

CHAPTER 2

Iconology—Outline of a Working Methodology

ARCHITECTURE AS A VISUAL MEDIUM

Architecture as a visual medium envelops and influences emotional interaction differently than do the other visual arts. That is because human actions include a spatial characteristic. In consequence, architecture has both a public and personal existentialist character. More than simply inviting the viewer into an imaginative scene, as in painting, or focusing on a particular object, as in sculpture, architecture envelops, creating literal environments and representational space, not simply representations of space. It includes nonrepresentational compositions but also, potentially, coded meanings of theological significance.

Therefore, in a study such as this we are compelled to use buildings themselves as texts in order to assess their meaning. As J. H. Elliott argues in his book *History in the Making*, artifacts like the churches we examine played a cultural role of defining the faith of their communities.¹ Their architects' use of existing styles did not necessarily conflict with the new meanings intended by their designers, but expressed possibilities of expressing their ideas about a new creation, the right ordering of life, of rationality and the purposes of God. As we will argue, in utilizing these

1. Elliott, *History in the Making*.

styles, they edited the ideas of Vitruvius and helped recover a classical style and its visual language.

A methodology is needed to address the questions raised, a criteria to assess the meanings suggested by cultural artifacts in their own context, and in particular to ascertain what churches have meant for the communities who build them or appropriate and adapt them. Richard Kieckhefer provides a starting place for articulating a methodology that will approach the questions of interpreting liturgical space.² Using Kieckhefer as a point of departure, informed by insights from Jacobsen, Torgerson, Mugerauer, Whyte, and Dyrness, we will look at a sort of “architectural iconology” of French Protestantism, by which is meant an historical analysis and aesthetic investigation of architectural forms and images in their context. More specifically, this will help us to read French Protestant worship spaces, to determine what forms meant theologically to those that designed or used them.

WORD-ORIENTED AND FORM-ORIENTED CHURCH SPACE

All churches demonstrate characteristics that can be described as sacramental and evangelical. All Christian communities celebrate the sacraments, even if their major point of contact with the divine is in the hearing of the Word of God; all are evangelical in the sense of reading Scripture and recalling the gospel tradition, even if this is sublimated to the celebration of the Mass. However, churches tend to exhibit one of these factors as a “fundamental determinant of church design.”³ Some follow a long Eucharistic ecclesial and architectural tradition dating from the early period of Christian worship, seeing the approach to sacraments as this fundamental determinant of church design. Others follow the kerygmatic tradition that sprung up in the later Middle Ages and in the sixteenth-century Reformation, a tradition that understands the encounter with the Word of God to be the primary manner in which one accesses the holy. These influences can be seen to a greater or lesser degree in all churches, then, but one of these tendencies shapes the essential form.

Various contexts contribute to the experience of responding to a church, including cultural interaction, expectations, the ethos of its

2. Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*.

3. Krautheimer, *Early Christian*, 13.

community, and how it is being used liturgically.⁴ One person, for example, might experience a liturgy as a meaningless show, and another not as a show but a sacred enactment. The meaning of architectural space is negotiated, then, between the intention of the architect and the experience of the building's users. Response to a church is learned and requires informed reflection, for "the meanings of a church are seldom obvious."⁵

Kieckhefer proposes four ways of looking at a church, undergirded by two foundational questions: How is it used? And, what sort of reaction is it meant to elicit? Both questions may be separated into two distinct refinements: when we ask how a church is used, we are enquiring first about the *overall configuration of space*: "how is it shaped, and how does its design relate to the flow, the dynamics of worship?" Another way of putting the question would be, Where is "*the central focus of attention*, if any . . . and how does it make clear what is most important in worship?"⁶ The questions address the immediate impact and first impressions of walking into the church, of what the disparate elements communicate, and of the mood evoked. The center of attention communicates what is most important in the experience of worship, and pays attention to the "accumulation of impressions" that comes to the forefront through longer exposure. Marks of holiness, of the set apart nature of the worship space, lead to an intensification of experience and to deeper understanding.

To further elaborate Kieckhefer's methodology, he proposes four distinct questions to pose when looking at a church. They are:

1. *How is the space shaped, and how does its design relate to the flow of worship?*
2. *Where is the focus of attention?* (On the Lord's Table, an altar, or a pulpit? Is the focus on the worshipping community itself?)
3. *What is the aesthetic impact?* (Entering a church parallels our experience of coming into God's presence. A church's design—its aesthetic impact—reminds us of leaving behind the world for a time to enjoy community with God in prayer as well as with fellow believers.)
4. *What is its symbolic resonance?* (Does the church communicate rich associations that invite further exploration? Such connotations can take place both visually and verbally, but if little is communicated

4. Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 5–7.

5. *Ibid.*, 9.

6. *Ibid.*, 10.

The Visual Theology of the Huguenots

that draws us into deeper meanings, then there is little to hold one's interest.)

Following Jacobsen, we might also ask of a church, Is it beautiful? Does it elicit our affection? How does the building provide for "the experience of approach, for hospitality, and for enhancing relationships?" As Lindsay Jones reminded us, buildings also have meaning because of how they are used as containers of religious activity. To grasp multiple meanings, we will look at transpositions between a building's designer, its users, and those who observe it. Dyrness's analysis of Protestant use of narrative applies as well.

