

Sacred Geometry II

Benjamin von Bredow, Summer 2018

I. Introduction.

In his paper of Summer 2017, *Sacred Geometry*, Matthew Vanderkwaak discusses the “prayer” of the Round Church. The Round Church’s design draws worshippers into prayer by suggesting the mysteries of creation and of the Holy Trinity, and participates in those mysteries itself through its structure. It thereby also offers its own prayer, bodying these mysteries forth in visible form, and drawing lower things (wood and stone) into the higher things of God. This is the activity of prayer. Vanderkwaak first offered a historical study of round buildings and their philosophical significance, then offered a meditation on the building’s roundness.

This paper, *Sacred Geometry II*, follows the same method as Vanderkwaak’s paper, although it treats a different aspect of the building. I shall discuss the significance of the church’s horizontal direction. Since the original Round Church did not include a chancel, it is tempting to conclude that worship in the original church was focused around a pulpit in the exact centre of the building. This idea acts almost as an Edenic myth, enlivening the imagination with a vision of the church as a perfect image of God and of his creation, before the “Fall” into historical time, eschatological hope, and priestly mediation, which the current building presents by its strong linear focus on the altar at the (liturgical) east wall of the chancel. However, St. George’s most likely never had a central pulpit. Worship has always been directed toward the western wall of the church. The first part of this paper will be historical. In it, I will offer seven reasons to think that worship at St. George’s has always been oriented in its current direction. In the second part of this paper, I will discuss the building’s prayer, asking, “How does the fact that the church has a strong sense of direction convert architectural material into spiritual worship, and how does it convert the worshipper?” That is, how does the building pray, and how do we pray in it, if worship is oriented toward the (liturgical) eastern wall?

II. The original pulpit was not centrally located, but was toward the western wall.

No previous historian of St. George’s, including Pacey in *The Miracle on Brunswick Street*, which the most complete history of the parish to date, dwells at length on the placement of furniture within the church, specifically the pulpit. No primary sources definitively proving the location of the pulpit exist. The oldest historical document relating its location are the historical notes of the Rev’d Henry Ward Cunningham, rector from 1900-1936. Vanderkwaak quotes at length a passage from Cunningham’s notes which is also relevant to this paper:

It is in the interior [...] that the chief charm of the architecture of St. George’s exists. [The interior] was originally a complete circle of 60 feet in diameter with the pulpit, a three story one, in the centre. The main aisle, four feet wide, led from the door on the East to near the pulpit where it widened out to a circle of 15 feet diameter, and then continued on at its original width of four feet to a high palladian window at the West, below which is probably where the Altar or Communion Table stood (although a tradition says it stood at the base of the pulpit).

The Clerk sat at that point, the prayers are read from the middle elevation, and the sermon was delivered from the top. [...] Outside of the central opening, the pews were arranged in circles, the two outer rows being raised one and two steps respectively, above those in the body of the Church; and in front of these two rows ran a secondary aisle that separated them from those on that level, while a radial aisle ran from the central opening, one to each of the four windows on the two sides. (Quoted in Vanderkwaak, 4; from “Chapter VI,” in *St. George’s Parish Magazine*, July 1939.)

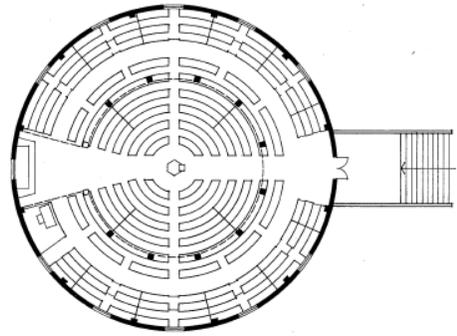


Figure 1: Cunningham’s idea of the original floorplan

Cunningham, contrary to the argument of this paper, believes that the pulpit was located at the centre of the original church. Vanderkwaak defends the general historical reliability of Cunningham’s notes by arguing that, although Cunningham “joined the parish 100 years after its construction” and was not “a primary witness,” he would have been the rector to elderly parishioners “in their 80s who grew up in the church, who could have remembered the original round,” or at least the “members whose parents or grandparents could have told them stories.” And, truth be told, Vanderkwaak’s case could be pressed further on this point. By limiting his study to the years 1800-1827, after which the interior of the original round was completed by the addition of the umbrella dome, the children’s gallery, and the decorations painted by William Valentine (Pacey 64), Vanderkwaak mistakenly supposes that children who grew up in the original round would need to have been in their late 80s to have spoken with Cunningham in person. In fact, the addition of the chancel did not occur until 1842 (Pacey 74), meaning that octogenarians in Cunningham’s early congregation would have been young adults—more reliable witnesses than children—in the original round, which is a reason to generally trust Cunningham’s history of the parish.

