

Reformed/Presbyterian Church Architecture: Then and Now

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THIS paper is about “visible/visual Christian culture” (or “material Christian culture”), a subject that has been attracting scholarly interest over the last 20 years, for example, by William Dymess, in *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards*.¹ My focus will be one area of that visible Christian culture, namely, church architecture, a large-scale aspect of our material Christian culture.²

Today’s talk is a continuation of a paper which I did earlier this year for a South African journal, *In die Skrifling/In Luce Verbi*, under the title “The Reformation of Space for Public Worship.”³ This paper today moves on from that and will provide a wider survey of the Reformed/Presbyterian churches of the Reformation period, touching upon examples in Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, Scotland, and England. Next, we will proceed to the early colonial period (pre-1860) in British North America and a select group of examples of colonial period Reformed/Presbyterian church architecture. We then move into the late nineteenth century (post-1860) and survey changes in Reformed/Presbyterian church architecture in the second half of that century. Finally, we move into the last third of the twentieth century and survey changes in Reformed/Presbyterian church architecture then.

A few caveats: First, I am painting with a wide brush today so not every exception will be noted, and second, always recall that the way you find a building today may not be the way it was built, and the interior layout may have been radically altered. *My thesis will develop as we come near the end of this paper that Reformed/Presbyterian church architecture has not been a static template but has been undergoing significant developments during the last 450 years in virtually all branches of the Reformed/Presbyterian family.* I will offer my reflections as we conclude. Finally, although the word *architecture* appears prominently in my title, this is very much an interdisciplinary paper: church history, theology, liturgics, aesthetics, architecture, ministry, social cultural issues, and stewardship are all intertwined.

A Selective Literature Survey

Before proceeding with a survey of early architecture, however, I want to briefly give a selective survey of some of the key literature essential to this subject at present for the European context. I will limit this to three authors.

First, the late **Nigel Yates** and his three books are seminal studies on this subject:

- *Preaching, Word and Sacrament: Scottish Church Interiors, 1560–1860* (2009);⁴
- *Liturgical Space: Christian Worship and Church Buildings in Western Europe, 1500–2000* (2008);⁵ and

¹ William Dymess, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Another worthy work is Paul Corby Finney, ed., *Seeing beyond the Word: Visual Arts and the Calvinist Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

² I wish to give thanks to those who engaged through questions and conversation at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History in September 2018 at Knox College, Toronto, when this paper was presented. You have been most helpful.

³ Jack C. Whytock, “The Reformation of Space for Public Worship: Past and Present — Continuing the Discussion,” *In die Skrifling/In Luce Verbi* 52, no. 3 (2018): a2307.

⁴ Nigel Yates, *Preaching, Word and Sacrament: Scottish Church Interiors 1560–1860* (London: T & T Clark, 2009).

⁵ Nigel Yates, *Liturgical Space: Christian Worship and Church Buildings in Western Europe 1500–2000* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2008).

- *Buildings, Faith and Worship: The Liturgical Arrangement of Anglican Churches 1600–1900, Revised Edition* (2000); Original 1991.⁶

Next, there is the prolific author **Andrew Spicer**, currently at Oxford Brookes University:

- *Calvinist Churches in Early Modern Europe* (2007);⁷
- *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, co-edited with Will Coster (2005);⁸ and
- “Scotland and the Reformation of Church Architecture,” a chapter in *A Companion to the Scottish Reformation* (2019).⁹

In addition, Spicer has done many scholarly articles that I will not mention here.

Finally, a more recent contributor to this field is **Randal Carter Working** and his now published Ph.D. thesis: *The Visual Theology of the Huguenots: Towards an Architectural Iconology of Early Modern French Protestantism, 1536 to 1623* (2016).¹⁰

All current readers of historic Reformed church architecture must engage with these three authors as a starting point. Mention could be made of others, but this list will suffice to begin.

Pre-Reformation Churches in Europe: Characteristics

Before doing a selective survey of early Reformed church buildings, let us begin with a summary of the general interior layout of the late medieval Catholic Church at the eve of the Reformation.¹¹ Doing so will help accentuate the change that occurred in visual Church culture during the Reformation.

It can be said that, generally, the interiors of church buildings in Europe at the time leading up to the Reformation focused on the high altar, situated at the short wall. This was the focus — for the drama of the Eucharistic Mass. The lines were clear — the chancel for the priests and the nave for the people — hence, the expression “the two-room church.” The clergy kept their back to the nave while conducting the ritual of the Mass. Generally, long preaching times were not the focus; thus, seating was not consistently patterned in the interiors. It would appear, though, that gender segregation was quite common as was social segregation.

The church buildings were generally open at least daily if not permanently. They were places to go and worship privately, whether to pray, to meditate, to confess — whether in the main nave or in side chapels. Thus, the interior of the buildings was much more than limited to public Sunday worship venues.

