

WORSHIP SPACE OF THE WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD IN
THE CONTEXT OF HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE AND ART

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

MEQUON, WI

MARCH 2012

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Approved at Mequon, Wisconsin, on _____

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the history of Christian architecture and art, and how Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) churches shape worship space in the 21st century. When believers come together in corporate worship they gather as a community to receive God's blessings through the proclamation of the gospel in Word and sacrament. Therefore, a church building will be designed in Christian good taste and discretion to allow for this clear proclamation. First, the paper investigates how church architecture has accomplished this in the past. There is an emphasis on how Lutheran architecture developed in post-Reformation Europe. Then there is an examination of the Second Vatican Council's impact on modern theory of worship space, and the response from critics. Finally, the paper concludes with four case studies of 21st century WELS worship space that reveals certain trends. In conclusion, Lutheran churches today continue to keep the proclamation of the gospel as the priority in worship. However, their expressions of traditional architecture (and style in general) will differ according to circumstance, setting, and Christian judgment.

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INTRODUCTION

The first worship space, in a broad sense, was the Garden of Eden. It was in this pristine sanctuary that God communicated his love to his creation. Man and woman enjoyed the gift of life, perfect bodies, interesting trees, the taste of food, amazing animals, and biological wonders that still baffle modern science. They would experience God’s majesty, love, and goodness in a very tangible way through sight, sound, and scent (Ge 1:29-31; 2:8-9). Martin Luther comments on the unique beauty of God’s creation, particularly in Eden: “So in this passage (Moses) sets man apart by the particular place and abode which the Lord planted for man and, as it were, constructed with greater sumptuousness and with more careful application than all the rest of the earth.”¹

However, God’s sanctuary was not just an art museum. Adam and Eve did not examine God’s masterpieces behind velvet ropes and glass. Rather, they took hold of creation, worked with it, and expressed their thankfulness to God by gardening and caring for animals as God intended (Ge 2:15). Not only did God create the world to show love for his creation, he created it for his creation to express their love for him. This would be the endless cycle of events: God blesses man, and man worships God. God gave man woman (Ge 2:22), then man proclaimed God’s work through poetry: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man” (Ge 2:23). God gave man animals to enjoy and rule over, then man honored God by naming them (Ge 2:20). God gave man food from every tree and shrub (1:29), and then (for a time) man willingly forfeited fruit from one tree in the middle of the garden.² Man willingly obeyed God to worship the Creator who gave him everything (Ge 1:28-29). He worshiped God with his heart as well as his hands. Lutheran theologian, Peter Brunner, argues that everything man spoke and expressed – his language, naming of the animals, and attitude toward creation – was man’s artistic response in thankful response to God’s gifts.

¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, vol. 1 of *Luther’s Works*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 91.

² Luther: “Today in our churches we have an altar for the administration of the Eucharist, and we have platforms or pulpits for teaching the people. These objects were built not only to meet a need but also to create a solemn atmosphere. This tree of the knowledge of good and evil was Adam’s church, his altar, his pulpit. Here he was to yield to God the obedience he owed, to give recognition to the Word and will of God, give thanks to God, and call upon God for aid against temptation.” (Ibid., 95.)

God was the author and artist of all beauty, art, intellect, and order. Man reflected these gifts by using them to God's glory.³

Today God still blesses his creation. The believer still offers his life as a living expression of thanks to God for his mercy (Eph 5:1-2). The Lutheran Confessions recognize the true worship of God as confidence in his saving power, particularly faith in Christ.⁴ In this sense true worship, or *heart worship*, of God can occur at any time and place: at home, work, or on the playground. Although the former beauty of the garden has tarnished since the fall, Paul encourages believers to continue to take hold of God's beauty and art to enjoy and employ for godly edification (Php 4:8). The Spirit himself chose beauty, art, intellect, and order to communicate his Word.⁵ The Psalms touch the heart with poetry. Paul's epistles stimulate the intellect with logical progression. The Gospels were written with different flavors to communicate to particular audiences. So God encourages believers to take hold of art, beauty, sound logic, and every God-pleasing faculty to also proclaim his Word: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16). True worship in Eden was man's faith in God, who gave him all. Man responded by giving all these gifts back to his Creator in grateful and creative service. True worship in the world today is man's Spirit-created faith in God, who not only gave him life, purpose, intellect, and beauty, but more than that, his own Son. Believers respond with *heart worship* by making their life a living sacrifice to God (Ro 12:1).

God's gifts of beauty, art, intellect, and order are used throughout the believers' life of heart worship, but they are also utilized when believers come together in corporate worship.

³ "In the beginning of all things, man's work of art is the echo on earth of God's act of creation and of God's word of creation. In that way, this work, the mirror of the Word-related, true being of the creatures, is simultaneously a "glorification of God" (Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968], 248.)

⁴ "See, here you have the meaning of the true honor and worship of God, which pleases God...The heart knows no other comfort or confidence than in Him. It must not allow itself to be torn from Him. But, for Him, it must risk and disregard everything upon earth." *Large Catechism* I:16 (Paul McCain, ed. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006], 316).

⁵ "Furthermore, the Gospel is such a means of grace in every form in which it reaches men, whether it is preached (Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:47), or printed (Jn 20:31; 1Jn 1:3-4), or expressed as a formal absolution (Jn 20:23), or pictured in symbols or types (Jn 3:14-15), or pondered in the heart (Ro 10:8), and so forth." (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics. Vol. III*, [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953], 106).

When discussing the fine arts in worship, specifically church architecture⁶, it is important to note the difference between heart worship and corporate worship:

True worship of God, according to Luther, can take place at almost any time and almost anywhere. It is a concern for convenience and the common good that dictates regularly appointed worship services at regularly appointed places. Similarly, while love does not require any particular set of rites, it does necessitate worshiping according to some stated forms. And the choice of these forms is not a purely personal matter but results from the needs of one's fellowmen.⁷

First, corporate worship happens so that the gospel can be preached and sacraments administered for the convenience and common good of the body of believers. It is at church where God blesses man through the Word and sacrament in an orderly and dignified way. It is at church where believers carry out Christ's commission to baptize and preach the gospel (Mt 28:16-20). It is at church where believers obey Christ's invitation to eat and drink his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:26-28). It is at church where believers come together to formally and publicly use God's gifts: beauty, art, rhetoric, and music, to confess sins, receive absolution, and proclaim the gospel. The writer to the Hebrews saw tremendous benefit of corporate worship for the body of believers: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb 10:25). When discussing sacred architecture in the Lutheran Church, it must be noted that the church building is the structure within which believers formally carry out Christ's great commission to preach the gospel. Therefore, the Lutheran church will be conducive to that goal.

Second, if God has given man beauty, art, music, intellect, and order for enjoyment and edification in his Word (cf. above), then wouldn't these gifts be utilized all the more in corporate worship? God has been the author and artist of these gifts since Eden. Like man in the garden, believers will return any and all gifts to the glory of God. Since corporate worship is carrying out Christ's Great Commission, then these gifts – including the God-given intellect and art of organizing and placing bricks on top of one another – will be used to clarify and proclaim the gospel as best they can. As history has proven, and as this paper will demonstrate, architecture is

⁶ "We may define architecture as the art which seeks to harmonize in a building the requirements of utility and beauty... Only when the idea of beauty is added to that of use does a structure take its place among works of architecture." (A.D.F. Hamlin, *A Textbook of the History of Architecture* [New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1920], xxiii.)

⁷ John Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 58.

one aspect of art that can be used to bring glory to God and underscore the message of the gospel.

Since formal worship happens in a tangible way through the preaching and administration of Word and sacraments, Christians must select a place for it. Although God encourages corporate worship, he has not given us the blueprints for where and how this should happen. Therefore, believers use Christian love, intellect, and good taste to designate where and how the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments distributed. This paper traces the history of worship space from the time of Adam and Eve to present day and identifies how believers of all ages have used their God-given gifts of art and architecture to proclaim the gospel in public worship. By understanding the development of worship space it may become clear why Lutherans worship in the structures they do today, and how their churches will look in the future.

PART 1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

1.1 OLD TESTAMENT WORSHIP SPACE

1.1.1 Patriarchal Worship

The first record of a formal worship ritual was when Cain and Abel made offerings to the LORD (Ge 4:3-4). We do not hear of any type of corporate worship until the time of Adam's grandson, Enosh (Ge 4:26). Still there is no evidence that worship happened in any specified place. Families may have gathered together in homes as fathers orally transmitted the story of the Fall and God's promise to send the head-crusher to deliver them from sin and death.⁸ We can assume that formal worship, including oral transmission and sacrifice, continued in the home until the time of the exodus.

The first consecrated "House of God" is mentioned in Genesis 28 when Jacob was fleeing from his brother Esau. One night the Lord came to Jacob in a dream to reaffirm his promises to him. The next morning Jacob turned his rock pillow into a pillar and poured oil on top of it saying, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Ge 28:17). He named this crossroads of heaven and earth "Beth-el", that is,

⁸ "From the beginning of the world these two proclamations (Law and Gospel) have always been taught alongside each other in God's Church, with a proper distinction. The descendants of the well-respected patriarchs, and the patriarchs themselves, called to mind constantly how in the beginning a person had been created righteous and holy by God. They know that through the fraud of the Serpent, Adam transgressed God's command, became a sinner, and corrupted and cast himself with all his descendants into death and eternal condemnation. They encouraged and comforted themselves again by the preaching about the woman's seed, who would bruise the Serpent's head (Genesis 3:15); Abraham's seed, in whom 'all the nations of the earth [will] be blessed' (Genesis 22:18)." *Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration V:23*. (Paul McCain, ed. *Concordia*, 556-557.)

“House of God”. The “Jacob’s Ladder” episode is much more than a nice Sunday school story. Perhaps the “crossroads” between heaven and earth was a clear illustration of how a transcendent God would interact with his people to comfort them and bring about their salvation. Throughout much of the Old Testament almighty God would physically dwell among his people in their worship spaces.

1.1.2 The Tabernacle

The “House of God” became mobile after the exodus. As his people wandered in the wilderness the Lord dwelt among them as a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night (Ex 13:21). Finally the Lord commanded Moses to build a consecrated dwelling place, the Tabernacle, in which he would physically dwell: “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it” (Ex 25:8-9).

The Lord not only gave Moses the blueprints for his tent of dwelling, but he also designed the furniture, utensils, and cloth down to the last lamp stand, tong, and goat hair. Every part of the Tabernacle was rich in symbolism: tables, crossbars, altars, and clasps were made of gold to remind the people that they were in the presence of royalty, as did the rare blue and purple yarn used in the curtains. Rams’ skin and goat hides not only waterproofed the ceiling but also reminded the people of two regular animals of sacrifice. Fine linen throughout the curtains and priestly vestments suggested purity, refinement, and kingly authority (Ge 41:42).

The focus of Tabernacle worship was organized along the longitudinal axis, which suggested a hierarchical arrangement finishing ultimately at the Holy of Holies.⁹ The bronze altar stood at the entrance, the cleansing basin between the altar and tent, then the Holy Place, and finally, the Holy of Holies where the Lord himself dwelt. (Cf. ILLUSTRATIONS, Figure 1, p.40). The Tabernacle had several names: house, tent, dwelling, tent of coming together, tent of witness, tent of testimony (Nu 17:6-9). It served as a physical sign of God’s presence among his people. Lutheran theologian and church historian, Paul Kretzmann, comments: “The place of God’s dwelling among His chosen people is finally called ‘sanctuary’ and ‘tabernacle,’ because it was a holy, a sanctified place, separated from common or secular use, dedicated entirely to

⁹ Jeanne Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 7.

