

## Placing the Sacred: Reflections on Contemporary American Church Architecture

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From the often stark landscapes of southern California rise many remarkable monuments, but perhaps none as striking as the Crystal Cathedral. Rising one hundred thirty feet in the air, the building is a startling employment of ten thousand panes of mirrored glass reflecting the bright California sun. The acute angles of its exterior and its glimmering surface bring to mind otherworldly and fantastic associations, like something from Disney or Oz. On the interior, the hard exterior surfaces dissolve into a spectacular array of refracted lights dancing around the enormous diamond-shaped auditorium (fig. 2). Completed in 1980, the building was and remains a unique experiment in American church architecture. Seating almost three thousand people in addition to the one-thousand-voice choir, the building comes alive each Sunday for the thousands in the seats and the millions who tune into Robert Schuller's Sunday morning *Hour of Power*.

To design a building to house his rapidly expanding church, Schuller initiated an unlikely relationship with the renowned architect Philip Johnson because he believed that traditional church designs were "unconsciously seeking to impress those who were raised in a church— instead of trying to design a structure that would make an impression on non-churched, secular Americans."<sup>1</sup> But this was not Schuller's first opportunity to work with a prominent Modernist. For an earlier church Schuller hired Richard Neutra in 1962. In the mode of late International Modernism, the building's cleanly articulated materials and crisp volumes certainly captured the eye of the 1960s passerby. By abandoning visual references to the traditional American church—these were hardly brick boxes with white steeples—Schuller's commissions are typical of megachurch construction in the late twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

The canonical example of the megachurch is Willow Creek Community Church outside of Chicago (fig. 3). The building sits comfortably in its suburban context. Man-made lakes with single fountain jets, and nondescript architecture devoid of any legible referents to traditional church architecture, do little to differentiate Willow Creek from a shopping mall or a corporate park. Exteriors are marked by acres of parking, differentiated into color-coded lots. The building's main entrances are not prominent; darkened glass doors give access to atriums with clusters of sofas, tables, and chairs, interspersed with ficus trees. Surrounding these atriums are food courts that offer the best of McDonalds and Starbucks, and bookstores that carry everything from inspirational literature to Jesus action figures. Willow Creek's auditorium is similarly devoid of any explicitly Christian iconography. Banks of theatre seats slope toward the stage as in any large-scale public performance venue. In the words of one megachurch pastor, "Rather than dealing with the hereafter, we deal with what it means to be here right here and now."<sup>3</sup> The result, of course, is quite consciously an architecture that speaks to the quotidian, the everyday of American suburban life. In this way Schuller's Crystal Cathedral is quite distinctive. While Schuller may have consciously avoided referents to traditional church architecture, his Modernist buildings still communicate that the building is special, distinctive, set apart from the landscape. Conversely, most megachurches embrace an architecture analogous to—shopping malls, corporate centers, sports arenas—the American everyday.

Born in the 1960s to evangelize the baby-boomers, the megachurch epitomizes the Christian embrace of American popular culture. With campuses approximating shopping malls or corporate headquarters, it is touted by proponents as a radical new church model that has

manifested a new architectural vocabulary in American evangelicalism. When defined as buildings of worship containing two thousand or more members, there were only ten such buildings in America in 1970. Their great expansion occurred in the 1980s, when their numbers rose to four hundred. While this was still only two percent of the total number of churches in America, it was clearly the fastest growing church type in the landscape.<sup>4</sup> By the 1980s megachurches were commonly seating from three to four thousand, and some as many as ten thousand. They now commonly breach fifteen thousand. Among America's largest churches, with twenty-five thousand attending weekly, Lakewood Community Church in Houston, Texas, has successfully transformed the Compaq Center—the former arena of the Houston Rockets—into its new church campus. The seventy-five million dollar Lakewood International Center includes an ice-skating rink, a dining and retail plaza, two hundred thousand square feet of classrooms, a convention center, an international broadcast and production studio, and a sixteen-thousand-seat worship center with stage and orchestra pit flanked by continuous waterfalls.<sup>5</sup>

The megachurch is the major contribution to American church architecture of the late twentieth century, and is on that criterion alone a topic worthy of study by historians, clergy, and architects. One strategy might be to examine the architects who design these buildings, and the pastors for whom they work. But I want to argue that much is to be learned by studying these buildings as signals of the identity of the congregations they house. Rather than a top-down model, I'd like to explore what American church architecture might reveal about the person in the pew. And I'd like to frame the megachurch historically as an outworking of mainstream American evangelicalism.

