

# The Reformation of the Space for Public Worship

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As we focus on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, one senses a certain repetitiveness in the themes explored: salvation, authority, polity/church governance, worship, the Christian life, ecclesiology, sacraments, education, the Kingdom, and the key leaders – all very good themes. However, a particular area which is rarely addressed is the impact of the Reformation upon the “space” set-aside for public worship.<sup>1</sup> In fact, this particular theme is rarely mentioned in Reformation church history courses or lectures. The purpose of this paper is: firstly, to provide a popular and brief discussion on the situation which the Reformers inherited at the time of the Reformation in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century concerning designated space for public worship and, secondly, to discuss how the Reformers reacted to this. Obviously, many generalities will be made in this popular study since the way the Reformers reacted to the issue of space for public worship is less than uniform. This paper will tend towards the Magisterial Reformers of the Reformed branch, but, even in somewhat limiting the scope of this discussion, generalities will need to be made.<sup>2</sup> The discussion will then be carried further, thirdly, to raise the question of the ongoing use of designated space for worship today in

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<sup>1</sup>The word “space” has taken on a significance of its own in recent years which was formerly indicated by other words such as place, location, and building. The word “space” itself is a neutral word and often depends upon the adjectives used with the word, such as “sacred space”. This paper will employ the term “space” without the adjective unless in quotations and will use the word virtually as synonymous with “place”. James F. White says it quite well, “Any Christian community needs a *place* for worship of the Incarnate One. It can be anywhere but it has to be somewhere that is designated so that the body of Christ knows *where* to assembly.” [italics mine], James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship Revised Edition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 89. My personal conviction is that the building used for worship is not any more sacred than another place, such as a meeting location for worship under an Acacia tree.

<sup>2</sup> Two authors of recent note who have written extensively about European Protestant church architecture are Andrew Spicer and Nigel Yates. Serious readers would benefit from these authors. See, Andrew Spicer, *Calvinist Churches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); and Nigel Yates, *Preaching, Word and Sacrament: Scottish Church Interiors, 1560-1860* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2009) and *Liturgical Space: Christian Worship and Church Buildings in Western Europe 1500-2000*, (Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2008).

evangelical and Reformed churches. It should be obvious that the use of designated space visibly expresses theological convictions, and these will be duly noted as the paper unfolds in its three parts. A word of advice about reading this article: reading the text body only will reveal the general popular story-line; however, for more technical discussion and source information, the reader should also consult the footnotes throughout.

### 1. Public Space for Worship at the Time of the Eve of the Reformation

What did the public space for worship look like on the eve of the Reformation? General comments here are in order with an understanding that no-doubt somewhere in Europe in 1517 exceptions or unique permutations could be found. Generally, the space for public worship was rectangular as to the foot-print of the space/place with or without cross-arms (transepts).<sup>3</sup> Within this rectangular overall shape the interior focal point was the short wall at the front. The focus of this short wall was the high altar for the celebration of the mass. Often the building was configured so that this short wall was facing eastward, although this was not a universal custom by any means.

In small village churches the rectangular design was simple and may not always have included an elaborate screened area where the high altar was enclosed behind nor may it have included side transepts. If the building was a larger church complex, then the design included a screened chancel with two side rows for choir stalls and clergy or monks and nuns, virtually a “church within a church”<sup>4</sup>. The orientation of the choir stalls/rows was more-or-less against the two long walls, loosely speaking, and at right angles to the altar.

This pattern can still be seen in ecclesiastical architecture to this day in many an Anglican church and other Protestant churches. It also has been adopted within many Parliamentary traditions stemming from England, whereby the House of Commons has a dais where the high altar would have been and two rows of benches on the long walls for the members of the parliament to sit.<sup>5</sup>

Usually the main space, the nave, did not have pews, benches or permanent chairs provided for the lay people of the congregation. Pews or benches were found in some church buildings in Europe before the Reformation but not universally. Some churches did have some stone benches around the inside of the exterior walls as seating for the elderly primarily.

<sup>3</sup> “Footprint” refers to the shape of the building as outlined on the ground, similar to a human footprint, the outline of the shape of one’s foot pressed into the ground.

<sup>4</sup> Another name for this is the “two-room church” (of the Medieval Period) — for the sanctuary and the nave. J.G. Davies, “Architectural Setting”, in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. J.G. Davies (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 28.

