

## CHURCH BUILDING AND WORSHIP

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### Abstract

*Worship is essential for Christians because it is an expression of the relationship between the people as creation and God as their creator. Some people assume that the act of worship is more focused on what is done in the worship service than the place where they worship. On the other hand, some argue that the place of worship is important because it affects the quality of the worship itself. This article attempts to present how the Bible provides descriptions of the relationship between worship and the place of worship from various times. A qualitative research method by investigating related literature has been conducted. The findings of this study provide that God's people have specific places of devotion and refer to one specific place that can be accessed in group devotion. The people of God have also built proper places of worship to worship their Lord and Savior that can fulfill spiritual needs. In construction of the church building should consider the theological value of the building in revealing truth, beliefs and philosophy of the church*

**Keywords:** *worship, church building, spirituality.*

### Introduction

Worship is a spiritual experience in the relationship between God and human beings. People do the activity of worship according their beliefs and ways. Christians have own place and pattern in worship. Church building is a place that Christians do the activity of worship and praise to God. There many different ideas among Christians about place of worship. Each denomination, nation and culture have own views.

Some people have perspectives that in worship do not need special place and exact place because God is omnipresent and they can worship Him everywhere. In the other side believe that the people of God should prepare special place and erect a building for God's dwelling place among His people. It seems that there is contradiction between both, whereas, they have similar purpose to worship and praise God.

One of the ways in nurturing the congregation to grow and have good relationship with God is through worship service. Where the people of God in the bible times worshipped Him? Does the surrounding environment influence the worship service? What criteria of the better church building that can give better atmosphere for the worshippers? Should the Christians consider the needs of the proper church building?

## Biblical-Historical Background of the House of Worship

This part describes the historical-biblical background of the existence of the house of worship both of the Old Testament and New Testament period. During those periods, the people of God had a certain place for corporate worship. Each place had own model and uniquely that influenced their liturgy.

### Old Testament Period

The Bible tells us both that the people of God can worship him anywhere and that there is something inevitable and altogether fitting and important that divine worship should be conducted in a space designed for the purpose. “Worship involves persons, not places. Persons are the temples. They are the holy things. It is in them that the kingdom is present. The encounter with God is any place. And the life in God – is not a matter of special places, times, or esoteric rituals, but of spirit and truth.”<sup>1</sup>

**Pre-patriarchal and Patriarchal Periods.** Christians have often been forced to offer their worship to God in forest and glen or in the living room of someone’s home. But the importance of the embodiment of spiritual realities is a commonplace in the Bible. The worship ceremonials are examples of that principle at work and so is sacred place of worship.

Altar was built as “a structure on which sacrifices or incense is offered to a deity. Altars were used by almost every ancient nation, not only in temples but also in open-air sanctuaries.”<sup>2</sup> The book of Genesis 8:20 mention that the first word of altar is written in the bible, when Noah offered a sacrifice to God after the Flood. However, altars may have been built a long time before. During the time of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3–5), they erected altar to offer sacrifice.

The function of altars was not only one purpose. In contrary, “altars were not always used to offer sacrifices; they served also as memorials (Jos 22:22–29). Almost never does the Bible call the altar “a table” (Mal 1:7, 12). Possibly the term was avoided because the pagan altars were always considered to be tables of the gods.”<sup>3</sup>

Worship and sacrifice offering continued during Abraham time. Abraham and even his family offered burnt offering that symbolize the redemption of Jesus. The ceremonial of offering was the center of their worship. They had certain place for doing the activities.

“During the life of Abram/Abraham, the act of worship, whether bound up with building an altar or calling on Yahweh’s name, seem to related to some location, frequently place where God has revealed himself (see Gen. 12:7-8; 13:4, 18; 21:33; [22:29]). Meeting with God or encountering God is an essential component of worship. Thus the

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<sup>1</sup>E. A. Sovik, *Architecture for Worship*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota), 1973, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1979),33

<sup>3</sup> Ibid,33

experience of encountering the living God at specific location was easily tied to the idea of a particular sanctuary.”<sup>4</sup>

In another event, Jacob had different experience about a significant place in encountering with God. “When Jacob had a dream at an insignificant place and woke to exclaim what it was a fearsome place, the house of God, the gate of heaven (Gen 28:17). His dream provoked him to erect a pillar and give the place a new name, house of God, that all might know the event.”<sup>5</sup> When Jacob rose up early in the morning, he erected a pillar and poured the oil upon the top of it (Gen 28:18). It is for this reason that in the pre-patriarchal and patriarchal periods they had a particular place for meeting with God. They built an altar to offer the sacrifice.

