A Call to Return to a Reformed Worship Space

Just How Far Have We Come?

Q. 88. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?
A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

The character of the early church and her worship sets the stage for any consideration of the concept of Christian worship. For that reason, it should be regarded more carefully than is typically done today. Some historians routinely use the word "primitive" to describe what we read in Acts and in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. But that kind of language is also used in a way to justify the "progress" in the development or even the "evolution" of Christian worship that has been allowed to occur over the centuries, together with all the man-made trappings, the arguments, along with the distinctiveness of original artistic style and expression, not to mention the politics.

This is not to say, or even less, to ignore the achievements of early Christian councils in dealing with recognized heresies. The doctrines of the faith have truly developed over time and with constant struggle to be more carefully defined and stated. In that process, the church has, indeed, profitably grown. And we are also not wishing to overlook the achievements of the Reformers, themselves, in wrestling with necessary issues of proper worship, such as the Regulative Principle and its implications to a proper Christian liturgy, as well as the contribution of the Divines of

Westminster in their production of the finest summation of doctrinal truth the church has ever possessed and enjoyed.

But it is to insist that the early church was never "primitive", as if it were literally inventing itself as it went along. To be built by the Lord, himself, the God-man who came in the fullness of time and unto whom the entire revelation of the Old Testament was about, was no small thing. As we discussed in chapter one, it is stunning to realize how mature and Spiritually enlightened and theologically aware Stephen and the others actually were. Then, within just one generation, the early church possessed the inspired writings of the gospels and of Paul and held, with confidence, "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3b, ESV). The worship of the church was understood early on in Paul's writings, as exemplified in his battle with Judaizers who continued to stress the practice of the ceremonial aspect of the law and as he stressed the leadership of the church to be led by her elders. On the basis of this, we think it an essentially incorrect conclusion that Christian worship legitimately "evolves", that it matures, grows and develops into some sense of perfection of liturgy, design and form, even as it has been allowed to do, beyond anything we read instructed/required in the Scriptures.

Still, the position we take here is not merely an idealistic one – not just a romantic call "back to the simple days of the Apostles" as if that truly existed in the first place or if that were even possible. What we are saying is that the church's worship has been allowed to go astray in many ways and, in many ways, the mindset responsible for that

drift has been in the kind of attention given to the room in which Christian worship is given.

The Particular Priorities

When you visit a church in order to attend its service of worship for the first time, you can detect a good deal about what you will experience in the service simply from how the room strikes you before the service begins. The room will speak to you – displaying and declaring the priorities and values of the congregation which gathers there.

The worship room of some church buildings will be called "sanctuaries" – rooms dedicated, decorated and devoted to nothing else but worship. Here, the children are not allowed to run and the adults will tend not to speak too loudly. The ceiling is majestic and vaulted, the seating arranged in strict rows front to back and the lighting is muted. This room seems to require of you a self-restraint and encourages you to private devotion and prayer.

The worship rooms you find in other church buildings are very different – they are obviously universal spaces where the kids had their championship basketball game just yesterday amidst cheering and yelling and where the fellowship dinner will be held later tonight. Here, the brightly lit atmosphere is carefree and a bit noisy (not only because of the talking but because acoustics are clearly not a concern) and the emphasis seems to be on casual fellowship as people converse in the aisles, many holding paper coffee cups or travel mugs from home. Even just prior to their time of worship in this room, if you are sitting alone and not talking to someone, you actually feel strange and

out of place. You could not pray privately in such a room even if you wanted to, so you just wait for the show to begin.

What do you see when you look forward? In some such rooms there will be a wide, inviting stage, perhaps with music stands and microphones, guitars, drums and other instruments strewn about. There might be a small, portable lectern in sight, either off to the side or buried in amongst everything else – or not. In other worship rooms you might look up and see a huge box of massive, elegantly displayed organ pipes set into the front wall and several rows of chairs or pews below or around those pipes reserved for choir members who will soon come out in their own colorful vestments. In front of those things, one or two heavy, wooden or even granite desks which are either permanently fixed to the their place on a smaller, restricted platform or else obviously difficult to move if one was to try. With it, there might be other pieces of elegant, heavy and matching furniture as well.

Even before the service of worship begins, you have perceived a lot about how the congregation understands worship and how that service will probably proceed. You are already getting a "feel" for how comfortable you are going to be during the service and whether or not you want to stay.[i]

Yet, who is it or what is it that has already determined such things? Is the worship of God such an extremely relatively interpreted thing? Is it simply up to each one of us to find the place where we are individually comfortable? Is the way we worship God merely a democratic process where the majority of those in attendance are free to dictate their wishes? What about God? Is God bound to accept whatever suits

us to give Him? Or does God actually tell us how we are to worship Him? Many ministers and sessions have carefully worked out their interpretation of the distinction between the "elements and the circumstances" of worship, which justify the decisions they make regarding the appearance of the room and the priorities it communicates. But are they right just because they are satisfied?

That may sound like a simple question to answer but the two thousand years of church history tells us it is not. Nevertheless, we should be bound to try, because yielding, instead, to other, subjective inclinations alone – i.e., just whatever suits us individually, just whatever will draw and attract seekers, just the amount of money we decide to spend on a building and the activities we want to have going on inside – leave God's true presence out of the picture entirely.

> *In a sense, what happened in church architecture is symptomatic of some of the profound changes occurring in Protestant worship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This period saw a tendency toward the breakdown of the emphasis on corporate action in common worship which the reformers sought to achieve. (White, p. 119)*

In response to that, the cry is beginning to be heard that the Church has, for far too long, gone in the direction of mere democratic concerns and preferences; that once again, the approach to God needs to be centered in principles that declare truth and that call the worshipper to stand before his God. That cry, we would stress, is to return to those Reformation ideals and priorities and see them applied even to the rooms in which we worship.

> *The concert stage and the divided chancel arrangements certainly do not express the concepts of worship held by the sixteenth-century reformers and are equally foreign to the best liturgical thought of our own time. And yet these stereotyped arrangements are repeated in hundreds of new churches every year. (White, p. 121)*

> *[T]he church must be unapologetic in her worship. She must not cater to those bound to ridicule her ways as foolish. Christian worship is, in fact, a bold political act. It subverts the world's values by assigning glory and praise to the one whom the world despises. And as weak as the church at worship might appear to the watching world, the truth is that the powers of this world are no match for the power of God, who is present among his people when they gather to sing praise, pray, and hear his Word. Moreover the church must reject the claim that worship is old-fashioned, irrelevant, and isolated from the 'real world'. For believers, the church at worship is the real world. The gathering of the saints in the holy of holies is the eschatological foretaste of the new heavens and the new earth, the reality to which all of history is headed. (Hart & Muether, p. 34)*

Such certain things were very important to the meaning of the 16th century Reformation and those things became distinctives of the Protestant expression of worship in the years that followed. Those things were not at all new, they were just rediscovered. The Reformers were protesting that the medieval, Roman church had badly and significantly drifted from the principles and true priorities of the Christian faith and that this was clearly visible in the rooms constructed and decorated for their "performance" worship. The Reformers wanted to return to biblical priorities and emphases and boldly display that return in the arrangement of the room where the true worship of God could take place. Writing in 1964, James White observes:

> *Historical studies have led Methodists to realize how far they have moved from eighteenth-century Wesleyanism, Presbyterians to see the gap between themselves and sixteenth-century Calvinists, and other denominations to re-examine their own traditions. … The result in many cases has been a rediscovery of the reformation traditions of each denomination. This has had considerable influence on contemporary thought about worship. (White, p. 145)*

White's observation is correct, but the only solution he can offer is not based on the necessity of and return to those Reformation principles. His only suggestion is the need for more architectural experimentation – a notion that history has already determined to be a dead-end street.