First, however, a historical sketch of the development of the sacramental and the evangelical traditions will establish some context, and further define the two foundational orientations to church space that undergird discussion of churches. If Gadamer is correct that a structure's local history as an "event" and its social context help define meaning, then this survey is indispensable.

THE CLASSIC SACRAMENTAL TRADITION: ORIGINS OF SPATIAL ARRANGEMENTS IN CATHOLIC CHURCHES

The classic sacramental tradition emerged from the first decades of church building in the fourth century. Its most representative form is known as the basilican plan, a long hall-like structure with side aisles, completed by an apse form at the eastern end. The name basilica derives from the Greek *stoa*, a long covered walkway, and *basilea*, royal, a designation for a king's tribunal chamber in fifth-century BC Athens. In the second century BC, basilicas functioned as public halls for conducting business and deciding legal affairs.⁷ Colonnaded aisles ran parallel along the sides, and a raised dais on the apse provided space for magistrates to sit. The central hall, being higher than the side aisles, permitted light to penetrate the building through clerestory windows. Christianity developed within the cultural framework of the Roman-Hellenistic world, and its organization as well as its architecture reflected this context (see figure 6). Familiarity with the historical development of the basilican form of church building, prevalent in the classic sacramental church, helps us understand the forms of medieval churches

7. Gietmann, "Basilica," line 3ff.

that sixteenth-century Protestants inherited in territories where the Reformation was adopted.

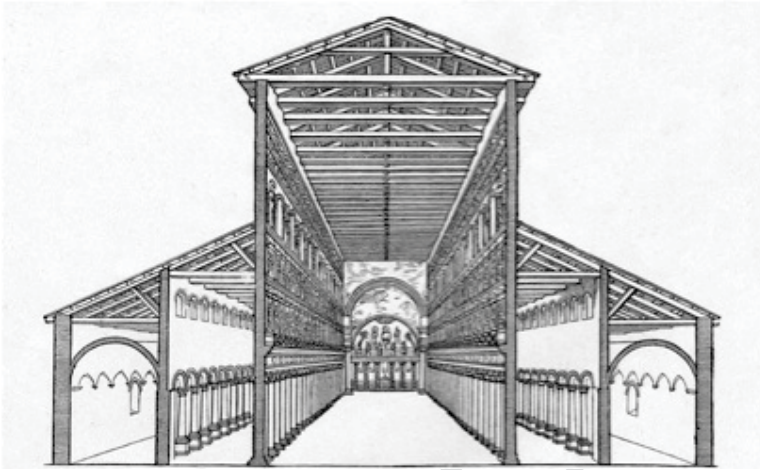


Figure 6: A front section of old St. Peter's church in Rome shows the Roman basilican form.

Worship in the Late Roman Empire was a public obligation for its subjects, who were required to pray to the gods who assured the well-being of the state. In the private realm, citizens were free to worship or not without interference. As long as cults of personal salvation did not interfere with the cult of the emperor, explains Richard Krautheimer, no conflict need arise.⁸ Indeed, in the first century of the development of Christianity, the faith grew with little notice. In officialdom or when under scrutiny, however, worship of the gods became a litmus test for loyalty to the emperor. As Krautheimer points out, “worship was a civic duty performed according to a state ritual.”⁹ Due to the work of St Paul, however, the Christian movement broke with Judaism, and could no longer be seen as simply an offshoot or as a heresy within its ranks.

Within the first century, Christianity spread to the Hellenized cities of Greece, Asia Minor, to towns and villages, and eventually to Rome. Organization of new congregations fell to lay administrators, overseers or bishops (*episkopoi*), and stewards or deacons (*diakonoï*), with preaching and guidance supplied by the itinerant disciples and by apostles and prophets.

8. Krautheimer, *Early Christian*, 23.

9. *Ibid.*, 23.

The Visual Theology of the Huguenots

By the mid to late second century, tasks included teaching and the leading of worship, works of charity, the teaching of catechumens, the care of cemeteries, the cure of souls, and the administration of property. Bishops and deacons, along with elders or presbyters (*presbuteroi*) formed a hierarchical class of clergy. Bishops eventually came to oversee the churches of each city, following the pattern of Bishop Dionysius in Rome (259–268). As Christians grew in power and influence, they came to be seen as challenges to state authority. Early persecutions had been local and sporadic, but after 250, Christian self-separation and refusal to participate in the cult of emperor worship caused ill feeling to issue in fierce persecution.¹⁰ In the mid third century, authorities

in Alexandria, Carthage, and Rome confiscated property, executed church leaders, and prohibited Christians from meeting together. The church proved resilient, however, and Emperor Gallienus restored property, cemeteries, and the right to assemble. The larger churches owned property, either legally or overlooked by authorities. Smaller congregations continued to meet in homes, and large congregations would revert to this practice in times of persecution.

Built structures served spiritual needs as well as the exigencies of social welfare, for worship administration, and distribution of charity. Cemeteries allowed for memorials for the dead and particularly for the martyrs. The liturgy had been standardized by the early third century, and the common meal was no longer celebrated weekly, but on special occasions only, such as memorial banquets and meals for the poor.

A service consisted of two parts: the Mass of the Catechumens, for the catechumens as well as for regular believers, which consisted of prayers, Scripture, and sermon. The second part, the Mass of the Faithful, was for regular, confirmed members, and consisted of a procession for bringing offerings and contributions for the poor and for the maintenance of the church, and of the Eucharist.