A clearly defined theology emerges from looking at these church interiors: the visual drama of the Mass was the focus and the ministry was priestly. There was clearly an almost universal de-emphasis upon preaching and the auditory. Related to this was often the lack of organized seating — such seating just was not always necessary. Singing had come to have designated space and thus limitations developed with this. Because the auditory was not the primary focus, the visual took a larger role through the development of

⁶ Nigel Yates, *Buildings, Faith and Worship: The Liturgical Arrangement of Anglican Churches 1600–1900, Revised Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷ Andrew Spicer, *Calvinist Churches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁸ Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁹ Andrew Spicer, “Scotland and the Reformation of Church Architecture,” in *A Companion to the Scottish Reformation*, ed. Ian Hazlett (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

¹⁰ Randal Carter Working, *The Visual Theology of the Huguenots: Towards an Architectural Iconology of Early Modern French Protestantism 1535 to 1623* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

¹¹ Summarized from Whytock, “The Reformation of Space for Public Worship: Past and Present — Continuing the Discussion,” *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verb*, 52, no. 3 (2018): a2307, <http://www.indiesriflig.org.za>.

iconography. The overall result was to see the church building as sacred space,¹² and even within it there was a *more* sacred space — the chancel versus the nave.

Aesthetically, a sense of beauty emerged: one that was complex. At least in the larger structures, there was elaborate ornamentation combined often with impressive soaring bulk. Definitions of what constituted beauty in church buildings were not always uniform, however. Sometimes, there were attempts to move to a much plainer or minimalist approach, but this was generally a minority approach.

A Survey of Early Reformed/Presbyterian Churches in Europe

There was an incredible variety in adapting medieval Catholic parish churches, cathedrals, monastic chapels, and abbeys into new Protestant places for worship. It must be noted that the building of new purpose-built Protestant worship buildings took time and did not happen immediately after 1517. Many believe that the first purpose-built Protestant church was not erected until 1544 in Torgau at Hartenfels Castle.¹³ (Some argue for the Neuburg Castle Chapel, 1543, to hold this title.¹⁴) Some of this response whereby new walls were constructed in some medieval cathedrals or abbey churches was more pronounced. Where the screen had been now a wall might appear so that the congregation could be in the nave and a new school in the former chancel or vice versa. In some cases, even a portion of the building was abandoned.¹⁵

For the Reformed branch of the Reformation, the focal point of the interior moved now from the high altar to the high pulpit located either on the short wall or on a side long wall. This is illustrated in the one example that has been selected in this paper of adapting a medieval church building, namely, St. Peter's (St. Pierre), Geneva.

The changes to this building can be dated to 1541. The pulpit was moved to a side long wall by an aisle column before the north transept. It appears to have been a pulpit that was already present in the cathedral and was repositioned and modified. The screen, altar, and chancel stalls were all removed.¹⁶ Galleries were then added in the two transepts and the chancel to facilitate the closeness of the people gathered around the Word.¹⁷ The result was the congregation were now around the pulpit in the shape of a star design, at the front of the nave, and in the two transepts and in the former chancel. (Note: This is not exactly what one will find at St. Peter's today.) The pulpit spoke of the importance of the Scriptures and of providing a desk for the preacher to have freedom for preaching.¹⁸ These high pulpits were massive and could display remarkable craftsmanship. The Protestants were not the first to construct such massive ones. There was precedence before and during the Reformation whether in a cathedral or by Jesuits, who also were constructing such pulpits in some places in the sixteenth century.¹⁹

¹² Daniel W. Hardy, "Calvinism and the Visual Arts: A Theological Introduction," in *Seeing beyond the Word*, ed. Paul Corby Finney (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 9.

¹³ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 15–16.

¹⁴ "Neuburg Castle, Bavaria," accessed January 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuburg_Castle_\(Bavaria\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuburg_Castle_(Bavaria)).

¹⁵ Spicer, "What Kinde of House a Kirk Is: Conventicles, Consecration and the Concept of Sacred Space in Post-Reformation Scotland," in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, 84–85; James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 103.

¹⁶ J. G. Davies, "Architectural Setting, 'Nave,'" in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. J. G. Davies (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 34.

¹⁷ R. S. Brightman, "Church Architecture as an Approach to the Study of Religion," *Horizons: The Journal of the College Theology Society* 3, no. 1 (1976): 78.

