

Author: Paul F. Bosch [pbosch@golden.net]

Series: **Worship Workbench**
Issue: **Essay 103 + May, 2006**

Copyright: © 2006 Paul F. Bosch.

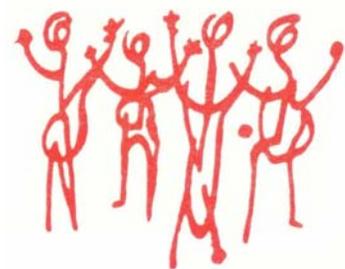
*This document may be freely reproduced for non-commercial purposes with credit to the author and mention of the **Lift Up Your Hearts** web site < www.worship.ca > as the source.*



WW '72: CHAPTER 5 (CONTINUED) SOME RAW MATERIALS FOR WORSHIP

III. SPACE / ARCHITECTURAL ENVIRONMENT

For the earliest Christians, the word “church” meant people, not bricks and mortar. The building that sheltered that community was the “House of the Church.” Hence, among others today, I’d argue that we are at a time in our history when the **TEMPLE** must be replaced by the **TENT** as the basic architectural image for Christian Church buildings. The tent is characterized by four qualities which the temple lacks, and these characteristics have become more and more useful, if not necessary, in our revolutionary age: simplicity, flexibility, functionality, and expendability.



My argument is this: The Church in the Twenty-First Century does not need more Temples. It needs more **TENTS**.

An aside: Why should it be that so often, when a “mission congregation” feels itself at last able to abandon its early beginnings in some rented or borrowed space — its Tent, you could say — and finally manages to build its own building — its own kind of Temple — something precious is LOST? Something of its earlier zeal and passion goes out of its ministry and its mission? Something priceless evaporates from its weekly worship? It happens again and again, when congregations mature and decide to build...

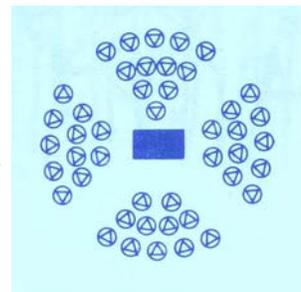
My only hope is that we will **EXPLOIT** the Tent’s potential thoroughly. It’s a tragedy that so many of our congregations know only one architectural possibility for worship. Give them an empty room with table and chairs — a Tent, you might call it — and they will

almost invariably put the Table immovably against the short wall and arrange the chairs in rows perpendicular to the long wall, “because that’s what a church looks like, doesn’t it?” They will be even happier if we can provide a red velvet curtain to hang against the wall behind the Table.

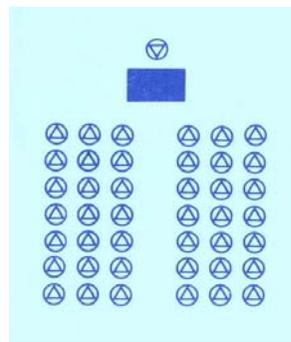


There is, of course, nothing at all wrong with that architectural possibility. But it is only one possibility out of **AT LEAST FOUR** which congregations can use for Eucharistic worship. (The great contemporary architect Rudolph Schwartz, in his magisterial book *The Church Incarnate*, identifies no fewer than seven environmental configurations for Christian Eucharistic worship.) I’ll maintain there are basically four possibilities, as my diagrams suggest. Further, I do not think we can claim that any of these possibilities is altogether adequate, theologically or practically. Each configuration “preaches” a slightly different “sermon”.

Thus the **RADIAL** plan (1) speaks of the gathered community of faith, with a strong sense of God’s immanence among us and a palpable perception of gathering for nurture around the Table of the Lord. But it’s awfully static, as is, and it is almost impossible to utilize when there are more than two dozen people present. A half-circle is easier on the leaders than a full circle. And does a full circle suggest a wholeness, an unchanging and unchangeable fulfillment, which the Church-on-earth does not really yet possess?



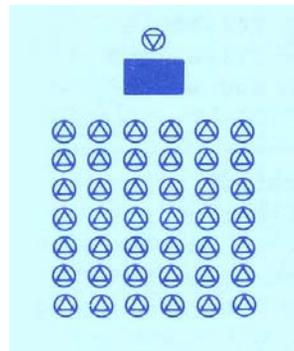
(1) Radial



(2) Axial

Both **AXIAL** (2) and **PROCESSIONAL** (3) plans recall early Christian basilicas of the Mediterranean basin, in which the “altar end” of the building invariably was placed to the East, location of the rising sun as a metaphor for Christ. (To this day Church architects refer to the “altar end” of a Christian church building as the East end, whether or not it’s actually oriented in that compass direction.)

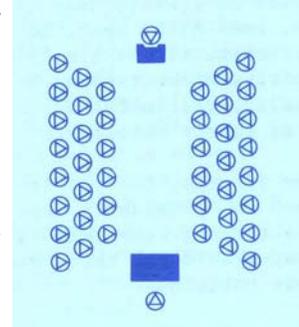
But both plans 2 and 3 carry with them such strong evocations of the **THEATRE** that we may well have to abandon them, at least for a time. Worshippers in either setting can get too strong an impression of a lecture hall or a concert venue, with clergy or leaders presenting something to an audience — either for entertainment or inspiration. It’s a highly presentational configuration.



(3) Processional

And there can be an unseemly impression of **HIERARCHY** presented in 2 and 3, especially when there is a raised chancel in the East: “There are the clergy, up there in the chancel with God, while the laity languish down here in the nave...”

The **ANTIPHONAL** plan (4) is sometimes called the collegiate or choir configuration, recalling an early monastic architectural tradition. This arrangement for worship has its own problems — the one worshipping assembly is divided into two, like a Parliament — but it's marvelous for singing in *alternatum*.



The bottom line: I'd prefer to **MODIFY** each of these plans, and not necessarily symmetrically.

At the same time, there's no point in **NOVELTY** for the sake of **(4) Antiphonal** novelty. To arrange the space, for example, in the pattern of a maze or a spiral or labyrinth, just for the sake of jazziness, is to betray a misunderstanding of the function of the liturgical space. Idle imagination alone is never adequate. Some sense of the history and function of what we're doing is also required of us.



The precept “less is more” — together with a conviction that the Tent must replace the Temple as our day's dominant architectural metaphor or model — encourages you to find beauty and meaning in a **SIMPLE**, functional space, undecorated and unadorned, with no permanent art or symbols. The art and symbols can always be carried in and carried out, used for a season and then retired. (See [Essay 75](#) above for examples of how a simple, undecorated space can be adorned spectacularly to reflect the Day or Season. Almost none of which would be possible in a traditional Temple-type worship space.)

And we could **DEVISE** worship forms that would be appropriate for use in the kitchen, around the fireplace, in a bedroom or washroom; who knows? Our only limitation is imagination, instructed by both revelation of God in Christ and “religion”— that is, the human response to what is most real in our lives.

Next time: IV. Action, and thence to V. Words, VI. Music, VII. Vestments, Paraments, and Colour, and VII. Symbols.

