

Law, Religion, Health and Healing in Africa



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28 THE ROLES OF LAW, RELIGION AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN SOUTH AFRICAN CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

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INTRODUCTION

During the Covid-19 pandemic large gatherings, including church services, were prohibited by law, and once these were allowed again, churches could only comply with the rigorous requirements of social distancing by leaving empty seats between congregants. Covid regulations led to a resurgence of authoritarianism, as civil rights, including freedom of religion and belief, were suspended in reaction to the global pandemic. In South Africa, some religious groups continued to conduct services and hold religious gatherings in defiance of lockdown regulations, and church ministers and congregation members became lawbreakers, attracting criminal records. Some religious groups saw the ban on faith-based gatherings as an attack on religion and challenged what they called irrational and arbitrary regulations in court. But many churches and faith leaders actively concurred or passively accepted these restrictions. As denominations moved to online or virtual services that streamed sermons and messages of health and healing to a wider, global audience, questions on how the pandemic is changing the religious landscape arose.

During the pandemic, many South Africans were forced to reconsider how and where they worship, but as restrictions were lifted, public health protocols often remained, and although churches attempted to return to a new normal, services continued to be livestreamed and in-person attendance remained optional. The trend of substituting in-person services with online services is concerning when one considers the future of traditional church architecture. A historical investigation of the evolution of Christian church-building through the ages, reveals five important elements of its architecture. First, Christianity is a congregational religion, focused on the sense of community through worship *in which concepts of ecclesia*² and *koinonia*³

- 1 PhD in Architecture, University of the Free State; Founding member of Y and K Architects; 2021 inaugural Emory University–Halle Institute Fulbright South Africa Distinguished Chair at the Center for the Study of Law and Religion.
- 2 The word *ecclesia* was originally used to describe Christian assembly and refers to the congregation or community of believers. *Ecclesia* derives from the Greek for “called together”. The church consists of those that are called together by God. Gaum F, Boesak A and Botha W (ed). 2008. *Christelike Kernensiklopedie* [Christian Core Encyclopedia]. Wellington: Lux Verbi: Bybelmedia, 286.
- 3 *Koinonia* is a Greek word that means Christian fellowship, joint participation and communion with God, or more commonly, with fellow Christians. See Roth LM. 1993. *Understanding*

are especially important: Second, Christian churches have a religious function and are designed to include liturgy and rituals of worship that represent the communal response to and participation in the sacred. Third, Christian religious structures containing sacred space have through the millennia been regarded as the pinnacle of architecture for their ability to transcend the physical world and to create a sense of God. Fourth, church architecture has a spiritual dimension that is not limited to its religious function. Buildings designed specifically for spiritual activities have experiential qualities that play a role in spiritual healing. Finally, although church architecture symbolises the unified intent of a congregation and its expression of faith, its pastoral care function of charitable giving extends beyond the limits of its architecture and is performed outside the boundaries of the physical structure of brick and mortar. These statements address both the functional and the spiritual requirements of church architecture.

The five points above can be summarised as assembly and community, liturgy and ritual, sacred space, spiritual healing and pastoral care. This chapter argues that the prohibition by law of faith-based gatherings during the Covid-19 pandemic seriously disrupted these important functions of Christian worship. Although online services have become a valuable part of the ministry of the church, they cannot replace what is contained in its architecture: the congregation of a religious community that actively participates in its rituals in the sacred space of a church building. There are, however, functions that will always be performed in the outside world, beyond the confines of church-building. When the pandemic disrupted pastoral care, it was proved to be an essential service that could not be done through the virtual medium of cyberspace.

COVID-19, THE LAW AND THE CHURCH

On 15 March 2020, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, South Africa's Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs,⁴ declared a national state of disaster, due to the magnitude and severity of the Covid-19 outbreak, which had been declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). On 18 March 2020, Dlamini Zuma issued regulations aimed at preventing an escalation of the disaster, and alleviating, containing and minimising its effects. On 23 March 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced an initial 21-day lockdown. Community gatherings

Architecture: Its elements, history and meaning. New York: Herbert Press, 243; Koorts J. 1974. *Beginsels van Gereformeerde Kerkbou* [Principles of Reformed Church-building]. Bloemfontein: Sacum Beperk, 1.

- 4 The Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), as designated under Section 3 of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002, *Government Gazette* Vol 451 No 24252), through the Disaster Management Act of 18 March 2020 (*Government Gazette* Vol 657 No 43107) and the Regulations to address, prevent and combat the spread of Coronavirus Covid-19 of 25 March 2020 [the last, hereinafter Covid Regulations]. The National State of Disaster was only lifted on 5 April 2022, nearly two years after it was introduced.

other than funerals were stopped immediately and wedding receptions and celebrations had to be cancelled.

