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‘When it comes to the environment of worship, we should never underestimate the influence of our building upon the way we think about God, about each other, and about the relative importance of what we have come together to engage in’ (Richard Giles)¹

What follows is, on the surface, a discussion of several ‘sacred spaces’ in and around Sydney, Australia. Our foci are happenchance, but inspired by tales Richard has shared with Stephen of Richard and Susan’s holiday in France, travelling to Fanjeaux (at one time home of St Dominic) with a six-week old Simone on the back seat. So we discuss what is here to be found, places we have stumbled across on these shores—some of which will delight, and some disturb, Richard. Throughout, we consider buildings with Richard’s ‘lenses’, in terms of what they say to and about the Christian people who gather within them.² And given Richard’s conviction that ‘church buildings have ceased by and large to speak clearly of a present reality, and instead convey a mumbled message of a glorious, though faded past’³, we are especially concerned to consider buildings in their Australian setting, which is one without longstanding Christian heritage, nor one which can readily be identified as ‘glorious’. Hence, an undercurrent in our reflections is our concern with the question of tradition, how it might be lost and found, vivified, celebrated, fragile and tenuous in the culture from which we write.

Sydney Anglicanism: creating uncommon worship!
The buildings we look at introduce Richard—and readers—mainly to worship spaces in Roman Catholic communities, and, in our view, include at least one to rival Philadelphia Cathedral—a dazzling example of liturgical renewal in the southern hemisphere as ‘his’ cathedral is in the north. But we also write from a local context in which the kind of Anglicanism Richard represents is hardly present to be found at all, and so begin in a building which we think would appall him: Sydney’s St Andrew’s Cathedral, in which the altar-table is often found housed as it were out of the way under the stairs (the table is on wheels). It has been decentralised from the altar-space in front of the reredos by a bible (and one encausted in plastic—unusable—to boot), and where pillars have been plastered with television screens proclaiming bible verses to visitors. This is the heart of the kind of intentionally qualified ‘Sydney Anglicanism’ which is far from ‘always open’⁴: it is infamous for the like of its opposition to women priests (supported by a novum doctrine of trinitarian subordination), trenchant dislike of homosexuality, and its advocacy of lay presidency.⁵ It has championed some particular understandings of ‘Christian assembly’ (in which the use of the very word ‘worship’ is suspect) a world away from the renewal which Richard has advocated and implemented on both sides of the north Atlantic. For us to note if not to concentrate on this context is important, because it points to a quirkiness which is out of kilter with much of Anglicanism elsewhere, and it invites reflection on what might be distinctive developments of tradition in the wider context of Australian Christianity, which frame and to some extent explain some of the quirks of the Sydney mould of Richard’s own tradition in all its difference.

Re-pitching the tent?
The oldest church building in Australia dates from 1809—Ebenezer Chapel on the edge of Windsor, itself on the western edge of Sydney—a building now used by the Uniting Church in Australia. Ebenezer itself is a small,
unremarkable if not ugly liturgical space, centred on a giant pulpit, which is dwarfed by two enormous flags which together cover the best part of the entire ‘east’ wall: the Union Jack and the Southern Cross. If one holds in mind the date 1809 and hunts for contemporaneous buildings in David Stancliffe’s Church Architecture6 (a collection of holiday photographs, amongst other things, even more lavish than Richard’s picture books on liturgical space, Re-pitching the Tent and Creating Uncommon Worship) one learns that in England, buildings were being built to better facilitate sacramental worship. This is a shift on which the builders of Ebenezer missed out. But even more striking is that any building from 1809 would necessarily be placed in the final two chapters of Stancliffe’s book, because his historical narrative begins to incorporate (and illustrate) buildings still standing in England from the early centuries of monastic expansion, a story in which Aidan and Cuthbert find mention. This contrast points to the obvious fact of Australia’s ‘youth’ as a contemporary nation: the first settlers/invaders, who built Ebenezer, came to a demanding land that whilst host to the earth’s oldest still-living culture—it was no terra nullis—was not and still is not (and vast as it is, never could be) marked by often ancient buildings of sometimes stunning proportion or execution which at the very least keep some kind of rumour of God alive. If that rumour persists in Australia, it does so in the land itself, its overwhelming spaciousness, its resilience in ferocious fire and flood and drought, its gorgeous liminal edges between surf and new cities, and maybe in longer murmurs of song-lines. If the divine presences itself, it does not need buildings—an apparently biblical conviction, and one which can be impressed here. Church buildings, inevitably ‘artificial boundaries’, are ‘soon rendered inconsequential’,7 or mute—or at the very least weak—in their articulation of mystery, beauty, wonder. Moreover, in the damaged, frayed, culture which has resulted from the invaders’ collision with the land and its ‘prior owners’, building which ‘rely on any “venerability” for their currency’,8 imported from elsewhere, may well now be seen as a pock, not graced presence respectful of, coherent with, the awesome land. If Europe’s church buildings can sometimes still by their very longevity or relation to long-standing like-kind, proclaim or gasp or whisper a hope of the durable ever-presence of a God they ‘glorify’, a God empathic to the places into which they have been long set, the buildings that have emerged in Australia are a struggle for tradition in a different sense.9 The ‘past of persons’10 they embrace, or seek to, is a particular cluster of sufferings—relatively new wounds, some unhealed. Getting to any ‘new co-ordinates’11 of time and space into which church buildings may invite Australians involves a transition distinct to this context.