However, for the reasons I offer below, I argue that Cunningham’s testimony is incorrect about the location of the pulpit, despite its *prima facie* believability, and that original pulpit was close to the western wall of the church. I have seven arguments to this point.

1) *Round churches from the period generally have chancels and/or a focal point at one wall.* Pacey’s introductory chapter is devoted to the history of round churches, including Figure 1, which is the hypothetical plan of a round church by “the influential and prolific architectural writer” Leonhard Christoph Sturm (Pacey xx), a German mathematician and architect who lived 1669-1719. Sturm produced this drawing for a treatise called *Architectural Considerations for Small Protestant Churches* (Hamburg, 1712). He would later argue, in 1718, that rectangular churches were not well-suited for a Protestant focus on the pulpit, and so he drew ten “centralized floor plans” as suggestions for alternatives (Pacey xx). Of the four that I have seen, of different shapes, it is noteworthy that in none is the pulpit at the centre of the building, but, in accordance with his concern that the sermon can be seen and heard by all, it is off-centre. The pulpit is “centralized” only

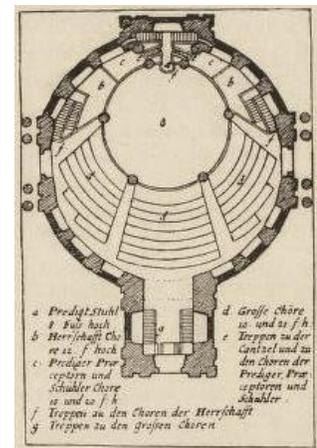


Figure 2: Sturm’s round church plans

in the sense that all the pews have a clear view of it. The original St. George's follows Sturm's principles very closely in a number of points. As Pacey summarizes,

Sturm was a proponent of bringing as much light as possible into churches ... Regarding the dome, Sturm felt that the more space between supports and the thinner the supports without affecting the strength of the church, the more beautiful the church would be. For constructing an arcade, Sturm suggested that arches could spring from entablatures atop paired columns. And he felt the beauties of the interior should be revealed gradually as one proceeds into the church, rather than immediately upon entering.

There is no positive evidence that Figure 1, or even Sturm's general principles of design, was the direct basis for the design of the Round Church, although this is plausible. If the original architect of St. George's were known, this might seem more likely or less.

However, Sturm's drawings are by no means the only examples of German round churches from the period. The most notable example is the Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady) in Dresden, completed in 1743, only a few years before the construction of the Little Dutch Church. The original 11th-century Romanesque church, which became a Lutheran church during the Reformation, was replaced beginning in 1726 by the building which stood until the Second World War, when it perished in the Allied fire-bombing of Dresden. The church was rebuilt only very recently, from 1992-2005.¹ As in the Round Church, the galleries account for a significant portion of the pews in the building. Within the ring of the pillars on the ground floor, the pews face the pulpit on the east wall, curving slightly inward toward the centre aisle, maximizing the view of the chancel. Underneath the gallery, the ground floor pews face toward centre of the circular nave, as do the gallery pews. Despite the central orientation of these outer pews, the focal point of the building is the raised pulpit, which is placed in an area cleared of pews within the nave, toward the eastern wall. This area measured, as in Cunningham's description, a quarter of the diameter of the circular body of the church. Also as in Cunningham's notes, the Frauenkirche has a perpendicular aisle cutting across the nave in a north-south direction. Given these similarities—it is no exaggeration to say that the Frauenkirche is the church from the same period most similar to St. George's—and given the reputation the Frauenkirche must have had in the Lutheran world of the 18th century as the most splendid and modern church building, it