Between 26 March 2020 and 1 October 2021, the country's alert levels fluctuated between Levels 5 and 1. This risk-adjusted approach was guided by several criteria, including the level of infections and rate of transmission, the capacity of health facilities, the extent of the implementation of public health interventions and the economic and social impact of continued restrictions.⁵ The aim was to "flatten the curve" of infections and deaths related to Covid-19. Under Alert Levels 5 and 4, only fifty people or less were allowed to attend funerals, provided that not more than 50% of the venue capacity was used, with persons observing a distance of at least one and a half metres from each other. Travel between different metropolitan areas was forbidden, but since funerals were deemed essential services, attendees were allowed to travel. However, this was only under the condition that a permit was obtained from the nearest magistrate's office or police station upon submission of a death certificate. The duration of a funeral was restricted to two hours,⁶ and attendees had to adhere to health protocols, including the wearing of masks.⁷ Faith-based gatherings were prohibited, and church services with live congregations came to a halt completely.

Under Level 3, faith-based or religious gatherings were allowed, but attendance was limited to fifty persons or less for indoor venues and a hundred persons or less for outdoor venues, provided that not more than 50% of the venue capacity was used and with persons observing a distance of at least one and a half metres from each other.⁸ According to modern building standards and ergonomic requirements for church buildings, the space required in a Protestant church is 0.4-0.5 m² per person.⁹ Social distancing meant that the minimum of 2.25 m² per person as required by law could only be obtained by leaving empty seats between congregants. As alert levels decreased, more people were allowed at indoor and outdoor faith-based or religious gatherings, as well as at funerals, but health protocols remained in place.

The regulations determined that a convener of faith-based or religious gatherings had to ensure compliance with the limitation on the number of attendees, failing which the convener was committing an offence and was liable, upon conviction, to a fine or imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months or to both a fine and imprisonment.¹⁰ Also, a person who attended a faith-based or religious gathering and who knew or ought reasonably to have known or suspected that the number of

5 South Africa. 2022. "About Covid-19. About Alert System". Online at: <https://www.gov.za/Covid-19/about/about-alert-system>

6 Covid Regulation 35(5).

7 The wearing of face masks in public space was compulsory under Regulation 67(a).

8 Covid Regulation (36)(4)(i).

9 Neufert E. 1970. *Architects' Data*. London: Crosby Lockwood and Son Ltd, 334. Protestant churches do not require kneelers with hassocks as do Anglican and Catholic churches.

10 Covid Regulation 36(6).

persons exceeded the limitation provided for in the Covid regulations, was committing an offence and was subject to the same potential penalties.¹¹

Where a gathering was in contravention of the regulations, an enforcement officer had to order the persons to disperse and, if they refused, take appropriate action which might, subject to the Criminal Procedure Act,¹² include the arrest and detention of any person at the gathering.¹³ These regulations had the potential to make lawbreakers or criminals out of church ministers and congregation members, which is exactly what happened.

CRIMINALISING CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND CHALLENGING THE LAW

During the Covid-19 pandemic, over 400 000 South Africans spent time behind bars for failing to adhere to Covid lockdown regulations.¹⁴ Congregants who defied these regulations by gathering to worship were dispersed by police, who often fired rubber bullets and tear gas at them. Churchgoers became lawbreakers, were arrested and given the option of admission of guilt fines, which enabled a person to admit guilt in advance to avoid having to appear in court on a minor criminal charge. But these fines had long-term consequences. Section 56(1) of the Criminal Procedure Act clearly states that the payment of an admission of guilt fine will be the same as being convicted and sentenced in court. Traffic offenses do not lead to criminal records, but contraventions of lockdown regulations often did. If a criminal record arises from paying an admission of guilt fine, the criminal record will be valid for ten years, which naturally has serious implications, especially when seeking employment in future.¹⁵

The Covid-19 pandemic had many consequences, and one of most notable was that it further exposed existing fault lines in society, which in South Africa means the extremes of inequality between rich and poor.¹⁶ Rich people, who could afford lawyers, were advised to not pay admission of guilt fines and could therefore avoid attracting criminal records for curfew violations, but poor people who do not have access to lawyers, were advised by arresting officers to pay these fines without knowing that they would have a criminal record, which can take up to ten years to expunge.¹⁷ Ultimately, lockdown regulations did not affect the rich as much as they

11 Covid Regulation 7.

12 Criminal Procedure Act No. 51 of 1977, s 56(1).

13 Covid Regulation 16(a) and (b).

14 "Over 400,000 people have been arrested for breaking South Africa's Covid-19 rules", *BusinessTech*, 8 April 2021.

15 "The consequence of paying an admission of guilt fine", *LegalWiseZA*, May 2020.

