

# Church to Mosque: a short account of the recycling of the Pretoria West Dutch Reformed Church

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In 1941, a new Dutch Reformed church was built in Pretoria West to the design of Gerard Moerdijk. The "Neo-Byzantine" design, developed and defined by Moerdijk himself, was not regarded by everybody as suitable for a Reformed church, but the form was nevertheless found wide spread in South Africa – until it was replaced by a more rectangular shape in the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1990s, the demography of Pretoria West changed. Many of the original residents left the area and new inhabitants, among whom were many Muslims, settled there. A space for prayer became necessary. The church was bought for this purpose. A brief look is taken at the history of the building and its conversion. The ideal spaces for the expression of faith are highlighted and the meaning of the change is considered.

**Key words:** architecture, church, conversion, liturgy, mosque, recycling

تحويلاً إلى مسجد إيروتيير برغاً تسيك ريوحتن ع قريصة تصفة: دجسم ي لإ تسيك ليوحت  
ك. كجيدروم دراريج ن م ميمصتب ايروتيير برغ قديدج قحلاصا قيدنلوه قسيك عاذر مرت 1941 قنس ي ق  
ه ناب عيمجلا ل ي ق ن م ربتعيمر ، ه سبغنب كجيدروم ع غاصو ه روط ي ذلا "ديدجلا ي طنزيلا" ميمصتلا ن ا  
ن ا ي لإ ايقيرفا بونج ي ق اعساو اراشتنا ل كشتلا اذه رشتنا ك لذ عمو ، قحلاصا قسيكلا ب سائم  
ي فارغميدلا بيكرتلا ريغت تانيستلا لولج . تانيستلاو تانيستلا ي ق قديوم رثكا ل كشر ل ديتسا  
ريبك ددع مهنيب ن م ددج ن اكسد مهلحم ل حو قطنملا ن ي صلا ن اكسلا ن م ددع رداغ ايروتيير برغ  
ضربلا اذهل قسيكلا ارشد مرت . قحلام قوررض تاولصلا اذلا ن اك م ن ع ثحبلا حبصا اذهل ن ي ملسملا ن م  
قيلتملا ت اعاضلا ي لع عوضلا ي قلاو . دجسم ي لإ ه لوتو ي نيملا خيرات ي لع قزجوم قزطن اعلا مرت  
ارط ي ذلا ربيغتلا ي نعو قينيلا رثاعشلا قسراملا

**Stelutwoorde:** argitektuur, hergebruik, kerk, liturgie, moskee, omskepping

Existing buildings converted to mosques are not unknown in the history of Islam. In fact, the first mosque, the house of the Prophet Mohammed in Medina (622-), could be regarded as such a conversion. This simple rectangle also served as meeting and praying venue for the first Muslims and it influenced and laid down the compelling guidelines for the layout of all subsequent mosque plans.

In Christian regions conquered by Islam, reuse was no exception and various churches were taken over for Muslim prayers. This also happened to fire temples in Iran (O’Kane 1994:119; Gibb & Kramers 2001:332-333). The oldest surviving monumental mosque, the Great Mosque of Damascus (709-715), was built over the church of John the Baptist, which, in turn, had been installed inside a Roman temenos in the fourth century.<sup>1</sup> According to tradition, the original Great Mosque in Cordova (784-6) was also built over a church.<sup>2</sup>

Yet another impressive church building, The Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (532-537), was adapted to a mosque almost 1000 years after it was built without violating its inherent architectural qualities. This renowned building influenced Turkish mosque architecture immediately and Protestant church building in South Africa 500 years later. In the conversion of the Pretoria West Dutch Reformed church to a mosque, it continued to play a role.

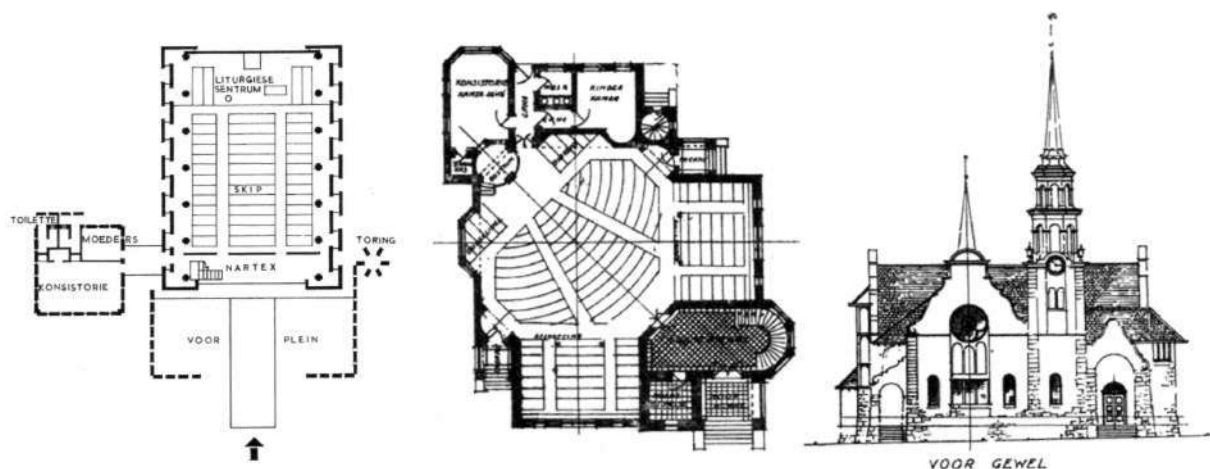
In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, conversions of churches for other uses again gained impetus on account of the decline in religious practice and demographic relocations in towns and cities. In this process, demographic compositions and the nature of inner cities changed to such an extent that many churches fell into disuse. In Italy, a national research programme was even launched to address this trend. Four universities were involved with this study, *Renaissance opportunities for redundant churches*. The study concentrated in particular on suitable reuse and conservation of the historical and architectural integrity of churches that often stood as landmarks in their towns and surroundings (Frattari, Albatici & Dalprà 2004).