<sup>5</sup> See, James Macnutt, *Building for Democracy* (Halifax, NS: Formac, 2010), 7-8, for a helpful historical summation on the development of the space in St. Stephen’s Chapel, the Palace of Westminster, as a Parliament (House of Commons specifically).

There is some dispute as to whether or not the space for the public to assemble (the nave) was divided by gender, but the evidence appears to suggest that generally men and women were separate from one another in the worship space and sat or stood apart from each other prior to the Reformation.<sup>6</sup>

There was much diversity in the public portion of the building. It appears that some brought their own stools, some kneeled, some sat on benches, and others stood. This also tells us a great deal of what actually was going on in worship – the focus was generally not long sermons but the drama of the altar and private worship matters.<sup>7</sup>

There does appear to be evidence of some departures from this general description above. For example, some evidence seems to indicate special spacial orientation may have been dualistic, in that a high altar may have been on the short, front wall but an elaborate high pulpit in the centre of the one long wall (often by a column row). This type of special orientation may have been more-so with certain chapels where “preaching” was also more particularly emphasised as opposed to the medieval norm where it was not. There is evidence that also some large church buildings had similar large high pulpits in the nave portion again towards the long wall and not as a central pulpit on the short wall as that was reserved for the altar. These cathedral churches often had special preachers.<sup>8</sup>

Thus the changes which many of the Reformers brought about in public worship space were not totally without some measure of precedent, but the conclusion is clear that the vast majority of pre-Reformation church buildings were true to the spacial orientation of the general description above, namely the focal point being the high altar on the short wall and generally screened and with side-rows of stalls in a separate chancel, then a more open nave for the “people”.

Other significant features were included in larger churches (cathedrals, basilicas, and abbey churches): side-chapels honouring perhaps a particular saint and again, with appropriate orientation, again always with a central altar and no pulpit generally present. The other overall chief interior features were colour, imagery, containers of various shapes and sizes, and elevated chairs for the hierarchy of the clergy or governing classes. The imagery range was vast – biblical scenes, biblical characters, church fathers, noted leaders both

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<sup>6</sup> A. Thomas Lambert, “Preaching, Praying, and Policing the Reform in Sixteenth-Century Geneva” (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998), 122-123.

<sup>7</sup> Karin Maag, *Lifting Hearts to the Lord: Worship with John Calvin in Sixteenth-Century Geneva*. The Church at Worship: Case Studies From Christian History, eds. Lester Ruth, Carrie Steenwyk, John D. Witvliet (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 43. Also, White. *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 102. White states that “until the 14<sup>th</sup> century the nave was clear of chairs and pews”. There does appear to be variance about just when chairs/pews may have been introduced as furnishings.

<sup>8</sup> See White, *An Introduction to Christian Worship*,

ecclesiastical and civil, noted saints, and heroic activities remembered whether the slaying of a dragon or marching in a Crusade. Such imagery could be depicted through painted frescoes, stained glass, statuary, containers or relic vessels/reliquaries, and architectural structural embellishments.

The architectural styles of the pre-Reformation churches display much variety. The buildings might exhibit an overall Norman, Romanesque, Gothic, or Classical style (and often incorporating ancient Roman basilica floor designs). In many regards this style factor is not the most critical factor in coming to understand pre-Reformational interior church space.<sup>9</sup> The more significant matter is the spacial interior orientation and focus and the specific features of the interior and its furnishings because this is really much more significant for understanding the relationship between the space designated for public worship at the time of the Reformation and what theological underpinnings were at work here.

Finally, a brief discussion is necessary concerning choir space in the pre-Reformation churches. Choir space was either near the high altar in the chancel area and/or in a rear balcony. Music accompaniment may in some instances have been with an organ – often located in a rear balcony, although it could be situated in a variety of locations depending upon the size of the instrument. Since it was the choristers who were the singers, those in the nave did not generally participate to the same extent vocally – some might but many did not, they listened. Looking at this through the lens of the Reformers, this use of space and the lack of congregational involvement in singing would appear to represent a failure to understand the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

## **Summation**

It can be said that generally the interiors of church buildings in Europe at the time leading up to the Reformation focused upon the high altar situated at the short wall. This was the focus – the drama of the mass. The clergy kept their back to the nave while conducting the ritual of the mass. Generally long preaching times were not the focus, thus seating was not consistently patterned in the interiors. It would appear, though, that gender segregation was quite common as was social segregation.