16 York G, "Covid-19 exposes the fault lines of equality across South Africa", *Globe and Mail*, 5 July 2020.

17 "Covid-19: Eased lockdown and rule of law webinar", *Mail & Guardian*, 25 May 2020.

did the poor. Townships are densely populated, and stay-at-home orders presented a challenge when ten people or more lived together in a single shack.¹⁸

Critics of the regulations said that law enforcement was using a sledgehammer to kill a fly and that the crime did not fit the punishment,¹⁹ but the Department of Justice stated that regulations were there to curb a wave of infections. Initially, we did not understand the virus, and the rules were harsh. Police were accused of trying to reach a target in terms of number of arrests. People were angry, because police focused on soft targets such as surfers on a beach,²⁰ or congregants in a church.²¹ Police Minister Bheki Cele was accused of diverting attention away from real criminals, or those responsible for state capture.²² Furthermore, if the aim was to lessen infection, it made no sense to arrest people and force them into a crowded holding cell with 20 to 25 people sharing the same space, where the danger of getting infected was greater than staying out past curfew by a few minutes.

When the pastor and several congregants were arrested during a church service in Sebokeng for defying lockdown regulations under Level 3, even though the service was conducted outdoors and worshippers were wearing facemasks,²³ many religious groups saw the Disaster Management Act of 18 March 2020 and the Covid Regulations of 25 March 2020 as an attack on religion. Congregants insisted that the government had no power over them and that they were not consulted when these regulations were made, since they were not members of the South African Council of Churches.²⁴

18 Harrisburg K. 2020. "Coronavirus exposes 'brutal inequality' of South Africa's townships", *Reuters*, 12 June. See also Fisher DA et al. 2022. "Locked Down: Economic and Health Effects of Covid-19 Response on Residents of a South African Township", *Global Social Welfare*, 3 August. Townships are urban living areas that were historically created under South Africa's apartheid regime for exclusive occupation by people classified as non-white, i.e., black, coloured or Indian. Although these segregated areas have undergone transformation since the end of apartheid, they are still mainly occupied by lower socioeconomic groups. See Donaldson R. "South African Township Transformation", in Michalos AC (ed). 2014. *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Dordrecht: Springer.

19 Broadbent A and Smart BTH. 2020. "Why a one-size-fits-all approach to Covid-19 could have legal consequences", *The Conversation*, 24 March; Muller SM. 2020. "Covid-19 in South Africa: A critical assessment of the first 90 days", *The Conversation*, 7 December.

20 Taylor K. 2020. "South Africa's lockdown exposes inequalities", *Pavement Pieces*, 14 May.

21 Sangotsa V. 2020. "Eastern Cape villagers arrested over lockdown church service", *Sunday Times*, 11 April.

22 Trippe K. 2022. "Pandemic policing: South Africa's most vulnerable face a sharp increase in police related brutality", *Africa Source* (blog), The Atlantic Council, 24 June. So far, prosecution of state capture is slow and former president Jacob Zuma, under whose watch it happened, still manages to avoid persecution. See Republic of South Africa, "Judicial Commission Inquiry into State Capture Report, Part III, vol. 2, BOSASA.

23 "SAPS breaks up Sebokeng church gathering", *eNCA/YouTube*, 10 January 2021.

24 Ramaphosa held a conference with religious leaders, but churches outside the Council of Churches say they did not agree anything with the president. See "Sebokeng Church says they were brutalized by the police", *South African Breaking News*, 2020.

This attack on religion did not remain unchallenged. The South African National Christian Forum (SANCF) filed urgent papers in the Gauteng High Court in Johannesburg to challenge the lockdown regulations that resulted in churches being closed. The decision to ban religious gatherings was heard in a virtual sitting of the court. Senior Council Advocate Margaretha Engelbrecht argued on behalf of the SANCF and Solidariteit Helpende Hand:²⁵ “Let me make it clear: what is being challenged is not [the] government’s response to the pandemic. What is being challenged is the irrational and arbitrary decision of the minister to prohibit faith-based gatherings whilst she allowed at the same time, a variety of social gatherings in restaurants.”²⁶ The case, however, was removed from the urgent court roll in February following the announcement by President Cyril Ramaphosa lifting the ban, with places of worship being permitted to resume their services with a maximum amount of fifty people indoors and a hundred people outdoors.²⁷ But Engelbrecht continued that, while the ban had been lifted, the country was moving towards the December period, and a real possibility existed that the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister Dlamini Zuma might ban faith-based gatherings once more, while keeping open restaurants, gyms, and casinos. Engelbrecht questioned banning faith-based gatherings, when people in restaurants, casinos and other public places could not keep a distance of 1.5 metres.²⁸

EXPOSING AUTHORITARIANISM

The recent “Partygate” debacle in the United Kingdom, where former Prime Minister Boris Johnson was fined for contravening the lockdown regulations by hosting a birthday party at 10 Downing Street, is not unique to that country. In South Africa, similar double standards came to light when officials were spotted attending funerals and other gatherings without wearing face masks.²⁹ It must be said that the South African government is notoriously corrupt,³⁰ and many government officials were linked to tender fraud in the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE)

25 Solidariteit Helpende Hand is an affiliate of Solidarity trade union that promotes social issues in the Afrikaner community. The name means “Helping Hand”. Online at: <https://helpendehand.co.za>

26 Maphanga C. 2021. “Lockdown advocate tells court curb on religious gatherings was ‘irrational and arbitrary’”, *News 24*, 22 November.

