Abstract

With Protestant denominational membership declining steadily, and at times dramatically, since the 1960s, numerous local churches eagerly search for ways to attract new members. In efforts to reverse this trend, or at least slow it down, many have turned to techniques more informed by market logic and capitalist ideologies than the triune God revealed in biblical texts. One such technique insists upon creating “gathering spaces” with little if any evidence of Christian identity. Not even the nomenclature (e.g. “gathering space” instead of “worship space” or “sanctuary”) indicates the nature of the purposes intended for these spaces. Many conclude the more sterile and unmarked a space the more welcoming and, therefore, evangelistic it is.

This essay begins with a brief proposal to more fully reclaim biblical foundations for evangelism. Through a canonical approach that reads the biblical texts theologically, a richer perspective of evangelistic understandings and practices emerges. Second, this essay explores one implication of such a canonical and theological approach. If the language and practices of the gathered community are constitutive for initiating and forming people in the Christian faith, might the space in which they gather be theologically significant? In this article I argue that recognizing and ordering the sacred character of a gathering space can lead to its significant role in Christian invitation and formation in contemporary communities of faith—thus situating the Word.

Keywords: evangelism, Christian identity, sacred space, worship

Lacey Warner is associate dean for academic formation and assistant professor of the practice of evangelism and Methodist studies at the Divinity School at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.
With Protestant denominational membership largely declining steadily, and at times dramatically, since the 1960s, numerous local churches eagerly search for ways to attract new members. In efforts to reverse this trend, or at least slow it down, many have turned to techniques more informed by market logic and capitalist ideologies than the triune God revealed in biblical texts. One such technique insists upon creating "gathering spaces" with little if any evidence of Christian identity. Not even the nomenclature (e.g. "gathering space" instead of "worship space" or "sanctuary") indicates the nature of the purposes intended for these spaces. An assumption behind these techniques is that Christian symbols and language may offend or exclude. Thousands gather weekly in local churches without names, in rooms without symbols, and are not offended. Many conclude the more sterile and unmarked a space the more welcoming and, therefore, evangelistic it is.

Such an understanding of evangelism neglects biblical and theological foundations outlined in related scholarship. A major theme within the current academic study of evangelism is the initiation of individuals into the reign of God. This return to a theological—rather than anthropological—foundation relies upon an understanding of evangelism as the heart of God’s mission, integrating the once (and sometimes still) estranged components of word and deed. Such an understanding of evangelism includes a process of Christian initiation in communities of faith that emphasizes both language and practices in response to God’s invitation. This notion of evangelistic/missional wholeness has led to a critique of evangelistic methods lacking theological foundations. The current arguments, however, and the trajectory generally, seem constrained by a relatively narrow reading of scripture.

This essay begins with a brief proposal to more fully reclaim biblical foundations for evangelism. Through a canonical approach that reads the biblical texts—both Old and New Testaments—theologically, a richer perspective of evangelistic understandings and practices emerges. This brief consideration first surveys the limitations of several current studies with regard to biblical foundations followed by possible contributions of a canonical and theological perspective. By taking seriously the Old Testament as Christian scripture alongside the New Testament, we begin to see a more textured and dynamic understanding of God’s mission and
the church’s participation in it through evangelism.

Second, this essay explores one implication of such a canonical and theological approach. If the language and practices of the gathered community are constitutive for initiating and forming people in the Christian faith, might the space in which they gather be theologically significant? Could theological reflection upon the invitational and formative role of space (whether in architectural design, furnishings, or decorative art) in light of biblical foundations provide possibilities for further enrichment? In the following reflections I do not insist upon an aesthetic prescription for how the space of gathered Christian communities should be constituted. Rather, based on a theological reading of biblical texts, recognizing and ordering the sacred character of a gathering space can lead to its significant role in Christian invitation and formation in contemporary communities of faith—thus situating the Word.