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<sup>9</sup> The point can be made that all of the above mentioned styles still used a common theological framework yet had a very similar spacial interior usage and design. After the Reformation all of these overall styles could still be found in Reformational churches, yet we will see often with very new spatial interior usage and design yet still it could be called a Gothic structure etc. We need to be careful that we not see Pugin's thesis that Gothic was the only style suited for church buildings to be re-imposed upon earlier periods. Such a thesis has never received universal, inter-generational support. The reality is that at the time of the Reformation there was a diversity of styles of church buildings. St. Peter's, Rome at the centre of the Reformation conflict was being built in the Classical style. Also, since many church buildings were built over many years, they contained more than one style.

The church buildings were generally open at least daily, if not permanently. They were places to go for private worship, whether to pray, to mediate, to confess, whether in the main nave or in side-chapels. Thus the interior of the buildings was designed for much more than simply a place for public Sunday worship venues.

There is a clearly defined theology which emerges from looking at these church interiors. The visual drama of the mass was the focus along with an emphasis on priestly ministry. There was clearly a de-emphasis almost universally upon preaching and the auditory; and related to this was often the lack of organised seating – it was simply not always necessary. Singing had come to have designated space and thus limitations of full congregational involvement developed with this. Since the auditory was not the primary focus, the visual took a larger role through the development of iconography. Thus the overall result was to see the church building as sacred space and even within it there was a more sacred space – the chancel versus the nave.

Aesthetically a sense of beauty emerged which was complex and with elaborate ornamentation combined often with impressive soaring bulk, at least in the larger structures. However, definitions of what constituted beauty in church buildings were not always uniform. There were attempts to move sometimes to a much plainer or minimalist style, but this was generally a minority approach.

## 2. The Reformation of Space for Public Assemblies

With the Reformation, came an incredible variety in adapting medieval parish churches, cathedrals, monastic chapels, and abbeys into new Protestant places for worship. (It must be noted that the building of new, purpose-built Protestant worship places took time and did not happen immediately after 1517. Many believe that the first purpose-built Protestant church was not constructed until 1544 in Torgau at Hartenfels Castle<sup>10</sup>). Some of this adaptation was more pronounced whereby new walls were constructed in some medieval cathedrals or abbey churches. For example, where the screen was, now a wall appeared so that the congregation could be in the nave and a new parish school in the former chancel or vice versa.<sup>11</sup>

For many following the Reformed branch of the Reformation, the focal point of the interior moved now from the high altar to the high pulpit located either on the short wall or on a side, long wall, such as at St. Peter's Geneva, where in Calvin's church the pulpit was moved in 1541 to a side, long wall by an aisle column support and the screen and chancel stalls were removed.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See, Jack C. Whytock, "Scottish Liturgics and Church Architecture", A Study of a Transplanted Kirk on Prince Edward Island", *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 39.2 (2014), endnote 13, page 63.

<sup>11</sup> White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 103.

<sup>12</sup> J.G. Davies, "Architectural Setting", 34.

The congregation was now seated in a shape of a star design around the pulpit, at the front of the nave and in the two transepts and in the former chancel.<sup>13</sup> The pulpit spoke of the importance of the Scriptures and of providing a desk for the preacher to have freedom for preaching.<sup>14</sup> These Reformation high pulpits were massive and could display remarkable craftsmanship. The Protestants were not the first to construct such massive pulpits. There was precedence before and during the Reformation whether in a cathedral or by Jesuits, who also were constructing such pulpits in some places in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

The raised pulpit allowed the preacher to have better eye-contact and also was viewed as a way to aid audibility. To help further with the audibility, a sounding board was often constructed above the pulpit. The point is clear – the Word is to be read and preached with effect to be heard by all in the interior or meeting space.

Going together with the pulpit is seating. Thus a move to universal seating in Protestant churches became the norm. Before it was hap-hazard, but now it was to become universal. Thus moveable benches or fixed pews started to appear with much more regulatory, although stools continued to be encouraged in many congregations where benches or pews had not been completely provided.

The sermons were now longer and hence the practical need for seating was necessitated. The emphasis was upon learning together the truth of God's Word. Benches and stools still allowed for flexibility and movement of the space to accommodate communion tables. Pews usually are fixed and do not allow as much flexibility, thus aisles or space near the pulpit must be provided for communion tables.

