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The church, as we know it, has always presented itself through various architectural forms as works of art, and these forms in turn have usually represented the theology of a given church. Of course, the church as we know it did not always exist. Early Christians avoided the construction of ecclesiastical buildings because they were too few in numbers (though not for long), too poor, and sometimes too persecuted.

> The followers of Jesus did not simply represent the presence of God on earth; they were the presence. Any sense of need for a specific locus could scarcely have occurred to them, and the lack of any reference in the New Testament supports that it didn't. From the beginning they gathered to "break bread" in their homes and other private places. They started to teach and preach in the synagogues, but they soon found themselves excluded. So they met wherever it was convenient. Where they were, God was, for his name was Emmanuel.[1]

The earliest known ruins of a Christian church were discovered in the area of Dura-Europos. It was a dwelling, converted in 232 A.D. to be a small church building. This domestic type of church continued late into the 3rd century and it wasn't until Constantine's proclamation of toleration in the Edict of Milan (313 A.D.) that there occurred "that overwhelming change in churchmanship and in the attitudes towards place, enclosure, and the nature of worship which has given us the tradition of church building that has lasted sixteen hundred years and is just now coming to an end.[2]

Official toleration was followed ten years later by Constantine's baptism and then the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of

the empire. This change caused a movement toward associating God's presence with places rather than with people.

E.A. Sovik believes there were three circumstances that contributed to the change . First, converts came to the church by multitudes, among them the rich, the powerful, and the eminent. The gatherings of the church, which had been private, if not clandestine, became public. Second, the necessity of providing for the assembly of swelling congregations meant that homes and ad hoc places were no longer adequate. The third factor in the change derived from the immense honor that come to be accorded to the memory of martyrs. Now honour was given to architectural and monumental forms, and sites of martyrs' deaths and graves became favourite places for church buildings.

The Middle Ages is a record of theology, liturgy, as well as a piety that contradicted in many ways the essential teachings of Jesus. However, even the Reformation of the 16th century did not effectively bring the minds of the church back into harmony with the mind of the early church.

> The lesson to be learned here is that architecture is a more influential factor in the life of society than most people suppose. The incompleteness of the Reformation in terms of architecture was no doubt the result of the longevity of architecture. Buildings stand, and are not easily removed or changed.[3]

As far as church architecture and the environment of worship were concerned, this "Middle Age thinking" continued for the most part up to the first part of the 20th century. Peter Hammond believed that this "legacy of vast, dim naves, unrelated to human scale, has been a factor of major importance in the persistence of the psychological proletarianism that prevents the Church from manifesting its true nature today. Splendid as these buildings are, they embody a particular and transient relationship between the Christian community and society at large which did not survive the passing of the Middle Ages; they are essentially 'rhetorical assertions of the temporal triumph of Christendom', *not* houses for the family of God."[4]

A least these builders realized that architecture needs to be related to theology. These structures were built as monuments, to impress a largely illiterate congregation, and were ministered to by a clergy with increased public dignity and power. It is no wonder that today's Christians are sometimes frustrated, without knowing why, when they worship in buildings that imply beliefs they do not hold and patterns of worship they do

not practice.

Theology must be manifested in the architecture of the church. There was a reawakening, spurred on in part by a change in thinking of the architectural circle in the early part of the 20th century. This new thinking was manifested in what we tag as the International Style. It idealized such principles as function, honesty and structure, lack of adornment, and simplicity in detail, and led architects and their clients to re-evaluate the reasons behind some of the things they did when designing a building, and rethinking the basic question of what a church is for. Peter Hammond says,

> Our most urgent need is still to recover the conception of a church as a house for a community, the form of which must grow out of the characteristic actions in which the community manifests (or should manifest) its essential nature. It is still necessary to insist that the building exists for the people who are themselves the temple of the living God; that it is not a shrine or a monument to some abstract concept of religion but a liturgical and pastoral instrument for the furtherance of the Church's apostolic task.[5]

Probably one of the most noticeable changes that took place in this century, even in many existing churches, was the moving of the altar away from the back wall. "The old rule of worship was that the pastor turned his back on the congregation for the times of praise to God and prayer, and only faced the congregation when reading the Bible, preaching and making announcements. This model became popular in the 12th century when Europeans became fascinated with Jerusalem ruins during the Crusades."[6] During the Reformation, Luther called for the altar to be moved away from the back wall, but Lutherans reverted to the old orientation to Jerusalem in the 19th century.

This renewed thinking didn't only affect the altar being moved. Jorgensen says there are four major things to see in worship, according to the Augsburg Confession; these are the Gospel (Bible), the water, the bread and wine, and the believers. In most well thought-out churches that have been designed in the last half of this century, these manifestations are obvious. The pulpit's design and prominence are downplayed and the Bible is central. Baptismal fonts are more prominent, not only in their location which is often by the entry, but old covers have been removed and the water is open. The altar or the table is left bare so the emphasis is on the meal and not all the other clutter that tends to collect

there. The creating of a space where the believers themselves are more visible has had the greatest impact on architectural design in this century.