A Canonical and Theological Approach

As William Abraham notes, an understanding of evangelism based merely on specific biblical terms is insufficient.5 Many projects within the academic study of evangelism begin with or give prominent place to etymological analyses of evangelism and related biblical terms, most often focusing on Greek antecedents (εὐαγγελίζωνται).6 This method privileges the term and its use in the New Testament, and further, extended to the Hebrew equivalents (בָּאתָ), drastically narrows the possibilities for a theological reading of evangelism in the Old Testament.7 Abraham clarifies the problem: “At issue is the appropriation of what evangelism has actually meant in the early church and in history, not judged by the etymology of the word evangelism and its rather occasional use in Scripture, but by what evangelists have actually done in both proclaiming the gospel and establishing new converts in the kingdom of God.”8 As Abraham acknowledges, first, such language usage is relatively limited in biblical texts. The Greek terms related to evangelism seldom appear in the gospels, for example, in Jesus’ commissions to the disciples. Second, as etymological studies demonstrate, the uses of biblical terms related to evangelism consistently convey practices myopically focused upon verbal proclamation. Since etymological studies alone are inadequate, how might Christian communities read the biblical texts to better contribute to understandings and practices of evangelism?

Even the most helpful theological projects in the study of evangelism are informed by biblical foundations that seldom reach beyond the New Testament. Abraham, Arias, and Jones, for example, while acknowledging the Old Testament frame as a reference for comprehending the reign of God, concentrate their biblical exegesis and theological reflection in the
New Testament. Likewise, from Barrett and Bohr’s etymological studies to Klaiber and Bosch’s comprehensive exegesis, most academic treatments of evangelism remain dependent upon the New Testament with little or no consideration of the Old. Other biblical scholars reflect theologically upon mission, in some cases to the exclusion of evangelism. However, even those related texts with helpful insights for evangelistic understandings and practices seldom emerge in the academic study of evangelism.

While the New Testament is essential for Christian theology and discipleship, and the previously referenced texts make significant contributions to the study of evangelism, there may be a tendency, if unintentional, for Christians to simply dismiss the majority of the canon as merely historical background. Such dependence upon the New Testament without adequate acknowledgement of its relationship to the Old Testament—also Christian scripture—seems dangerously close to a neo-Marcionism. Ironically, the first “Bible” of the early church was the Old Testament. As a people of “one” book, though two testaments, Christians must remain attentive to the distinctive witness of each. A canonical approach to biblical interpretation can offer a fresh hermeneutic, revealing further texture and resources—while not glossing over distinctions—for understanding evangelism in the contemporary context.

From Going to Gathering

Implicit in the current trajectory within the academic study of evangelism is a reorientation from the traditional notion that evangelism, particularly in the New Testament, functions mainly as a centrifugal dynamic of “going out.” Julian Hartt, writing half a century ago, refers to this dynamic as “the church go[ing] out into the world to preach the gospel.” Hartt’s statement, while demonstrating this traditional notion, also indicates an important theological shift in the church’s self-understanding from the church sending messengers to share the gospel to God’s sending the church as messenger to the world. While this shift in self-understanding is significant, a merely centrifugal understanding of evangelism does not offer a comprehensive representation of the biblical witness—even in the New Testament.

Mortimer Arias addresses this truncated understanding when he argues for the biblical emphasis on hospitality as a paradigm for evangelism, particularly as a distinctive mark of Christians and their communities in the New Testament. Arias explains: “Christian mission from its beginning has been centrifugal mission—going from the center to a periphery in the world. Mission cannot remain at any center, it has to move to new boundaries and frontiers: ‘to all peoples everywhere;’ ‘to the whole world;’ ‘to the whole creation;’ ‘to the end of the earth;’ and ‘to the end of time.’” Hence, when many think of God’s mission and the church’s participation
in evangelism, the general dynamic is one of going. Yet there is another
dynamic, modeled in the Old Testament: “Israel is the missionary people
of God, ‘the light of the nations,’ whose primary mission is not to go but
to be the people of God.”\textsuperscript{18} For Arias, this characteristically Old Testament
dynamic of centripetal mission changed following the resurrection and
Pentecost to the traditional, centrifugal pattern. However, even in the New
Testament, the notion of centrifugal mission remains—“by attraction, by
incarnation, by being.”\textsuperscript{19}

