

seasons. Symbols pertain to different occasions too: a star, a crown of thorns, tongues of flame, and so on. The lack of objects also is a powerful form of communication. The absence of any flowers and candles during Holy Week can say much.

A word of caution is necessary. None of these colors, textures, images, or objects is a decoration or an ornament. If they are used as such, they are trivialities not worth the time or effort they consume. But if used to add one more dimension to our perception of the Good News, they can be well worth considerable effort and expense. Much work goes into a sermon, meant to be preached only once. Work from a broader segment of the community on visuals to present the gospel is a good plan even though visuals, like the sermon itself, may be used only once.

All in all, Christians are called to proclaim the gospel by every means available. The Christian year and the lectionary based on it are two vital resources for this. If keeping time with the church can make for better Christians, then exploring all the possibilities such a discipline can offer is most worthwhile.

## CHAPTER THREE

# THE LANGUAGE OF SPACE

**I**t should not surprise us that a religion whose fundamental doctrine is the incarnation should take space seriously in its worship. Not only did Jesus Christ enter human time, but he also came to dwell among us, occupying a specific and definite place on earth in Judea. The New Testament is full of place names; Jesus was at Jerusalem, Bethany, the Sea of Galilee, the River Jordan, and so on.

The same is true for the rest of salvation history. The Jewish and Christian God is made known by events that occur among men and women, not on Mt. Olympus or in Valhalla. It is space on earth that is made holy, not because of the place itself but because of what God does for humans in that place. In the Bible, saving events usually happen at some ordinary field, well, or village street. Today such places would be as ordinary as a shopping mall. The location is indifferent, the event is crucial.

Of course, after the event, the place becomes significant as a bearer of meaning: the place where something happened. Jacob had a dream at a remote place and woke to exclaim that it was a fearsome place, the house of God, the gate of heaven (Gen. 28:17). His dream provoked him to erect a pillar and give the place a new name, "House of God," that all might know about the event. We have already seen how fourth-century Jerusalem shaped all subsequent Christian worship by commemorations at the times and places where climactic events in Christ's life and death occurred. Fourth century pilgrims to Jerusalem were still shown the sycamore tree Zacchaeus had climbed to see Jesus—once an

ordinary tree but by then a holy place. Europe eventually became dotted with pilgrimage places where an event had made a spot significant. All these testify to the eloquence of the language of space. A religion of the incarnation has to have its feet planted firmly on the ground. God and humanity meet at a place, whether it is as casual as an ordinary desert bush or as magnificent as the Jerusalem Temple.

Any Christian community needs a place to worship the Incarnate One. It can be anywhere, but it has to be a designated place so the Body of Christ knows where to assemble. Early missionaries in the British Isles simply set a cross on a pole to determine the place for worship. Eventually such places were roofed and walled, and the spaces sheltered thus were organized for the convenience and comfort of the worshipers. We call the art of organizing space "architecture." Today, we are so accustomed to the Christian use of architecture that, in many languages, the word "church" refers to the building just as much as to the body of believers.

The relationships between architecture and what Christians do when they worship are complex. Church architecture not only reflects the ways Christians worship but it also shapes worship or, not uncommonly, misshapes it. Architecture reflects Christian worship by providing the setting and shelter needed by a community to carry out its worship together. This is perhaps obvious—not even a football crowd will sit still in below-zero weather. But, at the same time that architecture is accommodating worship, it is also, in a subtle and inconspicuous way, shaping that same worship. In the first place, the building helps define the meaning of worship for those gathered inside it. Try to preach against triumphalism in a baroque church! Try to teach the priesthood of all believers with a deep Gothic chancel never occupied by any but ordained clergy! Second, the building dictates the possibilities open to us in our forms and styles of worship. We may want good congregational song, but do the acoustics swallow up each sound so that all seem mute? Or do we have to give up any hope of movement by the congregation because everyone is neatly filed away in pews? We soon realize that architecture presents both opportunities and limitations, some possibilities opened and others closed. We could wor-

ship with difficulty without buildings; often we worship with difficulty because of them.

The way space is organized reflects and shapes Christian worship, so much that we must examine why and how space speaks a language that is so important for worship. In this case, it is best to interpret theory first, then to survey the history, and to offer practical conclusions from the history of church architecture. Finally, the role of the visual arts will be discussed.

## THE FUNCTIONS OF LITURGICAL SPACE

How does the way space is organized reflect what happens in Christian worship? To answer this we may make use of a description of Christian worship involving "public speaking and touching in Christ's name." Another way of saying the same thing is that in worship we speak for God, to God, and to one another as well as reaching out to touch others in God's name. This is unquestionably a severe oversimplification of what happens in Christian worship, but it does make clear that Christian worship is action that requires space. This crucial insight is not apparent in more abstract definitions.

Let us begin, then, by asserting that in worship God acts in self-giving through human words and by human hands and we give ourselves to God through our words and hands. All that happens in worship depends on God, but it occurs through the instruments of human speech and the human body.

How does God act in self-giving through words? God speaks God's word to us through the mouths of humans. That seems a strange way to reach people; it displays a far greater trust in humans than most of us would ever have. But it is God's way as scripture repeatedly testifies: "I have put my words in your mouth" (Jer. 1:9) or, to tongue-tied brothers, "I will be with your mouth and with his mouth" (Exod. 4:15). There can be no doubt that in biblical faith God calls men and women to speak God's word.

Now there are a few, very few, necessities required for one human being to speak to others. One is that in order to communicate best one ought to be able to sustain eye contact with those to

whom one is talking. One speaks best to those who can be looked in the eye, not to those to the side or behind one. Eye contact is part of reaching out in love to others and is an important part of speech. Mark tells us "Jesus, looking at him, loved him" (Mark 10:21). Looking is part of loving.

Spatially, this implies a straight line between the speaker and the hearer. The speaker may need to be elevated a few inches so that the heads of others do not interfere with sight lines, but too great an elevation becomes a visual barrier, a moat of height. Pillars, partitions, and other barriers must not intervene. The audience and the speaker must meet face-to-face. The best space for face-to-face encounter is organized along a horizontal axis, as if there were a straight line from the speaker to the person in the middle of the audience. This is the basis of the synagogue where people come together to hear God's word read and expounded or a meeting-house where Christians assemble to hear the gospel.