In terms of seating, gender segregation appears to have been fairly universally practiced in the early Reformation churches whether in Switzerland or Scotland. In part it may have been custom from the pre-Reformation period, or in part to imitate the Early Church, but also it was thought as a way to be less distracting to separate men from women.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> J.G. Davies, "Architectural Setting", 34. It should be noted that this is not exactly the way it is today at St. Peter's, Geneva. Care always needs to be taken when discussing church architecture that we not conclude that "as we see things today, that is how they were originally" — either by the Reformers and what they did to reconfigure space, or what later generations did in reconfiguring an evangelical and Reformed church interior in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for example. See my article, "Scottish Liturgics and Church Architecture", 56. Also one does wonder if the star-shape in 1541 was Calvin's ideal that a church be built more in the round as did occur in some of the French Reformed *temples*. See, Maag, *Lifting Hearts to the Lord*, 45, and the *Temple de Paradis*.

<sup>14</sup> White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 96.

<sup>15</sup> White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 102.

<sup>16</sup> See, Andrew Spicer, "'Accommodating of Thame Selfis to Heir the Worde': Preaching, Pews and Reformed Worship in Scotland, 1560-1638", *History* 88 (2003b), 415.

The next major change was the space to be provided for the communion table or tables, especially for many within the Reformed branch. These tables were to be constructed of plain wood and to look very much like a table and not in any way like an altar, hence no box tables.<sup>17</sup> Space was to be made whereby the people could come in relays to the table/s and be seated, again by gender, or they would queue at the table/s and receive the bread at one end and the wine at the other end of the table as they walked, again segregated by gender.<sup>18</sup> These tables were usually mobile and often not seen in the interior if communion was not being observed on that Sunday.<sup>19</sup>

There is no evidence in the Reformed branch of the Reformation of ever eating meals or serving beverages after or before the services of public worship in the church interior space. This was in many ways something which would develop later with more pietistic groups through the agape love feast or with Anabaptists but not with the Magisterial Reformers.<sup>20</sup> This does raise the question whether this was viewed as a very important aspect of the use of church interior space? The answer is quick to answer – no. Provision for eating and drinking was not in the church interior, hence no need for kitchens either. Thus slowly non-moveable seating (fixed pews) was to become the norm, as the only space needed for some movement was around the communion tables.

Fonts also underwent reformation. Baptismal fonts remained in the buildings, but sometimes they changed locations, migrating from the entrance door to closer to the pulpit area. This, too, was making the point that the sacrament was not a private family matter but a matter for the whole congregation to witness. Fonts for holy water were destroyed or abandoned. Also fonts generally became less elaborate and many were “basins/bowls” placed near the pulpit or attached to the side of the pulpit with a bracket.

What did the Reformers do with the chancel/choir stalls? Again the answer is varied. Some removed them altogether as in the case of St. Peter's (Ste. Pierre), Geneva. Others kept them but basically the chancel became a

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<sup>17</sup> Modern box tables in some evangelical and Reformed churches often did not start to appear until the liturgical changes of the later 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>18</sup> See, Yates, *Liturgical Space: Christian Worship and Church Buildings in Western Europe 1500-2000*, 18. There was diversity of custom in the emerging Reformed churches whether you came and sat at the table or whether you walked to the table or even sat at your bench for communion. On rare occasion some came and knelt.

<sup>19</sup> Whytock, “Scottish Liturgics and Church Architecture”, 53-64. Many of these tables were collapsible. Some churches left the communion table up in the former chancel and would only use that space on communion days and all other worship took place in the former nave, such at the church at Emden. See, Yates, *Liturgical Space*, 21.

<sup>20</sup> The evidence is not conclusive that the Reformers were reacting against some Medieval churches where in the nave dances, eating, drinking and plays were conducted. J.G. Davies, “Nave”, in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, 388.

dead space; others walled it off; still others retained it for a “choir” or for the leading singers. The change was more in the direction of full congregational singing. However, the school boys often sat in front of the pulpit, and they became the leaders of congregational praise (such as at St. Peter’s, Geneva). So in some respects the chancel choir moved into the nave whereby all sat together to praise the Lord.

