Blessed are the Consumerists: The Ideology of Contemporary Mega Church Architecture

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Abstract

Church architecture is commonly a tactile expression of theology, revealing to us who we are, what we believe and how we practise Christianity. While the content of the Gospel message is significantly more important than church architecture, we nevertheless ought to work towards an architecture that creatively and meaningfully expresses Biblical Christianity, its faith, theology and praxis. In this paper I argue that most contemporary mega church architecture is unfortunately an expression of consumer-capitalist ideology, and fails to contrast itself as 'other', by aligning itself with secular architectural typologies. These generally govern the form, space and aesthetics of the contemporary mega church. It is argued that contrary to good architectural design theory, the mega church building all too often is a form that does *not* follow function, but is rather a manifestation of consumerism and capitalism. And while this manifestation of ideology is arguably noble, because of its apparent evangelistic objective,

[1] The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

I demonstrate that this is problematic on several accounts, ultimately offering an inversion of authentic Christian community. The paper then endeavours to offer counter-cultural ideologies from Scripture that are often in contrast to the ideologies of the mega church and its Christianity. Some of these Biblical ideologies and other ideas are then developed into features that might inform any church architecture. It is hoped that further reflection on this topic would encourage a Biblical theology and spirituality that leads to world-class church design.

1. Introduction

Architecture tells us something about ourselves and the world in which we live. The same has always been true of church architecture; it tells us how we ought to relate to God and to one another. Church architecture is commonly a tactile expression of its theology. Mohler (2005:online) is in agreement, he says, 'Architecture does signify meaning and intention' and gives the example of the difference between the 'soaring nave of a Gothic cathedral and the flat auditorium of many evangelical church buildings'. The Gothic style communicates transcendence and majesty, while the flat auditorium is an expression of nearness, fellowship and teaching. The verticality in the Gothic style draws us in awe, and on the other hand, the flat auditorium offers a more horizontal perspective (2005:online), perhaps relational.

Much has been written about traditional church architecture, but little on contemporary church buildings. By contemporary church architecture, I wish to distinguish between two very different expressions. (1) *Contemporary Sacramental Church Architecture:* More often than not they are of modest size and are elegantly designed

in one of the architectural styles. The church building usually belongs to traditional or sacramental denominations. Among many others, such churches include, (i) Tadao Ando's magnificent, *Church of the Light* (1989) in Ibaraki, Japan, employing a Japanese modernist style whereby Ando uses raw concrete to enclose spaces, where light and solid convey deep spiritual meaning. (ii) Richard Meier's *Jubilee Church* (1996) in Rome, Italy, designed in the abstract modernist tradition, and (iii) Reiulf Ramstad Arkitekter's *Community Church Knarvik* (2010), in Hordaland, Norway, which is a contemporary timber-cladded church, taking cognisance of its environment, landscape and cultural heritage. (2) *Contemporary Mega Church*[2] *Architecture:* While these churches may be designed well, they often take on a theology of prosperity and the typology of shopping malls or entertainment centres with large parking facilities and spacious auditoriums. Although many such churches have been built, very little, if anything has been published on contemporary *mega* church architecture, perhaps because it is a recent phenomenon. The interest of this paper concerns the architecture of the contemporary mega church.

García-Lozano believes that church architecture 'should provide a response to the specific persons they try to serve, to their experience of faith and to the expression of the communion with God and with people'. He further says that the church, or 'temple' as he calls it, is founded upon specific theological ideas that serve as its bases (2014:41). Arizmendi (2014:55) pushes this further, by calling our attention to the purpose of contemporary church architecture, as responding to the globalisation and secularisation of the cityscape. It is an 'immigrant', so to speak, in the secular urban fabric and must find meaning by expressing 'otherness'.

[2] A *Mega* church is usually characterised as having more than 2 000 members.

This 'otherness' is contrasted by the secular architecture of the contemporary mega church whereby the building appeals to the elite and the popular, with its superb imagining, music[3], interior design, shops, and signature eateries and coffee bars, and more often than not, the auditorium is a hi-tech state-of-the-art performance venue [4] (Mulugeta 2010:online).

The focus of this paper, therefore, explores what it is that drives contemporary mega church architecture. To achieve this, I will examine the ideologies that inform the buildings of mega churches. Secondly, the evangelistic objective of contemporary mega church architecture will be considered. Thirdly, I hope to demonstrate how this contributes towards an inversion of Biblical Christianity. It would be unseemly to offer a critical response without offering an alternative, and thus the fourth discussion will explore Biblical ideologies for Christian community, after which I will offer ideas and suggestions towards a Biblical expression in church architecture.

[3] Staub makes and interesting observation when he says, 'sensory repetition can desensitize the audience to a particular sensation, producers have learned that to retain an audience and avoid boredom requires a constant escalation of new and more sensational experiences' (2007:9).

[4] Recently, the satirical evangelical Christian website, The Babylon Bee, created by Adam Ford, put out a short online satirical article titled, *Mall Shoppers Suddenly Realize They're Actually At Megachurch* (2017), highlighted this spectacle humorously in tongue-in-cheek fashion.
Available at http://babylonbee.com/news/mall-shoppers-suddenly-realize-theyre-actually-megachurch/.

2. Ideologies and Contemporary Mega Church Architecture

2.1. Introduction

Before we discuss ideologies that contribute to the trend in contemporary mega church architecture, it should be made quite clear that church is not the same as church architecture. The two are quite different. The church, or ἐκκλησία[5], is an assembly, a community of Christians with a shared belief (Arndt, Danker, Bauer 2000:303), or as the Greek implies 'those who are called out', presumably out of the world and into the kingdom of light, becoming followers of Jesus Christ.[6] Nevertheless, church architecture, I argue, is an expression of its church gathering and its theology.

Arizmendi observes that there have been collective changes in the way western cities understand the purpose of church buildings. The God of the creeds, has become, he believes, displaced by the 'god of the machine, and traditional Christian architecture has been assigned a role of less if not, at worse, irrelevance in the context of the machine/city of modernism' (2014:57). If Arizmendi is talking about traditional (sacramental) Christian architecture, what about modern evangelical church architecture? How ought we to respond?