As we have seen , there are three man-made obstacles, even myths, that the Reformation soundly rejected: holy space, the holy priesthood, and, if you will, a "holy" worship. But, in turn, there are three priorities that Reformed theology stresses as being most important to the worship of God: the preaching of the Word, the proper understanding and practice of the sacraments, and the holiness of God's people gathered together.

The first is the Word of God proclaimed. The Word comes from God and, therefore, it is the primary source of hope, blessing and guidance for mankind. That comes from the preaching of the Gospel. But the Word also teaches the wisdom of God – the true enlightenment for mankind that is the light of the world. Even more than pointing the way of salvation, as primary as that is, Scripture also teaches us to have a proper view of our world and life now, a proper value system and ethic now, and a proper duty and responsibility now. Scripture teaches us of our sinful hearts, it rebukes our pride, and it calls us to repentance and new trust and obedience. The instruction of the Word to God's people, to the world, is absolutely vital to all our lives. But there is something else. The preaching of God's Word is, itself, significant. Even more than our individually reading of it on our own, the preached Word of God is particularly crucial, for it comes to us with the authority of God and it is that authority that the Holy Spirit uses to ground our hope and faith, strengthen our trust and compel us to obedience. So the preached Word is to be significantly displayed in the worship room.

The next priority is that of the ordinances, or sacraments, related to the covenant of God – baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are the visible signs and seals that

convey vital messages to God's people in worship, confirming them in their identity as God's people and their calling to the world. Baptism represents the inclusion of the faithful into the number of the true church of Christ and it represents our hope and trust in God's covenant for our children. The Lord's Supper reminds us of the grace of God in Christ to pay for our sins through his blood and give us the hope of eternal life through the reality of his resurrection and return. Therefore, the ordinances of the New Testament – baptism and the Lord's Supper – are to be prominently displayed in the worship room.

Finally, the third priority in worship is to visibly demonstrate the gathering of the saints together around the throne of grace, being constituted and recognized as the body of Christ, his bride. This is the picture described for us as early as the book of Exodus, with the Israelites surrounding Mt. Sinai, all the way to John's vision of our eternal worship in the book of Revelation. While it is wonderfully true that each of us is claimed and delivered unto salvation glory on an individual basis, we are also adopted to be part of the family of God, which is to be our new corporate identity. The worship of God must visibly display and demonstrate this unity and identity as, together, we exist and witness to the world that we are the Church. We are God's people.

Now, this is not to say that other items we are familiar with in worship – music, creeds, even the practical design of the room for human beings – are not important. It is just that these things, along with other notions, have their place underneath the deliberate expression and presentation of our first priorities. The other things in the room should not be what should first catch our eye, what draw us in or what sets the

tone for worship as much as presence and presentation of those essentials that remind us of the essence of what it means to be the covenant people of God.

The Pulpit

WSC Q. 89 How is the Word made effectual to salvation?
A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, fo the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

WSC Q. 90 How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?
A. That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

With the Reformation came a renewed burden and responsibility to preach the Word of God as the central focus of the true worship of God rather than to witness the sacrament taking place at the Altar[ii]. It was not merely that the Reformers saw education as the key to power and social improvement, it was that God speaks not just to scholars and church officers but to every man, woman, boy and girl; and God commands them all to learn of him and live before him. This was why the format of the worship room changed with the Reformation. The people now were to gather around the minister so they could hear together what God was telling them[iii]. And the minister's platform was raised not just for the ease of hearing (which is very important in its own right) but also that the authority of God's proclaimed Word[iv] might be evident and unchallenged to all.

This centrality and authority are what make preaching different from teaching. In teaching, the aim and burden is the communication of facts, evidences, principles

and information. If ethics are mentioned in the classroom, they are communicated in a way as to be examined from both sides of the issue for the student's ability to compare and contrast[v]. Preaching should involve teaching but it goes beyond it in terms of pressing the listeners to understand that the information declared is not merely from man alone and, therefore, subject to opinion, but from God; ethics are not only declared but required of the listener under the impending judgment of God; a judgment which is escaped only through the gospel of forgiveness found in Jesus Christ. So, far more than teaching facts and figures, dates and dead people, and speaking words of mere encouragement, the minister proclaims a true and living hope and insists that his hearers embrace this hope with all their heart and soul, and that they live their lives by it alone.

These elements of centrality and authority remain key and should play a role in both the design of the pulpit itself as well as where it is placed in the worship room. As a piece of furniture, the pulpit is to represent and symbolize these elements and bear witness to them even when no service is presently going on. Likewise, even during other parts of the worship service, the physical nature of the pulpit should represent these superior elements and should not have to compete with the other, lesser priorities when they are being focused upon in the eyes and ears of the congregation. This is why a moveable lectern or a music stand, or even the absence of such furniture altogether is not satisfactory. The centrality and authority of the proclaimed Word of God is not witnessed to and communicated by such choices and options. Rather the opposite is communicated – "this, too, is not all that important".

- Centrality – The centrality of the pulpit in the worship room is more than an architectural necessity – it conveys the centrality of the Word of God to the life of the church as well as to the individual Christian. That Christian needs the hope of the gospel that such a powerful symbol conveys. Faithful preaching in the early first millennium struggled to uphold the importance of the preached Word but was progressively set aside when Constantine demanded a worship service fit to compare with that of the pagans. The Medieval Church rejected and even disdained the preaching of the Word in favor of the centrality of the Mass. Even in Anglican England, such dissenting churches were simply described and dismissed with scoffing as "preaching houses" as if that alone did not truly define a proper and complete worship service.

  The tendency in the heart of man is always the same: to put off, to put aside the Word of God in order to be caught up with other things that he can control and manipulate and make into performance. In contemporary American churches, many worship services intentionally resemble the culture around them – the worship of God is given over to enhanced musical performances, multi-media communication, and displays of the arts. These all come from the same basic root. Man becomes more interested in what he can offer to the people (and to God, of course) in worship rather than submitting to what God has to give to the people.

  To have the pulpit centrally located in the worship room deliberately declares to the 1st time visitor as well as deliberately reminds the faithful older

disciple that God's Word is present and it must be heard. The pulpit must be central.

- Authority – If you go online or thumb through a church supply catalog you will discover that pulpits have been manufactured in factories to suit every possible mood and taste. Sometimes they are chosen for very specific architectural reasons: the wood and carving match the décor, a particular model is particularly interesting, even innovative. Another is specifically designed to be conveniently portable, another has other features which make it visually interesting. I have become persuaded that the furniture offered at such places only caters to those other, lesser motivations and interests. Such marketing should be rejected rather than attended. Instead, the pulpit should be designed and be constructed to communicate the one element so easily forgotten and set aside: the authority that it represents. Certain characteristics that I see as necessary include:

Grace Chapel,
Reformed Presbyterian Seminary,
Jackson, MI
www.rts.edu

  - *the pulpit should be raised*. More than being just a lectern on a wide stage which, itself, suggests multi-use and availability for other things, the pulpit should be raised uniquely and deliberately or built onto its own platform;
  - *the pulpit should be substantial*. While some pulpits are much too light and inconsequential in appearance, the pulpit should visibly support and

symbolize the true and unique weight and value of the gospel message. Its appearance should be undeniable and it should be allowed to correctly dominate the room[vi].