Self giving occurs in speech to people gathered along a horizontal axis from human speaker to human hearer. If that were all that Christian worship involved, then planning a worship space would indeed be simple. But God not only places God's word in our mouths, but God also uses our hands. And this is where organizing space for Christian worship gets complicated. We must provide not only for receiving the word but also for receiving the sacraments. God's self giving comes in both ways. All good church architecture is a compromise to provide for both types of divine activity. The whole history of church building is the history of compromises between arrangements best for speaking in God's name and those best for touching in God's name.

If the path of the speaking voice is a horizontal axis, the locus of the outstretched hand is on a vertical axis. The reach of the human voice can be artificially extended—not so the human arm. God has created each of us small enough so that we can reach out only about a yard. Others have to come to us, and they come best in a circle gathered about us. The image this projects is one of people gathered in concentric circles around a vertical axis. On that vertical axis may be an altar-table, a font or pool, or simply a person. From there we can reach out—God can reach out through our hands—to the community standing around us.

In other terms, we need both a synagogue and an upper room for Christian worship. We need space in which we can both project our voice and reach out our hands, whether it be hands baptizing a new Christian, hands giving the Lord's body at the eucharist, hands laid on a head, hands uniting the hands of a couple, hands blessing or reconciling, or hands sprinkling a coffin. Not only do we speak for God but we also touch others for God. And we have to be close enough really to touch them. A woman touched the hem of Jesus' garment and power passed to her. We touch others' heads, lips, or hands, and power passes to them. But our reach is limited by arms which, unlike our voice, cannot be stretched by a microphone. We need intimate concentric space to touch in God's name. The scale is that of the human body.

How do we reconcile space organized along a horizontal axis with space situated around a vertical axis? There is a paradigm of worship itself in the problem, the God to human represented by the vertical, the human to human represented by the horizontal. Soon, we shall trace different ways this tension has been resolved historically.

But what of the words people offer to God? There seem to be few spatial requirements for this; prayer and praise can be offered anywhere that people can assemble. Above all else, a church building is a place for people to come together. In Quaker terms, where many candles are brought together there is more light. Christians can speak to God wherever they can assemble for worship. Spatial requirements for this act are not specific. Churches once tended to suggest that God was high and lifted up—maybe in the dim recesses of the rafters or at the end of the chancel. Today we are more inclined to suggest that God is in the midst of the worshipers, not in a remote holy spot. One architect places the cross in the midst of the congregation to state this fact. In addition, there are few requirements for space in which to speak to one another in Christ's name. Access to our neighbor is all that is necessary.

Of course, we cannot touch God, but each of us can touch others in God's name. In recent years, the **passing of the peace** has again become a prominent sign of reconciliation and love as Christians embrace one another or shake hands during worship. Other possibilities include pronouncing God's forgiveness after a prayer of

confession, an act that can be done with the hands even better than the voice (a sign of the cross traced on one's neighbor's forehead, for example). Foot washing is a dramatic occasional act. And, in services of reconciliation, touching others for God may be practiced. All that seems necessary for these aspects of worship is accessibility to one another.

We can break down the components of space for speaking and touching in God's name more specifically. Most Christian worship necessitates six different **liturgical spaces** where worship occurs and three or four **liturgical centers**, that is furnishings from which worship is led. It is amazing how few and how simple the physical necessities for Christian worship are. But since we never encounter them in isolation from each other, we may not be aware of them individually. If a church building can be compared to a complete sentence, then, it is time, for a moment, to look at the individual words that compose that sentence.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, we have become much more aware of the importance of **gathering space** as a key liturgical space. The Christian community needs to assemble in order to worship and this act of coming together may be the most important single activity of the congregation. In the heroic age of the early Church, the very act of assembling produced martyrs. In every age, forming the body of Christ is the first act of worship—one in which all participate. Therefore, space that marks the temporary separation of the community from the world outside, space in which individuals become a community, deserves careful attention in the design of churches.

The second type of space is **movement space**. Christian worship demands considerable movement. Revivalists in the nineteenth century and charismatics today remind us that to move people spiritually we have to move them physically, too. Christians seem to be restless pilgrim people. The people who gather must take their places, but even then processions, weddings, funerals, baptisms, offerings, and receiving communion involve further movements, more rearranging of the community at worship. Movement is an integral part of worship, and aisles and cross aisles demand careful planning.

The largest liturgical space is usually **congregational space**. Basically, a church is a people place. The Greek temple was the

reverse; pagans kept the money on the inside and the people on the outside. Christians use the money for the world outside and serve the people inside. Quaker meetinghouses consist almost entirely of congregational space and make it manifest that God's presence is known in the midst of God's people. In an important passage, Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (CSL) lists as one of the ways that Christ is present in the church's liturgical celebrations: "He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for he promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20)" (par. 7). Today, we might also add that Christ is also present in the poor in our midst.

**Choir space** may be the most difficult liturgical space to deal with, especially when there is uncertainty about the role of a choir in worship. Such space may also need to accommodate instrumentalists or dancers. The chief role or roles assigned to the choir should determine the location and design of this type of space.

We are accustomed to speaking of baptism in terms of a font or baptismal pool; less often do we think of it in terms of **baptismal space**. At worst, baptism has been a private ceremony tucked off in a remote corner of the church. Yet every baptism is an act of the whole community, not just because it adds to the body's number but because it witnesses again and again to the fact that those who have gone through the waters of death and resurrection are united to Christ. Like the wedding service, baptism involves both the whole church community and the more intimate circle of family and sponsors gathered as a special focus of love around the one being baptized. In terms of space, this necessitates access and space for the candidates and baptismal party in a way that does not impede participation by the whole congregation. Baptismal space is people space in concentric circles. Around the font or baptismal pool gather, first of all, the candidates and ministers, then family and sponsors, and finally the whole congregation.

**Altar-table space** surrounds the altar-table itself. Some traditions call this area the **sanctuary**. Usually it is the most conspicuous space in the building, often blinding us to the fact that its role is to serve, not to dominate. Thus we need to avoid such barriers as excessive height, the glare of too much direct light, overscaled furnishings, enclosure, and other ways of making this space seem a

remote and detached holy spot. Strangely enough, in many denominations with little eucharistic piety, this is the one spot in the church never approached by the people. It remains more aloft and aloof than in those denominations where people gather around it weekly.