Him whose presence in this sanctuary was promised.”¹⁰ For over 400 years this combination of church, slaughterhouse, and open-air kitchen would provide Israel with sensory evidence of their sin and God’s salvation. The Lord was tangibly present with his people at Shiloh (Js 18:1), Bethel, Gibeon (1 Ch 16:39; 21:29; 2 Ch 1:2-6), Nob (1 Sa 21-22), and finally Jerusalem until the Temple was built (2 Sa 6:17; 1 Ch 15:1).

1.1.3 The Temple

King Solomon began building the first Temple (960-587 B.C.) 480 years after the exodus. Like the Tabernacle, Israel’s permanent house of worship was rich in symbolism. Its worship was also organized along the longitudinal axis, giving the worshiper the impression that only through sacrificial atonement and the priestly office could they approach a holy God. “By its symbolism, the sanctuary taught the rule of the Lord over the whole creation and His special headship over Israel.”¹¹ The focus of worship was sacrifice. In the inner courtyard was the brass altar, standing 15 ft. high and 30 ft. wide, making it visible to all, even in the outer courtyard. Not only was this altar the final destination of the worshiper’s offering, but it stood as a symbol to the congregation of the ultimate sacrifice that would be made to atone for sin (He 10).

God himself commissioned the building of his Temple (1 Chr 17:12), but it is interesting to note that Solomon had tremendous freedom to adapt the modern style of architecture for the Temple. He not only conscripted workers from a heathen nation and bought their supplies (1 Ki 5), but he also borrowed their architecture:

The architecture of the temple was borrowed from the art of the peoples with whom the Israelites had relations or with whom they came in contact. Egyptian conceptions are found in the successive courts and in the lofty entrance pylons, Phoenician and Assyrian detail and workmanship is seen in the cedar wood-work, over-laid with metal work, and in the platform of stupendous masonry.¹²

Solomon’s Temple was plundered by the Babylonians at about 598 B.C. (2 Ki 24:13). In 587 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar burned most of Jerusalem, including the Temple (2 Ki 25).

There is very little information about the Second Temple, also known as Zerubbabel’s Temple. It was desecrated by Antiochus the Noble (1 Mac 1), and restored by Judas Maccabeus after the defeat of Lysias (1 Ma 4). Herod the Great eventually disassembled Zerubbabel’s

¹⁰ Paul Kretzmann, *Christian Art in the Place and in the Form of Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 9-10.

¹¹ Edward Engelbrecht, ed. *The Lutheran Study Bible: English Standard Version* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 541.

¹² Kretzman, *Christian Art*, 15.

Temple and replaced it with a new and more brilliant structure that would rival Greek heathen temples (Cf. Figure 2, p.40).¹³ By the time of Jesus' public ministry Herod's Temple was in its forty-sixth year of construction (Jn 2:20), and the final touches would not be completed until 64 A.D. – six years before the Romans razed it (70 A.D.).¹⁴ Herod doubled the size of the Solomon's temple and surrounded the courts with Corinthian columns. Courts were laid out across the grounds at the various heights leading up to the inner court, Holy Place, and Most Holy Place. To the south were the Royal Porch and Gentile Court. Solomon's Colonnade was to the east (Jn 10:23).

Approaching the sanctuary were three separate courts for Jewish women, Jewish men, and the priests, which surrounded the Holy Place. There were also halls and chambers for the Sanhedrin and elders to meet.¹⁵ The sanctuary itself had the same dimensions as Solomon's. A heavy curtain separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, thus separating the priests from the presence of God for every day of the year but one (He 9:1). The entire layout and progression of Herod's Temple instituted a hierarchical arrangement of worship. Only through blood and atonement could the sinner be worthy to stand before a holy God (Ps 24:3). The method of approaching God was yet another symbol of the Messiah to come who would spill his blood so that God's people could stand before him as saints forever (Heb 10).

1.1.4 Synagogue

Jesus often taught publicly in the synagogue, as did the Apostles. These Jewish houses of teaching and prayer were in nearly every large town,¹⁶ so early Christians took advantage of the platform to preach the gospel. If any Old Testament worship space can be compared to the modern church, perhaps the synagogue comes closest: "The synagogue was the most important alternative to the Temple in Israel's experience and was a forerunner of a Christian space for worship."¹⁷

¹³ Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶ "Where there was no Synagogue there was at least a *Proseuche* (Acts 16:13), or meeting-place, under the open sky, after the form of a theatre, generally outside the town, near a river or the sea, for the sake of lustrations. These, as we know from classical writers, were well known to the heathen, and even frequented by them." (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah: New Updated Edition* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1993], 52.)

¹⁷ Anita Stauffer, ed., *Where We Worship: Leader Guide and Process Guides* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 8.

The Greek word συναγωγή literally means gathering place. The ancient synagogue never assumed to be a house of God, but rather a house of gathering around God's Word. Just as the synagogue liturgy was a reflection of the temple liturgy, so the synagogue architecture was but a reflection of the temple structure. There was a special significance of the common architecture employed by synagogues from one city to another. Edersheim comments on the uniformity of the synagogue both in Palestine and across gentile lands in which Jews were exiled:

But to the Jew the synagogue was the bond of union throughout the world. There, on Sabbath and feast days they met to read, from the same Lectionary, the same Scripture-lessons which their brethren read throughout the world, and to say, in the words of the same liturgy, their common prayers, catching echoes of the gorgeous Temple-services in Jerusalem... Here the stranger Jew also would find himself at home: the same arrangements as in his own land, and the well-known services and prayers.¹⁸

Scholars speculate about the the origins of the synagogue, but many agree that it dates back to Babylonian captivity after the destruction of Solomon's Temple. Tradition dictates that Ezra formalized organized synagogue worship. According to mishnaic prescriptions the synagogue was to be constructed in a prominent part of town, such as a high place, or near a brook or spring. They were to be square or rectangle, and their entrances facing Jerusalem, the only place in the Hebrew mind where men could truly worship.¹⁹ The largest ancient synagogue is in Capernaum measuring 385 square feet. Some scholars suppose that ancient synagogues had a balcony for women, but there is no evidence of this. The architecture encouraged the gathering of people, but still illustrated the transcendence of almighty God by separating the housing of the Torah from the general assembly:

The layout of the synagogue was generally sober and simple. Here, too, there were similarities to the temple: the inner space was divided into two parts—the 'holy' and the 'synagogue', and they were separated by a curtain. The 'holy' was situated furthest from the entrance and contained a holy 'ark' or chest in which the scrolls of the Law and other holy books were kept.²⁰

Not all synagogues were somber and simple. Excavations of a well-preserved third century A.D. synagogue in Sardis suggest a beautifully ornamented basilica (Cf. Figure 3, p.41).

¹⁸ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁰ Andreas B. Du Toit, J. de Villiers, I. du Plessis, J. du Rand, B. Lategan, G. Pelsler, J.C. Breytenbach, & J. De Villiers, *The New Testament Milieu*, vol. 2 of *Guide to the New Testament* (London: Orion Publishers, 1998), 1655.

The focal points of the room are the bema, from which the Rabbi spoke, and a permanent shelter for the Torah Shrine. The assembly would sit along the walls of the interior.

1.2 NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP SPACE

1.2.1 Early Christian House Church

Almost nothing as far as “Christian” architecture was built for the first three centuries after Christ.²¹ Christians were far less concerned with securing a building permit to construct a church in downtown Jerusalem than they were concerned about preserving the gospel in the young and persecuted church! We can assume that the Apostles utilized any public forum available to them as Jesus had: synagogues, halls, mountainsides, boats, and the temple courts. However, as they grew unpopular with synagogue leaders and the Roman government, Christians eventually moved to the privacy of homes:

(Jesus’) disciples at that time were still members of the Jewish church, and, with Him, performed the outward works of the cultus. After the day of Pentecost, indeed, the organic connection of the disciples with the Jewish Church was loosened and, in many cases, even severed. They were considered and treated as heretics by the religious leaders of the Jews. So long as they could, they continued to have assemblies in one of the many halls of the temple...It became the custom to meet in the houses of members of the congregation.²²

St. Paul’s ministry illustrates the fact that the gospel became intolerable in public worship space: Every time the Apostle entered a town he went first to the synagogue. After being rejected there he preached in public halls (Ac 19:9), but most often in homes (Ac 18:7; Ro 16:23; 1 Co 16:19; Co 4:15).

The Roman persecutions of Christians during the first three centuries A.D. were somewhat responsible for the Christian house church. Christian graffiti found on catacomb walls suggest that worship went underground literally in some places until 410 A.D.²³ However, the persecutions were rather intermittent. For instance, Serverus (222-235 A.D.) allowed Christians

²¹ “Eusebius and Optatus mention the existence of many churches at Rome and elsewhere at the beginning of the fourth century, but Constantine, in his letter to Eusebius on the building of Christian churches, refers to the small size and the ruin of previously existing buildings. Today, after more than half a century of intensive research through the Mediterranean world, there is nothing whatever to suggest that before the reign of Constantine the Church had made any attempt to develop a monumental architecture of its own.” (Beckwith, *Early Christian Art*, 14.)

²² Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 21.

²³ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

to worship in halls for a monetary price.²⁴ There is very little evidence of what a house church may have looked like because in 304 A.D. Emperor Diocletian destroyed all churches in private homes in the Roman Empire.²⁵

One of the earliest evidences of a Christian house church is the Dura Europos house church. Located near the Euphrates River in eastern Syria, the Dura Europos ruins date back to 235 A.D. The house is famous for its Christian iconography and frescoes (Cf. Figure 4, p.41). Although the house church stressed community in worship, it also held meaningful art and symbol in high regard. Dura Europos illustrates the character of early Christian congregations:

The rooms would hold no more than 50 people. Humble frescoes decorated the walls, illustrating biblical stories. A wealthy member had either donated the building at Dura Europos or allowed the congregation to gather there. Instead of the “public” character most Christians associate with church today, early Christians would have regarded their gatherings as more personal or private.²⁶

By the fourth century many congregations sought to attach historical significance to their worship space. They began establishing churches or chapels on the traditional sites of Jesus’ ministry or a martyr’s tomb. Perhaps historical reminders were an additional comfort that Jesus dwelt among them and suffered for them. They too, like many saints, would suffer for the faith in a very physical way. The house of worship began to take on special significance. Not only was it a place of meeting, but a reserved space with special meaning.²⁷

By their very nature both the synagogue and the house church were less *domus Dei* and more *domus ecclesiae*.²⁸ They both stressed the community that gathered within their walls, but still utilized art and symbols, which connected them to the larger community of believers. The simple architecture and basic art in the early Christian home reminded worshipers that they and countless believers across the world were part of the same body of Christ, worshiping him in

²⁴ “Under the reign of Severus, the fury of the populace was checked; the rigor of ancient laws was, for some time, suspended; and the provincial governors were satisfied with receiving an annual present from the churches within their jurisdiction, as the price or as the reward of their moderation.” (Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. I [London: Penguin Group, 1996], 646.)

²⁵ Frederik van der Meer, *Early Christian Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 54.

²⁶ Engelbrecht, *Lutheran Study Bible*, 1934.

²⁷ Kilde, *Sacred Space*, 6.

