The development of Protestant Evangelical Church Architecture

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Abstract

The Protestant Evangelical religion is defined by its focus on spreading the gospel. Evangelical churches do not consider their churches as sacred, but rather as spaces for worship and community. Consequently, their architectural church designs deviate from traditional church designs. This thesis explores the architectural development of Protestant Evangelical churches in the United States, spanning the period from 1800 to 2002. It delves into how these architectural developments have both responded to and interacted with contemporary societal demands. By examining the relationship between the church architecture and the societal demands, this research highlights the dynamic nature of Evangelical church architecture. Through its analysis, this study underscores the resilience and adaptability of the Protestant Evangelical religion. It presents the evangelical church's architectural development as a narrative of innovation, reinvented tradition, and community growth.

Keywords: Church architecture, Evangelical, Protestant, Societal demands

Outline

Introduction

The emergence of the Protestant Evangelical religion in 1800, introduced a new perspective to the Protestant Religion in Christianity. Unlike the community focused approach of traditional churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant Evangelicalism encouraged a personal religious experience for the individual (Hovland 2016). For the Protestant Evangelical Christians the church building is the space where they meet their community and connect with God. The church architecture is not needed to form a personal relationship with God. In the Protestant Evangelical religion it is believed that God does not live inside of the church building, God is everywhere (Kilde, 2017). This intriguing dynamic between church architecture and the development of the Protestant Evangelical religion will be the focus of this research.

In the Protestant Evangelical religion the church building is not considered a sacred space (Falconer, 2017). Unlike traditional churches as the Roman Catholic church, where the building is vital for religious practices (Kilde, 2002). Due to this different role of the church building in Protestant Evangelicalism, the architecture used and designed over time for the Protestant Evangelical religion is expected to deviate. This research aims to trace the evolvement of the Protestant Evangelical church architecture, to create an understanding in the connection between the Protestant Evangelical beliefs, historical events, societal changes and the architectural developments of the churches. The central research question is: ***'How has the architecture of Protestant Evangelical churches in the United States evolved from 1800 to 2002, and to what extent have these changes responded to contemporary societal demands?'***

In order to research this question it is important to understand what is already known and studied about the Protestant Evangelical religion and their architecture. In the article "Protestant Theologies and the Problem of Sacred Space," Jeanne Kilde discusses the personalized approach to religion within the Protestant Evangelical church, which emerged as a response to the desire for individualized spiritual experiences (Kilde, 2017). This movement, influenced by evangelical revivals, diverged from traditional Protestantism following the Reformation. In "Christianity, Place/Space, and Anthropology: Thinking Across Recent Research on Evangelical Place-Making," Ingie Hovland also highlights the importance of personal religious experiences encouraged within the evangelical faith. As expressed by Kierkegaard, believers were encouraged to seek a personal connection with God: "alone before God" (Kierkegaard, 2019). This emphasis on individual spiritual experiences underscores the authority of the Bible and the direct connection to God (Hovland, 2016). Additionally, Tanya Luhrman's book "When God Talks Back" delves into the significance of biblicism and worship within the Protestant Evangelical church, emphasizing the active role of believers in spreading the gospel and addressing societal issues (Luhrman, 2012).

In the Protestant Evangelical religion, the church is defined as the community of Christians, not the physical building (Kilde, 2002). Sövik relates to this, in his book

‘Architecture for worship’ he explains that the church building is not considered sacred in itself. When the people are not in the building, the building should not be thought of as a place of divine presence (Sövik, 1973). Falconer also supports this notion, stating that the church and church architecture are separate things (Falconer, 2017). Mircea Eliade extends this perspective, proposing that for the religious individual everything is created by their God, and therefore god does not just live in the church but everywhere (Éliade, 1987).

Over time, the protestant evangelical movement experienced exponential growth, evolving from small gatherings of ten individuals to church services accommodating thousands of people (Falconer, 2017). Therefore, over time bigger meeting spaces were needed. Jeanne Kilde explains that the focus on a personal relationship with God suggested that a church building specifically designed for the Protestant Evangelical movement was not the initial logical step (Kilde, 2017). Instead, meeting spaces evolved to meet the community’s changing needs. From homes and barns to tents and repurposed buildings, to eventually the designing of dedicated church architecture. This evolvement of spaces shows the dynamic role of the church architecture for the Protestant Evangelical religion. The physical space was adapted to the evolving needs of the evangelical community (Kilde, 2002).

To study the development of Protestant Evangelical church architecture from 1800 to 2002 and its responsiveness to contemporary societal demands, this research will review literature alongside the examination of case studies. The case studies will date from different time periods and will be examined in chronical order.

The research question will be answered by first looking at the origin of the Protestant Evangelical religion. In the first chapter the focus will be on the period from 1800 to 1900. The influence of the reformation on church design will be studied. Furthermore, the early architectural typologies and designs of Protestant Evangelical architecture will be discussed. The case studies that will be analyzed for the period of 1800 to 1900 are: the Elder Ballou Meeting House in Rhode Island (1740), the Plan of Washington camp (1809), the First Baptist church in Baltimore(1818) and the Tremont Temple in Boston (1840). These case studies illustrate the instant significant growth of the evangelical community, paralleled by the rapid development of evangelical church architecture.

Moving to the second chapter, which spans from 1900 to 1970, the research will examine the impact of World Wars I and II on Protestant Evangelical church architecture. In addition, it will study the mid-century architectural trends in Evangelical churches. For the period of 1900 to 1970 the following case studies will be examined: Saint John’s Church in Rockford (1918), the First Evangelical church in Knoxville (1946) and the North Christian church in Columbus (1964). These case studies highlight the fluctuation within the evangelical community, both during and after the war, as they navigate between modern evolution and a return to more traditional church architecture.

In the third chapter, spanning from 1970 to 2002, the research will delve into the connection between the rapid growing evangelical community and their church architecture. This chapter will analyze the development of new architectural styles and the re-evaluation of historical ones. For the period of 1970 to 2002, the case studies that will be investigated include: the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove (1980) and the Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington (1990). These case studies demonstrate the historical significance of evangelical church architecture, highlighting both the mega church and secular buildings to underscore the essence of evangelical church architecture.

Chapter four, the final chapter, delves into a personal case study: the Meerkerk, the author's own church situated in Hoofddorp, the Netherlands (2002). The chapter delves into the similar developments of evangelical church architecture globally and in America. Finally, the research will be concluded by answering and reflecting upon the research question.

1. Evangelical church architecture: 1800 – 1900

1.1 Origin Protestant Evangelical religion

In tracing the development of evangelical church architecture, it's crucial to first explore the origins of the Protestant Evangelical religion. The religion did not origin from one historical event, but developed over time by different events and influences. Three of these influences are evident. Firstly, the reformation that was initiated in 1517 by Martin Luther and John Calvin. As a response to the church's reformation, Protestantism developed in the 16th century (Osborn, 2013). Protestants wanted a direct connection with God through personal beliefs and reading the Bible, unlike the Catholic reliance on priests. The reformation was a defining point for Protestantism but was not the start of evangelicalism. The primary objective of the reformers was to alter existing church structures, not to prioritize evangelism by spreading the gospel in non-Christian contexts and gaining converts (McGrath, 1995). The second influence was Puritanism that developed in the 16th century in England and was spread to the North of America in 1630. Puritans sought to 'purify' Christianity. They prioritized a simple and direct worship style, with the Bible at the core, rejecting decorations and elaborate ceremonies (McGrath, 1995). To accommodate this worship style the Puritans used and designed 'meetinghouses' which were neutral public spaces where the word of god could be preached. An example of an meetinghouse in 1740 was the Elder Ballou meetinghouse in Rhode Island, America (figure 1). The interior existed of simple wooden benches, a platform for the preacher and a small elevation where people could stand and listen (figure 2) (Loveland, Martin and Wheeler, 2006). The concept of the 'meetinghouse' would later also be used to accommodate the Protestant Evangelic religion. Thirdly, the religious movement Pietism in the 17th century influenced the development of evangelism. Pietism encouraged a personal religious experience where a heartfelt relationship with god would be created (Bebbington, 1989). The Reformation, Puritanism, and Pietism collectively shaped the development of evangelical revivals. These revivals combined elements from all three influences, with a key focus on spreading the gospel (McGrath, 1995).