**Exodus Period.** When Israelites was in the wilderness, God prepared a movable sanctuary. It was beautiful in its appointments and designed specifically for the worship. He had taught his people to give him. God instructed to Moses to build a sanctuary. “The command was communicated to Moses while in the mount with God, "Let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them;" and full directions were given for the construction of the tabernacle.”<sup>6</sup> This sanctuary, by the express teaching of Holy Scripture, was patterned after the sanctuary in heaven where Christ himself now serves (Hebrews 8:2-5). Sacred building and architecture, in other words, brings eternal realities into view.

**The Temple of Solomon.** David had originally planned to build the Temple at Jerusalem (2 Samuel 7:1–3). When he was not permitted to erect it, he amassed during his lifetime a tremendous amount of building material and precious metal which, together with detailed plans. Later, when Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem according to the plan that his father David had prepared and with the resources that David had gathered for the purpose. It was his express intention to make a sanctuary worthy of the Almighty and, in that way, an appropriate setting for Israel’s worship of him (2 Chron. 2:5,9).

### New Testament Period

In general, the New Testament epoch can be divided in two periods. Those are the Jesus time and early Christian period. This part describes the house of worship during the teaching of Jesus Christ and the early Christian church.

**The Time of Jesus.** Jesus did not ask his disciples to build a certain place or house for special purpose. Although when Jesus was on Mount of Transfiguration, one of His disciples asked to build some shrines, He persuaded not to build anything.

During His ministry Jesus attended the synagogue on a certain Sabbath morning during the worship service in Nazareth. The synagogue was the regular Jewish assembly for prayer and

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<sup>4</sup>Yoshiaki Hattori, “Theology of Worship in the Old Testament” in Carson D.A., *Worship: Adoration and Action*. (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI., 1993). 23.

<sup>5</sup>James White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, (Nashville, TN : Abingdon, 1980), 76

<sup>6</sup>Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958. 343.

worship. Jesus is depicted as teaching and performing miracles in synagogue (Matthew. 4:23).<sup>7</sup> He read from the Isaiah scroll and explained it (Luke 4:16-20). Sovik stated that “He attended synagogue meetings which consisted of reading and of teaching.”<sup>8</sup> The chief element of worship in the synagogue was the reading and exposition of the Law (Acts 13:14, 15) which basic pattern was carried into Christian assemblies.<sup>9</sup>

In those days the Israelites was still keeping the Old Testament ritual of worship in the temple. Animals offering and others ritualistic were held in the temple in Jerusalem. Even though Jesus never offers the animal offering in the temple, He keeps the holiness of the temple. Twice Jesus cleansed the temple; the first was recorded in John 2:13-16 and the second were recorded in Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46. At the time, the temple in Jerusalem was placed as a common place for marketing and other business. Jesus wants the place of worship is the place that God meets with His people and the temple is specialized for God dwelling. “Those today who conscientiously seek to make their Father’s house a “house of prayer” will avoid making it a place for common thoughts, words, or actions.”<sup>10</sup>

**The Early Christian Church.** Christ Himself give us the classic example when He attended the synagogue service and Paul never missed and opportunity to proclaim Christ as the fulfillment of the Law of the Prophets (Acts 13:14-46; 19:8). Paul also encouraged Timothy to give attention to the public reading of the Scriptures, and he expected his own letters to be read at corporate worship (1 Tim 4:13; Col 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27).<sup>11</sup>

Further, Christianity was an expression of new social, political and economic ideals which began in a small way in a world that was official, imperial and pagan. Because the humble condition of the Christian church in the early period of persecution, its worship was in bold contrast to the pomp of Greek and Romans communion. In early Christianity, as was the case with Israel in the wilderness, there was no possibility of building permanent sanctuaries for worship. Ordinarily the early Christians worshipped in homes, often in the larger homes of the wealthy.

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<sup>7</sup>Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, “synagogues” *Dictionary of the New Testament Background*. (Downer, Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 1145.

<sup>8</sup>E. A. Sovik, 10

<sup>9</sup>Ilion T. Jones, *A Historical Approach to Evangelical Worship*. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 59.

<sup>10</sup>Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol.5 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1978), 923.

<sup>11</sup>G.W. Kirby, “The church,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Ed. Merrill C. Tenney, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 850.