The assembly hall had to be large enough to accommodate worshippers, and was divided into spaces for clergy and laity. The bishop's seat occupied a space on a raised platform to one end of the chamber, adjoined by chairs for the other assisting clergy. Men and women sat on opposite sides of the assembly. Furniture included chairs for the clergy, a table for communion, and a second table for the offerings. A confirmation room and a baptistery were also needed, according to the needs of the cult. Other

10. *Ibid.*, 25.

requirements included rooms for clergy offices and quarters for clergy and their families; rooms for storing and distributing food and clothing for the poor; classrooms for the instruction of converts, and community gathering space. The scale and diversity of these usages determined that congregations needed more space than a private home could afford.

Krautheimer tells us such structures, occasionally purpose-built and often purchased and adapted, were dubbed *domus ecclesiae* or *oikos ecclesias*, or in Rome, a *titulus*.¹¹ Such houses that are known follow the general plan of local utilitarian domestic architecture of the third century. Christians shied away from religious forms of architecture such as temples and sanctuaries because of their association with pagan religious practices and Roman cultic customs. Christian meeting places were usually typical peristyle dwellings, following the manner of domestic middle class architecture, as was certainly the case at Dura-Europos in the eastern part of the Empire. This style comprised a courtyard faced on three sides by rooms, and by a columned portico on the fourth. In Rome, tenements seem to have been converted into Christian community houses in the third and fourth century to accommodate the needs of larger congregations.¹² Christians integrated classical forms into funerary architecture—mausolea, martyria, and banqueting halls—more readily than into worship spaces, since pagan funeral buildings did not carry the religious associations of public monumental buildings. Structures devoted to regular Christian worship and church administration resisted classical pagan architectural influences longer, preferring the purely utilitarian design of the *domus ecclesiae* into the late fourth century.

Gradually, however, churches began to emulate the more exalted architectural surroundings and ceremonial practices of a Roman magistrate. As Christianity gained official favor and eventually became the dominant religious power, the basilica was the principal form used for ecclesiastical building. From the time of Constantine, “Christian concepts [are] expressed in the language of the official architecture of Late Antiquity.”¹³

Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 313 insured official toleration for Christianity, and throughout his twenty-four year reign the church became increasingly enmeshed with the power of the state. The hierarchy of leadership that had developed in the years of peace for the church from 260 to 305

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 29.

13. Ibid., 37.

The Visual Theology of the Huguenots

further solidified; the Mass was standardized across the Empire; and the bishops accustomed themselves to the privilege, rank, and insignia of high government officials.¹⁴ In consequence, the church demanded an architecture commensurate with its social standing, and sanctuaries that stood on a par with the grandest of palaces and public buildings.¹⁵ Sanctuaries contained “a lofty throne atop a dais, an audience chamber,” and worship was accompanied by “the performance of acclamations upon entering the meeting room for services.”

Today, variants of the basilican plan are seen in Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Episcopalian, and other traditions. An extended nave contains seats for the congregants, and a chancel allows for the seating of clergy. Kieckhefer underscores that terminology and arrangements vary, but standard features include choir stalls and an altar, a symbolic place of sacrifice. This, in the classic sacramental church, is the point of focus. He writes,

If a church of this type is based on a coherent aesthetic vision, it is usually one meant to evoke the immanence of God and the possibility among worshipers for transcendence of ordinary consciousness. Such churches often abound with symbolic forms and decorations, making them rich in symbolic resonance.¹⁶

That is, if the church was constructed with intentionality, the grandeur and immediacy of God will likely resonate in that space. Such spaces are usually replete with artistic pieces, but even without them, the structure itself communicates. It may be obvious that the scale of a classical sacramental church edifice communicates God’s transcendence more than it does immanence due to the height and the expansiveness of Romanesque or Gothic styles. This dynamic is counterbalanced, however, with symbols and iconology, which convey a tangibility and imaginative locus for worshippers.

Even with the change in religious loyalty to Calvinist or Lutheran teachings, old perceptions of sacred space were not quickly or easily overcome. In addition, practical considerations insured that Protestants, where possible, appropriated classical sacramental churches, changing the utilization of space where that proved necessary for their purposes. Examples of this trend are numerous in the Rhineland-Palatinate, in Scotland, in the Netherlands, in the Alsace, in southwest France, and in the cities

14. *Ibid.*, 39.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 11.

of Protestant Switzerland such as Neuchâtel, Basel, Lausanne, Bern, and Geneva.

The basilican form, then, conveyed dignity, solidity, spaciousness, and grandeur, attributes suited to its original usage as a place of business or governance. As well, it was suited to express, in its adaptation for Christian worship, a theology of transcendence, power, and authority, as Krautheimer suggests. Churches were divided into spaces of increasing degrees of holiness, conjuring memories of the ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The physical movement from the church yard, over the west porch and through the main doors, most often passing under carvings of Christ at the Last Judgment, would have relayed an impression of moving from the world into the heavenly realm. This form will be relevant to our later discussion of the Protestant adaptation of St. Pierre in Geneva, several centuries old by Calvin's time. Although in use as a Christian place of worship for over one thousand years, conceptualized through this long period as *domus dei*, perceptions of its nature would undergo a significant shift in the Reformation period, a return to the pre-Constantinian understanding of the church as *domus ecclesiae*, or *oikos ecclesias*.