A similar recognition of the dual dynamic of centripetal and centrifugal
evangelistic practices appears in more recent studies. For example, Brad
Kallenberg, in \textit{Live to Tell}, concludes: “Faithfulness in evangelism must
simultaneously attend to both the group and the individual.”\textsuperscript{20} Evangelism
informed by biblical foundations includes not just centrifugal proclamation
to the individual but centripetal participation in the life of the gathered
Christian community. Drawing on insights from postcritical theory,
Kallenberg argues for the essential role of communities in inviting, initiating,
and forming Christian disciples: “The first lesson for evangelism to be
gleaned from postcritical philosophy, then, is the importance of embodying
the story of Jesus in our communal life. Such a community provides the
context that demystifies the gospel by making it concrete.”\textsuperscript{21} The biblical
narrative culminating in the story of Jesus Christ and the subsequent
embodiment of that narrative in the communal life of Christians is the
essence of evangelism. Kallenberg proposes a broader understanding of
evangelism beyond centrifugal verbal proclamation, such that “we insist
on embodying the story in the web of relationships that constitutes our
identity.”\textsuperscript{22} “Simply put,” says Kallenberg, “when viewed through a
postcritical lens, conversion can be understood as entailing the change of
one’s social identity, the acquisition of a new conceptual language, and the
shifting of one’s paradigm.”\textsuperscript{23}

At least two components foster the acquisition of this new conceptual
Christian language. First, “fluency is gained by participation in the linguistic
community’s form of life—that weave of activity, relationships, and speech
that gives the community its unique personality.”\textsuperscript{24} And second, “we learn
a conceptual language by means of our community’s stockpile of interpretive stories.”\textsuperscript{25} Kallenberg builds upon George Lindbeck’s
suggestion that our religious world is limited or expanded by the conceptual
language at our disposal.\textsuperscript{26} So, Christian invitation, initiation, and formation
includes a changed social identity and a new conceptual language facilitated
through narratives—the most significant, found in biblical texts—as well
as activities and relationships cultivated within the gathered community
of faith.

Such a perspective may be recognized among younger evangelicals, who
in their worship are increasingly incorporating liturgical practices and resources from traditions such as Catholic, Orthodox, and Episcopal. Orthodox offers a paradigmatic example of the evangelistic significance of the language and practices of the gathered Christian community. While the ecclesiocentric perspective of Orthodoxy often equates the church with the reign of God, the gathered community provides a visible, concrete witness to the fulfillment of the gospel. From the Orthodox perspective, participation in God’s mission is initially centripetal, a gathering of the community of faith to participate in the liturgy. This intensely evangelistic “eucharistic ecclesiology” arguably facilitates a changed social identity through formation in a new conceptual language, informed by biblical texts including the salvation narrative of the liturgy. Individuals are initiated into the reign of God following the acquisition of this new language and participation in accompanying practices such as confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. For Orthodoxy, in addition to worship, which culminates in the Eucharist, unity—the ecumenical unity of Christ’s church—is essential for participation in God’s mission. Ideally, the (centripetal) gathering of Christ’s church to worship through the Eucharist participates in a dual dynamic with God’s (centrifugal) sending of the church into the world for witness through service.

Situating the Word

Miraslov Volf, speaking at the 2003 Practicing Theology conference, remarked: “Church membership is not declining in many areas [for example the Southeast United States]; however, the church’s influence upon person’s lives is lessening dramatically.” This is a troubling claim. Despite the seeming rally of pockets within mainline Protestant denominations after decades of numerical decline, Volf argues that the church is accomplishing little in the struggle against nominal Christianity. Response to such a claim necessitates an attentive patience that attempts with some humility to recognize and address the various facets of an immensely complicated system. In this spirit, the following explores merely one facet and its possible implication for the current trajectory within the study of evangelism.