Consider the megachurch as the third of three acts. In each act I'd like to contextualize American church architecture, and examine the extent to which churches are a response to the social, political, and cultural circumstances that have shaped American Protestantism. The opening scene of this story will focus on American church architecture of the last turn-of-the-century, the looming Romanesque churches of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cities. Next we will move to mid-century and look at the architecture of the 1950s, those colonial revival and Modernist churches which comprise the majority of churches in America. And finally we will return to reconsider the megachurch in light of these recent pasts.

### ***The Late Nineteenth Century***

Our first act opens at the end of the nineteenth century, specifically in the 1880s and 1890s. These decades were a season of remarkable tensions in American culture broadly and in American Christianity more specifically. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century most mainline Protestant denominations had split into northern and southern branches over the issue of slavery. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Christianity was confronted with the scientific and intellectual challenges to biblical history posed first by the science of geology, and then by Darwin's *Origins of the Species*, initiating debates that threatened to secularize American culture. Americans also witnessed the explosive growth of cities largely through Eastern European immigration. Not only did these immigrants bring with them alternative Christian expressions, but they also exacerbated the problems of the city: illiteracy, poverty, unsanitary conditions, and overcrowding. Social and economic unrest came to a head in the 1890s. In 1893, the country was rocked by an economic depression followed by the Pullman strikes in 1894. For many Americans, these were dark days. Contemporary observers suggest

that these decades were, if not anti-religious, at the very least a-religious.

But, as the historian Jeane Kilde has shown, these same decades witnessed the emergence of a grand new church building type. Unlike the classically styled buildings of the Antebellum years or the Gothic Revival of the mid-century Oxford Movement, these new buildings embraced the Romanesque. Usually articulated in a heavy rusticated stone, the walls of these churches broke from the traditional forms of earlier buildings. The churches are characterized by low, stocky, central towers, steeply pitched roofs, and sequences of arcades enclosing large, comfortable auditorium interiors. Kilde has identified hundreds of evangelical congregations who erected buildings in this mode, “creating” she asserts, “a veritable revolution in Protestant architecture in the closing decades of the century.”<sup>6</sup>

Consider three examples from Pittsburgh: First United Methodist Church (now Christ Methodist), Bellefield Presbyterian, and Shadyside Presbyterian (fig. 4). All three buildings were built in the 1890s; all three embraced a rusticated Romanesque; and all three had abandoned downtown for more fashionable locations in the newly available suburbs. The former building of First United Methodist was burned in an 1891 fire, and the property and ruins were sold within three weeks. The suburb of Shadyside was made available by a new street car line that had been completed in 1870, and by the 1890s Shadyside Presbyterian had relocated to a lot described as “finely located and valuable as an investment.”<sup>7</sup> The church was opened in 1894 as a pewed church, which meant that members paid an annual rental fee for the right of occupying their pews. The plan of Shadyside exhibits quite clearly the movement of these evangelicals toward the theatre as the model for a church. Banks of seats all sloped toward a central stage, where the service unfolded with the dramatic new styles of preaching and sophisticated music and organ accompaniment that these congregations came to expect of their Sunday services. Notes from the building’s dedication communicate the congregation’s vision for the building as a work of art: “it is one of the most imposing and impressive structures in the denomination and is scarcely surpassed as a triumph of architecture by any Protestant church in this country . . .” Others praised the interior: “Working in entire sympathy the artists have endeavored to perfect a carefully considered and well adjusted composition in forms and color (olive and gold predominating in the color scheme), in which both windows and wall surface should be united in that intimate relationship of color and form which produces at once a sense of harmony and peace, and an impression of dignity and grandeur.”<sup>8</sup> Their interiors became comfortable theatres for self-presentation, and enlisted domestic cues in color, woods, and fabrics to put the congregation at ease, and to signal that church was a spiritual home. In the 1880s and 1890s, when the hegemony of evangelical Christianity faced its darkest season of doubt in the face of civil unrest, visible poverty, and intellectual assault, congregations by the hundreds retreated from the city and erected safe havens of evangelical Christianity, fortresses against the assaults of contemporary intellectual attack, and safely removed from the social ills of industrializing Pittsburgh.<sup>9</sup>