The Second Great Awakening in 1800 was the evangelical revival that defined the Protestant Evangelical Religion. This was not the first evangelical revival, but from this moment Evangelicalism was recognized as a religious movement (McGrath, 1995). The Protestant Evangelical religion emphasized a personal relationship with God through faith and salvation. Evangelicals highly valued the individual religious experience and held the bible as the central authority (Hovland, 2016). In their faith they prioritized spreading the gospel and worshipping god from pure intentions (Reid, 1998).

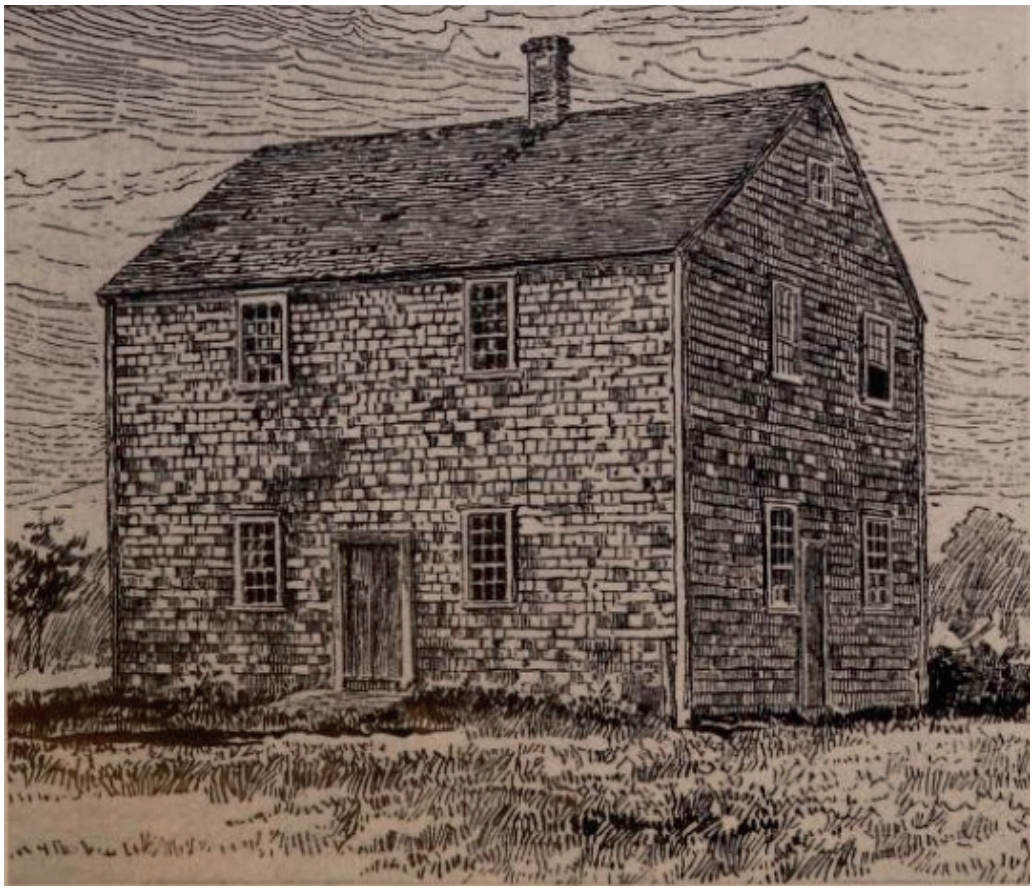

Figure 1, Elder Ballou Meeting House, Rhode Island (1740) *Photograph by Frank Farley (Loveland, et al., 2006)*

Figure 2, Interior Elder Ballou Meeting House, Rhode Island (1740) *Photograph by Arthur W. LeBoeuf (Loveland, et al., 2006)*

1.2 The early evangelical architecture

To practice the evangelical religion the revivalist in the beginning of the 1800s were opiniated that specific church architecture was not necessary. Revivals are spontaneous and transformative, architecture is thought out and permanent (Kilde, 2002). Therefore, a simple architectural structure that would accommodate transformation and the spreading of the gospel would form the church. Although not planned or designed this did result in an architectural structure, namely the tent as church. In and around simple tent structures, evangelical camp meetings were conducted, sometimes attracting thousands of people. These meetings lasted multiple days before being relocated to another site to spread the gospel. The camp meetings formed the basis to spread the evangelical beliefs and were essential to grow the Protestant Evangelical community (Loveland et al., 2006). Benjamin Latrobe sketched the plan for a camp meeting close to Washington in 1809, visible in figure 3. The camp meeting was located on the descent of a ridge. Latrobe placed the preacher at the bottom of the ridge and arranged the seating on the slope rising in front of it. The preacher, positioned at the base of the audience on a small elevation, shows the altered relationship between the preacher and the audience compared to former traditional church settings. The preacher served God along with their audience and was not considered more elite or elevated (Kilde, 2002). The elevation in the design of the camp meeting only had a functional motivation, namely to ensure that the preacher would be clearly audible (Loveland, et al., 2006).