There are also three or four liturgical centers essential to Christian worship. Again, their use reflects how we perceive the presence of Christ in our worship. A **baptismal font** or **baptismal pool** is a necessity for the sheer physical fact that water demands a container. It can be a recess in the floor (as the earliest surviving baptistery buildings reveal) or a basin mounted on a pillar. The one necessity—that it can contain water—seems more concealed than revealed in many designs. The *Constitution* reminds us: "By his power he [Christ] is present in the sacraments, so that when someone baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes" (CSL, par. 7). Without a container for water, we cannot baptize or experience this form of Christ's presence.

Christ is also "present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church" (CSL, par. 7). One could argue in a strict sense that a **pulpit** or **ambo** is not a necessity but a convenience. Yet if the reading and preaching of God's word is understood as a fresh theophany each time the people of God gather, then we need physical testimony to that belief in the form of a pulpit. The Bible is displayed when it is not being read, and it is held so that the reader's or preacher's hands are free when reading or preaching. The visual aspects of this form of Christ's presence are not to be minimized. This also means that bookbinding must again become a major art form for the church.<sup>2</sup> A lectern is unnecessary and weakens the focus on the unity of reading and preaching of God's Word.

There is no need to emphasize the importance of the **altar-table** for Christian worship, but we need to be reminded that it is not present as the architectural focus of the building or even as a symbol of Christ. It is there because it is used, in short, just as fonts hold water and pulpits hold Bibles, altar-tables hold the communion vessels. The altar-tables depicted in early Christian art were hardly larger than a card table. They were ministerial altar-tables, quite adequate for holding what was put on them but not monuments to

fill space or to create an architectural focus or religious symbol. In Western culture, it would seem most inconvenient to have to put the communion vessels on the floor, so an altar-table is a necessity.

In the early church, the **presider's chair** was the center from which much of the service was conducted and the place for preaching until late in the fourth century. There has been a revival in the importance of the presider's chair since Vatican II in Roman Catholic circles. Many Protestants are still recoiling from the ugliness of the inevitable three pulpit chairs the nineteenth century provided for preacher, song leader, and guest preacher. As a result, many Protestants, are reluctant to make clergy seating very conspicuous. The *Constitution* speaks of Christ's presence "in the person of the minister," but it is questionable how much a living person can be identified with a chair in the way we associate water with a font, the Bible with the pulpit, or communion elements with the altar-table. A chair does not function in quite the same way, since Christ's presence in a person does not need a furnishing to make it visible. Certainly the presider's chair is a convenience, but it ought to be designed and located with reticence and not resemble a throne.

No more is necessary. There is a certain sense of poverty or economy of means about Christian worship, but too often, we gild the lily. Other spaces, other furnishings (lecterns, prayer desks, communion rails) are not necessary and may confuse by concealing those that are. Restraint and understatement are the most powerful forms of statement. The essential spaces and centers—and only these—reveal what is basic in Christian worship.

There is also a quality in church space that rarely takes visible form, and it is one of the most easily and tragically overlooked factors: the way space affects sound. Every church building forms a unique **acoustical environment**, and few things affect worship more profoundly than the way sound behaves in space. Sound, of course, exists in time too, and it could well have been treated in chapter 2. The relation of sound to space, however, needs emphasis, especially since it is so frequently overlooked when liturgical space is planned. Churches are built to be used; they are usually photographed empty of people, but a church functions chiefly when peopled by a congregation. The very act of people assem-



bling is an event with sound, often commencing with bells calling them out of the world.

Sound exists in space, then, as well as in time. Our concern here is with all the sounds that exist within a church building and the way those sounds act in that space to shape and determine the nature of the worship offered therein. A few examples may be helpful. The large dimensions and hard surfaces of medieval stone buildings made necessary the practice of chanting prose recitations in melodic form in order to ensure audibility. The psalms were usually chanted in unison to plainsong melodies; a practice well adapted to such an acoustical environment where sound lingers. On the other hand, it is not accidental that congregational song in England developed in the small meetinghouses of dissenters rather than in stately medieval parish churches. Hymnody was picked up in time by Anglicans, but Congregationalists and Methodists took the lead. Their small intimate meetinghouses encouraged congregational song by making everyone feel that they are "on stage." In similar fashion, it would be hard to imagine the silent waiting for God in Quaker worship in any place where sound is as resonant as in a large stone cathedral. In a small domestic space, Quaker worship seems natural; in a vast area, such speaking from the Spirit would appear difficult.

Worship involves a wide range of sounds. How do people interact as they gather? There is the sound of feet, voices, and moving chairs mixed into worship. Babies cry and children whine. These are not sounds to be suppressed; they are the natural and welcome sounds made when forming the body. But there may be annoying sounds from outside that need to be subdued or internal mechanical hums from lighting, heating, or air-conditioning that ought to be absorbed.

More crucial, though, is the spoken voice. If there is an echo bouncing off hard or curved surfaces, preaching may be difficult. Hearing the word of God ought not to be prevented by echoes. There are also similar problems with an environment that is too absorbent; it can make each person think she or he is singing solo, so each one usually stops singing. Too much absorbency can make organ music lose much of its brilliance. Although requirements are not the same for the speaker and the musician, poor acoustics can

frustrate both of them. The speaker wants no echo while the organist relishes a bit of reverberation. Compromises between the two are usually necessary.

## HISTORY OF LITURGICAL ARCHITECTURE

A look at how Christians have arranged these liturgical spaces and centers over the course of history can teach us much. The relative prominence or reticence of various spaces or centers, their relation to one another, and the design of the liturgical centers themselves give us a clear indication of shifts in practice and theological perspective. This variety in worship spaces indicates the diversity inherent in Christian worship. Yet the persistence of the same six spaces and the three or four centers is a clear witness to the large degree of constancy in Christian worship. We can only give a rapid survey of diversity and constancy, but this survey will indicate the great variety of liturgical arrangements that have been found useful.<sup>3</sup>

The early church had to worship in makeshift quarters during periods of persecution, yet we know buildings of some magnificence were occasionally built—even while Christianity was an illicit religion. We have very little documentary or architectural evidence of the architectural setting of Christian worship before Constantine. Apparently, early Christians often met in private homes, usually those of the more well-to-do members of the community. During periods of persecution, there was always danger that Christians could be put to death for the crime of assembling for worship or become the victims of mobs who considered such assemblies unpatriotic or irreligious. Thus it was probably wise to use regular family furniture and rooms for such worship then return them to their places immediately.

