Again, noting something of Paul's teaching about edification, it was observed that gospel preaching is a key to the growth of the church in size and in its progress to maturity in Christ. Edification has a 'vertical' or Godward dimension as well as a horizontal dimension. The idea that evangelism and edification cannot take place together was critiqued and the practical consequences of using ordinary church services for evangelism were to some extent explored.

### Exploring further

1. When Luke describes the activities of the earliest Christians in Acts 2:42-47, he concludes by saying 'And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved'. What connection do you think there might have been between the ministry of those Christians to one another and the conversion of more and more of their fellow Jews?
2. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 and 11:17-34 suggest that those who participate in the Lord's Supper ought to have a genuine faith in Christ and a proper regard for one another as the body of Christ. To what extent should we encourage unbelievers or inquirers to participate in Holy Communion services?
3. In churches where they regularly or exclusively have the Lord's Supper on Sundays, what could be done to make these occasions more relevant and appealing to unbelievers or inquirers? Would it be better for them to invite outsiders to services of another kind?
4. What difference might it make to the task of evangelism to think of it as a call to worship God through Jesus Christ? In what contexts might this be especially helpful?
5. Especially in churches where a set form of service is used, how might it be possible to incorporate more contributions from members of the congregation, by way of ministry to one another?

# THE ARCHITECTURE OF A MISSIONARY CHURCH

*Peter Jensen*


### Synopsis

The paper that follows is intended to provoke discussion about the task of planning and erecting suitable buildings for today's Christian congregation. We live in a society where the Church is marginalised. The Church exists by the gospel and is therefore impelled to be a missionary church. Christian history has seen the 'temple' mode and the 'meeting house' mode of buildings. The meeting house type is better suited to a theology which emphasises the gathering of God's people to hear his word and to respond in faith expressed through loving service. The meeting house should itself serve the needs of the congregation, especially the need for Christian relationships. To this end flexible and useable space is required with attention to features that welcome and create hospitality while advancing the ministry of God's word. The paper concludes with a consideration of some of the tensions that characterise the planning of Church buildings in the areas of aesthetics, symbolism and history.


### Introduction: various necessary disclaimers

My guess is that what follows is the only paper on architecture ever given without the aid of illustrations. No diagrams, no plans, no drawings.

Furthermore—and I wish it was mere modesty which makes me say it—it is given by someone without artistic, design or construction skills of any order at all. I could not

design or build a child's cubby-house. I cannot assemble IKEA furniture without help.

Further, I have not yet had the responsibility for erecting a building of any sort, let alone a church building.

And finally, I am going to use as my 'text', the famous but antique functionalist slogan 'form follows function'. This utilitarian concept means, I take it, that the uses we intend to make of a building should determine its construction, that 'if something is designed to fit its purpose we can let beauty look after itself'.[1] I have no doubt that this text has its real dangers, especially in the hands of an amateur. I can see that it serves a utilitarian philosophy, and that at a more basic level it is the sort of thing a client may embrace in order to make sure that an architect does not allow his artistic sensibilities to triumph over the budget. It is a plea to be spared the economic consequences of the rococo spirit.

But this is also unfair. The slogan makes a valid point about the nature of beauty, namely that there is a certain beauty which can come into existence only when we are not looking for it, or, rather when we are trying to do something else. Just as the scientist will tell us of the beauty to be found in the simplicity of the natural world, and the mathematician will rejoice in the beauty of an economical theorem, so understatement and simplicity of form will be found to have great dignity and attractiveness in the end. When a building serves a purpose it can be beautiful; it may even be that, written into the physical laws of the Universe, there is something which creates beauty in service, the beauty of the perfect cricket stroke which serves to hit a boundary, for example. It is a parallel thought to that of Wordsworth: we are 'surprised by joy'.

In speaking of dignity and attractiveness, I do not mean to say that there is no room for what I like to call the 'joke' in architecture. The Sydney Opera House is a wonderful joke.

1 E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, (Oxford, 1986), 445. In his response to this paper at the School of Theology, Dr Peter Armstrong, an architect, pointed out the reductionist and even atheistic sources of this slogan. Despite this I think that it can be put to Christian use when attention is paid to ideology in the way outlined below.