27 Maphanga C. 2021. “Lockdown: Issue of curb on religious gatherings still relevant as state of emergency continues, court hears”, *News 24*, 24 November.

28 Maphanga, “Lockdown advocate tells court curb on religious gatherings was ‘irrational and arbitrary’”.

29 Magome M. “South African cops investigate official for not wearing a mask”, *Associated Press*, 25 January.

30 See Lodge T. 1998. “Political corruption in South Africa”, *African Affairs* 97(387):157-187; Gumede W. 2019. “Why corruption killed dreams of a better South Africa”, *University of the Witwatersrand News*, 19 September; Southall R. 2019. A democracy or a kleptocracy? How South Africa stacks up”, *The Conversation*, 6 February.

and communication services to the government.³¹ Millions of rand from Covid funds meant for the poor, disappeared or cannot be accounted for. Covid has made more visible, or has exposed, the dysfunctional aspects that already existed, including unemployment, poverty, government inefficiency and corruption.

Law and religion scholar Mark Hill writes in the introduction to the *Routledge Handbook on Freedom of Religion or Belief* that:

[The Covid-19 pandemic] has led to a resurgence of authoritarianism, particularly in Western democracies, with towns, cities and entire countries being placed into lockdown and places of worship closed, with the active concurrence, or passive acceptance, of faith leaders. Civil rights, including freedom to manifest religion and belief, have effectively been suspended in consequence of a global health emergency. Severe limitations on personal and associational autonomy – unthinkable in normal times – have been imposed, in circumstances in which most major faith groups have been complicit and supportive. It will be interesting to see how the landscape will have changed after the current public health emergency has passed.³²

Although one can debate whether South Africa is a Western democracy,³³ this statement is equally applicable, and asking how the religious landscape has changed and what the reaction of the church was in South Africa, is relevant to this argument.

VIRTUAL SERVICES: A NEW FORM OF WORSHIP

As mentioned above, some religious groups continued to conduct services and hold religious gatherings in defiance of lockdown regulations, but many churches and faith leaders actively concurred or passively accepted these restrictions. Churches that could, replaced their traditional services with online or virtual services, and

31 Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize has close links to the communications company *Digital Vibes* that colluded in the tender awarded by the national health department. See Singh O. 2021. "SIU prob into R82m tender related the Zwele Mkhize's associates 'at an early stage'", *The Sunday Times*, 25 February. There are many more examples. "An estimated R500 billion Covid-19 budget allocation is alleged to have been whipped away in just three months in tender fraud schemes to members of the ruling African National Congress and senior government administrators, their family members and even diseased members of the public"; Mbandlwa C and Netswera F. 2021. "The effect government supply chain processes have on the procurement of Covid-19 personal protective equipment", *Ilkogretim Online-Elementary Education Online* 20(4):1782-1790.

32 Hill M. 2020. "Locating the right to freedom of religion or belief across time and territory", in Ferrari S, Hill M, Jamal AA and Bottoni R (eds). *Routledge Handbook on Freedom of Religion or Belief*. London: Routledge.

33 South Africa is a constitutional democracy with a three-tiered system of government and an independent judiciary. The president is the head of the government and is elected by parliament. See Republic of South Africa. Structure and Functions of the South African Government. Online at: <https://www.gov.za/about-government/government-system/structure-and-functions-south-african-government>

those with access to the internet could tune in. But others without internet access could not attend church services at all. I would like to use my own church as an example: before the pandemic, the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk Menlyn Maine, Pretoria created a nickname “*die Kerk*” (the Church), with a Facebook page and a logo resembling the universal WiFi symbol. The credo was “extend the reach of the church, increase our bandwidth and strengthen your signal”.³⁴ The church’s reach was compared to internet connectivity, with the aim of reaching as many Afrikaans-speaking people as possible. Every morning from Monday to Friday, our ministers took turns to present a daily reflection that was made available on YouTube. Every weekday had a different theme, the most unusual being our youth minister, who filmed his messages with a selfie stick while skating, on a skateboard, through the suburbs near the church. The message was clear: “Please like and share this video, and if you can, make a payment, because we are wholly dependent on contributions for the sustainability of our ministry.” The church’s banking details, and a SnapScan QR Code was provided at the end of each video.³⁵ Once restaurants were allowed to open, pop-up Sunday church services were held at different restaurants with tremendous success, and the short service was livestreamed via Facebook, which meant that anyone with access could tune in. The Facebook page states that: “Our dream for *die Kerk* is to create a space not only for the growth of the Hervormde Kerk, but also for the church and Christianity overall.” When church services were allowed to resume under Level 3, there were still restrictions on the number of worshippers that were allowed to attend, so services continued to be livestreamed. Even after all restrictions were lifted, in-person attendance became optional.

