



The Church of Scotland  
Mission and Discipleship Council



# The Setting of Presbyterian Worship

An information leaflet from the  
Committee on Church Art and Architecture (CARTA) of the Church of Scotland

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*'We shape our buildings, and our buildings then shape us' Sir Winston Churchill*

A historical and theological overview of the purpose and design of Church buildings in the Church of Scotland for consideration and reference.

## **Introduction**

We are those who construct buildings, and we shape them according to certain principles and preconceptions, which are often unconscious, and frequently draw on our inherited ideas of what is 'right' or appropriate. In relation to the building and design of churches in the Church of Scotland, much confusion and speculation is rife. What we believe (our theology) ought to shape, or determine, our style of worship and the place in which we worship. While there ought to be congruence between what we believe as a denomination and what we say and the place where we say it, this has not always been the case. The building itself makes important theological statements whether we recognise them or not. Explicitly and implicitly, some theological views and perspectives are 'spoken' by the structure in which we worship.

Church buildings also have different meanings to different people and this must not be ignored or avoided in what we do and change in relation to our buildings. As the author Thomas Hardy expressed it in his writing, the church building means:

To the incumbent – a workshop

To the antiquarian – a relic

To the parish – a utility

To the outsider – a luxury

To this list, many more perspectives and terms might be added in the light of our experience. There are many possible views of a church building, as they reflect and embody our theology, and they have developed as theology changes over the years and context develops in alternative ways. This, however, may not happen without tensions and challenges

## **Prehistoric Roots of Buildings for Worship**

From archaeology, we know that in the early years of human development, worship and religious practice emerged and found expression in rites and rituals. This led, in time, from the use of shrines and areas of human habitation dedicated to worship to the erection of buildings dedicated to the purpose of worship. This appears to have been the basis of the concept of the idea of "sacred space" used primarily for worship.

### **Old Testament**

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, early in the history supplied by the Old Testament narrative, there were places all over Israel and Palestine which were designated as sacred. These included the shrine at Shiloh, the place of worship where Eli was the priest and where Samuel lived and slept.

Over time, with some degree of interpretation in the accounts, the idea, probably from other religious traditions, developed of a central place of worship. This led to the determination of King David to buy a piece of land in Jerusalem where the Temple would be built. In reality, the Temple was not built by King David, but by King Solomon, his son. While it is described in great and grand

detail, it probably was not as impressive as the palace in Jerusalem where David and Solomon lived.

From the “Tent of Meeting” which characterised the wanderings in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses, where the Ark of the Covenant resided, the tradition of a building for worship developed among the “people of the Covenant”. The temple became the resting place of the Ark and the focal point of worship at the great religious and secular festivals of the nation (particularly Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles). The Temple was where people made offerings, guided by strict regulation and prescription for specific purposes (e.g. after the birth of a child). Other traditions grew up around the development of the Temple including the separation of areas for the Gentiles to worship in, for women, and as we see in the New Testament, for the sale of birds and other animals which were approved for sacrifice in the rituals.

### **Synagogue Tradition**

Probably as a result of the Exile in Babylon, and the numerous invasions and dispersion of Jewish people throughout the centuries immediately before and after the birth of Jesus, the synagogue became common. It is likely that the tradition of the synagogue proliferated as a result of the destruction of the Temple in AD 79.

In Judaism, any place where 12 male adult Jews lived could have a synagogue. This was a place of worship where reading from the Torah and the writings which we know as the Old Testament, and preaching and teaching, took place. An important aspect of the synagogue, which continues in contemporary Judaism, is the education of young people in the traditions of the Jewish faith. The structure of the synagogue was centred on reading and hearing the words written being articulated with the ark or bema (pulpit) in the central place, where copies of the Torah were kept safely in an ‘ark’, and read from in worship. This foreshadows the development of altars in a central place in the buildings of the Early Church.

Synagogues were found throughout the ancient world from Israel and Palestine, through Asia Minor and certainly in Rome. Judaism enjoyed the unique protection of Rome as a religious group distinct from all other forms of religion within the Roman Empire. This distinction was conferred on Jews because of the importance of monotheism in Judaism. History reveals that Jews had often, under previous conquests, refused to engage in worship of what they regarded as idols (e.g., the Maccabees). The Jews, under Rome, unlike all other conquered peoples, were not required to burn incense and offer worship to the “genius of Caesar”.

### **‘Church’ in the New Testament**

In the New Testament the word used for ‘church’ refers both to a place and a people. The word means a building where the people of God worship, and a community of living human beings, who are not static symbols.

### **Early Church**

In the first two centuries of Christianity, worship of Christian communities was influenced by synagogue worship. Often, Christian communities began in the synagogues and therefore the focus on reading, prayer and preaching developed. When synagogue leaders rejected Christianity as a sect disloyal to Jewish tradition, Christians met in homes and houses. In this local gathering for worship, there was not “sacred space” as such, but places where worship took place. The worship was often held in the homes of wealthy Christians where there was room for groups to gather, or in Rome in the many caves under the city.