THE CLASSIC EVANGELICAL TRADITION

The Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century rediscovered and returned to the ancient idea of a temple as the *domus ecclesiae* rather than as the *domus dei*. Harold Turner, who relies on his own observation of patterns in historic worship spaces, explains in *From Temple to Meeting House* that the reformers' new understanding of church space sprang from their changing view of the church itself and their recovery of the "primitive communal nature of worship."¹⁷

Kieckhefer describes the classic evangelical tradition as essentially an auditorium designed for the purpose of hearing the exposition of Scripture. All other visual elements are sublimated to this purpose, for as Calvin insisted, "Unless we listen attentively to [God], his majesty will not dwell among us."¹⁸ Indeed, in this scheme in a place designated for Protestant worship there can be no place for symbols or images. In this space the pulpit, the focal point of the proclaimed Word, dominates the space. Rather

17. Turner, *From Temple*, 205.

18. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.4.

The Visual Theology of the Huguenots

than cruciform or rectilinear, the space is often broader, even square or octagonal. This enables all the individuals to clearly hear the preaching and be edified by it, even encouraging spontaneous interaction with the preacher. The building is stripped of ornaments, plain in style, most often lacking in chapels, images, frescoes, altars, and stained glass windows—all the elements charged with theological meaning in the classic sacramental church. Kieckhefer reminds us that the style would be appropriated by nineteenth-century urban revival preachers, following the pattern of exposition of Scripture and call to faith above all else, and once again by twentieth-century evangelicals “with the latest technology at their command.”¹⁹

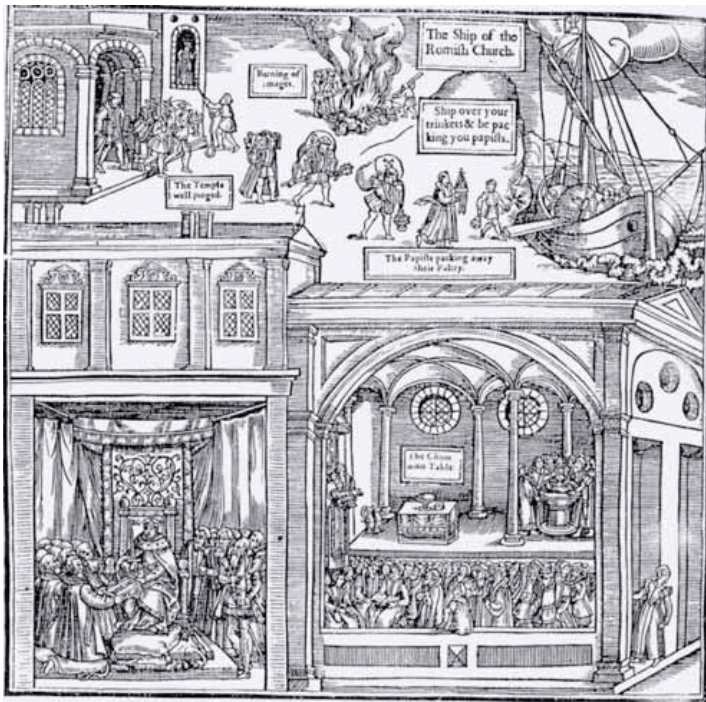


Figure 7: “Purging the Temple” (upper portion), receiving the Scripture (lower left) and the typical features of Protestant worship, with the two biblical sacraments and the congregation gathered around a pulpit to hear the preaching. (From *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, 1563 edition.)

19. Krautheimer, *Early Christian*, 11–12.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CLASSIC EVANGELICAL TRADITION

The classic evangelical tradition in church design developed in response to needs of new Protestant worshipping communities. For Luther, churches' physical significance paled in comparison with the believing community itself, and churches were not consecrated as holy spaces but approached from a perspective of practical concern. In purpose-built Protestant worship spaces, there was no altar and the Lord's Table became predominant. Turner points out that the first Lutheran architectural treatise appeared only in 1649 at the end of the Thirty Years War in response to the need for guidance in matters of design. The city architect of Ulm, Joseph Furttenbach, penned *Kirchenbau* as a guide to construction of sanctuaries in rural territories devastated by war. "He recommended plain domestic rectangular buildings, with pulpit, table and font together where all could see and hear."²⁰

This arrangement was a shared characteristic with Reformed spaces, although in contrast with Huguenot churches, the exterior as well as interior space in Furttenbach's church designs was adorned with crosses, and in contrast with Reformed churches in general, his church designs included ornate altars. Along with Jacques Perret, he was one of two architects of the period writing about the arrangement of Protestant churches per se; it was not until the eighteenth century that a theoretician of Protestant temples properly speaking would appear with Leonhard Christoph Sturm, "a Lutheran converted to Calvinism and author of works on architecture and theology."²¹

There was much deliberation over the nature of the church, whose distinguishing characteristics Calvin held to be "the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution."²² One implication of this conviction was that appropriate worship space included a visible and centralized pulpit for proclamation, a baptismal font visible to the congregation, and a Lord's Table accessible for the Eucharistic meal. Calvin recognized that buildings themselves are neutral: even pagan temples can serve as spaces where God encounters his people.²³