In almost direct contradistinction to these neo-medieval evangelical churches, more actively minded congregations also began to rebuild in these decades, but in a manner quite different, and in the heart of expanding city centers. The first floor plans of these buildings are not at all dissimilar from their suburban counterparts. A large theatre-like auditorium stands amidst lounges and coatrooms. It was the basement plan, however, that differentiated some urban churches from others (fig. 5). Gymnasiums, showers, bowling alleys, and other non-conventional spaces fill the floor. The 1890s witnessed the emergence of the “institutional church,” usually

characterized by social services geared to addressing the needs of recent immigrants, the urban poor, and working class populations of the city. It was the material expression of the Social Gospel. Churches transformed their libraries into public reading rooms that offered literacy classes and English language training. Churches opened portions of their buildings to use as infirmaries, and transformed classrooms to clothes closets; Sunday Schools became kindergartens and day nurseries to free mothers to enter the labor force during the week. Expanding, they erected gymnasiums for exercise and showers, and taught classes in personal hygiene. They also worked to expose the poor to the fine arts, most obviously through the architecture of their church plants, but also through art appreciation courses and music classes. The motivation behind this was the assumption that the fine arts engendered moral uplift. Yet the social and cultural separation between congregation and community often meant that far fewer than expected found their way to these services. Unfortunately, too many of these urban experiments by evangelicals failed, and these expanded church plants came to support the expanding programs of the church congregation rather than meeting the needs of the outcasts and downtrodden.<sup>10</sup> In these institutional churches lies the genesis of the later megachurch.

### ***The Mid-Twentieth Century***

The economic impact of two world wars meant that the first half of the twentieth century saw relatively few church-building campaigns. That would all change by the 1950s, the great decade of American church construction, and so opens our second act. As opposed to the religious pessimism that characterized the turn of the century, the 1950s are hailed as an almost hyper-religious era. Church affiliation had reached 69 percent by 1960.<sup>11</sup> A booming economy opened the doors to massive suburban expansion and the need for many new churches. Compared to only twenty-six million dollars in 1945, Americans spent over one billion dollars on church construction in 1960. In 1954, “under God” was added to the Pledge of Allegiance. In 1956, “In God we Trust” became the country’s official motto. In those same years, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, seeking reelection, argued that “Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith.” He was elected to a second term. This explosion in church adherence and construction led to the prevailing characterization of America as a “Christian nation,” especially in contrast to the self-consciously atheistic Communist states identified as America’s greatest threat.

The majority of buildings erected in these years embraced the colonial revival idiom that prevailed in American church architecture for decades (fig. 6).<sup>12</sup> Writing in 1951, William Ward Watkin complained that since the turn of the century “the most generally accepted and prevailing church building form throughout America was that of the Georgian or Colonial.”<sup>13</sup> The nationalist and isolationist atmosphere of the 1950s meant that the massive church building boom of that decade established the Colonial Revival as the prevailing church type in the American landscape.

While hardly a representative sample, a brief look at the mid-twentieth-century churches in my hometown of Charlottesville, Virginia, illustrates the prevalence of the colonial revival. In the fifteen years between 1950 and 1965, eight Charlottesville churches erected new buildings, more than one every two years. They appeared in 1950, 1953, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1961, and 1963. These buildings almost uniformly embraced some expression of the colonial revival. The single exception is St. Mark’s Lutheran, erected in 1957. While Charlottesville is certainly a town known for glorifying its own past, that only a single mid-century congregation chose to

break from the colonial historicizing tradition in the city is remarkable.

The era generated certain assumptions about what comprised a “colonial” church. The colonial revival church of brick, with white trim and steeple, and fronted by a white portico, had become a national symbol. As Gretchen Buggeln has demonstrated, the form of the New England colonial meetinghouse triggered deep associations in the mid-twentieth century American imagination. The Thanksgiving 1944 cover of Life magazine, for example, included an image of a white-steepled meetinghouse because, wrote the editor, “New Englanders have always carried with them their faith in God and their belief that Americans should be humbly grateful for the good things they enjoy.”<sup>14</sup> Never mind that the building was built in Ohio fifty years after the American Revolution, it functioned to communicate a deeply held image of colonial American values. The Christmas edition of the same year carried a two-page view of a snow-clad Connecticut town reenacting the nativity. Critical to that view were not one but two “colonial” churches (fig. 7). Buggeln argues that in the mid-century the colonial church triggered visions of “tightly bound communities sharing democratic values and a sure and steady faith in God.”<sup>15</sup>