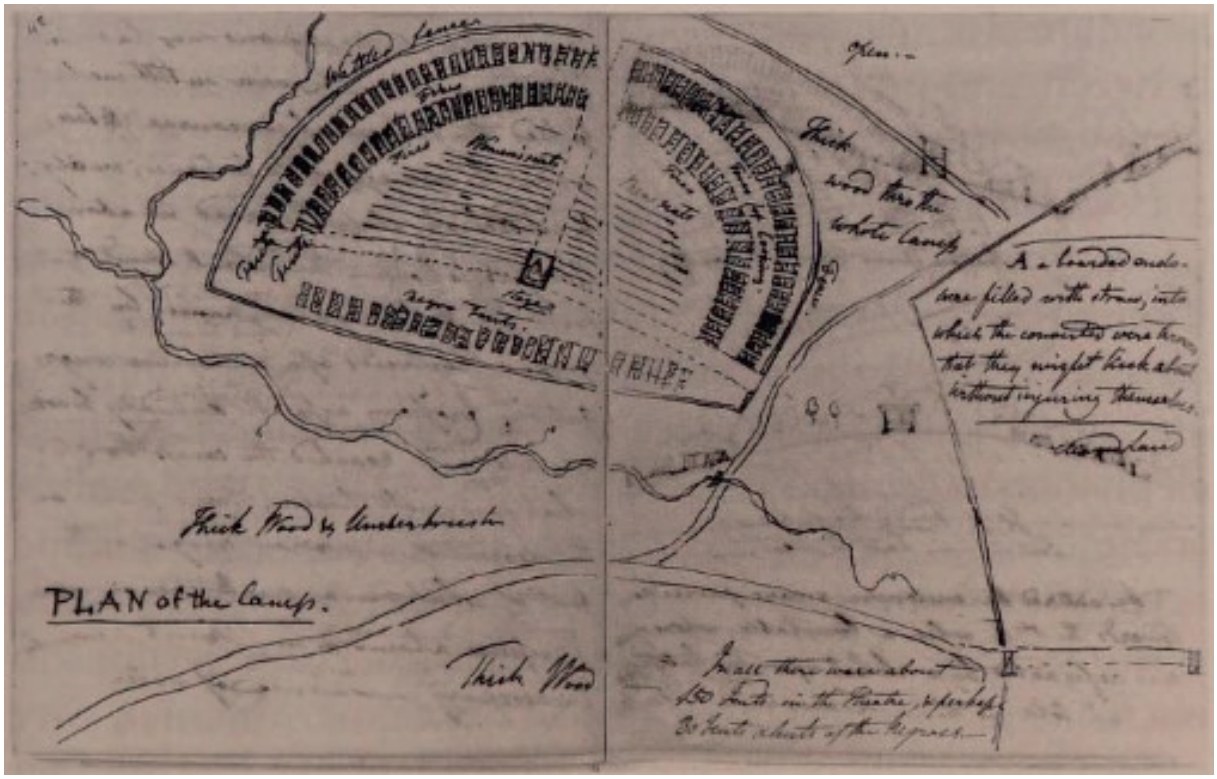

Figure 3, Plan of the Washington camp (1809) *by Benjamin Latrobe (Loveland, et al., 2006)*

Beside using tent structures and campgrounds, evangelists often used secular buildings to host their revival meetings. These secular buildings ranged from schools, barns and courthouses to hotels and taverns. The existing church buildings in towns were often too small for the crowds that were attracted to the Evangelical services (White, 2003). Besides spatial and financial reasoning, secular buildings were used because the evangelists believed that not the building but the community formed the church. The worship space was not considered sacred, so any suitable space could serve as an Evangelical church (Kilde, 2017). Perfect when there are no financial means or time to construct specific church architecture while traveling through the country.

In the period from 1810 to 1820, the Evangelical community experienced significant growth in the United States. Local evangelical communities and prayer groups emerged, regularly meeting in homes and secular buildings, marking the initial stages of Protestant Evangelical churches (Osborn, 2013). In 1818 the first auditorium Protestant Evangelical church in the United States was build, namely the First Baptist Church in Baltimore (Figure 4). Robert Miles designed the church and was the first architect to introduce the typology of the auditorium church. The church consisted of a twenty three meter wide domed hall with straight-line seating and a gallery. The gallery was set on pillars and was curved into a horseshoe-shape. Galleries had been a common feature in theatre buildings since the ancient Greek times, but were not often used in church architecture. The gallery made it possible to welcome more people into the church. In total four thousand people could visit the church to listen to the word of God. Robert Miles chose a round shape for the church design because it aligned better with the priorities of the Evangelical community compared to a rectangular shape. The round shape ensured that everyone in the audience could clearly see and hear the preacher (Loveland, et al., 2006). What stands out in the architecture of the First Baptist Church is the resemblance in layout with the campground meetings and their tent structures. The circular shape, both straight-line as curved seating and an elevation for the preacher that placed the preacher closer to the audience, all resonate with the arrangements of the campground meetings. These resemblances are clearly visible when comparing the layout of the First Baptist Church in figure 5 with the sketch of the plan of the Washington camp by Benjamin Latrobe visible in figure 3.

Figure 4, First Baptist Church in Baltimore (1818), *courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore (Loveland, et al., 2006)*

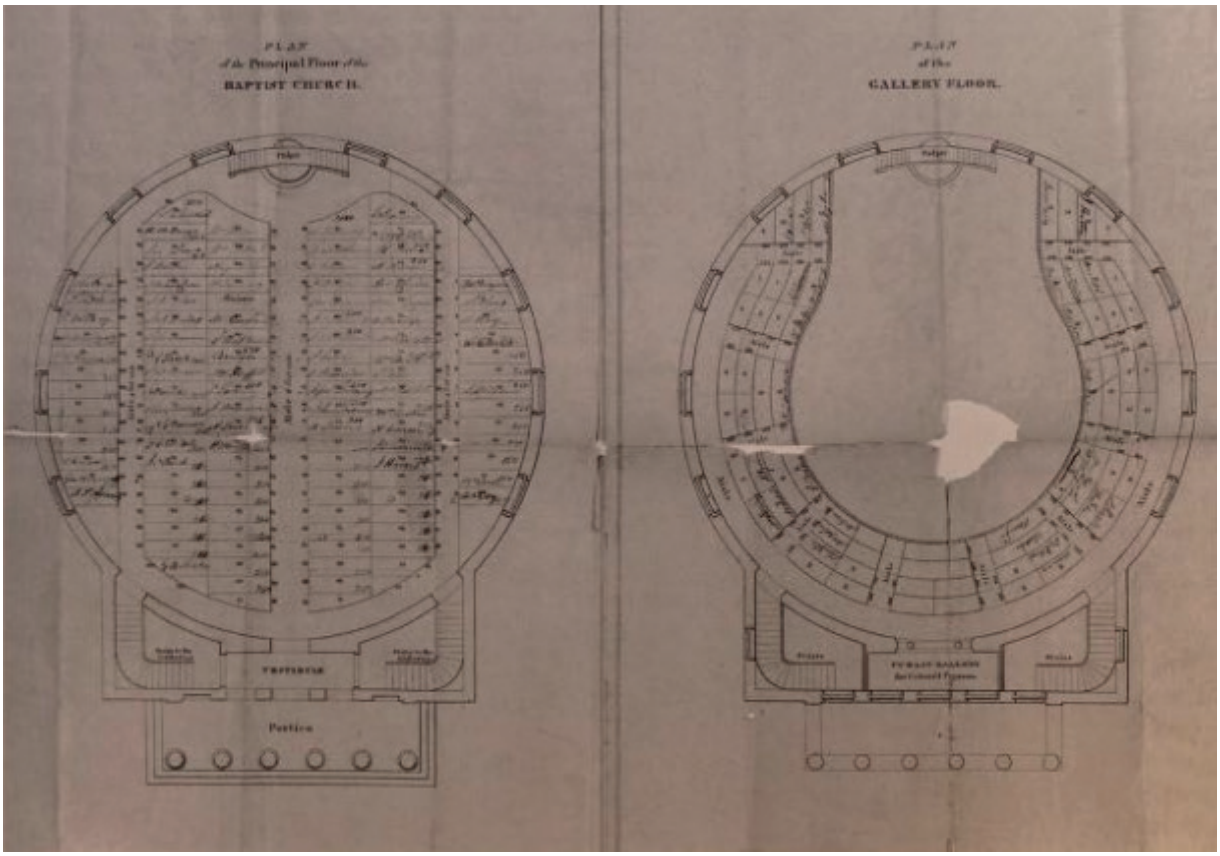

Figure 5, Floor plan of the First Baptist Church in Baltimore (1818), *courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore. (Loveland, et al., 2006)*