The domesticity of these spaces in private homes gave a sense of hospitality and intimacy that was lost when Christian worship went public. Yet the advantages of such intimate space recur again and again whenever Christians are persecuted or an impoverished minority, such as the Anabaptists, the Amish, the Quakers, and even Christians in some countries today. We probably deceive

ourselves if we think this same domestic feeling of hospitality and intimacy can be easily imitated in public buildings yet we are equally misled if we forget the need to seek these qualities in good church architecture. These characteristics clearly shape the style of worship practiced within these settings.

We do have an astonishingly well-preserved example of a house-church from **Dura-Europos** on the Euphrates River. It is a home that was adapted permanently for Christian worship early in the third century (long before persecution ended in A.D. 313) and destroyed in A.D. 256. The ruins indicate that a wall had been removed and two rooms were joined to provide space for the eucharistic assembly (fig. 1).<sup>4</sup> At one end is located a small platform, possibly for the altar-table and the bishop's throne. A room on the opposite side of the house was probably used as a baptistery. It had a font covered by a canopy and walls ornamented with frescoes. Thus, even at this early date, there appears an explicit allocation of spaces for different liturgical functions, a pattern reflected in most subsequent church buildings.

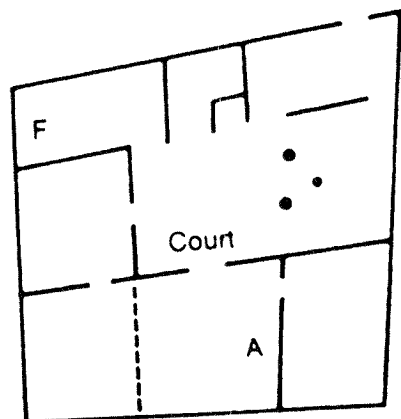


Figure 1

In the fourth century, Christianity not only became legal and respectable but was also espoused by the emperor Constantine who showered magnificent gifts on the church: nine new churches in Rome and others in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Constantinople.

The worship in these magnificent new buildings matched all the sumptuousness of the imperial court—a far cry from that of the persecuted Christians huddled together in secret meetings. The emperor's architects simply adapted a well-developed building type, the **basilica** or Roman law court. The civil basilica served much the same functions as the county court house and high school auditorium do in American towns. Most were rectangular buildings with a semicircular space, the **apse**, at one end, opposite a long people's part, the **nave**. In the apse, there was a platform with a throne for the judge, who might be flanked by scribes. The basilica was basically a **longitudinal** building organized along a horizontal axis. The church made this building type its own in the fourth century (fig. 2).

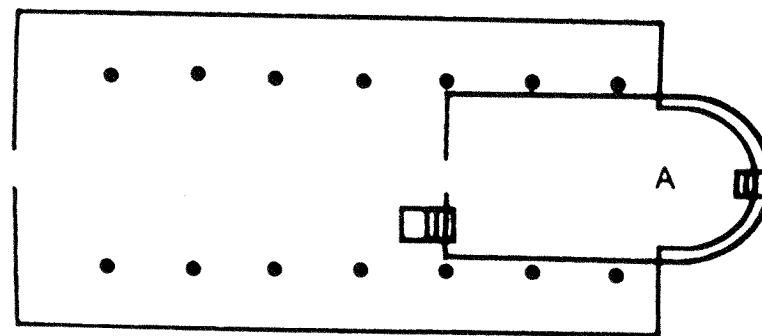


Figure 2

The bishop's throne replaced that of the judge, and presbyters sat on either side of him. A platform for the singers extended out into the nave (indicated here by solid lines). The altar-table usually appeared near the junction of the apse and the nave, and an ambo (pulpit) stood on the end or side of the platform. Preaching, at first, was done from the bishop's throne, and the eucharistic prayer was offered facing the people across the altar-table. The rest of the building was unencumbered by seating, the mobile congregation moving wherever they could best hear and see.

From an early time, the tradition of a **centralized** building organized around a vertical axis in the center of the building has also

existed. A separate type of building for baptism, the **baptistery**, was often designed on this basis—as was the **martyrium**, or chapel over the grave or relics of a martyr. Both of them were based on the mausoleum. New technology for building domes over square naves led to the gradual adoption of centralized buildings among Eastern Orthodox churches instead of the elongated basilicas favored in the West. Frequently, three apses are walled off by an **iconostasis** (screen covered with images of the saints) from the central congregational space, which is frequently covered by a dome (fig. 3). The iconostasis shielded the people from the awe and mystery of the service surrounding the altar-table. **Icons** (images) of the saints surround the congregation, reminding them that they worship amidst the whole company of heaven.

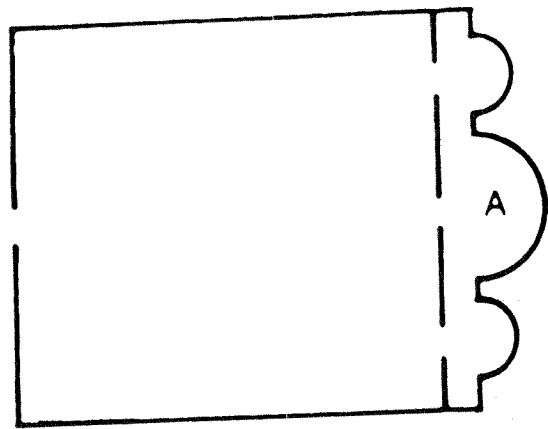


Figure 3

In the West, churches tended to develop longitudinally, partly, because of technology. (The maximum width of Gothic vaulting was about eighty feet, but by repeating bays a church could be extended lengthwise.) This tendency, however, was also the result of a growing complexity in the forms of worship and the specialization of priests and lesser clergy, as well as those in religious orders. The complexity and specialization can be seen most dramatically in the retreat of the altar-table from proximity to the congregational space until the sanctuary space became located at the

farthest extremity of the building, away from congregational space.

The Middle Ages saw the development of highly specialized types of churches: pilgrimage churches or shrines, churches for monastic communities, collegiate churches, cathedrals, preaching churches, and ordinary parish churches. The pacesetters, though, were the **monastic churches**. Since a large part of the time in these communities revolved around saying and singing the seven daily offices and the night office and since large communities could include as many as a thousand monks, it is not surprising that a magnificently functional type of building evolved, specifically designed to accommodate such worship. The most important space was the choir stalls (since the whole community was a choir), arranged in two parallel sections so that psalms could be sung **antiphonally** (alternative verses sung back and forth). In effect, these elongated choirs provided a church within a church, often sectioned off from the nave by screens (fig. 4).