Jokes are a species of drama and drama arises from conflict or discord. But I wonder whether there is much room for the gratuitous joke, or the unprovoked quarrel. I have in mind the sort of construction which clashes violently with its context merely in the interests of utility. This manner of thought suggests again the inadequacy of saying no more than that form follows function. Again, we may all know what the function of a crematorium is, but it is very unsatisfying to think that there is one obvious form that will suit that function. Something more is involved. In this case it is our view of death and mourning and relationships. In other words, the function itself is shaped by a world-view, an ideology. The bleakness of secular death is tellingly captured in our crematoria, just as other buildings may express the vulgarity of our civic spirit.

Whatever truth there is, then, in saying that form follows function must be modified by the additional truth that function is the child of ideology. I find it hard, however, to believe in the existence or even value of absolute ideologies. The form itself influences our ideology in ways too subtle and numerous to catalogue: 'We make our buildings and then they make us,' as Winston Churchill once said. In fact, our church buildings have had a most powerful effect on our perception and practice of church, and even on our theology.

Here at last is the real agenda! I want to talk to architects, pastors and congregations about theology in relation to church buildings. I suppose that the architect may be interested most in form, and the congregation most in function. Between them they may have assumed an ideology without thought. Tradition has served as the ideological underpinning for interests of the congregation and the creativity of the architect. But the day when such an approach could be justified is now past. We are addressing 'the missionary church', and the theology of church must be heeded although I must also stress that it will not by itself answer all our questions or determine all our choices.

By the phrase 'missionary church' I do not mean that the church exists purely and simply for evangelism and that everything should be subsumed under that end. Rather, it is

intended to remind us that the church is no longer the handmaid of the state, receiving the loyalty of the vast majority of persons, and that it no longer can claim to control the prevailing world-view and morality of the people. Our congregations are connected with one another to form a reasonably large voluntary society, existing in the midst of indifference and rejection but with a gospel which demands that we reach out in evangelism. What is the function of the church in these circumstances and how does that shape the form of the buildings it uses? We will need a theological approach to help us answer such questions.

I have suggested that, even if form follows function and function depends on ideology, we ought to realise that ideology itself is shaped by form. Is there a way into this circle? How do we ensure that the legacy of the past will not serve without criticism as our ideology? In short, how do we get architects to stop automatically thinking (traditional) 'church' when they are asked to house the activities of a modern congregation?

I suppose that the first thing we must insist on is that the congregation *needs* no special buildings at all in order to establish its identity or perform its vital functions. We ought to be as radical as this, and to insist on such a position in order to get architects and congregations to think again about what they are doing. When the total lack of any need for special buildings is established, we can begin to think about the buildings we may want. To do this, we must go to theology.

## A theology of space and place

Our first task is to distinguish between natural and revealed theology. By revealed theology I mean the theology which comes from God's Word, the Scriptures. The Bible is God's written revelation of himself and it takes pride of place in anything to do with our knowledge of God and the practical consequences thereof. By natural theology I mean the theology which arises from our experiences in and of the world. Interpreted through the Scriptures it has a subsidiary



validity, but used as an independent source of the knowledge of God and Christian obedience, it is capable of leading us very far astray.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency of architects and their clients to go into a 'religious' mode when they plan church buildings, which allows ample scope for natural theology to dominate. When it comes to religious thought about space there has been over the millennia a tendency for human beings to designate certain spaces as 'sacred', meaning they are especially devoted to or indwelt by the gods and must receive the awe and respect of human beings.