From the third century or so, there grew up the custom of holding the sacramental meal, the Lord's Supper, on the tombs of martyrs in the cemeteries, or in the catacombs.

## **Constantine**

After years when the Christian Church was challenged by persecution under Nero and other Emperors, the Church began to develop buildings which were purpose built for worship. Many of them shared the characteristics of not just the synagogue, but the large buildings of the Roman state which were designed for public gatherings and meetings for debate, discussion and political exploration. In the early years, it is possible that some of the church buildings were converted from large houses and space was specifically provided for baptism and the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

With the Edict of Milan in 313, religious toleration was established in the Roman Empire and then the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the officially favoured religion of the Roman Empire. This was decisive as it allowed the change of the Christian Church from an oppressed minority group to a publicly acknowledged community worshipping completely in the open.

This led to the building of some magnificent churches throughout the Roman Empire, often by wealthy donors. Nine churches were built in Rome by Constantine and he also built others in Constantinople, Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

## **Altars – on the Tombs of Martyrs**

From the third century or so, there grew up the custom of holding the sacramental meal, the Lord's Supper, on the tombs of martyrs in the cemeteries, or in the catacombs. By the time of Constantine, this association with the martyrs has become almost universal. New churches were built in locations believed to be the sites of where martyrdoms had taken place, and the remains of martyrs were moved into other churches.

They were placed in stone coffins, which by the high Middle Ages, had replaced, in the West, all wooden communion tables. Every altar was therefore a coffin, and without the body or parts of the body of a martyr, it was seen as incomplete. It appears from the sixth century that these coffin altars were 'consecrated' by funerary rites which really had no relevance to the use of the table in the early centuries of Christian worship.

## **Church Building from the Constantinian Revolution**

This brought a change in the way people worshipped as intimacy of worship within a home gave way to grandeur and the prominence of the clergy as distinct from the laity. The congregation became increasingly passive.

The distance between groups in worship was reflected in the adaptation of the Roman, civil basilicas model (perhaps, though this is not clear, this was a development from Pagan Greek temples developed by the Romans as the normative shape of buildings used as courts of law and for other civic functions).

There two types of civil basilica. One in which the building was wider than its length. The other was where it was longer than its width. The second type determined the shape of the Christian basilica of the early post-Constantinian period.

The adaptation of the basilica is seen by the area where the judge sat becoming that of the throne of the bishop surrounded by the presbyters, with the altar in front creating a barrier and forming a nave for the laity. The focus is on the end and a rectangular shape.

There were other types of buildings used in worship.

1. Baptisteries which could be similar in shape, or in the West circular, hexagonal or octagonal and in the East usually square. The font was often at floor level to symbolise the rising from the dead.
2. Tombs for the relics of martyrs where the focus was not at the end, but in the middle, and, often in the East, with a dome over the grave or tomb.

In churches, as time went on, screens were erected to protect the “holy” area from infection by the unholy and divide the clergy from the laity by creating “clergy only areas”. This was similar, perhaps, to the veil in the Temple in Jerusalem, where the ‘Holy of Holies’ was located and the Ark of the Covenant was supposed to sit.

## **Medieval Period**

During this time for the end of the Dark Ages, the priestly and clerical power grew. The priests were the writers and readers, and had political power as a result of their control of documents. They also developed as the interpreters and celebrants of the ‘holy mysteries’ (the sacramental system), and a mystique was developed around the idea of ‘apostolic succession’ and their separation from other mortals.

### **The Mass in the Medieval Period**

The growth of the doctrine of transubstantiation (whereby the wine and bread become the blood and flesh of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper) based on Aristotelian metaphysics, aided this development. As a result of the Black Death, only the ordained clergy were allowed to drink the wine in the sacrament (it was believed, correctly, that the infection could be passed on through the exchange of saliva). This thereby increased the separation of the clergy and the laity, who became more and more passive spectators.

The ‘coffin altars’ also developed further in this period. This style of altar continued to be used throughout the medieval period right up until the Reformation. Its construction was focused not on its similarity to a table, but the large box for the storage of relics, in the style of a stone coffin, and therefore much of the symbolism of the Lord’s Supper was lost.

It also became decorated, with large amounts of elaborate vessels, containers and objects of adoration placed upon it making it more like a display centre for treasures of gold and precious metals, or side board (crosses, candlesticks, ‘tabernacle’ for consecrated elements). At the same time, its position was moved back against the wall, with the possibility of the people gathering round the table, with the celebrant facing the congregation becoming impossible. Frontals (a cloth which hangs in front of the table/altar, often decorated with bands), dossals (a hanging or tapestry behind the table/altar, often in the colour of the liturgical season) and reredoses (a screen usually made of decorated wood, behind the altar) all contributed to make it an impressive architectural feature without the slightest resemblance to the table of the Lord.