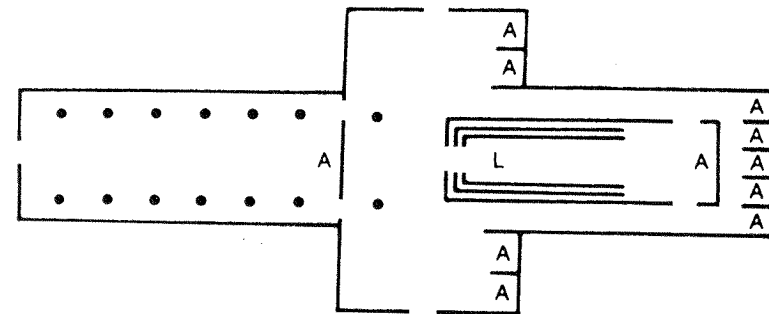


Figure 4

For a monastic community, it was a functional arrangement. A high altar-table in the sanctuary served for mass, and other altar-tables were scattered throughout the building for private masses. Various other arrangements were tried for monastic communities: a choir in a western apse in Germany and a walled-in space in the middle of the nave in Spain. Cathedral churches followed the monastic pattern, often subdividing the interior space into more specialized compartments for chantry chapels where mass was said for the repose of the dead.



It should not surprise us that these highly specialized churches had a disproportionate effect on **parish churches**, where most people worshiped in their village (fig. 5). These buildings, too, sprouted large screened chancels, spaces used only by the local clergy and the family of the lord of the manor. But the congregation was not monks or clergy, it was lay people relegated to the nave, where they could glimpse mass being said at the altar-table at the other end of the chancel. The nave often contained a pulpit around which they could stand.

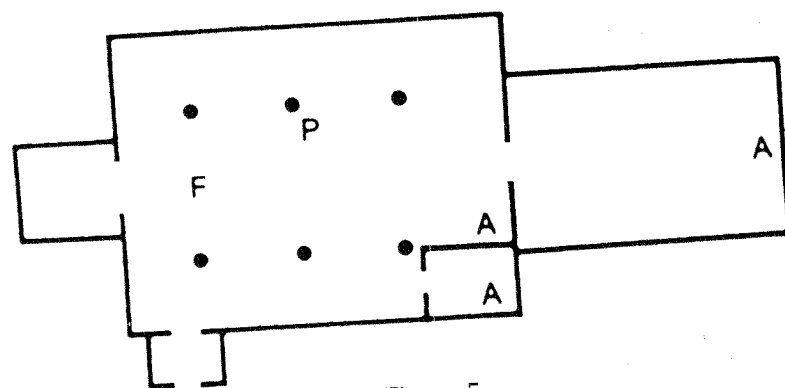


Figure 5

Unlike the monastic church, each parish church contained a font. The services of baptism and marriage, by the late-Middle Ages, began in a porch, just outside the nave, which was decorated with a vast array of sculpture, painting, and stained glass meant to instruct and to stimulate devotions. Until the fourteenth century, the nave was clear of chairs and pews; a mobile congregation moved where they could see and hear best. The late and gradual introduction of pews meant sitting down on the job and a congregation that was no longer mobile. Their time had come to be spent in private devotions.

Clergy and people had become so divorced that a sixteenth-century Catholic bishop wrote: "The people in the church [nave] took small heed what the priest and clerks did in the chancel. . . . It was never meant that the people should indeed hear the

Matins or hear the Mass, but be present there and pray themselves in silence."<sup>5</sup> The division between nave and chancel, so functional in a monastic church, was inappropriate in parish churches but, nevertheless, imitated with zeal. The medieval parish church had become an excellent place for personal devotions (which was indeed primarily how the people used it) but a very poor place for genuinely liturgical worship with that "full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy" (CSL, par. 4).

Another medieval development was attributing symbolic meanings to every bit of space, furnishings, and actions of worship. This fanciful development often betrayed the lost comprehension of how items were once functional and obvious in purpose.

The Protestant and Catholic Reformations saw great changes in the arrangements. The Jesuits, who had no need for choir space to say the daily office together, led the way among Roman Catholics in building sumptuous churches where the mass could be a dazzling spectacle. The altar-table once again became conspicuous without the intervening space of a choir or screens. Ornate pulpits were common.

It is hard to generalize about the Protestant experiments in liturgical architecture, so richly varied were they in trying to leapfrog over medieval developments to achieve what they, rightly or wrongly, considered to be primitive (early church) patterns in building. It was difficult, if not impossible, to teach the priesthood of all believers in a building rigidly divided into clerical chancel and lay nave. Medieval buildings were adapted by bringing all the communicants into the chancel for communion or by moving the whole service out into the nave. Sometimes the chancel was simply walled off and used for schools.

When Protestants began building numerous new buildings in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the variety of shapes they experimented with was extraordinary, though many were of a centralized type. Figure 6 shows (left to right) several patterns that were drawn from German, Dutch, and Scottish examples.

The same variety of experimentation continued in eighteenth-century America. Figure 7 shows (at top) a typical Congregational

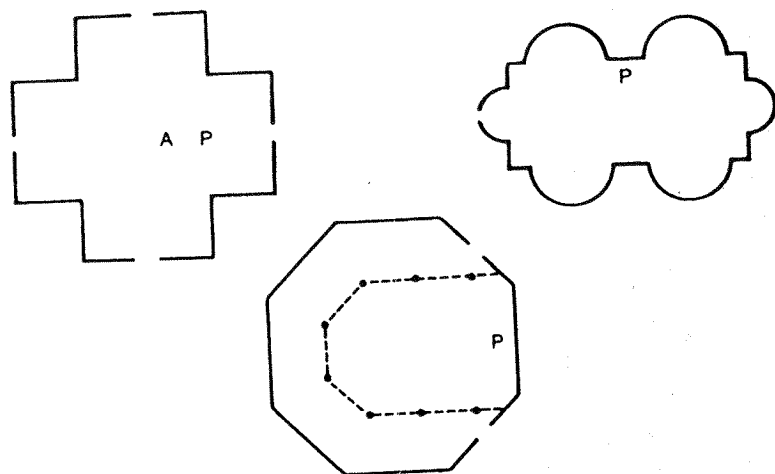


Figure 6

meetinghouse, one of the many arrangements tried by Anglicans, and (at bottom) a Quaker meetinghouse with the movable partition between men's and women's meetings (indicated by a zigzag line).