- *The pulpit should look studious*. Preparing and preaching God's Word properly is time-consuming and requires training and adequate resource material. The one who preaches from it must be called of God and by the church. He must be ordained with authority, and held accountable before other elders of the church. The pulpit should reflect the seriousness that the congregation asks and expects their minister to give to his preaching. Therefore, the pulpit should be broad, desk-like, with room for the man's Bible, his notes and his body so that nothing distracts from his efforts to feed his people.
- *The pulpit should be made to hold and present the Bible visibly and prominently*. The Bible must remain important while the minister preaches so that it is clear to all that the preacher relies not merely on his notes or his personality but on the Word of God himself. The desk should not be hidden but exposed, slanted only slightly so that the top of his Bible, at least, may be visible to the congregation[vii]. That way, they can see that it is open and before him and that he is speaking to them from it[viii].

<u>The Furniture of the Ordinances: Water Baptism</u>

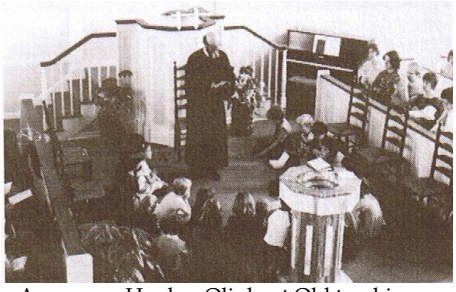
The Reformers have given us three working principles regarding the ordinances:

- *There are only two in number*. This is determined by the fact that Christ, himself, communicated to us only these two (rf. Mt. 28:19; Lk. 22:19-20 & parallels). In this, we can readily see the connection with the ordinances given the people of God prior to Christ - circumcision and Passover - as well as the ordinances spoken of in their future and eternal state - the mark of God (Rev. 7:3) and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-10).
- *Their observance is a part of the worship of God*. The ordinances are not to be conducted in private or selectively (such as by the priests on behalf of the whole congregation, etc.), but that they are to be understood covenantally; and, as such, they are to be a part of the service of worship to God and done in the presence of the whole congregation.
- *Their meaning is as signs and seals*. What do the ordinances actually accomplish? As mere objects and performances, nothing. Just as water baptism does not save by itself, the bread and wine do not unite us to Christ in and of themselves. Instead, they are means by which God's grace comes to us. For that reason, the ordinances are called signs and seals: they physically point to the spiritual reality to which they refer and they testify to the veracity and guarantee of our Lord's promises.

Because of these three Reformation principles, the priority of the ordinances is evident. It is necessary that the symbols of the ordinances be continually and visibly displayed before the congregation, whether they are presently observed or not during any given worship service. None of the means of God's grace to his people should ever be

allowed to be set aside in the worship of God. Even when worship is not going on, the visitor should see the symbols of the ordinances displayed prominently in the room.

But how is that display to be properly done? Protestants have considered the matter in two ways. The one is to regard the container of the ordinance as needing to be prominent. When Baptists try to be faithful to these principles, they find they must invest heavily in a sizable and attractive immersion tank. When pragmatic concerns for space arise, these tanks are often located to suit. That might be behind the choir loft and shrouded with plants or curtains and raised well above the pulpit itself. Or, the tank might be recessed in the floor of the raised platform and covered, when not in use, by a carpeted trap door. Neither of these commonly used positions really succeed in visually teaching these Reformation principles[ix]. For other Protestants, the practice changes but the same priorities dominate[x]. The amount of water is not crucial in their theology, but the rationale is often the same: to make the container itself the thing that is significant, rather than something to be diminished. Therefore, baptismal fonts are often constructed out of sizable amounts of wood or stone to emphasize the "weight" of their importance. But then, pragmatic concerns arise that are twofold: is the size of the font made in proportion to the rest of the room and should it be fixed to the floor or made to be portable so as not to be in the way when not used?



A younger Hughes Oliphant Old teaching a Children's Sermon at Faith Presbyterian Church in West Lafayette, IN, behind the red and white granite baptismal font that he helped design.

In the heritage of Scottish Presbyterianism, not only was the act of baptism more important than the container, it was also important to link the meaning of baptism with the covenant promises from the Word of God and not just the symbol. The tradition here was not to have a grand construction that would simply hold water that was to be used for a baptism but to have a simple bowl or other humble container which was visibly and literally attached to the side of the pulpit[xi], demonstrating its true meaning is derived from God's Word and covenantal promise.

The pulpit of Durisdeer Kirk, Dumfriesshire (late 17th c). Notice the baptismal bowl on the right and the hourglass on the left.

One element that does not seem addressed in these considerations is that of the water itself. "Living water" was understood by the Jews as flowing water and not standing water. Bathing or washing in a tub or drawing from standing water would not have been considered true cleansing. The water needed to flow in order to cleanse. Baptists pick up on this theme when they advocate baptism in rivers rather than tanks[xii]. The symbol of one's sins being washed away is visibly portrayed. For other Protestants, this is seen in the action of pouring – the water flows from above and on to the individual and then off.

This movement seems important. More readily teaching the aspect of Christ being our "living water" (Jn. 4:10) would be the symbol of a baptismal font that is made to flow, as with a small fountain, or, much more simply, a pitcher and bowl combination. If a pitcher and bowl were to be utilized, there would be no need for a

separate font stand. Instead, they could be placed on the table reserved for communion, alongside the plate and cup which symbolize Christ's other ordinance.


Baptismal bowl on Communion Table, Westminster PCA, Lancaster, PA

No matter how the ordinance is displayed, it should always be in its place in the worship room and never be allowed to be relegated to a corner or to a storage room when not in actual use. Our baptism is the sign and seal of our relationship in Christ. It should be gazed upon by believers as a constant reminder to them of their reception into the family of God and of the benefit of their assurance of salvation. It also stands as a witness before Christian parents to the claim of God upon their covenant children, of the parents' own vows unto God for obedience in the raising up of these children, and of God's continual blessing and comfort to them as they do so.

The Furniture of the Ordinances: the Lord's Supper

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper has probably been the most contentious topic in all Christendom. Most Christians today simply cannot grasp that fact. Today, it is the music which has become virtually sacramental in priority and concern, and which raises much more opinion and disagreement. But the communion of God's people has been at the center of major and intense storms which have swirled and blown throughout the entirety of church history. Since Jesus instituted this activity, this ordinance has been both deified and degraded. Wars have literally been fought over it,

and it has also suffered from gross apathy and disregard. At the heart of all this is not only the question of its meaning but also of its power.

a) *Location of the Table* - How central or primary is the ordinance of the Lord's Supper? Should it be front and center? Is it of supreme importance? Does the ordinance itself "define" worship? By the middle of the first millennium, the church had determined that the Eucharist (from the Latin for "thanksgiving") was, indeed, a very significant activity of worship. As that first millennium progressed, the drama of the Eucharist was intensified. All eyes focused on the activities of the priest as he acted out the worship of God. Afterwards, the people were told in Latin: "Go, and be *dismissed*" whereupon the worship of God became known by all simply as the "Mass".