Traditional church architecture may be found in the Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic (and later Neo-Gothic), Renaissance, Baroque and Rococo architectural traditions, where one goes to experience spirituality or to commune with God, and to experience the awe and

[5] cf. Matt 18:17; Acts 5:11; 9:31; 11:26; 12:5; 1 Cor. 1:2, 10; 11:18; Eph 5:23-24; 1 Thess 2:14; Rev 1:11.
[6] cf. discussion by Beltran 2014:online.

magnificence of God (or his architecture). Modern evangelical church buildings on the other hand are primarily about functionality. Among others, one might highlight (1) the 'basic bare-minimal' church building, (2) The warehouse or shed, as a church facility, (3) the tented church, (4) the rural mud hut, (5) the experimental church which usually duplicates into another function like an art gallery or a coffee bar, or even (6) the house church[7] without a church building, and of course, (7) the contemporary mega church, the state-of-the-art religious centre, where one may experience great spectacle. The church building is usually driven by theological and socio-economic considerations. I will argue that both theological and economic considerations are deeply embedded in contemporary mega church architecture.

2.2. Form follows function

Theological and socio-economic concerns inform church architecture, but at a more basic architectural level, the question is, 'why do buildings look the way they do?' The form, space and aesthetics of any building is driven by its function. A school looks like a school, a house looks like a house, a stadium looks like a stadium, and so on. It would be unusual if a school looked like post office, one might call this 'architectural dishonesty'.

American architect, Louis Sullivan (1856–1924) who practised in Chicago and is celebrated for his contribution to the development of Modernism, came up with the famous idiom, 'Form follows function'. He argued that the exterior form should express the activities or the

[7] cf. Acts 2:46; I Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3, 5; Col 4:15; cf. recent article by Sheryl Lynn, titled, Francis Chan Goes into Detail with Facebook Employees on Why He Left His Megachurch (2017), available at http://www.christianpost.com/news/francis-chan-goes-into-detail-with-facebook-employees-on-why-he-left-his-megachurch-190136/#.WVaDEtgzmsI.facebook

functions of the interior[8] (Craven 2016:online; Righini 2000:92). Further, in his book, *Thinking Architecturally*, South African architect Paul Righini urges his readers to design buildings while also keeping in mind what is valued. That is, buildings reflect value, they are not merely aesthetic objects (Righini 2000:3). He continues, 'Style reflects attitudes to the crafting of buildings as well as issues of cultural taste and appropriateness' (Righini 2000:3). So while the Christian philosopher Woltersorff (2012:online) is correct when he states that, 'Architecture is the art of enclosure and the carving out of enclosure', the architectural form should also express function (Righini 2000:93). And while 'form follows function' was the primary unifying idea of many Modernist architects and designers (Righini 2000:36), the basic concept remains true in varying degrees throughout history and architectural styles, even though to a lesser degree in deconstruction. The Parthenon on top of the Acropolis in Athens, speaks the language of a classical Greek temple. And while Frank O. Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, is a spectacular expression of architectural deconstructivism,[9] it's not impossible to conceive it as museum of modern and contemporary art, despite having all its traditional architectural typologies stripped away, rather than, for example, an Engen fuel station. According to Craven, Sullivan had remarked that 'all things in nature have shape, that is to say, a form, an outward semblance, that tells us what they are, that distinguishes them from ourselves and from each other'. These shapes, Sullivan believed, express the inner life, and that this is a law in nature and should be followed (Craven 2016:online).

[8] cf. Sullivan 2012.

[9] I use the Guggenheim Museum as an extreme example due to its deconstructivist style, whereby, even if the architectural categories are intended to be blurred and the architecture is unidentifiable, it nevertheless still resembles a certain type of building.

Wolterstorff (2012:online) is right when he says that when it comes to church architecture, we should begin by reflecting on (1) what kind of architecture does the liturgy[10] call for? (2) how should the architecture enclose the space 'identifying the activities that will be performed in that place and then asking what will enable, enhance and fit those activities',[11] (3) and then of course, as I have already mentioned, affordability (economics).

Irrespective of the architectural style of any church architecture, whether it be an expression of a traditional classical style, or whether, modernist, postmodernist, deconstructivist, or other, it ought to exhibit architectural honesty, as should all other buildings; even if there is a 'blurring of edges' with respect to architectural language and meaning, for example, as we see in deconstructivism.

Today's contemporary mega church architecture, often does not reflect the internal function of church and Christian worship, but rather those of secular ideologies, speaking the architectural language of performance centre and shopping mall. A church building where form does *not* follow function suffers dishonesty.[12] Such religious centres, I believe are informed by certain ideologies, and these ideologies are all too often the 'architects'.

[10] By 'liturgy' I do not simply mean the style of worship practices by traditional and sacramental churches, although I mean that too, but also the general arrangement of worship in Reformed, Pentecostal, Charismatic, non-denominational and 'mega' churches.

[11] Wolterstorff, speaking of a contemporary church he attended, recounts how he was unable to imagine any practice and understanding of the Christian liturgy that would call for such an enclosure (2012:online).

[12] These mega churches *do* follow function when they have shops, restaurant, coffee bars, parking garages, performance auditoriums, *et cetera*, but *not* in so far as they are said to be a church, a place of worship.

2.3. Architects of contemporary mega church architecture

If the architecture of the contemporary mega church is an expression of the performance centre and the shopping mall motif, one is compelled to ask whether the ideologies of consumerism are its architects. As a case study, the founder and leading pastor of such a church in Sandton, South Africa, in a recent article titled, *Christ and Capitalism Reconciled,* in the *Mail & Guardian* believes that, 'Capitalism is a biblical system endorsed by the Bible', and that 'many mistakenly believe that the Bible endorses socialism'[13] (Whittles 2017:17). Even if capitalism is endorsed by scripture (and I am unconvinced that neither capitalism nor socialism are endorsed), should it influence church architecture over and above all the other grand theological motifs?

The founding pastor explains how capitalism is unashamedly incorporated into the service and in the daily functions of the church. He acknowledges that this may seem out of place for those visiting for the first time, but nevertheless sees this as a vital part in keeping the church open and Christianity alive (Whittles 2017:17). Horton makes a revealing statement,

> Jesus has been dressed up as a corporate CEO, life coach, culture-warrior, political revolutionary, philosopher, co-pilot, cosufferer, moral example, and partner in fulfilling our personal and social dreams. But in all of these ways, are we reducing the central character in the drama of redemption to a prop for our own play? (Horton 2008:25).

[13] This is no better demonstrated when he gives a tour around the church building (cf. THiNK International. Church Building Design — Rivers Church Sandton Building Tour, n.d. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmRMPEEajCA.

One wonders whether capitalism in Christianity encourages people to 'obey God in order to get things from God', rather than obeying God to get God— 'to delight and resemble him' (Keller 2012:85). As Keller says, urban churches ought to train Christians to be neighbours in the city, not simply consumers (2012:175).