Figure 3: Frauenkirche, Dresden, 1726-1743

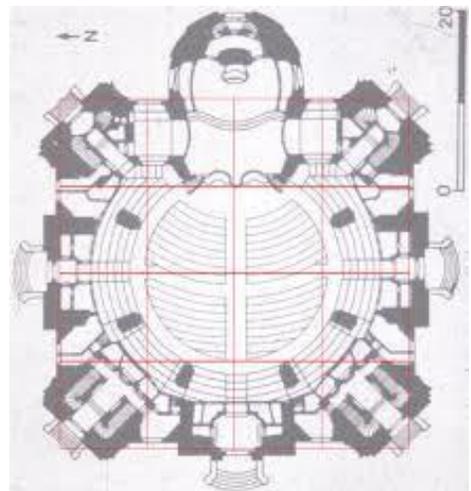


Figure 4: Floor plan of the Frauenkirche

¹ Interestingly, Anglican Evensong is held in the new building once a month, under the leadership of the clergy of St. George's Anglican Church in Berlin.

is very natural to suppose that the architect of St. George's drew inspiration from the Frauenkirche. But, to draw a more modest conclusion, the Church of Our Lady is at least a good example of a period round church with a focal point toward one wall, and a chancel.

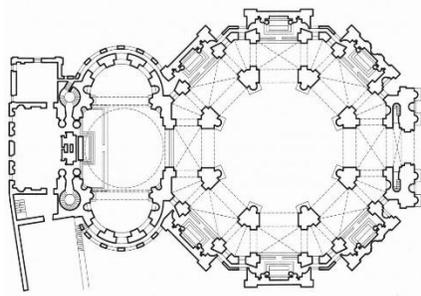


Figure 5: Floor plan of St. Maria della Salute

Round churches were not only popular in Germany. Two others especially merit attention. In Venice, the Church of Santa Maria della Salute (St. Mary of Health) was built beginning in 1630 to commemorate a plague that killed a third of the city's population. Santa Maria is notable with respect to St. George's because it was also built in the Palladian style. There are no pews in church, and it was intended principally for the annual procession into the building by the Venetian senate to commemorate of the end of the plague on November 21 (the Feast of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary). Despite the lack

of pews, the focal point is clearly defined by the presence of the chancel and the high altar against its (liturgical) east wall. Second, the round church most likely to have been familiar to the early settlers of Halifax is Temple Church in London. The original building, which was the round portion (the nave) and a chancel about two-thirds of the present chancel's length, was consecrated in 1185 by the patriarch of Jerusalem for the Knights Templar, who had returned to England from a crusade in the Holy Land, where their vocation was to protect pilgrims visiting the famous churches of Jerusalem, many of which were round. In both of these cases, what is important for our argument is that *it is the norm for round churches to have a focal point at one end and a chancel*. Indeed, while examples of such churches abound, I know of not one round church from the Baroque period or before which has an altar or pulpit at the centre of the round. The practical reasons for this, aside from the theological ones discussed in the second part of the paper, are easy to understand: prayers and preaching are very difficult to project evenly in all directions from the centre of a round building.

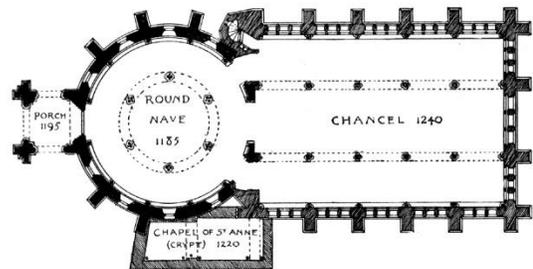


Figure 6: Floor plan of Temple Church, London

2) *The gallery and west window suggest a western focal point.* In the Round Church, the original wall space where the nave now meets the chancel was originally occupied by a large window. The gallery never extended all the way around the church, since it was originally interrupted by the window. These features provide a strong sense of east-west movement to the church, especially given that the large window was opposite the door. The break in the gallery and the light from the window would have given the sense that the church “opened up” in the direction of (liturgical) east, which is consistent with the eschatological openness which is the theological meaning of east-facing worship, as I discuss below. Nor should it be supposed that the church could not have been otherwise. Certainly, there was no need for the additional light in the building which the large window provided. If the gallery-level Palladian windows had extended around a connecting circular gallery, there would have been as much natural light in the building as at present. Moreover, this arrangement would have made intuitive sense were the original pulpit in the centre of building, and practical sense in terms of seating a maximum

number of people, especially considering that, as Pacey reports, the chancel was added for the sake of increasing the seating capacity (74).