The Reformation focused critically on this evolved elaboration. The Reformers determined that the Lord's Supper was not being performed in the "Mass", nor was it so essential to meaning of worship that it should stand at the center of the worshipper's focus. Instead, the preaching of the Word was to take center stage. In many Protestant churches, the table (or altar, as they were taught it truly was) was removed completely to visibly demonstrate this demotion. It often disappeared altogether until it was needed, or it was permanently relocated to the side, out of the way - relegated to a much less significant spot in the worship room[9]. But this was done more out of a direct response to the error of the Romanists than by direction from the Bible.

Curiously, with the rise of Anglicanism – which, itself was a creation of anti-Roman politics in England – and by the influence of Archbishop William Laud, the creation of the "split chancel" became standardized. This meant the table was again

placed center stage while the pulpit was placed to one side and a reading desk was then called for, which could be placed on the opposite side – not because the reading desk was necessary, but just because it provided some symmetry to the front platform[xiii].

Among the Puritans in England and within the churches of Presbyterianism in Scotland as well as of the Reformed faith in the Netherlands, there would be no split chancel. The pulpit was to remain central to the focus and emphasis in the worship of God. But the table also retained its own precious significance. It could not simply be set aside so harshly.

To be truly biblical, it would not be proper to deify the table on the one hand or merely bring it out and set it up when needed on the other. The Scriptures emphasize all three – the Word and the two ordinances – for all of these together are the means by which God faithfully dispenses his grace to his people. The emblems of God's grace must all have their continuing and constant place before God's people in the worship service.

The means of grace permanently on display in the worship room of Ballston Center ARP, Ballston Spa, NY. (Note also the symbol of the "fenced" table, which is present but not in a way prohibiting the approach of the worshipper.) www.ballstoncenterchurch.org

This point is vital and yet today it is often neglected. In some churches today, furniture that represents these means of grace are more regarded pragmatically – they do not need to be center-stage or even present at all when not in actual use. In many churches today, the pulpit is replaced with just a lectern or with nothing at all. In others, there is no emblem of Christian baptism visibly present unless a baptism is called for that morning. In others, the table might remain at the front of the worship

room but it used as "just as table" - often being routinely covered by various decorations such as flowers or candles, offering plates or even Bibles when not otherwise in use. Indeed, many worshippers come and see these decorations and get the impression that the table is simply another convenient piece of utilitarian furniture upon which may be called upon when the Lord's Supper is to be observed.

Instead of this misdirection, the table must be allowed to speak of the theological reason it is there – to speak of the grace of God given to us in the Lord's Supper. It needs to bear continual witness of its meaning every time a worshipper gazes upon it. It should constantly remind the worshipper of the gift of God in Christ to unworthy sinners that He has chosen to redeem. So, even when the Lord's Supper is not actively a part of any given worship service, the cup and the plate should still be present and remain on the table as visible testimonies and witnesses of God's grace to the sinner who is united to Christ by His Spirit. These things should not be absent.

Consequently, other things should not be allowed to take their place. Flowers, offering plates, etc., all speak of our offerings to God and to the church. But to place them on the table communicates the wrong message. The table is for what God gives to us and not what we offer to Him[xiv]. It is <u>not</u> an altar. There can be other places to put a gift of flowers, there can be other places to receive the offering. The table is for the ordinance of the Lord's Supper and should not be used in other ways – even for decoration – and it should not be allowed to be cluttered with other things.

b) *Size, Shape and Position of the Table* - The position of the table, typically sideways or broadside to the congregation, is nothing more than a matter of staging. By

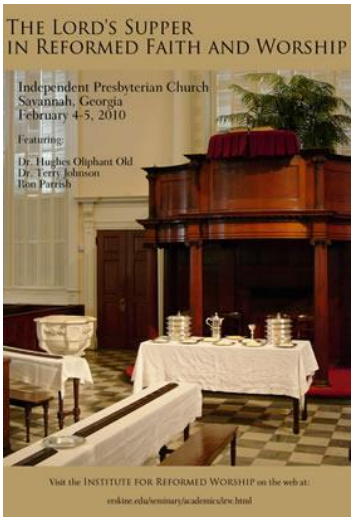
the first half of the first millennium, the church, borrowing its worship room design from the Roman Basilica, placed religious artifacts and relics in a box referred to as the altar[xv] and placed it in the apse for that was the most prominent place. Then, prayers were offered over the altar and, eventually, the Lord's Supper was conducted over it as well. Later in the first millennium, the Roman church kept the altar as far forward as was possible, even screening it off from the rest of the worship room, teaching the congregation the visible lesson not only of the altar's prominence and holiness but also of the necessity to separate the sinful worshipper from that holy place. The priest would conduct the Eucharist with his back to the congregation, "facing God". Later, in response to the Reformation, and ultimately as a result of Vatican II, the Roman altar has been moved forward and the priest now stands behind it facing the congregation - to make it appear more inviting and the congregation more included.

The Protestant churches routinely have kept the table in this broadside position - most placing the table in front of the pulpit which allows the minister to stand behind it when leading the ordinance. This may look balanced and allow for the best use of the space in the front of the room, but it is not enough. It is important to convey Christ's hospitality to us – he is our host and we are his invited guests. Christ is at the head of this table and the minister, serving in Christ's name, should be in his place - not along the side of the table, as a waiter might serve from a lunch counter - but at its head.

The large communion table at Covenant PCA, Houston, TX.
www.covenantpca.org

Now, we've all seen Da Vinci's painting, *The Last Supper*, and we know where Christ is seated – in the center. But that is just that artist's notion and is, in no way, truly accurate or instructive. The head of the table is a place of prominence, typically at the end and the guests sit down the length of the table on both sides. As such, the table should not be just a small piece of furniture in the worship room, barely big enough to hold all the cups and plates which are stacked in some unnatural way or covered with a linen sheet prior to partaking. Rather, the table should be long and wide and inviting, and the elements set for the enjoyment of the guests.

c) *Observance* - With this concept in mind, many church buildings in 18th c. Scotland, particularly, but in the Netherlands as well, were constructed with the concept of the congregation coming forward and being seated at the table – not walking through a line or kneeling at a rail as if in adoration of the elements, but seated as recognized and received guests[xvi]. Some of these rooms would have long tables set along the edge, or in a separate room adjacent to the worship room, or even down the wide center aisle for the celebration of communion. Others had benches around the table toward the front to accommodate the congregation's approaching the table row by row or family by family.



A recent conference brochure illustrating how Communion is served at a common table that runs the full length of the wide center aisle.
Independent Presbyterian Church, Savannah, GA

It actually caused a major Scottish Presbyterian controversy bringing outrage and consternation, when pragmatism suggested that the worshippers remain seated

where they were and that the elements be distributed among them row by row[xvii]. The service went faster, apparently, everyone could partake together rather than in turn, and there would not be any pedestrian traffic issues. The argument against it was more sound: it is in the movement of one's physical body, the active, individual answering of the call of Christ and the joining with other Christians, that confirms, demonstrates and helps to strengthen the faith; it causes the worshipper to more deeply examine and question himself if he knows he actually has to get up and respond, or not. It stimulates the worshipper to be more resolved to repent of his sins, and to trust in God with more devotion and obedience. Having the elements brought to the worshipper seems lazy and self-serving and doing so required nothing more of the worshipper than to put his hand in the dish.