Whittles, from the *Mail & Guardian*, points out that the main branch of this particular church is a multipurpose centre for Sunday worship, Bible study *and trade*[14]. This, he says, 'resembles a mini-mall and franchise stores such as the Italian Illy café complete with family-owned and operated food and drink shops, as well as a Christian bookstore.[15] The article comments that this is an 'effective networking space'[16] (Whittles 2017:17).

Although mega churches explain why money is necessary and justify how their money is spent, including feeding the poor, which is a laudable endeavour, there remains a growing concern for the role of money in the practice of Christianity, as Whittles puts it. There seems to be 'an underlying principle that distances worldly riches from Christian belief' (Whittles 2017:17). While the Bible does talk about money and

[14] Commenting on much of contemporary Christianity, Staub argues that instead of being theological, 'it is therapeutic; instead of intellectual, it is emotional and revivalist; instead of emphasizing a serving community, it is consumerist and individualistic; instead of producing spiritual growth and depth, it is satisfied with *entrepreneurialism* and numeric growth' (2007:43; italics mine). Even if there are Bible studies, these seem to be overshadowed by entrepreneurship and the focus on numeric growth.

[15] When I visited this 'branch' and walked in to both its bookstores, the shelves were filled almost entirely with books promoting therapeutic deism and self-help, not to mention books on good business practice and success, all from a 'Christian perspective' of course.

[16] One is not surprised then, that its founding pastor authored, *The Principles of Business Success* (2012) and *12 Things that Undermine Our Success* (2015), and that business management feature prominently in his talks (Whittles 2017:17).

business practice, and Jesus certainly did (e.g. Matt 25:18–27; Luke 19:23). The theme is not as prominent in the New Testament as one might expect. The issue for Jesus is focused on one's attitude towards money, rather than promoting capitalism.

The internal activities or functions of these church buildings call to mind certain gospel narratives; (1) While I doubt all that happens in the so called 'trade centre' of any contemporary mega church is akin to the 2nd Temple being a 'den of robbers' when Jesus cleansed it (Matt 21:12–17, Mark 11:15–19, Luke 19:45–48), one does, however, wonder whether Jesus might cleanse the 'trade centre' on other grounds, the imagery being indicative. (2) There is no reason either to question whether wealthy individuals have come to salvation and have entered the kingdom of God. But is a wealthy church with excessively grand décor, technology, glitz and architecture appropriate? After all, Jesus did say, 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God' (Matt 19:24, ESV[17]). (3) In Mark 6:8 Jesus sent out his twelve disciples and charged them 'to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts'. The parallel is found in Luke 10:4, but later in Luke 22:36, Jesus says, 'But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one'. The concern in the first scenario is to have no money, an antithesis of capitalism if you will, and then later in Luke's account to take a money bag, if a disciple had one. The issue here is financial need or provision, rather than wealth. (4) The theme of moneybags is also found in Luke 12:33, and here Jesus encourages his listeners to sell their possessions and to give to those in need, and to acquire 'moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that

[17] All scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise indicated.

does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys'. In this instance, the concept is not monetary wealth, but spiritual wealth. (5) In addition to Jesus' words, Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 3:1–5 'that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money … lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power'.[18]

Mulugeta (2010:online), quoting from Paul Germond, a lecturer of the sociology of religion at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, says that 'all these churches[19]—are mega churches that preach a gospel of prosperity in which theology says that God rewards the faithful in material ways.' This Germond believes, 'fits in neatly with consumer capitalism. You see it in the car, homes, dress … the conspicuous consumption.'

Indeed, the architects, consumerism and capitalism, have changed the form, spaces and the aesthetic of contemporary churches, and I argue Christian Theology included. As a result, the unique style, form and aesthetics of church architecture is flattened, fitting inconspicuously into the secular urban fabric. Arizmendi (2014:57) articulates this well when he writes,

> The ascent of modern institutions to perceived higher echelons of cultural importance have subsequently created the conundrum of the Church's sacred spaces becoming less iconographic in urban contexts, backdrops to the life of the City, no longer central or as relevant in

[18] I am hesitant to suggest all the vices of 2 Tim 3:1–5 are applicable to the attendees of contemporary mega churches, and neither do I wish to suggest that all are lovers of money and such pleasures, on the contrary one should expect to find a number of faithful and genuine believers in these congregations, for this reason I have contracted the verse.

[19] Referring to South African Churches, Rhema Church, Grace Church, His People, and Rivers Church.

> meaning. At worse, it is the absorption of the sacred aesthetic by the profane.

He proceeds by asking whether the church should respond architecturally, and 'should it adopt secular form and styles, movements or themes in an attempt to gain relevance in the secular cityscape? (Arizmendi 2014:57).

2.4. Conclusion

It seems then that there are generally two issues at play that contribute to the trend in contemporary mega church architecture; (1) There is a conscious shift away from the architectural idiom, 'form follows function' in much mega church architecture, whereby the architecture of the church takes on secular architectural typologies, for example, a shopping mall. This then lends itself to 'dishonest architecture', where a building is said to be what it is not, a church. Such an architecture, I believe, is the result of the second issue. (2) Consumerism and capitalism are the socio-economic ideologies, the architects, that promote the expression of the performance centre and shopping mall motifs found in many contemporary mega church buildings. These two work conjointly.

3. The Evangelistic Objective of Contemporary Mega Church Architecture

Despite serious problems, the ideologies of contemporary mega church architecture do serve a purpose, they have an objective. The objective is an evangelistic one, bringing people into the church, being relevant to the youth and seeking to contextualise Christianity.[20] Notwithstanding,

[20] cf. Mulugeta 2010:online

even if such churches are effective in doing just that, and there is a sincere evangelic objective, why is all the expense in décor, technology and architecture not being exploited towards gathering the people for teaching in sound theology and biblical exposition in preaching with evangelistic focus, rather than powerful messages on being successful, offering life and business principles. This seems to be the norm in many contemporary mega churches. One ought to ask, not only what message is being preached to church members and visiting non-believers, but what message does the architecture of the church convey? What Gospel does it preach, and what are people being converted to; a religious brand of consumerist capitalism?[21]

Beltran, of *Visioneering Studios,*[22] an American architectural practice that specialises in contemporary church architecture makes it clear that church architecture has an evangelising purpose when he says, 'we help churches with storytelling and architectural evangelism' (2013:online). Nonetheless, as Arizmendi points out, 'Church architecture which seeks to compete with the iconography around it fails its primary purpose, incorrectly thinking it can measure and demonstrate God's glory to the world using a secular yard-stick'. He believes, and I think rightly so, that when a church building does this, it conforms to the secular and denies its intrinsic sacred existence (2014:59). To clarify, the building is

[21] At the back of the glossy information brochure from a South African mega church, is an invitation to salvation together with a 'sinner's prayer'. And while there is mention to a relationship with Jesus, it begins by quoting Jeremiah 29:11, 'The Lord declares that He has "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future", and then continues, "God said this because He made you and wants to bless you…'" Notwithstanding that this is taken entirely out of context, it is an indication of the consumer capitalist ideology.