Our working concept of evangelism takes seriously the role of the gathered community of faith in Christian invitation, initiation, and formation. While the language, practices, and relationships cultivated in community are essential in Christian invitation, initiation, and formation, might it be that the space in which the community gathers also plays a part? In an attempt to make such spaces more functional and welcoming designers at times actually sacrifice the evangelistic potential of space for inviting and forming Christian disciples. In an American context within
which the vast majority of individuals claim “Christianity”, though often so anemically that biblical illiteracy pervades, it seems appropriate to reflect upon the invitational and formative role of gathering spaces—particularly when a number of “thriving” local churches refrain from employing sacred architecture and symbols.33

Theological reflection upon the ordering of Christian space begins with biblical texts. While biblical foundations for the study of evangelism focus predominantly upon the New Testament, the Old Testament offers substantial resources for theological reflection upon evangelistic theology and practices. The Old Testament also provides guidance in thinking theologically about the gathering space of faith communities. Interestingly, the biblical texts offer detailed descriptions of only two (land-based) products of human labor, both for the purpose of worship: the portable tabernacle, built during the wanderings in the wilderness, and Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem.34 While Solomon’s palace, a much grander edifice than the temple, took almost twice as long to build, it barely receives mention in biblical texts.35 Instead, the biblical writers are concerned with the construction of sacred space.36 For biblical scholar Ellen Davis, this demonstrated interest in the building of sacred space results from a recognition of the “very real way a sanctuary has a kind of creative capacity of its own,” namely, to form those gathered in the space—and specifically, to form them in faith.37

The construction and representation of sacred space embodies the relationship between God and creation. The seven-speech description of the building of the tabernacle in Exodus, for example, parallels the sevenfold structure of the creation narrative of Genesis chapter one.38 In this way, the sacred space of the tabernacle constructed by humans comes into being in a process similar to God’s good creation, that is, through obedient response to God’s commands.39 Further, the description of the tabernacle’s construction, like the narrative of creation, concludes with an act of blessing. According to Davis, “the very same wording is used: just as God blessed the Sabbath when ‘the heavens and the earth were finished’ (Gen.2:1), so Moses blessed the people, when ‘all the Tabernacle-work was finished’ (Ex. 39:32, 43). The point of these parallels is to show that the Tabernacle is a microcosm, a small image of the world as it stands under the blessing of God.”40 Thus, the design and construction of sacred space for the gathered community simultaneously grounds the community in God’s creation and elevates its imagination—hearts and minds—toward God.41 Such an orientation contributes to an eschatological perspective from which to understand individuals’ initiation into the reign of God and formation into Christian identity.
Jeanne Halgren Kilde, in *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America*, acknowledges the complex character of sacred spaces: “At once messengers and agents, mirrors and actors, they enable people to think through their ideas about religiosity and convey them to the rest of the world while, in turn, influencing those ideas and shaping religion and society.” A similar theme has emerged in the context of theological education that attends to the formative role of space. James White argues that the worship space of seminary communities forms its students by influencing their understanding of both humanity’s relationship to God and the nature of the worshiping community. According to White, “The chapel can reinforce images that we [theological educators] would disown if stated in words, but the building’s silent witness is often more powerful than we admit.” This formation of the seminarian’s imagination then becomes a definitive characteristic of their later pastoral leadership.

The process of theological inculcation shares similarities with that of Christian initiation as described by KallenBerg. For both, participation in the community is essential to formation. Jackson Carroll et al. define “culture” as “those shared symbolic forms—worldviews and beliefs, ritual practices, ceremonies, art and architecture, language, and patterns of everyday interaction—that give meaning and direction ... to the people who participate in them.” In their comparative study of culture and formation in two seminary contexts, Jackson and his colleagues found that “some students are very little impacted by the schools’ cultures. They simply are so little involved in significant encounters with the culture, especially outside the classroom, that they miss immersion in the rich symbolic, ritual, and conversational life that takes place in chapel, hallways, dorm rooms, dining halls, or student hangouts. One must ‘be there’ to be formed in any significant way by the culture.”

So, those participating in Christian and theological formation are formed not only by *being there* in the gathered community but also by the symbolic forms of language, narratives, and practices—as well as art and architecture—which reflect, for good or ill, the meaning and mission of the community’s shared identity. Indeed, individuals participate in formation, or, as White implied, counter-formation, by their very presence in the gathered spaces. Therefore, the more intentional a gathered community’s use of language, sharing of narratives, participation in practices, and ordering of space—in prayerful and humble discernment—the more faithful will be their continued formation as they live into the fullness of humanity’s relationship with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit and relationship with others.
Imaging the Word