20. Turner, *Theories of Culture*, 206.

21. Germann, "Les Temples Protestants," 346.

22. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.9

23. Turner, *Theories of Culture*, 207. Turner cites Calvin's reflections on the nature of

The Visual Theology of the Huguenots

In his sovereign freedom, God deigns to meet his people in the place where they gather; Julie Canlis, in her work *Calvin's Ladder*, reminds us that "Calvin will emphasize time and again that we are to be drawn up to God rather than dragging him down to us—whether it be in the Lord's Supper, idolatry, or carnal ways of conceiving of God. . . . 'For our affections must ascend to heaven, or otherwise we would not be at all united to Jesus Christ.'"²⁴

Nonetheless, it is possible to construe some preferences of Calvin, which accentuate the Protestant predilection for simplicity, practicality, and accessibility. Church space is consecrated by the Word and yet is not sacred more than any other place; it can be put either to godly, edifying use, or used to erect idols in the minds of believers. He writes, "As God in his Word enjoins common prayer, so public temples are the places destined for the performance of them."²⁵ Calvin recognizes the practical need for gathering space dedicated to prayer, arguing for the gathered worshiping community and against what he sees as the inadequacy of merely individualistic devotion. His language speaks of the church's public prayers, but seems at times to refer as much to the worship space itself. God invites the prayers of the faithful, and therefore buildings set aside for those prayers, which are contrasted with the Christian's private "chamber," have their necessary place. In the prayers (and the buildings themselves?) "there [should] be no ostentation, or catching at human applause." Calvin betrays some

the pagan temples. To quote the pertinent section from Calvin, "All the temples which the Gentiles built to God with a different intention were a mere profanation of his worship, —a profanation into which the Jews also fell, though not with equal grossness. With this Stephen upbraids [Israel] in the words of Isaiah when he says, 'Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the Prophet, Heaven is my throne,' . . . For God only consecrates temples to their legitimate use by his word. And when we rashly attempt anything without his order, immediately setting out from a bad principle, we introduce adventitious fictions, by which evil is propagated without measure. [Yet] it was inconsiderate in Xerxes when . . . he burnt or pulled down all the temples of Greece, because he thought it absurd that God, to whom all things ought to be free and open, should be enclosed by walls and roofs, as if it were not in the power of God in a manner to descend to us [emphasis added], that he may be near to us, and yet neither change his place nor affect us by earthly means, but rather, by a kind of vehicle, raise us aloft to his own heavenly glory, which, with its immensity, fills all things, and in height is above the heavens." (*Institutes*, 4.1.5)

Here Calvin lifts up the principle that space is only sanctified by God's Word—an implicit denial of the validity of Catholic space, since in Calvin's view the Romanists did not handle Scripture properly—yet he leaves open the possibility that any space can in theory be so consecrated as to be fit for worship.

24. Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder*, 119.

25. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.30.

ambivalence at this point: he consistently emphasized human participation in Christ, but is nearly mute on the effectiveness of the material sphere for such a connection. He only tentatively ruminates on the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the created order, contributing to “a historical reticence toward the arts and images.”²⁶ Calvin’s reluctance here seems to be in part a reaction to the ostentatious display of medieval imagery. He does confer a certain dignity on the actual place of common worship when he says, “lest the public prayers of the Church should be held in contempt, the Lord anciently bestowed upon them the most honorable appellation, especially when he called the temple the “house of prayer.” Calvin continues,

If this is the legitimate use of churches (and it certainly is), we must, on the other hand, beware . . . of imagining that churches are the proper dwellings of God, where he is more ready to listen to us, or of attaching to them some kind of secret sanctity, which makes prayer there more holy. For seeing we are the true temples of God, we must pray in ourselves if we would invoke God in his holy temple. Let us leave such gross ideas . . . knowing that we have a command *without distinction of place*, [emphasis added] “in spirit and in truth.”²⁷

The former temple of Israel was indeed consecrated by prayer and sacrifice, but above all it prefigured God’s dwelling within the people of God, the true church. The Old Testament prophets insisted that God could not be contained in a temple made of human hands. Turner rightly observes that the temples or churches possess only a kind of derived or secondary sanctity that depended entirely on the kind of worship offered there (see figure 7). God has honored humanity by making people (i.e., the Christian community) to be his literal temple, his sanctuaries, and we should not debase the dignity of our calling by venerating walls and ceilings. However, Calvin left room for churches to work out an appropriate physical setting for worship. Andrew Spicer explains,

Although the Reformed attitudes towards places of worship and their appearance were largely shaped by the theology and writings of Jean Calvin and the second generation of Reformers—ideas which were enshrined in the Second Helvetic Confession—there

26. Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder*, 244.

27. *Ibid.*

The Visual Theology of the Huguenots

was no architectural model or blueprint of an ideal Reformed temple. Such matters were regarded as *adiaphora* by the Reformers.²⁸

Calvin's reflections thus provide a theological foundation for Reformed approaches to church architecture, not as specific designs but as biblical guidance on appropriate attitudes, particularly toward the church buildings that Reformed Christians inherited. The majesty and glory of God were best perceived not through decorative adornments, but rather were heard in the Word of God read and expounded upon. The lack of specific and extensive architectural and design directives may not be so much a lacuna in Reformed ecclesiology as an expression of the freedom to develop forms appropriate to the settings of various diverse communities. Calvin is more concerned with what takes place within a church than with its specific shape.