[22] Visioneering Studios has designed many contemporary church buildings, from high to modest budget. Much of their architecture is contextual, and while some of their church buildings are done successfully and sensitively to the Christian faith, others look like commercial shopping malls (cf. http://www.visioneeringstudios.com).

not itself sacred, of course the church is its people, but the building does house sacred activity and is an expression of sacred function and of the 'sacred faith'. Arizmendi argues that such contemporary churches are misaligned, having a dogma (ideology) that cares less about Christian theology than it does about the age. Meaningful church architecture, however, 'follows theological and liturgical vigour'. If we are to design appropriate church architecture in the urban fabric in our contemporary world, we are 'to have a rigorous understanding of how former Christian approaches developed a synthesised architecture that was both relevant and timeless' (2014:59).

Former Christian approaches to architecture were timeless as is the message of scripture. The presentation (architectural style), however, remains cultural, argues Beltran, using examples from Jesus' own ministry. He believes that if Jesus was walking around today, he would use 'technology, music, buildings, and everything else at his disposal as tools to reach people where they are' (2014:online). Staub, on the other hand argues that we have created 'a spiritually confused, superficial popular culture that is artificially sustained by technology, money, and marketing' (2007:27). Staub (2007:46) laments later in his book,

> I simply note that Christian use of media has been primarily imitative, striving to look like and sound like mainstream media while adapting the lyrical and moral content to the reductionist, feel-good gospel of pop Christianity. Generally, it lacks spiritual depth, intellectual firepower, and artistic originality, and for the most part, it is satisfied with being a counterpart to the popular culture: entertaining and mindless and driven by celebrity, technological competence, good marketing, and above all else, profitability.

And if media has been primarily imitative of secular media, one could say the same for contemporary mega church architecture. Shopping

malls and performance centres, fitted with multi-storey parking garages are all imitative of secular consumerist culture.

Keller acknowledges the need to rightly contextualise Christianity, saying that, 'All gospel ministry and communication are already heavily adapted to a particular culture'. But we do need to contextualise consciously, he says. However, he makes a salient point when he writes, 'If we never deliberately think through ways to rightly contextualize gospel ministry to a new culture,[23] we will unconsciously be deeply contextualized to some other culture. Our gospel ministry will be both overadapted to our own culture and underadapted to new cultures at once'. This he believes will lead eventually to a distorted Christian Gospel (2012:96). I believe that this has unfortunately become the downfall of many contemporary mega churches, and their architecture is the expression of the same.

Staub picks up on this idea, that in almost every way the evangelical quest for cultural relevance is influenced by secular culture rather than the culture being influenced by evangelicals (2007:39). In like manner, contemporary mega church architecture is largely influenced by a consumer capitalist culture, not to mention its influence on Christian faith and theology. It seems, according to Staub, that even though contemporary mega church Christianity seeks for cultural relevance, it is mostly unsuccessful. Yes, they are very successful by business standards, with its wealth, 'electronic and print media empires', its marketing and even its political influence, but there is little evidence that this is transforming culture. Staub asks, 'If evangelicals are

[23] Keller sees the first task of contextualisation as an immersion of oneself in the questions, beliefs and hopes of the recipient culture, in order that a biblical, gospel-centred answers might be offered in response to its questions (Keller 2012:96). This is evident in Keller's own ministry and writing.

dominating American culture, why is our culture in such bad condition spiritually, intellectually, morally, relationally, and aesthetically?' (2007:39). Secular media does not find such a form of 'evangelicalism noteworthy for its spiritual depth', nor even for its 'intellectual rigour, aesthetic richness, relational health, or moral purity'. Staub is right, one rarely, if ever, hears of contemporary Christianity described 'as a profoundly spiritual movement offering deep union with a transcendent God or as the basis for a spiritually inspired, intelligent, and aesthetically rich cultural renewal' (2007:43).

While the evangelistic objective of contemporary mega church architecture might be sincere, and achieves much of what it envisions. I do not believe, for the most part, that it provides a meaningful reflection on authentic Christianity, a Christianity that is neither consumerist nor capitalist, or even socialist. Arizmendi offers a striking proclamation, 'In the Christian context, a relevant architecture within the secular city can only be created if the Church takes seriously the significance of its own revelation' (2014:63).

4. The Inversion of Authentic Christian Community

This discussion examines how contemporary mega church architecture inverts authentic Christian community. Beltran, while acknowledging that there is nothing wrong with traditional church buildings and traditional church music, he suggests that a church will continue to be ineffective in reaching its community, and the unreached in the culture of today by 'using methods and facility prototypes created hundreds of years ago'. He likens this to a doctor using leeches and other medical 'technology' of a few hundred years ago to treat a patient today (2014:online). I think Beltran is right here, but misses the point when he begins asking, 'What type of places and buildings do people choose to

go to spend their free time? What type of music do people choose to listen to on their iPods? Churches need to be offering their community what their community needs' (2014:online).

In an earlier article, Beltran, speaking about his architectural studio, writes, 'we use services such as planning, vision clarity, design, architecture and construction, but they are merely a means to fulfilling our core businesses'. He then askes a series of three *business* questions for the church and accepts that such questions might be uncomfortable to ask. He asks; (1) Who are your customers? (2) Who is your competition? (3) What products do you produce? (Beltran 2013:online). To which I ask, ought a church community to ask such questions at all, or is the church something entirely different from business and its practices?

I am convinced Belran and those who advocate such a contemporary mega church architecture are wrong on several accounts, and in essence invert authentic Christian community. My argument is as follows: (1) If people wish to see a movie, they visit a movie theatre, if they wish to experience live rock music, they should attend a rock concert, if they wish to go shopping, they should visit a shopping mall, if they wish to drink artisan coffee they visit a coffeehouse. The church need not and should not imitate secular subculture. (2) The church is a place of worship, not another secular venue. It ought not to be an extension of secular activities with a Christian aroma. The issue has everything to do with authentic Christian devotion, and nothing to do with 'keeping up with the times'. Garbarino (2017:online) in his book review of Hurtabo's, *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian distinctive in the Roman world,* writes,

> If Christianity wishes to grow in an increasingly pluralistic West, we can't accommodate to secular social norms any more than early

> Christians could accommodate to Roman social norms. If we believe and act just like everyone else, what's the point? Christians were different at the founding of the church, and many of the things that made them distinct are just as relevant today.