> In the old picture of worship, fellow Christians were considered distractions to our meditation. [However] worship involves both speaking to God and to each other. Thus a conversational seating plan as is used in a living room seems better suited to what we are doing. The old seating plan in our churches resembles that of a Greyhound bus, with a separate compartment at the front for the driver (pastor). As people who believe in the priesthood of all believers, we are all drivers belonging to the front.[7]

The way we design and shape our churches and worship spaces invariably reflects our beliefs and theology. In turn these spaces have a formative influence on the people who worship there. As Robert Maguire says:

> If you are going to build a church,
> you are going to create a thing which speaks,
> It will speak of Meanings, and of values,
> and it will go on speaking.
> And if it speaks of wrong values,
> It will go on destroying.
> There is a responsibility here.[8]

I have recounted some specific changes that have been incorporated into church buildings that are a result of specific theological beliefs. There are, however, many other qualities of an architectural space that affects us in ways, often without our knowing it.

In the western world over the past several hundred years, we have become verbally oriented. We believe that truth or knowledge is best expressed through the symbol systems that support this orientation. There are, however, other symbol systems that communicate not through the rational intellect but through the senses; music is one of the most obvious. "Tones, rhythms, harmonies, sequences and other qualities of sound are symbols which meet our sensibilities, and move us to feel as composers and performers wish us to feel."[9] All the arts carry this dimension of being able to communicate. "People are aware of being affected by the tones of rooms. They have said to themselves, What a peaceful place! Or they have felt restless and uncomfortable without knowing precisely why. It is possible immediately and profoundly to influence

people by the tonal character of an interior."[10] A good designer understands the effects of the physical arrangements of colour, light, shadows, shapes, scale, etc., and church building committees should be aware of this and give thought to the tonal quality desired. Vogt believes that "there are many American churches which repel people because they are chilly and barren in atmosphere."[11] Just as pianists train their fingers so that they can communicate the complexities of music, or poets learn grammar to be able to write poetry, so architects equip themselves with knowledge about building so they can design shapes and spaces that are more than just s shelter.

They only constant is change and the future church must also change if it is to stay relevant and alive. Change doesn't come easily, especially in the church. "In an *Edmonton Journal* article, Richard Caemmerer was quoted as saying, 'One church lost six families after the pastor moved the altar just far enough away so that he could squeeze behind it." (He also said, "Some churches find it easier to get rid of a pastor than a piece of furniture.")[12] In addition to reflecting our theology in the design of well-thought and well-planned spaces, good stewardship should also be reflected. All spaces carry a message and the

> use of fuel, electricity, the presence of absence of comfortable gathering spaces and accessibility all make statements about the structures' intended function...good thinking about space will result in a diversity of buildings, but will involve common planning elements — attention to the wisdom at hand, a sense of historical and physical location, and responsible and creative use of available resources.[13]

Other practical wants of the community will also play a role in designing the future church.

> For example, the new building proposal could provide meeting space for AA or other groups, or provide administration for a food bank or consignment clothing store. Depending on the socio-economics of the neighborhood, the new church might be able to provide resources that the municipality could not afford, such as auditorium time for youth at night, pleasant park-like settings for seniors, or access to affordable housing. In places like Chicago or Detroit, churches have initiated community economic development programs which create jobs and provide training, entrepreneurial linkages and community-wide promotion.[14]

The future church will incorporate many new functions; however, we must remember that, "the public worship of God is the reason for the

being of the organized church."[15] As such, the art of worship must be supported by good architectural planning. The worship space should be flexible so it can easily adapt to changes in worship patterns and not frustrate those who use it. A well-designed church is an invaluable tool to the pastor and those who worship there.

Notes

1 E.A. Sovik, *Architecture for Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973) 13.

2 Ibid. 15.

3 Ibid. 19.

4 Peter Hammond, "A Radical Approach to Church Architecture," *Towards a Church Architecture*, ed. by Peter Hammond (London, UK: The Architectural Press, 1962) 35.

5 Ibid. 29.

6 Philip Jorgensen, "Architecture: A Way to Worship Renewal," *Canada Lutheran* (July/August, 1987) 20.

7 Ibid. 22.

8 As quoted by Peter Hammond in Hammond, *Towards a Church Architecture*, 33. For the actual text and quotation see Robert Maguire's article, "Meaning and Understanding" (p. 66) in this same volume of collected essays on church architecture.

9 Sovik, 45.

10 Von Ogden Vogt, *Art and Religion* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1960) 193.

11 Ibid. 197.

12 Jorgensen, 22.

13 Melinda R. Heppe, "Where Buildings Speak," *In Trust* 6 (New Year, 1995) 10.

14 Doug Makaroff, "So You Wanna Build a New Church?" *Christian Week* (August 20, 1996) 8.

15 Vogt, 232.