

# Foreword

*... worship must determine the building, not the building the worship.*  
*James A. Whyte (1962), 189*

Space is all around us – and we constantly refer to it. He is taking my space! This place is homely! This room is very impersonal! We need more room! We need to de-clutter! I was lost in the vastness of the hall! I felt locked in and had to go outside!

We also know that how space is arranged affects us: we want ‘round table talks’ and we do not want to be put in the back row! Churchill captured the importance of built space in a couplet: We shape our buildings, then our buildings shape us.

And in every society buildings have been used to project power and authority, to regulate society, to promote human interaction, and to project an image of how that group sees itself.

Strangely, we do not think very often about this aspect of space when it comes to liturgy – yet every religion (and every Christian denomination) has used buildings as part of their worship: from the megalithic tombs in Ireland’s Boyne Valley, to classical temples, to contemporary Christian spaces built of steel, concrete and glass. And it was this concern of the Second Vatican Council that led to the changes in the arrangements in Catholic churches in the 1960s and 70s. But this religious use of space – just as with the changes mandated by the Council – is little appreciated or understood.

This book brings together eighteen Christians – liturgists, pastors, architects, artists – from several churches and from around the world who all try to examine the question of how space affects us in worship.

The topics covered include the role of light in a religious building, the need for space to appreciate dance as part of worship, the varying needs of spaces for different liturgies, accounts of how communities have become creative with space, and questions about how the liturgical renewal begun in the Second Vatican Council should continue today.

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The purpose of the collection is to promote deeper discussion about ritual space – and its unnoticed importance.

### **Converging approaches**

That said, one of the problems in promoting a deeper discussion is that it is easy to find any number of books and articles on distinct parts of the topic, but very few that try to draw these issues together. One can buy books on church architecture that pay almost no heed to the liturgy. These are books that focus on ‘the church’ as one more known kind of building – and the worship of those who enter it is hardly mentioned. There are even books seeking to identify ‘beautiful churches’, where the needs of the liturgy – or its reform – are seen as a dreadful distraction from the aesthetic satisfaction of enjoying a work of art. Likewise, there are liturgists who write about the activity of the liturgy, yet never notice that worship ‘takes place’ – and so the space of the activity is as significant an element as the texts used. Other liturgists pronounce on the need for the worship-building to have a specific shape or orientation on theological grounds, yet do not engage with either theologians or historians of architecture about whether their statements can be justified. Theologians – and ritual anthropologists – often address the issue of space/place as a conceptual problem, but fail to engage with the needs of liturgy, the problems of buildings, or the expectations of communities: space needs to be experienced before it is theorised. Then there is the fact that insights tend to follow denominational lines, yet the problems of the spaces of our worship affect all Christians. Likewise, the solutions cross traditional boundaries, as all who worship do so within a secular age where worship is itself seen as no more than a voluntary activity within society as a whole. Our worship spaces are those of particular communities within a larger landscape; we are no longer simply inhabiting the focal building of the village, town or city – even if our worship space is still the most imposing landmark in a locality. Then there are the pastors, those who lead the communities of faith in their worship, who have to try to operate within given spaces each week. Some of those spaces are wonderful, some are counter-productive to community worship, and most could be improved with some discussion and minimal fuss. But how can one get these various groups to talk to one another?

No one has yet succeeded, but a start might be this book, which has architects, liturgists, experts on space and movement, theologians and pastors between its covers. Each contributor was chosen because they could address at least two constituencies – perhaps the seeds of a greater dialogue can be found here. You, gentle reader, are invited to dip into this collection, and then to dip in again. The juxtaposition of approaches – and the many ways you can combine them – will, it is my hope, stimulate not only discussion but actual experiment

### ... with gratitude

This collection began in August 2019 on the edges of the Durham conference of the *Societas Liturgica*, when several of us identified the problem of unconnected discourses about the location of our worship. Could there be dialogue between them? While no one expressed a great deal of optimism, some noted that Richard Vosko (2019) had just published *Art and Architecture for Congregational Worship: The Search for a Common Ground*, and perhaps we could take that discussion forward and locate it closer to where we live and worship. This brought generous offers of papers from various people there and then, and the list of contributors steadily expanded. Then came Covid-19 and energy for such a project had to be deployed elsewhere as Christian liturgy saw, in the space of weeks, a greater disruption than anyone had ever seen before. While some who took part in those initial discussions had sent me their papers within weeks, it was not until 2022 that the whole array could be assembled in one place.

Over that three-year period I, who volunteered to edit the collection, accumulated a long list of debts of gratitude to scholars, librarians and friends. My initial thanks is to Tom Elich and Paul Bradshaw, whose combination of wisdom, energy and enthusiasm mixed with generosity got this collection off the ground. At once I realised that any such endeavour would be incomplete without the 1996 essay by Richard Hurley, which attempted to combine the insights of architect, liturgist, theologian and mystic in just the same way as this book desires to do – it would have to be reprinted! So my thanks to Bernadette Gasslein, the editor of *Worship*, and Deb Eisenschenk of Liturgical Press, for facilitating this. Once that was included, the memory of Carlow, which was a place of liturgical conversion for so many, had to be celebrated,

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so I contacted Margaret Daly-Denton, who has helped form this collection in more ways than I can count. But no book can come to be without a publisher, and so I want express my gratitude to all at Messenger and to Cecilia West in particular. There is a piece of proverbial wisdom among publishers that ‘collections do not sell’ and so books like this one are increasingly rare – so it is a credit to Messenger that they saw the specific rationale underlying this book and have offered it every support. Similarly, it is gratifying that the idea was sufficiently attractive – before all the papers had arrived – to the Alcuin Club that they adopted it as one of their sponsored books.

I cannot end this foreword with sharing with you my favourite ‘one-liner’ on the importance of liturgical spatial awareness. With the opening scene from *Star Trek: The Original Series* echoing in his head, Jaime Lara (2010, 131) wrote:

‘Space: the final frontier ... ’

Sacred Space: the ultimate frontier.

Thomas O’Loughlin  
All Saints Day, 2022

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