

# Towards a spatial theory of worship: some observations from Presbyterian Scotland

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*In an attempt to add theoretical depth to the emerging literature on geographies of religion, this paper pays particular attention to the concepts of space and worship in relation to the practice of evangelical Presbyterianism in the Scottish Highlands. I argue that 'worship', a term which has no universal application in religious studies, has been thinly conceived in geographical literature and must be examined both as process and as practice. Worship is here considered as the dynamic and varied human response to the theological proposition of Divinity. Specifically, the paper explores the dialectic between the theology of the Reformation and the practice of formal worship, a relation that is given a spatial expression in the Sabbath service. Departing from the familiar use of Henri Lefebvre's work on the production of space to describe the geography of mobile capital, I apply his neglected observations on French ecclesiastical architecture to Calvinist worship in the Outer Hebrides. The material in this paper was collected in the course of a long-term ethnographic engagement with the island of North Uist and is placed in the context of wider representations of Presbyterianism within popular culture.*

Key words: space, religion, worship, Reformation, Presbyterian, Scotland.

## Introduction

What would remain of the Church if there were no churches? The Christian ideology, carrier of a recognizable if disregarded Judaism ... has created the spaces which guarantee that it endures. (Lefebvre 1991a: 44)

In our present condition of late capitalism there are few material cultures which have been left untouched by the market: all emblems of national distinctiveness have been pressed into the

service of competition. If globalization has meant that places have taken on a levelling and 'cosmopolitan character' as Marx and Engels described it 150 years ago (1998 [1848]: 39), then local capital has surely become more adept at producing the signs of national difference as a means of claiming distinctiveness. 'The more somewhere becomes everywhere' quipped Terry Eagleton, 'the more these somewheres need to attract investment by demonstrating that they are not just anywhere' (1997: 23). In the Scottish context, it would be hard to

identify aspects of national culture which have not been corralled into the wider goal of self-promotion. Religion, however, has not always proved amenable to the marketing project. Several commentators have observed how Calvinist Presbyterianism in the Scottish Highlands has been one of the biggest obstacles in tourists' attempts to reconcile the reality of community life with the more romantic images of Celtic tradition (Chapman 1987: 25; MacDonald 1997: 166). While Presbyterianism could be said to enjoy a limited brand loyalty, it is scarcely an image which, one would have thought, has much international currency. It is perhaps surprising, then, that the 1999 edition of the *Lonely Planet Guide to Scotland* has on its cover a picture of a remote Highland church, with its simple lines and damp-stained whitewash (Smallman 1999). Even the austerity of Scottish Calvinism, it seems, has a market value.

On the cover of a tourist guide, the church takes on a new set of meanings: perhaps it suggests a rough and rustic chic for which Scotland has always been prized; or maybe it reinforces popular notions of isolation, as if the Highlands occupy a space and time outside modernity. Most likely is that it has become another naïve exoticism with *multiple* meanings, an image less kitsch than a castle but nonetheless identifiably Scottish. The fact that a decaying Presbyterian church has entered the imaginative geography of Scottishness in this way, is surely sufficient justification to explore in more detail its social and spatial relations. Despite this interest, both media and academic understandings of the space of worship appear sketchy or erroneous. Even within the substantial literature on geographies of religion, the very concepts of 'space' and 'worship' have been inadequately theorized. So in attempting to add depth to the analytic category of space, I want to draw upon Lefebvre's seminal *The*

*Production of Space* (1991a)— a volume which has already been put to work in fashioning new approaches to human geography (see, for example, Harvey 1990, 1996; Merrifield 1993; Soja 1989, 1996)— in order to cast light on the spatial processes and paradoxes of Presbyterian worship in the Scottish Hebrides. In so doing, I hope to reconfigure the current geographical interest in religion.

This work is part of a wider ethnographic interest in the politics of Presbyterian Scotland and is largely based on fieldwork undertaken on the island of North Uist during 1998 and 1999. The island is part of the long archipelago which forms the Outer Hebrides off Scotland's north-west coast. It has been described by some of the more conservative Presbyterians as a 'frontier' between the Protestant islands of Lewis and Harris to the north and the Roman Catholic islands of South Uist, Barra and Eriskay to the south. These economically marginal islands largely remain under crofting agriculture, a tenurial system which has long been associated with the predominantly Presbyterian communities that descended from the Clearance Highlanders of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Hunter 1976). Although crofting, the Gaelic language and Reformed Presbyterianism are often considered to be markers of community in the Protestant islands (Mackenzie 1998), the latter of these has received comparatively little research interest. And yet within popular culture, Scottish Presbyterianism is frequently used as a metonym for a variety of unhappy conditions ranging from Gordon Brown's economic 'prudence' to the oppressive patriarchy in Lars Von Trier's acclaimed film *Breaking the Waves* (1996). This secular hybridization of Presbyterianism as a linguistic sign for repression/oppression has also been refracted in more academic commentary.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the paucity of reliable scholarship on contemporary Presbyterianism serves to

perpetuate the more exotic mythologies of Calvinism (alcoholism, mental illness, gloominess) while being simultaneously blind to its everyday meaning and politics.