These ‘new co-ordinates’ do not bear well any Cartesian clarity. Indeed, all buildings on the Australian landscape cannot escape their innate fragility on such an ancient, flat and never-ending landscape. Even the largest of Australia’s cities give the impression of perching on the shore and skirmishing with the surrounding countryside rather than being truly a part of the territory. Hence there is, we suggest, a challenge here to northern notions of transcendence: the meaning of a place of worship in a town or city needs always to be read within a dual dynamic that engages both traditions of architecture and interpretation through local context. Because ‘traditions of architecture’ have developed largely in the north, a particular kind of disjuncture opens up in the south. So whilst there is a northern hemisphere relationship between churches, spires, hills and ascending to the ‘traditions of architecture’ have developed largely in the north, a particular kind of disjuncture opens up in the south. So whilst there is a northern hemisphere relationship between churches, spires, hills and ascending to the

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6 David Stancliffe, The Lion Companion to Church Architecture (London: Lion, 2008).
8 Moore, ‘Sacramentality’, p. 143.
9 Note Moore’s discussion ‘Towards an Australian anamnesis’ in ‘Sacramentality’, pp. 149-52.
10 Edward Farley, Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Efficacement and Reclamation (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), p. 30: ‘tradition is more than the factual past, the aggregate of past contents, . . . tradition’s past is a past of persons’.
12 David Brown, God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 301 suggests that ‘the Gothic spire did proudly proclaim that beneath its upward thrust lay a meeting of heaven and earth’.

...
human spirit can feel deflated and emptied. Here, the divine encompasses with an embrace that is only slowly felt after long periods of standing in the land, freed from the ‘baggage’ of other climes and cultural habitats, humbled by the sheer size of things, yet belonging.