In this period, there was a noticeable increase in immigrants, also from predominantly Muslim regions to Western countries. While churches were falling into disuse, mosques were often needed for practising the Muslim faith. The colourful history of only one such [Protestant] building outside South Africa can illustrate these adaptations.

After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, approximately 40 000 to 50 000 Huguenots fled to England. Almost half of them settled in Spitalfields, near the Thames and became involved in the silk industry. Seventy years later, they addressed a petition to King George II (1683-1760) for permission to construct a church. This *Neuve Eglise* was built in 1743-4 and served the French enclave until 1809. Subsequently it was used for a short time by the *London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews*. In 1819, it was taken over by a Methodist congregation.

This process repeated itself twice more. After new restrictions on their movements and job opportunities, more than two million Jews moved from Eastern Europe in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many turned to England. In London, they settled mostly in Spitalfields and Whitechapel. In 1898, they took over the *Neuve Eglise*. The pews were arranged around a new central platform and the arc was fixed on the eastern wall; the organ was removed. The building became known as the Spitalfields Great Synagogue. Then, in 1976, it was bought by the Jame-masjid Trust for the Bangladesh community.<sup>3</sup>

The building's exterior was left almost unchanged. Inside, the women's gallery of the synagogue was removed and an additional floor was installed. The construction of a minaret was refused by the local authority. The simple interior space could meet the requirements of all three Middle Eastern religions without drastic changes.<sup>4</sup> Much the same approach was followed with the conversion of the church in Pretoria West.<sup>5</sup>



Figures 1.1,1.2 & 1.3

Figure 1.1 Plan of Dutch Reformed church, Ritchie, where, according to Koorts (1974:116) an effort was made to meet the requirements championed by him.

Figure 1.2 Plan of Dutch Reformed church for Piet Retief which, according to Moerdijk (1919:s.p.), was designed "in completely modern style, while the gables of the old influence are visible."

Figure 1.3 Facade of the Dutch Reformed church, Piet Retief.

## Building a church

Two local books about Reformed church construction that were published in quick succession - the first was the result of a church commission in this regard, chaired by professor H.D.A. du Toit, and the second had been written by an architect - laid down almost similar principles for

good Reformed church design: rectangular shape, horizontal liturgical axis, immediate direction to the focal point; uninterrupted lines of sight for all those present to the or pulpit as focal point in the liturgical centre; no visual distractions; symbolic rather than fine art and good acoustics. The sermon and lines of sight remained the most important requirements:

The Reformers emphasised the preaching of the Word in public worship very much. In a Reformed church, one always first sees the pulpit with the open Bible on it. Therefore, they set as requirement for a church building that the congregation should sit so that they can easily see and hear the preacher. Thus the pulpit has no other intent than that it should be a stage for the sake of intelligibility of the sermon (Du Toit 1966:3 translated).

As regards liturgical planning, here we see the permeation of the influences of the Reformation. The liturgical centre is not separated from the nave, but open and situated in the same space as the latter. This is something new after the centuries-long separation of nave and choir of the Roman and Gothic eras (Koorts 1974:44 translated).

Whilst Roman Catholic churches in Europe were taken over by Protestant congregations and fitted out according to their own views, Reformed church building in South Africa was developed locally, initially without any recognisable binding architectural concept. This becomes clear from the descriptions of the first churches in Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Drakenstein by Francois Valentijn (1666-1727) and Peter Kolbe (1675-1725) (Valentijn 1971:87-95; Kolbe 1777:119).

The Neo-Gothic<sup>6</sup> dominated the design of churches in Cape Town and the oldest settlements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it was only early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that a diligent search for an "own" South African or "Afrikaans" church-building style emerged. This search was led and directed by Wynand Louw (1883-1967) and Gerard Moerdijk (1890-1958).

When Moerdijk talks about "Afrikaans architecture", it is sometimes unclear whether he is referring to the African environment or the Afrikaner, but in this argument, the latter is the premise. He regards the English takeover in 1806 and the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) as interruptions in the course of formation of an "Afrikaans building style".

Almost all the buildings - houses, schools, public buildings, etc. - erected in the first 30 years after 1902 [thus until his writings] are imitations of foreign buildings, without reference to or link with the tradition, history of lifestyle of the South African nation.

Only now, the Afrikaner is again beginning to consider tradition in the field of art. Everywhere, art and culture societies are being established and we are made aware of the difference between what is indigenous and foreign. (Moerdijk 1935:94-99, translated).<sup>7</sup>

The Gothic building style was rejected out of hand - based on the local climate and living conditions, because it was conceptualised around Roman Catholic liturgy, but also because it was said to carry a political religious burden. Moerdijk continues:

Historically, the development of the Gothic building style was associated with the growth and expansion of the Roman church in Western Europe and consequently also with the persecution of Protestants, from which partially also resulted immigration to South Africa. Thus it would have been an anachronism to design church buildings in South Africa according to the Gothic style.

Moerdijk also explains the adaptation of the Latin to the Greek cross, with pews arranged around the pulpit in theatre layout, as the ideal shape and whereby also acoustic problems could almost be eliminated. Gothic details were also reasoned out of the external appearance of churches and classical and Renaissance styles were presented as examples that could be imitated (Moerdijk 1935:101-103). By this time, he had already designed churches according to these principles, inter alia in Piet Retief (1922) and Bloemfontein and Pretoria (1928) and he would persist in this until the 1950s.