Alongside the construction and ordering of sacred space, symbols and art can make the gospel message accessible to largely illiterate (or nominal) professing Christians. In this way, they assume an evangelistic (invitational and formative) purpose. Symbols and art, ideally inspired by the divine revealed in biblical texts, witness to God’s reign in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit the possibility of humanity’s participation. Throughout Christian tradition voices particularly among Orthodox and Roman Catholics claim the significance of images for Christian formation, while Protestant Reformers mainly offer criticism. At least one exception to this Protestant criticism is Martin Luther’s acknowledgement of the educational role of artistic images in faith formation. Influenced by the growing literacy facilitated by the printing press, Luther would not explicitly defend the use of images. However, unlike other influential Reformers, neither would he decry their use. While Luther vehemently disapproved the worship of images, he claimed them “praiseworthy and honourable” for their witness.

I have myself seen and heard the iconoclasts read out of my German Bible. I know that they have it and read out of it, as one can easily determine from the words they use. Now there are a great many pictures in those books, both of God, the angels, men and animals, especially in the Revelation of John and in Moses and Joshua. So now we would kindly beg them to permit us to do what they themselves do. Pictures contained in these books we would paint on walls for the sake of remembrance and better understanding, since they do no more harm on walls than in books. It is to be sure better to paint pictures on walls of how God created the world, how Noah built the ark, and whatever other good stories there may be, than to paint shameless worldly things.

Luther argued that for him it was impossible to hear the biblical narratives without forming mental images: “If it is not a sin but good to have the image of Christ in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes?”

Luther’s position followed others within Christian tradition. One of the most often quoted texts regarding images in Reformation and medieval conversation is the moderate stance of Pope Gregory I (the Great, c.540-604) in a letter to Serenus, Bishop of Massilia. Gregory the Great opposed both the worship and the destruction of images, encouraging instead their formational role: “For to adore a picture is one thing, but to learn through the story of a picture what is to be adored is another. For what writing presents to readers, this a picture presents to the unlearned who behold, since in it even the ignorant see what they ought to follow; in it the illiterate read.” Likewise, in the midst of volatile iconoclasm in the ninth century,
the Fourth General Council of Constantinople (869–70) declared veneration of the image and of the written word to be equivalent—accepting images as expressions of the word accessible to the illiterate:57

We decree that the sacred image of our Lord Jesus Christ, the liberator and Saviour of all people, must be venerated with the same honour as is given to the book of the holy Gospels. For, as through the language of the words contained in this book all can reach salvation, so, due to the action which these images exercise by their colours, all, wise and simple alike, can derive profit from them. For, what speech conveys in words, pictures announce and bring out in colours.58

Hence, sacred spaces in which Christian communities gather may participate in the evangelistic process of Christian invitation and formation through the language—even the proclamation—of images depicted in art.

Proclaiming Beauty?
A danger with arguing for the significance of space (as well as images and art) related to Christian invitation and formation is the tendency to default into assumptions about beauty that desire a dominant culture’s perception of opulence without virtue. Theological reflection upon the gathering spaces of Christian communities will not necessarily lead to the finest guildings and craftsmanship in the spirit of Saint Denis, the Abbey Church near Paris famous for its influence upon Gothic church art and architecture beginning in the early twelfth century. While these spaces are beautiful and at times provide a context for meaningful witness and ministry, more modest spaces also serve a formative role for Christian communities. My purpose is not to insist upon a particular stylistic emphasis with regard to local church edifices and worship spaces. Rather, my hope is for us to reflect theologically upon the significance of the spaces in which our Christian communities gather for worship and fellowship, their relationship to God’s sending us in service to the world, and the implications of these for Christian witness, specifically evangelism.

A consistent theme throughout Christian tradition recognizes beauty as a way to God. Beauty and the truly beautiful reside in and flow from the divine. Whether divinely created beauty in nature—even the simple purity of light—or humanly crafted beauty such as sacred art and architecture all beauty turns humanity toward God. Indeed, according to Karl Barth, beauty is the deepest description of God’s eternity and glory:

If we can and must say that God is beautiful, to say this is to say how He enlightens and convinces and persuades us. It is to
describe not merely the naked fact of His revelation or its power, but the shape and form in which it is a fact and is power. It is to say that God has this superior force, this power of attraction, which speaks for itself, which wins and conquers, in the fact that He is beautiful, divinely beautiful, beautiful in His own way, in a way that is His alone, beautiful as the unattainable primal beauty, yet really beautiful.  