It makes good sense, then, that one kind of liturgical space which has emerged in Australia is the bush chapel, makeshift open air space for worship. One has recently been built in the grounds of the Uniting Church in Terrigal, on the Central Coast of NSW north of Sydney. A ‘men’s shed’ (which points to more than the sex of the volunteers, but participation in a tradition, a national myth, of larger proportions—the manly digger, sport, and/or mate) built it in woodlands, interestingly not overlooking the ocean, as it might have done, but overlooking a housing estate that forms part of the ‘parish’—although ‘parish’ is a term that the Uniting Church in Australia has now dropped, which itself points to a struggle to vivify an imported tradition, deemed ill-fit, to this context.¹³ The Terrigal bush chapel makes a splendid devotional space, but it is less successful as a venue for liturgical celebration. The space is centred on a table (there is no font and no ambo), but the pews, on an incline up a hill, are separated from this centre of liturgical action by uneven ground over ten foot wide, severing the chapel into two, and making audibility difficult, if not impossible. This is a strange arrangement for a tradition that would otherwise think of itself as prioritizing ‘word’. Nevertheless, the Uniting Church, itself new—from Congregationalist, Methodist and (some) Presbyterians in 1977—has embraced a sometimes robust attitude to its national context, resulting in numerous courageous statements about social issues at the same time as an arguable retreat from local communities (note the abandonment of parish) to press resources into umbrella-level caring agencies and social provisions (notably ‘UnitingCare’ which provides services that elsewhere are now within the gift of welfare states such as the UK). The notion that Christian tradition is a ‘potted plant that has never taken root’¹⁴ in Australian soil is perhaps more steadily held in this denominational context than others and has led to some abandon with ecumenical considerations.¹⁵ It has also met with considerable resistance from representatives of other ecclesial communities—a dispute which, if nothing else, illumines the struggle for tradition in Australia. Unsurprisingly, the Uniting Church has also more readily than other ‘old-line’ churches embraced the liturgical incursions which new denominations, such as the mighty Hillsong, have nurtured. Combined with its preoccupation with ‘word’, the formative dimensions of space have perhaps often been underestimated, such that it is commonplace in Uniting Church buildings to find furniture on which liturgical action is centred, clustered ungainly underneath a screen, if not displaced by a worship-band. Dynamics particular to this ecclesial community shape its struggles to discern and assert a shared tradition—particularly in terms of vexed stalemates about how any shared sensibility unfolds in liturgical celebration. Although its new worship book, *Uniting in Worship 2*,¹⁷ is a careful blend of the ecumenical consensus and sometimes highly innovative aspects,¹⁸ it is little-used and not well-known, captured in a conflict between those who regard its verb ‘uniting’ as weighting its relation to ecumenical consensus and those who use it to accent the particularities of this new tradition.

At heaven’s gate? Exploring specific spaces
Most new-built liturgical space in Australia shelters Roman Catholic communities, and some of these buildings are extraordinary achievements—although, as the two examples we explore suggest, for different reasons. Blessed John XXIII is a Catholic building in an “aspirational” (working class to lower-middle class) area of rapid growth. It makes good sense, then, that one kind of liturgical space which has emerged in Australia is the bush chapel, makeshift open air space for worship. One has recently been built in the grounds of the Uniting Church in Terrigal, on the Central Coast of NSW north of Sydney. A ‘men’s shed’ (which points to more than the sex of the volunteers, but participation in a tradition, a national myth, of larger proportions—the manly digger, sport, and/or mate) built it in woodlands, interestingly not overlooking the ocean, as it might have done, but overlooking a housing estate that forms part of the ‘parish’—although ‘parish’ is a term that the Uniting Church in Australia has now dropped, which itself points to a struggle to vivify an imported tradition, deemed ill-fit, to this context.¹³ The Terrigal bush chapel makes a splendid devotional space, but it is less successful as a venue for liturgical celebration. The space is centred on a table (there is no font and no ambo), but the pews, on an incline up a hill, are separated from this centre of liturgical action by uneven ground over ten foot wide, severing the chapel into two, and making audibility difficult, if not impossible. This is a strange arrangement for a tradition that would otherwise think of itself as prioritizing ‘word’. Nevertheless, the Uniting Church, itself new—from Congregationalist, Methodist and (some) Presbyterians in 1977—has embraced a sometimes robust attitude to its national context, resulting in numerous courageous statements about social issues at the same time as an arguable retreat from local communities (note the abandonment of parish) to press resources into umbrella-level caring agencies and social provisions (notably ‘UnitingCare’ which provides services that elsewhere are now within the gift of welfare states such as the UK). The notion that Christian tradition is a ‘potted plant that has never taken root’¹⁴ in Australian soil is perhaps more steadily held in this denominational context than others and has led to some abandon with ecumenical considerations.¹⁵ It has also met with considerable resistance from representatives of other ecclesial communities—a dispute which, if nothing else, illumines the struggle for tradition in Australia. Unsurprisingly, the Uniting Church has also more readily than other ‘old-line’ churches embraced the liturgical incursions which new denominations, such as the mighty Hillsong, have nurtured. Combined with its preoccupation with ‘word’, the formative dimensions of space have perhaps often been underestimated, such that it is commonplace in Uniting Church buildings to find furniture on which liturgical action is centred, clustered ungainly underneath a screen, if not displaced by a worship-band. Dynamics particular to this ecclesial community shape its struggles to discern and assert a shared tradition—particularly in terms of vexed stalemates about how any shared sensibility unfolds in liturgical celebration. Although its new worship book, *Uniting in Worship 2*,¹⁷ is a careful blend of the ecumenical consensus and sometimes highly innovative aspects,¹⁸ it is little-used and not well-known, captured in a conflict between those who regard its verb ‘uniting’ as weighting its relation to ecumenical consensus and those who use it to accent the particularities of this new tradition.