(3) The church ought to be a 'strange' place, different from the familiar places we so often visit in our secular society. Hurtabo (2016) says that Christianity, even in its inception has been referred to by outsiders as 'different, odd, and even objectionable'. Garbarino (2017:online) in his book review of the same, tells us how Hurtabo, 'describes how Christians in the first three centuries set themselves apart from the broader Greco-Roman society. Christianity, with its universal claims, must be accessible to all cultures, but *it shouldn't accommodate itself to that culture in a bid to be relevant.*'

Being accessible and odd at the same time, Hurtabo argues, *helped Christianity grow* (emphasis mine).

This idea is evident in a recent online article put out by the *Telegraph,* which says, a 'study, commissioned by the Christian youth organisation Hope Revolution Partnership and carried out by ComRes, suggested that levels of Christianity were much higher among young people than previously thought'. It continues to mention that 'the influence of a church building was more significant than attending a youth group, going to a wedding, or speaking to other Christians about their faith'. Further, the study also suggests that 'new methods invested in by the Church, such as youth groups and courses such as Youth Alpha, are less effective than prayer or visiting a church building in attracting children to the church'. And so some of the 'old school' methods, like church architecture, are still some of the most effective ways of getting people

into the Christian faith[24] (Rudgard 2017:online). It seems quite clear that the church ought to offer relief from the mundane and the familiar. The church is a place to retreat from the 'secular noise', images and experiences of this world. We are after all the *Ekklesia,* 'the called out ones', the church's 'profile' is different from the world and its systems. Jesus calls people out of society and into something new, and yet we are still to participate in our world meaningfully[25] (John 17:14–15; cf. Rom 12:1–2). (4) While churches require some element of business and management, it is not a business enterprise. The business of the church should be in the foreground, preferably unnoticed. Jesus himself managed his ministry and it appears he had Judas Iscariot manage the moneybag that was used for ministry (John 13:29). Yet, the financials of Jesus' ministry barely features. Luke tells us how Jesus said, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Luke 9:58). (5) Beltran suggests that a church facility could be a '7-day-a-week Christ-centred community' rather than a '2-hour-a-week Christian insider's club' (Beltran 2014:online). There is merit in making full use of the church building, but Beltran fails to remind us of the great commission in Matthew 28:16–20, where Jesus says, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations…',[26] which is the

[24] Even if one were to question the study and ask questions about the depth of theology, devotion and discipleship, and whether young people truly become followers of Jesus Christ, one cannot help but notice the importance of Church architecture in evangelism, as a starting point. I believe the same holds true for all church traditions.

[25] Indeed, Bonhoeffer (2003:245) wrote, 'The 'unworldliness' of the Christian life is meant to take place in the midst of this world. Its place is the church-community which must practise it in its daily living'.

[26] Wallace notes that πορευθέντες (go) is the first of two participles in verse 19, βαπτίζοντες (baptising) is the other. He argues that πορευθέντες 'fits the structural pattern for the attendant circumstance participle; aorist participle preceding an aorist main verb (in this case, imperative)'. Further, he says that there is no grammatical reason 'for giving the participle a mere temporal idea'. Should πορευθέντες be an adverbial participle, the Great Commission becomes the *Great Suggestion*; as he aptly

apex of the missionary motif in Matthew's Gospel.[27] We attend church and smaller gatherings to pray, to worship, to hear the exposition of Scripture and to be taught the Christian faith, but we are to live out that faith publically in the marketplace, in educational institutions, or wherever we might find ourselves. Although it is a good thing to bring people to church services and call them into fellowship with Jesus Christ and with believers, we are called to be witnesses, the light of the world (Acts 1:8; Matt 5:14–16). Frost proclaims how Christians should live meaningful 'incarnational lives' in mission, engaging one's community as the body of Christ, proclaiming and demonstrating 'the universal reign of God through Jesus Christ by engaging at a deep, personal level with the brokenness of humanity', as well as being a part of a physical gathering around Scripture. Frost offers this as an alternative to the intrinsically excarnate, highly individualised and emotional culture found in many of the mega churches (Frost 2014; Falconer 2016:104, 109–110).

Previously, as Staub bemoans, churches sought after 'thoughtful biblical expositors to serve as pastors, but now they require entrepreneurs and magnetic personalities who could establish new churches or develop strategies to reach target markets'. The expectation now is for pastors to be CEOs of local churches which function like franchises, submitting reports that are evaluated by their numerical

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puts it. Wallace, along with most other translations, therefore translates πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς… as, 'Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations…' (1996:645). Young (1994:158) also points out that 'the participle πορευθέντες should be translated in the same mood (imperative) as the leading verb', μαθητεύσατε (make disciples).

[27] David Bosch offers detailed discussion on the Great Commission and how the whole gospel of Matthew points towards these final verses, and that 'all the threads woven into the fabric of Matthew, from Chapter 1 onward, draw together here' (1991:57; cf. pp. 56–83).

growth (2007:38–39). The church has aligned itself with popular culture which reveals to some degree, that, 'despite our magnificent spiritual, intellectual, and imaginative capacities, have chosen to wade in the shallow but spiritually toxic waters of superficiality' (Staub 2007:6).

Traditional architecture, as the philosopher Žižek, explains, was intended to include the interior from the exterior, but today it often attempts to enclose the exterior itself, providing a protective screened outside. This envelope he explains, isolates a set of buildings from one another, this architectural version is long known in political economy as the 'enclosure of the commons'… (Žižek 2010:online). In other words, the building cuts itself off from the rest of the world, in isolated fashion without integrating meaningfully into urbanity and its cityscape. While church architecture should be distinguishable from other buildings, they still need to relate to the urban fabric, its built environment and context, opening out onto the streetscape, without being an isolated envelope, disregarding its outside world.

Associated with contemporary mega church architecture, because of its visual function and ideologies, is its use of media, which is for the most part imitative of the secular, 'striving to look like and sound like mainstream media while adapting the lyrical and moral content to the reductionist, feel-good gospel of pop Christianity', says Staub (2007:46). Arizmendi is right, all church architecture after all is for the church, and not for the world and its ideologies! (2014:57).