Against this background, I consider one particular dimension of religious experience—the formally constituted Sabbath service—in an attempt to understand the complex dialectic between society and space that is enacted through public worship. It is my contention that the scholarly treatment of Presbyterianism fails to take seriously the character and function of worship. Drawing from literature in anthropology and religious studies, I suggest that the study of worship should be elemental to much of the new work on the geography of religion. After briefly outlining the character of Presbyterianism, I go on to locate this Hebridean study both within the specific tradition of ecclesiastical geography, and within more general work on religious space. I argue that research in this field could do more to realize the implications of the spatial turn in cultural geography. In addressing this need for a profoundly spatialized analysis of religious life, I advance Lefebvre's conceptual triad of 'spatial practices', 'representations of space' and 'representational spaces' as a template for understanding the production of space through worship. This paper breaks the familiar use of Lefebvre's work to describe only those processes which are bound up with the geography of mobile capital. Despite his dogmatic materialism,<sup>2</sup> Lefebvre often used examples of French ecclesiastical architecture to illustrate wider points, showing that in this respect he was a good deal more heterodox than many of the heirs to his tradition (1991a: 220–221). Before introducing his schema to the empirical detail of Hebridean religion, it is necessary to attend to the historical importance of Reformation theology in the production of space. Such an attempt to correlate theological conviction with spatial practice

is a necessary approach if, as Livingstone, Keane and Boal (1998) suggest, religious space is a product of both material *and* metaphysical processes. Specifically, I deal here with the Calvinist strand of Protestantism to which most Hebridean Presbyterians adhere. If the Reformation represented a seismic change in the nature of organized Christianity, it was revolutionary not least in its radical departure from previous spatial codes. This transformation was, of course, prefigured by the more fundamental shift two thousand years ago from the sacred space of the Judaic temple to that of the early Christian church (see Kunin 1998). But these Protestant rules of space, although ostensibly liberating, have themselves become an orthodoxy replete with a myriad of contradictions and complexities. In the final section of the paper, I consider more closely the spatialities of Presbyterian worship with reference to the churches and worshipping community on North Uist.

### Connecting space and worship

Despite the much-vaunted reassertion of space in critical theory (Soja 1989, 1996), comparatively little attention has been paid to spaces of worship. For many researchers religion remains a matter of *ritual* rather than *geographical* importance. Inasmuch as geography has been brought to bear on religion at all, the discipline has largely been in its pre-Lefebvrian incarnation, concerned with areal patterns within a passive space rather than treating space as an active part of social action. If space and worship have been given insufficient attention independently (such a separation is in any case problematic), then there has been even less of an attempt to explore their inter-relation. In his classic architectural history of Anglican parish churches in colonial Virginia, Dell Upton illus-

trates how the politics and society of pre-Revolutionary America are reflected in the plan, structure, fabric and construction of church buildings (1997). But his work rarely attends to space *in itself*. A few other studies can be said to constitute a specifically *ecclesiastical* geography which, from a positivist stance, consider the empirical arrangement of Christians in Britain (Baker 1966; Davies, Watkins and Winter, 1991; Gay 1971). There is even a similar treatment of religion in the Scottish Highlands, albeit from an earlier era, which attempts to describe and account for the transformations in the ecclesiastical geography associated secession and union within Highland Presbyterianism (Anon 1905). Although in more recent times Donald Macleod has documented some of the characteristics of Highland religious life at the end of the twentieth century (1998), there is no doubt that an empirical survey of geographical distributions of worship would be helpful. That, however, is not my intention here. Rather, I want to forge an alternative ecclesiastical geography which takes as its central theme, the micro-politics and social relations of space in the context of worship.

### *Spaces of worship*

In examining worship in some detail, it is important to acknowledge a debt to anthropologists who have considered the most obviously ritualistic and symbolic aspects of Scottish Presbyterianism, namely Communion and the Sabbath (Ennew 1980; Macdonald 1997; Nadel 1986; Owen 1956; Parman 1990a, 1990b). Even if the geographical literature has not been so particular in this sense, the long-established dialogue between geography and religion has produced a coherent corpus of work, advanced recently by the scholarly interventions and

compendious surveys of Lily Kong (1990, 1993, 2000; Kiong and Kong 2000). In her most recent review of the field (Kong 2000), she highlights various themes which have gained primacy within the discipline: the religious landscape; notions of sacred space and place; dichotomies of the sacred/secular; and the politics and mobilities of pilgrimage. Despite the geographical character of this research, the conception of *space* in relation to both the texts and practices of religion has scarcely changed, a point made almost a decade ago by David Wilson (1993). This is not to say that all geographers of religion have deployed a naïve version of space; Kong, for instance, holds that space is open, contingent and is the outcome of (rather than the container for) complex social processes. But this body of theory which has taken its initiative from Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* has not been fully applied to the religious sphere, despite its increasing influence in economic and social geography (Unwin 2000). It is, however, an emerging field as Valins' recent work on Judaism demonstrates (1999). While geographers have conventionally 'grounded' religious behaviour through a research emphasis on sites, locales and places, there has been little specific attempt to relate the practice of worship and the production of space. This must be our main task.

One might think that there could be no possible precedent for talking about the theory of Henri Lefebvre and the theology of Jean Calvin in the same breadth, given the temporal and political chasms between the two. But although David Livingstone rather tantalizingly mentions both in his paper on Calvinists' engagement with Darwinian theory (1994), the spatial connections have been left unexplored. What, then, is Lefebvre's project? The primary commission of *The Production of Space* is the search for an approach 'which would analyse not things in space but space itself, with a view

to uncovering the social relationships embedded in it' (Lefebvre 1991a: 89). To this end, Lefebvre often illustrates his theses with reference to the monumentalism of Roman Catholic architecture and the space of Mediaeval Christendom (1991a, 1991b). By extending this repertoire to include the material culture of the Reformation, I think it is possible to provide a more complete account of the reciprocal processes of the production of space. Such an approach does not require a critique as resolutely materialist as that of Lefebvre. So in different ways this work simultaneously departs from and adheres to a long tradition of Marxist scholarship on the Reformation (for example, Bloch 1962; Friesen 1974).