Peter McKenzie describes sacred space as

> a primary apprehension of religious man. It has to do with this perception of the world, of how it is founded, constituted and ordered. This awareness was universal long before the rise of Christianity. Sacred space is a creation of divine action. It is revealed by divination, or constituted as such by rites of consecration. Sacred space becomes a significant centre and point of orientation for human life and activities. It is 'a little piece of heaven on earth'.[2]

It is evident that the religion of Israel described in the OT made use of 'sacred space' in some sense. We need only mention the Solomonic temple. Furthermore, it is easy to point to the rise of sacred space in the history of Christianity. McKenzie is able to describe elements in the Christian home such as an icon or a shrine, as well as the development of holy places, churches, altars, tombs of the martyrs, and sanctuaries. Even here, however, we cannot help also drawing attention to another strand of Christian belief and practice. The earliest church centred on the gathering of persons rather than the space in which they gathered, the Scriptures themselves become the focal point in a protestant home, and John Wesley 'widened the open space to include the whole surface of the globe when he declared that the world was his parish'.[3] Indeed, far from accepting the idea of sacred space, the Christian gospel challenges and transforms it. We will never build appropriate

2 P. McKenzie, *The Christians, their Beliefs and Practices* (Nashville, 1988), 48.

3 McKenzie, *The Christians*, 49.

Christian buildings without understanding this. Let us consider a biblical approach under the broad themes of creation and redemption.

### *Creation*

There is one God who is Creator of heaven and earth. His power is unlimited and is exercised throughout both space and time. There is no point to which one can travel in the space/time continuum and escape his powerful presence. And yet he is not to be identified with space or time. He exists outside these categories even while he rules them. This means that there is no spiritual power which rivals him or competes with him.

Although in the infancy of biblical religion, objects, spaces, persons and time were used to convey truth, each of these were spiritually transformed with the coming of Christ. All that was sacred met in his person: 'The Kingdom of Christ...has no sacred days or seasons, no special sanctuaries, because every time and place alike is holy'.[4] The whole world belongs to God and is made sacred by his presence. There is no place where he may not be found, no time at which he is absent.

By this doctrine of creation, the world is cleansed of superstition. We do not have a belief in sacred sites, in the necessity for buildings to face in certain directions, or in 'lucky' numbers or actions. If the demonic is associated with a space, it may likewise be banished by appeal to the power of God, by prayer rather than processions. Our buildings are relieved of the burden of having to function as 'a little piece of heaven on earth'.[5]

---

4 J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, 1965), 181.

5 In his response to this paper Bishop Harry Goodhew raised the question of 'hallowed' rather than 'sacred' space, pointing out that certain places become hallowed in memory by events and persons. This may well be a valid distinction, and one that needs to be taken into account in the remodelling of church buildings. And yet, as was discovered when we changed to decimal currency, we cannot 'let all the old people die out' before taking necessary action. Can 'hallowed' space be acknowledged while being changed? All life involves such alterations.



### *Redemption*

Into this God-controlled space/time, however, enters one who is circumscribed by space and time. The incarnation is wonderfully limited. If all of space is now ours, it is because a specific point in space is ours. The Lord Jesus submitted to the limitations of space and time for our sake. He became the sacrifice slain 'outside the city gate' (Heb 13:12). In doing so, he became the place, the *topos* (a word used for the Jerusalem temple, too) where people meet God.

Jesus Christ himself is the central focus of the new temple. We meet God in him. His presence removes the need for a Solomonic temple: 'the temple he had spoken of was his body' (John 2:21). The temple image is extended to include the individual believer, who is indwelt by God's Spirit, and the church, the gathering of God's people, which becomes the very sanctuary of God himself: 'Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?' (1 Cor 3:16). Not surprisingly, Jesus promises to make the meeting of believers his own: 'For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them' (Matt 18:20). When John sees the end of all things in the form of a city, there is no temple, 'because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple' (Rev 21:22).

The significance of all this may be seen in the NT doctrine of the church. The people of God gather by appointment in order to meet Jesus Christ and to serve one another. Here is the church. It needs no sacred liturgy, priests, times, buildings, for it has all these things in Christ: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in (i.e. among) you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God' (Col 3:16). I believe this to be a miniature of the church in session, and hence instructive for the shaping of the completely incidental, though not unimportant,

circumstances in which we meet as Christians. If this article has a text, Colossians 3:16 is it.