In general, virtual services have increased the church’s ecumenical reach and extended its influence beyond the physical brick and mortar structure of the church building, but that does not mean that the church building and in-person church attendance will have no place in a post-pandemic world. To substantiate this statement, one must consider the reasons for the historic advent of Christian religious architecture, which is centred on the community of believers.

SEEKING SHELTER FOR THE ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS

Christianity is a congregational religion, not built around the individual, but rather focused on the sense of community through worship or *koinonia*. As architectural historian Leland M. Roth states in *Understanding Architecture: Its elements, history and*

34 die Kerk. 2021. “Oordenking | Deel Dit Donderdag | Op Die Board Deel 39 | Nog ‘n koue front”. Online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT9rQ1SWwuQ> [Accessed 18 December 2022].

35 SnapScan is a South African contactless mobile payment solution. A QR code™ is a pattern of black and white squares that contains information, often a web address, that can be read by the camera of a smartphone. It is the abbreviation for “quick response code”. “QR Code”, *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary*.

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meaning,³⁶ the church refers not to the building but the assembly of believers. There is no rule that a church service has to be in a specific type of building or space. It could be in the veld³⁷ or under a tree, or in a tent or a school hall. Matthew 18:20 makes it clear that the act of gathering is central to worship: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am among them."³⁸ Even though a community can use a private living room, hall, or temporary structure for many years, it will through time develop the need for a space specifically designed for the purpose of assembly. Architecture then becomes the facilitator of the gathering of people. A building provides shelter, and a level of privacy to concentrate on the service. In the early days of Christianity there was no need for specialised buildings. Early Christians gathered where space was available and adapted their worship to the space. When they faced persecution, their worship spaces where the sacraments of mass and baptism were administered, needed to be concealed from public view.³⁹ But when it became an accepted mainstream religious movement, Christianity outgrew the private house and dedicated buildings for Christianity emerged. Worship space changed from private to public spaces. The movement grew and by the fourth century, it had moved past the stage of repression.⁴⁰ With the conversion of Emperor Constantine and the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, Christianity became the official religion, and the problem of devising a building type, one that would be suitable in terms of function and symbolism for public worship, arose. Christianity differed from older religions in which individuals made private offerings. It was focused on the gathering of the faithful which required a large, enclosed space with good acoustics so that congregants could hear the sermon and in which choir singing could be projected. The development of buildings that could accommodate large groups and that had the appropriate symbolism were architectural considerations that continued into modern times.⁴¹ Roman basilicas that fell out of use were famously adapted for early Christian purposes.⁴² The basilica had characteristics that fitted the needs of the worshippers. These buildings were originally designed for public gathering and the symbolic connotation with justice was a bonus.⁴³

But as religion scholar Mona Siddiqui so eloquently explains, "in traditional, sacramental, or quasi-sacramental understandings of what constitutes the church as church, a more balanced dialectic moves back and forth between local congregation

36 Roth, *Understanding Architecture*, 241.

37 Open, uncultivated country or grassland characteristic of parts of Southern Africa (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/veld>).

38 English Standard Version of the Bible.

39 Roth, *Understanding Architecture*, 241.

40 Kostof S. 1995. *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*. Second Edition. London: Oxford University Press, 248.

41 Roth, *Understanding Architecture*, 243.

42 Kostof, *A History of Architecture*, 248.

43 Roth, *Understanding Architecture*, 243.

and universal *ecclesia*. Every church polity gives an account of the congregation's relationship with the whole church that shows itself in analogies to modern democratic thought and political forms."⁴⁴

DESIGNING CHURCH BUILDINGS FOR RITUAL AND SYMBOLISM

Basilicas were more desirable than the temples of other religions that already had their own embedded symbolism. By taking over the plan of the basilica, patterns of activity and symbolism that were associated with that building type were incorporated into the rituals of Christian worship. Christian rituals, on the other hand, were well-suited to the space provided by the nave and the linear plan of the basilica. The light from the clerestory windows served the symbolism of salvation, divinity and reverence. Two principal divisions marked the basilica: the great rectangular hall, destined for the laity, and the apse, used by the clergy.