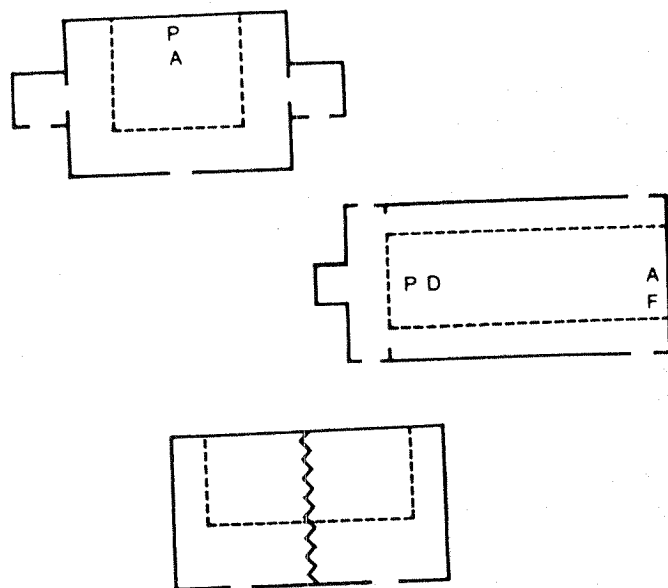


Figure 7

What do these have in common, if anything? None has a chancel; it virtually disappeared from buildings constructed for Protestant worship for nearly three centuries. Instead, congregational space was magnified, and choir and sanctuary space have shrunk or disappeared. The Quaker building is entirely congregational and movement space. A characteristic Protestant addition was balconies to enable speakers to be heard by a large number of people. Balconies also helped bring the total community together about the pulpit and Lord's table, although movement was difficult.

The nineteenth century saw a strange reversal. The romanticism of the **Cambridge Movement** led many churches in the English-speaking world to see the Middle Ages by moonlight and to clamor for a return to a neo-medieval type of building (fig. 8—compare with fig. 5). Revivalism, on the other hand, emphasizing pulpit personalities and massed choirs, developed the concert stage arrangement (fig. 9). Roman Catholic churches of this period tended to be variations of figure 9, with the altar-table at C, a font near the door, and a diminutive pulpit off to the side of the chancel.

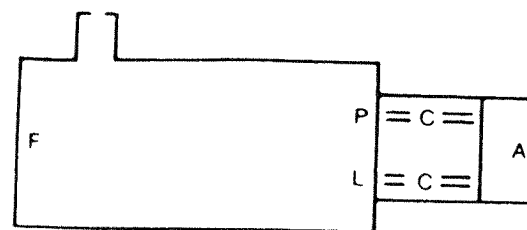


Figure 8

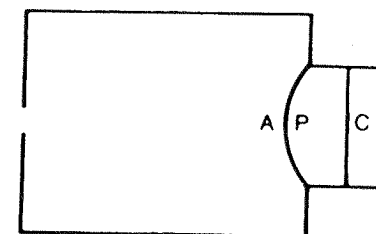


Figure 9

Recent years have seen drastic changes, especially since Vatican II. Many of these modifications represent a move to a centralized plan, but with compromises necessary to make the spoken word function well and still allow concentric arrangements of people.

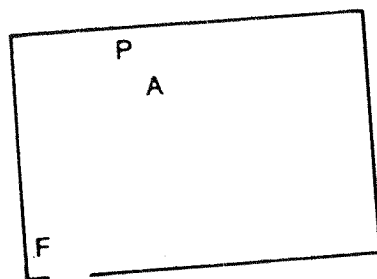


Figure 10

Figure 10 shows an arrangement that might appear in either a Protestant or a Roman Catholic church built today. Protestants would be more inclined to place the font before the congregation, but this is not unknown in new Roman Catholic churches. Roman Catholics would be more likely to feature a presider's chair; Protestants are currently reacting to overly dominant clergy seating. Both groups are inclined to seek centralized shapes with the congregation gathered around the altar-table. The fan shape has a wide popularity among Roman Catholics.

Some of the most pronounced characteristics of current church buildings are the result of economic necessity and new construction methods. But others, such as low profile buildings, nondirectional interior space, and flexible seating, show deliberate attempts to recover some of the hospitality and intimacy of the house churches in which early Christians worshiped.

What practical conclusions for our times can we draw from this rapid survey of the Christian experience with liturgical space? Obviously there is enough diversity mentioned here to make generalizations of any type difficult, yet when we look at these experiences with a critical eye, there is much to admire and much to deplore in each. Obviously, our point in time has different standards of judgment than these of other ages, but if we accept the qualification that we are speaking from the beginning of the third millennium, we can propose some criteria of practical relevance for those who build or remodel space for Christian worship today.

Our first criterion is that of **utility**. How well does a building function in being used, not admired but used, by worshipers? The question can be resolved only by seeing how adequately the build-

ing serves for speaking and touching in God's name. If speaking cannot be heard because of atrocious acoustics, even though the space functions well for music, it can hardly be considered adequate. Or if the speaking is fine but the congregation is fractured into inaccessible balconies so that giving communion is difficult the building again flunks. Clearly, there must be compromises between an ideal preaching church and a perfect sacrament church. The criterion of utility covers all uses. Churches are built to be used, not to be monuments for tourists to admire or art historians to chronicle.

Much of the success of the space organized most usefully for Christian worship is the result of a devotion to **simplicity**. Only when we understand clearly what is basic and essential in worship can we build well for worship. Restraint and discipline are crucial. Too many church buildings have been ruined by too much money and effort expended on nonessentials and too little concern directed to basics. The six essential liturgical spaces and the three or four liturgical centers provide the core of our discipline of simplicity. Knowing when to stop is all important. One must talk worship before one talks architecture. Church building committees are notoriously poor clients because they do not do their homework to make up their mind about what the church is and what it does in its worship. Without this information, even the best architects cannot design buildings adequate for use in worship. The most they can do is design very attractive facades.

Our survey has shown that the circumstances of Christian worship and the needs perceived are subject to change. The events of the last few years, especially, have also taught us the importance of **flexibility**. Despite the constancy in Christian worship, there are strong forces shaping and changing the outward forms through which these constants are expressed. The most difficult churches to deal with today are those built, not so long ago, when we had not yet come to accept the reality of change in worship. A most important new element in our thinking about church architecture is the frank acceptance of change. John Ruskin's romantic "when we build, let us think that we build for ever" belongs to another age.<sup>6</sup> Instead, we should say, "When we build, let us not tie knots in the future." For we know it will be different, maybe even in a very

short time. Immovable pews, massive pulpits, and fixed choir stalls, belong to an age that could not even imagine the possibility of change. Both history and recent experience have taught us that what seems so true and obvious in one period of time may not be so in the next. Let us not try to impose our will irrevocably in concrete on those who come after us. They deserve a voice, too.