The first spaces designed expressly for Reformed worship appeared in Huguenot strongholds of France, and later in Holland, Scotland, the Palatinate, Transylvania, and eventually in the plain meeting houses of colonial New England. These spaces were created for dignity rather than magnificence, with symbolic reticence and focus on the preacher. In the course of time and with the rise of the modern liturgical movement in the twentieth century, buildings displaying the characteristics of the classic evangelical model borrowed stylistic elements from the classic sacramental tradition as well, though reinterpreting these elements for their own purposes.

In the era of Renaissance architectural treatises, we find little explicit conceptual basis for Protestant space, in spite of the fact that many architects in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France were themselves Protestants or at least crypto-Calvinists. Turner writes that "there were no major [written] treatments of the church building, and nothing at all comparable to the great treatises that provided a theory for the Catholic symbolism of the Renaissance churches."²⁹ This is doubtless attributable to the conflictual religious context in which they labored, where architects in the employ of Catholic royal power would naturally attempt to avoid costly ideological debate. In the context of Protestant territories, it seems that builders' attention centered on practical concerns. "Reformation activity was focused more on the development of liturgies, and explicit statements

28. Spicer, *Calvinist Churches*, 2.

29. Turner, *Theories of Culture*, 206.

about the buildings tend to be rather incidental or limited to their internal arrangements.”³⁰

Reformed Christians saw themselves, rather than an architectural edifice, as the church of God built from “living stones” on the foundation of Christ. The primary consideration in most built spaces was functional rather than aesthetic. Specific modifications in the practice of Protestant churches included a diminishing of the distinction between clergy and the laity, the reception of communion in both kinds, the reunification of preaching and sacrament, the extinguishing of the cult of the saints, and a new distaste for luxury and ostentation. These changes necessitated a rethinking of the space of worship, resulting in bringing the pulpit into new prominence, eliminating the high altar, restoring the table as a locus for communion, doing away with divisions of interior space, and generally cultivating space that reflected the people themselves as the temple of God. The priority was making possible a gathering of the people in physical proximity to hear the gospel proclaimed and to join in common prayer rather than establishing, as in Catholic churches, a physical separation that echoed spiritual progression from the entryway to the pulpit and beyond it to the altar.

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS TO THE CLASSIC EVANGELICAL TRADITION

Zwingli must be noted as well for his contribution to Reformed habits in use of worship space. His is a voice for simplicity and what may be termed visual concentration in the locus of common worship. One of the dramatic acts of the Reformation would be when he prepared communion in Grossmünster at Zurich in the Reformed manner on Maundy Thursday in April 1525. Having removed the church altar, he served at an ordinary domestic table, dressed in secular garb, facing the congregation rather than with back turned and facing the altar as per custom of the Catholic Mass. Instead of costly accoutrements, simple wooden cup and plates were used. Rather than the consecrated host, ordinary bread was used. In so doing, powerful new visual symbols were implemented, ones insisting that a life of holiness was not reserved for the cloister, but penetrating secular and family life in the place where one fed physically and spiritually.

30. *Ibid.*

The Visual Theology of the Huguenots

Martin Bucer in Strasbourg is another voice in formulating a Reformed sense of space fit for worship. His conclusions are consistent with Calvin's theological approach to worship, yet he provides a few more specifics, and he embarks on a program to rearrange interior space to better facilitate intelligible worship. Reflecting on his approach, Turner writes:

After recognizing the need for churches, which was not true of all sections of the Reformation, [Bucer] declared "that the choir should be so distantly separated from the rest the temple, and the service (which pertains to the whole people and the clergy) be set forth in it alone, is anti-Christian." This arrangement suggests that the ministers are "nearer to God than lay people," and also "confirms the pernicious superstition by which reading . . . the Scripture and prayers without intelligence and without understanding of faith is thought worship pleasing to God." For these reasons, and from a misapprehension as to the frequency of round churches in antiquity, Bucer favored a building of this shape as the ideal form.³¹

Bucer explicitly directed, then, that the worship space must be in proximity to the choir, enhancing the connection between the clergy and the laity. That he would give this rule is evidence that the reformer understands the power of visual elements to symbolize and instruct—in this case, that worship is for the whole people of God; that all have equal status in worship; and that fitting worship entails understanding. Few others were as clear on the matter as Bucer was, but other Protestant communities practiced a similar manner of translating theological convictions into the arrangement of worship space.

Margarite de Navarre, who was attracted to the teachings of Luther and sympathetic to reform, is another illustrative voice in forming a view of Reformed worship space. In her creative piece *Heptameron* she reflected on what she considered appropriate design and appointment of spaces for worship:

Truly, I have often wondered . . . how [Catholics] think to make their peace with God by means of things, means of things which he himself reprobated when he was on earth, such as great buildings, gildings, painting, and decorations. But if they rightly understood what God has said, that the only offering he requires of us is a humble and contrite heart, and another text in which St. Paul says that we are the temple of God in which he desires to dwell,

31. *Ibid.*, 208.

they would have taken pains to adorn their consciences while they were alive, and not have waited for the time when a man can no longer do either good or ill.³²

Margarite is expressing, in the artistic form of a novella, her convictions on what pleases God in the sanctuary. This is, no less, a form in which she frequently reflects on the meaning of material objects and works of art, as Catharine Randall has shown.³³ The place of worship is to be marked by simplicity, as the appropriate focus in preparing for worship is repentance and return to God in humble faith, a beauty not “from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.”