Architecture is thus more than shelter. Although religious architecture provides basic function and shelter, closely linked to its rituals, the need for symbolic and aesthetic representation of the congregation's communal values and beliefs is equally important.⁴⁵ Buildings are informed by both use and aesthetics and in spaces with a religious function, the need for symbolic representation is closely linked to the ritual.⁴⁶ Architect and community planner Tara Johnson sums it up: "Beyond the pragmatic, churches are monuments to community cohesion and physical markers of a sense of place in a city. The building not only symbolises the unified intent of a congregation ... it is also an expression of faith."⁴⁷

Journalist Charles C. Mann suggested in a 2011 *National Geographic* cover story on Göbekli Tepe that it was the urge to worship that sparked civilisation, rather than the rise of agriculture, as we used to think. He added that "[t]he human sense of the sacred and the love of a good spectacle, may have given rise to civilisation itself."⁴⁸ Rory Olcayto, an architect and award-winning journalist and critic, explained: "We chose to design and build places of worship before any other kind of building, perhaps even before house and home. We used to think agriculture gave rise to cities and later to writing, art, and religion. Now the world's oldest temple implies the urge to worship sparked the idea of a civilised world no longer bound by

44 Siddiqui M. 2022. "Martyrs, Minorities, Faith and Fidelity" (online course), *Canopy Forum*.

45 Roth, *Understanding Architecture*, 5.

46 Verster W. 2013. *A Study of the Life-cycle, Re-use and Adaptation of Places of Worship in Bloemfontein from 1948 to the Present, with Specific Reference to the Afrikaans Reformed Churches*. Master's of Architecture Thesis, University of the Free State, 13.

47 Johnson TA. 2004. *Socio-economic and political issues in the successful adaptive reuse of churches*. Cincinnati, OH: University of Cincinnati, 1.

48 Göbekli Tepe ("potbelly hill" in Turkish) are ruins on a hill in Southern Turkey, consisting of broken limestone slabs dotting the site. German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt claimed it is the world's oldest temple, dating back 11 600 years. See Kabil A. 2018. "Did the Urge to Worship Lead to Civilization?", *Long Now/Medium.com*, 1 February.

hunting and gathering.”⁴⁹ He concluded that the buildings created for these rituals reveal the intimate relationship between religion and architecture.

Similarly, in Christian church-building, new building types developed to provide space for religious worship, suited to its rituals. Church architecture grew to become more than just utilitarian. Added to its primary function of accommodating large congregations, the church also represented the symbolic: its spires, cross or centralised plan types, the use of daylight and the placing of pulpits, all strengthened, facilitated and enhanced symbolism and ritualistic events. Christian rituals include baptism, communion (Eucharist), the ministry of the word or church service (ceremony) from the pulpit, weddings and funerals, but the importance placed on these rituals differed between the various denominations. For instance, in the early medieval Roman Catholic Church, the focus fell on the liturgical centre, with altar in the east, but with the Reformation in 1517, the church service itself became the focus of the interior layout, and the pulpit became the essence of the liturgical space, as it symbolises *sola scriptura*.⁵⁰ Church design revealed the importance of the rituals embedded in the daily lives of the congregation. The medieval cross churches no longer fitted the needs of the Reformed Protestant service, especially since the lines of sight in these buildings did not allow for a clear view of the pulpit.⁵¹ Church design thus changed to follow a specific Reformed ritual. A church building is generated from the plan form, which in turn is determined by the dominant activities or rituals. The distribution of the main elements of a church plan reflects the hierarchy of activities taking place in the assembly, and by extension it also reflects the theological doctrines that determine these rituals. South African churches followed specific European-historical form language elements, revealing a close art-historical bond between the Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk in South Africa and the churches in the Netherlands and England. Protestant churches mostly took over old church forms. Luther maintained the division of the interior into a main nave and choir, and the two areas were used for preaching and communion respectively.⁵²

49 Olcayto R. 2012. “Sacred Space”, *The Architects Journal: Places of Worship* 235(14):35.

50 *Sola scriptura* is Latin for “word alone”, which is the Reformed Protestant Church’s theological focus. Liturgy is the customary public worship performed by a religious group, especially by a Christian group. As a religious phenomenon, liturgy represents a communal response to and participation in the sacred through activities reflecting praise, thanksgiving, remembrance, supplication or repentance.

51 Kesting DP. 1978. *Afrikaans-Protestantse Kerkbou Erfenis en Uitdaging: ‘n Ondersoek na Kerkbou met besondere verwysing na die gebruik en inrigting van die drie Afrikaanse (moeder) kerke, te wete die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, die Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika en die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika* [Afrikaans-Protestant Church-building Heritage and Challenge: An investigation into church-building with particular reference to the utilisation and furnishing of the three Afrikaans (mother) churches, namely the Dutch Reformed Church, the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa and the Reformed Church in South Africa]. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Port Elizabeth, 109.