Concerning colour, imagery, and containers –iconoclasm– the story is well known on this and again various forms of the Reformation of interiors occurred. The relics of the saints were removed, the walls were made white, and many stained glass windows were destroyed or removed. The move especially by the Reformed branch was towards simplicity and plainness. It has often been said that there was no longer an aesthetic of beauty. This is actually misleading as any interior designer today will tell one that minimalism, currently a popular design expression, has its own aesthetic of beauty.

Immediately after the Reformation in many Reformed areas, the church buildings were locked outside of public worship times. This was a change from the pre-Reformation period. It was to break with the past about the space being used for private worship practices; many of these practices were viewed as non-biblical. The point was perhaps needed due to immaturity of development, but often one reaction can lead to another problem: could it be that from this a conviction developed inadvertently amongst some that the building was “sacred” and only for worship and not to be used for any other purposes such as eating or drinking a beverage in the worship space? The question is worthy of consideration.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, though the Reformers were not necessarily all of one opinion or conviction, clearly there was a general move towards seeing the space where the congregation gathers as a “place” and not as “sacred” space. The church building was generally seen as a space to meet but it was not seen as sacred. The Reformation would work through stages in its developmental history. The Puritans began to use the language sometimes of the place they met as “the meeting house”. This clearly is to make the point – the church is the people of God, not a building. Hence it really does not fit to describe a Reformed building as sacred space for many within the Reformational context.<sup>22</sup> The Anglican branch may have various streams of thought within it on this, as so may the Presbyterians currently or even historically.<sup>23</sup> In France

<sup>21</sup> I myself have had Reformed people tell me that serving coffee in the place where worship is conducted is not appropriate. This does appear to support a view of “sacred space”.

<sup>22</sup> David Gobel, “Reforming Church Architecture”, *New Horizons* (February, 2011), 6-7. This Christian magazine was one of the few popular Christian magazines which I have found to actually devote a cover to the theme of church architecture. See also the article by Larry Wilson, “How to Lay Out Our Worship Space” in that same issue, *New Horizons* (February, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> For a helpful article upon the tensions within Scottish Presbyterianism and Scottish Episcopalianism on space/sacred space of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, see Andrew

the worship space after the Reformation was extremely varied – barns, houses, outdoors, and sometimes new purpose-built places – *temples*.

### Summation

The Magisterial Reformers transformed the interior space of the existing medieval churches by making the focal point the pulpit. The exact location of this appears to be usually to one side of the long wall but again not universally. Generally the screens were removed at the chancel. With the emphasis upon the auditory, fixed seating arose and became much more common after the Reformation. The seating plan could vary as to shape and was also generally gender segregated. Singing was more emphasised through full congregational singing but could be led by one group; yet all were to participate, thereby the chancel choir stalls were not universally used. Thus people and clergy were brought much closer together – not in “two rooms”. The interiors also underwent a movement to a much plainer appearance yet with a beauty still present. Many had portable communion tables made of wood introduced for communion times. The interior space was used only for preaching and teaching meetings but not for what our modern age would call “fellowship” times. Tensions did arise however over civil seating in these newly designed interior spaces.<sup>24</sup> For some of these matters summarised here there are some Medieval precedents, yet these are muted and not general.

### 3. Reformed and Reforming: The Use of Space for Public Worship Today<sup>25</sup>

Is there still a latent pre-Reformation attitude or theology sometimes expressed by some evangelical and Reformed Christians with such statements as “they worship in an industrial warehouse or a hotel dance-room – I want to worship in a proper church”?<sup>26</sup> How does this reflect the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman: “... a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.” (John 4:21,23 NIV 1984)? Is it possible to make Protestant church buildings our holy/sacred places so that we lose the spirit of flexibil-

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Spicer, “‘What kinde of house a kirk is’: conventicles, consecrations and the concept of scared space in post-Reformation Scotland” in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 81-103.

<sup>24</sup> Spicer, “‘Accommodating of Thame Selfis to Heir the Worde’: Preaching, Pews and Reformed Worship in Scotland, 1560-1638”, 405-422.

<sup>25</sup> I think it is appropriate to apply the dictum *Semper Reformanda* to this discussion on church architecture.

<sup>26</sup> As a church planter many years ago, I received this comment many times from folks who adamantly told me that they were “Reformed”. I would reply, “Yes, we worship in space which was often a bar and a dance hall Monday through Saturday.”

ity which is actually biblical. We will explore these questions now through some specific examples.