Both Du Toit and Koorts decided that the central building type was not the ideal shape. Particularly the architect, J. Koorts, was adamant about this (Koorts 1974:54, 58):

The very first effort at something new and 'typically South African' was the Neo-Byzantine church buildings ... The typical floor plan (round, polygonal or Greek cruciform) was also extremely unsuitable for public worship in a Protestant church. The natural position of the liturgical space in such a building shape would have to be the geometric centre since everything pointed towards the centre. Thus, in the Neo-Byzantine churches, an unnatural layout was made: the pulpit was moved to a side wall and the remaining space was filled up with pews as well as circumstances permitted. The result was a confusion of direction, since the liturgical centre that had been shifted aside, contended with the geometrical centre.<sup>8</sup>

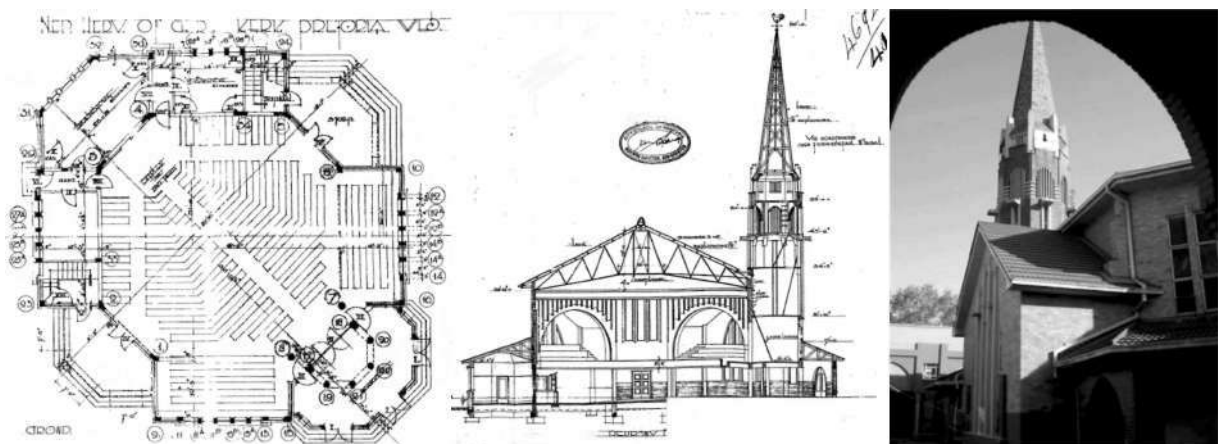
Although both Louw and Moerdijk were confronted by the same problems as Koorts and Du Toit, they nevertheless found the solution in the neo-Byzantine plan. Because of them, this floor plan was the most common in all regions of the country until the appearance of the co-called bonnet or tent church developed and refined particularly by Johan de Ridder (\*1927) from Pretoria and J. Anthonie Smith (1910-1996) from Cape Town. **Figures 1.1, 1.2 & 1.3**

With the design of the Dutch Reformed church in Pretoria West, 1941, Moerdijk followed the guidelines he himself had laid down.

### The Pretoria West church

In 1925, the Dutch Reformed congregation of Pretoria West seceded from the Pretoria congregation. At that time, there were 1500 souls and 700 members of the church (NG Kerk 1926:160). Ten years later, there already were 6975 souls and 4555 members (Deysel 1976:20).<sup>9</sup>

The new congregation at first held church services in the Burger Hall, next to the later church. In March 1938, the architects Gerard Moerdijk and Johannes Burg (1874-1961) submitted plans of churches at a meeting of the church council. Both also presented plans in terms of which the Burger Hall could be enlarged by 300 seats and a tower constructed. After their presentations, it was decided to build the church next to the Hall. In April, a meeting was held with the congregation, whereupon the decision of the church council was ratified (ABID GEM 1727 1938). Moerdijk was appointed as architect. The plans were approved early in 1941 and the church was built in that same year.



Figures 2.1, 2.2 & 2.3

Figure 2.1 G. Moerdijk. Plan of the Dutch Reformed church, Pretoria-West, 1941 (R. Vally Architects, 13 April 2006)

Figure 2.2 G Moerdijk. Section through the Dutch Reformed church, Pretoria West, 1941 (R. Vally Architects)

Figure 2.3 Dutch Reformed church, Pretoria West (photo: Wallace Honiball, 2007)

The church is on the corner of Church and Maltzan Streets and the main entrance faces this corner. The principles, explained two decades before by Moerdijk, were followed. The main space was an octagon within a cross but with sides of unequal lengths. The pulpit was against one of the short sides directly opposite the main entrance. Secondary entrances in the two other short sides were accessed from small verandas. Two sets of stairs led to the gallery that stretched around the full church space, except the pulpit wall which rised to the full height of the interior. The gallery was deepened by means of four large arches to fill the intersections up to the windows that stretched through two storeys. The tower was directly above the main entrance and richly segmented. **Figures 2.1, 2.2 & 2.3**

The Pretoria West church is a typical design by Moerdijk and actually repeated the plan he had proposed and built in Piet Retief. Here the central concept was merely purified further and the Cape-Dutch facades were left aside in favour of the "neo-Byzantine". It is a sober and austere design to complement the chosen plan.

In the *Geskiedenis van die Boukuns* Moerdijk's (1935:59-63) discussion of the Byzantine architecture was restricted to the development of the dome on pendentives and buttresses. The strongest argument for the acceptance of the building type might be his rejection of the long axis of the Latin cross and the approval of the Greek cross, which, as a result of its shape almost unavoidably leads to the central plan. The Byzantine appearance, as applied by Moerdijk, was a dim reflection of the original. It could still be seen in the plan and the four large arches, but the resulting octagon was simply built up above the four legs of the cross and roofed over. The Byzantine striving to replace structural walls with columns so that space is not restricted, but can continue through and around the dome supports, was imitated without any conviction. The reason for this is probably the pursuit of a single horizontal focal point in a space with unrestricted lines of view, as well as Moerdijk's rejection of any hint of ritual route and separation between liturgical centre and interior space.