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¹³ Tom Frame, *Losing My Religion: Unbelief in Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009) recounts the struggles of clergy from early days of settlement onwards attempting to provide pastoral care over vast distances, esp. 44-46.


¹⁵ Witness, particularly, still unsettled friction over ordination, as can be seen in Rob Bos and Geoff Thomson, eds, *Theology for Pilgrims: Selected Theological Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia* (Sydney: Uniting Church Press, 2008), a large part of which is concerned with controversies about orders and ministry.


¹⁸ For example, inclusion of lament in the gathering rite of one of its ‘Services of the Lord’s day’, innovate rites of baptismal recollection, a milk and honey rite for the Easter Day eucharist, a service of healing at the end of a marriage, and so on.
expansion—with the mood caught in the like of the name of the road on which Blessed John XXIII is situated, Perfection Avenue—half way to Windsor (and Ebenezer) from the tourist trap around the harbour. The building itself was designed by Fulton Trotter Architects, an Australian based company. The parish was formed by the amalgamation of several parishes, and each of the prior communities is represented in the new building in having furniture and fittings re-located in the new space. This lends a rather ramshackle ambience to the interior of the new building, with several different styles of seating, for example. This amalgamation of resources reflects the somewhat cash-strapped (likely heavily mortgaged) circumstances of the new parish, having invested in a dramatic new building. Nevertheless, it seems that pastoral virtue has been made of financial necessity, and in its own way the space witnesses to a kind of reconciliation: if the aesthetics are jarring, an acknowledgement of human contingencies has prevailed. At the same time, the interior perhaps reflects a certain domesticity. One of the entrances to the church displays the characteristics of a typical Australian verandah, replete with barbecue facilities. Some of the upper glass panels are louvre windows, open for the circulation of air, as they might be in many Australian homes. And its rather hotch-potched interior conveys the kind of clutter that oftentimes marks ‘comfortable’ domestic space. However, whether it reflects the interiors of the ‘McMansions’ which surround the church is perhaps an open question, which leads to questions about possible perceived difference between ‘public’ and ‘private’ space in the immediately enveloping culture. Still, from the moment of entering the door of the building, one is aware of ‘blending’ dynamics: so a font with flowing water greets those assembling, pot plants abound, and behind the altar space (which opens back to the tabernacle, and a pyx bought from e-bay) a ‘lounge’ space—replete with bean bags—creates a distinctively ‘homely’ kind of devotional ambience closing in around the tabernacle. However this relates to the local homes, it can be seen as hospitable towards the young of the several Catholic schools that share the same site as Blessed John XXIII. Aspects of the ‘relax-ness’ of the interior space acknowledge the informalities of majority youth-cultures.

The church sits on a slight incline on Perfection Way itself, but its wider setting in gently rolling environs means that the building can be seen for several kilometres around. In one sense, the rooftop of the church coheres with the rooftops that dot the contours of the local landscape; and this in itself suggests considerations about how church buildings are sympathetic to the local built environment—Blessed John XXIII suggests a consistency which is hardly conceivable in some English landscapes, replete with their ancient church buildings which have ‘outlived’ successive generations of domestic dwellings.

Although there are lines of continuity between the exterior of Blessed John XXIII and its build environment, there are also some discontinuities. The construction itself is of concrete, steel and most notably glass, so that it has a certain kind of resonance with a bird, perched, stretching out, about to take off. This feature invites a certain transcendent reference, an ‘away-from-here’ quality even in its sympathy to the locale in other respects. Most strikingly, though, the masses of clear glass enable the building to be seen, but also for those outside to see within. This coheres with the parish’s strong emphasis on mission On the one hand, the clear glass enables the liturgical assembly to see out upon the parish and engages the locale in the sense of the sacramental celebrated within the building: there are deliberate continuities between in- and outside. On the other hand, the liturgical assembly can be seen throughout times of prayer—at least in daytime liturgies. In the daytime, the walls of glass fill the building with the Australian light, so bright, strong and clear. The same light that blazes across the countryscape illuminates the churchscape; both are held in the same luminosity. But especially at night, when the building is lit from within, it is highly visible in the dark. Hence, the parish has a self-designated vocation to be ‘a light on a hill’, an image with obvious gospel resonance (Matthew’s version of the Sermon on the Mount), as its glass box illuminates the night sky all around. As a a building that exudes mixed messages, it is deeply interesting: although with little or no liturgical ‘purity’ about it, and some dubious aesthetics that are not with the grain of Richard Giles’ work, this parish’s orientation to mission is something of which he would approve and in which he would take delight.