Heinrich Bullinger, too, in a section of the *Second Helvetic Confession* titled “Decent Meeting Places,” includes instructions for the arrangement of worship space:

Moreover, the places where the faithful meet are to be decent, and in all respects fit for God’s Church. Therefore, spacious buildings or temples are to be chosen, but they are to be purged of everything that is not fitting for a church. And everything is to be arranged for decorum, necessity, and godly decency, lest anything be lacking that is required for worship and the necessary works of the church.³⁴

Bullinger insists that places of worship which honor God are to be modest, governed by the principle of humility. There is to be a sense of fittingness in houses of worship. Beauty in such places will be seen in sensitive arrangement; aesthetic concern is appropriate, suggested by his terms “fair,” and “comeliness,” but these terms are held in balance by the words “necessity,” “seemliness,” “decency,” and what is needful for the rites and orders that comprise the liturgy of the church. There is here a dynamic in which the faith of the church, not external elements like architecture, is the essential component of the community ordered by the Word of God; nonetheless Bullinger suggests a kind of set-apart quality of the buildings themselves that were dedicated to worship. Built structures are to enable and enhance the worship offered within them, and yet it is appropriate to conduct oneself with reverence, a kind of anticipation that God will be

32. Marguerite, *L’Heptameron*, 313.

33. Randall, *Earthly Treasures*.

34. Bullinger, *Second Helvetic Confession*, XXII.4.

The Visual Theology of the Huguenots

pleased to meet his people gathered for worship in this place in a way distinct from other places.

And as we believe that God does not dwell in temples made with hands, so we know that on account of God's Word and sacred use places dedicated to God and his worship are not profane but holy; and that those that are present in them are to conduct themselves reverently and modestly, seeing that they are in a sacred place, in the presence of God and his holy angels.³⁵

Here, Bullinger goes so far as to suggest that the places used for worship are made sacred by the activities that take place within them. He shared the sentiments of nearly all reformers, that the places where God's people meet were not intrinsically holy by any magic they possessed, however, these were places to be treated with due reverence. Their special function demanded a fittingness or appropriateness of response, a humility that recognized the nature of the true ornaments of the church. Whether on the continent, in Scotland or elsewhere, all Reformed parties were attempting to return to an ancient Christian understanding of the church building as the *domus ecclesiae*. So the place itself is not holy, until inhabited by God's holy people, sanctified by prayer and by God's Word, among whom he dwells. In "The True Ornamentation of Sanctuaries," Bullinger continues, seemingly blurring the line between human and architectural ornamentation:

Therefore, all luxurious attire, all pride, and everything unbecoming to Christian humility, discipline, and modesty, are to be banished from the sanctuaries and places of prayer of Christians. For the true ornamentation of churches does not consist in ivory, gold, and precious stones, but in the frugality, piety, and virtues of those who are in the Church. Let all things be done decently and in order in the Church, and finally, let all things be done for edification.³⁶

Externals, such as apparel, reflected internal reality, and therefore the putting aside of pride and the adopting of "humility, discipline, and modesty" were to be reflected in simplicity of manner, just as in sobriety of decoration in the meeting place itself. Simplicity of design reflects godliness just as does appropriate clothing or virtuous comportment. Michel de Montaigne, a Catholic whose mother was a Protestant and who was sympathetic to the

35. Ibid., XXII.5

36. Ibid., XXII.6

cause of reform, reflected on pretentiousness of manner and the obsession to impress among the nobility and aspiring nobility. This pretentiousness made everyone look ambitious and foolish. Clothing might ostentatiously show “superficial errors,” but was also enough “to inform us that the whole fabric is crazy and tottering.”³⁷ Just as the recognized importance of laying aside excess in clothing highlighted the value of unadorned simplicity, so the simplicity of design reflects godliness and deference.

Théodore de Bèze, the successor pastor/reformer in Geneva following Calvin’s death in 1564, is another voice in our brief survey of influences in shaping a Reformed practical theology of worship space. Using the language of the church as the “house of God,” he employs a series of “opposites” to illustrate the quality of ordinary/extraordinary in the church. In his *Sermons on the Song of Songs* he refers to the “extraordinary vocations” as the “architects” of the church, and the “ordinary vocations” as the “custodians.” The function of the architects was to build the church on the foundation of Christ as mediated by the apostolic witness, and the function of the latter to maintain what was given for the ages. In the case of corruption in the church, the custodians’ function became to restore the church to the purity of the apostolic foundation. In using “architect,” “building,” and “foundation” metaphorically, perhaps De Bèze suggests that the real built space of the church is not for the purpose of grandeur or innovation, but for clarity and fidelity to the biblical faith.

PROTESTANT CHURCH BUILDING IN FRANCE AND THE CLASSIC EVANGELICAL TRADITION

The churches of France drew from these multiple influences. Principally, they drew from the theological inspiration of Calvin and of Martin Bucer. Calvin’s influence was profound, as seen in his work behind the Gallican Confession of 1559, in his sending de Bèze to represent the Reformed party at the Colloquy of Poissy, and in his commissioning scores of Geneva-trained missionary pastors to serve in France.

Nevertheless, the traditions and discipline of the French Reformed churches drew from wider sources than Strasbourg and Geneva. Glenn Sunshine underscores the influence of the Pays de Vaud through the work of Pierre Viret on the system of the *classe* of the French polity.³⁸ In addition,

37. Montaigne, “Of Sumptuary Laws,” 65.

38. Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 4, 41.

