cle on central-plan churches (with its slightly fractured English) of nearly forty years ago.2

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Notes

Jeanne Halgren Kilde
When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America

Jeanne Halgren Kilde's impressive new book is a Rosetta stone for an undervalued genre of American ecclesiastical architecture. This well-researched and tightly argued study insightfully interprets and contextualizes the American neomedieval auditorium churches built in the Gilded Age. Kilde provides an in-depth, interdisciplinary analysis of these novel and ubiquitous religious structures, which were constructed by middle-class congregations of Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Presbyterians in the years between the Civil War and World War I. Large numbers of buildings in this genre were erected in the 1880s and 1890s, but it fell out of fashion with both architects and architectural critics in the early years of the twentieth century, at least partly through the influence of Ralph Adams Cram and other champions of a more strict and studied Gothic architecture. Kilde's work adds complexity to our understanding of both American religious architecture and American religious history.

When Church Became Theatre posits that the architecture of neomedieval auditorium churches expressed a tripartite religious agenda that formed the basis of late-nineteenth-century evangelical Protestantism. The three prongs of this agenda were worship, family ministry, or the Christian nurture of all members of the congregation; and missionary work, or Christian outreach to individuals outside the church. She argues that a commitment to this program, as well as a shared architectural form, bound disparate denominations into a unified evangelical culture during the period of her study.

Kilde asserts that the characteristic form for the sanctuaries of these churches, described as an inverted cone in which preachers spoke up to audiences rising around them, was a revolutionary rejection of traditional Protestant worship spaces, in which elevated ministers expiated down to congregations seated in rectilinear matrices. She convincingly demonstrates that this spatial departure was rooted in Charles Grandison Finney's urban revivals of the 1830s. By examining three sanctuaries designed for Finney—the Chatham Street Chapel (1832), created from a playhouse in New York City; the Broadway Tabernacle (1836), also built in New York City; and the Oberlin Meeting House (1844), in Oberlin, Ohio—the author explores the dialectical relationship between transformations in worship spaces and systems of power among congregations and preachers. She positions this architectural transformation amid shifts in society occurring in Jacksonian America, including an expanding populist activism, the increasing charismatic authority of religious leaders, and the diminishing importance of traditional social hierarchies.

Following the Civil War, new auditorium sanctuaries were erected in middle-class suburbs surrounding urban centers as congregations followed parishioners out of downtown districts increasingly relegated to commerce and the working classes. Although the central worship spaces of these edifices were innovative in that they included individual upholstered seats arranged in curvilinear rows, and facilitated musical performance by including expanded organs and choir lofts, they were clad in neomedieval exteriors that spoke of the rootedness of the Christian tradition by using either Gothic or Richardsonian Romanesque motifs. Resonances with the arsenals and armories being built across the country in these styles during the same decades allowed the churches to express a martial Christianity that could be counted on to both battle sin and defend institutional order. Kilde argues that in the Gilded Age, during which Americans became discerning consumers, interior amenities and ostentatious exterior ornamentation were significant factors in a church's ability to attract congregants successfully, as were the allure of its pastor and the quality of the musical programming. By serving as the window dressing for the goods within, a church's physical plant thus contributed significantly to its financial viability.

Kilde further contends that church interiors and domestic spaces approached each other asymptotically during these years, as the sacred quality ascribed to each contributed to the character of the other. Just as the cult of domesticity elevated the importance of the family dwelling, a church came to be seen as a home, both for the inhabitation of the deity and for the nurturance of the congregation's individual members. As a result, furnishing patterns of churches changed, and new spaces such as kitchens, parlors, and Sunday-school rooms were included in building plans. These spaces, newly enclosed under church roofs, served the second point of the evangelical agenda, that of family ministry, which Kilde sees as mediating between the era's masculine public sphere and its feminine domestic realm. Women played an active role in making the church a second home for their families. Kilde links the inclusion of parlors and kitchens in church buildings to a burgeoning of women's participation in church affairs and thus also to an expansion of women's circumscribed behavior.
in bourgeois American society. Thus, Victorian sanctuary seating was upholstered, not simply because Americans craved comfort, but also because the church was cognitively an extension of their overstuffed parlors.