In 1830, the Protestant Evangelical churches often outgrew the secular buildings they were using due to their fast-growing communities. As a result many churches moved to larger secular spaces such as theaters and town halls (Kilde, 2002). A theater that was used as a Protestant Evangelical church was the Tremont Temple in Boston. Designed in the Greek Revival style by Isaiah Rogers and constructed in 1827 (figure 6), the Tremont Theatre was an impressive building featuring a marble front and brick walls. Its spacious auditorium had the capacity to accommodate more than two thousand people. In 1840 the Free Evangelical Baptist Church in Boston began using the theatre for their gatherings. When the churched received enough funding in 1843, they decided to buy the theatre and renamed it the Tremont Temple. The theater underwent no remodeling, instead the church maintained the same arrangement as before. The auditorium featured an elevated stage, straight-line seating, and one gallery shaped like a horseshoe (Lorimer and George, 1896). After the Tremont Temple burned down in 1852, the pastor and the church community decided to rebuild the church. Despite having the chance to create a more traditional church building, the evangelical community chose to construct a larger structure in the Renaissance Revival style (figure 7). This decision was made to accommodate more evangelicals and to have a distinctive presence on the street, attracting individuals who may not typically have been drawn to church settings (Loveland, et al., 2006). A notable aspect is that the new church design preserved a significant portion of the original theater's auditorium layout, indicating that the church found the theater arrangement well-suited for their gatherings. Changes

included enlarging the auditorium and adding a second gallery. The galleries were designed with tiered seating, ensuring a close connection with the preacher visually and auditorily (figure 8) (Lorimer and George, 1896). Not only did the Tremont Temple preserve aspects of the theater interior architecture, but from 1860 more churches began to incorporate similar features into their church designs (Loveland, et al., 2006).

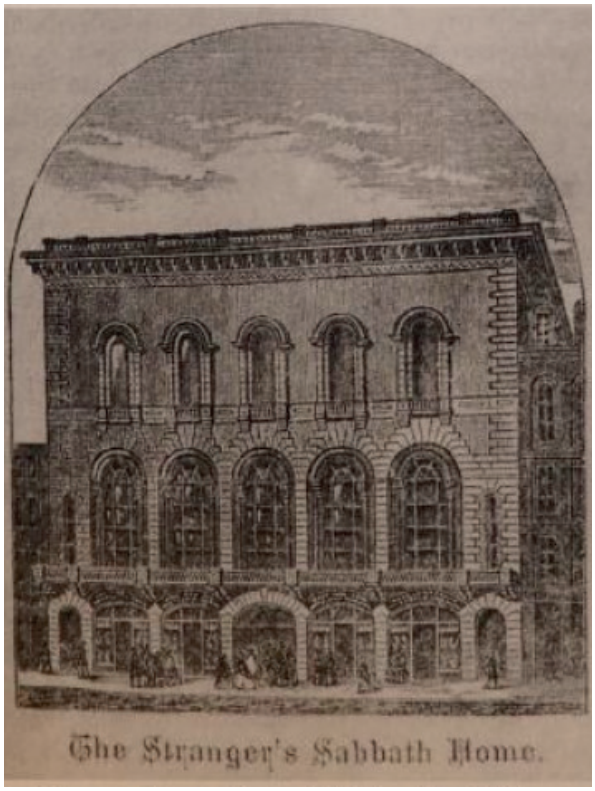

Figure 6, Tremont Theatre, Boston (1827) *Photograph coutesy of the American Baptist Historical Society (Loveland, et al., 2006)*

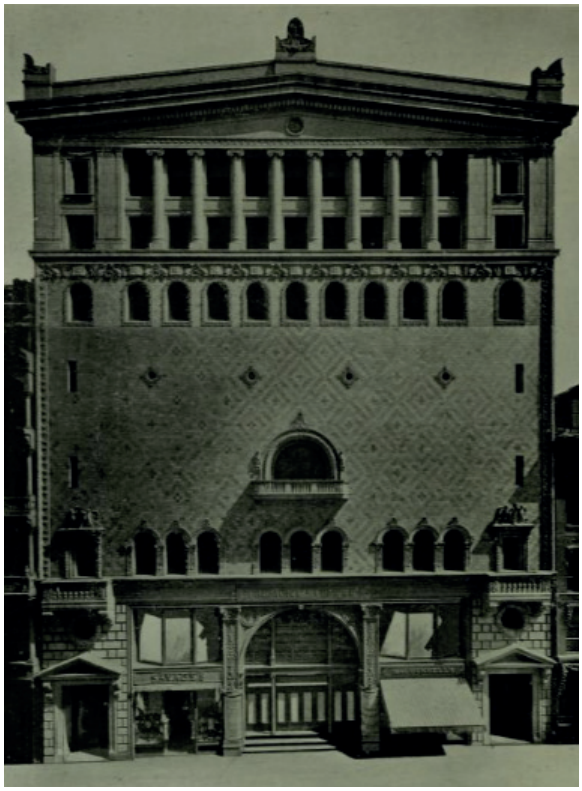

Figure 7, Tremont Temple, Boston (1853) *(Lorimer and George, 1896)*

Figure 8, Auditorium Tremont Temple, Boston (1853) *(Lorimer and George, 1896)*

In 1861, the Civil War broke out in America. This war made it hard for the evangelical community to relocate their over the years continued campground meetings, causing their growth to stall. The evangelical community faced not only logistical issues with campground meetings but also experienced religious divisions, reflecting the wider societal conflicts that hindered its growth. Due to the influences of the war, recognizable in the financial challenges and stagnating growth of the evangelical communities in the period of 1861 to around 1865, the Evangelical church was mostly housed in tent structures, meeting houses, existing churches and secular buildings (Osborn, 2013). From 1865 to 1900 the evangelical community grew significantly, especially in urban areas. The expanding evangelical community led to the construction of more purpose-built evangelical churches. The auditorium church was the most build typology, due to its ability to enhance aspects that were important to the Protestant Evangelicals. This included providing visibility and audibility for everyone, maintaining a simple yet functional design and potentially being more approachable for individuals that were not familiar with the church (Bains, 2022).

In the period from 1800 to 1900 the Evangelical community grew and adjusted their architecture to their needs but also let the architecture adjust their practice of religion. For example, while using secular buildings, they found that some theatre layouts had positively influenced their gatherings. In the period evangelist used and designed architecture that would both have an impact on the individual as on the world. They focused on the personal religious experience but also found it important to spread the word by for example using movable tent structures as churches. Furthermore, as new typologies for Protestant Evangelical churches were designed, evangelists continued to make use of older designs and buildings. The Evangelists are not concerned with the building but with what is spread by using the building, the gospel.

2. Evangelical church architecture: 1900 – 1970

In the period from 1900 to 1970, global events like the World Wars and the Cold War profoundly influenced society, including the evangelical community. During this time there was a shift in perspectives and priorities within the evangelical church community. As a result, evangelical church architecture evolved to reflect new societal norms.

2.1 The revival of the Gothic-style

In the period from 1800 to 1900, Evangelists adapted their church architecture to their evolving needs. In the period of 1900 to 1970 this trend continued, however in a way one would not expect. Namely, by reaching back to historical church architecture. The outbreak of the First World War from 1914 to 1918 caused significant societal unrest (White, 2003). While evangelical churches build in the Gothic-style had been appearing since 1850, there was a notable surge in their construction surrounding the first world war. This reflects the desire for stability and comfort during and after the first world war. The Gothic style had been a recurring architectural style from the 13th to the 18th century. This style was originally designed for churches, making it a reliable option to show stability in church architecture (Stanton, 1970). Evangelical churches needed a sense of stability to show that they were indeed places of worship, maybe not as traditional as before but still holding onto their essence as churches. The auditorium-style churches and secular buildings did not capture the desired importance of spiritual orientation in their architecture. Therefore, turning back to a traditional style like the Gothic was seen as a way to radiate the evangelical church to the community in a time of insecurity. A space of worship, understanding and safety (Kilde, 2002).