Architecture has always had a tremendous political-ethical responsibility, and this is 'grounded in the fact that much more is at stake in architecture than it may appear'. Architects materialise not only public ideologies, but go off without realising ... right there in stone, 'also what public ideology cannot say publically, the obscene secrete of the public ideology', says Žižek with outright insight (2010:online).

Likewise, much contemporary mega church architecture materialises the ideologies of consumer capitalism, in brick, mortar and steel, rather than pronouncing the ideologies quite so explicitly in public.[28] Biblical Christianity, on the other hand, offers ideologies for Christian community that are starkly different.

5. Biblical Ideologies for the Christian Community

5.1. Introduction

In the previous section I explored how contemporary mega church architecture inverts authentic Christian ideology. Other than the architecture of the Judaic temple and references to synagogues, there is no biblical teaching on church architecture; understandably when church architecture came later. However, we can examine biblical ideologies that are in contrast to the ideologies that inform many mega church buildings. In the discussion which follows, I will offer Biblical exposition, highlighting some biblical ideologies of the Christian community that are counter-culture.

5.2. Give us this day our daily bread

Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray in Matthew 6:9–13, traditionally called, The Lord's Prayer.[29] What is of interest to us is, τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον·(v. 11), rendered as 'Give us this day our daily bread' (my translation). Verbrugge (2000:787), explains that bread was a staple and was used as a synonym for food or

[28] Whittles' (2017) article in the *Mail and Gaudian*, *Christ and Capitalism Reconciled*, is an exception. Here the ideologies are expressed publically by the founder and pastor of such a church.

[29] It's curious that contemporary mega churches rarely, if ever, pray the Lord's Prayer in community or encourage it to be prayed by individuals.

nourishment. To eat bread meant to have a meal, it is concerned with our bodily[30] needs. Keller picks on the same, that '"Daily bread" is a metaphor for necessities rather than luxuries' (2014:114). The imperative[31] δὸς, 'give', is employed to express a request directed towards God (Wallace 1996:488). Yet it is also a modifying verb, 'give to us', δὸς ἡμῖν (Porter 1994:126). Wallace explains that δὸς[32] ἡμῖν σήμερον stresses the urgency of the action, and the specific situation is usually in view here rather than a general precept (Wallace 1996:719). The sense of community is emphasised here, where we ask for 'our daily bread', and not my 'daily bread', and that this prayer is inclusive of our neighbours, evident in 'our Father' and 'our bread' (Bailey 2008:122).

Verse 11 has a social dimension, according to Keller. For everyone to get the 'daily food', there must be a flourishing economy, a just society and good employment. To pray, 'give us our daily bread' implies a praying against exploitation' in business, trade, and labour which inevitably deprives the poor of their 'daily bread' and nourishment. In essence it is to pray for 'a prosperous and just social order' (Keller 2014:114–115). While we should affirm economic and national prosperity[33] and a just social order for any country, Bailey points out that in the petition, we ask for bread and not cake, after all, bread is a gift. He continues by saying that, consumerism and the kingdom of *mammon* have no place among those who pray this prayer. We ask for that which sustains life, not all its extras' (Bailey 2008:122).

[30] Verbrugge (2000:787) includes spiritual needs as well.
[31] Earlier similar imperatives include ἐλθέτω and γενηθήτω in verse 10.
[32] The parallel in Luke, however, has the present δίδου rather than δὸς (Wallace 1996:720).
[33] I am not alluding to the prosperity gospel here.

5.3. Sell your possessions and give to the poor

Later on in Matthew, a man comes to Jesus asking what he should do to have eternal life. Jesus responds by asking whether he has kept the commandments, to which the man replied that he had done so. And Jesus responds by saying that if he wishes to be perfect, he should, 'go and sell all that he possesses and give it to the poor, and he would have treasure in heaven, and then he should go and follow Jesus (Matt 19:16–22; my paraphrase). Of interest here are Jesus' words in verse 21, ὕπαγε πώλησόν σου τὰ ὑπάρχοντα καὶ δὸς [τοῖς] πτωχοῖς, καὶ ἕξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, καὶ δεῦρο ἀκολούθει μοι, rendered as 'Go away, sell what belongs to you and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me' (My translation). The verse has four imperatives; (1) ὕπαγε, 'Go away', (2) πώλησόν σου τὰ ὑπάρχοντα, 'sell all that belongs to you', (3) δὸς [τοῖς] πτωχοῖς, 'give to the poor', and (4) δεῦρο ἀκολούθει μοι, 'come follow me'.

The focus it seems is not so much giving to the poor, although that's important too (and many mega churches do just this extravagantly), but rather on giving *sacrificially,* and following Jesus, living simply and without excessive luxury. Contrary to the wealthy man in Matthew 19:16–22, Bonhoeffer notes how 'people left everything they had for the sake of Christ and tried to follow Jesus' strict commandments through daily exercise. Monastic life thus became a living protest against the secularization of Christianity, against the cheapening of grace'[34] (2003:46–47).

[34] Neither Bonhoeffer nor I are suggesting here that we should live monastic lifestyles.

5.4. Devotion, prayer and fellowship

In some ways Acts 2:42–47 is a practical outworking of both the previous discussions on Matthew 6:11 and 19:16–22. The believers devoted themselves to (1) the apostles' teaching, (2) fellowship, (3) the breaking of bread, and (4) to prayers. These certainly were characteristics that identified the early Christians as rather peculiar and separate from the secular world as they continue to be today. Verse 44 alludes to a kind of micro benevolent communist society, where 'all who believed were together and had all things in common'.[35] This idea is developed further in verses 45, reminiscent of Matthew 19:16–22, where the believers themselves take on Jesus' command to the rich man by 'selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need'.[36] While no one was obligated to sell their possessions, they did so sacrificially. The architectural theme in verse 46 is interesting. The believers met in two places, in the temple and in one another's houses where they broke bread and shared food, perhaps an implicit reference to, 'Give us this day our daily bread' (Matt 6:11). It is not surprising that the early Christian community met in the temple, especially since that was where Jesus often taught, and that the early believers were mostly Jewish. While the intent of the 2nd temple may be dubious, having been built by Herod who was not the true king (Wright 1992:225–226), it was nonetheless religious

[35] I don't mean to suggest that the New Testament supports communism, but rather I mention this by way of illustrating that Acts 2:42–47 certainly does not support consumerism and capitalism.