²⁸ “Certainly in the New Testament and in the early Christian period, the emphasis was on the community of God’s people. Paul developed the image of the church as a body; he was also accustomed to employ the figures of the temple and a building (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19-20). House of God, building, holy temple - these New Testament terms call to mind the temple of Jerusalem.” (Kevin Seasoltz, “Sacred Space, the Arts and Theology: Some Light from History,” *Worship* 82:6 [Nov 2008]: 519.)

Word and sacrament.²⁹ In the Old Testament the Lord dwelt among his people with fire and power in tabernacles and temples. Now he dwelt among the believers wherever and whenever they gathered around his Word. Corporate worship centered around his dwelling in Word and sacrament. Just as it was in all previous worship spaces God blessed believers as they gathered in his presence. Believers responded by beautifying and proclaiming the gospel through the development of the arts, music, rhetoric, and the liturgy throughout the years. The development of Christian architecture would also blossom rapidly over the next 1600 years.

1.2.2 Basilica: Byzantine Style

As early as the later part of the third century the church fathers began referring to their places of worship as *churches*. Clemens Alexandrinus and Eusebius refer to these worship spaces as *ekklesiae* (“churches”). Tertullian and Hippolytus recognized them as *domus Dei* or *oikos theou* (“House of God”). Cyprian designates them as *kyriakon* (“House of Worship”). There is evidence that by the fourth century Rome had more than 40 churches.³⁰

The exact origins of the basilica church are dubious. Some scholars believe it evolved out of the forensic basilica, others believe it originated from the private basilica or the Roman house. Still others claim it is a unique ecclesiastical creation of its own.³¹ One popular theory is that it developed out of classical dwellings of the time, but with additions and modifications that utilized the space for liturgical worship.

Certainly the most attractive theory of the development of the basilica which could be advanced is that which refers its origin to the private house, and the Apostolic custom of gathering there for worship... We may suppose that the earliest churches were either actually dwelling-houses which had been adapted and perhaps enlarged for Christian worship, or new buildings which preserved both without and within substantially the appearance of the private house... If we must recognize that the scheme of the basilica was prescribed by the necessities of the Christian cultus, we must recognize that the cultus was in turn determined in part by the arrangement of the private house.³²

The difficulty in determining the origins of the basilica is identifying whether Christian worship was public or private by the fourth century A.D. Persecution and tolerance were inconsistent

²⁹ Some of the earliest Christian art (2nd c. A.D.) is found on the walls and ceilings of crypts, such as the tomb of St. Peter in the Vatican. Some pagan art, like the vine of Dionysos, was transformed into the vine of Christ (Jn 15:1-8). Other simple mosaics include allusions to fishing (Mt 4:19), Jonah and the resurrection, and Christ the Good Shepherd. (Beckwith, *Early Christian Art*, 19-26.)

³⁰ Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 23.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Walter Lowrie, *Monuments of the Early Church: A Handbook of Christian Archeology* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), 94-96.

between rulers and regions, therefore worship was never consistently public (forensic basilica) or private (home basilica). Whatever the exact origin, the basilica became the grandfather of church architecture well into the 21st century. Every classical church style that followed – Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic, and Baroque – was birthed from the basilica.³³

The basilica soon was recognized as the universal church building after the Peace of Constantine in 313 A.D., when Christianity was recognized as a legal religion.³⁴ In 323 A.D. Constantine moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium, where he ruled over both church and state. The result was a marrying of church and state, and also a merger of secular architecture and church architecture. The Hagia Sophia in modern-day Istanbul is the ultimate definition of the Byzantine basilica (Cf. Figure 5, p. 41). Dedicated in 360 A.D. the Hagia Sophia evolved from a humble basilica to the ultimate definition of Eastern church architecture by 537 A.D. Gigantic pillars, several imported from the ancient Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, support high vaulting domes. Wide-open spaces make the pilgrim feel small and insignificant amid the ornate decorations, mosaics, gildings, and Christian symbols. No doubt any visitor is awestruck by the building's majesty. He may also wonder what the worship space communicates: the majesty of God or the majesty of the Holy Roman Empire? In the mind of the emperors and architects of the time there was no difference.³⁵

The Byzantine basilica became the norm in the Eastern Orthodox Church by the ninth century. Typically, the churches are square, with a narthex on the west and an apse on the east. The floor plan is in the shape of a Greek cross (“plus sign”). Windows are circular. Exterior

³³ The main features of the early basilica: narthex, nave, and apse, are evident in one way or another in Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic, Baroque, and even 21st c. Neo-Gothic churches.

³⁴ For the entire West and wherever its influence was potent enough, the basilica in its Christian form became the model. It was an edifice eminently suited for the cultus of the Christian religion. The preaching service of the congregation was, in its essential parts, modeled after that of the synagog, and consisted of prayers, Scripture readings, and exposition. It demanded an elevated position for the elder, a reading desk for the lector, a place where the assembly could hear well. In addition to this, the Christian service demanded a table for the Eucharist. All this could be provided for by a division of the church building as had been suggested by St. John, who distinguishes between the *thysiasterion*, or altar, the *naos*, or temple nave, and the *aule he exothen*, the outside hall, Rev. 11, 1. 2. (Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 27.)

³⁵ “The purpose of the new Christian buildings was not simply to house worship rituals but to demonstrate the power of the emperor and of Christianity – in other words, these buildings were informed by clear social, political, and religious agendas. Constantine’s churches were symbols of both religious and imperial power.” (Kilde, *Sacred Space*, 40.)

walls are smooth and plain. Interior walls are lined with iconographic murals and carvings in low relief. The focus of worship is in the center of the floor under a large dome.³⁶

1.2.3 Medieval Romanesque

What Constantine began for Eastern church architecture, Charlemagne (768-814) continued in western Europe. The emperor united Europe under a system of unified religion, schools, and government throughout his courts and monasteries. The result was the Byzantine style adapted regionally by Western architects. From about 1000 to 1200 the Romanesque style matured in various forms depending on region:

The name Romanesque, therefore, does not designate a new art, but it is a continuation, with creative additions, of the early Occidental Christian art of building. And just as the Latin language was obliged to undergo many variations and transformations in the various countries...so also the principle of the ancient Christian basilica was used as a model by the Germanic peoples, especially in France and Germany, varied and transformed to suit the symbolism of their cultus, and transmitted to other countries, wherever their influence reached. It is for this reason that many scholars make subdivisions for the Romanesque or round-arched style.³⁷

The Cluny Abbey in France was a fine example of the Romanesque architecture that influenced churches throughout Europe from the tenth century onward (Cf. Figure 6, p.42).³⁸ The Romanesque building is heavy, thick, square, and symmetrical. Very often castles were built in the same style. The arches are rounded and the windows circular. The floor plan of the Romanesque church is often in the shape of a Roman cross. The laity sits in the nave. The clergy performs the liturgy in the chancel. The “arms” of the cross is called the transept. The transept provides seating for the choir or extra clergy. It may also serve as a side chapel or baptistery. Normandy, England, and France in particular developed the popular Romanesque style, which was the forerunner of Gothic architecture in the twelfth century.

1.2.4 Medieval Gothic

Considered by many as the zenith of church architecture, the Gothic style was the result of the social, political, and religious unrest of the Renaissance. The thirteenth century marked the beginning of Gothic style. Rich patrons supported the arts like never before. Cities thrived on

³⁶ Kim Lovejoy, ed., “The Byzantine Style,” *New York Landmarks Conservancy: Common Bond* (October 1997). Available from <http://www.sacredplaces.org/PSP-InfoClearingHouse/articles/The%20Byzantine%20Style.htm>; Internet; accessed 28 February, 2012.

³⁷ Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 44.

³⁸ Joan Evans, *The Romanesque Architecture of the Order of Cluny* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1938), 3-15.

drawing in pilgrims by the thousands to see the latest architectural wonders in the heart of their town. Freedom of artistic expression blossomed:

The struggle between the old and new methods of building very clearly reflected that of the people for greater freedom of thought and action in the countries in which it took place. The keynote of both was an aspiration after nobler things, and, in architecture, a yearning for religious expression, typified by the pointing upwards of the spires and pinnacles of churches and cathedrals, coincided with the craving of builders for increased lightness and grace of structure.³⁹

Gothic architecture is lighter and more vertical, with sharply pointed details and high pitched roofs, spires, and flying buttresses. A new technique called cross-vaulting supported the walls which were filled with windows. Large arch-pointed windows were grouped in threes or more under the arches allowing colored light to fill the nave. A rose window often took up the western wall above the entrance. Whereas the windows in early basilicas were small and clear, the advancement in technology during the Renaissance allowed artists to cover entire walls with stained glass. During the Byzantine and Romanesque periods the more elaborate windows were colored with mostly red and blue glass in a general mosaic style. During the Gothic era artists used more colors – including yellow and green – to create intricate scenes, portraits of saints and martyrs, and Christian symbols that would illuminate the worship space.⁴⁰

The floor plan was also in the shape of a Roman cross. Art saturated the worship space. On the outside gargoyles climbed the stone walls. Stone saints stood in niches. On the inside murals lined the empty wall space, a statue filled every corner. The Gothic cathedral was the religious and cultural center of town. Notre Dame, Westminster Abbey, and the Cologne Cathedral are timeless expressions of Gothic architecture (Cf. Figure 7, p.42). The secular and religious power of the papacy and its influence on the arts during the Renaissance had no little influence on the majestic architecture of the Gothic period. That power, however, would be challenged by the Reformation. So too, would the liturgy and the arts.

1.3 LUTHERAN REFORMATION

1.3.1 Luther's Reformation and Iconoclasm

The sixteenth century Lutheran Reformation was a doctrinal reform. The papacy had exerted its power over and above God's Word in the doctrine of justification. The result was corruption throughout doctrine and worship. Man became his own savior, or at least he helped

³⁹ N. D'Anvers, *Architecture* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack Book Publishers, 1914), 60-61.

⁴⁰ For a full discussion on the development of stained glass windows, see Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 114-116.

his Savior along in the work of salvation. Human works paired with Jesus' atoning sacrifice became the formula for salvation. On the streets this translated into the selling and buying of indulgences. In church this meant that a priest would re-sacrifice Christ's body over and over again in the Eucharist to free a loved-one's soul from torment. The clergy were to blame for most of the laxity in worship. The worship service was not in the vernacular. Not only did language cause a barrier for the worshiper, but the physical structure of the room's layout could easily hinder a visual connection to the means of grace. Priests behind rood screens performed the Eucharist. Very often the layperson would come to church not to participate in worship, but to pray, meditate at a statue, and have private devotion in the pews or side chapel. The papacy had mastered the "mystery" of the sacrament in worship – but not in a scriptural sense. The mystery left the laity wondering what actually went on in worship!⁴¹

As part of his doctrinal reformation, Martin Luther set about to educate the laity about the truth of the Bible first in the home, and also in worship. While in exile he began to translate the New Testament into German at the Wartburg in 1521. In 1529 he published the Small Catechism for widespread use in homes. One of the great achievements of the Reformation was the worship reform. In Luther's "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (1520) he detailed the abuses of the clergy especially in the mass.⁴²

Luther's suggestion was not to throw away the liturgy, but to revise it. The result was his *Formula Missae* (1523), a revision of the Latin Mass in the vernacular. This much was certain in Luther's worship reforms: let the Gospel predominate and let the people participate.⁴³ Luther's doctrinal and worship reforms made an impact on church art and architecture. First, it unintentionally caused a destruction of art. In an attempt to throw away everything "Catholic"

⁴¹ "It is not only the people who greatly misuse and desecrate the holy day who sin against this (3rd) commandment...But even that other crowd (that goes to church) sins. They listen to God's Word like it was any other trifle and only come to preaching because of custom. They go away again, and at the end of the year they know as little of God's Word as at the beginning. Up to this point the opinion prevailed that you had properly hallowed Sunday when you had heard a Mass or the Gospel read. But no one cared for God's Word, and no one taught it. Now that we have God's Word, we fail to correct the abuse. We allow ourselves to be preached to and admonished, but we do not listen seriously and carefully. *Large Catechism* I:96-97 (McCain, *Concordia*, 369.)