¹⁸ White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 96.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

The raised pulpit allowed the preacher to make better eye contact and was thought to aid audibility. To help further with the audibility, a sounding board was often constructed above the pulpit. The point is clear: the Word was to be read and preached with effect to be heard by all in the interior or meeting space and was focal and central for the worshipping community. Clearly, changes reflected theological principles.²⁰

Going together with the pulpit was seating. A move to universal seating in Protestant churches became the norm. Before it was haphazard, but now it was to become universal. Thus, movable benches or fixed pews began to appear with much more regularity; the use of stools, however, was still also encouraged in many congregations where benches or pews had not been completely provided.²¹ Pews usually are fixed and do not allow as much flexibility; thus, aisles or space near the pulpit was provided for communion tables. The sermons were now longer, and hence, the practical need for seating arose. The emphasis was upon learning together as a community the truth of God's Word.

In terms of seating gender, segregation appears to have been quite universally practised in the early Reformed churches whether in Switzerland or Scotland. Partly, it may have been custom from the pre-Reformation period and partly, it may have been an effort to imitate the Early Church, but separation was also thought to be a way to lessen the risk of having men and women be distracted by one another.²²

The next major change was the space to be provided for the communion table or tables, especially for many within the Reformed faith. These tables were to be constructed of plain wood. They had to look like tables and not, in any way, like altars. Hence, no box tables were made. This was a matter of deep theological conviction and not a legalistic issue. The rationale here was most significant — there was nothing of the sacrifice of the Mass with a table, and it was making a statement of the familial aspect of the sacrament.²³

Space was to be made for people to come in relays to the table(s) and either stand or be seated — again by gender. These tables were mobile. Hence, some were made according to a collapsible trestle style (often plain boards placed on trestles for the ease of assembling and dismantling) and often were not seen or kept in the interior if communion was not being observed on that specific Sunday.²⁴

There is no evidence in the Reformed branch of the Reformation that eating meals or serving beverages after or before the services of public worship ever took place in the church interior space. The evidence is not conclusive that the Reformers were reacting against some medieval churches where, in the nave, dances, eating, drinking, and plays were conducted.²⁵ In many ways, this was something that would develop later with more pietistic groups through the agape love feast or with Anabaptists, but not with the Magisterial Reformers. This raises the question of whether eating was viewed as an important aspect of the use of church interior space. The answer is no. Provision for eating and drinking was not in the church interior and, therefore, there was no need for kitchens either. Thus, non-movable seating (fixed pews) was slowly to become the norm as the only space needed for some movement was around the communion tables.

²⁰ Donald J. Bruggink and C. H. Droppers, *Christ and Architecture: Building Presbyterian/Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 80–81.

²¹ Andrew Spicer, "Accommodating of Thame Selfis to Heir the Worde': Preaching, Pews and Reformed Worship in Scotland, 1560–1638," *History* 88 (2003): 411–14, 421.

²² *Ibid.*, 415, 421.

²³ George G. Burnet, *The Holy Communion in the Reformed Church of Scotland, 1560–1960* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), 25–27.

²⁴ Brightman, "Church Architecture," 78; Akira Demura, "Calvin and à Lasco: A Comparative Study of Two Ecclesiastical Ordinances," in *Calvinus sacrarum literarum interpres: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research*, ed. H. J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 177–78, 183.

²⁵ Davies, *New Westminster Dictionary*, 388.

Baptismal fonts remained in the buildings, but sometimes their locations changed, perhaps from the entrance door closer to the pulpit area. This, too, was making the point that the sacrament was not a private family matter, but something for the whole congregation to witness. Special fonts for holy water were destroyed or abandoned. Baptismal fonts also generally became less elaborate, and many were “basins or bowls” placed near the pulpit or attached to the side of the pulpit with a bracket.²⁶

What did the Reformers do with the chancel or choir stalls? Again, the answer varies. Some removed them altogether, as in the case of St. Peter’s Geneva. (The stalls that are there today come from another building and were relocated there later.) Others kept them, but basically made the chancel an unused space. Others walled the chancel off;²⁷ others retained it for the leading singers. The change was more in the direction of full congregational singing. However, the school boys often sat in front of the pulpit and they became the leaders of congregational praise (as at St. Peter’s, Geneva). Some Scottish churches also had designated space for pupils who helped with the singing.²⁸ Therefore, in some respects, the chancel choir moved into the nave whereby all sat together to praise the Lord as one congregation.

The story is well known concerning colour, imagery, and containers. Iconoclasm occurred, and again various forms of the reformation of interiors of imagery occurred. The relics of the saints were removed, the walls were often coloured white, and many stained-glass windows were destroyed or removed. Some churches had texts of Scripture painted upon the walls or upon boards in the main meeting area. The move, especially by the Reformed branch, was towards simplicity and plainness. It has often been said that there was no longer an aesthetic of beauty. This assessment is misleading as any interior designer today will confirm that minimalism has its own aesthetic of beauty. If you think of the contemporary world of design, you can quickly see this. Beauty should not be limited here to the visual, as it may be argued that there was also a beauty in the new manner of singing; the artistry of this would also need to be properly considered.