The Saint John's Church, built by the Evangelical United Brethren community in Rockford, Illinois in 1918, is an example of the Gothic revival in church architecture (figure 9 and 10). The community's choice of the Gothic style stemmed from their belief that architecture should unite structure, purpose, and form to provide an environment for spiritual personal growth. The church architecture would reflect the beauty of life in a troubled world (Phillips, 1949). Instead of replicating historical architecture, their goal was to design new church architecture that fulfilled the church's functional requirements but also created a religious atmosphere. To provide a space of safety and understanding that is recognizable even to those who are not part of the church community. By incorporating Gothic elements like pointed arch windows and a prominent central window surrounded by smaller ones, they aimed to reflect the church's purpose through its architecture. The use of brick emphasized strength, and a modest tower reflected traditional church designs. The community's belief that the church serves as a place to spread the gospel rather than being sacred is reflected in its simple design, evident in both form and ornamentation. Additionally, interior spaces were carefully designed to prioritize functionality, with the preacher placed at the center of attention (Phillips, 1949). Ultimately, the design of the Saint John's Church was strived to create a religious

atmosphere while upholding the evangelical principles of functionality and simplicity. Reflecting a shift in thought within the evangelical community, from considering the architecture as having minimal relation to the church's function to recognizing that the architectural design supports the church's actions, underscores the importance of the design (White, 2003).

Figure 9, Saint John's church, United Brethren community in Rockford (1918) *(Phillips, 1949)*

Figure 10, Saint John's church, United Brethren community in Rockford (1918) *(Phillips, 1949)*

2.2 Division in evangelical church architecture

The rise of Gothic-style evangelical churches in the 20th century posed some challenges. By 1920, there was a conflict within evangelical communities about church architecture. Some wanted buildings to clearly show their purpose, while others preferred a more functional design. This latter viewpoint conflicted with their belief that the church itself should not be considered sacred, as they feared that adopting Gothic-style architecture might lead people to view the building as sacred (Sövik, 1973).

A division arose within the evangelical community. Those who embraced the Gothic revival were called the liberals, while those who were unconcerned with architectural aesthetics were deemed conservatives (Kilde, 2002). The conservatives adhered to architectural principles established in the 19th century, emphasizing that the church's primary purpose was to house the word and spread the gospel. Nonetheless, even they began remodeling their auditorium churches in the 1920s, taking their principles even more seriously. During this period, the concept of "form follows function" provided inspiration for the conservatives in their remodeling efforts. They modernized their auditorium churches by incorporating new construction materials, improving sightlines, and optimizing spatial layouts to enhance functionality (Niermann, 2016). The first evangelical church in Knoxville, Tennessee, underwent a conservative remodeling after world war two in 1946 to adopt a more modern approach. Figures eleven and twelve clearly show the changes made to the church's interior. The preacher and choir platform, along with the organ pipes, were removed. Curved pews were replaced with straight ones, and the seating arrangement was adjusted to create a central aisle. These modifications aimed to modernize the church and focus more on functionality rather than aesthetics (Kilde, 2002).

Liberals criticized the auditorium churches for feeling too homely and feminine, believing that they did not sufficiently housed religious practices. They perceived these churches as resembling theaters, lacking the religious atmosphere suitable for worship. Reserved seating arrangements further contributed to this perception, making the church feel exclusive rather than inclusive. Both liberals and conservatives remodeled churches around 1920 to align their churches with their architectural perspectives. Liberals favored the addition of traditional church features to clearly signify its function as a place of worship, while conservatives focused on modernizing their churches to better serve their functional needs (Bains, 2022).

Despite their differing approaches to evangelical church remodeling, both groups held a similar principle regarding the role of church architecture. The church's architecture should serve its function. While liberals viewed architectural aesthetics as enhancing the church's character and atmosphere, conservatives prioritized functionality, aiming for a more modern interpretation of church design.

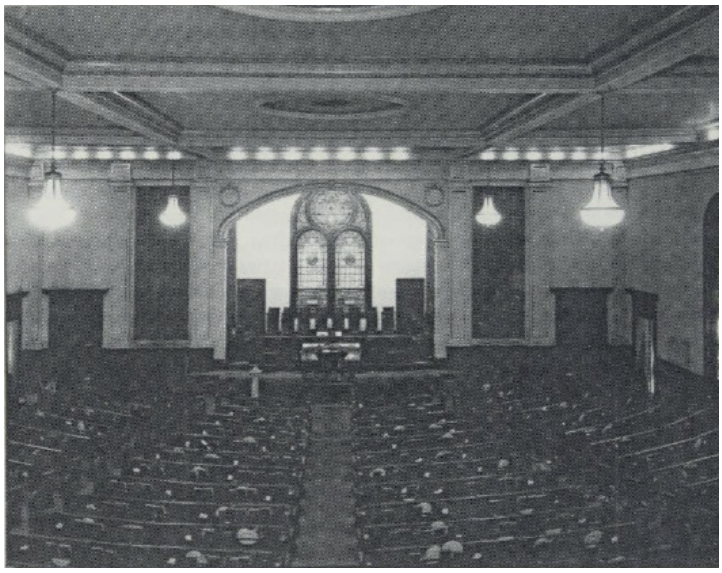

Figure 11, First evangelical church, Knoxville (1946) *Courtesy of the C. M. McClung Historical Collection (Kilde, 2002)*

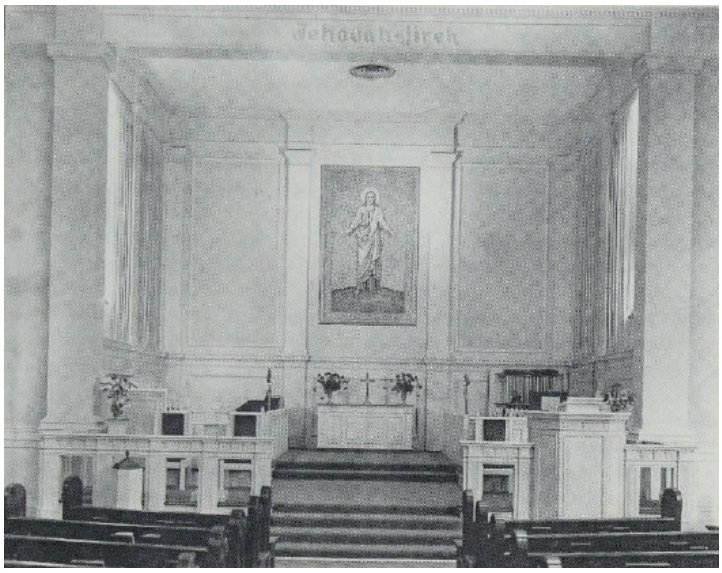

Figure 12, First evangelical church, Knoxville (1947) *Courtesy of the C. M. McClung Historical Collection (Kilde, 2002)*

2.3 Post-war modern church architecture

After world war two, the modern architecture encouraged by the conservatives was the preferred style of evangelical protestant churches, offering an honest expression of faith through the use of materials, construction techniques and adaptability to new forms. These churches typically accommodated fewer than six hundred people to encourage and enhance social connections within the church (McGrath, 1995).