⁴² 1) Withholding the cup from the laity, 2) Transubstantiation, 3) Re-sacrifice in the mass

⁴³ "I also wish that we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during mass, immediately after the gradual and also after the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. For who doubts that originally all the people sang these which now only the choir sings or responds to while the bishop is consecrating?...But poets are wanting among us, or not yet known, who could compose evangelical and spiritual songs, as Paul calls them...I mention this to encourage any German poets to compose evangelical hymns for us." (Robert Ross, "Ein Feste Burg: Luther's Hymn and Bach's Cantata," *Journal of Church Music* 25:8 (October 1983).

Andreas Carlstadt encouraged the removal of all religious art. The resulting movement became known as iconoclasm. In 1522 Carlstadt roused the mobs to tear down ecclesiastical statues, altars, and works of art, claiming that they broke the Decalog's command against making graven images.⁴⁴ Carlstadt's famous *Bildersturm* was a precursor to the worship space endorsed by Zwingli and Calvin that minimized not only the sacraments, but much art and symbol associated with them.⁴⁵

Luther's view of art in the church changed as the Reformation developed. At times he was cautious about the use of art in worship space, but by the end of his life he certainly held a high view of the arts.⁴⁶ He admitted that the large Gothic cathedral was not ideal for preaching, but he never endorsed iconoclasm. Commenting on the Gothic cathedral Luther states:

They are unusual buildings and not arranged for the understanding of sermons. Medium-sized churches with low vaultings are the best for the preachers and the audience, because the purpose of churches is not the loud singing (Bruellen and Schreien) of the choir-members, but the Word of God and its preaching. St. Peter's of Rome, the churches of Cologne and Ulm, are very large and unsuitable.⁴⁷

This never stopped Luther from preaching in such churches, as he often did. Unlike Carlstadt, Zwingli and Calvin, when it came to architectural and artistic change Luther had a heart for the laity who knew no other setting for worship than the Gothic church. If extreme change in adiaphora would shake their faith, then why attempt it? Plus, Luther encouraged the arts, and

⁴⁴ In the eyes of a great many of those influenced by the reform, religious images clearly had come to be seen as inducements to idolatry and superstition. This was true not only of theologians such as Karlstadt, Zwingli, Bucer, and Oecolampadius, but also of many of the laity, as evidenced by the 1525 petition of the Strasbourg burghers. In a matter such as this, where men's eternal salvation was believed to be at stake, one simply could not afford to compromise." (Carl Christensen, *Art and the Reformation in Germany* [Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1979], 103.)

⁴⁵ Calvin: "If the papists have any shame, let them no longer use this subterfuge, that images are the books of the illiterate; which is so clearly refuted by numerous testimonies from Scriptures...But even then, we will reply, that this is not the method to be adopted in sacred places for the instruction of the faithful...Of what use, then, were the erection in churches of so many crosses of wood and stone, silver and gold, if this doctrine (Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins) were faithfully and honestly preached...From this one doctrine the people would learn more than from a thousand crosses of wood and stone. As for crosses of gold and silver, it may be true that the avaricious give their eyes and minds to them more eagerly than to any heavenly instructor." (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Allen, trans., 7th Ed. Vol. 1. [Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936], 121-122.)

⁴⁶ "The story of Luther's views on religious imagery is much more complex; a considerable evolution also is to be observed in the development of his mature position. He moved from an originally critical, even somewhat negative, evaluation of church art to an ultimately rather positive one – finally providing an endorsement that laid the theological foundation for the creation of an important tradition of Protestant religious art." (Christensen, *Art and the Reformation*, 42.)

⁴⁷ Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 74,76.

wished to see faithful believers pursue them with vigor.⁴⁸ Therefore, Luther's architectural reform was rather conservative. He supported the arts, and had there been a need for new and better ecclesiastical art and architecture, he may have supported it.

1.3.2 Post-Reformation Lutheran Architecture

The first church built by Lutherans was in the village of Torgau. This large central space was surrounded by balconies with the pulpit, altar, and baptismal font near the center of the room, making it possible for the entire congregation to hear, see, and participate in the liturgy. Luther preached the dedicatory sermon for the new church October 5, 1544:

My dear friends we are now to bless and consecrate this new house to our Lord Jesus Christ, that the purpose of this new house may be such that nothing else may ever happen in it except that the dear Lord himself may speak to us through his Holy Word and we in turn may respond to him through prayer and hymns of praise.⁴⁹

The centralization of the pulpit, altar, and baptismal font was the signature of Lutheran architecture during and after the Reformation. The Castle Church and City Church of Wittenberg demonstrated some of these traits. As a church that stressed the preaching of the Word the Lutherans moved the pulpit from the chancel to the center of the church, and made seating reversible so that people could hear and see the preacher better.⁵⁰

In Germany the trend continued to place the font, altar, pulpit, and organ together as close as possible.⁵¹ The result was the pulpit-altar, which came to be the single greatest Lutheran contribution to church architecture. Not only was it a piece of art, but the pulpit-altar was a conscious doctrinal statement about Lutheran worship:

Perhaps the most emphatic expression of this emphasis on the means of grace was the development of the pulpit altar, called in German, Der Kanzelaltar. Many scholars of church architecture consider the pulpit-altar to be the most distinctive and significant contribution of the Lutheran church to the history of church architecture. In the pulpit-altar the structure of the architectural representations of the means is literally built out of the same substance, the pulpit rising up above the altar; the altar and the font standing before the pulpit so that all may plainly see that what happens in the assembly of God's people is the proclamation of God's Word and the administration of the Sacraments

⁴⁸ "Nor am I of the opinion that the gospel should destroy and blight all the arts, as some of the pseudo-religious claim. But I would like to see all the arts, especially music, used in the service of Him who gave and made them." (Martin Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns*, vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Ulrich Leupold [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965], 316.)

⁴⁹ Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 157.

⁵⁰ Yates, *Sacred Space*, 31.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

which God has established as his means of grace. For decades and centuries following the Reformation pulpits filled Lutheran churches across the world.⁵²

1.3.3 The Frauenkirche

The Lutheran church building evolved during the era known as Baroque (1600-1800). This era saw another modification of the basilica, but instead of employing new architectural ideas, this period is infamous for arbitrary decoration. The layout of churches often returned to a central focus. The room was again horizontal with a dome and flat paneled ceiling above. Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian columns were used at the preference of the architect. Some critics note this period as a decline in architecture: “All the principles of construction are sacrificed for the sake of pictorial effect; columns and other architectural parts are not treated according to their structural purpose, but merely as decorative members, and all demands of proportion are coolly ignored.”⁵³ The innovative, classic Gothic cathedral with strong vertical lines was compromised for the sake of frivolous foliage, shells, snails, garland, fruit, flowers, and animals made out of every kind of material. In an attempt to combat Protestantism and reaffirm its power and prominence in society the Catholic Church commissioned architects and artists such as Bernini and Borromini to develop a unique style during the High Baroque Era (1600-1700).⁵⁴ The Late Baroque Era saw the apex of decorative style called Rococo (1700-1775).

Between 1726 and 1743 the Lutherans built a signature church that underscored the centralization of the means of grace. Affectionately known as *die Steinerne Glocke* (“Stone Bell”), the Frauenkirche in Dresden, Germany, was the Lutheran answer to St. Peter’s Basilica, Rome. The city leaders of Dresden commissioned George Bähr to construct the church to embody Lutheran doctrine. The church was in the shape of an octagon – the symbol of Christ’s resurrection and Holy Baptism (Cf. Figure 8, p.43). Beneath the 12,000-ton sandstone dome stood the pulpit, baptismal font, altar, and organ in a prominent position (Cf. Figure 9, p.43). Worshipers surrounded the extravagant pulpit-altar from the ground floor to the seventh balcony. The building stood as a confessional statement in stone. Historian Matthias Grötschel says, “The Stone Bell was the most important example of Protestant church architecture in the world. It was

⁵² Laurence White, *To the Glory of God and the Salvation of Man*, DVD-ROM (Adam White Productions, 2001).

⁵³ Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 80.

⁵⁴ “In the context of the Council of Trent, the church also began to rethink its earlier embrace of Greco-Roman classicism... Striving to buttress its authority during a period in which many were calling for reform, the church looked to the spaces of the early Christians as a means of historicizing its legitimacy through association with those earlier practices.” (Kilde, *Sacred Space*, 100-101.)

Martin Luther's *Mighty Fortress* in Saxon sandstone, the *St. Peter's Basilica* of the Reformation.⁵⁵

The Frauenkirche dominated the Dresden skyline for over 200 years until the city was bombed on February 13, 1945. The Stone Bell withheld two days of allied forces' bombing before collapsing on February 15. In the late 1980s there began an effort to rebuild the Frauenkirche. The remnant of its original Saxon sandstone was collected and cataloged so that as much of the original structure could be restored. Finally, by the fall of 2005 the church was completely rebuilt to nearly the same specifications and size of its original construction.⁵⁶

1.4 AMERICAN CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

1.4.1 The Wren-Gibbs and Meeting House

The earliest churches within the borders of the United States were Roman Catholic adobe mission chapels near Santa Fe, NM. These were established soon after Coronado discovered the territory in 1542.⁵⁷ In the early seventeenth century the Anglican explorers led by Captain John Smith built homely log churches after initially worshiping in tents. When the Puritans arrived several years later in Plymouth they worshiped in a meetinghouse. This simple, unadorned style of architecture was adapted from a popular architecture called the "Wren-Gibbs church", named after two eighteenth century English architects: Sir Christopher Wren and James Gibbs.⁵⁸

The Wren-Gibbs style varies from tall churches in the heart of a city to common meetinghouses in the countryside (Cf. Figure 10, p.44). They generally are as wide as they are long. Unlike the extravagant stain-glass windows featured in Gothic cathedrals, the Wren-Gibbs style has clear, unadorned glass that allows natural light to flood the worship space. The buildings have good acoustics for speaking. The Wren-Gibbs reflects the doctrine and liturgy of the Puritans who emphasized the preaching of the Word but deemphasized Baptism and the Supper: "Unlike the English medieval liturgy, which emphasized ceremony and mystery, the

⁵⁵ White, *To the Glory of God*, DVD.

⁵⁶ For full coverage of the Frauenkirche's reconstruction visit <http://www.frauenkirche-dresden.de/wiederaufbau+M5d637b1e38d.html> (Accessed February 25, 2012).

⁵⁷ "After Coronado and his famous band of explorers had opened up the territory in 1542, the priests followed. In the early years of the seventeenth century, they built quite a number of chapels in that section of the country" (Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 89).

⁵⁸ Christopher Jenks, ed., "American Religion Buildings: Wren-Gibbs." *New York Landmarks Conservancy Common Bond* (December, 1994) Available at <http://www.sacredplaces.org/PSPIInfoClearingHouse/articles/American%20Religion%20Buildings.htm>; Internet; accessed 28 February, 2012..

new liturgy emphasized the spoken word...Ritual was reduced to a minimum so as not to detract from the spoken word.”⁵⁹

The Wren-Gibbs became popular among American Protestants because it separated them from traditional Roman Catholic architecture. It was also affordable.