An elusive strand throughout our historical survey has been the need for buildings that foster a sense of **intimacy**. This was certainly true in the early church, recovered again in many Reformation traditions, and now ardently sought in building today. The sense of intimacy is important as we emphasize participation by the entire worshiping community. Current revulsion against monumental type buildings is a healthy sign that a servant people has learned that architecture is meant to serve the community, not dominate it. This means smaller scale and less expensive buildings that allow each worshiper to feel he or she is on stage and playing an important role in worship instead of being a lonely spectator lost in the audience. Intimacy implies a sense of hospitality, of welcoming the stranger.

The human spirit associates **beauty** with worship. Beauty is an elusive quality, and consensus about what things and places are beautiful is not always easy to obtain. Excess height seems to be almost the only constant factor associated with making worship space beautiful. Other design features will continue to change as architects seek to build the best possible space of which their era is capable.

Utility, simplicity, flexibility, intimacy, and beauty seem to be the criteria by which we can best judge how adequately liturgical architecture serves the church today. These are obviously not the standards by which the great cathedrals of the thirteenth century were built or even the churches of the 1950s, although we can learn much from both. But the directness and honesty sought in our time can indicate new directions to add to the varied legacy of the past.

Those who have the responsibility of building or renovating space for a worshiping congregation have a wonderful opportunity to renew the life of their community. A building project can be the catalyst that makes church renewal possible. It can also be sheer hell. The *process* (planning to build) can be more important than the

final *product* (the building). After all, the church is people, not a building. But planning for a building can often help the people discover, or rediscover, what it means to be the community of God's favor. Much depends on the leadership given in guiding the planning process and the willingness to take the time needed to prepare adequately.

Nevertheless, the building is not unimportant, either. After it is built, it will continue to shape worship in its image for generations. Although it is not completely true that the building will always win, we must at least recognize in it a powerful ally and a formidable foe. Its witness will outlast its builders. The more carefully we study and reflect on Christian worship, the better equipped we will be to help plan a building that will provide the best space for speaking, acting, and touching in God's name.

## LITURGICAL ART

Space provides the setting for an important component of Christian worship: the **visual arts**. Ralph Adams Cram, the famous architect, was fond of referring to architecture as the "nexus of the arts." To a large degree this is true; architecture provides shelter not only for music and dance but also for sculpture, painting, and a variety of visual arts and crafts. But architecture does far more than just shelter the other arts; it adds to or subtracts from their effectiveness in helping Christians express their relationship to God.

What function do the various visual arts play in Christian worship? Some traditions have avoided them altogether. At times, in the early church and the Reformation, there were violent outbursts against them, though these various outbreaks of **iconoclasm** (image smashing) were in themselves strong testimony to the power of visual images. In the opposite extreme, the arts are sometimes used simply to ornament space. Thus tamed and innocuous, they have little potency for contributing to worship and merely provide superfluous decoration.

We must distinguish between religious art in general and **liturgical art** (sometimes called cultic art, especially when non-Christian examples are being considered). Most briefly stated,

liturgical art is art used in worship. "Religious art" is a much broader category and, by some definitions, includes illustrations in Sunday school literature, Van Gogh's landscapes, or abstract art. Paul Tillich was willing to apply the term "religious" to any art that had a dimension of depth, penetrating beneath superficial observation.<sup>7</sup> Liturgical art, by contrast, is defined more by its use, although its subject matter is usually the divine or those through whom God has worked.

The prime function of liturgical art is to bring us to an awareness of the **presence of the holy**, to make visible that which cannot be seen by ordinary eyes. Liturgical art does not make God present, but it does bring God's presence to our consciousness. As a photograph brings to mind loved ones who may be absent from us, so liturgical art opens our eyes to the unseen presence of God. There is a difference, of course; liturgical art makes us aware of a presence, not an absence.

Adequate liturgical art has a tremendous potency because of its **religious power**.<sup>8</sup> This is the power to penetrate beneath the obvious and to convey the divine. Much of the art placed in churches in recent centuries was profoundly deficient in this respect. Liturgical art has to use the objects of this world to represent the immaterial. But when painting and sculpture simply reflect naturalistic reproductions of the appearance of persons or objects, they fail to penetrate beneath the surface, no matter how skillful the artist. Many popular paintings of the head of Christ represent only the human nature of Jesus and never lead us beyond the obvious. A mid-twentieth-century painter, Georges Rouault, on the other hand, could treat this type of subject with such sensitivity that we know we stand before a suffering God. The far less skilled makers of *santos* of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hispanic culture of New Mexico and Colorado created a liturgical art of extraordinary religious power. Their images are primitive and crude, but no one can contemplate them without being called to worship. They let loose numinous power in a piece of wood or canvas by relying on conviction and insight far more than academic artistic skills. Our inner eye is addressed by such art and we discover how close seeing is to believing.

Those who destroyed liturgical art in the past recognized clearly

its religious power, but they feared that ignorant people might confuse the mirror with what it reflected. This is probably the least dangerous form of idolatry we face today. Indeed, when liturgical art calls us from indulging in the egocentric satisfying of our emotions and self-centered lives, it can break down a far worse form of idolatry.

Another characteristic of good liturgical art is its **communal nature**. What is projected is not the individual experience of the artist but the insights of the total community. Good liturgical art is not noted for originality in subject matter but for capturing the experience of a community. This does not mean that the artist must even be Christian. From the ancient catacombs to modern France, successful liturgical art has been created by non-Christian artists working under the careful guidance of the Christian community, and many Christian artists have failed to produce satisfactory liturgical art because their muse called them to a personal vision rather than a communal one. An architect can no more design a good church without understanding the life of the community that will use it than an artist can produce good liturgical art without comprehending the same life.

The community whose life together is meant to be served by such art is not just one generation old. It is a community of traditions. Those traditions reflect the way other generations have experienced and rejoiced in God's actions. These communities have found that some ways adequately reflect these realities in visual form. Past experience is always our point of departure in creating liturgical art for today. That is not to say liturgical art is unchanging; historical research can easily chronicle the introduction of new styles and contents. But beneath all its diversity, there is a strong underlying current of constancy in returning again and again to the same visual contents, just as we still prefer many of the same words and acts that link us to other Christians in different ages.