## **Intermezzo**

Fifty three years after having built the church, the dwindling congregation<sup>10</sup> was in dire straits financially. Various plans were devised to overcome this situation, but eventually, in 1995, it was decided to sell the church complex (ABID GEM 1732:1996). In 1999, the Pretoria West congregation appeared in the Journal of the Dutch Reformed Church for the last time.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a noticeable movement of Muslims to Pretoria West. The vacant properties next to the church were bought by a commercial enterprise, existing buildings were demolished and a large new business complex was erected. Many of the workers found accommodation in nearby flats and a place of prayer became necessary. The church was also procured by the owners of the centre with a view to fit it out as a mosque, (Vally 2005).

On 22 December 1997, the property was registered in the owners' names at the Deeds Office.<sup>11</sup> Vally architects were appointed to investigate the possibilities of the conversion and their initial study indicated that the church was indeed suitable for conversion and that it could be done without altering much of the existing building.<sup>12</sup>

Because the building was more than sixty years old, application for approval of the modification was made to the South African Heritage Resources Authority. In June 2001, a permit was issued by SAHRA. Hereafter, application for rezoning and consolidation was submitted to the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality and approval was eventually obtained in January 2004.

In the meantime, the building deteriorated on account of negligence and vandalism and a section of the roof was destroyed in a fire. By the time the Municipality's approval was received, the permit from SAHRA had expired and the proposals and plans had to be resubmitted to the Provincial Heritage Resources Authority. During this time, objections to the change also had to be dealt with. In May 2005, a permit was procured and building could finally start.<sup>13</sup>

## Building a mosque

As with the Reformed church, the manner in which a mosque is utilized is evident almost at first sight. Conceptually, it is a simple place of which the basic plan shape has been laid down since the earliest years of Islam by the mandatory ritual of prayer. All over the world, mosques comply with these requirements, irrespective of how enclosing structures may be articulated.

The simplest form of the mosque is a building erected over a single invisible horizontal line directing the worshipper towards Mecca. The faithful arrange themselves in closed parallel rows behind and follow the movements of the prayer leader or imam who takes the front and central position.

The prescribed or accepted form of the prayer ritual is the strongest factor in determining the interior. Traditionally, the front row directly behind the imam has priority (Dicky 1978:36; Khan 1977:I/XI688). Consequently, the ideal mosque should be erected longitudinally across *qibla* (direction to Mecca) or should otherwise preferably be square (Ettinghausen 1976:63). The Prophet's own house in Medina was an early, clear and direct response to this need.

Specific prescriptive, but also exemplary, customs of Mohammed were associated with the *salat* (ritual prayer). In the mosque, these led to some of the accepted and common elements inside and outside the building.

The prayer had to be executed in a state of ritual purity and for this *wudu* or bodily purification was necessary, which led to the installation of a fountain, water basin or functionally designed ablution facilities outside the prayer hall. For the imam, a specific location was preferable; hence the niche or *mihrab* appeared in the wall across *qibla*. During the Friday noon prayer (*djum 'a*), the *minbar* was positioned to serve as "pulpit" for the *khutba* (reading). The muezzin originally used the highest point near the mosque to call the faithful to prayer. The minaret developed from this custom. **Figure 3.1**

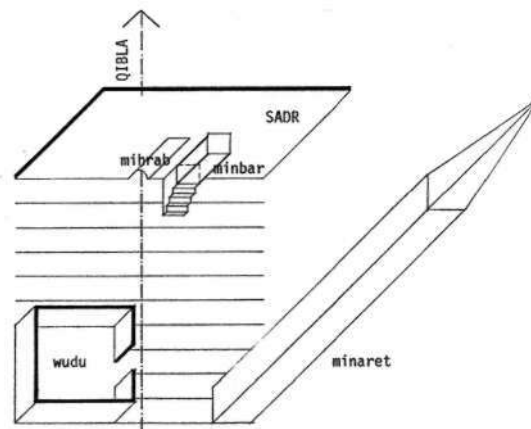


Figure 3.1

Schematic representation of a mosque and its parts.

While the plan shape of the mosque was clearly visible, the architectural cladding of this plan varied depending on where it was built. Important regional styles have developed

through the ages and the Iranian, Egyptian, Turkish and Indian are clearly distinguishable types (Hillenbrand 1994). The celebrity of their architectures is based on the calm and practical conceptual development that took place over many centuries and was based on local precedents, knowledge, building materials, climate and aspirations.

In areas outside the Muslim sphere, mosques were often influenced by the surrounding architecture. This also happened in South Africa. The southern or Cape mosque developed by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century from homes from which they could hardly be distinguished. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the appearance of the first free-standing mosques was strongly affected by the adjacent church architecture, and consequently, like the Reformed churches from the same era, the Gothic revival style.<sup>14</sup> It was only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and subsequently with the construction of mosques in newly created separate areas, that a building form that hailed from outside South Africa was chosen.<sup>15</sup> This represented a breach with the continuous local development and was a self-conscious effort to explain a connection with the central world of Islam itself rather than with Islam in the immediate context.

The shape of mosque in the northern parts of the country was influenced by the background and origin of its builders and can be classified as the "Indian" mosque type in South Africa.<sup>16</sup> The plans of these mosques were simple rectangles preceded by a veranda or surrounded by verandas on two sides; lean-to roofs rest on fully rounded arches of which the edges were highlighted with plaster edgings. Above these, parapets rose, often obscuring roofs over the mosques themselves. The parapets were throughout the most decorated elements. Interior spaces were white and illuminated by windows in all the walls except on the side of the entrance. Consequently, the mosques were free-standing although they were often captured within the fabric of the surroundings.