Most important, however, as the Wren-Gibbs church had initially developed in response to the need to build a large number of churches economically in London after the Great Fire, it also suited the needs of a land that was being newly and quickly settled by Europeans. Few congregations in the American colonies or the new Republic could afford to build churches as large as those erected in prosperous cities. Moreover, rural builders generally were not as sophisticated as their urban counterparts. The Wren-Gibbs scheme, however, was easily reproducible even in small communities.⁶⁰

The meetinghouse church remained popular especially along the East coast until the Gothic revival took hold of the country by 1850.

1.4.2 The Gothic Revival

After decades of developing the English style of church, American architects returned to the Gothic style from 1830-1940. The Neo-Gothic revival began in Europe and England before coming to America. The style initially saw an amateur return to medieval art. Architects merely copied outward forms of Gothic art, but didn't capture the true form of Gothic architecture.⁶¹ The leading architects of the Neo-Gothic such as Ralph Cram (1863-1942) believed “that Gothic style had not exhausted itself, but had been prematurely cut off by the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.”⁶² Architect James Gallier noted the change from the Wren-Gibbs meetinghouse style to the Neo-Gothic in an 1836 *North American Review* article:

This (Puritanical) spirit is still a strong element in the New England character, but it is much modified and softened...Meantime, the Grecian and Gothic styles, neither of which is discoverable in the earlier architecture of the country, are beginning to appear in every village.⁶³

⁵⁹ Jenks, *Wren-Gibbs*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 95.

⁶² Kim Lovejoy, “American Religious Buildings: The Late Gothic Revival,” *New York Landmarks Conservancy Common Bond*, 12:1 (June, 1998). Available from <http://www.sacredplaces.org/PSP-InfoClearingHouse/articles/American%20Religious%20Building2.htm>. accessed 28 February, 2012.

⁶³ James Gallier, “American Architecture, Art. III: The American Builder’s General Price Book and Estimator; Deduced from Extensive Experience in the Art of Building,” *North American Review* 43:93 (October, 1836): 359, accessed February 25, 2012, <http://digital.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=nora;cc=nora;rgn=full%20text;idno=nora0043-2;didno=nora0043-2;view=image;seq=0362;node=nora0043-2%3A4>.

The Gothic revival that swept across the East coast finally reached the Midwest by the late-19th century. Many Midwest Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches established during this time built in the Neo-Gothic style:

Apparently the 1870's were the high years of Victorian Gothic, as many buildings of this decade show very similar characteristics...As Episcopal churches reflected essentially English antecedents, German and other national influences were equally evident in the work of other denominations, especially the Lutheran and Roman Catholic. A rather austere variation of German Gothic was developed in Wisconsin, particularly in rural areas. The work was generally that of country masons and carpenters whose knowledge of Gothic architecture was limited, but who invariably were excellent craftsmen with a fine appreciation for the material they were handling.⁶⁴

By the beginning of the 20th century American church architecture was very diverse. Reformed churches generally kept the square meetinghouse style with low roofs and clear glass. Unitarians, Universalists, and Christian Scientists developed a style called Renaissance temple. Liturgical churches such as Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians generally maintained the Neo-Gothic well into the twentieth century.

PART 2. MODERN DEVELOPMENTS IN WORSHIP SPACE

2.1 VATICAN II AND LITURGICAL REFORM

Protestant church leaders from around the world were invited to observe the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council from October 11, 1962 to December 8, 1965.⁶⁵ The results of the meetings would have an impact on almost all church bodies in one way or another. Pope John XXIII had called the twenty-first Ecumenical Council into action to address the political, social, economic, and modern challenges that faced the Roman Catholic Church. One of the main issues was the revision of the liturgy – particularly encouraging the laity's involvement in worship.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Richard Perrin, "Pointed Arches and Buttressed Walls: Gothic Stylistic in Wisconsin Architecture," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 47:3 (April, 1964): 244.

⁶⁵ "The meetings were held in the central nave of St. Peter's basilica. Despite the huge proportions of that space (2,500 square meters), it was barely sufficient to hold all the attendees. The nave was outfitted to provide 2,905 spaces: 102 for cardinals, 7 for patriarchs, 26 for the General Secretariat of the council, 2,440 for the bishops and archbishops, 200 for the periti, and 130 for observers and guests from the other churches. The observers and guests sat in a tribune reserved especially for them, right under the statue of St. Longinus, nearer to the presiders' table than even the cardinals—the best seats in the house." (John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008], 23.)

⁶⁶ "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious and active participation in the liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people...is their right and duty by reason of their baptism." (Vatican, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, under "II. The Promotion of Liturgical Instruction and Active

2.1.1 *Sacrosanctum Consilium*

The document that was adopted concerning liturgical reforms was the *Sacrosanctum Consilium* (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*), which had an almost immediate affect on the lives of Catholics. It allowed Catholic parishes to celebrate the Mass in the vernacular and gave permission to artists, musicians, and architects to enhance worship in every way to meet the demands of twentieth century liturgical worship. Catholic laity began seeing drastic changes in architecture. Instead of copying the long, narrow, Gothic, two-room church, many architects interpreted *Sacrosanctum Consilium* as an encouragement to construct more worshiper-friendly designs. In place of the two-room church design where a rood screen separated the clergy in the chancel from the laity in the nave, architects began building one-room churches.

The effects of *Sacrosanctum Consilium* dripped over into Protestant architecture as well. Roman Catholic bishop and liturgical design consultant, Dr. Richard Vosko, explains the impact of Vatican II on other denominations:

This reformation (liturgical reform of Vatican II) would also reach into the worship patterns of some other Christian religions. Shared resources helped to distinguish what different religions historically held in common and what would foster further contemporary collaboration... One facet of religious life that would be affected by these ecumenical collaborations was the environment for worship... The Roman Catholic Vatican II Council generated enthusiasm for liturgical reforms not only in its own ranks but also in many other Christian denominations.⁶⁷

For the forty plus years after *Sacrosanctum Consilium* churches of all denominations have seen changes in architecture. The main change for churches was from the Neo-Gothic or “traditional” church building to a worship space devoid of typical “churchy” layout, art and symbols. The mystery and awe of a transcendent God that was once exemplified in high steeples and soaring arches was replaced by the contemplative aura of open and flexible space. Simple structures that stressed the community of saints gathered around Word and sacrament were the priority of many Protestant and Catholic church architects of the late twentieth century.

In 1978 the Bishops Committee of the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops gave similar guidelines for churches in a document titled *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* (EACW). Since EACW many influential Roman Catholic architects such as

Participation, 14,” http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html [accessed February 25, 2012]].

⁶⁷Richard Vosko, “Houses of Worship: Emerging Trends,” *Faith & Form* 40 (October 2007), 7.

Vosko have carried on the idea of the modern “centrum” worship space. They view pre-Vatican II church buildings as archaic expressions of a foreign liturgy. Instead of building iconic Gothic cathedrals from an ancient era, Catholic cathedrals, he argues, should reflect the modern diocese they serve.⁶⁸

Both supporters and critics of such new architecture admit that over the past 40 years churches are being built less as *houses of God* and more as *houses where God's people gather*. The trend affects confessional Lutheranism as well. As a liturgical body that strives to remain relevant in the world, the modern Lutheran church must take into account the importance of worship space: *Domus Dei* or *Domus Ecclesiae*? What has the worship space historically communicated? What should it communicate in the present? How does it enhance worship? What is its purpose in the community?

2.1.2 Edward Sövik's *Architecture for Worship*

Even before Pope John XXIII called together Vatican II there had been a significant shift especially in Protestant church design. Already before 1960 Lutheran churches were making worship space more modern by stretching out tiny chancels to the size of the nave and making the sanctuary a wide, one room structure. Stained glass was found in fewer churches as clear glass became increasingly popular. Also, traditional decoration began to disappear in many Lutheran churches.⁶⁹ Arlis J. Ehlen writes in a *Concordia Theological Monthly* 1957 report on over 70 modern Lutheran churches: “There appears to be a widespread dearth of surface ornamentation in modern Lutheran churches. The once commonly used Christian symbols and figures are not generally seen in the new churches... The only universally used emblem is the cross; and because of the lack of other symbols this one is sometimes definitely overused.”⁷⁰ Lutheran churches may have been following a Protestant trend that started in the mid-century. Whether the Catholic Church recognized this architectural trend (among many developing ecclesiastical trends) before 1962 and was merely acknowledging the change in Vatican II cannot be proven, but is likely.

⁶⁸ Karen Dietlein, “What's a cathedral anyway?” *The Evangelist* - official publication of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany (November 2002), accessed February 26, 2012, <http://www.evangelist.org/main.asp?Search=1&ArticleID=18439&SectionID=3&SubSectionID=28&S=1>

⁶⁹ Arlis Ehlen, “Contemporary Church Architecture in the Lutheran Church of America,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 28:3, (1957): 164.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

In 1973 Lutheran architect Edward Sövik published *Architecture for Worship*. He called for the dismantling of traditional worship space, and replacing it with a “centrum” design that fosters a feeling of community in worship while being conducive to the liturgy.⁷¹ According to Sövik, the centrum embodied the worship space of the early Christian home. In his *Notes on Sacred Space* he argued that the Lutherans should adopt the theory behind the Puritan meeting-house: “The Puritan meetinghouses very consciously dissolved the barrier between sacred and secular, and demonstrated...that it is beauty, authenticity, and hospitality, not a particular style, that are the metaphors of the sacred.”⁷²

He argued that as church architecture developed, the traditional design was not conducive to the liturgy. Rather, the ideal worship space is found in secular buildings because they do not distract from the Word. They are less contextual, therefore allow worshipers to focus on what happens in worship. A simplified, flexible space focused on community is more historically accurate and more conducive to liturgical worship.⁷³

Sövik discouraged building “Houses of God”. Worship space should encourage gathering, not stress the transcendence of God through traditional Christian art and architecture. The transcendence of God is stressed in the contemplative non-space, carefully placed furnishings, and simple art. The church building should be essentially a hospitable house for worshipers. Similar to the Puritan meetinghouse Sövik saw the simple yet inviting Japanese teahouse as a prototype for a church layout.⁷⁴ He made specific suggestions as to how this should happen. On the outside the church should fit in with the neighborhood’s architecture.⁷⁵

⁷¹ “When people gather in an open space to listen to a soap-box orator, the shape of the assembly is likely to fall into a mass that is rough circular, with the speaker at one point on the edge or slightly inside the edge. Since speaking and reading are parts of the liturgy, this provides one clue to a reasonable shape. When people gather in activities of interchange and interaction, the normal shape is likewise a circle, but if there is a moderator or presider, the shape is likely to be more like a half-circle or gathering at a hearth. For a meal we like to think of a round table.” (Edward Sövik, *Architecture for Worship*, [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973], 73.)

⁷² Edward Sövik, “Notes on Sacred Space,” *The Christian Century*, 99:11, (March 1982), 365-366.

⁷³ “And it is clear that places other than dedicated church buildings can be perceived as good places to assemble for worship. The early Christians recognized this fact when they were content to worship in homes...and later...secular basilicas.” (Sövik, “Notes,” 365.)

⁷⁴ “The most interesting prototype may be that of the Japanese tea house. To think of such a place as an analog for a place of Christian worship may be surprising; to those who know the tea ceremony and its environment the analogy will be clear. The tea ceremony is at best a ritual aimed at human interaction at the most profound level of openness and seriousness. It must be enough to say here that the places prepared for these events are beautiful and simple, elegant and earthy, asymmetric, inventive, and altogether gracious.” (Sövik, *Architecture*, 76-77.)