Blessed John XXIII is a new-build opened in 2007. Another opened in the same year is St John Baptist in Woy Woy, at the entrance to the Central Coast north of Sydney. It was designed by PMDL Architecture & Design, who have local offices in Sydney as well as Melbourne and Hong Kong. If Blessed John XXIII has a striking exterior, St John Baptist is even more so, with a commanding design, a reflective metal façade that gleams in the sunshine—and circular. The building has been dubbed ‘the UFO church’ on several Flickr.com

pages referring to it. Presumably, however, the inspiration for its shape was nautical, fitting its place beside the water; though if so, it perhaps suggests sturdy tug-boat rather than steam-liner!

The circular shape of the exterior shelters a centripetal interior space, accessed by a long narthex for ‘journey’ past devotional spaces dedicated to Joseph, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary and past a reconciliation room before coming to the main doors of the sanctuary. Those doors are made of glass and embossed with text proclaiming welcome. Richard would love this narthex, which also houses a prominent aumbry for the three holy oils and what is perhaps a concession to artefacts of the earlier church building which the present construction was erected to replace: a sequence of stations of the cross also adorns the walls of the narthex, although they are clustered so closely together as to entirely diminish any sense of procession from one to another—a complete contrast to the marvellous sense of journey that the narthex otherwise so eloquently expresses. One further feature of the narthex is notable: the floor, which is pebbled. Entering the main doors, one progresses in a circular movement, which is resonant of a highly structured shape like a labyrinth, but all the time along a pebbled floor, which evokes a sense of the shifting, unstructured ‘floor’ of a beach—again fitting the building’s setting in a coastal town. The effect is not only visual, in that one can, if ably-sighted, see the pebbles, but the effect also engages other senses—one can, if able-bodied, feel the pebbles underfoot, even through shoes (although the strength of informal ‘beach’ culture means that it is common for Australians not to wear shoes to walk the street as well as the beach).

As one moves through the doors between narthex and sanctuary, one enters the celebration space via an imposing font with running water. The water flows down into a shallow pool: and one that can be entered either down steps from the entrance side of the font, by from other angles into the shore-like deepening pool which gently ripples with moving water. Once more, one is ‘at the beach’. This baptismsal scene opens into a spacious centre in which the altar is located up a simple step, although like the narthex, the step is made of pebbles, so it is as if the altar is also itself shored up on a beach at the heart of the building. As one surveys the space, one notices that the pews, ranked up to three deep around the walls, are also ‘shored up’ on pebbles, although the space between inner pew and altar—perhaps three metres wide—is made of light wood, in continuity with many of the surrounding walls. The combination is to suggest both different ‘natural’ environments—beach and what Australians call bush—but also solid and shifting structures, beach and building. As one looks above the wooden-cladded walls immediately behind most of the pews, the circular vaulting space includes dozens of small square windows within the rising shape resonant with the swell of a large wave. The windows themselves are in stained glass and depict waves, with surf, ‘white horses’. So yet again, the beach is brought to the building.

Quite unlike Blessed John XXIII, however, very little of the glass on the exterior walls of this building is clear. Clear glass is used along stretches between narthex and sanctuary—not just the doors, but also enabling the devotional chapels to be seen from the sanctuary—but only in perhaps less than a dozen seats can the road outside be seen. Rather, the sacramentality of the local context enveloping St John the Baptist is affirmed in its strong aquatic and nautical resonances.