### **Exclusion of the Members of Congregations**

Lay people could not understand the services at all as they were in Latin and all the bible readings were in Latin (Translations into the vernacular were specifically banned and those who were discovered to use them were burned alive). The laity relied on stained glass windows to understand some of the bible stories, or the preaching of the Dominicans and other friars outside Church buildings, and the ‘mystery plays’ which were performed in the outdoors. There was little in the services of worship that could engage them and the clergy asserted a ‘right’ of control.

## **The Impact on Architecture of Churches**

Church buildings reflected this by developing in the shape of a cross, with the segregation of the ordained activities being expressed physically. The chancel (the word was derived for the Latin word, cancelli for 'lattice' or 'screen') became 'screened' so that the clergy celebrated and the people watched through the screen to catch sight of the action in the sacrament of Holy Communion. This became known as the 'gaze that saves' when the priest elevated the bread and wine and the words 'this is my body' (in Latin, this was 'hunc est mea corpus', which became in common parlance 'hocus pocus').

In the 14th century fixed seating began to be introduced in the nave of churches, certainly in England, with congregations sitting in rows facing the altar. This emphasised the static immobile congregation, gathered as if it was an audience.

## **Reformation**

The Reformation had many roots – political, economic, cultural, intellectual and the development of the printing press. It was also a spiritual movement and this should not be forgotten as this impacted on the design of churches and the worship which they provided opportunity for and as a venue of participation.

The key event of the Reformation may be seen as the issue of the sale of indulgences and the introduction by Pope Julius II of Jubilee Indulgences as a means of raising funds for the new basilica of St. Peter's in Rome. It is perhaps important to note that the Reformation had at its core a problem about buildings and how to pay for them!!

Despite many differences between them as Reformers of the Church, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin were convinced and in agreement about two major principles.

1. The character of the Church of Christ
2. The style, content and importance of Christian worship

All affirmed the corporate nature of the Christian community and rejected, or repudiated, the domination exercised by clergy in the medieval period.

### **Reformation Worship**

The Reformation led to a recovery of worship within the church as a body, involving clergy and laity. It led to a rediscovery of the ministry of the Word as well as of Sacraments. While it can be argued that the Reformers knew a lot less about primitive Early Church worship than they believed, they wanted it to be less performance based and much more participatory.

The implications for the architecture of churches developed from this understanding of worship. Worship should take place together with the table brought forward and the people gathered round the pulpit and the altar was removed, or declined in significance, as there was no "sacrifice of the mass".

## **Principles**

In the Reformation period, a new symbol was created for a special function preferred to a traditional symbol which might cause confusion with Roman Catholicism. This led to the strategic and crucial emphasis on the symbolism of three corporate means of grace:

Baptism

Lord's Supper

Preaching of Reconciliation with Christ

The corresponding symbolic furniture in worship would be, therefore:

Font

Table

Pulpit

## **Baptism in the Reformation Church**

Baptism was to be in public, as entry to the church was a congregational action in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It signified the recognition of the communication of the grace of God through the fellowship of the reconciling community. Fonts at the door, or a separate baptistery, were rejected. The font was to be at the front of the church where everyone could see and hear and the Reformers insisted that baptism should be part of congregational worship.

One method used was where a bowl was placed on the Communion Table (if the Church had one or a table was placed in the building specifically for the purpose of associating it symbolically for baptism) to show it was a sacrament that was linked intimately to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In others, a font was attached to the pulpit, again to speak of the intimate connection of the preaching of the Word with the sacrament of entry into membership. In the Highlands, the tradition of baptism outside with running water also developed, with the use in baptism of a conch shell which had been seen in the paintings in the catacombs from earliest times in association with baptism. '...in the majority of churches of the Calvinist persuasion a shallow basin was used, placed either on the holy table, that the sacrament might be administered in the face of the congregation, or in a bracket attached to the pulpit' (J.G. Davies).

There was no concept of baptism as a second class sacrament, and in the design of the building, the equal significance of the sacraments should be seen in the place of these symbolic objects having proper eminence and equal importance.

The idea of fonts at the back of Churches or in side chapels was rejected as erroneous. Baptism was to be a public act in which the congregation took part as the baptism conveyed serious responsibilities on the membership for the nurture and support of those coming for baptism.

## **Celebration of Holy Communion**

The idea of an altar was also rejected. There was no sacrifice to be offered, and the concept of a table was to be restored. The early Church had gathered round a table and this was to be revived.

This was a major event in a parish and as there was no altar, several alternatives were available for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In some instances, the kitchen table from the manse was brought into the church, after being scrubbed by the women of the parish, and covered with a white linen cloth. The congregation gathered round the table to receive the elements.

In other instances, the church was constructed with a long narrow table running down the centre of the church, with fixed seating round it (surrounded by a wooden 'fence' or waist height wall) and four 'gates', one at each corner. The purpose of the gates was to allow those who had communion tokens to enter, and ensure that the table itself was, according to St. Paul's tradition, "fenced" (as Calvin would suggest) to prevent the ungodly from receiving the sacrament to their eternal destruction.