After the wars, the belief that the church did not have to look like a church to be a church grew stronger. This was evident in the design of the North Christian Church in Columbus (figure 13), completed in 1964 designed by Saarinen. Using modern materials and techniques, Saarinen created a tent-like structure with a central spire. This design, while modern, resembled traditional church architecture, reflecting the historical architecture roots of evangelical churches as the tent structures. The remarkable architecture of the North Christian Church influenced many others built between 1965 and 1970, leading to a trend of churches replicating its style (Loveland, et al., 2006).

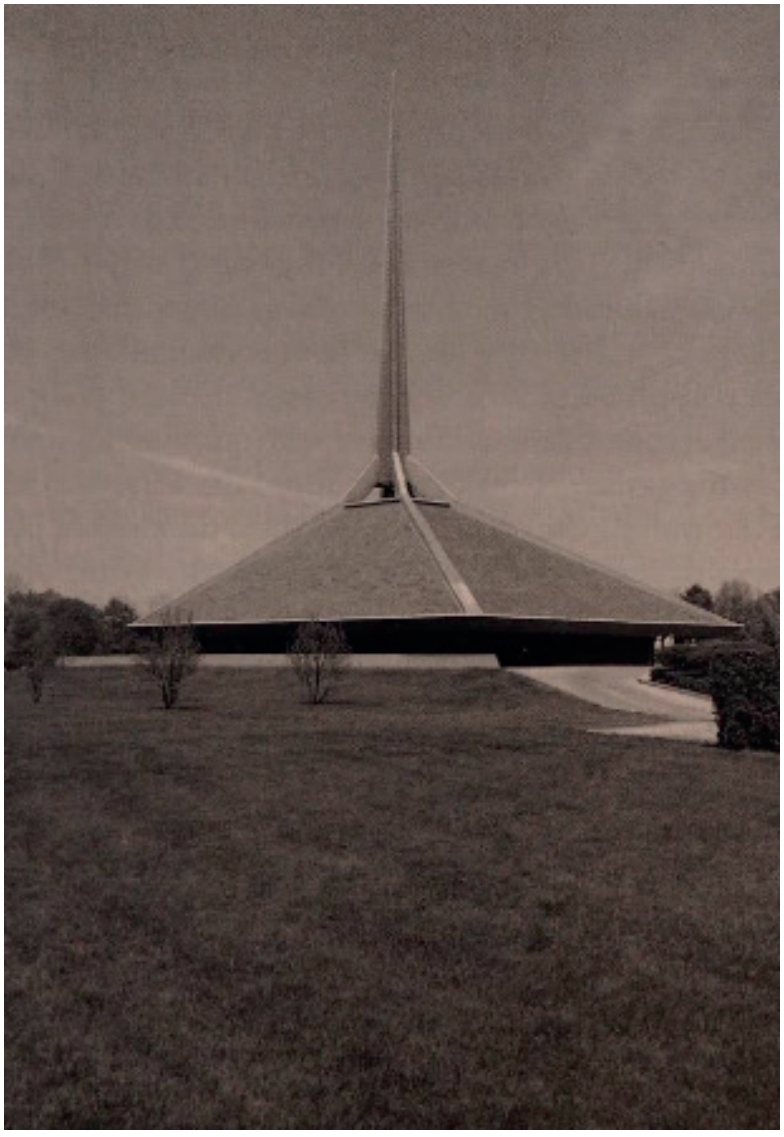

Figure 13, The North Christian Church in Columbus (1964) *(Loveland, et al., 2006)*

3. Evangelical church architecture: 1970 – 2002

Following the wars, the evangelical church community experienced remarkable growth, marking a new period from the 1970s to the early 2000s. During this transformative period, there was an exploration of the relationship between the community and evangelical church architecture. This led to the development of new architectural styles and a reassessment of historical ones (Kilde, 2002).

3.1 Rise evangelical mega church

The close connection between evangelicalism and the theatrical spaces resurfaced at the end of the twentieth century with the development of megachurches in the 1970s. These megachurches were developed with the aim of bringing middle-class Protestants who had drifted away from the church in adulthood back to church (Loveland, et al., 2006). The development of the megachurch was driven by a focus on the evangelical community. Attendees, who came to worship, hear the word, and share the gospel, where at the forefront. Pastors tried to identify the needs and desires of both existing church members and those still distant from the church. Often it appeared that people did not know what they wanted, but knew very well what they did not want. The megachurches mission therefor grew from a negative model (Niermann, 2016). As evangelicalism is not traditional, the architecture of the megachurches intentionally diverged from traditional styles to address the broader community. Religious symbols were avoided in the architecture to avoided intimidating the non-churchgoing community. Services would be conducted without requesting money, ensuring that everyone feels welcome and equal within the church. The church would minimize class distinctions and not encourage dress codes or behavior expectations. The evangelical religion focuses on the individual religious experience, therefore it should not matter how someone looks or behaves. The goal was to create a safe and inclusive space for everyone. Additionally, troubling religious elements as sin and guilt were downplayed, as evangelicals believe in forgiveness through Jesus Christ's sacrifice (Kilde, 2002).

The megachurch formed the connection between everyday life and religion, by providing the means for community engagement and individual counseling on a voluntary basis. The church services were designed to be entertaining with modern music and down-to-earth people who spoke from the heart and about issues that all people faced on a daily basis. The church was relevant for everyone (Falconer, 2017). From the principles of the megachurch it is clear that the mega church was consumer oriented. The focus on the gospel in the church can therefore be questioned. However, the megachurch did make religion relevant and accessible for everyone.

Because of differing perceptions on church architecture within the evangelical community, as for example with the liberals and conservatives, a wide variety in megachurch architecture exists. Some churches did find it important to create a religious

atmosphere by for example ornaments. Other churches purely focused on the functional and chose the modern style. However there are certain aspects of megachurch architecture that were important for every church. Hearing and seeing everything clearly in a comfortable setting was the main point evangelical churches designed their churches around. The strategies used to accommodate this varied (Loveland, et al., 2006). The evangelical Crystal Cathedral in California is one of the earliest examples of an acknowledged megachurch. The Crystal Cathedral was designed in 1980 by Philip Johnson and housed 2800 people (Figure 14). The church shows the willingness to explore innovative architectural forms, evident in the auditorium designed in the shape of a four pointed star. The shape represents the star followed by the wise men to find Jesus, making it a subtle religious symbol in the architecture that reflects the church's identity (Kilde, 2002). In the auditorium the seating is arranged in straight lines, with two elevated balconies offering views of the main hall. At the convergence of the star's points is the preaching platform. Every seat provides a direct line of sight to the preacher, ensuring a strong connection between the audience and the speaker. The build of the church costed around 18 million, at the time very costly for an evangelical church (Robles-Anderson, 2012). Spending big amounts on the church building became more common after 1970. As the evangelical community grew and became more popular the financial contribution did as well, resulting in more money within the church. Furthermore the period after 1970 experienced different periods of economic growth, evangelical churches profited from these periods and invested in their churches (Falconer, 2017).