Immediately after the Reformation, in many Reformed areas, the church buildings were locked outside of public worship times. This was a change from the pre-Reformation period. It was to break with the past about the space being used for private worship practices — many of which were viewed as non-biblical.²⁹ The point was perhaps needed due to immaturity of development, but often one reaction can lead to another problem. Could it be that from this a conviction developed inadvertently that the building was sacred or holy and only for worship, and not to be used for any other purpose such as eating or drinking in the worship space? This question is worthy of consideration.

Finally, although the Reformers were not necessarily of one opinion or conviction, clearly there was a move towards seeing the space where the congregation gathers as a “place” and not as “sacred” space. It is their space to meet, but it is not sacred.

The Reformation would work through stages in its developmental history. The Puritans began to use the term *meeting house* for the place they met. This clearly is to make the point that the church is the people of God, not a building. Hence, it does not fit to describe a Reformed building as a sacred space for many within the Reformation context.³⁰ The Anglican branch may have various streams of thought within it on this as may the Presbyterians currently or even historically. In France the worship space after the

²⁶ D. J. Bruggink, “Architecture, Church,” in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. D. K. McKim (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 10; Davies, 369.

²⁷ Yates, *Preaching, Word and Sacrament*, 30.

²⁸ Spicer, “Accommodating of Thame Selfis to Heir the Worde,” 416.

²⁹ Spicer, “What Kinde of House a Kirk Is,” 88.

³⁰ David Gobel, “Reforming Church Architecture,” *New Horizons* (February 2011): 6–7.

Reformation was extremely varied: barns, houses, outdoors, and sometimes new purpose-built places, generally in a Classical style. These purpose-built churches were referred to as “temples,” the new temple of the Lord’s people wherein the Holy Spirit dwells — this is the community of the Lord’s people. There is also this underlying matter of attempting to be distinct and to make a break with the Roman past.

I have included descriptors of five significant Reformation buildings. They come from five different European countries and have been selected to show the range of Reformed influence. As already stated, the first is an adaptation, and the other four are purpose-built.³¹

1. **St. Peter’s, Geneva, Switzerland (1160, 1541f)**

As described above, St. Peter’s, Geneva, was the reorientation of a modestly appointed Romanesque-Gothic building to the new Protestant faith. Note that the Classical west portico was not there during Calvin’s time and was added later as was the spire/lantern.³² In the interior, many changes more reflective of nineteenth century liturgical ideas have been made.

2. **Koepelkerk, Willemstad, North Brabant, Netherlands (1596f)**

This is a significant Dutch Reformed purpose-built church and one of the earliest of such to be built in the Netherlands. It is a domed and octagonal structure with a high pulpit placed on one of the walls. The patron’s intent was to make a clear break with Roman Catholic cruciform churches. The floor plan design included room for communion tables. The patron insisted that the pulpit must be seen by all and that the building have good acoustics for preaching. The exterior is topped by a rooster, not a cross.³³

3. **The Second Temple of Charenton, near Paris, France (1621f)**

This was to be one of the most significant Reformed churches/temples to be built in France. In the Classical style, it was modelled after Vitruvius and Roman basilicas. The windows were both round-headed and flat, and the interior possessed amazing light. The roof had window dormers. Later, architect Augustus Pugin and others would describe such designs, along with most post-Reformation churches, as pagan³⁴ The Second Temple had a rectilinear footprint. Doric columns were in the interior with double galleries and a central high pulpit — one-third into the space. The stairs were all in the interior and in the four corners of the building. There was ample space for communion tables. The building included benches for an auditory experience. It had a hipped roof and a copula without a cross or rooster. The Ten Commandments were on the one wall, high at the ceiling in gold and blue. The temple could seat 4,000, thus making it one of the largest such Reformed church buildings in France. It also had an organ. The architect was Salomon de Brosse. The temple was destroyed in 1685 with the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (also called the “Edict of Fontainebleau”).³⁵

³¹ This text will be limited to prose descriptions. The actual presentation of the paper in Toronto included images. See the link to the website *Church Architecture Worldwide* for full images of numbers 1 through 5 Look under the main tab Continents and then the sub-tab Europe: <https://www.churcharchitectureworldwide.com/europe>.

³² Karin Maag, *Lifting Hearts to the Lord: Worship with John Calvin in Sixteenth-Century Geneva* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 42–43.

³³ “Koepelkerk,” [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koepelkerk_\(Willemstad\)](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koepelkerk_(Willemstad)); C. van Mastrigt, “Heemkundekringdewillemstad,” <http://heemkundekringdewillemstad.nl/gebouwen/koepelkerk.htm>; and “The Reformation and Its Influence on Church Architecture,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_architecture#The_Reformation_and_its_influence_on_church_architecture. All sites were accessed in September 2018.