Lefebvre's argument is often complex, the form of the book difficult and, being a consummate dialectician, he is prone to self-contradiction as a rhetorical strategy. This latter talent has been dramatically mis-read by Tim Unwin who attempts to argue—in a style reminiscent of Jones on Harvey (Jones 1999; Harvey 1999)—that the notion of the production of space is 'fundamentally flawed' (Unwin 2000). But rather than attempt to summarize the totality of Lefebvre's argument, let us extract a few key points which are helpful for our present interest in worship. Consider, for instance, the unlikely juxtaposition of the following passages, one from our revolutionary Marxist and the other from the more sedate authors of an encyclopaedic treatise on Scottish church architecture:

What [space] ... signifies is dos and don'ts ... above all it prohibits. Its mode of existence, its practical reality (including its form) differs radically from the reality (or being-there) of something written, such as a book. Space is at once result and cause, product and producer. (Lefebvre *The Production of Space* 1991a: 142)

Presbyterians and Puritans discouraged everything

which savoured of the ancient faith, whether in building or in services. The result was that during the century which followed the Reformation there were two styles of ecclesiastical structures erected in the country, one style showing some reverence for the house of God in its form and decoration, and in the appropriateness of the divine service; while the other seemed to be designed, both in its buildings and form of worship, to be as far removed as possible from any outward sign of inward sweetness or grace. (MacGibbon and Ross *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland* 1897: 534)

If there can be any confluence of meaning in these passages—and on an initial inspection this may seem improbable—it must surely be that *form* matters. Lefebvre here refers to a material and spatial order that is both product and producer of social action. As the phrase 'spatial order' implies, the form of space discloses a set of power relations, a system of rules ('dos and don'ts') through which social behaviour is mediated. In order to avoid an artificial dichotomy between a spatial form on the one hand and social behaviour in space on the other, the two must be conceived dialectically as part of the same process, which Lefebvre calls the *production* of space (1991a). With a bold leap of imagination, we can envisage that the authors of the second quotation, MacGibbon and Ross, might be in agreement with this theory inasmuch as they recognize that the form and structure of a building, in some sense, conditions a behavioural response. And that a theological (social) conviction can be held to account for differences in form.

In their discussion of church architecture they contend that the iconographic style of Episcopal religion is more God-honouring and appropriate for collective worship than the minimal aesthetic of Presbyterianism (MacGibbon and Ross 1897). If there is, as I suggest, a

complex dialectic between society and space enacted through religious practice, this is not to say that spaces of worship exist primarily to be read in this specific manner. On the contrary, Lefebvre himself makes clear that ‘space was *produced* before being *read*; nor was it produced in order to be read but to be lived by people with bodies and lives in their particular ... context’ (1991a: 143, original emphasis). But the import of Lefebvre’s work is that the study of space (spatial practices, representations of space, representational spaces) must be considered alongside other textual sources which have conventionally been used in writing the history and geography of Presbyterian Scotland. Lefebvre cautions that

to underestimate, ignore and diminish space amounts to the overestimation of texts, written matter and writing systems along with the readable and the visible, to the point of assigning to these a monopoly on intelligibility. (1991a: 62)

With the exception of a few ethnographic works (most notably Macdonald 1997; Munro 2000; Nadel 1986; Owen 1956; Parman 1990b), mainstream ecclesiastical scholarship has been almost entirely text-based. The material and folk cultures of Presbyterianism, in historical accounts at least (for example, MacLaren 1974; Withers 1998), have been largely eclipsed by official and bureaucratic sources. Given the recent priority accorded to ‘practices and performances’ in geography and anthropology, it is important to look beyond the conventional boundaries of ecclesiastical knowledge in order to uncover some sense of the profoundly spatial everyday experience of worship in both historical and contemporary contexts (see Crang 1998). This, I believe, is the primary challenge for a new ecclesiastical geography.

### *Worship as practice and process*

Any attempt to understand the practice of worship must surely be based on some form of ethnographic engagement with religious community. Written accounts—even hagiographical or pietistical literature on worship—can never sufficiently illuminate the micro-dynamics of formal worship. The observations recorded here are based on sixteen months of fieldwork in the Scottish Hebrides in the period 1998–99, during which time I attended the Sabbath services of the North Uist congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (see Figure 1).

There are four Presbyterian denominations currently worshipping in North Uist, their names betraying the common progenitor of these famously fissile conservative protestant groups (see Bruce, 1985): the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and most recently the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (see Ansdell 1998; Brown 1997; MacDonald 2000a). All share most of the same liturgical and theological features arising out of a common view of the infallibility of the Bible as the Word of God and, in the words of the Shorter Catechism, as ‘the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him’ (Westminster Assembly 1978). The congregations have services twice on a Sunday (a day of strict Sabbath observance) which consist primarily of praise (singing), prayer, Bible reading and the sermon or ‘preaching of the Word’. A service normally lasts just over an hour<sup>3</sup> and is attended by all able-bodied ‘members’ of the church and other ‘adherents’, a distinction to which we shall later return. The congregation are conspicuously well dressed, men wearing suits and women smartly clothed in dresses and hats, this latter article representing the Pauline injunction that women should cover their heads



Figure 1 The Free Church of Scotland, North Uist. Author's photograph.