52 De Waal LM. 1978. *Europees-Historiese Vormtaalelemente in Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerkargitektuur van die Groot-Karoo* [European-Historical Form Language Elements in Dutch

But the Dutch Reformed tradition to use the choir as a vestry originated in the Netherlands, as Protestants took over Roman-Catholic churches.⁵³ The rectangular church hall with liturgical centre in the middle of the congregation was ideal for Protestant worship. Traditionally, the entrance was west and a long, narrow main nave with a passage in the middle led to the pulpit with dignified, stiff, formal wooden benches on each side of the passage along the entire width of the nave. The pulpit, baptismal font and communion table were centrally placed in the east with the vestry behind it, separated from the rest of the church by a dividing wall. The pulpit could be reached directly from the vestry and an external door on the east provided a separate entrance to the vestry for clergymen. Decoration was sparse.⁵⁴

Although guidelines by the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, stipulating the appearance of interior spaces, were not published until the middle of the twentieth century, church buildings had a simple rectangular form and a horizontal liturgical axis in common. The pulpit was invariably the liturgical centre and focus point to where sight lines without visual disturbances were directed.⁵⁵ Architects such as Johan de Ridder claimed the form was a result of Reformed principles. The auditorium, or modified Greek cross with Romanesque influences, became popular from the early to mid-twentieth century, due to the influence of Gerard Moerdijk (1890-1958).⁵⁶ South African churches with their spires are particularly iconographic. They are significant landmarks in the landscape that remind us of the religious institutions that they house. Urban theorist Kevin Lynch states that “a church in a city is a landmark: an external point of orientation, usually an easily identifiable physical object in the urban landscape”.⁵⁷ Seen as God’s house on earth, church buildings and the ministry of the Word were combined with other means of reaching people, which included education, physical health and spiritual healing.

CREATING SACRED SPACE FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST

Creating sacred space has through the millennia been regarded as the pinnacle of architecture. Religious structures, such as Gothic cathedrals, have the ability to transcend the physical world and to create a sense of God. St. Augustine saw light as the

Reformed Church Architecture of the Great Karoo]. Unpublished MA Thesis, University of the Free State, 53.

53 De Waal, *Europees-Historiese Vormtaalelemente*, 79.

54 De Waal, *Europees-Historiese Vormtaalelemente*, 53-54.

55 Le Roux SW. 2008. “Die soeke van drie argitektheite na ’n planvorm vir Afrikaanse Gereformeerde kerkbou [The search by three architects for appropriate plans for Afrikaans Reformed church-building]”, *Tydskrif vir Kultuurgeskiedenis* [Journal of Cultural History] 22(2):20-21.

56 Verster, *A Study of the Life-cycle, Re-use and Adaptation*, 29.

57 Lynch K. 1960. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

symbol of divine illumination,⁵⁸ and thus devices such as light, scale, materiality, procession and verticality were used in the design of these ecclesiastic spaces to evoke the divine, and cause wonder and a spiritual experience that goes beyond the boundaries of the church. After the Reformation, transcendence became less important, because believers had direct access to God and did not need the power of the church, but even Protestant churches have an ephemeral quality and are different from other building types in that they remained places of mysterious presence.⁵⁹ Physical needs are often placed on the forefront of the pursuit of human betterment, often to the detriment of spiritual needs,⁶⁰ but as architecture and communications theorist Julio Bermudez argues: “transcending architecture considers the mysterious, profound, and real power of designed environments to address the spiritual dimension of our humanity.”⁶¹

HEALTH AND HEALING

The healing quality of architecture is usually associated with health care and hospital design and addresses the body, but when used in a spiritual context, church architecture also has a healing dimension, which is broader than religiosity. Publications on the subject are rare, as architect and theologian Bert Daelemans points out,⁶² but the buildings designed specifically for spiritual activities play a role in spiritual healing. Daelemans describes the multisensory and synaesthetic (spiritual) dimension of church architecture that engages the body and all the senses, as a highly personal experience, one of being in the world, that cannot be replicated by virtual space. Synaesthetic means a specific atmosphere or *genius loci* that comes to the fore when a human is in or moves through a space. He describes healing as a process that implies motion. It is more than just the absence of disease: it incorporates sustenance of emotions. He adds that synaesthetic atmosphere is an essential element often overlooked in the design of modern church buildings, which are criticised for being cold and soulless. A church building has the ability to address the body and therefore the soul. It has the ability to slow us down and heighten our perception. The healing dimension of space reminds us of our wholeness, and that we are embodied and spiritual beings.

58 See Goodyear D. 2019. “180. St. Augustine and Divine Illumination”, *Philosophical Eggs*, 11 June.

59 Verster, *A Study of the Life-cycle, Re-use and Adaptation*, 17.

60 Ripley E. 2020. *Transcendent Architecture: Faith Inspired through Sacred Design*. Bachelor of Architecture Thesis, Ball State University, 9 May.

61 Bermudez JC. *Transcending architecture: Contemporary views on sacred space*. Washington DC: CUA Press. Professor Julio Bermudez directs the Sacred Space and Cultural Studies graduate concentration programme at the Catholic University of America’s School of Architecture and Planning.