God has purchased his church by redemption. There is but one true church gathered now and for all eternity around his throne. But on earth this one true church finds its expression in the gathering of God's people to seek Christ Jesus in his Word and to serve one another lovingly. The pastoral ministry is part of that service, since it is the pastor's task to preach and teach God's Word, the gospel. The gathering is not oblivious of the unbeliever. Where the word of God is preached, the unbeliever is challenged to repentance and faith. The NT is supportive of the ministry of God's Word and the care of the church through certain persons. But it knows nothing of the passive, clergy-dominated church so familiar to us. The relationship with God expresses itself in our response to him and in our relationship with one another.

We need to see in all this a tremendous conflict between natural and revealed theology, between what we may ordinarily think and the gospel. Both architect and client need to grasp this fact and to understand the nature of the conflict and the issues at stake. In the history of Christianity, the conflict is physically embodied in the churches that Christians have built, amongst which there have been two broad categories, which we may label 'temple' and 'meeting house'.

## Theology shaping the function

My use of the terms I have just mentioned comes from the excellent survey by Harold W. Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship*.[6] Turner makes the point that

> Jesus bequeathed no sanctuaries, altars, sacred objects, nor any places or instructions for those from which his followers might design a church building and its contents...There is only one

6 The Hague, 1979.



> instance in the gospels of Jesus deliberately choosing a place of assembly for a special religious purpose, and that was the upper room in a private house...[7]

Turner observes that the first Christians met in houses, and he concludes,

> the domestic house as the place of worship in the first Christian century embodied a new form in the history of religions, and provided a norm for this new tradition. This norm lay not in making a private house mandatory, but in setting the sanctuary free from bondage to particular holy places and buildings and locating it in the Christ-centred life of a community meeting wherever was most convenient.[8]

Much of the rest of the story concerns the re-assertion of the temple tradition in Christianity, linked to a theology which made much of sacred actions, persons, times and objects, and, by way of contrast, the occasional recovery of the NT insight. After Constantine Christian churches became public buildings, designed originally like the civil basilica or meeting hall. But strong influences were at work to ensure that the temple tradition triumphed. Turner isolates in particular 'the cult of the dead, and equally of the martyrs' as significant in this development, and argues that this tradition then flourished for a thousand years from the fifth century. As the middle ages wore on, such features as the gradation of sanctity and the proliferation of symbolism occurred. Here we enter the period of Gothic architecture with its heroic grandeur and its numinous quality. But the coming of the Renaissance offered no fundamental challenge. Turner sums up:

> The Renaissance church, like the Gothic before it, may be accepted for its aesthetic and architectural achievements and as a magnificent expression of a sophisticated religious spirit, but from a Christian standpoint it was a useless repetition of an outmoded type in the temple manner. It manifested a grand theory, but not a Christian one.[9]

7 *From Temple to Meeting House*, 150. It is worth observing, furthermore, that there was nothing of religious significance in the choice of the 'upper' room.

8 *From Temple to Meeting House*, 153.

9 *From Temple to Meeting House*, 200.

The Reformation, however, was a re-affirmation of the biblical gospel. Its emphasis on universal divine sovereignty began to empty the world of its sacred places, times and persons and gave men and women the courage to look at the world on its own terms. Its doctrine of justification by faith related believers directly to God and in fellowship with one another. Its doctrine of revelation produced a new relationship between Word and sacrament, making the pulpit central and turning the altar into a table.

These and the other vital aspects of the Reformation should have had a revolutionary impact on church architecture. The impact was vast, but for a number of reasons it fell short of a complete revolution. Among the Reformed churches, images and other religious works of art were destroyed. 'Protestant plainness', or a simplicity of style and ornament, became the fashion. The church building became a place for the giving and receiving of sermons. The Lord's Supper became a symbolic meal of remembrance at a table. On the other hand, the full effect of the Reformation was not always manifest. Most existing church buildings were 'cleansed' and re-arranged, but the basic plan remained, to be resumed at a later date. Furthermore, the consequences of the gospel for the mutual ministry of Christian believers were inhibited chiefly for reasons to do with the church's place in society.