In other places, in particular, in the Highlands and, in the West of Scotland, as described by Robert Burns, the church erected huge tents for the Communion Season and sometimes, due to the cost involved, the sacrament was celebrated once every three to five years, with people walking or travelling to other locations in the area when it was offered elsewhere.

If there was a table nothing was permitted upon it, according to Reformers' understanding of the Early Church, which prescribed that nothing should be placed on the table, except the cloth and vessels for the Sacrament and the Gospels and these should only present when the celebration of the Lord's Supper was to take place.

### **Style of Celebration of Holy Communion**

The celebration of the sacrament varied in the Reformed tradition. One method was to bring people forward after the Prayer of Thanksgiving to the table. They stood around on three sides to receive the bread and wine. Sometimes the practice was for the minister to give the elements to each communicant. At others, it was the custom to pass the elements from hand to hand from the minister to the person nearest. All elements were passed from hand to hand till all had received.

The passing of bread and cup from hand to hand testified to the mutual ministry by all believers of God's gifts to each other. The table was architecturally at the centre of the congregation at every service, so the prayers were offered from the table so that they were associated with the Lord's Supper when there was no communion.

The English congregation in Geneva, where John Knox worked, adopted a practice which was followed in the later years in Scotland and Holland and later on in the America colonies. This involved the seating of the communicants round the table, evoking a re-enactment of the Last Supper.

Such a dramatic act involved extensive preparation, and usually temporary tables were used, often in Scotland they were put up in the aisles. Sometimes they were put out in the open air to enable the whole congregation to be served at one time.

The third Reformed usage, that of receiving communion in the pews, developed under the influence of Zwingli in Zurich. The re-enactment of the Last Supper was engaged with, but for practical reasons, most of the congregation was not brought to the table. Instead, they were served in the pews, or seating. For English Puritans this custom of seated communion became very important, as it became joined to their opposition to kneeling to receive the elements. Kneeling was rejected as being associated with the idea of adoration of the elements in Roman Catholicism.

In the important discussion that characterised the Westminster Assembly of the 17th Century, the most heated debate was on the subject of worship when the Scots insisted that all communicants must be seated at the table, while the Independents (Puritans) insisted that the custom of sitting in the pews or fixed seating and not moving to a table, should be continued. The argument was that the serving in the seats of the church would allow the whole congregation to be served at

once, while the method in Scotland had to serve tables in relays, sometimes indeed, on different days. The Scots thought the dramatic symbolism of the Biblical basis of the Last Supper was lost by communion in the pews or seating. The final document, the Westminster Directory finally came to no firm decision and instead indicated that the communion should be served 'at or about the table' although this alternative was not seems as acceptable to the Scots.

### **Communion Tokens**

Communion tokens were issued to those who wished to participate in the Lord's Supper by the elders who examined the people and made decisions as to their "state of grace" and fitness to receive the sacrament. Some of this was judged on their behaviour and the way in which they reared their children. The elder would check that the child knew the questions and answers of the Shorter Catechism, the words of many of the psalms, and could recite the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes and various other parts of the Bible (this had its roots in the training of Jewish children in the Torah).

### **Sacramental Vessels**

At the Reformation many of the elaborate vessels used for common were destroyed and the Churches often used the vessels of public houses to celebrate Holy Communion. This led to a style of decanter and chalice that reflected this origin and later on became influenced by secular style in the Georgian era, and later on by Victorian designs.

Small glasses on trays for common were an import from the USA from the United Presbyterian tradition which abhorred alcohol and its uses. The common cup, in order to be in some way hygienic, used alcoholic wine.

In early Reformation times, in Scotland, the bread was unsweetened shortbread to distinguish it fully from the 'host' or wafer used in Roman Catholic celebrations of the mass. The host wafers were white, almost transparent and made by nuns and not able to reflect in any way the 'bread of life' as experienced by the people in ordinary daily work.

### **One Room Approach**

The style of worship in this period proclaimed that the people were participants and while they were led by the clergy, the whole community was fully involved in the act of worship. This led to the concept of the "one room" approach to the design of church buildings to ensure that the clergy were not elevated, or separated.

### **Preaching in the Reformation Church**

There can be little doubt that the Reformers placed great store in the power and importance on preaching in worship and its effect on the development of the faith of those who heard it. Calvin described the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper without preaching as a 'dumb show'. Preaching and the preparation for preaching characterised much of the work of Calvin and other Reformers and the crucial nature of the Word being exegete and interpreted as an act of grateful response to the Grace of God become one of the signs of the Reformed tradition.

Originally in church buildings in the Early Church, the pulpit or preaching position had been the central position of the apse in the basilica, which had associations with the location of the bishop's chair. In medieval times, the pulpit came to be positioned on the one side, often half way down the nave among the people.