Let's begin with fixed seating of pews or moveable benches/chairs. Fixed seating greatly limits what can be done in a space. The use of chairs which can be quickly stacked or moved immediately changes or transforms a space as to its function. It means that the space can quickly be converted into a space for meals or for standing to have tea, coffee, and conversation. Also, the space can become a place for a game of floor-hockey or aerobic classes or a sleep-over by a youth convention. Are any of these activities incompatible with Christians doing such when they gather or should they do these activities in space never used for public Sunday worship? Do economics allow for a space reserved only for Sunday public worship to be built to accommodate say three hundred people plus another public space built for eating or playing a game for two hundred people? Economically and also aesthetically it may be very beautiful to have two separate spaces, but is it necessary from the biblical vantage point of the new covenant community? The rationale biblically is very difficult to find, but perhaps economically some congregations can afford two such spaces and this may be much more aesthetically pleasing. John Calvin in Book III of the *Institutes* warns his readers of ascribing to our church buildings "hidden holiness"<sup>27</sup>. Even though we may confess that in evangelical and Reformed churches we do not subscribe to the statement of sacred space, there does appear at times to be a hearkening back to such thinking. The Reformation of space has not completely ended.

Wholistic ministry recognises the value of believers eating together and visiting with one another. Pews are a relatively modern circumstance and they do place limitations upon space for such eating at informal gatherings. Many times I have experienced (in Africa, Asia, and South America) that immediately following the Communion service the white plastic chairs are moved around to allow for easier service of the hot food and sodas in the same space. Yes, meals are served in the same space where a few minutes before public worship was conducted, where men and women sat segregated by gender. It all seems rather in keeping with the Church being a people and with practical financial realities for many Christian communities where the luxury of two spaces is not feasible.<sup>28</sup> There appears to be no evidence that evangelical and Reformed churches ate together four hundred to five hundred years ago in worship space. Yet they were very flexible in transforming the space which they inherited into new preaching and teaching places. I would

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<sup>27</sup> As translated by Karin Maag from Calvin's *Institutes*, in *Lifting Hearts to the Lord*, 110.

<sup>28</sup> Larry Wilson, "Suggestions Toward Reflecting and Reinforcing Principles of Biblically Reformed Worship in Our Church Buildings", *Ordained Servant* 10.4 (2001), 87-88. Wilson's suggestion number one appears to be more in the direction of having two separate spaces if I am interpreting this correctly. I suspect the date 2001 may be part of the context for reading this suggestion and today this may not be written in the exact same way (my supposition).

assert the continuing transformation of ministry does not need to stop with how the Reformers transformed their inherited space.

Allow me to reflect over a worship experience which my wife and I recently had in London, England. It was at London City Presbyterian Church.<sup>29</sup> They use the historic 1788 building of St. Botolph-without-Aldersgate with the adjacent courtyard where John Wesley was converted. The building they worship in is an elegantly adorned Classical Georgian church. The interior is a three-sided gallery with central aisle and apse and choir stalls with no rood screen and side high pulpit, and communion table against the apse wall. The interior has been modified with chairs now in three-quarters of the main floor seating area and fixed pews remaining at the back and in the gallery.<sup>30</sup> The large font remains in the building near the front left door. The interior pattern is quite typical of many church buildings of London built after the style of Gibbs and St. Martin-in-the Fields or All Souls Langham Place by John Nash. St. Botolph-without-Aldersgate bears the marks of a modified post-Reformation plan for many Anglican churches or even for many Presbyterian churches. The London City congregation worships in this space.

The Sunday we recently worshipped there, they used a central small lectern and then after the service there was a meal served in this same space. The chairs were all moved and tables were brought out for people to sit around. Tables were laid out down the centre aisle and across the front. Food was served under a gallery aisle. Then we heard a mission presentation with informal questions at the conclusion of the meal. Folks stayed for some time visiting and talking in this space. There is no immediate church hall or fellowship hall nearby so if food is served it seems there is only one space available to do such other than eating outside in the courtyard, which was not feasible given the late November weather in London.

One notes that the building has undergone modifications especially as regards fixed seating. The result is really a space with both fixed and moveable seating, something which is actually becoming quite common now in many UK church buildings. The alternative is to try and dig a space underneath the building for a hall or else go off-site to locate another space for a hall. Economic realities would appear to be again at the forefront and also a change in thinking whereby a wholistic ministry is being developed.