during worship (First Corinthians 11: 5). The worshippers sit together in the regular pews, often in the same places according to family custom, with the back pews full and the front ones usually empty. Before the service starts—often with the Minister's words 'let us worship God by singing to His praise, Psalm number ...'—the congregation sits silently in the pew. Likewise, there is no conversation in the church after the worship is concluded with the Benediction. The services are conducted in either Gaelic or English or, depending on a diverse set of variables, sometimes both. A measure of reflexivity is important here, as it was clear that my own presence as a non-Gaelic speaker was factored into this process of linguistic brokering. This position was further complicated by

the fact that during most of my fieldwork the Free Church congregations in North Uist were vacant (without a minister) and were often dependent on English-speaking 'pulpit supply' from the mainland. Language is therefore a highly important—though by no means pre-eminent—determinant of the character of worship, Gaelic being associated with particular sound patterns in preaching, singing and prayer (Heath 2000). At the end of the service, once the minister has left the pulpit and stands at the door ready to greet the congregation, the pews are emptied row by row from the back forward, with such rapidity that a visitor might be forgiven for thinking that it was a well-rehearsed fire drill. When safely outside the building, the worshippers exchange fleeting

handshakes before darting into cars and heading for home.<sup>4</sup>

The solemnity of the service and the high reverence of the liturgical style is central to our interest here. It powerfully suggests that we must consider the motivation, function and character of worship as elemental to a more nuanced geography of religion. The problem is that the concept of *worship* is by no means a conventional category of analysis or subject for geographical enquiry. Even within the substantial literature on geographies of religion, the conceptual understanding of formal worship is often regarded as 'given'. Inasmuch as the term can be considered familiar at all, it is usually found lurking in phrases like 'places of worship' or 'the worshipping community' (Kong 2000). In part this can be attributed to the fact that the concept of worship has no universal application in descriptions of religious life. While it may be an appropriate term for the Abrahamic religions, it cannot as easily be used to describe the actions of devotees of Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. There are, however, sufficient commonalities in religious practice to make 'worship' a potentially viable concept. But in using the word we must place it alongside a wider vocabulary of associated terms that retain—as Wittgenstein might describe it—some 'family resemblance'. These related concepts may include *bhakti* (devotionalism) or *dharma* in Hinduism, *pūjā* (honour) in Sikhism and so on (Davies 1994a). Although worship is only one aspect of religious life it is, to be sure, an important one; it emphasizes what people *do* rather than what they 'are' (as in some essentialist readings). It privileges process and practice against religion as a 'thing' or a state.

The superficiality with which worship is regarded is by no means confined to the specific literature on geographies of religion. Historical and cultural geography too has tended to con-

sider the weekly act of collective worship to be, in itself, unremarkable. In the case of Christianity in Scotland, the social functions performed by churches have been reduced to how individuals and groups have used the church as an instrument of some secular transformation. Charles Withers, for instance, in his work on the role of urban Gaelic chapels in lowland Scotland has consistently emphasized the way in which these institutions have been used as meeting places for Gaelic-speaking urban Highlanders; as social elevators for the upwardly mobile; and as civilizing agents of a politicized Anglo-improvement (Withers 1985a, 1985b, 1991, 1998). Many of these aspects of social life in the church are disproportionately weighted by an historical record largely composed of minutes of Presbyterian government, which necessarily deal with points of conflict (MacDonald, I.R. 2000: xv). And from these sources, ecclesiastical historians and geographers have understandably concerned themselves with internal fractures along the fault lines of class, ethnicity and language (MacLaren 1974; Withers 1998). But none of this is to account in any meaningful sense for what brings people to worship, in varied and culturally elaborate forms and with complex socio-spatial dynamics. Those works which have, in some small part, attempted to detail other aspects of sociality and spirituality (extemporary public prayer; the nature of preaching; family worship in the home) without reference to a wider class context, tend to be regarded as narrow and unambitious (see Withers 1996 on MacDonald 1995). I would suggest that a fuller picture can only be obtained by situating the micro-scale practices of worship that are embedded in congregational histories and hagiographies within a wider socio-political frame, while simultaneously taking account of complexity in the *desire* to worship. The sociologist Steve Bruce has attempted to



identify these motivational factors behind Presbyterian religion, even if he arrives at conclusions which are not ultimately very different from the historians (1983).

So if worship is given scant treatment in geographical literature, what definition can we use with regard to our present interest in space? At its most basic, worship must be considered as the human response to a belief in the greatness of God. For Christians, it is a process through which the believer can meditate on specific contrasts: a fleeting temporality in relation to a vast and unfolding eternity; on the moral perfection of God in relation to a 'fallen' humanity (Davies 1994b). In the Reformed Presbyterian tradition, the *Shorter Catechism* is used as a doctrinal statement to summarize the attributes of God for which worship is the necessary response: 'God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth' (Westminster Assembly 1978). Worship must also be considered as the practical affirmation of a particular cosmology such that its constituent elements relate closely to the doctrines or theology of the worshippers (Turner 1979). Although we shall consider these in more detail later in the paper, it is worth restating the varied forms that worship can take (singing, prayer, teaching, reading) which— at a time when cultural geography purports to attend to senses and the body— must be given closer scrutiny. For the meantime we shall consider the explicitly geographical character of Christian worship.

### The space of the Reformation and the reformation of space

It is clear, therefore, that a spatial code is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space: rather it is a means of living in that space, of understanding it,

and of producing it. As such it brings together verbal signs ... and non-verbal signs (music, sounds, evocations, architectural constructions). (Lefebvre 1991a: 47)

That the Scottish Reformation of 1560 had far-reaching consequences for the subsequent political and ecclesiastical development of the nation is incontestable. Whether this has been a progressive or reactionary force is a question which still exercises Scotland's intellectual and artistic elite (see Devine 2000). It certainly brought about changes in the fabric of ecclesiastical Scotland—in churches, religious art and architecture— ostensibly in accordance with the slogan of Reform: '*Sola Fide, Sola Scriptura*' (by faith alone, by scripture alone) (Drummond 1934; Hay 1957; Howard 1995). These changes were themselves evidence of a fundamental transformation in the space of worship: if, as Reformers like Calvin contended, God could no longer be *corporeally* located in the sacrament but as a Spirit manifest in the lives of individuals, then the spatial code must be revised. Space that had hitherto been engineered for the administration of the Mass was now used for different purposes. Signs were redirected from rites of a priestly class to the teachings of a ministerial class. Pulpits replaced the altar as the focal point of public worship and practices of burial and monumentalism were banished from the church to the churchyard (Spicer 2000b). But the enduring remembrance of attacks on pre-Reformation art and architecture is apt to overshadow the energy expended in the creation of new spaces of worship which were designed to emphasize the primacy of the Bible as the Word of God (Spicer 2000a). Far from being a comprehensive break with the past, Scottish Calvinism was able to take earlier forms and practices and adapt them to local use (Dawson 1994: 233). Space was re-formed.