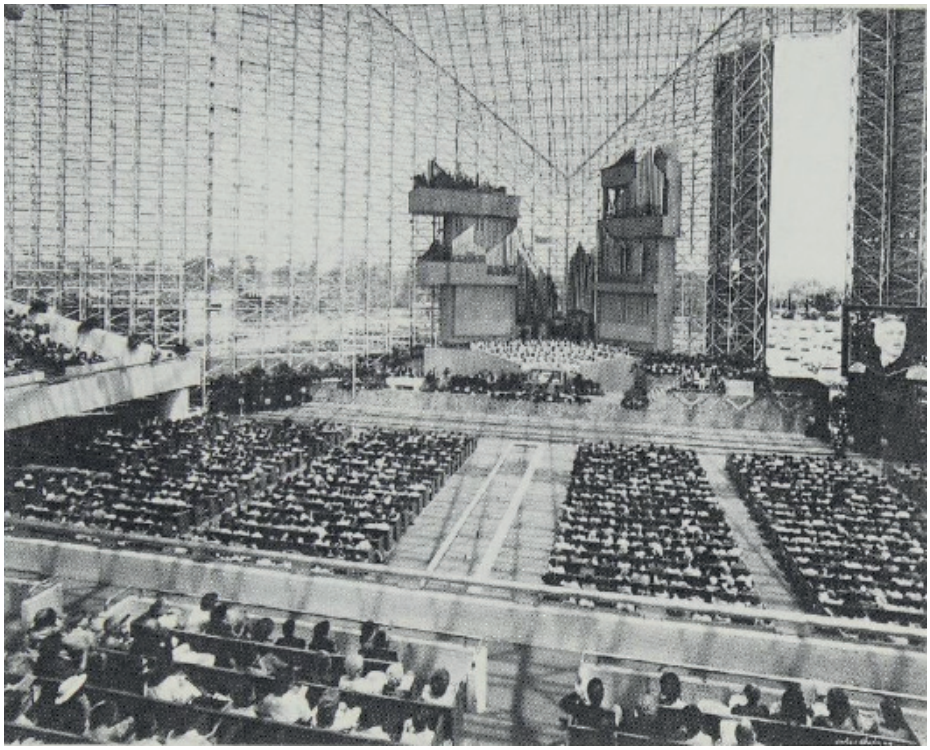

Figure 14, Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California (1980). *Courtesy of Robert Schuller's Ministrics (Kilde, 2002)*

3.2 Rediscovery of 1800s evangelical architecture typologies

To avoid intimidating non-churched individuals, some megachurches adopt the strategy of designing their architecture to resemble other functions and utilize their connected architecture typologies. For instance, evangelical communities drew inspiration from shopping malls and convention centers (Falconer, 2017). This conscious use of other typologies for church design dates back to the 1800s, when the use of secular buildings was common practice. While this continued among evangelical communities, it became less common over time as communities grew larger and built specific church buildings (Kilde, 2002). By building secular typologies as new evangelical churches, history was being revisited with a modern twist.

The Willow Creek Community church in South Barrington is an example of a church that used this approach in designing their megachurch. The Willow Creek Community Church was completed in 1990, featuring two boxlike structures constructed from industrial materials such as brick, glass, and steel. The architectural style of the church gave the impression that it was a corporate headquarters or convention center rather than a church (Loveland, et al., 2006). This architectural approach was driven by the beliefs of its preacher, Bill Hybels, who noticed that many young adults felt intimidated by imposing church structures. Hybels insisted that attending church shouldn't be a cultural shock, and therefore he advocated for church architecture designed to earn the respect of non-churched individuals, making them feel comfortable and receptive to the gospel message (Hybels and Hybels, 1995). He found that the architectural styles that appealed to non-churched individuals were commonly found in hotels, entertainment parks, and corporate buildings. Therefore, he tried to reflect these designs in the church architecture to build trust and familiarity among the non-churched community (Sargeant, 1996). The interior design of the Willow Creek Community Church incorporated typical features found in many megachurches, with a focus on ensuring visibility and audibility for all attendees. On the main floor, rows of seats were arranged on a gently sloping floor that curved around a raised platform for the preacher. Surrounding the ground floor was a gallery with again sloped seating arrangements, providing additional seating capacity. In addition to these traditional evangelical design strategies, technology was used to enhance the connection between the audience and the preacher. Microphones and amplifiers were utilized to improve audibility, while video screens offered close-up views of the preacher from every section of the gallery (Kilde, 2002).

Figure 15, Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois (1990) *(Loveland, et al., 2006)*

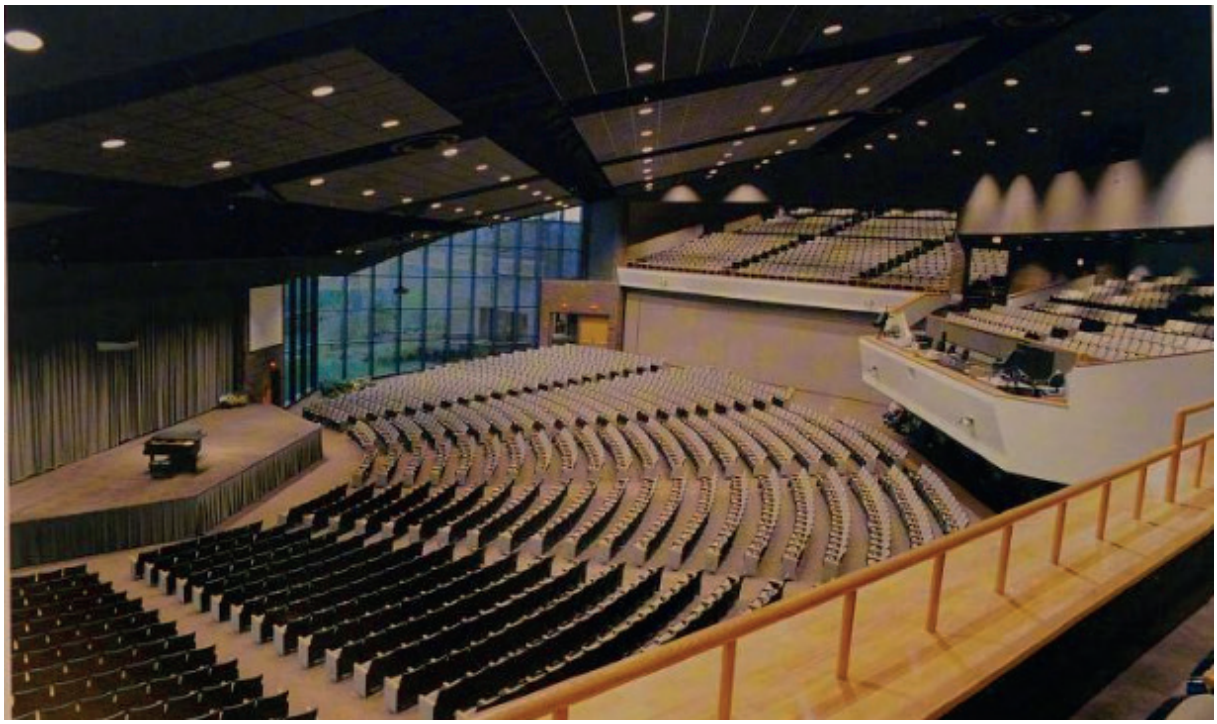

Figure 16, Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois (1990).
Picture of the auditorium (Loveland, et al., 2006)

As megachurches rediscovered the use of secular buildings and drew inspiration from them for their church architecture, many evangelical churches began to revisit architectural typologies dating back to the 1800s. This reflected a broader trend forming from the 1900s towards reconnecting with historical roots while adapting to contemporary needs. By revisiting historical evangelical architectural styles, the churches aimed for a balance between honoring heritage while addressing the evolving preferences and requirements of their communities. In doing so, evangelical churches demonstrated the success of early evangelical church architecture in a changing world. While these typologies logically underwent adaptations to fit the societal needs of a new period, the key principles remained foundational for their modern versions (Loveland, et al., 2006).