Christianity began with no distinct in situation and no church building. “The earliest description shows the follower of Jesus continuing in temple piety and table fellowship “from house to house” (Act 2:46; 5:42).”<sup>12</sup> Church historian Philip Schaff states:

“Until about the close of the second century the Christians held their worship mostly in the private homes, or in desert places, at the graves of martyrs, and in the crypts of the catacombs. This arose from their poverty, their oppressed and outlawed condition, their love of silence and solitude, and their aversion to all heathen art.”<sup>13</sup>

The worshippers were among small groups of people, “not many wise, not many powerful, not many noble (1 Cor. 1:26. They met in their houses, without musical instruments, without skilled singers, and without of any furnishings that we ordinarily associate with worship. The Word of God simply breaks upon the believers as God revealed Himself to the unaware and sleeping Jacob at Bethel (Gen29:12-19). However, the impact of worship is very deep in their heart as worshippers.

### **The Significance of Church Building in Worship**

Worship activity can not be separated with influence of the surroundings. The ability of surroundings to affect the mood of a group of people, and the ability of the group to model their environment over time are significant. It is easy to recognize the difference setting makes when the worship service is held in home, school building or in the church building. The mood of the worshipers are difference between attending worship service in the house building that they can see every day and in the church building with different decoration and furnishing. Many considerations should be made before the construction of the church building, such as theological, location and site, architecture, location and site consideration.

### **Theological Considerations**

The church buildings should have a deep and wide theological essence. The building itself belongs to God and as place that reflects God stays among the human beings. Ellen G. White states that “To the humble, believing soul, the house of God on earth is the gate of heaven. The song of praise, the prayer, the words spoken by Christ's representatives, are God's appointed agencies to prepare a people for the church above.”<sup>14</sup>

A church is in itself a symbol: as the gathering place of a living congregation, it calls the people to encounter God. It is an open space and a place for quiet reflection, where artistic and liturgical components are in harmony with one another. The church building should fulfill of spiritual, mental and physical needs of the worshippers. Segler states in these words:

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<sup>12</sup>Everett Ferguson, “house church” *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998), 546

<sup>13</sup>Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian church*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1910) II, 199.

<sup>14</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol.5. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 491.

“Historically, the church has vacillated between space that emphasized “the house of worship” (home church model) and “the house of God” (sanctuary Model. Effective worship space must meet both of these needs; it must be intimate so worshipers do not feel alone and ostracized, and it must also point toward God. Worship space should not look or feel like the family room in a domestic dwelling, nor should it be cold and indifferent to the individual. Worship space must, however, facilitates and encourages worship as action, for its design will have much to do with the congregation’s participation in the Word of God proclaimed, the prayer of the people, the congregation’s voice through music, the choir’s offerings of choral music, and the gift of instrumental music.”<sup>15</sup>

A successfully built sanctuary is more than the sum of its parts. The purpose of all its visual elements is to create a space in a dimension beyond time, shutting out the external world.

Christians as Solomon in ancient times, sought to build sanctuaries worthy of their God and Savior even as they have aspired to live lives worthy of him. Even small churches are often exquisite in their simplicity. But it is obvious, as soon as one enters such a building, however grand or small, ornate or simple, that it was built for a single purpose: the worship of God. It is, in other words, intended to be a sanctuary, a temple, a house of God. In other words, Ellen G. White said: “The house where God is worshipped should be in accordance with His character and majesty. There are small churches that ever will be small, because they place their own interests above the interests of God’s cause.”<sup>16</sup>

### Architecture Considerations

The basic purpose to erect a church building is for worship to God. “In the construction of churches, it is well to keep in mind that the building should not look like an ordinary house or hall. If a church is so similar to the buildings they see every day, the people tend to drift away from the spirit of worship.”<sup>17</sup> “In construction of this building He gave representation of His power and majesty; and His name is to be honored in the buildings that are erected for Him today. Faithfulness, stability, and fitness are to be seen in every part.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Franklin M. Segler, *Understanding, Preparing for, and Practicing Christian Worship*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publisher, 1996), 164.

<sup>16</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*. vol. 5. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948). 268.

<sup>17</sup>Walter Schubert, *Syllabus for Pastoral Ministry*. (Manila, Philippines: SDA Theological Seminary, Spring Extension School, 1956), 20.

<sup>18</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*. vol. 7. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948). 94.

## Artistic of the Church Building

In another sense worship is experience of art between the mighty God and human being as creature. God uses of art and His created works to speak to man. Ellen G white expresses in these words:

“In the home and the sanctuary, through the things of nature and of art, in labor and in festivity, in sacred building and memorial stone, by methods and rites and symbols unnumbered, God gave to Israel lessons illustrating His principles and preserving the memory of His wonderful works.”<sup>19</sup>

Worship may express itself through certain outward form, but its essence is not primarily of form but an experience. In spiritual worship the Spirit of God makes contact with the spirit of man.