Intriguingly, the circular space incorporates some large screens (large plasma television screens, not ‘OHPs’) fixed to the circular walls above worshippers’ heads, so that from whatever angle a screen can be seen whilst facing forward (all except, significantly—and in contrast to the ‘norms’ becoming familiar in Uniting churches—in the direction of the altar). Space behind the altar opens into a chapel for eucharistic adoration, which can be opened from the outside of the building whilst the main sanctuary space remains locked. In this space for eucharistic adoration, the book of the gospels has, artfully, been placed alongside the tabernacle itself, so that it imbues a rich sense of christic presence. Interestingly, the chapel also incorporates a local witness: the wrought-iron gates that separate (although not visually) chapel of adoration and liturgical space include a depiction of a

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21 See Richard Giles, Creating Uncommon Worship: Transforming the Liturgy of the Eucharist (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004), pp. 22-24, and Richard Giles, ‘Journey’, Stephen Burns, ed, Journey (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), pp. 16-18, in which Richard draws attention to the conviction in the Preface of Common Worship that ‘worship itself is a pilgrimage—a journey into the heart of the love of God’ (Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England [London: Church House Publishing, 2000], p. x [Roman numeral 10]). In the documents of Vatican Two, the motif of the ‘pilgrim people’ is central to theology of the church, and from another angle in the Australian context, the Uniting Church has explicitly defined itself, in founding documents and contemporary creedal, as a ‘pilgrim people’. Its buildings seem yet to inscribe this conviction, however, and could learn much from St John the Baptist, Woy Woy.

22 The chapel opens out behind ambo and presiding celebrant’s chair, both ‘behind’ the altar when viewed from the entrance
pelican. As in popular medieval Christian literature, this pelican is a eucharistic allusion, and she has pricked her breast in order to feed her dependants with the blood of her own body. However, real pelicans gather and feed on the water banks close to this building, so once more local scenes are honoured within the very fabric of the place.

If St John the Baptist, Woy Woy is commanding, the exterior of St Patrick’s Cathedral, Parramatta, is rather unassuming. From the busy roadside of a downtown intersection, one surveys a rather small mock-Gothic edifice, which only upon closer inspection might be seen to connect to a huge square box-like building of no distinctive style. The mock-Gothic building was the original cathedral, but burned out by an arsonist’s attack in 1996 and now only part of a spectacular renovation. In our view, this building ought to be celebrated as Philadelphia Cathedral is by Richard’s books. By contrast with Blessed John XXIII this building is severe in its sparse beauty. A devotional space (the former sanctuary) is entered via sculpted doors adorned with the Tree of Life which open onto a font with flowing water, in part a raised cruciform structure that allows water to trickle down into a pool, carved out of the stone floor, its shapes suggesting the seashore or the banks of a river. From this baptismal area the space opens out into a devotional space for adoration around the tabernacle, with enough seating for a small congregation to engage in eucharistic liturgy. To either side are reconciliation rooms and powerful side chapels (Marian, Sacred Heart, sanctorale, and the newly beatified founder of the Josephite order, Mary MacKillop—to date the only Australian to be so recognized). The entire space is enclosed in a darkness, accented by deeply coloured walls, and stained glass windows in ‘abstract indigenous’ mode. The, main, space juts off this, connected by a narrow walkway, with what is perhaps intended to be oculus, as if proclaiming the graced presence of the assembly itself in its gathering and sending. The exterior of the large new nave gives some clue to what is inside, though the simple giant box cannot in fact be seen from the main entrance through the old building. The interior of the new nave is vast, and whitewashed, with some light wood walls and fittings, and lots of clear glass. Light pours in beams, catching a massive muscled crucifix, organ pipes, and dramatic Aurelia above the giant granite altar. This altar is central to the entire space and on an axis with ambo and cathedra, so that the assembly face one another on pews on gradients along the long north and south walls. There is a small concession to devotion along one wall with stations of the cross behind the rows of pews. These stations are contemporary both in artistic style and script: drawing on Isaian suffering servant motifs more than the traditional cycle. The effect is a dramatic ‘holding (of) space’, in its cavernousness seeming to embrace the air and in its invitation of light seeming to collapse any clear distinction between in- and outside space. The continuities between out- and inside are manifest in other ways too: the cathedral, holding firmly to the ground, is situated close to the start of the broad western Sydney plain, the area which makes up the greater part of the diocese. Curved surfaces within the building evoke the meanderings of the Parramatta river, which flows nearby before emptying itself into the upper reaches of Sydney harbour. In our estimation, this cathedral, designed by MGT Architects with Romaldo Giurgola, is a quite remarkable achievement, the apex of church architecture in Australia.