Thus humanity, drawn to God's beauty, comes to know God's love. For Barth, "God loves us as the One who is worthy of love as God. This is what we mean when we say that God is beautiful." God's beauty not only reveals dimensions of God's nature that invite us to contemplate God's image; it ultimately invites us to participate in the beauty of God's unfolding reign. When spaces are ordered with their formative role in mind, they contribute in positive ways to a gathered community's witness through facilitating Christian identity and practices. Christian practices of worship and service to the world, within and from particular gathering spaces, together reflect the beauty of God's unfolding reign and contribute to Christian invitation and formation in local churches.

An example of such a modest local church might be Asbury Temple United Methodist Church, located in an economically depressed and transitional neighborhood in the small southern city of Durham, North Carolina. In need of some repairs, built early in the 1920s on a still busy corner, this local church with a high rotunda ceiling accented by stained glass windows with Christian symbols that allow light to illumine the fan-shaped seating enjoys an incredibly intimate space. Previously inhabited by a middle-class European American congregation, a historically African American Methodist congregation (once segregated as a part of the Central Jurisdiction) now worships in the space. The intimacy of the seating to the pulpit and altar, characteristic of the Akron plan, designed for the entertainment of its observers, now situated under a glass and metal cross invite participation through testimonies of song, narrative, and sermon as well as the weekly celebration of Eucharist. The stained glass windows given by those of a different time, remind those gathered from diverse economic and racial background of the changing Christian witness of the saints in that place throughout the generations. Offering significant leadership within the civil rights movement in that city, this local congregation continues to participate in God's unfolding reign through tutoring children and food distribution as well as Christian hospitality to homeless persons. This Christian community not only knows why it gathers, but to what it invites others.  

As I argued earlier, an understanding of evangelism based solely upon etymological studies and focused narrowly upon verbal proclamation does
not represent the full witness of the biblical texts. However, through a more nuanced theological reading of those texts, as well as texts formative to Christian tradition, the language of proclamation is not bereft of possibilities. God's beauty, offered to humanity in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, proclaims the message of salvation beyond words. Gregory of Nyssa elaborates on the implications of God's beauty, the image of God in Jesus Christ, for humanity:

This Person who is beyond knowledge and comprehension, ... because of His love for man, became Himself an "image of the invisible God" so that he took on the form which He assumed among you, and again, through Himself, He fashioned beauty in accord with the character of the Archetype. Therefore, if we also are to become an "image of the invisible God," it is fitting that the form of our life be struck according to the "example" of the life set before us.62

The image of God's beauty and love in the example of Jesus Christ invites humanity's participation in God's reign within the gathered community of faith. The gathered community, in turn—through its language, and practices, as well as its space—reflects God's beauty to the world. Such proclamation situated and imaged in and through the community of faith is perhaps evangelism in its fullest conception.

Notes


5. While Abraham and Jones (among others) abandon the notion of evangelism as merely verbal proclamation, Barrett's historical survey of the term and its general meaning as verbal proclamation seems to maintain a significant voice in the conversation. See Abraham, Logic of Evangelism, 41-44, 49-91; Jones, Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor, 16-17, 45-64; David B. Barrett, Evangelized: A Historical Survey of the Concept (Birmingham: New Hope, 1987).


9. For references to the Old Testament in their studies, see Abraham, Logic of Evangelism: for understanding the reign of God, 23-25, 31; for etymological study of evangelism related to proclamation in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, 40-43; in reference to the Shema in Mark 12.29-31 to demonstrate the implications for love of God and neighbor in Christian conversion and initiation, 134-35; with regard to a theology of world religions, 219-20, 222. See also Jones, Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor: for the starting point of evangelism in God’s love (which leads to God’s reign) in brief surveys of the Old and New Testament, 33-38; like Abraham, referring to Jesus’ quotation of Deuteronomy 6.5 (Shema) in Mark and Matthew and his inclusion of Leviticus 19, making note of Jesus’ explanation in Matthew that on these “hang all the law and the prophets” and reminding the reader that these were the entirety of the Jewish Scriptures at the time, 50-51; beginning his discussion of “God’s Mission and the Mission of the Church” with reference to God’s election of Israel “as a key turning point in the history of salvation” and the blessing of the nations through Abraham’s faithfulness, 53; describing the NT as a missionary document, 55. Mortimer Arias, in Announcing the Reign of God, likewise refers to a relatively small number of Old Testament references, particularly in initial chapters, to establish the nature of God’s reign; see 4, 14-15, 19-24, 28-29, 52, 85, 89-90.