Nonetheless, focusing attention on Anglican Christianity in particular, we see the power of the Reformation at work in the reordering of existing churches and the plans for new ones in the 17th and 18th centuries. These developments have been traced by Nigel Yates in his work *Buildings, Faith and Worship: the Liturgical Arrangement of Anglican Churches 1600-1900.*[10] Suffice to say, that whereas the post-Reformation developments were mainly in line with the needs of a Protestant church with liturgical worship, from about 1840 onwards there was a powerful recrudescence of medievalism, along what was called ecclesiological lines, with

10 (Oxford, 1991).



the result that the churches (both new and old) became standardised in a way alien to the requirements of Protestantism. Among other innovations were the placing of surpliced choirs in the chancel, the lowering of the pulpit, the introduction of the lectern, and 'the lengthening of the altar which was then elaborately carved or painted so as to emphasise the growing belief in the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist'.[11]

It is churches of this type which so many Anglicans have been led to think are *church*. We imagine that the external and interior must represent a powerful tradition extending back through the ages, and that this is the proper way to build a church. In the words of one church-building bishop, we should observe 'such things as setting aside a third of the building for God and allowing man to use two-thirds of it: God's part being the sanctuary and man's part being the Nave. This proportion always gives a sense of space and grace to a building'.[12] But such arrangements are themselves an innovation. Like many of our supposed age-long traditions they are recent inventions as far as the post-Reformation church is concerned. We ought to regard ourselves as free to design buildings within and without in accordance with an evangelical theology in which the function is that the congregation gathers to meet Christ in his Word and by his Spirit, and to serve by building each other up in faith and obedience.

## The function that shapes the form

Edwyn Bevan in his classic work *Symbolism and Belief*[13] tells the story of a man who visited a cathedral:

11 Yates, 185.

12 I. Shevill, *Half Time* (Brisbane, 1966), 72. I ought to add that Bishop Shevill also advocated a modern style in buildings. He insisted that they be related to their settings and aesthetically pleasing.

13 (Boston, 1957).

> He described how the ancient building around him, the half-light, the waves of music as he wandered about, gave him a rich sense of the numinous; and then he described the fearful fall into bathos, into dreary tedium, when the music ceased and he suddenly heard a voice proclaiming through the aisles, 'To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him'.[14]

Here we have the choice that confronts the builder. Is it the function of the building to speak to us of God, to symbolise the presence of God, to provide the experience of the numinous? If so, we are not bound to original, revived or pseudo-Gothic forms. There will be modern ways of suggesting the presence of the Divine: even a floor which echoes underfoot is a good start. Or, is it the function of the building to provide for the congregation to meet Christ in his Word and by his Spirit and to serve one another? In that case, the form will be quite different.

The function that I am suggesting imposes two demands. The first is that it be a building suitable for us to 'meet Christ' in his Word and by his Spirit. The mention of the Spirit is a reminder to us that we cannot demand his presence, that revelation is God-given, that God has the initiative. No builder can build a dwelling place for the Spirit of God. We ought not to attempt so bold a task. The mention of the Word reminds us that the focus for our encounter with Christ is in the Word, written, read and preached. Whatever else the building does, it must serve the need we have to speak and hear the Word of God through the reading and exposition of the Scriptures. The sight-lines, the acoustics, the interior arrangement of the building must serve this end above all. We must repudiate all attempts to involve the numinous or create the beautiful as a substitute for the power of the Word of God. The provision of a window behind the speaker through which we may gaze on scenes of natural beauty while being addressed by a faceless person is one such piece of nonsense inflicted upon us by bad theology; I suspect the towering height of ceilings is another.

14 *Symbolism*, 291.



The second demand is the mutual service of the congregation. Paul expresses it thus: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your heart to God' (Col 3:16). The goal of our mutual ministry is that we may respond appropriately to the Word, being edified or built up in our faith and putting on the love which Christians ought to have for one another.[15]

The mutual service of the congregation demands relationships. The older buildings seem deliberately constructed to discourage human relationship, and indeed there has been a theory of church-going where the emphasis has fallen on the individual's private communion with God. Fortunately these days have passed; indeed many of our buildings now incorporate features intended to humanise church-going and make relationships possible. But we have yet to truly extend ourselves in this area, still thinking perhaps that the numinous element of buildings retains some significance. It is far more important to provide a free and flexible space than to have the interior of the church arranged symbolically to speak to the casual passer-by of 'God'. The Word of God is not in the 'still small voice' of the empty building, but in the living and active meeting of God's people around the Word of Christ. It is into this assembly that the outsider must be encouraged to come, to feel welcome and to desire to remain. Above all, he or she must be able to hear and respond to the Word of God. This is the missionary church for today's world.