The high-pulpit was not used, and such is now often the case in many of these older churches. Rather a small portable lectern is placed in the centre of the short wall (front). The sermons were about thirty-five minutes at each

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<sup>29</sup> Sunday, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Conservation for heritage interiors is not always a simple matter for historic church buildings have often undergone various major renovations. One needs to exercise caution concerning preservation as the question may be preservation for which renovation period of an historic church interior? Secondly, the issue of conservation does raise matters of aesthetic value and community heritage. We will not focus upon these points in this paper.

service that day so seating does help rather than having to stand for the sermon, so it would appear that the tradition established, post-Reformation of people gathering to hear the Word of God expounded and be seated to aid one's concentration was in evidence.

The question remains: are two spaces needed or can one space be multi-purpose both for public worship and for congregational fellowship, eating, informal talks and open discussion, or is there a fundamental violation of biblical principle in this "movement" and arrangement? I would assert that in using one space what we are really seeing is consistent with the Reformed principle of the use of space not as sacred but as space as the place to meet. In many ways this is an illustration of ongoing reform and flexibility. To become slaves to all aspects of space as then adopted or implemented by evangelical and Reformed churches at the time of the Reformation can be very problematic. We actually become slaves to a new tradition of space.

Let us take another example. The month before, my wife and I worshipped at St. John's United Church in Fort Beaufort, Eastern Cape, South Africa.<sup>31</sup> This is a modest Gothic revival church building with a large pulpit on the right and a lectern on the left and a choir area behind.

We worshipped in the church space and then after the service a fellowship meal was served in the adjacent space of the church hall, a former building for worship until the new Gothic one was built. This Gothic church has fixed pews, which are as the word fixed implies not moveable. Thus it is rather difficult to drink and eat in this space. Hence the use of the adjacent hall next door. This meal allowed students who were with us to visit members of the congregation and vice versa and become acquainted with each other – a very vital aspect of Christian life and theological college life as well.

### **Summation/Conclusion**

Things have changed from the days of the Reformation, yet the audible preaching of the Word was given prominence and was still carried forth in both of these very different locations as described above in London, England and in Fort Beaufort, South Africa. Hopefully, the above serves as a basic starting point for a discussion of evangelical and Reformed church architecture and of how we use space or place for public worship and ministry today. The focus of this contemporary discussion has centred on worship and wholistic ministry and the concept of multipurpose space. There are many more contemporary aspects which need to be discussed, including the use of technology.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> 23 October, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> At the Fort Beaufort, SA service, the announcements were presented via PowerPoint before the service began and were reinforced in the weekly bulletin. I have found many congregations running announcements on PowerPoint projection prior to a service. Such technology was not used in the Reformation period. Again, Biblical principles need to be explored and applied to the use of technology as in the use of space.

The Magisterial Reformers certainly had some very clear guiding principles when they began to redesign their places of worship, and these principles were all tied with theological underpinnings. The changes which the Reformers enacted from the Medieval period have been duly noted in this paper. Yet to become slaves to all the ways the Magisterial Reformers redesigned and even purposely designed their places of worship is not right either.

There is clearly a distinction between principle and flexible circumstances in the space used for public worship. On this 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, we need to uncover the guiding principles which the Reformers saw as essential in their places of worship and then work these out within our context. There is incredible flexibility of circumstances and yet this is to be guided by principles rooted in the Scriptures about public worship.

**Now over to you for reflection and comment.** If you would like to comment and give feedback please engage with the author at: [jcwhytock@gmail.com](mailto:jcwhytock@gmail.com) . Your suggestions for part three and where we must continue to go in this discussion will be most welcomed as the author hopes to create a more extensive paper in the future on this third point.

“The reparation would be according to the ability and number of Kirks. Every Kirk must have dorres, close windowes of glasse, thack able to withhold rain, a bell to conuoate the people together, a pulpet, a basen for baptizing and tables for ministration of the Lords Supper. In greater Kirks and where the congregatation is great in number, must reparation be made within the Kirk, for the quiet and commodious receiving of the people. The expenses are to be lifted partly of the people and partly of the teinds, at the consideration of the Ministry.”

*The First Book of Discipline*, ed. J. K. Cameron (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1972), 203.