But one more building invites mention, not least because it is as it were in a way a cathedral that never was. Canberra, the capital of Australia is a new city and never had an Anglican cathedral built, although land was designated for such a purpose. The bishop at the time of initial plans for construction, Ernest Burgmann, aborted the building, suggesting that the time was not right for such a building; he believed that its presence was ill-fitting for the Australia of the day. Canberra has therefore remained part of a diocese which includes Goulburn and its jaded cathedral—a building with so little trace of the renewal for which Richard has striven elsewhere. What has emerged in place of the cathedral in Canberra is another building (again opened only in this new millennium, in 2003), designed by BVN Architects, who have Canberra offices as well as in other major Australian centres. The Centre for Australian Culture and Christianity does include a chapel. The rather spartan, bare, chapel-space is concrete, even quite car-park-like, with only a subtle cross embedded in steel into one of the walls, almost imperceptibly. It is a multi-purpose room which can be used for lectures and other ‘non-religious’ purposes, as well as for religious gatherings in inter-faith mode. It hosts no regular congregation for worship and as such has something of the feel of a crematorium, with minimal specific symbols. Nor does it

to the sanctuary from the narthex.


have any fixed pieces of furniture, so is mute in terms of ‘speaking’ of bath and book and table, the media by
which Christian tradition claims divine presence is most assuredly manifest. It is rather just there, with
the exterior is in fact covered in grass, as if somewhat ‘shy’ of imposing on the landscape. This feature is intentional,
as the space was designed as a ‘grassed berm – the concrete planes of abstracted cave forms emerg[ing] from
below [to] reveal the landscape’. The building is also no doubt intended as a comment on the place of
Christianity in contemporary Australian culture—an absence, in continuity with the never-to-be cathedral.
Indeed the architects suggest that the berm articulates ‘Australian spirituality’. It might also be perceived, not
least by its creators, as an appropriate statement about the relationship of the churches to their wider culture, and
it is notable that it makes no mark on the cityscape so close to the national Parliament. This Australian Centre for
Christianity and Culture could hardly be further from the upward thrust of a spire, and in its own way, it is an
important statement about the struggle for tradition. The land surrounding the building and also forming part of
the Centre is given to an indigenous camp-fire, a labyrinth, a bible garden (with herbs and plants mentioned in
the bible being grown) alongside totems and a plot of land preserving natural local grass. The ACCC juts onto St
Mark’s theological college and so happens to run imperceptibly into space given to symbols with stronger
sacramental resonance, a bush chapel in which a tree-trunk has been turned into an altar-table and a pool of
flowing water, in which baptisms can be celebrated. Both table and pool have crosses close by: in the case of the
the table an unfortunate concrete construction which grates with the natural environs, and is emphatically imposed
(as is an adjacent stone from Canterbury Cathedral), in the case of the pool, a towering cross tens of metres high
which can be seen from across the city and from which water flows down. The specific things for sacramental
celebration—water and table—are in marked and ironic contrast to the ACCC chapel itself.

Environment interacting with other ‘iconicities’

As the photographs which accompany our reflections suggest, our comments have sometimes been based on
spaces when they are empty. Such reflections need to be related to other realms of signification, and especially
buildings when in use for liturgy, and populated for this purpose. Their ‘working’ context raises questions not
least about what Uniting Church liturgical theologian Graham Hughes calls the presiding celebrant’s
‘iconicity’—which at the very least involves the way she moves as a ‘body person’, the sound of his
prayer—and various ways in which the presider seeks to evoke the sacramentality of the assembly as presider
and other celebrants inhabit the temporality of the liturgy. As Hughes elaborates his own meanings, he especially
focuses questions of iconicity in terms of what he calls ‘liturgical direction’, facing, or facing away from, others
in Christian assembly. Albeit whilst suggesting that ‘none of us, I imagine, is going to relinquish the “basilican”
position in which the leader stands behind the table’, he nevertheless asks questions like: ‘is Christ supposed to
speak from the people’s side, as mediator? Or is Christ the second person of the Godhead who speaks God’s
grace and favour to the people? Is Christ God’s Word? If a leader understands herself or himself as occupying a
role as in persona Christi, is that then acting from God’s side, the people’s side, or somewhere between them?’
Hughes also makes a number of suggestions about how liturgical direction might work in aspects of liturgical
celebration other than eucharistic prayer, as well as offering creative ideas about how the whole assembly, and
not just the presiding celebrant, might be engaged in movements which broaden the focus away from the
presider alone. So Hughes suggests collective entrance into celebration space, and congregational dance, for
instance; but his key theological point is to underscore that the assembly itself is ‘the basic symbol’.