10. David Barrett devotes only a few paragraphs, the majority of one page, to “usages before Christ,” with a survey of occurrences in 2 Samuel, Psalms, Writings, and Prophets; see Barrett, Evangelize! 10. David Bohr begins chapter one with an etymology of the language of evangelism with a few paragraphs on Old Testament foundations. The language can mean any good news (Nahum 1.15), but it develops into good news of the reign of God (Is 40.9-10; Is 52.7-8); see Bohr, Evangelization in America, 11-12. Bohr also mentions the universal/particular elements of the Old Testament, specifically Abraham as a blessing to all the nations, 13. Walter Klaiber’s etymology begins with evangelism’s root in the Old Testament followed by discussion of Isaiah’s implications for the practice, 21-22. Although described as biblical foundations for a theology of evangelism, Klaiber’s text does not engage the Old Testament in any depth until pages 102-7, which is a discussion of judgment and the preaching of the prophets. Klaiber tends to alternate chapters/sections between biblical exegesis and theological reflection. However, the theological reflection focuses primarily on the New Testament with little if any mention of the Old Testament; see Klaiber, Call and Response. See also David Bosch, Transforming Mission (Maryknoll: New York, 1991), 15-31. While Bosch acknowledges that for the Christian church there is no New Testament divorced from the Old, “on the issue of mission we run into difficulties here, particularly if we adhere to the traditional understanding of mission as the sending of preachers to distant places (a definition which, in the course of this study, will be challenged in several ways)” ; see ibid., 15-16. The argument of this essay, with Bosch, is critical of such a traditional understanding, but at the same time moves beyond his comparatively brief treatment of the Old Testament to a canonical and theological approach.


13. For a detailed proposal, see Chapman and Warner, “Jonah.”

14. Julian Hartt, Toward a Theology of Evangelism (Nashville: Abingdon, 1955), 113. Hartt describes the church’s task, “its entire energy is to be exhausted in proclaiming the love by which it has been created and which is given for the redemption of the whole creation,” 117.

15. “The phrase Missio Dei, ‘the mission of God’, has a long history. It seems to go back to a German missiologist, Karl Hartenstein. He coined it as a way of summarizing the teaching of Karl Barth ‘who in a lecture on mission in 1928 had connected mission with the doctrine of the trinity…. The phrase became popular in ecumenical circles after Willingen world mission conference in 1952, through the work of Georg Vicedom.” See Chris Wright, “Mission as a Matrix for Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology” (unpublished paper presented at the University of St. Andrews, Scripture and Hermeneutics Seminar, August 2003), 72.

17. Ibid., 74.

18. Ibid., 74-75. Italics mine.

19. Ibid., 75. “Jesus himself called his disciples to be: the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the city upon a hill, the leaven in the dough—all images of incarnational Christian witness.” However, Arias’s compartmentalization of centripetal mission/evangelism, to the Old Testament, also invites further nuance. See Chapman and Warner, “Jonah.”


21. Ibid., 54.

22. Ibid., 48.

23. Ibid., 32. For Kallenberg, “conversion” means “change.”

24. Ibid., 41. Italics original.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 40; see Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, 60-61.


29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 208.

31. Ibid., 210.


33. Webber, The Younger Evangelicals, 205. For a detailed discussion of evangelical trends in church architecture since the nineteenth century, see Jeayne Halgren Kilde, When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). On church architecture as entertainment, see ibid., 217, 219. Kilde compares such spaces to shopping malls. The amphitheatre plan and employment of technological innovations is not new to megachurches but rather repeats the strategies of evangelical churches in the 1870s and 1880s, ibid., 215. Kilde notes: “As the Reverend Lee Strobel, a pastor at Willow Creek, pointed out about St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, ‘The lighting is bad, you can’t hear the guys up front, and it’s uncomfortable.’ He continued, ‘We wanted Willow Creek to be more functional,’ ” ibid., 216. While effective in executing megachurches’ strategies, such a rationale has an anthropological rather than a theological starting point.