If, as Lefebvre argues, space is a product, then it follows that we should be able to reconstruct the process of its production (in this case through worship) by an examination of its material and representational forms (1991a: 36). This is most easily done with reference to the conceptual triad to which Lefebvre himself constantly returns: spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces. It is not merely through material forms that space is produced but, as in Lefebvre's quotation above, through 'music, sounds, evocations, architectural constructions'. It is to these diverse elements that we must now turn, using the framework of Lefebvre's triad to understand spatialities of Presbyterianism in North Uist.

I have already mentioned the transformations in ecclesiastical space that characterized the Reformation: the importance of the pulpit as a signifier of the Word of God; the minimization of decorative detail, an 'absence' of signs which in itself signifies the accessibility of God only through individual faith and experience. There are, however, numerous other ways in which spatial practices are constitutive of and constituted by Protestant theology, not least those connected with the sacraments. On the occasion of the bi-annual Communion, the front pews are covered in simple white linen cloth to demarcate a space in which church members will participate in the remembrance of the Lord's Supper (see Cheape 1997; Owen 1956; Parman 1990b). Only those who have publicly 'professed faith' through membership are eligible to sit at these tables and such a step is expected to involve rigorous self-examination. In practice, the scrutiny of the individual for 'marks of faith' is conducted by the elders of the congregation who police the Communion roll and ensure that individuals whose lifestyle is incompatible with the accepted norm, or whose understanding of the 'means of salvation' is defective, are refused admission to

the 'Lord's Table'<sup>5</sup> lest they 'eat and drink judgement on themselves' by partaking in an 'unworthy manner' (First Corinthians 11: 29).

Admission to the Lord's Table on the basis of an 'accredited' profession of faith (Macleod 1998: 165) represents a basic separation between members and adherents that is often expressed in a spatial metaphor: 'coming forward'. Prior to the dispensation of the sacrament, members will leave their pew in the back and go forward to take their seat in the linen-designated front pews. On entering this space, the member presents an inscribed 'coin' or 'Communion token' to an elder who thus regulates access to the table (see Figure 2). These tokens are handed out to the members of the congregation at one of the earlier 'preparatory' services in the communion weekend. If this separation constitutes a hierarchy, it is one in which other hierarchies of class, ethnicity, even gender, are momentarily suspended. Indeed, as Slavoj Žižek recently observed of Pauline theology, it can be argued that 'social hierarchy is reflected in an inverted way so that the lowest deserve the greatest honour' (2000: 125; First Corinthians 12: 24). As if to emphasize the social equality at the table, two male members recounted how (in Harris and Lewis) they had been privately reproached by elders for the 'gentlemanly' act of letting their wives into the pew before themselves; this was considered to be an inappropriate expression of difference in the context of communion. This complexity of spatial order evident even within normal Sabbath worship is difficult to describe, far less explain. In an earlier draft of this paper (and thinking of Free Churches more broadly), I wrote that

The ordering of the congregation in the pews represents something of an unspoken gradient of self-estimated piety. To sit near the front is to subtly identify oneself with church membership and thus



Figure 2 A Gaelic communion token from Spring Garden Parish Church, Aberdeen, 1839 (28 mm diameter). Photo: J. Livingstone, courtesy of I.R. MacDonald.

with particular codes of social behaviour outside the space of worship. (MacDonald 2000b)

But this is to over-simplify an impossibly complex pattern. While the spatial metaphor of 'coming forward' has some subtle transference to non-communion services (congregants generally gravitate to the back of the church<sup>6</sup>), it must be qualified by numerous other conventions, as in the practice of people sitting in 'family' pews. An adherent may sit nearer the front, not because of any spiritual confidence but because a particular pew was historically occupied by the adherent's family. This distinction between communicant members and non-communicant adherents is augmented by another spatial segregation between elders and the congregation. In Hebridean Presbyterian churches the elders sit apart from the congregation in a demarcated space below the pulpit, commonly referred to as *an suidheachan mor* (the big pew). Explanations for this practice are

varied, the most frequent being that elders need to defend the pulpit from false teaching and heresy and must, symbolically at least, be ready to intervene. Even more intriguing is the declining custom of allowing only ordained ministers access to the pulpit. If another minister could not be found to take the service in the absence or illness of the incumbent it was common for a lay preacher or elder to lead the worship. This would not, however, be taken from the pulpit which was strictly reserved for the separate (and spatially differentiated) teaching authority of the minister.

These Protestant rules of space are, of course, replete with numerous contradictions. Lefebvre writes:

The indispensable opposition between inside and outside, as indicated by thresholds, doors and frames, though often underestimated, simply does not suffice when it comes to defining monumental space. Such a space is determined by what may take

place there, and consequently by what may not take place there (prescribed/proscribed, scene/obscene). (1991a: 224)

This contest between prescribed and proscribed behaviour is severely paradoxical. One the one hand, the concept of sacred space is an anathema to the Calvinist tradition, as one Free Church 'worthy' put it:

We Scotch, when we have got a principle, we are accustomed to follow it out to all lengths. God alone can sanctify place and time. Under the N[ew] T[estament] dispensation *no place is more sacred than another*. The Sabbath, which was sanctified from the beginning when God rested from all His work of creation, remains sacred, after the mosaic dispensation of Law is done away in Christ. No other time is sacred. (Rev. John 'Rabbi' Duncan quoted in Ross 1998; my emphasis)