26 See splendid discussion in Graham Hughes, Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 148-70.
28 To echo a phrase from Gabe Huck, Liturgy With Style and Grace (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1984), p. 22.
29 Hughes, Worship, p. 164.
30 Hughes, Worship, p. 162.
31 Hughes, Worship, p. 159.
Hughes—from both an Australian and Uniting perspective—invites an important conversation, but his ideas need rethought in terms of ‘church in the round’. Employment of centripetal space entails an inevitable reframing of practical questions about how and when the presiding celebrant faces the assembly. Moreover, it potentially reconfigures at least any visual depictions of immanent divine presence and transcendent otherness. It also beckons attention towards an expansive (perhaps as yet only partly imagined) repertoire of gesture. Yet iconicity also shapes meaning in relation not only to the immediate liturgical environment, but wider environs, and so may not be the same in Australian and other contexts, given ‘the absolute immensity of [Australia], its sheer flatness, mant-faceted corrugations and features, and immense but hidden riches’. For example, any consideration of the temporality of the liturgy is touched in a general way by the antipodean experience of climatic and seasonal shifts quite different from the cycles of the liturgical year in the north Atlantic, and more specifically by the ‘longstandingness’ or otherwise of church buildings in which iconicity is enacted. A presiding celebrant’s iconicity may be one thing in say, an English cathedral (possibly with spire) built in (and rebuilt from) the first millennium, where presidency is offered from liturgical space juxtaposed to artefacts of long provenance, including perhaps relics or tombs of saints, and another in a modest ‘low’, tin-roofed, corrugated iron-sided (and possibly ‘multi-purpose’) space in Australia, which is necessarily (because Ebenezer is from only 1809) bereft of deep symbols of specifically Christian association. In parallel, we note in Appendix 2 of Philip Pfatteicher’s New Book of Festivals and Commemoration, on ‘geographical distributions of commemorations’ in a proposed ‘common calendar’, that England has dozens of internationally recognized saints, the Pacific few, and Australia none (although Mary MacKillop has since been recognized as such). Questions of ‘iconicity’, posed by Hughes, interact with these differences.

If Hughes represents an Australian hankering for an increased gravity of iconicity, the recent north Atlantic (and particularly European) pull towards centripetal space (such as commended by Richard) also needs to be seen in the context of enormous constraint by sometimes laborious requirements (for faculties, and so on) to make even the slightest changes to inherited liturgical spaces, quite apart from potentially overwhelming layers of ‘pastoral’ considerations in contemplating the stripping back or reconfiguration of successive accretions to such space. This is to say at least that each context may have its distinctive kinds of kitsch and clutter. Nevertheless, these considerations begin to suggest a way of reframing Hughes’ anti-immanentist sensibilities. In centripetal space, the significance of the presiding celebrant’s deportment may have an altogether different significance than in longitudinal space: if and when she holds her eyes open or closed, whether or not, and which, texts she carries by heart into prayer, and so on. In any case, the spaces we discuss variously express and question senses of liturgical direction, temporality and ‘longitudinality’/ ‘centripetality’ so as to suggest that distinctions between at least the latter pair may not always be so sharp. Rather, questions of a particular space’s immanent and transcendent reference may be best considered as one of gradient or discernment within very particular environs. Our discussion of liturgical spaces in and around Sydney has not considered such matters in detail, but like discussion of liturgical space in any and every context, needs to do so to achieve a fully-rounded view.

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34 Moore, ‘Sacramentality’, p. 147.
36 Notably in the circle enacted at Philadelphia Cathedral and adorning the cover of Creating Uncommon Worship. The argument for circular shape is also inscribed throughout Richard’s writing, for example: ‘An assembly sitting in tidy rows facing the same way will expect to be instructed and entertained, whereas an assembly sitting in a semi-circle, or facing one another in choir formation, will expect to participate and to exercise ministry’, Giles, Re-pitching, p. 175.