⁷⁵ Sövik suggested a specific style called the Miesian style: “The Miesian posture is obviously accepted by builders of every sort of commercial and industrial building. In varying degrees it must be seen as appropriate to churches who build also. And it is apparent that the forms and technologies which allow for change in ‘secular’ architecture

Essentially it should communicate “nothing special here.” The room should be horizontal to promote community versus hierarchy. Windows should be clear. Altar rails and domineering pulpits should be eliminated because they suggest hierarchy and discourage community. The ambo (slab of wood) is used for preaching and lessons. Pews should be replaced with chairs so the room can be used for other non-worship functions. The familiar Roman cross should be replaced by the ancient Greek cross (“plus sign”) because it is the ancient Christian symbol. The baptismal font should be placed at entrance of room.

When evaluating Sövik’s reforms, it is true that he is returning to the past to construct modern liturgical space. However, it could be argued that the centrum design is less a return to the early Christian house church, and more a return to the Byzantine and many Romanesque layouts where the liturgy took place in the middle of the room. As far as Sövik’s particular style and ornamentation of the room (clear glass, open space, clean lines, natural materials, and minimalist art), it could be argued that these are a product of 19th century style rather than the necessity of a liturgical church. Architect Mark Torgerson recognized the backdrop of Sövik’s education and influence:

A particular shift in architectural design occurred in the nineteenth century which set the stage for Sövik and his ‘non-church,’ a shift from Romantic expressions of design toward those dominated by rationalistic thinking. The Chicago school of architecture, to whom Louis Sullivan and the dictum ‘form follows function’ belong, emphasized a move away from nineteenth-century Romantic expressions (e.g., Gothic and Baroque).⁷⁶

Sövik himself often cites Frank Lloyd Wright, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier – three of the leading 20th century modernist architects – throughout his works as fine examples of architects to imitate in sacred architecture.⁷⁷ The fact that Sövik recommends a modernist style for a church is not surprising (after all, it could be argued that much sacred architecture was once secular⁷⁸), but what seems uncomfortable is his assumption that the modernist style best reflects the liturgical spirit of the early church. As discussed above, it is difficult to say exactly what the early liturgy looked like, let alone where and how churches assembled. Sövik argues that his architecture and art are birthed out of the house church. Perhaps

can be welcomed into the structures of the church and used most effectively if churchmen will abandon their commitment to ‘ecclesiastical’ details and motifs.” (Sövik, *Architecture*, 54-55.)

⁷⁶ Mark Torgerson, “An Architect’s Response to Liturgical Reform: Edward A. Sövik and his ‘Non-Church’ Design,” *Worship* 71:1 (1997): 20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Solomon’s Temple and Basilica* above

the stronger argument is that Sövik is a product of his age, and the modernist style *can* accommodate the liturgy well.⁷⁹ The only reason it is important to note Sövik's modernist influence is not because it cannot work well for the liturgy, but because, like any style, it risks going out of style.

2.2 TRADITIONALIST REACTION

2.2.1 Michael Rose's *Ugly as Sin*

Sövik's concept of returning to the "house church" by minimizing sacred art and architecture has raised speculation from traditionalists. Since traditional church architecture has disappeared over the past 40 years, there has been a significant loss of symbolic meaning in church buildings. That is the argument of Michael Rose in his book *Ugly as Sin*. Rose defends the preservation of traditional architecture for the benefit of the worshiper. He writes from the perspective of a pilgrim going to church on Sunday morning. The pilgrim drives to church. The steeple stands above the skyline, navigating him to worship: "From the time he catches a glimpse of that bell tower, steeple, or dome in the distance to the moment he approaches the altar of God to receive the Holy Sacrament, he is, in the traditional sense, making a pilgrimage."⁸⁰ He walks past the church courtyard, enters through large doors, and gathers himself in the narthex. He is reminded of the beauty of Eden, the gravity of God's Word and sacrament, and the sanctity of what will happen in worship.⁸¹ He walks into the sanctuary and sits in a pew. From one place everyone focuses in a single direction, the chancel, a place set apart where the Word is spoken and the sacraments distributed.⁸² The long, narrow nave is the "ship" of Christians pointed in the direction of their salvation and destination: Word and sacrament. The chancel represents Christ, the head of the body of believers.⁸³ The majesty of pointed arches and rich art in the nave and particularly the chancel gives a glimpse of the glories of heaven.⁸⁴ The choir and organ in the balcony above and behind him sing as from heaven without obstructing the view of the focus of worship in the front.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ For a full discussion about Sövik's modernist influence see Torgerson, "An Architect's Response," 19-41.

⁸⁰ Michael Rose, *Ugly as Sin: Why They Changed Our Churches from Sacred Places to Meeting Spaces and How We Can Change Them Back Again*, (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2001), 32.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 39-43.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 56-60.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 67-70.

Similar to other pre-Vatican II Catholic apologists, Rose is especially defensive of the “House of God” basilica style for a particular doctrinal reason. According to the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist the host is preserved, adored, and housed under the Tabernacle in the church, literally making the building a “house where God dwells.”⁸⁶ Many Lutheran theologians and traditional architects may lament with Rose about the loss of rich sacred art and symbolism. However, the Lutheran defense for adorning the *domus Dei* with traditional “hierarchical” architecture would be that this is the house where God dwells in the proclamation and administration of Word and sacrament. The building itself becomes an illustration of the kingdom where God dwells now in believers’ hearts and forever in heaven. The sacred space is reserved, as Luther preached for the dedication at Torgau, so as “nothing else may ever happen in it except that the dear Lord himself may speak to us through his Holy Word and we in turn may respond to him through prayer and hymns of praise.”⁸⁷

2.2.2 Paul Kretzmann’s *Christian Art*

Although he never lived through the 20th century liturgical reforms, Lutheran theologian and church historian, Paul Kretzmann, saw the traditional Gothic style as very fitting for the Lutheran theology and liturgy. In *Christian Art* Kretzmann notes the biblical doctrine of the Lutheran church is unique in the secular world. Justification by faith alone is so unworldly, in fact, that it demands a building that is unworldly – in other words, it should stand out as a church building in the community: “Moreover, to be true, the church must be churchly. A clubhouse, at best, stands for worldly comfort and entertainment; while the church, however comfortable and joyous its worshipers may be, always represents an order of ideas that transcends all human conditions.”⁸⁸

Kretzmann recognizes specific weaknesses of certain periods of church architecture which emphasized art to a degree that distracted from worship.⁸⁹ But in a world where buildings make a statement, Kretzmann argues that a strong Gothic church building with Christian symbols

⁸⁶ Rose, *Ugly as Sin*, 84-95.

⁸⁷ Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 157.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁸⁹ The extravagant Baroque and Rococo style (Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 130), the dark corners of cathedrals (131), some naves are too long to be practical for worship (158).

communicates exactly the church's purpose in the community.⁹⁰ The three purposes of the church building are to preach, administer sacraments, and provide a place for prayer. The traditional two-room church embodies the two-way action of the liturgy:

The Lutheran Church has retained the division of its church edifices into nave and apse, not in order to make a distinction between clergy and laity, as in the Roman Catholic Church, but in order to give expression to the division of the liturgy in the sacrificial and sacramental parts of the service. Everything that pertains to the office of redemption, the reading of the Scripture lessons, the pronouncing of the benediction, the preaching of the Gospel, the administration of the Sacraments, takes place in the apse; all acts of a sacrificial nature, prayer and singing of the congregation and choir, confession of sins and of the Creed, are performed by and with the assembled congregation in the nave.⁹¹

He goes on to argue that the Neo-Gothic not only embodies the Lutheran liturgy the best because of its rich symbolism, but that it is a historical reminder of what the Lutheran Reformation was.

In his book Kretzmann shares much of the same sentiment as Professor Victor Schultze:

The Lutheran (*evangelische*) Church is reformation, not revolution. This means not destruction, but renovation of the medieval Church. This goes hand in hand with the Protestant Lutheran reformation process. The Lutheran Church holds on to the Church's tradition in doctrine and practice so far as they do not contradict Scriptures... Therefore the leaders of the Reformation had no problems using the existing houses of God (*Gotteshäuser*). This then is why the Lutheran Church holds to this tradition. We will have to wait and see whether church architecture is ever developed into a new, more perfect culture or style, which more adequately expresses Lutheranism. At the present time we cannot predict and have no cause to insist on it. In no situation however should the Christian house of God be handed over to the artistic whims of an architect who is experimenting. Tradition extends its claim naturally not only by its style, but down to the last detail of the room's arrangement and furnishings.⁹²

It is interesting to note that although these men preferred traditional Neo-Gothic architecture as the best available church style, they were not dogmatic about their approach. Both write clearly that if a better, more perfect expression for the worship environment came along, they would gladly concede. It would be interesting to hear their opinions on the matter after Vatican II. Nonetheless, they raise valuable questions for Lutheran congregations today: What has been valuable and useful to the Church for centuries? What expressions no longer communicate what they originally did? How could a new structure or style do better? Accordingly, the necessity for

⁹⁰ "Everything is designed to awaken and to foster a feeling of devotion and reverence." E.g. the buttressed tower represents strength (Ps 46, Mt 16, 18)...the three-door entrance represents mystery of Trinity, (215).

⁹¹ Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 140.

⁹² Viktor Schultze, *Das evangelische Kirchengebäude*, trans. Daniel Laitinen (Leipzig: G. Boehme, 1886), 26.

change must come from a desire to improve the gospel proclamation, not just from the demands of the secular style or the whim of an artist.

PART 3. EXAMINATION OF RECENT WELS WORSHIP SPACE

Whether in a barn, coffee shop, or a Neo-Gothic chapel, when believers come together to worship, God promises to bless them through Word and sacrament (Mt 18:20). But the question remains, how are Lutherans, particularly Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, building in the twenty-first century? God has given his believers freedom to use his gifts of beauty, art, and architecture to enhance and proclaim the gospel. What is wise in one congregation may be unthinkable in another depending on circumstance, history, and surroundings. What may promote the gospel in one situation could hinder it in another. WELS churches are varied in respect to outreach ministry, social setting, finances, and historical considerations. The following case studies examine recently built WELS worship spaces that strive to carry out the gospel proclamation in public worship by carefully considering the space where it happens.

3.1 CHAPEL ARCHITECTURE AT WELS SYNODICAL SCHOOLS

In order to understand the pulse of WELS church worship space in the twenty first century, perhaps it is best to explore where the synod's future leaders are worshipping. During the mid-1990's the synod's school faculties came together to discuss public worship.⁹³ Among the studies of worship life was the question of worship space. There had been opinions that WELS worship space had been less than inspiring over the past several decades. To improve these trends it was suggested that synodical school worship spaces should exemplify excellence in architectural concepts. As a result young people would carry these concepts into ministry.⁹⁴ Within the next 15 years worship space in the synod's leading institution, particularly Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Martin Luther College – would change drastically.

3.1.1 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chapel, Mequon, WI

When constructed in the early nineteenth century the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) chapel began as a fairly plain worship space. It was a small room with no pews, altar,

⁹³ James Tiefel, *The Seminary Chapel* (Mequon, WI: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2005), 4-5.