[36] The textual variant in verse 45 reads as, καὶ ὅσοι κτήματα εἶχον ἢ ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον, D (syr), rendered as, 'and as many as had possessions or goods sold them'. Metzger argues that this 'may have been introduced in order to avoid giving the impression that all Christians were property-owners' (1994:263).

architecture, different from secular architecture,[37] marking out a certain (Jewish) theology, and was in some ways even missional (Mark 11:17; cf. Is 56:7). Despite the strangeness of early Christianity and its unusual activities, 'the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

5.5. Deny yourself and pick up your cross

In a culture where consumerism and capitalism are promulgated at every corner in media and marketing, Christians tend to forget that we are called to deny ourselves. Jesus called a crowd together with his disciples and said, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' (Mark 8:36). In verse 34, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν, 'Let him deny himself' and ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ, 'take up his cross' are in the imperative. Wallace, in a footnote under his illustrations of the imperative, lists Mark 8:34 as an example where 'the Greek is stronger than a mere option, engaging the volition and placing a requirement on the individual' (1996:486). A similar theme finds expression in Hebrews 13:12–13 where the author reminds his readers of Jesus' sacrificial death, and then concludes, τοίνυν ἐξερχώμεθα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔξω τῆς παρεμβολῆς τὸν ὀνειδισμὸν αὐτοῦ

[37] I acknowledge that the 2nd Temple combined the functions of religion, government and being a national figurehead, and included the idea of being the city, the financial and economic world. It was even 'the main slaughterhouse and the butchers guild'. Hence the desire of the Essene community to dissociate from it. Nevertheless, it was one of the most beautiful buildings constructed during its time (Wright 1992:224–225) and for the most part, its architecture shaped Judaic culture, rather than vice versa. Though, this was not always evidently so, as was shown in my mention earlier of Jesus cleansing the Temple (Matt 21:12–17, Mark 11:15–19, Luke 19:45–48). Detailed discussion on this topic can also be found in Aslan's (2013) controversial book, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth.*

φέροντες·, meaning, 'so let us go to him outside the camp enduring his abuse[38]' (my translation).

5.6. Free from love of money

A few verses earlier in Hebrews 13, in verses 5–6, readers are told to flee greed. The clause, ἀφιλάργυρος ὁ τρόπος, is awkward to translate into English, but the meaning may be adequately rendered as, 'Ensure your way of life is free from the love of money' (My translation; cf. Arndt et al. 2000:157, 1017). We are also to be satisfied (ἀρκούμενοι) with what we have, because Jesus said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'. And verse 6 implies that even if we are in need or in fear, 'the Lord is my helper'. Many contemporary mega churches pursue a culture of consumerist capitalism, which, in my view, subjects itself to the love of money and possession. Hebrews 13:5–6 (and v. 13) points us to a very different way of life and theology.

5.7. Aspiring to live quietly

The very nature of the mega church is characteristically large, bold, enterprising and public. Yet, Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 calls believers to aspire to live quiet lives (φιλοτιμεῖσθαι ἡσυχάζειν), minding one's own affairs. He continues advising that Christians ought to work hard with their hands and earn a living and be dependent on no one.[39] The teaching of contemporary mega churches which embrace

[38] The BDAG renders ὀνειδισμός as an 'act of disparagement that results in disgrace, reproach, reviling, disgrace, insult' (Arndt, Danker and Bauer 2000:710).

[39] One should accept that the situation of 'those in need' in Acts 2:42–47 mentioned above is different, and that these people had real needs (cf. Acts 4:34–37 and 6:1–2). Contemporary mega churches are also very effective in feeding the hungry and supplying the needs of the poor.

consumerist capitalism, and some proponents of the prosperity gospel do advocate hard work, and this should be commended.[40]

Thielman argues that Paul was concerned that the Thessalonian Christians' conduct was poor outside the church, and their bizarre behaviour was encouraging increased persecution. To prevent further suffering, Paul urges them not to give reason for offence. There is also the possibility that their behaviour may have prevented 'the ability of the church to communicate the gospel persuasively to outsiders' (2005:444). Therefore, Paul 'commanded them to lead a quiet life, mind their own affairs, and keep this rule: "If anyone does not want to work, he shall not eat"' (2 Thess 3:10; Thielman 2005:257). Believers today should consider how they might 'aspire to live quietly' in peace and tranquillity, and yet also how they might work hard so that they may be examples to outsiders.

5.8. Conclusion

This Biblical exposition has demonstrated that Christianity is counter-culture, offering a different image to the contemporary mega church typology. Even if the times have changed, the teaching of scripture and the essentials of Christian life and devotion stay the same. Arguably, some contemporary mega churches do demonstrate some degree of the characteristics mentioned in the biblical discussions above. However, for the most part, it seems to me that the consumerist and capitalist ideologies have 'hijacked' authentic Christianity, where prosperity, consumerism, business structure and principles, state-of-the-art technology, and performance take centre stage. Having examined the

[40] I noted in a Rivers Church pamphlet recently that a course on business and entrepreneurship is offered. While I disapprove of such courses run by a church as part of a discipleship programme, the point is that they do encourage hard work.

Biblical ideologies that are in contrast to the ideologies that inform contemporary mega church architecture, I now wish to explore how these Biblical ideologies along with other ideas might help towards a Biblical expression in Church architecture.

6. Towards a Biblical Expression in Church Architecture

6.1. Introduction

It is hoped, in this discussion, that church leaders and the architects of churches would consider carefully the theology and ideologies that inform their architecture, and provide ideas on how they might be implemented. The following are a collection of principles and ideas for good contemporary architecture, mega or otherwise. This list is not meant to be exhaustive.

6.2. Church as sacred space

I agree with contemporary (post)evangelical theology that the church is its people, not the building, and that the church building is not especially holy or sacred in and of itself.[41] However, as already noted by Arizmendi (2014:57), all church architecture is for the church, not for the world. A church building also houses certain special activities, such as worship, prayer, preaching and teaching, baptism and the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which are 'sacred' and specific to a church building. For this reason, the church building should be

[41] García-Lozano says it well when he says, 'the actual temple of God is not spatial for Christians, but personal: Jesus-Christ, God's Son. Because of his humanity and embodiment, he is the real temple of God. When he is worshipped, God is worshipped' (2014:42).

considered and treated as 'sacred space'.[42] The church is sacred because it is 'other', it is different from the places and spaces experienced in secular culture[43]—it is a place to retreat from the 'hustle and bustle' of the secular world and its ideologies. The architecture of the church and its media and music should also offer, not emotional experience, but spiritual experience. Staub proclaims that 'having been made for God, humans are designed for a spiritual experience and long for the transcendent, for a reality beyond the limits of their pedestrian daily lives' (2007:188). He urges for better crafted, thoughtful, spiritual, original and imaginative art (Staub 2007:176), likewise I urge for better church architecture and sacred space.