Evangelism, or the spreading of God’s word to the unconverted, was expressed by congregations during this time by providing Christian education to children of the community at large and by assisting less well financed congregations to erect churches in new territories, termed in this period “denominational extension.” In each undertaking, tensions arose concerning whether resources were better expended on evangelism or family ministry, on whether the first responsibility was to tend the flock already in the pasture or to try to convince errant sheep to enter the fold. Kilde explores this conflict in an articulate extended analysis of “Akron plan” Sunday-school facilities, a model developed in Ohio in the 1860s by that city’s First Methodist Episcopal Church. Even when facilities such as gymnasiums, bowling alleys, dining rooms, and parlors were added to churches by advocates of the Social Gospel specifically for the use of the neighborhood poor, Kilde argues, they often came to serve members of the congregation rather than nonmembers. “Natural interaction between disparate social groups within a church plant,” she writes, “was difficult to achieve” (195).

Kilde’s story ends with auditorium churches going into eclipse in the first years of the twentieth century. She notes that these buildings expressed the ideology of a specific time in American history. When that period ended, such structures were no longer built, and in many instances pews were once again made of hard wood arranged in straight lines. The author points to a number of causes that undermined the popularity of the form, including the increasing irrelevancy of the boundary between public and private spheres, a move toward a more individualized society, and the eventual schism in the 1920s between liberal and fundamentalist branches of the evangelical denominations. She argues that within certain evangelical circles, however, the auditorium form has continued currency in contemporary megachurches.

Kilde’s work belongs to the school of architectural history that uses buildings as documents to understand human actions and beliefs. She engages the buildings skilfully, but uses them primarily as tools within a larger humanistic endeavor rather than as an end in themselves. Thus, some noteworthy architects and firms— including Stanford White and Carrere & Hastings of New York, and Warren H. Hayes of Minneapolis—are treated in this study as supporting cast rather than as featured players. Doctrinal and functional requirements of the architectural program form the focus of the work, not the individual architects’ genius in creating appealing compositions to house the congregation’s requirements. The black-and-white illustrations, while buttressing Kilde’s arguments, unfortunately inadequately communicate the grandeur and polychromatic designs of these monumental buildings and their interiors.

Kilde has accomplished an extraordinary task in interpreting such a large corpus of buildings. She gives her readers tools with which to decipher this built form and challenges us to see familiar structures with new eyes. Her evidence, however, is drawn primarily from only a handful of examples, including, most prominently, the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Baltimore, the First Congregational Church of Minneapolis, and Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church of Denver. Although Kilde’s conclusions are persuasive, readers may find themselves wishing for case histories drawn from a broader range of edifices. Since this reviewer is based in North Carolina, for example, he cannot help but lament that the American South is almost completely absent; this is a notable lacuna in a book purporting to discuss American evangelical worship. Further, this bias begs the question of whether the form was truly a national phenomenon, or rather a genre characteristic of industrializing regions.

The work’s greatest shortcoming, however, is its unfortunate title. The name under which this groundbreaking volume has been published focuses on one portion of the author’s argument to the detriment of other equally significant points she makes within her broader study, withholding from prospective readers the full scope of her subject. More than simply addressing when churches became theaters, this volume compellingly explicates how one particular architectural form came to embody the complexities of late-nineteenth-century evangelical American Protestantism.

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American Topics

Susan R. Braden
The Architecture of Leisure: The Resort Hotels of Henry Flagler and Henry Plant

From Calgary to Calcutta, “Florida” means “vacation,” a fantasy world free of the pressures of household and business management. Despite the fact that the state, perched on the southern tip of the United States, has long served as a cultural and economic crossroads with a dramatic and sometimes violent history of economic struggle, social competition, and uneasy alliances among its diverse populations, for outsiders, the very name “Florida” conjures up images of sun-drenched beaches and endless days of rest and pleasure. That a place fraught with conflicts and difficulties of its own could come to be so widely viewed in such a rosy light is one of the crowning glories of modern tourist propaganda. Moreover, the creation in the nineteenth century of an image of luxurious relaxation and freedom from responsibility for upper-class men and