Ablution facilities were mostly provided in free-standing buildings or on open verandas. Visible and functional minarets were rarely part of the concept and the minarets at the old Church Street mosque in Johannesburg (1918) and the Queen Street mosque in Pretoria (1928) were exceptions.<sup>17</sup> Since the 1980s, many of these mosques have been changed and the original facades have often been destroyed. In the north, the Pretoria mosque remains almost the only one that has not been damaged by change.<sup>18</sup> **Figures 4.1 & 4.2**



Figures 4.1 & 4.2

Figure 4.1 Queen Street Mosque, Pretoria, 1928 (photo: ©Francois Swanepoel, 1998)

Figure 4.2 Prayer space, Central Mosque, Ladysmith, 1941? (photo: Nico Botes, 1993)

The results of the breach with local tradition were not always architecturally successful, likewise the modifications effected since the 1980s to make them stand out as Muslim edifices.

In this process, much of the charm of the "Indian" mosque type was lost in the northern regions of South Africa. Standard elements such as onion domes and variations of "Turkish" minarets suddenly appeared on or around old mosques while elevations were brought more in line with the appearance regarded as "Islamic".

Muslim architecture and Muslim art have an exceptionally rich past and buildings or details cannot simply be transplanted or imitated. Local climate, craftsmanship and tradition result in many of these efforts being dim reflections of the original - not much different from the neo-Byzantine efforts of Moerdijk, as translated into the Pretoria West church.

In the 1980s, Professor Cassim Lakhi (1976:45-49), former head of the Department of Art History at the University of Durban-Westville, raised his concern about random decision-making with the design of local mosques.<sup>19</sup> This concern is not limited to South Africa and could be regarded as one of the important arguments about the design of mosques worldwide (Khan 1994:267):

As a result of pressures to become more 'normative' and international, as well as of a conscious desire on the part of Muslim communities to be seen as Muslim, the use of clearly identifiable, universally 'Islamic' elements such as the minaret and dome is becoming ever more frequent... The Pan-Islamic style, with its kit of standard parts, has had a significant impact throughout the Islamic world, where it is gradually supplanting traditional architectural styles...

Reasons for reverting to the four or five traditional regional precedents could be sought in the legal constraints that have developed through many centuries. Innovation in religious issues is questioned and an attachment to that which is old and familiar is supported by this.<sup>20</sup> But there is also a human side. Association with the traditional and familiar is pursued, and particularly in non-Muslim countries, the Muslim presence is confirmed by this familiar facade that asserts itself in its surroundings. Grabar (1994:243) explains:

For the faithful it is emotionally and psychologically reassuring to know that the area of prayer and of gathering has remained unaffected by changes in the outside world and that eternal truths continue to be proclaimed in a space which seems itself to symbolize the eternal.

The aspects of a physical setting or settings which help a believer to feel comfortable, both physically and emotionally, as a Muslim are probably best explained by psychologists of religious behaviour.<sup>21</sup>

Mosques are now again appearing in the city centres of South Africa and what the shape and facade of the buildings are going to be will have to be asked and answered by the mosque builders.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, with the return of Muslims to the inner towns and cities, a need for new prayer venues has arisen.<sup>22</sup> In older and changing suburbs, existing buildings often offer better and more economical opportunities than what new creations could. It is insightful that all the mosques that appeared in Pretoria since then have been extensions of existing buildings or have been installed in older buildings that previously served other functions. This is a trend that will probably continue and the "Church Street Mosque" in Pretoria West is merely the latest example.

### **The Turkish precedent**

In his application to SAHRA in 2005, the architect of the Pretoria West mosque, Reedwan Vally<sup>23</sup> (1965-), stated that Ottoman architecture had served as inspiration for the design of the planned arcade around the church. The same applied to the interior space. This decision was connected in an interesting way to the neo-Byzantine concept of Moerdijk because, after having



conquered Constantinople in 1453, the Ottomans were also influenced directly by Byzantine architecture.

The Turkish architect on whom Byzantine building had the greatest impact and who devoted his long life not only to exceed the inherited achievements, but also to reinterpret them for a more ideal mosque shape, was Sinan ibn Abdulmennan (1490-1588). For more than 50 years, he was the chief architect of the Turkish Empire and 477 buildings were ascribed to him (Kuran 1987:7).

The architecture of the Seljuk or Oghuz Turks, who, in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, gradually invaded territory from Bukhara towards the west, had already been enriched by the Muslim influence in Central Asia and reached Anatolia in established form. Here it was adapted further until their successors, the Ottomans (1299-1923), also added Constantinople to their conquests. There they were introduced to the Roman-Byzantine architecture of the city.

Earlier mosques such as the Mosque of Hadji Ozbek in Iznik (1333) had already set the goal towards which Turkish architecture would develop: a square space covered by a dome with an interior unimpeded by disrupting supports. This was a gradual process and the next seminal step was taken only a century later with the construction of the Uc Serefeli Jami in Edirne (1438-1447). The dome with a diameter of 24 metre, was bigger than anything attempted before and there were only two supports in the prayer space (Unsal 1973:20-26). This mosque represented the end and climax of the Beylik period and the beginning of the Ottoman period, but this was also the shape to which Sinan reverted more than a century later for the design of his most successful mosque.

The development of Ottoman architecture is a study on its own and here reference can be made only to a few of Sinan's buildings that represent clear leaps in his thinking and expertise.<sup>24</sup> With his first buildings from 1547, he experimented with the oldest Turkish typology, where the main space was divided into nine squares of equal size, each covered by an independent dome. He simultaneously examined the tectonic principles of Hagia Sophia of which he built a series of different interpretations. The most important of these were the Suleymaniye in Istanbul for Sultan Suleyman the Illustrious (1520-1566) and the Selimiye for Sultan Selim II (1566-1574) in Edirne.