The Reformed Church often inherited a side pulpit and did not seem to find that in any way objectionable, unlike the position of the font or the style of the table. Many positions were

developed in church buildings for pulpits, varying from a central one facing the congregation seated in rows; some facing the long wall; and others with a high pulpit at one end with the table on a raised platform before it. Some Anglican churches had a pulpit in the middle aisle of the church with the table behind the pulpit. The major issue was how the location of the pulpit affected the communion table, in Reformed worship.

### **Impact on Church architecture**

The changes in theological emphasis and practice at the Reformation have serious implications for church building and design, in the light of the above.

Lecterns were seen as complete irrelevant as the idea of a reading desk separate from the place of the sermon made nonsense of the concept of one liturgical act which is the reading and interpretation of the Word in worship. A separate reading location was not appropriate to the idea that the people gathered to pray for right hearing of the Word, the reading of the bible and the sermon which explored the implications of the reading.

Chancels no longer had a purpose, and worked against the corporate nature of worship that was so important to the Reformers. Sometimes the screen was removed, converting two rooms into one. Sometimes the screen was retained to shut off the chancel as useless and a table set up for use in the nave, where the pulpit was installed against a side pillar. In some instances, the two rooms were retained. One in the nave for preaching purposes, while for the communion, the whole congregation moved into the chancel around the table. Chancels were an inheritance that had no real meaning for the Reformers

### **Art in Churches**

Calvinist Reformers could not build many new churches and had to adapt the inherited buildings as well as survive the persecution that many suffered. Flexibility in relation to what might be done was adopted as a principle, in accordance with general agreement on crucial matters like the rejection of any idea of the 'sacrifice of the mass', or the intercession of the saints.

While many spurious views of the Reformation's antipathy towards art have developed, it is clear that the Reformers had a healthy respect for art forms of art. They did object to some things in art - the use of art to convey no real message or the type of art which expressed a message which was not congruent with the Biblical heritage and principles.

Mood and thoroughness characterised churches of the Reformation period. Simplicity, clarity, precision and forcefulness were demanded in symbolism. Similarly, the sentimental, sensuous, ambiguous were rejected vigorously.

### **Post Reformation Period**

In the 16th and 17th centuries in Scotland pulpits were placed on the long wall in churches and the people gathered round the pulpit to hear the bible read, to pray and learn about faith through preaching and teaching. Sermons were long and often there was a preface to the service which explored the biblical readings. Singing was introduced with the use of the psalms where people sat in the pews or seats, while they stood to pray.

Churches were built, as a result of the Reformation settlement, by the heritors (the wealthy landowners who had benefitted from the Reformation dispersal of monastic and other church properties), the people of the congregation made no monetary contribution towards the maintenance of the fabric of church buildings, or the manse. Worshippers were expected to place

money in the alms' dish (for poor relief in the parish) which was placed outside the church under the watchful eye of one of the elders. Often a small building, looking like a sentry box, was erected to shelter the elder from the weather while he undertook this duty.

Pews were used for seating more and more frequently as a result of early 18th Century legislation which demanded that the heritors provide accommodation for one third of the male population of any parish. Pews were a cheap and easy way of fulfilling this regulation.

### **Worship in the Reformed Tradition**

The Reformers returned the responsibility of music of worship to congregations and the praise of the congregations began, after the Reformation, to make use of the metrical psalms, and later on, in the 18th Century, paraphrases, sung by the people as part of worship.

With the Gothic revival, choirs began to fill the stalls which had characterised the medieval church and the services were to be led, and the beauty of worship improved, by the use of practiced and often professional musicians substituting for congregational participation. This would be seen as contrary to the Reformed heritage.

### **Presbyterian Proliferation**

During the 18th century, and most importantly, in the 19th century, with the Ten Years Discontent and the Disruption of 1843, several distinct denominations emerged in Scotland sharing the Presbyterian heritage. They all contributed to the style and development of Church buildings. Most of the styles of building can be seen as either a result of the financial status, or the particular theological emphasis, of the new denominations.

In the Free Church of 1843 onwards, most buildings were rapidly built after the third of ministers left the Church of Scotland, and under Dr Chalmers money was raised not just for building Churches, but educational establishments (originally intended to be universities, not just theological teaching places). This resulted in buildings of little pretention, often with small windows (as these were expensive) and a central pulpit. Some exceptions, like St George's Free in Edinburgh existed, which were very grand and impressive and in a style that could compete with any of the traditional buildings of the Church of Scotland. Often a rail of wood existed round the area at the front of the church to suggest an 'apron chancel'.

In the United Presbyterian tradition (formed in 1847) often the buildings did not look like churches, but were based on town halls or civic buildings, built in an obvious and prominent position and designed to rival the local parish Church. UP congregations were often dominated by the middle class and aspiring wealthy, and this resulted in some impressive buildings (in the west of Scotland, people talked of a person being social mobile if they 'had a house as the coast and a pew at Wellington Church, on the hill at Gilmorehill opposite the new University buildings of 1870 built by Alexander 'Greek' Thomson).