A last and most objectionable issue has arisen with distributing the elements to the congregation while they remained in their pews. It had to do with the elders' responsibility of shepherding the flock. When the elements are distributed row by row, it takes the elements out of the elders' hands and, thereby, removes their authority, their charge of oversight and discipline of the members of the church. This symbol - of the elders' oversight over the congregation during the Lord's Supper by being the ones to hand the elements approvingly to each communicant - is also a very important, Reformed distinction[xviii]. The active service of the elders represents the spiritual shepherding that the Lord requires of them as well as the recognition and submission to that authority on the part of the worshipper that the Lord requires of His church.

To go along with that, all the elders should be visible and active during the communion service as both encouragement and warning to each believer. Often, the number of elders serving communion are limited pragmatically – how many does it take? But pragmatism should not dictate the call of the under-shepherd to serve the flock. All the elders should be visibly engaged in some way during the Lord's Supper so as to show their exercise of responsibility, authority and watchful care.

The Gathering of the Saints

a) *Borrowing an Architectural Model*

The very first gathering of Christians was around the preaching of the Word. *"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."* (Acts 2:42, ESV) Such gatherings were, by nature, informal and probably done in small groups. *"And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in the homes, … ."* (Acts 2:48, ESV). When congregations gather together for small group Bible study, they are emulating this ancient Christian practice.

The point to be stressed here is that this gathering of the saints is not only a spiritual and rhetorical truth but one that should be physically and literally displayed in order to incur the benefits of the gathering. The Roman basilican format, which soon adopted chairs and then pews in straight rows, fails to do that. While such arrangement establishes an order to the room, it removes the true sense of community and unity, and replaces it with an "audience" perception that separates the

worshipping congregation not only from the act of corporate worship but also from the spiritual bond they should be sharing one with another.

But, as we have demonstrated, this basilican format not only went on to identify the Roman Catholic tradition but it remained in place with the coming of the Anglican tradition as well. When building architecture took that for granted and continued to design more and more impressive worship rooms, alternative designs to the basilica simply could not compete for space needed for numbers or with the requirement to maintain and develop the concept of worship as performance. This has had a direct bearing on the meaning and character of worship – and, as a result, was at the forefront of the Reformation – if not in terms of actual dialogue, surely in terms of practice.

Since the time that Protestantism first come to America, there has been a forsaking of this principle. The principle has been forgotten and that has meant that the design of the room has slowly been allowed to return to the basilican order once again. Along with the sense of performance in such a room design, the congregation is, once again, relegated to the role of audience and spectators. Now, the building itself is one of the pressures and influences that have eroded the church's true calling and focus[xix].

B) *A Reformed Approach*

While the theater and arena style seating of the twentieth century did restore the concept of the congregation physically gathering around the Word of God, the overwhelming numbers of such large and megachurches virtually exclude the concept of real covenant community. Such churches often recognize the need for such community that the size of their own church building gives them and they proceed to

divide the congregation into small groups that meet at other times. This is really just an admission that the church, herself, is too large to function as she should. Such small groups will do many things for fellowship or study but they cannot meet the need for corporate worship.

Revivalism and the hunger for ever-increasing numbers have greatly damaged the very concept of Christ's church and the worship to which she is called. The seeker-friendly approach illustrates this as well, being a direct appeal primarily to unbelievers and to their compromising of the worship of God, changing it into the acceptance of the unbeliever without prejudice and seeing to it that they are properly entertained instead, in the hopes of their imminent return. Such concepts of church have continued to alienate those who still identify themselves as having a Christian faith.

It is true that the Reformers would have scoffed at the notion that the building in which worship is done is important.

> *Let's begin by recognizing that, properly speaking, the church is not a building. The Puritans understood how confusing it is to use the word 'church' to refer both to man-made buildings and to the mystical Body of Christ. Richard Mather, for example, wrote: 'There's no just ground from Scripture to apply such a trope as church to a house for public assembly.' … In saying this, they recognized further that such buildings are never to be thought of as 'sacred spaces'. The Reformed view of church architecture is at odds with much of architectural history and with much of contemporary church architecture. Indeed, a 'sacramentalist' approach dominates church architecture; most of the world's great church buildings were built to create a sense of 'the sacred'. While we can admire the beauty of such churches and ingenuity of those who built them, we must join the seventeenth-century Puritans in rejecting the faulty theology laid in their foundation. (Gobel, p. 6)*

But in dismissing the importance of the building completely, it has been too easily relegated from being elemental to being merely circumstantial. And that leaves the entire construction and design to the imagination and devices of men with little to no

awareness or regard for how such ideas actually dictates who or what it is that really controls the worship service itself. The early Reformers left to history their temporary or inexpensively built and attended-to structures. They built and occupied on a different theology than the cathedrals, and much of their legacy has been lost as a result. Thus, the longest-lasting legacies – along with the understandings and practices of the worship they were built for – are those coming from the Catholic or Anglican style of spectator worship and the sacerdotal theology that pervaded them.

> *Like all of society, our culture's built environment is in dire need of reformation. Sprawling landscapes of multilane highways, disconnected pod developments, and cheaply build, warehouse-style buildings are indicative of a self-absorbed society that is far from pursuing the true chief end of man. The automobile-oriented, big-box entertainment-style worship centers built by many churches today seem only to perpetuate such culture. How we build our churches is a matter too long ignored. Reformed churches should seek to build buildings fit for the supreme task of corporate worship, while contributing to the beauty and welfare of the city of man. (Gobel, p. 7)*

C) *A Meetinghouse Proposal* - One good design that has been historically set aside is that of the Meetinghouse. There are predictable reasons for this. The Meetinghouse design does not fit popular impressions of what a church "should look like" – meaning the vestiges of Wren's and Gibbs' influence upon America. That concept, with its sense of order, even grandeur, continues to be desirable. And it is inclined to depict the holiness in things rather in people. Also, the grander the building, the more economic

Westminster PCA, Lancaster, PA. Here, a modified Meetinghouse design, is capable of seating 1000 worshippers.

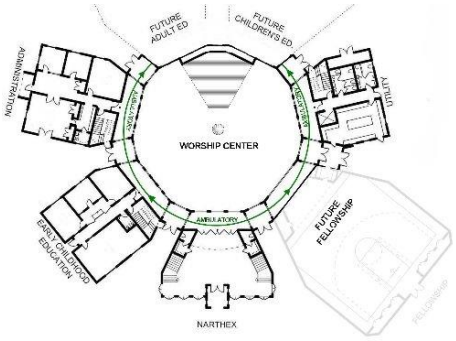
pressures and political influences comes to bear which all play a part, rather than theology, in the finished product. The financial gift of the building could become a sense of worship in itself which can often be the expression of an individual or a single family rather than the entire congregation.

But there is also something else, something psychological about the basilican design that is hard to pin down. Many times, Christian community is not even desired. Christians find themselves attracted to megachurches where they can "get lost" and maintain anonymity. They say that sitting in a congregation that wraps around the pulpit allows for distraction as one individual looks at the faces of other individuals. There is even the phenomenon that exists more often with humor that many prefer to sit in the back row where others can be watched while they, themselves, cannot be watched.