³⁴ Anthony Garvan, “The Protestant Plain Style before 1630,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 9, no. 3 (1950): 5.

³⁵ Working, *Visual Theology of the Huguenots*, 174–84.

4. **Burntisland, Fifeshire, Scotland (1592)**

Burntisland is one of the best surviving purpose-built Reformation churches in Scotland. The footprint is that of a square — again, a distinction from the medieval past. There is not consistent harmonization of window fenestration. Galleries were added in stages with exterior stairs originally and then interior stairs, except for one gallery, later. The walls were increased in height. There was a central high pulpit with bracket for the font and space for original movable communion tables. Slowly, in the seventeenth century, a variety of benches, stools, and designated seating was added. Post-1860 changes included the boxed and arcaded communion table and a new high pulpit.³⁶

5. **Toxteth, Liverpool, England**

(The building has been dated as early as 1604 as a schoolhouse, but it is usually dated 1618 as a chapel extension.) Today this remains as one of the earlier examples in England of a Reformed church. Its notoriety is often more associated with Richard Mather its first minister than the building itself. Mather went to New England from here and the Mather dynasty followed. As we find the building today, it has a rectilinear footprint and an interior with a three-sided gallery with interior stairs. The gallery may have originally been at the two ends and the cross/bridge gallery added later when the walls were increased in height. On the long wall is the high pulpit and two sets of round-headed windows flanking each side of the pulpit. There are box pews, some of which date to 1650. It does appear that the building has undergone various renovations. Originally, the gallery stairs were on the exterior, but they are now in the interior — a common change in many such buildings. There is some indication that there may have once been a chancel as there is an arch in the northeast wall. However, this can be interpreted in different ways and is not necessarily the case. The church building was Puritan, Presbyterian, and Congregational; it is now Unitarian.³⁷

An analysis of these five Reformed Reformation buildings shows many common features. The importance of the pulpit and the centrality of the Word are all at the heart of the interior space. Secondary placement seems to be given for the sacraments. Audibility and unity are much more critical; and a two-room interior of priest and people is not evident. It is interesting that shape (cruciform, octagon, square, rectangle) could vary, but interior special orientation really did not vary.

The Colonial Period in British North America, pre-1860

I will do a selective survey of some of the finest preserved pre-1860 Reformed/Presbyterian Church buildings remaining in Maritime Canada and use limited descriptors to help us here. (Time today does not allow sojourns to Quebec and Ontario.) These three buildings exhibit the best connectors with the historic European models of Reformed/Presbyterian post-Reformation church architecture. The three examples are (1) Covenanter Church, Grand Pré, Nova Scotia,³⁸ (2) Greenock Presbyterian Church, St. Andrews by-the-Sea,

³⁶ Yates, *Preaching, Word and Sacrament*, 36–37.

³⁷ Valentine D. Davis, *Some Account of the Ancient Chapel of Toxteth Park, Liverpool, from the Year 1618–1883* (Liverpool: Henry Young, 1884), 5; and "Toxteth Unitarian Chapel," accessed August 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toxteth_Unitarian_Chapel.

³⁸ A helpful overview can be found in Robert Tuck, *Churches of Nova Scotia* (Toronto: Dundum Group, 2004), 38–39. Images of these three churches can be found on the website *Church Architecture Worldwide* under the sub-tab North America: <https://www.churcharchitectureworldwide.com/north-america>.

New Brunswick,³⁹ and (3) Desable Free Church of Scotland, Prince Edward Island.⁴⁰ The basic uniqueness of these church buildings from the three Maritime provinces is the fact that the original high pulpits have been retained without alteration.

Greenock is centred around the high pulpit on the *short* wall, and the other two churches are centred around the pulpit on the *long* wall. Both Covenanter and Greenock have retained their original box pews, and Desable has replacement pews on the main floor level but originally had a basic bench style with open backs. These original open-back benches remain in the galleries. All three church buildings have three-sided galleries. Desable retains the portable communion tables, and the other two lack such, yet evidence appears to suggest that both once used long narrow trestle-style communion tables. Two (Covenanter and Greenock) are Classical styled and one (Desable) is a combination of Classical style and modest Gothic Revival style elements. Some have said that these church buildings are like New England meeting houses and there are clear parallels, but the chief precedent is rooted back in Europe and the Reformed/Presbyterian liturgical, theological, and architectural traditions that developed after 1560.

To date, I have identified nine remaining high-pulpit church buildings in Maritime Canada.⁴¹ The above three were all Presbyterian, but some of the other six were shared buildings on occasion. Some of these other six have undergone minor to major alterations of either the high pulpit or the overall configuration of the seating. (There is one church building in Maritime Canada, St. James's Presbyterian Church, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, which was built a little later than my cut-off period yet originally was configured with the pulpit on the long wall; however, it was a different high pulpit style than was the norm — that will be for another time.)