Integral to our response to God's Word and our ministry to each other, is song. I do not say music. Music as such is hardly relevant to the Christian gathering; it is a matter of indifference unless it interferes with edification. The characteristic Christian activity is song, and I take it that this means, especially, congregational singing. A building intended to serve the congregation should be designed to promote congregational singing, not for bravura displays of music. In particular there is no call for a choir to be on display; to help

15 D. G. Peterson in *Church, Worship and the Local Congregation. Explorations 2*, ed. B. G. Webb (Sydney: Anzea, 1987), 45-58.

the congregation it should be part of the congregation. Our buildings are not entertainment centres.

The first Christian buildings were houses. I am not suggesting that we should return to our homes, although some would endorse such a move. This, however, is mere primitivism—there is nothing sacred about the house as such. Rather I am suggesting that perhaps church architecture should be regarded as an outgrowth of domestic architecture as far as comfort, hospitality and flexibility is concerned. The missionary church must surely be housed in a place which welcomes people and meets their obligations to relate to God and one another without distraction or discomfort. There can be no excuse for our continued habit of building churches which are too hot or too cold, where seating is fixed and uncomfortable, where floors are bare of carpet, where you cannot hear or see, and where our needs for food and drink and child-care are neglected. In short, our buildings must support our mutual ministry rather than hinder it.

Two specific issues need to be addressed, if only briefly. The first is the question of the Lord's Supper. Even these words need translation into Australian English, for the Greek word for supper refers to the main meal of the day. The Lord's Dinner began as the meal of a major festival and continued as a substantial meal with great redemptive significance in the early Church. While our liturgical version of the meal is theologically justified, attenuated as it is, it may well be worth sparing a thought to the way in which our buildings can be used for fellowship meals. If the liturgical version of the Communion can be somehow rooted into the wider activity of eating and drinking with each other, its real significance may be greatly enhanced. We may then see how it 'preaches the Lord's death' and how we love one another in the gospel of his grace. It would also cause us to think seriously about the furniture of our buildings and the arrangement of this furniture. How is the room used for our ordinary fellowship meals? Does that suggest anything about the Lord's Dinner? Our reverence is not directed to objects as such, but to persons, especially the Lord; a building or an object is 'consecrated' by its proper use, not by a ceremony.



The second issue is the problem of the relationship between the church (and hence its building) and the community. Clearly there is no absolute need for a church building to be recognised as such in the community. Furthermore, the preaching of the Word and the love of Christian people are the appointed means of impact in society. The original 'Christian' buildings were not public buildings. But, on the other hand, wisdom and experience combine with historical perspective to suggest that there remains a strong argument for the missionary church to establish 'public' buildings. By this I mean buildings that will be recognisable and that will be well-located, but I also mean buildings which will be welcoming to the community of which they form a part. In this connection it may be worth considering how church buildings can function during the week to incorporate the lives of their neighbours. We need to be careful not to create problems for the management of buildings by allowing their continual use for all sorts of reasons. But are there uses which will encourage people to enter and make them want to return?

### The form that serves the theology: areas of tension

Without doubt there are many forms which may incorporate the functions called for by this theology. Much will depend on the host of other factors such as budget and site which are of such vital importance. The specific forms are not my business. But as the planners go about their tasks, there are at least three areas of tension to which thought needs to be given. They arise from the aesthetic, historic, and symbolic factors involved, and there may be tension between the interests of the architect and the theology I have advanced. These factors are linked to very powerful elements of human experience: the desire for beauty, the strength of tradition and the expression of religion in art and imagination. Is there a conflict?

## Aesthetic factors

If the function of a 'Christian' building is to follow the theology suggested here, what place remains for beauty? Historically, reformed theology has been iconoclastic, taking delight in the destruction of religious art associated with buildings and valuing simplicity and plainness of style in dress and architecture. It stresses the 'beauty of holiness' and repudiates any notion of the 'holiness of beauty'.