Focusing on, or catering to, the individual has effectively destroyed the sense of community in the gathering for worship. This was very clearly understood by the Reformers but has been lost in the years of the American experience. Returning worship to having that sense of community as a priority may not be easy – in fact, it may take another Reformation. If the church is to truly continue to exist even what has been allowed to become merely a circumstance of worship must be now be regarded as an element.

The Meetinghouse design was a singularly worthy contribution to this part of the discussion. We need to furnish the room again with a pulpit that is prominent, permanent, and raised well off the floor. We need to position the furniture for the ordinances of Christ before it in a meaningful fashion, and to position the people of God on all three sides of the pulpit. Doing this visibly indicates that which is truly important and declares that worship is not a spectator sport but a heavenly dialogue; that the minister does not "do the worshipping" but leads the gathered saints in their worship; that their focus is not only on the authority of the Word proclaimed and the sacraments dispensing grace, but also on one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and themselves as part of this singular body[22].

There are other shapes that would allow for such congregational gathering. One example is the twenty-first century construction of Wallace Presbyterian Church in College Park, Maryland. It is, essentially, circular in design with the Communion table projected out into the center of the circle and thus of the congregation. The pulpit stands on a V-shaped projection behind the table.



Wallace Presbyterian Church, College Park, Maryland


Wallace Presbyterian Church, College Park, MD

A Word About the Music of Worship

We have not focused on the aspect of music in worship in this study, but as its approach and involvement will determine its centrality and visibility, a small excursus is necessary.

Before the worship room can be properly arranged, the emphasis, priority and structure required by the music done in the service of worship must first be settled and understood. Too often, the participation of music in Reformed worship has followed familiar, pragmatic lines historically rather than solid theological ones. Christians would generally agree that God calls for music in the worship of His name but beyond that, very little consensus is held as to what Scripture actually dictates as to how the specifics of that are to be carried out[xx]. No matter how the particulars might differ from congregation to congregation, three over-arching principles must be used to guide our thinking. To begin this consideration, some principal, Reformed guidelines need to be hammered out.

An **element** of worship, as most theologians would agree to define the term, is simply what *must* be included in the worship of God because God has called and commanded his people to do it. Elements in worship include prayer, teaching, the ordinances and singing. In the Psalms, God calls for his people to sing in worship to him. And whatever is sung, it must be the truth[xxi]. It is bad enough that some Christians hold to selfish, twisted and ignorant misconceptions about God. How much worse that becomes when such thoughts are put to music and then sung to God in worship!

Singing the Psalms are, at least, singing the truth of God back to him. That is an important aspect to recognizing that the singing of God's people remains an element of worship.

- The Psalms are revelatory – they reveal and speak the very mind and will of God and, as such, they reveal God's thoughts to us – his attributes and his decrees[xxii]. Manmade songs can only be reflective of that – they can only focus on what is important to man as he responds to God and because of that, from time to time, manmade songs can be unbalanced and they tend to be overly creative and mainly emotive.

- The Psalms are truly inspired. They are God-breathed. They are, after all, Scripture[xxiii]. They recount the story of redemption as God teaches it, they give us prophetic hope as God promises it, and they give us truth in a truly objective way. Manmade songs can only be subjective and devotional. They come from what the author/composer thinks is important – to him or his audience - and such creations can only reflect and project how well that individual understands and interprets the truth.

- The Psalms are authoritative. They declare to us unequivocally: "This is what the Lord says … ", "Thus says your God", and to those words we must listen. Manmade hymns/songs are simply testimonial – they can only speak of the writer's own experience – "This is what God means to me". And that is something that someone else can take or leave.

A **circumstance** of worship, again as most would define it, is not what God commands but what man determines to be expedient and proper for the support of the

corporate worship of God. It is not the same as saying "what *may* occur in worship", as if man could add activities to the worship service at his own pleasure as well. Rather, even the circumstances include the "must" that the elements have. Common circumstances include the place and time for worship on any given Lord's Day, as well as other socially necessary arrangements. If the elders announce that the worship starts at 11:00 am, the congregants *must* be ready and in attendance.

Many Christians today hold to the opinion that musical instruments, if they are to be used at all, are circumstantial – they are not part of God's command but they *may* be used because they aid the congregation in offering their worship to God in an orderly fashion.

Yet, the nature of thinking regarding circumstance is its tendency, if not contested or held in check, to be allowed to evolve into the perception that it is, in truth, an element. The front of the worship room readily becomes the place for the "elemental" display of such circumstances – organ pipes, the handsome grand piano, the choir loft, the trap-set, the music stands and microphones – whatever drives the music gravitates to the front of the room. These items of musical performance become visible symbols of the worship of God themselves. They demand to be regarded as elemental[xxiv] or else it is construed that their presence in the room are "wrong" or, at least, unappreciated. "The truth is, that it is an abuse of language to rank among things indifferent any concomitant of public worship which becomes a part and parcel of it" (Girardeau, p. 196). But we have already seen how the only visible symbols that should

be set before the congregation are the symbols of God's grace – the Word of God and the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

In the Basilican design, where all seating is in tight rows with all eyes facing forward, the placing of instruments related to music is, indeed, limited. The reason for that, of course, is that the design of the room had not included such instruments needed accommodation. As a result, it almost requires that they be placed in front or on stage, crowding out other furniture. But this only enhances the perception that worship is performance and that performance is done by the professionals in the front end of the worship room and, in this case, those professionals are musicians.

This perception is not reduced in an arena venue for it virtually duplicates the atmosphere of a musical concert. To say here that congregational singing is stifled in such a venue as this would charge too much. The people often join in enthusiastically. But the perception shift is definite and noticeable. Music is sung toward the congregation. In doing this, the people see the similarities in the rest of their culture – when they sing along with their favorite band at a concert. They sing merely for their own pleasure and enjoyment.

However, in other venues, such as the Meetinghouse design, with the symbols of God's grace centrally placed along the long wall and the congregation gathered surrounding those symbols, the congregation, not the band, remains central to the worship of God and the singing remains their responsibility. In such a structure, accommodation can be made for the musicians so that their contribution remains supportive rather than oriented toward performance. The emphasis returns to being

much more the identity of the congregation as the ones rejoicing before God together, responding not merely as individuals in the same room but together as a body in worshipful dialogue.

> *Evelyn Underhill noted the distinctiveness of Reformed worship in her 1937 study on worship. 'No organ or choir,' she wrote, 'was permitted in [Calvin's] churches; no color, nor ornament but a table of the Ten Commandments on the wall. No ceremonial acts or gestures were permitted. No hymns were sung but those derived from a biblical source.' She goes on to note the distinctive character of Reformed church architecture. The walls were whitened, and the pulpit was at the center, along with the baptismal font and table. Unlike Catholic, Lutheran, 0or Episcopalian worship, the pulpit was not on the side with an altar in the middle." (Hart & Muether, p. 148)*

If instruments and musicians are to be utilized in a worship service, they need to visibly and perceptibly remain as circumstances of worship, by being placed strategically for the purpose of assisting the congregation in their own worshipful singing and very little, if any, more than that. The Meetinghouse design allows for this by placing such either in the rear or in the balcony, completely out of sight.

