or think of redevelopment projects for some of historical Church buildings in most European countries [15]. Christians in the Western world are increasingly disillusioned about parish environment seeing these as obsolete and unnecessary infrastructures in our contemporary architecture and evangelization. Christians in places like Dar es Salaam who still want to build and maintain parishes' environments have to find alternatives to solicit resources as well as adopt their own cultural architectural plans. Often times these designs are locally generated with little or no reference to Catholic architectural heritage. This has led to a changing landscape of local architectural elements departing from traditional Roman Christian basilicas and the Gothic Revival Churches of early 20th-century. The new architectural designs have been

referred as chaotic and sometimes ill-equipped architectural structures. Some of these designs are devoid of the key catholic architectural elements of permanence, verticality and iconographic elements.

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The growing population and improving economic conditions of many catholic faithful within the capital city have increasingly affected the architectural elements of the present church architecture in the Dar es Salaam archdiocese. Over the past two decades, the city of Dar es Salaam has experienced steady population growth with improving economic conditions. This has attracted more catholic faithful to the city and consequently demanded the attention of the diocese to expand, extend the already built churches but with no ancient church elements and provide spiritual and social services to the growing community of faithful. The increasing pressure to expand has led into the need to quickly expand the capacity by building structures that can serve the need with less emphasis on the traditional of the churches of time immemorial and their precious elements of massiveness and verticality. As exampled by figures 9 and 10, churches under construction at Kijitonyama and Ununuo respectively as designed by Architect Rev. Fr. Henry Rimisho one of the two authors of this paper. This has resulted to loss of beauty, traditional designs which maintained seclusion and often times quietness. Traditional parishes built environments were conceived as sacred places to appreciate nature, serenity and also meeting with God's presence. It encouraged tranquility and meditation environment and Catholic faithful would use these places to decompress form regular day life stresses. Growing local population and increasing economic power. The speed of urbanization process in Dar es Salaam, far surpasses the capacity of the city to plan and develop guided contemporary church architecture in archdiocese of Dar es Salaam. Hence, its own demise due to the lack of skills, appropriate building materials and willingness to echo the traditional church architecture.



Figure 9: Proposed Contemporary Catholic Church at Kijitonyama in Dar es Salaam (Under Construction) Source: Designed and Drawn by Rimisho (2018)



Figure 10: Proposed Contemporary Catholic Church to be built at Ununuo in Dar es Salaam Source: Designed and Drawn by Rimisho (2018)

Evolution and demise of Church architecture is the ongoing discussion in today's researches. The fact can be summarized on the iconographic images and structural elements which are no longer existing or diminishing as time goes on and still yet some scholars of church architecture who have studied deep in the area of religion are repeatedly describe the influence of the science and technology are the factors that can be traced back to the very early centuries of the church, [4]; [17]; [18]. The church has taken many different forms throughout history. The rise and fall of the religious congregations has been chronicled by various scholars [19]; [18]; [1]; [17]. In many places of the Western societies today, the church or temple is the oldest and most central building in the community, and one that in its history, design, and artwork is best thought to reflect the culture as well as the faith of the community [2]. Buildings intended for worship provide a space, or total environment, in which the religious reality believed in by these people, comes alive through the use of symbols and the evocation of memories. Everywhere one looks there may be a symbolic reminder of some truth of the faith, or scenes that recall previous times of worship or sacred events participated in by oneself or one's people. Often, it has the special feel of sacred space; one may instinctively talk in hushed tones and act differently in a church building than one does outside. This may particularly be the case during rites or services. Church buildings are basically of two types: those that are seen primarily as the House of God, and those that are planned primarily for congregational worship, an assembly place for the People of God [2]; [4]. These scholars emphasized that the church architecture is fading away though some of the structural elements remained historical for the future generation which results in spatial similarities to date though some elements are still used in some of the churches regions in Tanzania. Some of the churches in ancient time can be categorized as primitive from external appearance by believers of our time. As all religious practices involve geography [20], the spaces that support the rituals play an important role. [3] argued that sacred space is ritual space.

It is indisputable that, some of the elements of church architecture are gradually diminishing and changing day after day as time goes. This is a result of science and technology, which spearhead new creation of the modality of

construction as well as instruments used. It has been investigated how transformations of the church elements affected today's worship and have swept away the church identity from ancient time to date. Everybody can recognize a building, but a building is not necessarily architecture. The difference is that a building must have aesthetic appeal to the senses to merit this distinction. Aesthetic appeal is achieved in a number of different ways. For example, it may be overall shape of the edifice; the arrangement and detailing of the windows; the proportions of doors; and windows to solid wall; the rhythm of columns or projections: the line of roof. Be it pitched, soaring shell-shaped or domedagainst the sky; the massing of glass wall or solid forms in vertical or horizontal lines; the projection of mass into space; color and texture, carving and decoration; the sequence of rooms and their proportions [20]. All these elements can have their individual appeal, but they do not all have to be present to make architecture. In fact, some style and movements have relied on very few of them, for example, the decorative form of Late Baroque, known as Rococo. Quality of painting and sculpture are sometimes present in architecture, but architecture is unique in its quality of space enclosure, and has been referred to as the Mother of the Arts "Spatial concepts in church architecture have developed through structure, and structure has developed through simple column and lintel construction, the arch, vault, dome, and the use of iron to the amazing feats performed today using steel, glass, plastics, reinforced concrete. Church facade aspects are the key features.

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#### 4. CONCLUSION

Catholic Church architecture has provided magnificent church buildings that have stood elegantly and powerfully from ancient to present time. Combining a wide range of materials with outstanding designs, the Catholic Christians were able to express their beliefs through built objects and turn architecture into spiritual entity. Consequently, architecture became an imperial tool to demonstrate to the world that Rome was culturally superior because its wealth, skills, and audacity to produce such edifices. Even more significantly, the Catholic Christians use of concrete, brick, and arches twinned with building designs like the Amphitheatre and basilica has immeasurably influenced all dioceses in the world. Catholic Church architecture has persistently remained the same all over the world. The evolution of churches in localized contexts like the archdiocese of Dar es Salaam has posed several questions. In Tanzania for example, church architecture has significantly changed from Gothic architecture of St Joseph Cathedral to different architecture as exampled by Christ the King Cathedral of Moshi. Noticeably, parish church architecture of today is invariably different from the common church architecture of parish churches witnessed in Western societies. Indigenization of foreign established churches has given room to accommodate African culture, tradition and economies that has maintained the stability, beliefs and architecture of the church in accordance to local people's perception of the church they want and afford to build. The practice shows that there is no need to concentrate on old

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classical details and elements of medieval church

architecture that could take many years ranging from 10 to 100 to construct. This is a demise of the church architecture of the modern history in the local liturgical practices.

Rigidity of the church architecture should be relaxed by the

architects of the modern times to allow localized features.

elements, forms and economies while keeping the basic

functions of the church and Catholicism in praying and praising the almighty God, the supreme power at heaven.

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