But are we to repudiate the beautiful and value the ugly? As I have already indicated, there is a beauty which may well be found in economy and simplicity; such functionalism may provoke a beautiful form. We are facing here not a polemic against beauty—on the contrary—but a polemic against idolatry. The problem with the beautiful is that it may serve as a powerful agent of an alien ideology. But our doctrine is positive toward the gifts of God in creation and we may justly delight in the beautiful. Indeed, the relational aspect of our function will be served by aesthetically pleasing surrounds as long as they are not intended to serve as a substitute for the Word of God. The beauty of our surroundings should stem from the doctrine of creation rather than be an attempt to teach us or remind us about redemption. The stained glass of our earlier Australian churches incorporates geometric designs; the later churches give us religious pictures. There is a great theological difference.

I would say a key test for the aesthetics of a building for the missionary church is this: do they narrow and restrict the uses to which the building can be put? When we free ourselves from the 'temple' mentality, it is clear that the Christian meeting can occur without buildings or in buildings designed for other purposes. Surely therefore we will want to consider using our building for other purposes during the week. The barrier to this ought to be the question of convenience, not the inhibiting presence of religious art or symbolism. Furthermore, let us not make our buildings so beautiful in an ecclesiastical way that we cannot dispose of them or put them to some other use when circumstances change. Can we demolish this building when it no longer serves the interests of the gospel?



## Symbolic factors

It may be thought from what I have said to this point that I believe that anything symbolic should be avoided at all costs. Certainly the self-conscious efforts at symbolism so prevalent in church buildings have often introduced natural theology where none should exist, and helped create cold, uncomfortable and forbidding spaces. This is true in Protestant Reformed architecture as well as the Gothic renaissance. The attempts to make the Word central have resulted in buildings with pulpits to the front and choirs to the back, but where the congregation meets in surroundings which are both stiff and formal.[16]

Notwithstanding these difficulties however, I believe that symbolism is both inevitable and to be welcomed. Symbolism is part of all human existence. Speech and writing are necessarily symbolic; so, too, are many of the features of everyday relationships, such as gestures. Symbolism, in which something partial stands for something larger, facilitates human relationships and has the capacity to delight us as well.

But the use of symbolism is not to be unrestrained. It must serve reality, not create reality, lest we return to the dangers of natural theology and the building of 'temples'.[17] By all means let us ensure that our building and its internal arrangements give the message that God's Word is central to our business and that congregational fellowship really matters, that singing is important and that the Lord's Dinner is a meal. Let us give such messages, however, not by symbolic means as such. We do not just *symbolise* the centrality of the Word: we make the Word central; we don't

16 There is fine theology and commonsense in D. J. Bruggink and C. H. Droppers, *Christ and Architecture* (Grand Rapids, 1965), but the many churches photographed in the book are forbidding in their appearance. What of the relational aspect of the Christian gathering?

17 It is interesting to note that the heavily symbolic approach to Anglican church buildings was a product of the 19th century 'medievalism'. Yates shows that this was an area in which 'the ecclesiologists departed most radically from traditional Anglican approaches to church design ...' (*Buildings*, 160).

just *symbolise* the meal element of the Dinner, we provide a table. It is all too easy to replace a set of Catholic symbols with Protestant symbols while at the same time making the thing signified impossible to attain. Let us not symbolise fellowship in a way which destroys it!

### *Historic Factors*

The designers of church buildings are especially burdened by historic considerations. Even in domestic architecture, adventurous clients are, I presume, few and far between. In ecclesiastical architecture, there is doubtless a perception about what has always been needed for a church which dictates the sorts of buildings we have.

Nor is this entirely bad. The Christian Church is not a recent phenomenon and nor will it have a short life-span. There is a sense of continuity which legitimately helps to identify who we are, where we have come from and what place we have in the community.[18] Thus, for example, the act of 'preaching a sermon' as the foundational means of 'letting the word of Christ dwell among you', is stylised; so, too, is the liturgical expression of our Christian fellowship, which remains integral to what Anglican Christians engage in when they meet. Both these historic forms of meeting will affect the form of our building.