The above three examples all exhibit continuity with their theological and liturgical heritage. They used building materials at hand, but the design and purposes were, in essence, the same as the heritage from which they came, namely, Reformed Reformation, as to special orientation. In summation:

1. **Covenanter, Grand Pré, Nova Scotia (c. 1804):** long wall, high pulpit, two tiered, three-sided galleries, box pews, likely outdoor communions originally, Congregational, Covenanter Presbyterian
2. **Greenock, St. Andrew's by-the-Sea, New Brunswick (1822f):** short wall, high pulpit, two tiered, box pews, Classical, fine craftsmanship, space for tables or outdoor communion, Church of Scotland
3. **Desable, Desable, Prince Edward Island (1852f):** long-wall, high pulpit, one tier, but designated space for the elders/precentor, bench-style pews originally, long communion table still present and well preserved, Church of Scotland

³⁹ John Leroux and Thaddeus Holownia, *St. Andrews Architecture, 1604–1966* (Kentville, NS: Gaspereau, 2010), number 64; Gregg Finley and Lynn Wigginton, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Gothic Revival Churches of Victorian New Brunswick* (Fredericton: Goose Lane, 1995), 50–51, 53–54, 76. Even though the latter book is on Gothic Revival, there are comments about the Greenock church, a neoclassical Revival building; and good illustrations.

⁴⁰ H. M. Smith, *The Historic Churches of Prince Edward Island* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1986), 78–79; and Jack C. Whytock, "Scottish Liturgics and Church Architecture: A Study of a Transplanted Kirk on Prince Edward Island," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 39, no. 2 (2014): 53–64.

⁴¹ Other high pulpits include those in the Meeting Place in Barrington, NS; Union Presbyterian, Albert Bridge, NS; Churchill Presbyterian, PE; Moncton Meeting House, NB; St. James Anglican, Long Reach, NB; and St. Matthew's United, Halifax, NS. Two of these — Moncton Meeting House and St. Matthew's — are fairly modest high pulpits, but the design overall conforms to the high pulpit variety. Churchill Presbyterian has been modified. On Union Presbyterian, see Susan Hyde and Michael Bird, *Hallowed Timbers: The Wooden Churches of Cape Breton* (Toronto: Boston Mills/Stoddart, 1995), 30–31, 40–41, 122. More study is needed about the interior of the New London Church (Geddie Memorial), PE.

These three pre-1860 colonial examples in British North America exhibit remarkable continuity with their European cousins. Their shapes are all rectangular and there are no squares or octagons, but interior orientation conforms to their European roots. It may sound obvious, but originally, all three churches had no basement; however, this does have implications in many regards for church life and ministry of a holistic nature. Post-1860 is when we will see the many changes in spatial orientation, design, liturgy, and ministry.

Post-1860 to 2000: Liturgical and Ecclesiological Developments and Church Architecture — A General Survey

I will divide the period post-1860 into two basic divisions: the late nineteenth century and the late twentieth century. Both periods had significant liturgical shifts that have affected church architecture.

The first period, post-1860, saw many liturgical influences coming together. The first change, which began earlier in the nineteenth century, is often forgotten yet was extremely significant. The chief name associated with this major development is Thomas Chalmers. *The change was from sitting at tables to sitting in the pews for communion.* Especially for Scottish Presbyterians in the mid-nineteenth century, this was the first major liturgical change since the Revolutionary Settlement of 1690 or in almost 200 years; in many ways, if one excluded the Anglican attempts that the Presbyterians rejected, it could be argued that the last really significant change was almost 300 years earlier. Finally, the General Assembly conceded that this was acceptable and that it was not a censurable offence to have pew communion. The result was to begin a century of liturgical and architectural changes. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, there was a move towards a permanent communion table; however, it was clearly a four-legged table with totally open sides under the tabletop.

Following this we usually move to organs and hymns as the next major liturgical change. With the introduction of organs, many interiors underwent modifications, especially for the placement of pipes, between 1870 and 1900. Once this began to occur, choir stalls or a designated choir area were built in many Presbyterian church interiors. Over time, apses, or semicircular, recessed areas, were added or built at the front of a church to accommodate a choir and organ, clergy seating, an altar, or a communion table.