Part of the inherited vocabulary takes the form of **visual symbols**. Every mass movement creates its own visual symbols. Think of bumper sticker art on gun control, the environment, or feminism. Each is an instantaneous way of recalling shared beliefs. The church has long used the same kind of visual shorthand. A crown of thorns, a manger, or tongues of flame—all these, and



many more, convey shared beliefs and have done so for centuries. But symbols are mortal. Where now is the World War II "V" for victory? To how many Christians now does a pomegranate or a peacock speak of resurrection? It is not easy to create fresh new symbols intentionally. They sneak up on us spontaneously. Probably thousands of people simultaneously thought of the aptness of the mathematical equal sign for expressing the justice of equality for women and men. We can await the appearance of new symbols and bury those that have died, for symbols have died when they become an esoteric code. Symbols are meant to be used because they reflect realities of compelling importance for the lives of those experiencing them. They can be visual (images), audible (words), and kinetic (movements), but in all cases they must refer us to realities we experience.

We shall speak briefly of several media used as liturgical arts. The visual arts function in worship in two ways. Some are fixed and permanent; others are seasonal or only used occasionally. Both the commonness and the uniqueness of each event can be underscored by different liturgical arts, which can portray both continuity and change.

One of the most important of the fixed and permanent art media used in worship is **sculpture**. It has been greatly mistrusted in the Eastern Orthodox churches, which generally forbid sculpture in favor of two-dimensional representations. Until recently, most Reformation traditions also avoided three-dimensional forms as too tangible. It is hard, though, to doubt the religious power sculpture can have after seeing Henry Moore's *madonnas* or Sir Jacob Epstein's figures of Christ.

**Painting** seemed dangerous to some of the Reformers, but it must be remembered that each medieval church was itself a whole catechism, painted from floor to roof with sacred history, past and future. Some of the images (God the Father with a long beard) proved offensive to Roman Catholics as well and much of such art was obliterated. It was easier to print new catechisms, far less imaginative, no doubt, but far more explicit in teaching correct doctrine in an age of religious controversy. Georges Rouault, Graham Sutherland, Stanley Spencer, and a host of others have shown us how much painting can contribute to knowing the object

of our worship in ways that transcend most verbal categories. Much that was said about painting applies equally well to colored light, that is, **stained glass**. Few human creations are more beautiful or more changing than the warm splash of colored light on cold stone or plaster. We have misunderstood the medium too often by trying to make it explicitly pictorial. Its nature is closer to instrumental music, an abstraction that says something words and pictures cannot. There is no denying the emotive factors present in all worship, and stained glass seems to make an almost universal appeal to these.

Every church makes use of **basketry**, **glassblowing**, **ceramics**, or **metalsmithing** for communion vessels. These art forms provide opportunities for expressing the community's joy in its Creator. Good quality baskets, glassware, ceramics, and silverware are available commercially in most areas. They are often superior to those stocked by church-goods suppliers. Almost any community college has a studio art department that would welcome a chance to produce or help a congregation acquire these vessels.

**Bookbinding**, too, is a neglected but necessary art that deserves much more cultivation by the church today. If we regard the contents of Bibles and service books as vital, then there ought to be outward and visible testimony to the importance of these volumes in worship.

Liturgical arts for seasonal or occasional use include many possibilities, especially textiles, graphic arts, and the new electronic media. There has been an explosion of interest in **textile arts** in recent years, though their use is ancient. Undeniably part of the attraction of textiles is their impermanence. They can be removed, even discarded, after a single occasion or season. The variety of uses that textiles serve is impressive. **Antependia** or **paraments** are hangings or falls on the pulpit and lectern, and **frontals** serve in the same way to cover altar-tables (though the preference today is not to conceal the form of the altar-table). Seasonal colors and symbols are often used. Liturgical **banners** may be carried in processions or suspended where air currents give them movement.

More controversial are **vestments** or sacramental garb for the clergy. They are really testimony to the conservatism of the clergy.<sup>9</sup> When barbarians swarmed down from northern Europe in the fifth

century and introduced men's trousers to Rome, the clergy kept sartorial faith by continuing to wear the everyday garb of imperial Rome: the **chasuble**, a poncho-like outer covering; the **alb** or white dress-like tunic worn by men and women alike; the **stole** draped around the neck, a symbol of public office (comparable to a police badge); and the **cope**, a cloak. Derived from the tunic are the **dalmatic** with wide sleeves and slit sides, and the **surplice** with full sleeves, often worn over a long black outdoor garment, the **cassock**. Special garments are worn by bishops in some churches. Protestant clergy, academics, and judges continued to wear the black medieval scholar's gown. The eighteenth century saw the survival of a secular collar in two small white neck **bands** or **tabs** which some Protestant clergy wear over a black **preaching robe**. The alb is now often used as an outer garment and is favored by many as appropriate to women and men alike. Stoles add variety in colors, textures, and designs to whatever other garments are worn under (or over) them. Clothing is a means of communication, and what clergy wear says something about the event.

The **graphic arts** take as many forms as textiles. The first impression of worship is often a printed bulletin thrust into one's hand upon entering the building, then a hymnal or other service book. Gradually, we are coming to see that the way a page looks is almost as important as what is printed on it. Liturgical graphics have moved in recent years from depressingly drab to halfway exciting, although good examples are still rare.

**Posters** may be present in churches. Enlarged photos can make poignant statements, especially when lettered with key words in the lessons for the day. Every worship committee should make regular visits to the local art supply store. Obviously some spaces are more adaptable to the display of banners and posters than others but suitable lighting and places to hang seasonal art forms ought to be considered.

The most recent varieties of visual art forms utilize **electronic media**. Motion picture films are too disruptive to employ in worship, but still images may be projected with sensitivity, provided the building allows this method of presentation. Where adequate control of lighting, flat reflective surfaces, and electrical outlets exist, projections can add a new dimension to worship that no

other generation has known. Today a wall can be anything we want to project on it. The ability to use projections must be used with care, however, so that it supplements and underscores the rest of the service rather than overwhelming it. Like good liturgical music, visual art must be carefully coordinated with the entire service.

In all of these art forms, we depend upon what the space will allow. The building can greatly enhance the effectiveness of the various liturgical arts, or it can hamper them. For better or for worse, the influence of the space in which we worship is crucial. How could it be otherwise in a religion grounded in the incarnation?