Preaching was important in the UP tradition, as it was in the Free Church of Scotland, and often the churches of these denominations had a central pulpit. Later on, they were affected by the influence of the Gothic revival, and also by the work of those architects in the tradition of McGregor Chalmers, and adapted buildings with the addition of an apse at the east end of the Church for the Communion table and seating areas for the elders. In the 19th century the elders began to serve communion and moves were made to give them a distinctive place in the building to emphasis their importance. Previously they had not been so engaged in this way.

## **Nineteenth Century**

Communion tables were introduced into the Church of Scotland in 1834 in Glasgow where a riot resulted due to the outrage at such an innovation. In the 1880s organs were introduced to many churches, despite strong opposition in the General Assembly. Part of the popularity was thought to be due to the visit of the USA evangelists, Moody and Sankey to Scotland and their use of a small organ (on the back of a carriage) to accompany the popular songs and hymns sung at their meetings.

### **Chapels of Ease**

In the huge industrial development after the end of the Napoleonic war in 1815, the parish system crumbled and it was no longer possible for the old parishes churches – like the Cathedral, Govan and Cathcart in Glasgow, or St Giles, St Cuthbert's and Kirk O' Field in Edinburgh, to provide for the needs of the population. Instead, under Dr Chalmers, who later used the experience in the Free Church, there was a massive building project of new churches.

These were known as 'Chapels of Ease' not referring to any theological principle or attitude, but to the fact they allowed ease of access for the population. They often developed into important and impressive buildings in new area of cities, like Hyndland, Broomhill, Sandyford in Glasgow, or in Edinburgh as 'daughter 'churches'.

### **Outside influences on building style**

In the 19th century, in Scotland, the influence of the Oxford movement can be seen in the building of churches. Probably this came about through the advent of the railways and the fact that the sons of heritors travelled to English public schools and worshipped in chapels which were designed by those influenced by the Oxford Movement and the Camden Society at Cambridge. The Tractarian Movement was devoted according to its Charter:

*"To promote the study of ecclesiastical architecture and the restoration of mutilated architectural remains"*

The movement was not just antiquarian, but based on the hope that a recovery of buildings in a certain style would lead to the development of "more seemly" worship, congruent with a high style of theological interpretation. It developed a view that the only possible shape of a church building was medieval. This conviction led to the introduction in Victorian times of the revival of 14th Century Gothic architecture. This brought back a chancel, separated by steps and or a screen from the nave, and the creation of a sanctuary area for an altar, rather than a communion table in many English and later on Scottish churches (e.g. St Giles in the late 19th and for most of the 20th centuries).

The pulpit became diminished, and was often placed outside the chancel, and attention was focussed on the east end and celebrant, or facilitator of worship. The leader of worship moved from being near the congregation to a place of privilege in the chancel, or behind the communion table.

Attention was directed to the choir area, and choirs and organs were introduced at this time, to "lead" the worship. Congregations came to look, rather than "to be" or "act". The architecture symbolised that the worship of the people was not the property of the people, but had to be mediated in some way by those who had been ordained.

## **Organs**

Prior to the Gothic revival and its ascendancy, the organ was usually placed anywhere other than at the front, or in the chancel area. Once they did become inserted into chancel areas there were moves to put choirs near them and once again interfere with the direct contact of the people gathered for worship and the table of the Lord. This type of innovation continues with the number of praise bands being located at the front of the church, and thereby obliterating the symbolism of the table, preaching desk, and font, for reasons that are acoustical or performance related rather than theological.

## **Gothic Architecture**

The recognisable style of church architecture, marked by the pointed arch which characterised the buildings of the Middle Ages was known as Gothic. The term was invented by later scholars who regarded as barbaric (like the Goths who overran Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire) any architectural style that was non-Roman. While it is common to use 'Gothic' as a complimentary term for a type of pervasive ecclesiastical and civic architectural style, it was not intended to be in any way affirming or flattering when the term was originally invented.

In 1965, at the World's Fair in New York, there was an exhibition of what was then envisioned to be the shape of cities of the future. The only recognisable building in the exhibit was the church as it was designed in a Gothic cathedral style, showing that the architects and visionaries had only one conception of what a church might always look like!

## **Twentieth Century**

In this time, in periods of church building, new emphasis was placed once again on the heart of worship being in the community, rather than in one exclusive part of the building, in which specific acts were carried out by a select number of people. The functional aspect of ecclesiastical architecture became primary and the church building had to relate to the continuing needs both of a congregation and the surrounding community.

It is arguable that, since Vatican II, the Roman Catholic tradition is more true to the Reformed heritage of Calvin and his contemporaries, by insisting that the congregations are able to participate and the table is forward in the church with the priest celebrating behind it, and the reading and preaching of the Word are mandatory at every celebration of the mass. It is perhaps noteworthy that Calvin spoke in his magnum opus of 'the Sacrament without preaching is a dumb show' yet until relatively recently, in the General Assembly, the Lord's Supper was celebrated by the Moderator without any preaching.