The Visibility of Church Offices

As we saw in the study of the early church, the office of bishop rose to prominence quickly not only in terms of the government of the church but of the worship. Elders, as such, at least as Paul envisioned and taught of the office, quickly became the *persona non grata*. With the Reformation, the office of elder was restored, particularly within the context of Reformed and Presbyterian polity, but the prominence of the office has all but been lost once again. Elders, in the roles as governing watchdogs over the doctrine and life of the congregation, are not apparent regularly in any prominent or visible way. The duty and charge of leading the worship

service is either left solely to the Teaching Elder or Pastor by those who hold to a three-office view, or a ruling elder may take a turn in leading the service by those who hold a two-office view. But in many cases, such leadership in worship is deliberately taken away from the elders and handed over to a "Worship Leader", someone who has musical talents, who is charismatic in front of people, but typically has no theological training, let alone any true, biblical authority to take on such a role. The churches who allow for this might now be said to have a "four-office view".

With such pragmatic moves and attention to performance music as well as the emphasis on a more relaxed atmosphere in general, the role of the elder before the congregation has all but been lost. But what would make sense in trying to recover this aspect of vital church government?

This is another reason for arguing for the recovery of the pulpit to a central place before the congregation, for the pulpit is a symbol not only of the preaching of the Word of God but also the authority of the elder for which it stands. As mentioned before, Jeanne Kilde misses this point when she contemplates on the power the minister, himself, as as he stands before the congregation. That kind of thinking simply justifies and encourages the minister's personal projections and dramatic presentations. But when the minister stands behind the pulpit, he is symbolizing not only that he carries the authority of the Word of God to the congregation but that he submits to that authority himself. Standing behind the pulpit demonstrates and enlarges the focus on the Word of God and assists in diminishing the man for his own sake. Preaching without a pulpit or simply with the use of a lectern, as Finney and Moody did, projects

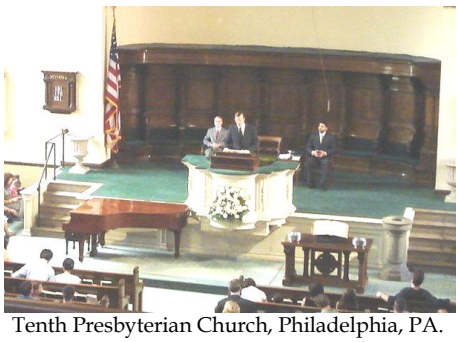
the man, himself, gives him celebrity status, and allows for the impression that he, in himself, is more important than the words he speaks. The same thing happens when large congregations are assisted by jumbo video screens that project an image of the minister that is "larger than life". Such technological "solutions" allows for larger and larger assemblies but does nothing for the cultivation of biblical authority in the concept of a worshipping community.

To temper the perception of magnifying the minister, of allowing him to possess unique or celebrity status and power, Scripture has clearly instructed the church to function with a college of elders of equal status and mutual accountability. Maintaining a visible perception of this has, historically, been a priority in Reformed churches.

Dr. David Gobel, from SCAD, speaking to a D.Min class of Erskine Seminary in the worship room of Independent Presbyterian Church, Savanna, GA. Behind him is the distinctive, raised pulpit with designated chairs for elders directly underneath, "supporting" the preaching of the Word.

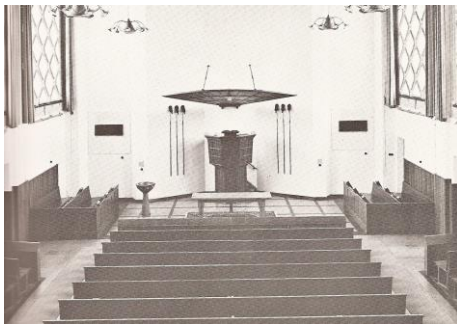
The doctrine of ordination plays a vital role in understanding this. Scripture teaches ordination to be a conferring upon selected men from among the congregation the spiritual authority and responsibility to lead the flock of God and supervise the preaching of the Word. The Deacons, likewise, are ordained to their own spiritual office – not one of shepherding but of representing the congregation in the ministry of deed. As such they are selected from among the congregation as well and are given their own authority by way of the sign of ordination.

But, commonly within Presbyterian circles, there is no regard or attention paid for the visible display of such elder authority in the worship of God. The minister stands alone on the platform and, as he preaches, there is no visible suggestion or indication that any other authority but his is to be regarded as real. But who guards his integrity? The elders of the church should be represented by positions of authority and presence and the elders should not be reluctant to fill them. Many older Reformed churches do have traditional seats for the elders behind the pulpit but, in many cases, those chairs remain empty during the worship service or, at least, during the preaching.



Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, PA. Note the seats built into the wooden back wall. Even though the places of visible elder distinction are provided by both of these designs, they remain unused. Two free-standing chairs, used only for the active worship leaders suffice instead.

In the Dutch tradition, there has been a more serious attempt to project the visible symbol of elder authority. It is not uncommon to see the elders sitting together in a prominent place toward the front or even in designated seating where they can be seen watching the minister and from where they can also observe the congregation. This practice, along with elder participation in the administration of the ordinances, visibly states to the congregation that their office is real and vital and that the proper worship of God is their responsibility to guard and protect.



The pews on either side of the pulpit are designated for elders. The staffs on the wall are for the collection, designating the office of the deacon.
The Reformed Church, Ochten, Netherlands
Bruggink & Droppers, p. 369

Conclusion

It seems evident that much of the necessary thought that once went into room design for the worship of God has been lost. One is very tempted to say we only have ourselves to blame. As a result, because some other agenda has been very active and determinative in influencing room design, those voices are allowed to lead the way. The worship of God has been quietly and steadily changed by the process.

The Anglican church not only tended to be "high" in its worship but opulent in its sense of building. Such buildings are revered for their construction, beauty, sense of permanence and display. Hence, such buildings are seen as necessary to maintain and preserve and, from to time, these buildings are often copied in the construction of other church buildings today.

In contrast, the Reformed church, historically, has been very different. The place of worship was simply not regarded as important, hence the emphasis on the building itself was insignificant. "Conservative Presbyterians and Reformed have carefully preserved orthodoxy in their theology, but they have not been as diligent about worship" (Hart & Muether, p. 178). Such buildings were typically much poorer in design and construction, modest in appearance by intention and their preservation was not seen to be on the same level as others. Such buildings also did little to inspire others to imitate them. If such worship centers were not built to last, then neither were their designs. Tearing them down and building new ones only prompted more and more imagination, innovation and technology, while the theology behind the very design of such buildings evaporated.

As a result, we find that even Reformed church buildings and their worship rooms being built today are not done with a sense of Reformed thinking but, instead, in ignorance, pragmatism and even with an historically Anglican influence. For most, the thinking has been simply: "this is the traditional look for a church".

As a result, the doctrine involved in the Church and even her worship has suffered as well. The Reformed community continues to not be at all concerned with a building's theological message and legacy. More and more in the Reformed community look more and more like the broad, evangelical church today and seem eager to follow along with the modern-day trends. This will not change or reverse itself until even the architecture of our worship rooms are "Reformed" and returned again to our Reformed roots and principles and our care in preserving our heritage for future generations becomes more important.