⁹⁴ “Our students—and our Synod—would receive great benefit if they observed the liturgical principles carried out in buildings that are conducive to these principles. The architectural emphases which students come to appreciate during their school years (e.g., art as gospel proclamation, the symbolism of altar, pulpit, and font, acoustics, etc.) will be carried into the congregations of our synod as these young people become pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and laypeople. This will help overcome the (frankly) bad church building that has occurred and continues to occur in WELS. (Ibid., 5.)

pulpit, musical instruments, or glass windows. Over the years many traditional furnishings and artwork were gradually installed including pulpit, lectern, pews, stained-glass windows and organ in a traditional church layout. However, as the school entered the 21st century its Facilities Committee noted “the chapel no longer reflected the worship practices of most WELS congregations or even the practices of the seminary.”⁹⁵ A report was given to the WLS faculty stating the need for a new chapel on campus,⁹⁶ and by early 2004 an architect and general contractor were chosen for the work.

James Shields of HGA Architects removed the low ceilings and opened up vertical space to allow for better acoustics and give the space a feeling of transcendence. The stained glass windows were replaced with large clear windows to display the unspoilt majesty of God’s nature. The organ was moved to a blank wall allowing three large clear windows that had previously been hidden to allow more natural light into the space. Pews were replaced with handcrafted chairs to allow for flexibility and an arrangement around the elevated platform on which sits the altar and ambo. The linear focus of worship was replaced with the horizontal centrum layout popularized by Edward Sövik years before.

The seminary chapel demonstrates symbolism in simplicity. The space avoids cluttering the room with pieces of art. The imagery is subtler. The live-water baptismal font is a solid square slab of marble at the entrance to remind worshipers of their baptism as they enter. The ambo and altar are not ornate. They are made of light maple wood, offsetting the action of the liturgy from the darker wood used in chairs and the organ case. The altar resembles a butcher’s block, reminding the worshipers of the bloody Old Testament sacrifices and the centrality of Christ’s sacrifice for sin. James Shields: “The piece relies on the beauty of God’s material finished in the simplest way possible for its character, and yet by its dominance reminds us that the presence of God brings power and promise to the Word and sacraments.”⁹⁷

In May 2006 the HGA architectural firm received an American Institute of Architects of Wisconsin Design Award for the chapel: “Jurors praised the design’s detailing, lightness, and simplicity.”⁹⁸ From the outside the chapel is integrated in the medieval Wartburg Castle-style of

⁹⁵ Tiefel, *Chapel*, 6.

⁹⁶ James Tiefel, “On the Philosophy of a Campus Chapel” (paper presented to the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary faculty, Mequon, WI, March, 1999).

⁹⁷ Tiefel, *Chapel*, 10.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

the campus buildings. On the inside it stresses the means of grace and the gathering of worshipers with flexibility, simplicity, and use of natural light and materials.

3.1.2 Chapel of the Christ, New Ulm, MN

The campus family at Martin Luther College (MLC) spent many years worshipping daily in the school's auditorium. The space was useful because it accommodated the nearly 1,000 faculty and students combined. However, the space was less than inspiring as far as uplifting worship. Professor Daniel Balge, who served on the chapel committee that first considered a new worship space, says, "The auditorium was a place that always felt borrowed, frequently felt as though it had been freshly, recently used for things other than worship."⁹⁹

The MLC chapel committee wanted a building with permanence and a space that was set aside for worship. They chose an architect who had built a church before to guarantee that these specifications were met. Campus Pastor Carl Boeder comments on the impression that the campus family wanted their worship facility to give: "We wanted an architectural firm that had experience building a church... You need to work with someone who has done it before. Without that there is not a good feel for what a church should be, what a church should look like."¹⁰⁰ They chose award-winning architect, John Holz, of Plunkett-Ragsich Design.

The chapel was dedicated in April 2010 on the WELS 150th anniversary. Like the seminary chapel the layout is horizontal and the seating is chairs on three sides of an elevated platform. Although the layout is modern, there is an abundance of traditional art and symbolism, such as the use of the octagon. The building is in the general shape of an elongated octagon, calling to mind a particular form of ancient Byzantine architecture and the "eighth day of creation" or "eternal Sabbath".¹⁰¹ Professor Keith Wessel headed the chapel's furnishing committee: "We also have a sacramental axis. If you stand right in middle of the entrance you see the baptismal font, altar, and cross on a short axis. That was done very intentionally. The

⁹⁹ James Enderle and Aaron Goetzinger, *The Chapel: A Documentary on the Chapel of the Christ*, DVD (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, Senior Church History Project, 2010).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ If we go back to Byzantine architecture we see a design that is octagonal. The earliest known example of the octagon as a worship facility has been excavated at Capernaum right on top of St. Peter's house. The tradition was probably very strong. We tried to pick up that design in several ways, the most obvious is the font. But essentially the interior space of the building is an octagon shape. This is the heart of the octagon idea: if you count in Hebrew they count inclusively so Sabbath to Sabbath is not seven days, it is eight days and that eighth day comes to represent the eternal Sabbath. Going from Sabbath to Sabbath. (Keith Wessel, Ibid.)

pulpit is offset, although we did talk for a little while about putting the pulpit in the middle somehow too.”¹⁰²

There is a live-water baptismal font placed in front of the only access to the sanctuary, encouraging worshipers to remember how they first entered God’s invisible church. The artwork in the chancel area is rich in imagery. A large painted crucifix hangs above the altar. The altar is detailed with twelve stones, painted images from Revelation 5, and a wood mosaic of a slain lamb (Re 5:6). A large triptych behind the altar depicts three scenes: the boy Jesus teaching in the Temple, Jesus speaking to the Emmaus disciples, and Jesus teaching Mary and Martha. All scenes are illustrative of the worship life at MLC: teachers and students, male and female alike, sit at Jesus’ feet to hear the gospel.

Music has always been a hallmark in Lutheran worship, and it is celebrated at MLC as well. Dr. Wayne Wagner, Professor of Music, oversaw the installation of MLC’s prized Schantz Organ with architecture in mind: “We did not put the organ behind the altar. It says something about our theology of music in worship and that is that the primary goal of the organ is to support the congregational singing, not to be a recital instrument, although it does that very well.”¹⁰³

The one-room, single level design makes the congregation, musicians, and clergy feel connected around Word and sacrament as it is proclaimed in hymns, responses, lessons, sermons, and sacrament. The raised ambo and altar make the liturgical action visible and elevated, yet not far from reach. The soaring arches and ceiling give transcendence to God’s house of worship. The Chapel of the Christ strives to balance transcendence and community and blend traditional symbols and art with modern relevance. Dr. Wagner continues:

The building design is a mixture of traditional and contemporary elements. That’s a statement in our time that I hope others will see and think. That we recognize the past and realize the contributions, but also that we look to the present and look forward to the future...I would hope that others in the synod would see this as a model that can be portrayed in bricks and stone and wood and art...and an encouragement that no matter what the economic times might be, Christians can do something if their motivation is to give glory to God, to spread his Word through what they do, to encourage fellow Christians.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Enderle and Goetzinger, *The Chapel*.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

3.2 TRENDS IN WELS PARISHES: TWO CASE STUDIES

3.2.1 Good Shepherd Lutheran, Kearney, NE

Many WELS churches are balancing transcendence and community in their worship space while focusing on the means. Good Shepherd Lutheran, Kearney, is located in a heavily church community in south central Nebraska. The parish moved out of its 1980s Worship, Evangelism, Fellowship Unit (WEF) and into its permanent home in 2009. When researching how to design their church, the congregation looked at recent WELS parish building projects in Verona, WI and Sharpsburg, GA. The result was a traditional church with modern alterations.

The brick church has a tall white steeple visible for the whole neighborhood. In a heavily Lutheran and Catholic community it was important to have a presence. Pastor Kurt Shaser comments about the advantages of moving from a WEF into a traditional church, “People in the neighborhood recognize us as the beautiful church on the hill. It is the first step to presenting the gospel. People often do not come to church to hear the Word. Building the church removed the obstacle of people thinking we were a cult. The traditional building structure is taking away an obstacle to the gospel.”¹⁰⁵ On the inside there are pews in the nave, but they are angled toward each other and towards the altar, cross, and font at the center of the chancel. “It is traditional, but we have made it more wide than long and angled the pews a little to give it a community feel...we enlarged the gathering space outside the sanctuary to promote fellowship.”¹⁰⁶

The windows are all clear. Shaser sees an importance of people realizing that they are entering the house of God while remaining at ease: “We want people to come in and say, ‘This is God’s house,’ We also installed clear windows to tell people we have nothing to hide. So many modern churches do not even have windows, and it makes you wonder what happens inside!”¹⁰⁷ Along with giving permanence to the congregation in areas like classrooms and other facilities, the sanctuary solidified the mentality of Good Shepherd’s members who now take ownership in their permanent church.

Some WELS churches have seen immediate and drastic growth after building churches similar to Good Shepherd. Although not drastic, the small Kearney, NE, church has seen more visitors in church and Bible Information Class after building the structure. “Some people say,

¹⁰⁵ Shaser, Kurt. Interview with author via audio/visual-over-internet Protocol (Skype™). Mequon, WI, December 5, 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

‘Build it and they will come!’ That is not entirely true. There is still work to be done. Buildings are not the be all and end all of ministry. Buildings do not save people! But they can help take obstacles away from the gospel,” Shaser concludes.

3.2.2 Victory of the Lamb, Franklin, WI

Not all churches benefit from a traditional structure. Many missions begin as Sunday storefront or home gatherings like the early Christians. Victory of the Lamb, Franklin, WI is representative of a trend of WELS churches that do tremendous outreach by not having a permanent location. The mission began in a soccer complex, “I always told people that if God could start a church (at the soccer complex), then he could start a church anywhere!” Pastor Ben Kuerth says about the early challenges of his church, “The early Christians met in the catacombs, so we do not have it too bad.”¹⁰⁸ Now they rent a local movie theater to hold worship on Sunday mornings. The members spend a total of two hours per Sunday morning setting up and taking down the worship space at the front of the theater. Pastor Kuerth talks about the obvious outreach advantages of rented secular space:

Our philosophy is that we could spend \$60,000 to \$80,000 on a mortgage for a small building in which we barely fit, or we can spend \$20,000 to rent Showtime Cinema on Sunday mornings and hire more staff to do more ministry and outreach. What is more important to us? Doing more ministry or building a building?...Many of these people think churches are there to ask you for your money for their building. The fact that we didn’t have a building resonated with them. Our motto is that the church is not a building, it is the people.¹⁰⁹

Victory has been able to afford a second part-time pastor to focus on spiritual growth and outreach. The Franklin community is full of nominal Lutherans and Catholics who have lost touch with the church over the years or have felt abused by it in some way. Therefore ecclesiastical architecture could hinder their willingness to hear about Jesus. “Some former Catholics or lifelong Lutherans members are not always excited to worship in a theater. But there are many who feel “burned” by a church or are totally unchurched, and they say, “Really? I can go to a theater and be in church?! It is not just young people who like it, but older people appreciate the casual setting.”¹¹⁰ Victory members also feel less intimidated to invite friends to

¹⁰⁸ Kuerth, Ben. Interview with author. Interview by audio/visual-over-internet Protocol (Skype™). Mequon, WI, November 15, 2011.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

“the theater” instead of a church. There are other advantages too: it is a large, comfortable space with no maintenance.

The conveniences come at a price however. First, the acoustics for congregational singing are poor. The seating is linear so there is a loss of community. Bible class, Sunday school, and fellowship contend with set up and tear down before the theater’s morning deadline. There is no place for weekly Bible study or confirmation class. Funerals, weddings, and special services need to be accommodated elsewhere.