By the 1970s the colonial revival had lost the archaeological accuracy of earlier decades. The conservative ethic of the style was now evoked through common visual cues rather than specific references to the forms and details of actual early American buildings. Churches erected in red brick with white trim and a steeple could evoke the nationalist associations of the colonial even if they had a low-pitched roofs, tall thin windows of abstracted glass, and prefabricated steeples. Such churches communicated their commitment to a tradition in architecture that signaled continuity with the past, even if the remarkably vague referent was some distant era in American rather than Christian history.

Against this backdrop of brick veneer and white trim a substantial minority of congregations broke from these emotive and sentimental associations, building in a contemporary idiom.<sup>16</sup> This radical departure from traditional design in American Protestant church architecture began with the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, and from the beginning it was associated with theological and social progressivism. Probably the earliest and most important example, of course, is Wright’s Unity Temple, built for a Unitarian Universalist congregation in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1905. As Joseph Siry has demonstrated in his book on Unity Temple, the building is a complex result of Wright’s drive toward an organic architecture, the complex programmatic needs of the congregation, and the progressive bent of both architect and congregation. Raised by Unitarian parents, Wright came from a long history of Christian progressives, and was eager to design the building. The church’s minister described the design during construction. “Without a tower or spire it expresses the spirit of the ideal. By its form it expresses the thought, inherent in the liberal faith, that God should not be sought in the sky, but on earth among the children of men.”<sup>17</sup> Erected in concrete, devoid of any vertical referent and rejecting all other traditional signs of American church architecture, the building was certainly something new. While Unity Temple was an early expression of Wright’s vision of a new progressive Christian type, it had little impact on American church architecture of the twentieth century.

If Frank Lloyd Wright introduced Americans to a modern idiom for church architecture, the German architect and theorist Rudolph Schwartz was the great theorist of the era, praised by Mies van der Rohe as “one of the greatest thinkers of our time.”<sup>18</sup> His monumental treatise, *The Church Incarnate*, was first made available in English in 1958. At the core of Schwartz’s theory was a series of seven floor plans for churches that are in fact not so much plans as models for

organizing the church in worship. These range from the first, the sacred inwardness, through the broken ring, the chalice of light, the sacred journey, the dark chalice, the dome of light, and lastly the cathedral of all times. The first, the sacred inwardness (fig. 8), is probably the most easily realized: a congregation surrounding a central altar.

The clearest articulation of this plan type was produced by Eero Saarinen, a Scandinavian architect working in the United States, and the son of Eliel Saarinen, also a prominent architect and the designer of some significant American churches. Saarinen's most radically different and visually striking church is the 1964 building for North Christian Church in Columbus, Indiana (fig. 9). On an octagonal footprint, the building's perimeter appears to hover just above the ground; in fact, connection to the ground is one of the building's great themes. The glass walls give access to a perimeter corridor that leads to a tunnel that takes the visitor down, emerging at the center of the building's sanctuary, in the very heart of the church. The reference to the spiritual journey is palpable. Once inside, the low, hovering roof seems to soar heavenward, though only emphasized on the exterior by the dramatic verticality of the building's central steeple. Like Unity Temple, the building was highly original and a dramatic departure from the norm. Emulative models of Saarinen's church—few as successful—are now scattered across the American landscape.

If "sacred inwardness" is the most emulated of Schwartz's models, the "dark chalice" appears as well. Richard Kieckhefer has described the dark chalice as "a parabola taken to represent the outstretched arms of Christ, seated at the front, waiting to receive the people who come toward him, but what seems at first a cheering vision becomes complex and troubling. The Lord hesitates; rather than closing his arms in embrace he looks beyond the people's heads to the portal, where he sees the scene of judgement and with outstretched arms now implores the Father for mercy, asking that the cup of judgement may, if possible, pass by, 'but it shall not pass by.'"<sup>19</sup> Resurrection Church in St. Louis, Missouri, by Joseph Murphy, is probably the best of the few examples of this plan in material form in America. Though he is widely recognized as the great church design theorist of Modernism, the extent of Rudolph Schwartz's impact on American church architecture is not clearly understood.

