

Structure and Vessels of the Church

Objectives

To gain a basic understanding about the physical structure of the church and the vessels used in the service

References

- 1- Church House of God by Fr. Tadros Malaty
- 2- Precious Pearls by Fr. Yohanna Salama

Scriptural Verse

“And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25: 8)

Lessons Outlines

Church Structure

Eastward Orientation

- ❖ To face the Lord Jesus Christ, The Sun of Righteousness (Zechariah 6:12)
- ❖ Commemorating the lost paradise that God planted in Eden towards the East
- ❖ Waiting for the Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 24: 27, Acts 1: 11)

The Outer Structure

- ❖ **Cruciform:** Reveals the church nature as the Crucified Body of the Lord Jesus Christ
- ❖ **Circular:** Refers to the eternal nature of the church as her Bridegroom (no beginning or end, everlasting and eternal).
- ❖ **Form of a Ship:** Reveals our hope while sailing among frightful danger as long as we remain within the Lord’s ship and also as Noah’s ark that saved him from the flood.

The dome - symbolizes heaven. One main dome resembles the Lord Jesus Christ, Three equal domes for the Holy Trinity or five domes to represent our Lord and the four Evangelists.

The Tower (Belfry)

It resembles the ship’s guard tower. It is our guide and a place to hang the bells.

The Bells

- ❖ They resemble the trumpets used in the Old Testament for wars and celebrations
- ❖ Their use in Christianity started in the 6th Century because of the persecution
- ❖ They are rung during the “offertory” and communion declaring the joy of the church
- ❖ A Joyful rhythm is tolled on feasts, Sundays and the 50 days following Resurrection
- ❖ A mourning rhythm to begin every hour on Good-Friday and Funeral Services

The Inner Structure

The Baptistry Site

- ❖ It should be built at the left hand side of the entrance as nobody can cross over to the Altar without Baptism. It is made unavoidable as a reminder of the spiritual birth and Vow to be with God forever.
- ❖ The font is considered as the Church's womb that brings forth heavenly sons who possess the right to enter into the mystery of the Divine Altar.
- ❖ An Icon for the Lord Jesus Christ's Baptism reflecting the atmosphere of the place.

The font can be:

- ❖ **Round:** Symbolizing the womb of the church.
- ❖ **Quadrilateral:** as a tomb denoting sharing death, burial and resurrection with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❖ **Hexagonal:** Symbolizing Friday, the 6th day of the week in which the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified and buried.
- ❖ **Octagonal:** Symbolizing the Resurrection, 8th day of the week.
- ❖ **Cruciform:** Declaring the reality of baptism as a Cross.

The font may have:

- ❖ A Dome: Baptism is the beginning of the heavenly life.
- ❖ Stairs: Allows convenient Baptism for the adults.

The inside of the church is divided into the Sanctuary and the Nave

The Sanctuary

- ❖ It represents heaven (God's residence with angels and saints). It is the Altar place.
- ❖ It is often raised one step above the choir

The Altar

- ❖ Cubic shape to resemble the Lord's tomb
- ❖ Detached from the wall and stands clear in the middle of the Sanctuary (Revelation 9: 13).
- ❖ Used to be hollow to accommodate the relics of the saints.
- ❖ It is not raised above the sanctuary but fits on its ground (Exod. 20: 26).
- ❖ The Coptic Altar has no engravings (Exod. 20: 25).
- ❖ Liturgies are celebrated once a day on a fasting Altar. Multiple Altars are used in the same church to celebrate more than one Liturgy in the same day.
- ❖ The Liturgy is held on a consecrated Altar or a non consecrated one with an **Altar-Board (a wooden board anointed with Holy Oil "Myron")** that can be used also with an ordinary table.
- ❖ Some Altars are surmounted by a wooden or stone **canopy**, which rests upon four pillars of stone or marble.

The Niche (Apse)

The niche is the eastern wall of the Sanctuary and is called the **Bosom of the father**. It is often occupied with the icon of the Lord Jesus Christ in His Glory.

The Iconostasis (Icon-Stand)

It is an important architectural feature of the Church formed of a rigid screen decorated with icons and candles and lies between the sanctuary and the nave of the church. An **Ostrich egg** is suspended between the Icons, representing hope, Resurrection and forever care of The Lord.

The Nave

The Nave is divided into two parts or “Choruses”:

1. The Chancel of Deacons: separated from the Sanctuary by the Iconostasis and from the rest of the Nave by a screen or fence and is higher by one to three steps. It contains seats for the deacons, two **Lamp stands** and **two lecterns** with a sloping book rest on which the books of reading are placed.

2. The Chorus of Believers: It is divided into two aisles with women sitting at the right hand of men, as the Queen is at the right hand of the King.

Mandatum: A shallow basin used to be laid in the floor in the western end of the nave and covered with boards to be used in the service of “Blessing the water” (Lakkan)

Pillars: There are **twelve** pillars in the Church referring to the Disciples of the Lord (Galatians 2:9)

Ambon: A high building for the preacher symbolizing the mountain of Transfiguration of Our Lord, the word of God and also refers to that of The Law of Moses.

SACRED VESSELS

The Chalice: into which wine is mixed with water and consecrated into the Blood of the Lord

The Paten: A round tray from Silver or Gold, with no stand or engraving for the Holy Body

The Dome: Two silver arched bands, held by a screw, crossed over each other and surmounted by a small cross to be placed upon the paten to support the coverings.

The Spoon: To administer The Precious Blood

The Cruets: Two vessels used in holding the wine and water for the Eucharist.

Three more Cruets are used for The Myron, the Ghalilawen and the Apocalypses oil.

The Ark: A wooden box used as a Chalice-Stand. Usually it is cubicle in shape and the top is closed with high flaps. It has beautiful carving and is decorated with icons.

The Ciborium: A small circular vessel of silver with a cover used to convey the Holy Body moistened with a few drops of the precious Blood to the sick or prisoners.

Other Articles

- ❖ **A copy of the New Testament** covered with silver or gold and decorated by icons.
- ❖ **Censer and Censing:** A brass or silver vessel in the shape of a cup suspended on three chains from which it can be swung during the service. And a small box for incense.
- ❖ **A Basin:** used for washing the hands of the priest during the service.
- ❖ **The oblation basket:** made from Palm leaves for choosing the “Lamb”.
- ❖ **Musical Instruments:** Primitive instruments as the triangle and the cymbals.

Conclusion

The church building reveals its dogmas and roles. Its designs reveal the Lord Jesus Christ’s teachings and they are backing up our liturgical worship.

Activities/Discussion Points

1. Discuss the reason behind the separation of men and women in the church.
2. Let the class members try to find the symbols behind specific designs given to them before the lesson.