So anxious were the Reformers to avoid the heresy that church buildings could have a territorial monopoly on religious experience, that the churches were locked when not in use so as to reinforce the doctrine that God was accessible at all times and in all places. But although the space of Presbyterian worship cannot be considered 'sanctified', notions of sacred/profane are still invoked in spatial practice. The church buildings, for instance, are not generally used for other purposes. Indeed for a church to host, say, a coffee morning would be regarded among certain conservative Presbyterians as sowing the seed of schism. As we shall consider briefly below, the representational space is also carefully policed lest rogue signs distract the worshippers. It is also important to attend to the embodied nature of spatial practice which is not only conditioned by optic senses but by sonic and haptic ones. Lefebvre again:

Silence itself, in a place of worship, has its music. In

cloister or cathedral, space is measured by the ear: the sounds, voices and singing reverberate in an interplay set up when a reading voice breathes new life into a written text. (1991a: 225)

There is a sonorous geography at work here, which finds its varied expression in the very different sounds (and in a sense, different spaces) of English and Gaelic. If space, as Lefebvre suggests, is measured by the ear then its production must be a function of language. This is perhaps most obviously seen in relation to the practice of unaccompanied Psalm singing (i.e. without an organ) in accordance with the 'regulatory principle', the idea that only devotional practices which have an explicit Biblical warrant should be introduced into public worship. The praise is led by a precentor (always a man) who, standing at the front and facing the congregation, will choose a tune from the Scottish metrical Psalmody and initiate the singing on the instruction of the minister. In Gaelic worship, the precentor will sing a phrase—'giving out the line'—which is then repeated by the whole congregation, thereby establishing an acoustic relation between the precentor and the congregation. The intonation of Gaelic Psalm singing is appreciably more elaborate than its English equivalent, which prompted one uncomprehending nineteenth-century tourist to describe it as 'nothing but the baying of a pack of hyenas' (MacDonald 2001: 163). On this mutual constitution of sound and space, the psychologist Erwin Straus anticipates Lefebvrian ideas by fully ten years, drawing particular attention to musical tones which 'approach us ... surround us ... fill space, shaping themselves in temporal sequences' (1966: 7; see also Straus 1963: 323).<sup>7</sup> Remembering haptic and kinaesthetic senses, it is worth mentioning that bodily practices of standing for prayer, sitting for Psalm singing and through long sermons on hard pews, also constitute a significant part of

spatial practice. Bodies in pews are divided by respectful distances both in relation to each other and, arguably, to the subtle gradient of spiritual self-confidence from front to back. Moreover, there are lateral patterns of social interaction as in the practice of covertly dispensing boiled sweets at the start of the sermon (see Macdonald 1997: 170). This acceptable transgression of an otherwise strict decorum operates along the line of a pew, a sweet being pressed from one palm to another with an artful dexterity.

To the extent that spaces of worship were first 'conceived', it is appropriate to examine the context of Presbyterian church building in the Scottish Highlands and islands. Lefebvre saw that representations of space 'are tied to the relations of production and the "order" that these relations impose' (1991a: 33); which is to say that we must look at the social and political context of worship in Reformation Scotland. Older pre-Reformation churches in the Highlands had often been built on holy sites associated with earlier Celtic saints who, as Jane Dawson has remarked, 'preferred isolation to comfort' (1994: 243). Small islands were favoured locations despite (or perhaps because) of their inaccessibility. As weekly worship had been uncommon, this had never previously been considered a problem. But with the Reformation transforming patterns of religious observance such that all parishioners were expected to attend worship every Sabbath, the logistical difficulties in getting the people to the church were formidable. The British Government, being concerned with the religious instruction of the masses, embarked on a large-scale church-building programme in the early nineteenth century, resulting in the so-called 'Parliamentary Churches'. Later in the nineteenth century, after the Free Church of Scotland departed from the Established Kirk at the cataclysmic Disruption of 1843, another

tranche of churches were erected to accommodate the rise in evangelical Presbyterianism. Even then, there were still large numbers of people for whom no formal provision of worship was made (Anon 1905: 21).

It would be wrong, however, to give the impression here that spaces of worship were strictly conterminous with church buildings. In addition to the Reformation insistence on the worship being an individual as well as collective activity (i.e. a feature of both *domestic* and ecclesiastical spheres), there are numerous instances, much celebrated in the hagiographic tradition, of worship being conducted outside (Meek 1997). For the most part this was during times of poverty or conflict, particularly in the years following the Disruption when landlords hostile to the newly formed Free Church often denied permission for church building. The non-cooperation of the proprietor was certainly one reason why in the mid-nineteenth century, the North Uist Communion were held at the local landmark, Creag Håstain, a large erratic boulder (Kilmuir Church Centenary Committee 1994). Curiously, at a time of revival in the 1950s this site again became a key venue for evangelistic services run by the Faith Mission (Ferguson 2000). If these spaces would not be described as sacred, their symbolic importance was in no sense lost on the community of worshippers.

Representational space is alive: it speaks. It has affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling house; or square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action, and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. (Lefebvre 1991a: 42)

Both ideology and knowledge are, for Lefebvre, subsumed within the wider term of 'representation' (1991a). These 'representational spaces'<sup>8</sup> (or 'spaces of representation' in other trans-

lations) refer not merely to material signifiers but also extend to social practices and 'lived situations'. Specifically, we can take this to mean the complex interaction of bodies and signifying practices that are most obvious in the ordering of church boundaries, architecture and décor. But there is also a sense in which it is particularly necessary to consider space here as time-space; the representational space of the church is difficult to separate from sanctified time of the Sabbath, or, as in the case of a weekday service, the formally constituted time for public worship. Thus the production of space in worship is a function of the time set aside for worship; the building is used for no other purpose.