Yet modern churches abound. Frank Lloyd Wright designed one church that incorporated the single design feature that best articulates modern American church architecture of the 1950s to the 1970s: the steeply pitched roof. Wright's 1947 Unitarian Meetinghouse in Madison, Wisconsin, might be the first example of this form. Wright's roof is thrust forward with projecting beveled banks of glass that create an animated sculptural form. Unlike Saarinen's North Christian Church, which was widely familiar, Wright's building is really better understood as an example of the mid-century craze for the A-frame, which transformed not only weekend cottages and mountain chalets but also churches. Lots of churches! That St. Mark's Lutheran in Charlottesville, the only mid-century modern church in town, follows this model is no surprise. Any time spent googling mid-century churches from across America can easily turn up hundreds of similar buildings.

Why were some Americans so interested in erecting these self-consciously Modern buildings when the majority of their counterparts were building in the Colonial Revival? The first observation that must be made is that most of the buildings erected in the Modern idiom were erected by the more progressive mainline denominations, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Disciples of Christ foremost among them. Modern architecture, it was argued by these

denominations, was good for Protestants for a number of reasons. First, the use of concrete and a reduction in ornament usually led to economical construction, which translated to good stewardship of resources, ultimately saving money that could be spent on the needs of the community. Secondly, it reflected an honest use of materials and a degree of constructional integrity. Honesty and integrity were Christian virtues attractive to progressives, especially in light of the emerging isolationism that characterized their more conservative evangelical brethren and the Colonial Revival buildings they erected. These new buildings were new, modern churches for a new, modern age.

### ***The Twenty-First Century***

This brings us to the present. If American evangelicals erected Romanesque fortresses defending against the uncertainties of the age in the 1890s, and colonial revival churches that signaled a nationalist isolationism in the 1950s, the turn of the twenty-first century offers an entirely different religious context: Post-modernity. But does that mean that the megachurch is something wholly new?

As a number of commentators have noted, megachurches tend to be located near the intersections of major highways, allowing easy access from a number of different directions, often from thirty to forty-five minutes away by interstate.<sup>20</sup> As a result, these buildings occupy locations that are often fairly remote from urban centers; this is not unlike the movement of the Romanesque churches away from late-nineteenth-century downtowns. Just as the streetcars and expensive neighborhoods meant that those churches attracted only a specific type of congregant, so too the megachurches—for all their talk of reaching the everyday American—require ownership of an automobile, quickly eliminating the urban poor. These churches also, we have noted, have enormous complexes, with family life centers, gymnasiums, and other extensive facilities. This is not entirely new to American Christianity: the institutional church of the turn of the last century is in many ways the model. Unlike the Crystal Cathedral, the architecture of the megachurches is quite common. Their emulation of office parks and shopping malls integrates them comfortably into the suburban landscape. This was also true of mid-century colonial revival churches, which nestled quite nicely into the mushrooming colonial revival neighborhoods that surrounded them.

But if these buildings have their roots in the twentieth-century history of American church architecture, they are also in many ways the clear byproduct of late-twentieth-century post-modern culture. The clearest expression is the dissolution of any boundary demarcating sacred and quotidian space. The megachurch has no visible signs setting it apart from the everyday—it is the everyday. In a remarkably post-modern way, the megachurch becomes a blank slate awaiting the inscription of meaning by the viewer. These buildings are usually without stylistic referents, because unlike their mid-century counterparts post-moderns know that style no longer conveys any stable meaning.

A second sign of post-modernity is the direct and comfortable engagement with the marketplace of commercialism, and the freedom of individual choice that that conveys. Obviously, these are buildings that look like shopping malls, the culmination of available options in a pre-Ebay world. With food courts, bookstores, even Starbucks stands, the interior of the megachurch constantly offers choice—the visitors are in charge, they are the consumers, in an arena comfortable for those interested in “trying on” a bit of Christianity.