We want to stay in rented facilities as long as we continue to reach people there. In the future we need to build, but we do not want to abandon the movie theater because it is an outreach tool. You are itching to get a building up, but then you think, once you get a building up ministry is done, which is not true. We can fall into that trap, and if you focus on the ministry instead of the building, then movie theater can be an excellent worship space for a long time. Look at the book of Acts!¹¹¹

Although the contemporary worship style in a theater is helpful in the Franklin community, there are a few traditional symbols that Kuerth sees as vital to worship space. The altar, cross, pulpit, and baptismal font sit on the stage in a traditional church layout. “We definitely wanted to keep the altar, pulpit, and font in front as symbols. Having the altar and cross in the center of a theater stage seems a little out of place, but that is the way the gospel is: out of place in the world. Worship is God coming to us in his means and we cannot forget that.”¹¹²

Church architecture obviously does not fit the mission strategy of Victory of the Lamb and other churches like it. This makes an interesting point about the use of art in worship. Although it can be used to highlight and proclaim the gospel in one church, it may be detrimental or unappreciated in another. If this is the case, then what is the value of sacred architecture? The mission of a Lutheran church, whether it meets in a cathedral or secular building, remains the same: preach the gospel. If art or architecture diminishes from that goal, then it is of no use. If meeting in a theater opens a stage for the gospel, then thank God! Interestingly, some German Lutheran architects in the early 18th century suggested that the local theaters would be an ideal place for the preaching of the Word.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Kuerth Interview.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Yates, *Sacred Space*, 36.

PART 4. CONCLUSION

During the Old Testament God dwelt with his people and blessed them in worship in a tangible way. The Lord gave specific instructions as to what to build. In the New Testament God continues to dwell among his people in a tangible way when they gather in his name around Word and sacrament. He still blesses them through Word and sacrament. Therefore, worship spaces continue to be houses where God dwells and houses where people gather. Today Lutheran churches reflect this theology of worship in their buildings. Some trends are identifiable. This is evidenced by the removal of pews, the circular rather than linear focus of worship, and, in many churches, the removal of stained glass windows and installation of clear windows to connect worshippers with the outside world.

Whether churches build or not, it is important to understand the history of church buildings. God has given his people many tools for ministry, and the building can be one of them. Finally, before dismantling the traditional church it is wise to understand the reason why churches were built in the first place. During the iconoclastic movement, Luther was especially concerned for those Christians who were reminded of Christ's cross through art and architecture. Architecture and art can preach the gospel!¹¹⁴ Before we disregard centuries of art and architecture it is wise to at least examine what we are doing. WELS artist Nathan Pope: "Before you change, look to the past. If you want to plan something new, look at the old because you are not going to find anything revolutionary new. Style, symbolism can change, but if you do not know the past you will not know where you are going."¹¹⁵

Over the centuries the church has enhanced worship with art. Sometimes the art and architecture overshadowed the gospel completely. Other times it downplayed the power of Word and sacrament deliberately. Where does Lutheran architecture fit in? As usual, in the middle. Lutheran churches recognize the careful attention to how buildings shape people and their attitudes in worship. It is a house where people gather and God dwells. Therefore, churches blend transcendence and community. This may translate differently in various settings and in different subjective art forms. Some churches will have the financial ability and ideal setting to recreate the Gothic cathedral. Others will see no advantage to using art because it has no

¹¹⁴ "The word of the gospel includes the thought expressed by symbols such as the crucifix or stained glass windows." e.g. Jn 3:14-15 (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Dogmatics Notes, Vol.II. Soteriology. 2.B.IV.1.c, 50).

¹¹⁵ Enderle and Goetzinger, *The Chapel*.

meaning or could be prohibitive to their mission. Nonetheless, God's Word and sacrament will remain the focus in the houses, theaters, or traditional churches where he blesses his people gathered in his name.

There is not enough space to thoroughly answer all the questions and explore every avenue that my paper has introduced. However, some topics would be of special interest if time allowed. One of the most sensitive subjects for many people is change. Church buildings are a tremendously personal matter! It is where we are baptized, confirmed, married, and carried out of by strong men. Some people spend their entire life at the same church and could not dream of any other type of architectural style but the one with which they grew up. For many, exterior change – even for good and constructive reasons – could be a hindrance to the gospel. In these cases change must be very deliberate and leaders must take time to listen and educate about the reason for change. This brings up another point about change. The Lutheran pastor and leader will always have in mind the spiritual welfare of the flock, just as Luther did during the Reformation. As discussed above he did not change many outward forms of worship because it would have shaken the faith of believers for the wrong reasons. Unless the art and architecture is hindering Christ's great commission, sometimes the best reason not to change outward forms is because the congregation identifies it as their own. This is true of any type of worship facility: traditional, modern, or alternate.

As far as appreciating church architecture on a subjective level, nothing more can be said except some people like it and others do not. However, for people new to the faith, who have no reason to appreciate church art or architecture, they could at least be educated about the Church's tradition. After all, a foreigner who knows nothing about baseball will not appreciate taking in a game at Yankee Stadium until he learns the rules and culture of the game first. Only then will the chalk lines, painted grass, bags, foul posts, and boundaries suddenly have meaning and make sense. The very fact that some forms of church architecture have remained the same for hundreds of years is testimony to their credibility in promoting the gospel. These staples have been a public testimony of the faith and testify to the unity of the one, holy Christian Church for a long time.¹¹⁶ That is not to say that they can never be removed or replaced for the benefit of the

¹¹⁶ In matters of outward form, past Lutheran practice...has avoided the sectarianism of going it alone, being different, striving for the unique. Thus Luther kept with the church year and the general structure of the Mass inherited from the medieval church.... Though for confessional reasons, we live in a state of outwardly divided

Church. The Church is a living tradition focused on the proclamation and spread of the gospel through all avenues old and new.¹¹⁷

Other topics for fuller consideration would be the necessity of building a church in a mission setting (discussed briefly above, cf. 3.2.2). Is a church building a priority in the budget? How could a building benefit or discourage growth? Another consideration is the fact that many churches today are community-centered and offer services such as childcare and English as a Second Language classes. In these churches the non-worship facilities become the highlight of the church building. How have these avenues of ministry affected the building? Has the worship space been neglected?

Finally, as long as the Lutheran Church keeps the gospel in Word and sacrament at the center of its mission, the worship space will form itself. God has given his Church the gift of art and the Church has responded with employing the best gifts to spread the gospel and proclaim it freely in worship. True, some sacred architects utilized the best secular styles of their day (such as Constantine, Solomon, and even Sövik), and no doubt the church will adapt suitable and respectful trends in the future. The great comfort is that all beauty, art, and human faculties are a gift of God given to bless man and used by man for his own edification and proclamation of the gospel in worship. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Php 4:8).

communions, the Christian Church nevertheless remains a single, catholic community of believers confessing one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. In this light would anyone want to gainsay that the sameness of outward form...has been a heartwarming and compelling witness to the true unity of the Church? (Theodore Hartwig, "The Creeds in Contemporary English," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 86:3, 203)

¹¹⁷ For Lutherans, their worship tradition is always a living tradition, continuously developing and living in a vital parish practice. Building on the experience of the past, the Church moves confidently into the future (Carl Halter and Carl Schalk, ed., *Handbook of Church Music*, [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978], 17).

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. Tabernacle Reconstruction. Timna Park, Israel. Permission granted through GNU Free Documentation License; Available online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Stiftshuette_Modell_Timnapark.jpg; accessed 28 February 2012.



Figure 2. Herod's Temple Reconstruction. Jerusalem Museum, Israel. Author's file.



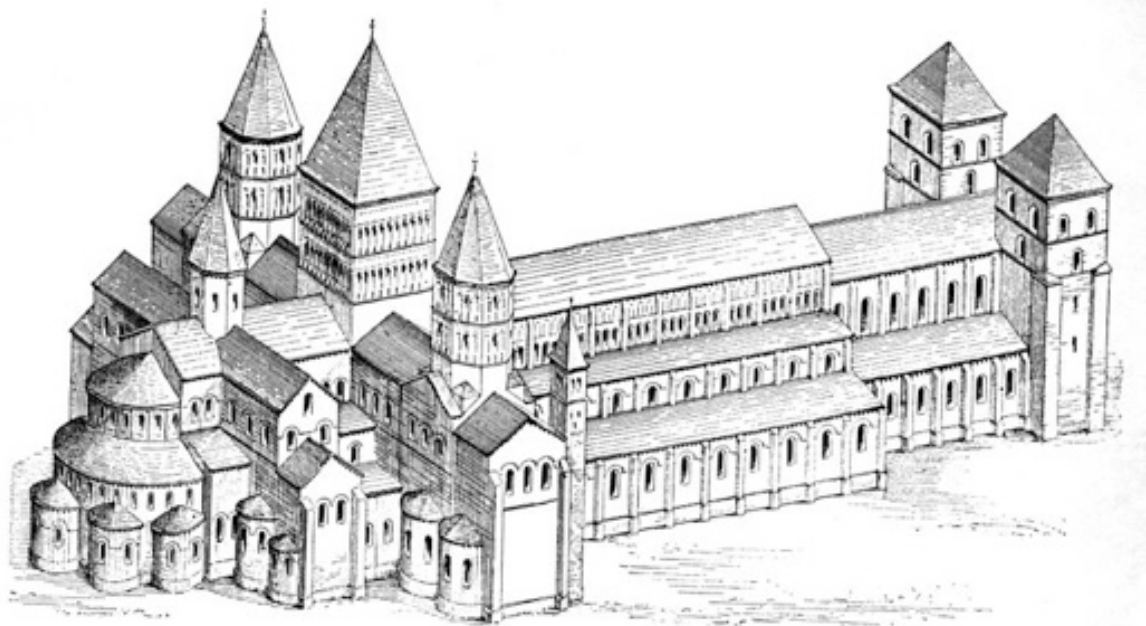
Figure 3. Artwork on the walls of the synagogue at Sardis. 3rd c. B.C. Author's file.



Figure 4. Jesus heals the paralytic. Dura Europos Baptistery. Public Domain.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dura-europos-paralytic.jpg>. Accessed 28 February 2012.



Figure 5. Hagia Sophia. Istanbul, Turkey. Author's file.



2. CLUNY (NO).

Figure 6. Cluny II. France. Georg Dehio, and Gustav von Bezold. *Kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes*. Stuttgart: Verlag der Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1887-1901, Plate No. 212.



Figure 7. Notre Dame. France. Available freely through Creative Commons license.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Notre_Dame_Back_from_Seine.jpg; accessed 28 February, 2012.



Figure 8. Frauenkirche c. 1890. Dresden. Public Domain. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dresden_Frauenkirche_1880.jpg; accessed 28 February, 2012.



Figure 9. Frauenkirche c. 2005. Dresden. Photo by Roland Geider. Permission via GNU Free Documentation License. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Frauenkirche_interior_2008_001-Frauenkirche_interior_2008_009.jpg; accessed 28 February, 2012.



Figure 10. St. Martin in the Fields. London. James Gibbs, architect. Photo by David Castor. Released to public domain. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saint_Martin_in_the_Fields-1.jpg; accessed 28 February, 2012.

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WORSHIP SPACE OF THE WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
SYNOD IN THE CONTEXT OF HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN
ARCHITECTURE AND ART

by

Daniel J. Laitinen

A Senior Thesis Submitted to

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Master of Divinity degree

Professor John P. Hartwig, Advisor

Approved at Mequon, Wisconsin, on 3/29/2012

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