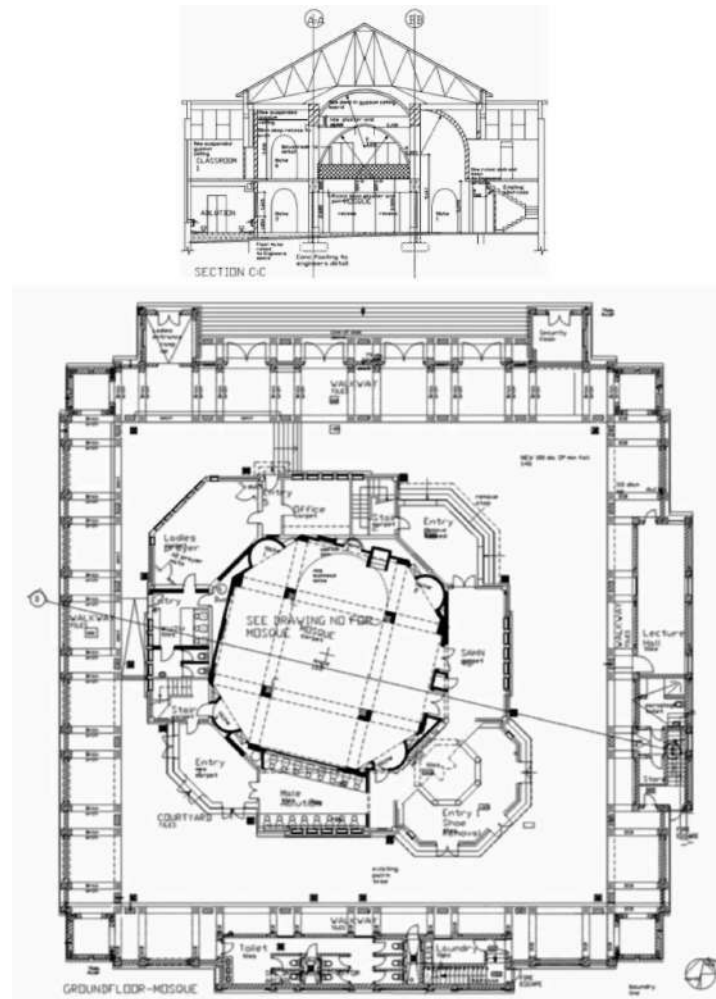
With the design of the Suleymaniye (1550-1557), Sinan for the last time turns to Hagia Sophia for direct inspiration. He himself stated clearly that the Christian building had to be surpassed in size and span, but at the same time, he wanted to create an uninterrupted mosque space. Although it was a magnificent building, he did not achieve either of his objectives. However, 18 years later, he did succeed. With the completion of the Selimiye (1569-1575), Sinan could claim that Turkish mosque typology had finally been freed from the Byzantine precedent and could stand independently.

Briefly, this amounted to the fact that four of the eight columns that carried the dome had been moved into the walls surrounding it. The space itself was now a square clearly evident from any point in the mosque and the elongated axis, inherited from Hagia Sophia, and still defining the Suleymaniye, had disappeared.

### **From church to mosque**

The Turkish precedent was the inspiration for the new Pretoria West mosque. Simultaneously, the architect decided to leave the existing building intact as far as possible. An arcade running

right around the church creates the presence of the new mosque on an urban scale. From the outside, this is the biggest change and as a new construction it stands separate from the church that externally retains its original condition. At the same time, inside the arcade, intimate spaces are created and some of the elements of the original building are reflected. Functionally, the arcade accommodates all the additional requirements that could not be provided for in the existing building: living quarters for the imam and muezzin, offices, washroom and toilets. **Figures 5.1 & 5.2**



Figures 5.1 & 5.2

Figure 5.1 Section through the mosque, Pretoria West (©R. Vally Architects)

Figure 5.2 Floor plan of the mosque, Pretoria West (©R.Vally Architects)

Spaces inside the church were adapted to meet the new requirements. The main entrance and the secondary entrances remain where they were although the mosque space itself is now entered from a vestibule (previously the eastern leg of the church cross) between two entrances. The southern cross space was fitted out for ablutions. The vestry became a prayer space for women next to a smaller ablution facility.

The biggest changes to the building were made in the interior. The church is oriented in accordance with the cardinal points, but because *qibla* is 13,5° east of north, it was necessary to reorient the prayer space accordingly. In refurbishing, this is normally done by simply changing the direction of the prayer mats and placing the *mihhrab* and *minbar* accordingly. Here it was done by building a new interior space inside the existing one. Like the existing space, it is also an octagon, but turned over *qibla*. Four columns in the space continue into four large arches and

are covered by a dome installed on a low drum beneath the existing roof trusses - typical of the Ottoman and Byzantine custom. **Figures 6.1 & 6.2.**



Figures 6.1 & 6.2

Figure 6.1 Adjusted mat layout in the prayer hall of the *Jame-e-masjid*, Brick Lane, London (photo: Dirk du Preez, 2007)

Figure 6.2 Mosque space inside church space, Pretoria West (photo: Wallace Honiball, 2007)

The solution is direct, simple and striking. Awkward connections between the two interior spaces are filled with four alcoves, this awkwardness is exploited further to explain interventions: both the original church and the new mosque can in some places be read separately and together (figure 5). The same happens on the outside. The new access is from the north so that people have to walk around the old church to get to the main entrance. This movement meant that they will move between the old and the new - eventually to enter a completely new and undeniable mosque space. **Figures 7.1 & 7.2**

Consequently, what the observer experiences is the street facade of a new ring wall with minarets behind which is the church. When the complex has been entered, old and new, church and mosque, are juxtaposed. This merging of old and new continues and can be viewed together and separately, until the prayer space itself is entered. This has been custom made for its new function and is a new mosque, without any apology to the old.

## Summary

Viewed from a purely practical point of view, the conversion indicates that Reformed churches as configured in South Africa offer spaces within which mosques can be installed with ease.