Campground meetings held in tent structures and the repurposing of secular buildings emerged as the most recurring architectural typologies, repeatedly utilized and adapted throughout history. For evangelicals, the primary focus has always been on spreading the gospel. Both of these architectural approaches offer flexibility and mobility, providing evangelicals with the opportunity to easily move and spread their message. The adaptability of these typologies makes them suitable for reuse, a tradition that has persisted from the 1800s to the present, though with differing frequency over time. Despite changes in usage, these typologies have maintained their relevance over centuries (Hovland, 2016). In the upcoming chapter, the personal case study of the Meerkerk will be examined, which serves as an example of this revisiting of secular typologies, while also highlighting the global influence of originally United States evangelical church architecture typologies.

4. The globalization of evangelical church architecture

The development of the evangelical church and its architectural evolution from the 1800s was not limited to the United States. Within Europa, there was a similar evolution of evangelical church architecture in comparison to the development of American evangelical church architecture. European evangelical communities initially met in campground meetings and meetinghouses. However, as their audience grew, they began to utilize secular buildings for worship, eventually constructing purpose-built churches for the protestant evangelical religion (Hutchinson, 2015). To analyze the evolution of evangelical church architecture globally, the Meerkerk will be examined as a personal case study in the Netherlands.

The Meerkerk, located in Hoofddorp, began with 13 people meeting weekly in the preacher's living room. As the community grew, they transitioned from meeting in a barn to utilizing a community center, and eventually to using a school for their gatherings. However, as the church continued to expand, the school building soon became too small, encouraging the search for a larger space. In 2001, a farmer in Hoofddorp offered his two barns to the church for use, as he was relocating his business to the Flevopolder. In just one year, these barns were transformed into multifunctional church buildings. While the exterior received renovations, the interior underwent a complete transformation to accommodate the church's needs (figure 17 and 18). The auditorium, with straight-line seating facing a platform for the preacher, could accommodate up to a thousand people. Additionally, the church fully embraced technology, employing microphones, screens, and live recordings to ensure that the preacher's message was visible and audible to everyone present, as well as those watching the service from home (Tamboer, 2023).

The Meerkerk demonstrates the enduring relevance of historical evangelical architectural typologies. While rooted in tradition, these architectural typologies have not faded with time but rather have spread worldwide, evolving in response to the changing needs and perspectives of evangelical communities. The journey of the Meerkerk reflects the global development of the Protestant Evangelical religion and its architectural expression.

Figure 17, Meerkerk in Hoofddorp, Netherlands (2002). *Picture by M.J. de Rijk (2018).*

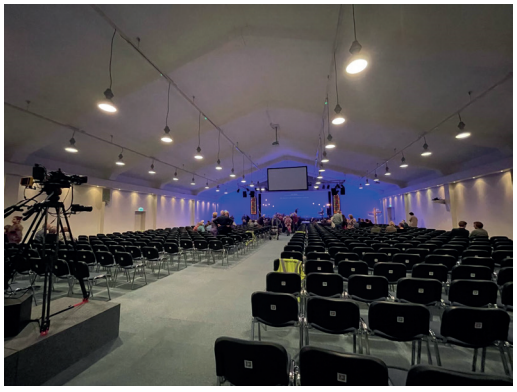

Figure 18, Meerkerk in Hoofddorp, Netherlands (2002). *Picture by A.B. Siegers (2024).*

Conclusion

This thesis examined the development of Protestant Evangelical Church architecture in the United States. Moreover, it analyzed how contemporary societal demands have influenced the architectural evolution within evangelical churches. The research question for this thesis was: *'How has the architecture of Protestant Evangelical churches in the United States evolved from 1800 to 2002, and to what extent have these changes responded to contemporary societal demands?'* This research question was explored through a review of literature and examinations of case studies in chronical order.

The evolution of evangelical church architecture from the 19th century to the early 21st century forms a cohesive story of adaptation, innovation, and continuity. It's a story that extends beyond mere bricks and mortar, offering profound insights into the values, beliefs, and aspirations of evangelical communities across time and space. From the beginning in camp meetings and repurposed secular buildings to the rise of modern megachurches and global expansion, evangelical architecture has continually sought to meet the needs of its communities while remaining faithful to its core principles.

At the heart of evangelical church architecture has always been the creation of spaces that encourage the spread of the gospel and a sense of community among believers. Nevertheless, it's important to recognize that these spaces were not regarded to as sacred. These fundamental principles have translated into a diverse range of evangelical church architectural typologies, each reflecting the unique needs and priorities of evangelical congregations throughout history. Whether it's the simplicity of tent structures or the grandness of megachurches, the underlying goal has always remained the same: to provide spaces that prioritize visibility, audibility, and accessibility for all attendees, regardless of architectural style or size.

The development of evangelical church architecture initially stemmed from the rapid growing evangelical community, facilitated by campground meetings that moved throughout the United States. Evangelical churches sought spaces to actively spread the gospel, whether by organizing their own gatherings or repurposing existing secular buildings. Architectural aesthetics took a back seat to functionality. What mattered most was ensuring the preacher's message could be clearly heard and seen, and that there was enough room for all who wished to be there. Any available space could be transformed into an evangelical church, emphasizing inclusivity and accessibility. As the evangelical community expanded and solidified its presence in the United States, auditorium churches began to emerge. These purpose-built structures took inspiration from theaters, prioritizing visibility and audibility. The traditional rectangular church layout gave way to a round shape, echoing the campground meetings, ensuring everyone could see and hear the preacher. Additionally, as the community continued

to grow, secular buildings were repurposed into evangelical churches to meet the evolving needs. Theaters underwent renovations to accommodate worship services, demonstrating the adaptive nature of evangelical architecture. Furthermore, the evolution of evangelical church architecture experienced the reuse of historical styles, exemplified by the Gothic revival in the early 20th century and the integration of 19th-century typologies in the church architecture. These architectural choices reflected the evangelical movement's connection to tradition while embracing modernity. After the wars, the evangelical community experienced significant growth, encouraging the build of more modern church architecture. In response, mega churches emerged, seeking to connect everyday life with religion. These megachurches varied in architectural styles, tailored to the needs and preferences of the evangelical community. Often, megachurches used secular typologies as inspirations for their architecture, to express a sense of accessibility and familiarity to non-believers.

Throughout the architectural shifts, former typologies were not discarded but rather revisited and integrated into the development of evangelical church architecture. This continual process of evaluation and adaption highlights the dynamic nature of evangelicalism, demonstrating its responsiveness to societal shifts and evolving community needs. As evangelical church architecture evolved not only in the United States but globally, it served as an expression of the movement's growth and its evolving identity and values, balancing tradition and innovation.

In conclusion, the evolution of evangelical church architecture reflects the resilience and adaptability of the Protestant evangelical religion. It's a story of innovation, reinvented tradition, and the growth of community through shared values and beliefs. Looking to the future, it's clear that evangelical architecture will continue to evolve, guided by the principles of spreading the gospel and building inclusive communities based on faith, worship and community.

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