

Book Review
by Ellen O. Schippert

An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today.

Mark A. Torgerson. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007.

While it often goes unnoticed, or at least unspoken by the average person attending church, the places in which we worship are an intersection of architecture, theology, and liturgy. Stained glass windows, very high ceilings, and long central aisles with pews facing in one direction toward a high chancel speak of the transcendence of God. Such awesome spaces relate less to this world and more to another realm. Formal worship is comfortable in such places of worship. In contrast, plainness and simplicity, use of ordinary and strong materials that are left exposed (such as brick walls), and pews or chairs organized around three sides of a minimally raised chancel, speak of the immanence of God. These houses of worship convey the sense that God dwells with us in this time and place. Less formal worship works well in these spaces.

In *An Architecture of Immanence* Mark A. Torgerson carefully traces the sources and explores the manifestations of twentieth century modern church architecture which produced the latter. The contributions of church architecture, the liturgical renewal movement, and theological developments to the twentieth century's "modern movement" are presented. Torgerson's overarching theme is that the contribution of modern architecture has been "the significant role it played in facilitating a renewed sense of the holy God dwelling actively in the midst of people engaged in worship and ministry." (205)

This book complements other more practical books on church design (such as *Church Architecture* by James F. White Susan J. White and *Re-pitching the Tent* by Richard Giles) by showing us where we have been in our recent past so that we might gain insight into what comes next in church architecture. We are at a cross roads in the culture and in church architecture. Our time is described as postmodern. While modern period churches are among us and continue to be built there is a desire to speak again of the transcendence of God and return to high ceilings and stained glass. Torgerson sees that the postmodern "world of architectural design is exploding with exciting possibilities for church design" (208) and that we can look for the "creative incorporation of traditional designs with the contemporary needs of congregations for worship and ministry." (209)

Both the immanence and transcendence of God long for expression. More than ever this means that the work of designing church buildings will and should be a collaborative effort involving worship leaders, pastors, architects, builders, acousticians, liturgical consultants, and others. Those involved in the renovation of existing churches or in the design of new churches will benefit from studying this book. The chapter entitled "An Illustration: The Thought and Work of Edward Anders Sövik" is especially helpful in its description of both the influences on this prominent twentieth century church architect and the work he produced. The book's footnotes, appendix, glossary, and bibliography provide valuable references and the ecumenical framework makes it accessible to persons from different branches of the church.

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