The Visual Theology of the Huguenots

the French church may have drawn on the organization of the diaconate from the Catholic Church, though perhaps by way of Strasbourg or Zurich. Most importantly, perhaps, the Huguenots made a number of structural innovations in response to their particular contexts. The French developed a presbyterial or synodical representational government to deal with matters of discipline and doctrine. In the Swiss cantons of Bern and Zurich Reformed theologians envisioned a system where church and state cooperated for the management of the church, in which the state insured outward conformity in behavior and the church established theological and organizational norms. There the system of called synods envisioned by Calvin devolved into a structure led by a single pastor or church rather than a full representational organization. In France, however, where the government never considered the Reformed Church as anything but seditious, a threat to the state to be eliminated, such a symbiotic relationship between church and state was impossible.

The implications for the built space of churches in France were diverse. Reacting against practices that smacked of popery, the congregations tended to extreme simplicity. In places where Protestant congregations were forced to meet in secret, the faithful gathered in homes or even in barns, usually outside the major cities. When Protestants were free to build temples, they demonstrated a preference for large basilican (longitudinal) or centralized forms such as the octagon or circle, providing maximum sight lines for all worshipers.³⁹ As the drawings or engravings of Huguenot churches in Charenton, Lyons, La Rochelle, Rouen, Dieppe, and Chermont reveal, Reformed Christians in many cases eschewed crosses on (and in) their buildings. In the cases where Catholic churches could be requisitioned and adapted for Protestant usage, such as in Languedoc, the church of St. Fiary at Agen, and St. Étienne de Capduel at Nîmes, chapels and niches would be “cleansed” of images, pulpits moved to more central positions, Lord’s tables repositioned or introduced into the worship space. Kieckhefer describes the essential options when adapting a Catholic worship space:

The early Reformers adapted existing churches more often than they built new ones, and their greatest ingenuity was often devoted to the reconception of medieval longitudinal space. They often set pulpits midway down one side of the nave, turning long spaces into wide ones. In a church with a distinct chancel, three main possibilities presented themselves. First, the nave could serve as

39. Guicharnaud, “Introduction,” 136.

the main worship space, and the chancel could be reserved for other occasions (for smaller services such as weddings). Second, the first part of the service (the liturgy of the Word) could be held in the nave, after which the entire congregation could be invited into the chancel for the remainder (the Eucharist), with the altar placed either “altar-wise” against the east wall or “table-wise” down the center of the chancel. Third, the chancel could become the space in which privileged individuals or families sat while the service was held in the nave. Along with any of these uses, the chancel could serve also as a space for burials.⁴⁰

It seems there were variations on adaptations for Protestant worship. Some would gather toward the choir, others in the nave but turned toward the short side. At times there would be movement during the service as when the lay worshipers gathered on the chancel to receive the Lord’s Supper.

The meanings conveyed by a seventeenth-century Protestant building differed from earlier churches in part because of the distinctively Word-centered worship which takes place within it. This is not because the form of the building is itself indifferent, but because the meaning of other forms is always amplified and explicated by the spoken Word. In a service stripped of extraneous elements and lifting up the gospel, aspects of Roman Catholic heritage are excised. When Reformed churches do borrow from the classic sacramental churches, they reinterpret these features. Classical liturgical churches, on the other hand, tend to serve a multiplicity of purposes, with varying aspects based on different principles. Speaking a language that much contemporary culture no longer understands, they can be more difficult to interpret. Either tradition can be coherent, and enhance the functioning that takes place within. Both the adaptations of the classical liturgical church-building and the innovations of the classical evangelical church-building expressed in their own manner a sense of sacrality. For Krautheimer, this is achieved not so much by separation from the profane, but rather in a church’s “symbolic associations,” or connections to profound human narratives.⁴¹

Theological meanings arise, then, from the intersection of design with actual uses of buildings, in particular with liturgical usage. In addition, buildings’ inhabitants adapted them in light of physical deterioration, changing uses, evolving surroundings, and the vagaries of fashion, and

40. Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 46.

41. Krautheimer, *Early Christian*, 18.

The Visual Theology of the Huguenots

especially in response to their quest for renewal and reformation. In this sense, buildings are perpetually metamorphic, “growing” in a kind of evolutionary fashion, artifacts whose use adapts to changing needs over time.

In summary, the classic evangelical tradition sees the church building as a frame for worship, not one that is holy in and of itself, but as a space which enables and enhances an encounter with God through the hearing of his Word in the gathered community. In France and Switzerland as elsewhere, decorative elements in such a scheme tended to be few; visual components intended for didactic purpose were missing; everything contributed to the experience of approaching, hearing, reflecting upon, and responding to the words of the Bible. In time, decorative elements such as tombs, tablets of the Ten Commandments, or coats of arms of civic leaders were introduced (which also made their way into the classic sacramental churches adapted for Protestant worship), and later expressions of the evangelical tradition would reflect some stylistic elements of the other basic church types. For the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, design preferences reflected a return to the pure and unadulterated worship of the early church. The context for these developments in both architectural theory and design was the early modern climate of reflection and discovery that drew on the theories of an ancient architect and engineer. First, however, we present a case study of a Catholic conception of space to make clearer what the sixteenth-century Protestants were reacting against.