The minimalism of this space has seldom in itself been assessed in artistic terms. For the travel writer Hugh Quigley, writing in the 1930s, the Highland churches simply could not compete with the cultural glories that were on offer elsewhere:

If one were to measure the contribution of the Highlands to creative art in religious buildings and memorials, communal dwellings or sculpture, painted and illuminated MSS., one would have difficulty in discovering anything of real value. (1936: 9)

If he offers no explanation for this creative deficit, then basic material poverty goes some way to accounting for the sparseness of detail, at least in many religious buildings. Even in the Catholic islands of Barra and South Uist, the churches are modestly arrayed compared with their urban counterparts. But in the Protestant Hebrides there are, of course, other reasons for visual austerity. For most of the notable Reformers—Luther, Calvin, Zwingli—it was necessary to be seen to react against what they saw on the iconolatry of Rome and protect the spirit of the first commandment (Spicer 2000a).

Given the importance of the Geneva leaders for the Scottish Reformation, it is unsurprising that the home-grown reformers purged the interior of churches with an almost Swiss vigour (Cameron 1984; Shaw 1985). Over four centuries later these same principles can be read in the representational space of Hebridean Presbyterianism. I want finally to consider three examples from the Free Church in North Uist.

High on an outside wall of one Free Church building in North Uist, there are a series of small, seemingly random marks in the stone, as if one of the granite blocks had been used as workbench by the mason. This would, in all probability, be the only explanation were it not for the fact that the masons contracted to build the church at the turn of the twentieth century were from South Uist, and therefore Roman Catholic. If this were not suspicious enough, two of the marks intersect to form what looks like the sign of a cross (Figure 3). The coincidence of these facts suggested, in certain Protestant minds, an alternative account: that this was a Catholic conspiracy to impose the Papish sign (the cross) on the otherwise clean space of Reformed worship. The fact that such an explanation could be offered—however disbelievably—shows that policing the representational space of worship is not confined to those who first conceived or designed the building. Rather, these spatial codes are actively negotiated, contested and reproduced within the community of worshippers.

Let us take a further example. One of the church members described how she had decided to brighten up the area outside another of the churches with some bedding plants which would add colour to the otherwise plain surroundings. Within a day the plants had mysteriously disappeared only to be later found abandoned at the back of the building. If suspicion was directed towards the elders of the congregation, this was a visual contest that



Figure 3 Wall markings on the Free Church with detail of a cross. Author's photograph.

reflected a more complex debate between very different social actors. On the one hand, here was a *woman* who had exercised some personal autonomy; who, despite being local and thus aware of (and even sympathetic to) Hebridean norms of behaviour, was aligned with a modernizing movement characterized by a more relaxed attitude to, for instance, the use of contemporary Bible translation or the practice of women wearing hats.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the elders were, even by the standards of the denomination, considered conservative and carefully protective of their own hegemony. But if planting flowers outside the church can be

seen as a challenge to existing spatial codes, we can consider another more enduring example from inside the building. Having emphasized the solemnity of the worship service, it might seem surprising that 'graffiti' on church pews could be part of the material record of worship. But in many of the island churches the genealogies of the worshipping community are inscribed in the pews, with initials, names and dates etched into the woodwork with a pocket knife. Writing graffiti can never be a very clandestine activity as long as it involves writing your name in a prominent place. But unlike its urban counterpart, these graffiti are not very

controversial. They do not ‘adorn in order to desecrate’ (Stallabrass 1996: 148); rather they are a powerful reminder that the space of worship belongs to the congregation, purchased by their tithes and, in some cases, actually built with their labour. Graffiti must be interpreted in a proprietorial sense: *this is our space*. A very Presbyterian transgression, it is a breach of etiquette which affirms the ultimate authority of pew over pulpit.

### Some concluding remarks

Opening the paper with a globally recognized image of Presbyterian worship from a tourist guide book, I have suggested that despite some popular interest in these images, the production of ecclesiastical space is thinly conceived in both popular and academic representations. I have attempted to show that Henri Lefebvre’s theses on space apply to forms of sociality which are not necessarily bound up with the geography of mobile capital and, specifically, can be used in the context of understanding spatial dimensions of religious life. Taking space seriously in this sense, or at least resisting the hegemony of written and verbal sources, must be central to future geographies of religion. If the title of this paper alludes to the Protestant Reformation, it is also intended to qualify Lefebvre’s own title by suggesting that space is produced in and through earlier spatial forms in a dialectical process of re-formation. As I have shown, the sixteenth-century ecclesiastical revolution did not start anew, but inherited, modified and re-worked earlier representations of space. It was certainly a fundamental change, or more accurately, a set of changes, which are constantly re-negotiated through the practice of worship.

In January 2000, two weeks after presenting this paper at the Institute of British Geogra-

phers, the Free Church of Scotland underwent a denominational split or secession which divided several congregations throughout Scotland, including the community in North Uist (MacDonald 2000). It is significant that this recent conflict has followed the usual recipe for schism (Bruce 1985): being passionately democratic and free-thinking (believing that all people can discern God’s will), conservative Protestants have a structural propensity for fission (Wallis 1979). It is as if, like amoebas, they have to divide to survive. Of most interest is that fact that conflict has to some extent served to test the relation between theology and space that I have offered in this paper. In North Uist where the conservative minority have left to form the Free Church (Continuing), the remaining group adhering to the ‘historic’ Free Church have asserted their defiance against the strictest theological and spatial orthodoxy by holding tea and coffee in the church after the evening service. Although this is held in a room adjacent to the main church, it is nevertheless a practice that would not have been sanctioned by the conservative minister and elders who have since seceded. In this case, the space of worship has been used to enact a new liberty which was unavailable under the earlier regime of leadership. And in a new Free Church recently started on the neighbouring island of Benbecula, the congregation are meeting in a coffee bar rather than in a church building. Predictably, this offers dramatic contrasts in the style of worship, the spatial order opening up new possibilities of informality and social engagement before and after the service.