35. Ibid. See I Kgs. 6:38-7:1: the temple took only seven years to build; the palace, thirteen.

36. Ibid., 2-3. According to Davis, thirteen chapters in Exodus detail the tabernacle and its furnishings, and Kings and Chronicles each have extensive reports on the construction and décor of Solomon’s temple. Davis also notes the architectural vision in the last nine chapters of Ezekiel, describing the temple that is to replace the one Nebuchadnezzar’s army destroyed.

37. Ibid., 3.


41. See Davis, “The Tabernacle Is Not a Storehouse, 5. Implicit in the reference to God's creation is its goodness. Webber mentions this dimension specifically with regard to interest in sacred art among younger evangelicals; see Webber, The Younger Evangelicals, 209, 205-215.

42. Kilde, When Church Became Theatre, 10. Kilde notes further: “Given the capacity of architecture both to embody and to broadcast ideas and meanings, to impose and to maintain them, the church buildings of evangelical Protestants provide evidence of their beliefs, missions, rituals, challenges, and fears during the turbulent period of the nineteenth century,” ibid., 11. R. Kevin Seasoltz articulates similar ideas from a Roman Catholic perspective: “Over the centuries, the architectural forms of Christian churches and their artistic appointments have taken diverse forms reflective of the structure of the liturgical rites and the theological underpinnings of such rites. However, the church buildings themselves and their appointments have also conditioned both positively and negatively the ways in which the liturgy has been celebrated and the theological understanding of the liturgy. Architectural and artistic styles have reflected both the phenomenon of inculturation and that of tradition. In fact architectural and artistic traditions are simply records of inculturation from the past; as such they provide us with a storehouse of models and resources for proper inculturation today.” Seasoltz, A Sense of the Sacred: Theological Foundations of Christian Architecture and Art (New York: Continuum, 2005), 345-46.


44. Ibid., 101.

45. Ibid., 103.


47. Carroll et al., Being There, 266.

48. According to Seasoltz, “The experience of God's mystery is discovered above all when we are conscious of God's presence and have centered our lives in God. That experience flourishes in a climate of hospitality, of welcome, in which people are present to one another as the body persons they are, as members of the body of Christ, comfortable with one another, gathered together with one another, capable of seeing and hearing all that is enacted within the worshiping assembly. An attractive beauty in all that is said and done, used or observed is the best way to facilitate the experience of mystery, for God is not only goodness and truth; God is also beauty.” Seasoltz, Sense of the Sacred, 343-44. Much can be accomplished in ordering space without extravagant building projects. Again, Seasoltz: “If we acknowledge that no human words or architectural or artistic forms can exhaust the infinite mystery of God, but that countless forms can become channels through which God comes to us and we go to God, then we need concrete criteria to judge those forms that are especially useful in our celebrations of the Christian mystery,” ibid., 343. For theologically informed and helpful guides to ordering and construction Christian sacred space, see James F. White and Susan J. White, Church Architecture: Building and Renovating for Christian Worship (Akron: OSL Publications, 1998, third printing, 2004) and Richard Giles, Re-Pitching the Tent: Re-ordering the Church Building for Worship and Mission, 3rd ed. (Collegedale: Liturgical Press, 2004).


50. Kilde, When Church Became Theatre, 11. According to Kilde, Luther was among Reformed theologians who argued that written and spoken language were the exclusive representations of divine power.

52. Ibid., 133.

53. Ibid., 133-34.

54. Ibid., 134.

55. Thiessen on Gregory the Great, *Selected Epistles*, in *Theological Aesthetics*, 47.


57. Thiessen on “Fourth General Council of Constantinople 869-70;” in *Theological Aesthetics*, 65. This stance, the equal status of word and image, is unique to the Orthodox Church. See Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 2nd ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999).


60. Ibid.

61. I am grateful to Rev. Shane Benjamin, pastor of Asbury Temple UMC, for his knowledge of historical details and assistance in composing this material.