Similarly, the Sacrament was described as being 'dispensed' in the General Assembly by the Moderator. This is a complete foreign concept to the tradition and principles of the Reformation, hinting that it is a 'magical or mystical pill' given to people to grant them salvation and eternal life, rather than a community act of celebration of God's grace, promise and sustenance in the past, present and future.

## **Reflections on the Historical Development of Church Buildings**

From the above brief historical survey, there can be some conclusions drawn about the style of architecture and design of church buildings.

- It is of crucial importance to remember that there is no one 'style' that is 'correct'; nor is there a right and wrong or appropriate place of a pulpit in Presbyterian worship. What is critical is the need for what is said and done in worship to be participated in by the

community which comes to worship in that building.

- The Reformation rejected a medieval understanding of building for worship. The medieval view of church building reflected a doctrinal belief. There was a consciousness of God's holiness and sovereignty which was reflected in the spires and lofty ceiling of cathedrals which soared majestically above the worshippers. Worship was a mystery performed only by qualified leaders, so the centre point was remote and surrounded by an atmosphere of awe. There was little sense of the corporate nature of the church, so church buildings were built with two distinct "rooms" separating clergy and laity. The seating arrangements allowed people to gather for worship where they might not be able to see and hear, leading to a degree of passivity and the status of observers.
- The Reformation, by contrast, insisted on a 'one room' approach to worship whereby all were participants in some real way in what was said and done in worship. There were to be no passive spectators and worship was not a performance on behalf of an audience, but a reflection of the group which came together to hear the Word of God read and preached and to engage with the power of the sacraments.
- There is no concept of 'sacred space' in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition. What makes the space 'sacred' is the worship which the people gathered to praise and pray to God in the place express. The space of the Church building, like all of God's creation, is suffused with the mystery and grandeur of God's grace and love, and is due respect as any home or building might be. The building itself does not have any part of it that is to be regarded as a shrine, but all of it is to be fit for the gathering of the people to form a congregation in response to God's gracious invitation to worship. 'Church buildings... should not be thought of as existing in their own right, but basically as serviceable shelters for a group of people liturgically in action (Gilbert Cope).

As the Dutch poet and theologian Huub Oosterhuis expresses it

*What is this place where we are meeting?*

*Only a house, the earth its floor,*

*walls and a roof, sheltering people,*

*windows for light, an open door,*

*Yet it becomes a body that lives when we are gathered here,*

*and know our God is near.*

- There is a sense that only the best is to be used for the building of the place for worship, and that the imitative and the cheap are inappropriate and crass. The designer and leader of the Arts and Crafts movement, William Morris, expressed this thought in relation to buildings 'have nothing in your home that you know not to be useful, or believe to be beautiful'. In the light of the inheritance of the Church of Scotland, it is clear that none of those in the past were prepared to give anything less than the best they had to offer in the construction of the place where God would be worshipped. Perhaps this is a reflection of the tradition of the Old Testament, in King David's words, when he was offered the threshing floor a gift to build the Temple, 'I will not offer unto the Lord that which has cost me nothing'. The importance of the best in materials and design that is congruent with the community and its experience are not to be forgotten.
- The building whether as a newly constructed one, or as one which is undergoing renovation, has to be designed and developed in the light of the principles of Presbyterian and Reformed worship, whereby all who gather are able to hear and see and are able to participate in the

worship. There ought to be no sign of a stage for 'performance purposes', as this is to reduce the congregation to an audience, and to veer very clearly into a view of worship from pre-Reformation times, when the congregation were passive spectators looking at what was done in their behalf. It is vital, then, to remember that 'careful and thoughtful study by the individual church of its own beliefs, its own attitudes and expressions of worship, its own traditions as well as those of the parent communion, before the architect ever comes on the scene' are required. (Briefs for Church Builders, USA). All involved in preparing for such a project have to be able to examine and then answer the question 'What do you believe about God?'

- Chancels and choir area at the front have really no place in Reformed worship. Worship led by choirs or praise bands can be facilitated by locations that are much less obvious and dominant and less distracting, allowing the focus to remain, as in the Reformed tradition, on the Word, Font and Table and preaching. Fonts should not be excluded just because they are not used as often as the Table or preaching and reading position. Indeed, in the Presbyterian Church (USA), a font has to be present at every act of worship and must be visible through to the proceedings of the General Assembly.
- Clearly everyone present must be able to hear and see in a Church building that is reflective of the Presbyterian tradition. Any area that is out of sight and excluding of some of the congregation ought to be addressed and alternatives found.
- Each design should reflect the central emphasis and character of a Presbyterian worship service with the proclamation of the Word and the congregation's response to it. The place where the Bible is read and the preaching takes place must be large enough to ensure that the Bible is seen as being the source of what is being said and done. The Word must not be minimised, or invisible and unconnected with worship, as the Reformation prided itself on putting the Word symbolically and practically at the heart of worship.
- The atmosphere of the building must be worshipful and have a rather indefinable atmosphere of reverence and peace. Exits and entries must not be intrusive and the simplicity of design may be more evocative of the majesty of God than elaborate decoration which may be distracting. People should be able to gather round the Word and Sacraments and do this with ease and accessibility. The principle here is expressed best by 'Religious buildings must be built from the inside out...' (John Stewart Detlie).
- In any design for a church building, it is important for the thoughts to be guided by theological concepts and idea. The design should not merely celebrate, or replicate the past, or be merely utilitarian. Instead, the building ought to be designed to speak to the community which gathers within its walls and those who do not attend worship, but pass by and see it as a witness to the Gospel and a means of proclaiming what the congregation believe.