Lastly, the megachurch is a typically post-modern “mediated” space. Consider, for example, the interior of the Crystal Cathedral. One of its primary functions is to serve as a stage set for Schuller’s internationally popular Hour of Power television show. The banks of ascending seats allow cameras to pan the audience easily during break-away shots. But the media connection is not limited to televangelism. The large screens that replay the broadcast for the audience in real time emulate the experience of the home viewer, emphasizing the importance of personal consumption of the event and, by extension, eroding the significance of the community. One can watch Mr. Schuller equally well at home or in church. The stages of many megachurches are also set for interviews between the pastor and recent converts, missionaries, and other personalities. In this way the visual culture of television has shaped the church interior. Stages boast overstuffed chairs, a lamp, and side-tables arranged to look just like the set from a talk-show.<sup>21</sup>

But even that is not the extent of the mediation. In more recent years megachurches have been outfitted with jumbotron screens emulating practices at rock concerts and basketball arenas. These screens amplify the face of the preacher, allowing the sense of an immediate connection between the visitor and the minister, even in the midst of thousands. Contemporary Americans, of course, are quite comfortable in these settings. The jumbotron is the television. Screens participate in communicating viewer choices; if dissatisfied one can simply change the channel, or turn the show off entirely. The importance of these visual media in the contemporary megachurch cannot be overstated. Unlike the Crystal Cathedral, most recent megachurches have no windows at all so as not to wash out the jumbotron screens. Visual consumption matters—a lot.

Critics of the megachurches rail against their uncritical embrace of American popular and visual culture. How can the everyday, the commonplace, be otherworldly? But that might reflect the particular stance of the speaker more than the reality in popular culture. Jeanne Kilde has argued that, “despite the complaint by some that megachurches do not look like churches, the continued association of this type with evangelical churches on television has transformed the idea of what a church looks like.”<sup>22</sup> The megachurch is the contemporary American church.

And if the churches of American evangelicalism are self-consciously quotidian, perhaps Americans are satiating their hunger for sacred spaces in other historically quotidian places. Two examples suffice. The close connection between American evangelicalism and consumer culture has led Ira Zepp to proclaim the American shopping mall the new religious image in post-modern America. Many malls have cruciform plans; they use the imagery of life and rebirth—cascading water, natural light, vegetation; their wings have an uncanny similarity to the naves and side-aisles of a church. Stores like Lane Bryant and Banana Republic become chapels, promising the rebirth or remaking of the consumer. One wonders if traditional sacred cues are informing the everyday as the quotidian increasingly informs the place and practice of American religion.<sup>23</sup>

One can also consider the remarkable popular behavior surrounding sports and sports arenas.<sup>24</sup> While I am not really a sports fan, I had the pleasure of spending a year in the lakeside district of Chicago, only a block and a half from Wrigley Field, the historic stadium that is home to the Chicago Cubs. Just outside the stadium a new statue to Harry Carey depicts the legendary announcer rising above the multitude, at least a hero, if not a saint or saviour. Jersey shops and sports bars line the streets around the stadium like the market stalls selling icons and holy water



before a medieval cathedral. Disembarking at the local El station, one is asked to “believe or leave . . .”—commitment differentiates between believers and others (fig. 10). This close connection between evangelical culture and sports culture is probably best exemplified by the wild popularity of Promise Keepers, the men’s revival movement. One wonders if the adrenalin of the sporting event and the deep emotionalism of much evangelicalism are mutually reinforcing. If so, does the stadium-like context of the megachurch draw on the enthusiasm of the sports contest to maintain the interest of evangelical men?

This blurring of boundaries raises critical questions about the potential for sacred space in contemporary culture. Many critics of contemporary Evangelical culture are horrified by what they see because they assume that sanctity is substantive. The tradition in American church architecture is that the building communicates religious meaning—the colonial revival church dominated the twentieth century—but in a culture that no longer recognizes any distinction between the sacred and the quotidian, can the critics speak so vehemently? Critics are wrong to level the argument that these buildings stand devoid of any theological substance. In fact they are directly informed by an evangelical theology that gives preference to drawing the “unchurched” through their doors. What appears at the outset to be an architectural act of selling-out to American capitalism is in fact a subtly negotiated dance with popular culture that accepts much but does reject some.

In doing so American megachurches put to us the essential questions that will shape church design for the twenty-first century. Is it possible that by holding fast to the everyday evangelicals have in fact more successfully engaged post-modernism than their more progressive counterparts? Or is it important to recognize that American popular culture is at least shallow, and potentially dangerous? Should the American church recognize that our religiosity must be sustained by significant architectural contexts that offer a place set apart from the everyday? The answers to these questions will shape the future of American church architecture.