62 Daelemans B. 2020. “Healing Space: The Synaesthetic Quality of Church Architecture”, *Religions* 11(12):635.

Healthy buildings provide a quiet atmosphere that reduces stress, good ventilation, fresh air and natural light that improves mood, health and the immune system. A healthy building also engages with nature. Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa likens walking through a cathedral with a forest of columns to walking through a forest in nature, which makes one aware of the eternal natural cycle of the world.⁶³

The American architect Steven Holl stressed the importance of authentic physical and sensory experience, what he called “the silent intensities of architecture”, that cannot be assumed, reproduced or substituted by words, photographs or even films.⁶⁴ It can only be found in a certain place, here and now. As Holl puts it, “Only the architecture itself offers the tactile sensations of textured stone surfaces and polished wooden pews, the experience of light changing with movement, the smell and resonant sounds of space, the bodily relations of scale and proportion.”⁶⁵ All these different, particular sense experiences converge in one synaesthetic event.

French philosopher and founding father of spatial theory, Henri Lefebvre, devised the triad *perceived*, *conceived* and *lived* space in his book *The Production of Space*.⁶⁶ His spatial theory can be successfully applied to the argument relating to the experiential quality of in-person Christian worship facilitated by church architecture in the here and now, as opposed to virtual services. Church attendance of a body in architectural space is a social (*lived*) practice. The spiritual and healing experience of being in a sacred space (*perceived* space), can only come about when the body is in the social or *lived* space.⁶⁷ Cyberspace is like Lefebvre’s *conceived* space. It is not real space, but only a representation of space. Pallasmaa talks about the inhumanity of being pushed out of space to become a mere spectator and pleads for the return of the healing role of architecture that can reconcile us with the world. He adds that the actual religious space stimulates the acoustical and tactile, more than the visual and allows for materiality and the *chiaroscuro* of light and shadows.⁶⁸

CHRISTIANITY OUTSIDE THE CONFINES OF ARCHITECTURE

This chapter argues for the preservation of church architecture, emphasising the important role that the church building plays in continuing Christian worship in a post-pandemic world, but is also presents the counter argument that paradoxically claims that religion can be served just as well outside of the building. Mona Siddiqui presents another paradox when discussing the value of in-person and virtual

63 Pallasmaa J. 1996. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. London: Academy.

64 Holl S. 1994. “Questions of perception: Phenomenology of architecture”, in Holl S, Juhani Pallasmaa J and Alberto Pérez-Gómez A (eds). *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*. Tokyo: A+U, 39-120.

65 Holl, “Questions of perception”, 41.

66 Lefebvre H. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Translated by D. Nicholson-Smith. London: Blackwell Publishing.

67 Daelemans, “Healing Space”, 6.

68 Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 34.

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rituals, as opposed to charitable work. She explains that the internet enabled many rituals online during the pandemic, which have made congregants feel as if they were still part of a ritual and at least they were seeing other people and interacting with them. But she warns that a continuation of online prayers, services and church meetings will further disembodify believers from the wider community. Rituals are about physical and mental effort, focusing on something in a group, and online rituals demand less physical exertion. She then adds to the argument that there is no moral value in ritual but that helping others is a moral act.⁶⁹

The answer to this paradox lies in the belief that the church is more than just a building. According to Ephesians 1:22-23, God placed all things under the authority of Christ, appointing Him head over everything for the church, which is His body. Biblically speaking, the church is the entire group of Christians, and the Eucharist sacramentally associates both the individual with the local community and the universal church through the body of Christ. It also fulfils an important pastoral care function outside the church. During the pandemic access to patients and health care workers were limited by law until spiritual care to these individuals was deemed an essential service. Charitable giving is not something that can be done in a virtual environment.

CONCLUSION

During the Covid-19 pandemic, large gatherings, including church services, were prohibited by law. Once gatherings were allowed again, the rigorous requirements of social distancing affected religious congregations. The regulations have forced many South Africans to reconsider how and where they worship, and whether their faith is best expressed in a house of worship or whether it can be equally expressed at home through a virtual YouTube or Facebook transmissions.

Many denominations moved to online or virtual services that streamed sermons and messages of health and healing to a wider, global audience. Modern digital technology has made it possible for Christian churches to extend their reach and influence, and church members strove to find a new normal in the ongoing negotiation with public health protocols to curtail infection rates, by taking up social distancing and forging a greater reliance on technology to bridge the gaps between themselves and others.

But the idea of social distancing, as required in the Covid-19 regulations, runs completely counter to the concept of assembly by a congregation in religious or sacred space. The pandemic has blurred the lines between secular and sacred space, and where the boundaries between these spaces were once clearly defined by walls of brick and mortar or stone, these spaces are now blended into cyberspace. One has to question whether the infiltration of secular space (home) into religious or sacred space (church) through the medium cyberspace (the internet) has changed the face of religious worship forever.

69 Siddiqui, "Martyrs, Minorities, Faith, and Fidelity".