What might be proposed as important to note in church buildings for the 21st Century?

1. Rows of fixed pews may not always be best. They isolate worshippers from one another and fill the floor space. This pattern speaks into a pattern of community where worship leaders were shaped more by moral authority, where there was a greater sense of teaching in a context of rote, rather than sharing something together.
2. Empty pews suggest more about the absent community, rather than the present community, however small, which has assembled for worship. Empty pews also create a sense of you in your small corner and I in mine. It offers a visual pattern into the value of worship where the sitting in the family pew and linking with the past community is more important than the creation and strengthening of the present community.

3. Most crowds in public assemblies gather on three sides of the centre of attention whatever that might be. This is helpful because it gives people sight of each other as well as of the central action and activity. The central action and activity becomes just that: central, so we gather round what is significant to us, that which gives us meaning and life, and create the space in which that activity happens rather than spectate. We become the congregation rather than the audience.
4. Seats may be adaptable and flexible and allow small or large gatherings to be possible along with movement. Flexible seating, used creatively rather than placed in the same rows as pews, enables stories of faith to be told more visually. With greater use of space, the story can be engaged more, visualised more and enables the deeply theological idea of the congregation becoming the story: letting the story live among us rather than listen to it. It also speaks into the sense of the ancient story being ever new. It enables storytelling and worship in general to open up in unexpected ways as space is used creatively.
5. While the functional aspect of buildings is important, we should not ignore the aesthetic aspect. The building should appeal and invite people to come in, and just as importantly encourage the person inside to understand and to worship. The space itself tells the bigger story. What story does your building tell visually when you walk in? What do the walls echo? Do they speak of functionality or the poetry of faith, encounter and mystery? Colour, shape, smell, sense of space, or eye being led to particular points are all significant indicators to what this particular community sees as important. Is it designed mainly for a worship band or for the proclaiming of God's promises in word and action?
6. A building is a symbol, not simply a shelter from the weather or from society. It speaks to the community, and may say the wrong thing. Shape and form of a building is an evangelistic medium.
7. Visibility and audibility are critical in Reformed worship. The word is alive and inaudible words or words lost in a bad sound system illustrate the value of those words. If they cannot be heard in the sacred places, they are scarcely going to be heard in the market places.
8. There should be sufficient clear space to appreciate the focal point in worship. This implies that there should be no clutter to distract. The simplicity acts like silence in worship.
9. Stained glass, lighting, murals, pictures, sculpture in metal stone and wood and the use of colour can enhance the significance as well as the beauty of church architecture. The integrity of creation and how we share this world justly is brought into the space in such a way. A sculptor from Carara who surveyed a block of stone all morning before he set his chisel to it. He chiselled for the rest of the day and as the sun was setting his grandson, who had been watching him work all day, said to him, "How did you know there was a lion hidden in the stone?" Using art forms unveils the mystery of creation and the integrity we have in how we use that creation.
10. All art in church buildings should arise from the design of the building itself. The metal, glass and stone should be congruent with the total structure and always point to the truth beyond its artistic expression. Therefore local materials are always best and while things may be placed in churches that may be attractive, they are only there to assist worship, not to "fill gaps". By using local materials it speaks of a living community in that place and finds the holy in what is local, a God always around us and whose promise and love has been invested in where we are.
11. Buildings should be related to the world around. They exist for the worship of God by people who go back into the society in which they exist. Any design should ask: 'What community is this building intended to serve?' and 'What might it say to those who do not

enter it as well as those who do?' It is a sanctuary, a building for all people and its design and use speaks into that with every activity that happens.

12. Buildings should not disregard the architectural heritage of the past, which represents the future as well as positive achievement. Nor should buildings be fettered to the past but look forward as well as back (as the early church did in its development). In some sense buildings are never finished. The Jewish idea of never completing a building, which goes back to the theological memory of the wilderness years and living in tents speaks into the future: we are reminded we are a travelling people, an evolving community, living always within the promise of continually being reformed. Indeed the story of God never finishes, so the building which tells that story can never be complete.
13. The church needs to be contemporary. We are not returning to the past, though we can learn from it. Nor are we building, or creating, a space merely for the present. The church building will be, and must be, related to the surroundings of the moment, and with an eye to the future for we are a people who have chosen not to settle down. We are instead people of faith.
14. Design should always be congruent with Reformed theological liturgical principles. Therefore the space must allow the congregation to hear, see and become a witnessing community.

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