As the century moved along, the communion tables went from being four-legged to box-styled, and these were repositioned in the centre of the front short wall with a pulpit and lectern on either side. We are now at a new trend which has various strains but is often loosely grouped as the “Scoto-Catholic liturgical tradition.” Some colloquially call it “high Reformed and Presbyterian” or a little more precisely, the “ecclesiological tradition of worship.”⁴² Robert Lee and G. W. Sprott are two Scottish Presbyterians often associated with leading this trend, but there were others.⁴³

By 1900 in both Europe and Canada, a diversity of liturgical and architectural features had been introduced and often without consistency of application. In a general sense, we can say that worship elements were being stationed in specific locations: the pulpit for the preaching of the Word, the lectern for reading and conducting of worship, the box table for the sacraments and offerings and sometimes the benediction, the choir for new praise items by an assigned group, the organ area for the new precentor, and a crafted baptismal font,

⁴² Yates, *Liturgical Space*, 113–34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 128–29. Other individuals include James Cooper, John Macleod of Duns and Govan, and H. J. Wotherspoon. The Scottish Church Society is significant as are renovators and designers such as P. M. Chalmers.

not just a bracket or a simple bowl. These changes reflect a liturgical movement in orientation. There is also a question to ask here: Was this trend towards the liturgical high church movement also a reflection of economic advancement and of a desire to become more like the other churches — in particular, the Anglican establishment? It is difficult to categorically answer this question with firmness.

The range of design plans by 1900 varied greatly and often a new liturgical and architectural tension emerged between interior designs. There was the more high church design with a chancel; there was the more revival-style auditorium, or Akron-style, plan; and there was also a hybrid of the two with a new mixture of a wooden four-legged, not a box, communion table, in front of the pulpit and no lectern but a choir behind the pulpit (which was to become very much the model in many rural and town churches), and yes, the basements were appearing. By the early 1900s clearly the old pre-1860 liturgical and architectural models had undergone major changes.

In the early twentieth century, things basically carried on as in the late nineteenth century. Canadian Presbyterian churches took on a great variety of configurations: these ranged from the neo-Gothic, quasi-Anglican arrangements to modified plans to facilitate pew communion and house organs and choirs to adoption of the Akron style, a more theatre-like auditorium style, also common for Baptist, Congregationalist, and Methodist churches. The lines of distinction were being blurred.

The church building boom of the late 1950s, the 1960s in Canada, and into the early 1970s saw many new building techniques employed, but again the special orientations really followed the patterns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Neo-Gothic may have been replaced by new tent-style churches, and further liturgical colours and vestments may have been added, but special orientation did not radically change.⁴⁴ The other boom — post 1925 — also saw a similar variety of churches being built. The only exceptions to all this were some of the Reformed churches built by immigrants in the late 1950s and through to the 1980s, such as in Canadian Reformed churches, where the high pulpit and portable table tradition have continued. The result has been that, by the 1970s, there was much variety in Reformed/Presbyterian church architecture within Canada.

The last 30 years of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century have seen the next major shift liturgically and spatially in Reformed/Presbyterian church buildings.

In this period, many church buildings have witnessed the demise of the organ and the move towards praise bands. Often going with this has been the demise of the choir and its replacement by the worship, or praise, team. When this happens, older buildings might see the former organ and choir space reconfigured into a plain platform space with no pews or formal row seating either chancel style or not. In new buildings — more like a hall or a theatre — a large platform is the norm.⁴⁵ The emphasis is on variety of musical instruments, with “banks of songs” being sung together under the worship team’s command.

The introduction of other technologies, such as the PowerPoint projector, came next, leading to the demise of the printed praise book. The fronts of many interiors now have large white screens, some of which roll up, installed; other places use the wall itself as the projection area. This change has affected where the person often behind the pulpit stands: an awkwardness has arisen during the singing of praise selections.

Matters of financial practicability have also given rise to a new concept of the worship space as a multi-purpose space to be used for meals, cafés, fitness groups, and outreach

⁴⁴ Readers interested in post-Second World War liturgical changes of the ecumenical era can see Yates, *Liturgical Space*, 147ff.

⁴⁵ What should we call this new liturgical movement? Is it the “Hillsong style,” named after the influence of Hillsong Church in Australia? See John Stackhouse, “Worship Leaders, Raise Your Eyes,” *Faith Today* (September/October 2018): 62. Regardless of the name, the reality is worship, and architecture is the discussion.

activities to the community as well as formal worship. A fascinating article by Erica Cottrill, “Top Church Design Trends of 2018,” highlights this design element of multi-functionality. The language is clear: “multi-purpose identity for our church space,” “mixed-use developments,” “mixed-use campus is shared with the community . . .” [often to help provide income as well as community engagement], “transforming the commons areas into an everyday gathering place . . . cafés . . .,” “architectural elements encourage parishioners and visitors to gather and mingle after services, thriving in building campus-like communities rather than a single church building.”⁴⁶

This development raises interesting questions beyond the financial constraints of many congregations where two spaces — one for worship and one for other activities — cannot be afforded; it also shows a major shift in ministry practices and thought from the Reformation period of Reformed/Presbyterian churches. The issue of “sacred space” — something theologically denied by most of the Reformers during the Reformation — arises, but how do we see this today when someone from the Reformed tradition, for example, tells me that “serving coffee in the place where worship is conducted is not acceptable”? This view appears to support a view of sacred space! And how does that match John 4?⁴⁷ How space is used crosses the theological and biblical, the liturgical, the ministerial, and the stewardship⁴⁸ aspects all at once, not to mention the aesthetical and social aspects.