In both mosque and church, interior spaces are simple, open and oriented towards one point - in the church towards the pulpit and in the mosque through the *mihrab* (prayer service) to the *ka'ba* in Mecca. Both can be unadorned, or if adorned, mostly with symbolic rather than fine art.<sup>25</sup> Where these two orientations coincide, conversion would be a simple process. Pews would be moved, pulpit replaced by *mihrab* and a place for purification could be installed near the entrance. Sloping floors would have to be levelled. For the rest, there are hardly any variable requirements. Even the tower could serve as minaret.

The octagon with its inherently less certain horizontal orientation - to be defined by access and focal point - offers a more convenient space to be converted to a mosque than the rectangular church regarded as the ideal for Reformed church building. Although the square

or rectangle ironically represents the preferable shape for both religions, it is the more central shape that could possibly lead to a more successful adaptation.



Figure 7.1 & 7.2

Figure 7.1 Mosque from Maltzan street (photo: Wallace Honiball, 2007)

Figure 7.2 Court between old church building and new arcade (photo: Wallace Honiball, 2007)

The notion of what the desired nature and appearance of a mosque should be, still needs consideration. Aspiration to set images yearning for the Middle East or Turkey could, as in the case of the "Church Street Mosque", lead to a rich overlay in which the germ of the development of a Southern African architecture for Islam is locked up; in less sensitive hands, it could also lead to the more general style pastiche. Like the discussion conducted by the Dutch Reformed Church to consider the nature of appropriate church building, it could be useful for Muslims in South Africa to hold a similar discussion, not only as regards conversions of older buildings, but particularly as regards extension or revision of existing mosques. They represent an Islamite heritage in South Africa which sometimes is indeed characterised by the fact that they are unrecognisable as "Islamic" buildings and could make a big contribution to worldwide Muslim architecture - like the Iranian or Chinese examples, removed from direct Arabian precedent, have done. This also applies to mosques created from scratch.

A second aspect that should be examined is conservation. Here were a client and an architect who were prepared to work with what existed and to grant it new life - and also prepared to struggle through the process of approval for this. Conservation institutions and municipalities should welcome, assist and accelerate these processes and not delay them through red tape.

But what is preserved and for whom is this done? In the case of the Pretoria West church, the National Monuments Council and later SAHRA were closely involved and an agreement was reached in terms of which the church would be "preserved". The questions are whether it ought to be preserved and if this has indeed happened?

It is certainly not one of Moerdijk's exceptional designs and there are many others that could explain his theories better. Sustained use also makes them better candidates for the purist or so-called authentic extension of their existence (Lowenthal 1989:843-847).

However, the mere fact that the existing building could be custom made for a new use is an equally worthy argument for its conservation and the developer and the architect have illustrated that this is possible. Ecological and cultural conservation are not two sides of a coin, but they have one and the same objective - understanding what the meaning of the past, present and future of the environment holds for climate, plant, human and animal. Apart from the 'cultural'

value of the church as historical architectural type, it also is of urban value and its conservation brings some stability in an area otherwise characterised by the raw realities of indiscriminate demolition, insensitive 'modernising' and purposefully created obsolescence.

The church, having lost its function, has been granted an extended life. As a Christian building, it has lost all future value, as architectural statement, it remains standing and as memory of a period and process, it is perhaps a better, although *nonintentional* (Riegel 1982:23), monument than many others often built for this purpose. Any visitor will observe the clear awkwardness between the two buildings and could ponder on history, architecture and process. Although the church space has been suitable for adaptation, it is perhaps indeed the abrasive connections and the space within space which are the greatest successes of this conversion. What has been preserved is a continuous and inclusive historical-cultural text that can be read again and again - rather than another isolated building of debatable architectural value.

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## Notes

- 1 Cresswell (1958:44-80) rejected the idea that the church itself had been converted to a mosque and doubted Ibn Battuta's repetition of an old tradition that for some time, the church was used by both Muslim and Christian (Ibn Battuta 1982:212-214).
- 2 The opposite also happened. After the reconquest of parts of Spain by the Christians, mosques were also converted to churches. The Mosque of Bab Mardum in Toledo was converted to San Cristo de la Luz after 1085; the Giralda, today the tower of the Seville Cathedral, is the adapted minaret of the Great Mosque (1171-1176). Even the inner court of the mosque was preserved.
- 3 "... the big boom in Bangladeshi migration .. came in the 1950's and early 1960's. Like the Huguenots and Jews, the Bangladeshis started work mainly in textiles ..." (Anon 2003:43-44).
- 4 Written and illustrated information provided by Dirk du Preez, Flat A, 59 Priory Rd, Chiswick, London. 18 April 2007.
- 5 Pretoria West was set out in *burgerrecht* erven and proclaimed in 1892. It is the oldest area west of Church Square and after Arcadia (1890) Sunnyside (1887) and Muckleneuk (1889), it is the fourth oldest suburb of Pretoria (Meiring 1955:152-15, 330-331, 366).
- 6 See Dutch Reformed churches in Montagu and Clanwilliam (1862), Malmesbury (1860-64), Prins Albert (1865), Ladismith (1874), Oudtshoorn (1880), Beaufort West (1894), Calvinia (1900). They all to some degree point to a lingering Neo Gothic style. Carl Otto Hager (1813-1898) was involved in the design and building of several of these churches. In the design of the second church on Church Square, Pretoria (1882) the Neo-Gothic style dominated. It was erected before the Dutch architects were brought to the ZAR by Kruger.
- 7 Where Moerdijk, earlier in his career, had praised the work of Herbert Baker, he totally ignored the latter in his contribution to *Kuns deur die eeue*, published by Van Schaik in 1935 (Fisher 2006:75). In his critique on Moerdijk's "dogmatic statements" and his defence of the roles of Cecil Rhodes and Herbert Baker, Pearse, interestingly enough, translated both *Suid-Afrikaner* and *Afrikaner* as "South African".
- 8 Mentzel's (1709-1801) description of the first Groote Kerk in Cape Town (cornerstone 1678, completed 1704) did indicate that the pulpit was central (Mentzel 1921:123). In a series of articles in *Die Kerkbode*, 31 August to 5 October 1960, one *Architectus* discussed the same aspects. The argument is so similar to those of Koorts that he probably was also the author of these articles (Arhitectus 1960).