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[i] "The sessions of the local congregations are free and responsible to make judgment calls about what is more and less appropriate in these things. What God tells them is, 'All things [the elements] should be done decently and in order [the circumstances]' (1 Cor. 1:14-40; WCF, 1.6)." (Wilson, p. 3)

[ii] "During that reformation the Word was so central that it touched and affected everything including church architecture. The altar was swept away along with the idolatrous mass and in its place was the lectern, where a great Bible was placed. The focal point was the pulpit, where the Word of God was read and expounded to the people in their own tongue." (L. DeBoer, Smith & Lochman, p. 137)

[iii] "The solemn reading and preaching of Scripture in the midst of the congregation is a cultic act, if we may use that term, in continuity with the sacrifices of the Old Testament.. Even more it fulfills these ancient cultic acts. The Old Testament sacrifices were but the type, the foreshadow, of something far greater, the proclamation of the gospel. The reading and preaching of Scripture is worship of an even greater intensity, an even greater depth, and an even greater magnificence than were ever the sacrifices of the Temple." (Old, p. 189)

[iv] "It is not only necessary that the Word of God be read but that it be read properly. That means first of all that it is to be read as the word of God. It is to be read with reverence and solemnity. it is to read with respect (sic). And it is to be read with authority. Christ's ministry, from His first public sermon, was remarkable, 'For he taught them as one having authority.' When read publicly Scripture ought to be read by those in authority, who have been ordained and set apart to the ministry of the word, and are clothed with the authority of church office as ministers of Jesus Christ. … As have noted earlier, it is God who

regulates all the details of His worship and it is God not man who decides who is authorized to do what in His public worship." (L. DeBoer,Smith & Lochman, p. 149, 155)

[v] Christian education, of course, is not satisfied with such mere objectivity and claims of neutrality nor aims for them.

[vi] "The design of the pulpit can give a sense of the divine-human encounter possible in preaching. This is especially true when the pulpit is solid and substantial enough to suggest authority far higher than the preacher's personality." (White, p. 46)

[vii] "It would be wise, when possible, to have the Bible visible on the pulpit when in use." (White, p. 37)

[viii] For this reason I prefer not to have a microphone stand on the pulpit as it is center and gets in the way of making the Bible visible on the pulpit. It is distracting and gets in the way. I would also reject pulpit designs that "hide" the platform for a Bible and notes for the same reason. Such a design allows only the person to be seen while his authority remains hidden.

[ix] "It seems to be virtually impossible to secure a location for the baptistery which will not be awkward on the numerous Sundays when it is not in use. It calls baptism to mind only when actually being used." (White, p. 129)

[x] James White offers the logic for this view: "Often the size of the font is a good indication of how important this sacrament is in the life of the congregation." (White, p. 46)

[xi] White reports the same practice occurring in the Dutch Reformed churches. "The font likewise was of minor visual significance. It might be only a basin placed in a hoop on the pulpit or put on a table when needed. Thus the pulpit was left the single dominant liturgical center of the building." (White, p. 89)

[xii] The Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Savannah, Georgia has a large baptismal font with small fountains emanating from its eight sides.

[xiii] This arrangement then led to an artificial notion that the pulpit was sacrosanct – only the preaching was to be done from the pulpit while all else - Scripture reading, announcements, etc. - could be done from the lectern on the other side. That, in turn, led to the question and discussion as to who may be permitted to read from the lectern - other officers, lay leaders, women, etc.? - seeing as how these things were not done from "the pulpit"!

[xiv] James White represents the confused logic of this borrowed from the early pagan roots of worship discussed in chapter two. "The altar-table signifies what is offered to God (altar) as well as what is given to man (table). … Long before Christian times altars were used to receive the gifts of man's work in which worshippers offered themselves to God through these tokens." (White, p. 40)

[xv] Incidentally, "altar" is a word borrowed from the Jewish Temple and from paganism. It speaks of a continuing sacrifice as well as of a uniquely "holy place" where prayers are thought to be more effectively and formally offered. But there are no more sacrifices made in the church today and neither is there a "holy place", only a holy people. Therefore, there is no "altar" in our church. It is a table and should look like a table, not a box.

[xvi] "Reformed churches have received the bread and wine standing, sitting around a table, sitting with the table before the congregation, kneeling, and even walking. Kneeling has been discouraged because of its association with the idolatry of the mass and its emphasis on humility instead of celebration which is stressed in the Supper. The Westminster Assembly had an extended debate as to whether people should come to the table or whether the elements could be taken from the table to where they were seated. It was finally decided that they could 'sit about it, or at it,' which allowed either. Because fo the large number of people and time constraints, the practice of sitting 'about it' has become normative." (K. Hurst, Smith & Lochman, p. 251)

[xvii] "Table communion continued to be the norm until, through the immense influence and prestige of Thomas Chalmers, pew communion was introduced in his parish, St. John's in Glasgow." (Rayburn, p. 54)

[xviii] McMillan and Ross both make the comment that in the practice of some, the minister sat at table along with the congregants and handed the bread and cup off to the nearest who passed them down the line. Even though this is also a common practice of the age, I did not detect any substantial argument in support of it.

[xix] "In many churches built in the last forty years the liturgical space allotted to the congregation is arranged to suggest that the congregation is an audience which watches the clergy and choir perform the acts of worship. Yet the opposite should be the case, for the congregation are actors in common worship." (White, p. 47)

[xx] With current "worship wars" dividing and changing church bodies with ease, there is also the transition not just in tune but in purpose. "In the end, the worship wars are not simply about new songs replacing old hymns, but reflect a reorientation of public worship away from the Word read and preached and toward the singing of songs. Worship music is threatening to undo the one trait that has always characterized Reformed worship, namely, the centrality of the Word. If this is the case, the worship wars are truly worth fighting. But this also means that the fight can't be waged over our preferences in music. It must be fought over the elements and nature of worship. Consequently, the contemporary debates about song in worship make all the more obvious our need for greater discernment." (Hart & Muether, pp. 173-174)

[xxi] Michael Bushell points out in his book, *The Songs of Zion*, that some have defended the use of uninspired hymns along the line of this distinction between element and circumstance. "Some advocates of the use of uninspired in worship argue that all of the words spoken during the service of worship are circumstances of the various 'elements' of worship. … that singing is a prescribed element of worship but that the specific content of the words which are sung is a circumstance of the act of singing which therefore lies within the realm of the discretionary power of the church." This would be tantamount to saying the church needs to have confession of faith but what that confession actually states is unimportant. (Bushell, p. 117)

[xxii] "Scripture, not history or tradition, is our rule of faith and practice. … The New Testament writers did not see themselves as innovators. Their purpose was to draw out the teaching already present in the Old Testament and to show how it fit in with the ministry of Christ. … [Jesus] did not see the Old Testament Scriptures as deficient after the cross. They only needed to be understood in the *light* of the cross. (Bushell, pp. 34-5)

[xxiii] "The Psalter was written by God. … The sufficiency of the Psalter is a direct consequence of the sufficiency of Scripture. … The sufficiency of Scripture is one of the five pillars of the Reformation. … The Psalter is sufficient because the Word of God is sufficient." (Bushell, p. 15)

[xxiv] "Any arguments produced in favor of instrumental music in the public worship of the church must profess to be grounded in the same considerations [Scriptures, Westminster Standards, and historical practice] – that is, they must assume to be derived from the same sources as those from which the foregoing proofs have been sought, or they are to be regarded as unworthy of answers." (Girardeau, p. 180)