Thus, theological convictions are enacted in spatial practices, embodied in representations of space and signified in representational spaces. But space also reciprocates: theology, in theory and practice, can be upheld or transformed by the spatial in/formalities of worship. It is to this dialectic that Lefebvre brings a



particular insight. *The Production of Space* is as useful in deciphering the spatial code of worship as of capital; a code which, as we can see, 'is a means of living in that space, of understanding it and of producing it' (1991a: 48).

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## Notes

1 John Agnew's article 'Liminal Travellers', for instance, offers the common but suspect notion that the 'hegemony' of the 'organic intelligentsia' (Presbyterian ministers) 'undoubtedly contributes to a number of social problems, such as high levels of anxiety and obsessional disorders among Hebridean women and very high levels of alcoholism among the menfolk' (1996). To support this argument, Agnew casually cites the comparative research of Brown and Harris while seeming not to notice that they explicitly refrain from drawing this conclusion (1978: 250–253; Brown, Davidson, Harris, Maclean, Pollock and Prudo 1977). In a comparative study of psychiatric disorders from Camberwell, London and North Uist, the authors observe that there is less depression and more anxiety in the Hebridean women, though the difference is not statistically significant. Within the North Uist sample, anxiety is greater and depression is less in those women who are well integrated into the community, church attendance being only one of three markers of integration. Brown and Harris say nothing about 'alcoholism in menfolk'.

- 2 In 'Notes written one Sunday in the French countryside', Lefebvre identifies churches as part of the 'irksome and incomprehensible mumbo-jumbo' to which dialectical methods of de-mystification must be applied (1991b: 224).
- 3 By Hebridean standards this service is unusually short, a result of the same minister having services in two places in the late morning. One visiting preacher from the neighbouring island of Lewis clearly felt constrained by such a time limit; in his own congregation he had the liberty of three hours.
- 4 It is necessary to say something about the nature of the fieldwork, which was principally based on observations of Sabbath worship together with informal conversations with the congregants. Unlike many ethnographic accounts, I make no attempt to represent their voices *directly* in this paper. This is because discussing worship and its spatial codes is acutely personal: in talking about the distinction between members and adherents, for instance, one is skirting around a discourse which is simultaneously about eternal destinies and the ultimate separation between heaven and hell. It would thus be hard to conceive of another subject, which has such a peculiar sensitivity.
- 5 Although most churches have a table that is used specifically for communion, the term 'Lord's Table' is generic and refers not to the furniture but rather the social space in which the sacrament is dispensed.
- 6 There is a more pronounced pattern in the Lewis churches with adherents tending to sit in the upstairs balcony and members downstairs (see Parman 1990a: 149).
- 7 I am grateful to David N. Livingstone for drawing my attention to the work of Straus.
- 8 In the Donald Nicholson-Smith translation this is term is written as 'representational spaces', although other commentators including Ed Soja have since opted for 'spaces of representation' (Soja 1989).
- 9 For a fuller discussion of the split in the Free Church of Scotland, see MacDonald, F. (2000a).

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## Abstract translations

### *Pour une théorie spatiale du culte: observations sur L'écosse Presbytérienne*

En vue d'ajouter une profondeur théorique à la littérature émergente sur la géographie des religions, cet article porte une attention particulière au presbytérianisme évangélique des Highlands Écossais. Je soutiens que le 'culte', un terme qui ne possède pas d'application universelle au sein des études religieuses, a reçu peu d'attention dans la littérature géographique et doit être examiné à la fois en tant que procédé et en tant que pratique. Le culte religieux est ici envisagé comme une réponse humaine

dynamique et variée à la proposition théologique de Divinité. Plus spécifiquement, ce travail explore la dialectique entre la théologie de la Réforme et la pratique formelle du culte, une relation qui s'exprime de façon spatiale dans l'office du Sabbath. Partant de l'usage commun des travaux de Henri Lefebvre sur la production de l'espace décrivant la géographie du capital mobile, j'applique ses observations moins connues sur l'architecture ecclésiastique française au culte Calviniste des Hébrides-Extérieures. Les informations utilisées dans ce travail ont été recueillies au cours d'un engagement ethnographique prolongé avec l'île de Nord Uist et sont placées dans le contexte plus large des représentations du Presbytérianisme dans la culture populaire.

**Mots clés:** espace, religion, culte, Réforme, Presbytérien, Écosse.

### *Hacia una teoría espacial de culto: algunas observaciones de la Escocia presbiteriano*

Haciendo una tentativa de profundizar la teoría sobre la nueva literatura que trata las geografías de religión, este papel enfoca a los conceptos de espacio y culto con respecto a la práctica del presbeterianismo evangélico en las tierras altas de Escocia. Sugiero que el 'culto' ('worship'), un término que no tiene aplicación universal en los estudios sobre la religión, ha sido ligeramente concebido en la literatura de geografía y debe ser examinado tanto como un proceso como una práctica. Aquí el culto es considerado como la dinámica y variada respuesta humana a la proposición teológica de la Divinidad. En particular, el papel examina el dialéctico entre la teología de la Reformación y la práctica de culto formal, una relación que tiene su expresión espacial en el oficio del Sábado. Desviando del uso familiar de la obra de Henri Lefebvre sobre la producción de espacio para describir la geografía de capital móvil, yo aplico sus omitidas observaciones sobre la arquitectura eclesiástica francesa al culto Calvinista en las Hébridias Externas. La materia de este papel fue acumulada en el curso de un estudio etnográfico a largo plazo en la isla de North Uist y aquí la coloco en el contexto de representaciones más amplias del presbeterianismo dentro de la cultura popular.

**Palabras claves:** espacio, religion, culto, Reforma, presbeteriano, Escocia.