## ENDNOTES

1. Anne C. Loveland and Otis B. Wheeler, *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch: A Material and Cultural History* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 118.
2. On the architecture of the megachurch see *ibid.*, and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, “Reading Megachurches: Investigating the Religious and Cultural Work of Church Architecture,” in *American Sanctuary: Understanding Sacred Spaces*, ed. Louis Nelson (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006), 225–50.
3. Loveland and Wheeler, *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch*, 240.
4. *Ibid.*, 1.
5. Terry Pristin, “A Sports Arena Gets Religion,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2004.
6. Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 85.
7. First United Methodist Church, *Remembering the Past: History of the Merging Congregations*

*and Their Buildings*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 8.

8. Ibid, 12.

9. Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 107.

10. Ibid., 190.

11. Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 952.

12. See Dale Dowling, "For God, For Family, For Country: Colonial Revival Church Buildings in the Cold War Era." Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 2004.

13. William Ward Watkin, *Planning and Building the Modern Church* (New York: The Dodge Corporation, 1951), 2.

14. Gretchen Buggeln, *Temples of Grace: The Material Transformation of Connecticut's Churches, 1790–1840* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003), 233.

15. Ibid.

16. Peter W. Williams, "Religious Architecture and Landscape," in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience: Studies of Transitions and Movements*, ed. Charles Lippy and Peter Williams (New York: Scribners's, 1988), 1338.

17. Joseph M. Siry, *Unity Temple: Frank Lloyd Wright and Architecture for Liberal Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 77.

18. Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 231.

19. Ibid., 234.

20. Peter Williams, "Metamorphoses of the Meetinghouse: Three Case Studies," in *Seeing Beyond the Word: Visual Arts and the Calvinist Tradition*, ed. Paul Corby Finney (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 501–2.

21. For more on this see Kilde, "Reading Megachurches" (note 2).

22. Ibid., 243.

23. Ira Zepp, *The New Religious Image of Urban America: The Shopping Mall as Ceremonial Center* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1986; reprint 1997).

24. See Joseph Price, *Rounding the Bases: Baseball and Religion in America* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2006).

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TRANSCENDING ARCHITECTURE. Contemporary Views of Sacred Space. TRANSCENDING ARCHITECTURE. Contemporary Views of Sacred Space, 2015. Julio Bermudez. Download PDF. INTRODUCTION If we ask professionals and scholars about the mission of architecture, most of them would agree that architecture is called to do a lot more than to guarantee the public health, safety, and welfare of building users. In fact, most would say that the promise of architecture begins fulfillment when such expectations have been met and transcended. But transcended into what? Will outstanding building functionality, economy, sustainability, formalism, or even symbolism do it? See more ideas about sacred architecture, architecture, church architecture. Modern Church Designs - Places of worship are often considered holistic and traditional in structure, but these modern church designs are showcasing that these otherwise s Sacred Architecture. Religious Architecture. Church Architecture. Modern Architecture. Modern Church. Church Design. See more ideas about architecture, place of worship, church. Contemporary , Armenian open air church humble architecture in a mountainous village 2017. A donated personal villa turned into public modest church with minimal architectural modification design concept. A As Architecture Religious Architecture Contemporary Architecture Architecture Definition Enterprise Architecture Architecture Portfolio Modern Church Church Design Facade Design. CHURCH ARCHITECTURE, HISTORY OF Part 1: Introduction A vast array of literature surrounds the study of church architecture, embracing a range of interests from archaeology, anthropology, sociology, and aesthetics, to the evolution of consciousness and theology. Part 1: Introduction. A vast array of literature surrounds the study of church architecture, embracing a range of interests from archaeology, anthropology, sociology, and aesthetics, to the evolution of consciousness and theology. This entry presents in 11 parts systematic summaries of the history of church architecture from the early Christian period to the eve of Vatican II. 1. OVERVIEW. Church architecture refers to the architecture of buildings of Christian churches. It has evolved over the two thousand years of the Christian religion, partly by innovation and partly by imitating other architectural styles as well as responding to changing beliefs, practices and local traditions. From the birth of Christianity to the present, the most significant objects of transformation for Christian architecture and design were the great churches of Byzantium, the Romanesque abbey churches