- 9 These figures included 2000 members of the then Roberts Hights. A major cause of this rapid growth was probably the founding of Iscor in the 1930s. It was established in the middle of the "great depression". Industrial production declined and the prices of agricultural produce dropped sharply. Debt forced many unschooled and impoverished rural people to the cities, also to Pretoria. Many of these people procured jobs on the mines, but also on the railways and with Iscor (Richards 1940:296).
- 10 In 1965, there were 1175 active members, in 1995 only 833. The congregation also grew older. In the same period, the number of baptized members (members who had been baptized but not yet confirmed) declined from 660 to 174 (NG Kerk 1966 & 1996).
- 11 Erf 3152/1+R, Pretoria-West.
- 12 One of the complaints against the design of the Voortrekker Monument was that it "looked like a mosque" (Protestant 1937).
- 13 Provincial Heritage Resources Authority-Gauteng, Ref: 61/04, 11 May 2005.
- 14 In South Africa, the three oldest mosques in Cape Town grew from existing buildings. The Auwal Mosque (c1798) developed from a warehouse to a madrassah, and later to a mosque, the Palm Tree Mosque (between 1807 and 1820) was installed on the first floor of a residence and the Noorel Islam Mosque (c1844) also once served as a residence. Owing to the prohibition on any religion but the Reformed, the first free-standing mosque in South Africa appeared only in 1846-1848 in Uitenhage (Le Roux 2007). This pattern of adaptation of structures to serve as mosques was maintained with a second string of Muslim constructions in the northern regions of the country since the late 1860s before the independent typology was developed. One of the interesting conversions was that of the round mosque in Bank (1957). According to tradition, the Group Areas Act prohibited new construction for "Asiatic occupation". An existing dam, registered in the name of a "Malay" woman was then converted. (Le Roux 1998a: 15; Bank Sports Club 1999:9); In Cape Town, the church hall of the First Church of Christ Scientist was also converted to a mosque. According to a date on the front of the building, it was built in 1919.
- 15 See for example the Auwal Mosque (c 1798), the Jamia Mosque (1852-3) and the Shafi Mosque (c1859), as well as the Muir Street Mosque, 1919, with subsequent changes (Davids 1980).
- 16 The Indian traders who followed the labourers who had come to Natal from 1860 were mainly from Gujarat. The first were Muslims. They brought the tradition of mosque building and developed it in the South African environment (Meer 1969:15-16; 187-210).
- 17 For a more complete discussion of this mosque type, see Le Roux 1998b:109-110.
- 18 In 1989 a demolition permit was granted for the Church Street mosque in Johannesburg. It was replaced by an imposing new mosque, designed by Mohammad Mayet (Nuttall 1990:36-40). This new building later received an award of merit from the South African Institute of Architects. The mosque is an exceptional building but the design looks for inspiration to precedents in the Middle East and ignores the local development of type.
- 19 Muslims who have migrated from their mother countries, where they are pioneers of a sort in non-Islamic territory, find themselves constantly called upon to react to alien art forms and architectural styles. The need for the formation of a contemporary Islamic aesthetic consciousness ... is a matter which penetrates the contemporary life of the Muslim on a much more important level and in crucial ways that will help determine if we are to live a life here in South Africa as a minority community, which is truly Islamic. It involves what we consider as Muslims beautiful; it involves our appreciation or our lack of understanding of the Islamic art heritage.
- It also involves the way in which we build those new structures which are essential and are demanded by the transplanted and emerging Muslim communities of this part of the African continent... These are permanent or at least semi-permanent structures. To erect them, haphazardly without consideration for their being aesthetically representative of Islamic beliefs would present a lasting irrelevancy or worse, a contradiction in our lives as well as in that of future generations of Muslims.
- 20 *Bid'a* is the exact opposite *oisunna* (custom). In the *hadith* (traditions of the actions and words of the Prophet), it is usually understood that reference is made to the *sunna* of Mohammed but it also points to customs older than Mohammed. To mark a custom as a *bid'a* indicates that it is an innovation and consequently represents a breach with tradition (Ali 1983:XV:13, XXXV:43; Gibb & Kramers 2001:62, 552-553). For example, the introduction of the minaret as part of the mosque in the 12th century was an issue of contention at the time.

- 21 Grabar (1994:243) also refers to the critique of the Egyptian architect, Hasan Fathy, on Notre Dame du Haut because "its design departs from the forms traditionally associated with the Latin church".
- 22 The relocation of communities from existing to new residential areas in terms of the Group Areas Act often left the first mosques with only a resident caretaker. However, their use did not lapse. In the newly created areas, new mosque complexes and mosques were erected. They were mostly designed by professional architects and some of them sought an honest connection between tradition and prevailing architectural theory. Many of these buildings represent worthy steps in the development of a Southern African Muslim architecture. One aspect that was ignored, was the tradition of the "Indian" mosque that for almost a century had been erected in places from Maputo and Durban to Zeerust and Tzaneen. This long, local development was cut short or discarded for a new, but older, and more traditional concept for the mosque and its surroundings.
- 23 Reedwan Vally completed his architectural studies in 1989 at the University of the Witwatersrand with a thesis, *Towards Islamic architecture*, in which he had examined the mosque and local Muslim building. He was also the architect of a mosque, converted from an office building in Du Toit Street, Pretoria.
- 24 For a more complete discussion of the development of the Ottoman mosque, see Goodwin (1971) and Le Roux (1989).
- 25 However, in mosques, representations of the *ka'ba* in Mecca and the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina are quite common. Both reinforce the focus of the prayer ritual.

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