The church building is a space for encountering God, where the temporal comes face to face with the eternal. The church building is bound to its time and materials, but it strives after the eternal, light, joy, and beauty. “Architecture is in many respects the greatest of the arts the service of the church. It fashions the fabric which other arts enrich. Within this fabric Christian assemblies’ worship and work.”<sup>20</sup> The interior environment inside the room affects the mood of the worshipper, however, to be careful in choosing the furnishing and artistic for this room.

## The Design of the Church Building

Worship space is first of all built for the congregation. Congregational participation in worship is importance. The architectural decision should be considered in light of the congregation. The congregation should enjoy the space during the worship service. Segler suggest that “For worship space to be effective, it must first meet the functional needs of the worshipping community. Aesthetic amenities must be secondary to function in worship space design.”<sup>21</sup>

The liturgical of worship in Christian Churches have developed in each generation. The liturgical movement has fostered continuing attempts at the theology itself and the kind of building for worship. Christians cannot ignore this trend. A deeper understanding of theological meaning and influence of the surroundings are needed during worship service. “There is a very intimate relationship between ‘things done’ in the way of worship and ‘things believed’ in the matter of doctrine.”<sup>22</sup>

Liturgical action often depends on the design of architectural space for worship. The creativity of the worship leader is influenced by the design of the room for worship. “Caution

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<sup>19</sup>Ellen G White, *Education*. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1952), 41

<sup>20</sup>Luther D. Reed, *Worship*. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 10.

<sup>21</sup>Segler, 164.

<sup>22</sup>Gilbert Cope, *Symbolism in the Bible and the Church*. (London: SCM Press, Ltd.,1959), 232

must be observed in altering the worship space. It is necessary to know your space, because each space has own unique character. It is necessary to know and its function to doing some activity in the worship service.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Location and Site Considerations**

The outside environment of church building has many influences for the worship service. The proper location should be chosen before build the church, because the congregation needs a comfortable place for worship. Designer for worship building must consider exterior noise that can disturb the worship service. “The kind of neighborhood has a great bearing on the atmosphere of worship. Great care needed in choosing a site.”<sup>24</sup>

The location of church building is also to lead the congregation into a more profound experience of the worship as truth, through a personal understanding of its promises and a sense of rejoicing in them through the holy place of God’s presence.” The place dedicated to God should not be a room where worldly business is transacted.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Summary**

Biblical evidences gave us a summary that from the Old Testament period and continued in the New Testament period, the people have a place to worship God. In each generation they had each model the place. Pre-patriarchal and patriarchal period the believers had altars to offer their offering for God. Even though, they moved from place to another place they erected the altar for offering as the part of their worship.

When God lead Israelites in journey from Egypt to Canaan, He instructed to His people to build a movable sanctuary. God Himself gave the model and miniature of the sanctuary to Moses. During their journey, this sanctuary became a dwelling place of God among them and they made it as the center.

David was the second king of Israel. He planned to build a permanent temple for worship and as a symbol dwelling place of God among the people. His planning continued by Solomon his son. Solomon used the best materials that David prepared for building the temple. It was his express intention to make a sanctuary worthy of the Almighty.

When Jesus was in the world, He did not build a special place for house of God. In His ministry He attended the synagogue for teaching, proclaiming the gospel and healing the sick. During this time, they have temple in Jerusalem and synagogues. Early Christianity began with no distinct in situation and no church building. They met from house to house. Because of persecution Christians held their worship mostly in the private homes, or in desert places, at the graves of martyrs, and in the crypts of the catacombs.

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<sup>23</sup>Frank C. Senn, *The Pastor as Worship Leader: a manual for corporate worship*. (Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), 92.

<sup>24</sup>Schubert, 20.

<sup>25</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*. vol. 5. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948). 496.



Today, the Christians worship God in church building. The Church building dedicates to God as the symbol of His presence among us. As the place where the people come and worship Him, in construction should consider the theological, architecture and location aspects to get the value of God's house and space of worship.

### **Conclusion**

The final result, within the limits of this study could be summed up in this following conclusion.

1. The people of God have a place that specialized for worship. Today, the church building is an importance place to revere him in corporate worship as congregation.

2. Christians sought to build sanctuaries worthy of their God and Savior. The church building should fulfill of spiritual, mental and physical needs of the worshippers. A deeper understanding of theological meaning and influence of the surroundings are needed during worship service.

3. In construction of the church building should consider the theological value of the building in revealing truth, beliefs and philosophy of the church. Architecture considerations have an importance thing to make worship service more meaningful. Before erect the building, the church should choose the right place to make more comfortable in worship service.

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