Nonetheless, historical continuity must not be allowed to become the *de facto* ideology which determines function and form. This is particularly the case in a cultural situation where new technologies need to be harnessed for the work of the gospel by the missionary church. The introduction of overhead projectors and public address systems changed our way of behaving in church a generation and more ago; technological advances in communications since then are far more revolutionary. This applies not only to such things as sound systems, lights and visual presentations, but to the comfort and flexibility of buildings and their construction.

18 See, too, the point about 'hallowed' space in note 5 above.



There is no fixed outward appearance for a church or special rules for its construction. But there is a limit.

Advocates of the 'temple' tradition will insist on limits to modernity in order to create religious emotions such as awe. The intrusion of screens, modern music, carpeting and flexible space are said to distract us from God's transcendence. I do not accept this view, but I do believe that modernity should be subject to theological reality. Christianity remains a religion of the Word of Christ and the responsive fellowship engendered by the Word. Our buildings are not classrooms, but they are closer to classrooms than to entertainment centres. Our music is congregational song, not 100 decibel noise or stylised choirs. For us, the personal matters; for us, the Word of God comes pre-eminently via the pastor, not via the sub-personal medium of the video.

## Conclusion

I see now only too well that the disclaimers with which I began are thoroughly justified! I have become more convinced than ever, however, that the question of our buildings is highly important, and if I have at least succeeded in provoking thought (or even opposition) this will be appropriate. I am certainly aware of at least two major issues that I have not even addressed. The first is the problem of finance, which will always mould our plans. The second is the problem of existing church buildings and what to do to make them suitable for a missionary church. In the latter case we need both courage and sensitivity—but more of the former in my judgment!

It may, perhaps, be surprising that I have not invoked the language of tradition—the nave, the sanctuary, the narthex, the transept, the chancel. This is deliberate. I have a great respect for tradition, but the days have come when we must give ourselves to new thought about the disposition and furniture of our buildings. This language suggests a theology which will not help. In saying this I am not attacking liturgical worship, but seeking a greater flexibility in its

outward circumstances, in the interests of the preaching of God's Word and the mutual care of the congregation.

I have observed over the years that scarcely a building is erected that does not provoke criticism and dismay. It is as if our ideals are constantly frustrated by reality. Church buildings are no exception. It is easier to write about them than to plan them. Nonetheless, Churchill was right—our buildings make us. Despite the difficulties, we must give ourselves to thought and discussion about the vexed problems of a missionary church and create the buildings which will express and serve the truth of the gospel.

### Exploring further

1. To what extent is the maxim 'form follows function' helpful or misleading?
2. If we called the church the 'pilgrim church' rather than the 'missionary church' would this affect our approach to building?
3. Should church buildings serve the wider community? How? What are some of the difficulties?
4. Are we putting too much emphasis on the relational rather than the transcendent in an age which emphasises the former?
5. Is there a theology of nature (as opposed to natural theology)? What does it say about matters such as beauty?

# EQUIPPING THE LOCAL CHURCH FOR MISSION

*K.A. Mascord*


### Synopsis

The assumption with which this paper began was that the local church does have a mission and that this mission can, more or less, be equated with evangelism. The local church is to be caught up in God's gospel mission to the world. This assumption appears to be threatened by the fact that Paul and the other NT letter writers nowhere explicitly call upon their readers (in general) to evangelise. The threat, however, is only apparent, because more than enough *is* said, from which to construct a theology of localised mission.

In seeking to understand why there is so little direct encouragement to evangelism, a number of important NT emphases are drawn out, chiefly (1) the importance of recognising gifts, (2) the importance of seeing the evangelistic process as an on-going one aiming towards maturity in Christ, (3) the importance of lifestyle as a powerful means of commending the gospel, and (4) the importance of personal readiness to speak the gospel. Any theology of localised mission needs to take full account of these four emphases.


### Introduction

There is an assumption implicit in the title of this paper, and that is that the local church *has* a mission. There are those, notably Donald Robinson, who have cast significant doubt on this assumption. Robinson has argued that 'the church as such has no face to the world, and is not therefore a direct