In the 1980s, an article identified the shift of recent years in Reformed/Presbyterian circles as that of the welcoming, or hospitable, church, or the church as engager of a post-Christian culture through making its space multi-purpose.⁴⁹ Cottrill, writing in 2018 and using language that is much more developed, conveys how this trend has worked itself out.⁵⁰ Rarely has there been theological reflection and writing in theology about this.

Recently I toured the reconfigured St. George’s Tron Church of Scotland (1808, neoclassical Revival style) in Glasgow.⁵¹ The organ, the high pulpit, and the downstairs pews are gone; instead, I found a platform for the worship team, a portable stand for the pulpit, chairs for seats in the main common area, and a kitchen for a café, which sees the church building used seven days a week by hundreds of people passing through its doors (but not necessarily on a Sunday). The space underneath the building was excavated, with rooms and washrooms added.⁵² The reconfigured church exhibits the trend towards holism and multi-functionality. It was like visually reading Erica Cottrill’s article.⁵³

Conclusions

We have surveyed Reformation church architecture in Europe and in early colonial British North America before 1860. Our survey has been highly selective, yet, I believe, also

⁴⁶ Erica Cottrill, “Top Church Design Trends of 2018,” *Church.Design* (March 5, 2018), accessed September 2019, https://church.design/cover_stories/multipurpose-design-elements-redefine-churches.

⁴⁷ See the discussion between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4:20–24, which marks the contrast between the Old Covenant idea of a designated sacred worship space and the New Covenant understanding conveyed by Jesus. This text was popular among many Reformers.

⁴⁸ John Starke, “Should Churches Spend Money on Nice Buildings?” accessed in September 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/should-churches-spend-money-on-nice-buildings>.

⁴⁹ Dirk J. Hart, “The Architecture of Hospitality,” *Reformed Worship* 6 (December 1987).

⁵⁰ An excellent further article by Cottrill is “Top Church Design Trends for 2019,” *Church.Design* (January 1, 2019), accessed January 2019, https://church.design/cover_stories/top-church-design-trends-for-2019/.

⁵¹ September 2018.

⁵² The firm CRGP Architects & Surveyors has a most helpful case study on St. George’s Tron and the twentieth-century renovations. See <http://www.crgp.co.uk/case-studies/st-georges-tron-church-glasgow/>. The main website is <https://www.sgt.church/>. The café inside the church is the Wild Olive Tree; here is the link: <http://www.wildolivetree.co.uk/about.html>. (Sites were accessed in September 2018 and January 2019.)

⁵³ Cottrill, “Top Church Design Trends of 2018.”

instructive; it allows for contrast to the many changes of the late nineteenth through early twenty-first centuries architecturally, liturgically, theologically, socially, financially, and technologically. In conclusion, we see that Reformed/Presbyterian church architecture has not remained static.

I hope that this paper will help us to sketch out and tease the subject further. The broad story needs to be seen first; then from there, we can engage more deeply. I also hope that we will become more conscious of reading our visible Reformed/ Presbyterian built culture. I now offer some specific conclusions *to continue the discussion*:

1. Reformed/Presbyterian church architecture in Canada is rooted in the European Reformation, and in the colonial period before 1860, it mirrors many aspects of that tradition. It is insufficient to always compare it to the American meeting house tradition.
2. The post-1860 liturgical changes in the United Kingdom, in particular, are reflected in Canada's Reformed/Presbyterian church architecture.
3. A noticeable shift towards wholistic use of the public space for worship can now be found in many Reformed/Presbyterian church buildings.
4. How deeply have we really engaged with the study of theology, worship principles, liturgical practices, aesthetics, and functionality, and stewardship in this tradition? Publications in Canada suggest that we have yet to do so.
5. Not all Reformed/Presbyterian churches responded to the liturgical changes of the nineteenth century; some remained committed in some fashion to the continuation of a former tradition. Others embraced these changes, but a whole variety of manifestations of how the changes were implemented can be found in the Reformed/Presbyterian Canadian scene. This comment can likewise be made about the changes of the late twentieth century.
6. Extensive inventory work on Reformed/Presbyterian churches in Canada has not been carried out. This lack is cause for concern as the built landscape of church buildings is undergoing major changes with numerous closures, amalgamations, retooling, and so forth. There is pressing need for the visual Christian culture of Reformed/Presbyterian church buildings in Canada to be documented and analyzed for posterity and further research. Maybe one solution is a virtual museum of this visual architectural tradition(s).