6.3. Form follows function

Contemporary church architecture need *not* follow the same architectural elements of traditional church buildings. Although it could make use of such elements in creative, meaningful ways. The church building, however, ought to have sufficient 'discourse markers' that communicate that this is a church building and it should communicate not only that it *is* a church, but also its theology and (Biblical) ideology. The form of the church building must follow its function, in one way or another. Church architecture should be truthful,[44] but also creative, relating to its social and urban (or rural) milieu meaningfully.

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[42] I understand that many of these activities are enacted in other building types, for example, a church services in a school hall, or prayer in a prayer room facility at an airport or hospital. I am not suggesting that church activities are limited to church buildings, but that we consider the church building as sacred space because of the nature of its activities.

[43] cf. 2 Cor 6:14–18.

[44] Architectural integrity may also be expressed by working honestly with raw materials, light, space, void and mass, colour, and structure.

6.4. Modesty

Church communities are the body of Christ,[45] and John tells us that those who abide in Christ ought 'to walk in the same way in which he walked' (1 John 2:6), that is, we are to imitate him.[46] It is doubtful that this means we are to live in poverty, rather our lifestyles should be modest. In the same way our church architecture should be an example of Jesus and his ministry. Modesty in church architecture goes a long way towards such a biblical expression.

6.5. Community

The aesthetics and spatial planning of church architecture are to communicate a spirit of community,[47] where *all* are welcome and are safe.[48] The (sacred) spaces are to facilitate gathering where people come, share and participate together as we saw in Acts 2:42–47, where believers met to hear teaching, to fellowship, break bread and to pray. Keller correctly explains that 'the gospel creates a human community radically different from any society around it' (2012:311). On the other hand, consumerism and capitalism foster a culture of individuality.

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[45] cf. Rom 12:5, 1 Cor 12:27, Eph 4:12; 5:23, Heb 13:3.

[46] cf. 1 Cor 11:1, 1 Pet 2:21.

[47] Mega churches attempt to do this my means of incorporating food courts or 'trade centres', but of course this is consumerist, and in my estimation fails to do justice to Biblical community.

[48] Arizmendi writes, 'But if we regard the Church's primary purposes, it is this positioning which primes it to become the safe haven for the disenfranchised, the foreigner (in spirit and in actuality) and ultimately the ark of the eschatological resolve of present chaos. It is this positioning which allows it to renew its sacramental purposes and its relevance within a new philosophical urban context' (2014:63).

6.6. Meaning

The forms, spaces and aesthetics of the church building should be designed creatively so as to communicate theological meaning and Biblical praxis. García-Lozano rightly considers that 'religious architecture is manifested by means of theology in its concept of people and the Church, as well as its way of comprehending God' and affirms that there is a connection between theology and religious architecture', even if it has not always been so (2014:42).

6.7. Address the street

Church buildings and their property could explore creative ways in opening up onto the street, asking firstly, how could the building pull people off the street and into the church building? —possibly by opening up the entrance.

Secondly, how could it lead the congregation out into the street with a missional attitude of going into the world as 'the salt of the earth' (Matt 5:13–16). Keller believes that the church should transform culture by engaging with it, 'largely through an emphasis on Christians pursuing their vocations from a Christian worldview and thereby changing culture' (2012:195). The way the church building addresses the street may offer an opportunity for believers to reflect on how their vocations engage their world.

6.8. Transparency

Consider how the façades might communicate transparency and honesty. This may be achieved by allowing passers-by to peer into the building and reflect on the activities within. Glazed façades are the obvious way to accomplish this effectively.

6.9. Proclamation furniture

Contemporary churches for the most part have kept the stage for performance, but have substituted the permanent fixture of the pulpit where the gospel is proclaimed and the scriptures are exposited, for a musical stand or some other object. The pulpit ought to make a statement up front about the primacy of scripture and its proclamation.[49]

6.10. Christ the vocal and focal foint

While the primacy of scripture should be creatively expressed in the church building, Christ needs to be both the vocal and focal point (1 Cor 2:1–5) in its architecture. Traditionally, a cross was placed above the platform,[50] but congregations might consider other creative options as well. Although I would encourage going back to the symbol of the cross.

6.11. Narrative

Consideration needs to be given to what story the architecture of the church communicates to people about who the Christian community is, what they believe and what they do.

6.12. Conclusion

In this discussion, ideas and principles were highlighted for further reflection on how Biblical ideologies might inform contemporary church architecture in a way that relates to society and the urban context as well as standing out as a building that is different from other secular buildings, and expresses ‘otherness’. Such principles should be applied

[49] cf. 1 Thess 2:13; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 3:16–4:5.
[50] Catholic churches have the crucifix and an altar where the mass is performed.

with great care and much creativity. The question remains, can spirituality lead to world-class design?

7. Conclusion

This paper explored the ideologies that inform the form, space and aesthetics of contemporary mega church architecture. I also considered the evangelistic objective of this type of church building. This led to a discussion on how the ideologies of many mega churches invert authentic Christian community. As an alternative, the biblical ideologies for Christian community were highlighted, which in turn provided an opportunity to discuss ideas on how these ideologies might help inform church architecture. I argue that much of contemporary mega church architecture promotes a pseudo-Christianity with an overemphasis on consumerist capitalism, which I believe is deeply concerning. Nevertheless, and despite my criticism, I agree with Keller when he writes,

> We must find a balance between the consumer mentality that seeks only to meet felt needs and our self-centred tendency to assume our own preferences are the only biblically right way to meet God. Instead, we can humbly learn from what the Bible teaches about worship while recognizing that God gives us great freedom in the particulars. As we fill in the blanks for our own worship, we must take into account what the Bible teaches, our own cultural and ecclesial setting, and our own personal temperament and preferences. In addition, we should intentionally create services in which both evangelism and edification can occur. The weekly worship service can be very effective in evangelism of non-Christians and in edification of Christians if it is gospel centred and in the vernacular of the community (2012:308).

Mohler aggress with Keller, saying, 'But, far above these concerns, I want my children to hear the preaching of the Word of God and to sing and pray among fellow believers. The content of Christian worship is infinitely more important than the architectural context' (2005:online). But let us, nevertheless, work towards an architecture that creatively and meaningfully expresses Biblical Christianity, its faith, theology and praxis.

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