However, it is not quite true that gallery seating would have been ideal for seeing a central pulpit, since the angle of the seats is not sufficient to get a good view of the middle of the church without leaning very far forward, whereas it is perfectly sufficient for seeing the western wall and the chancel. I argue that the location of the pulpit toward the western wall had priority in the floorplan of the church, which is why the balcony does not continue around in a full circle, which is why there was a large west window, to fill the open space and illuminate the pulpit from behind.

3) *The eight ground floor windows are arranged in a way that invites the construction of the porch, suggesting that additions to the original building were anticipated, including the addition of a chancel.* If one stands at the centre of the Round Church, one may observe that the interval between the windows is such that the cycle could not be continued further toward the eastern end or the western end of the church. The nave windows are “side” windows, arranged with reference to the centre aisle, which has always run east-west, much like the nave windows in a rectangular nave would have done. On the western side, extra windows would have interfered with the large window that was there before the chancel was constructed, and on the eastern side with the porch—but, in the original building, there was no porch with which for additional windows to interfere. The first porch was added beginning in 1827 (Pacey 61), mere months after the interior dome was complete (Pacey 58). This, and the provision for it in the layout of the windows, suggests that the porch was always intended to be added to the church once the interior work was complete. If it was always the intention to build a porch, it may well have been the plan from the beginning to add a chancel as well, once the congregation would grow too large for any of the nave to be taken up the pulpit. This did in fact happen by 1842, when the chancel was added.

4) *The fact that a chancel was added at all suggests that the direction of worship was already oriented toward the (liturgical) east.* Aside from having been provided for architecturally, additions to St. George’s were mostly likely also prepared for liturgically. It is not very likely that the fundamental orientation of worship changed after the construction of the chancel. Such a large change to worship in the parish would have created quite a stir among the congregation, of which there exists no record. The lack of records, however, could simply be a historical accident. More particularly, the rector during the construction of the chancel was the Rev’d Robert Fitzgerald Uniacke, who served as the rector of St. George’s for forty-five years (1825-1870). His plaque, which is on the south wall of the chancel, identifies him as “an unflinching defender of the doctrines of the Reformers.” Surely this reputation was earned Sunday by Sunday in the pulpit, but it was proved by his conflicts with Bishop Herbert Binney in the 1850s and ‘60s over the issue of the first Nova Scotian synod, which Uniacke opposed on the grounds that such a synod would strengthen episcopal authority and weaken the authority of local congregations (Pacey 79). If worship was not already facing (liturgical) east before the chancel was added, Rev’d Uniacke would not have made it so after the chancel was added. East-facing worship was a concern of the high church movement, of which Bp. Binney was certainly a representative, but it was not a concern of Anglicans with a strong sense of their “Reformed” heritage, such as Rev’d Uniacke. Moreover, if worship had been centre-facing before the addition of the chancel, and new space for pews was needed, it would have been possible to add pews in the chancel facing toward that same centre, rather than changing the direction of worship.

5) *There are deep marks in the nave where the original pulpit was anchored to the floor.* They are located to either side of the current prie-Dieu. The distance between the marks to the left and to the right of the prayer desk suggest that the pulpit was very large. Three-tiered pulpits were very common in the 18th and early 19th centuries. They either had the Communion table on the first level (as Cunningham describes), or a seat for the clerk to lead the prayers. The second level was for the lectern or the clerk, and the third for the sermon. They were, as one would expect if they were to serve all these functions, very large.

6) *Three-tiered pulpits already provide a definitive direction of worship.* When Rev'd Cunningham describes the original pulpit as “a three story one,” we ought to imagine a pulpit like the one pictured below, from St. Mary’s Church in Whitby (UK). Few three-tiered pulpits from the period survive, but the ones that do are uniformly quite imposing. More



Figure 7: Floor markings



Figure 8: Three-tier pulpit at St. Mary's, Whitby UK

importantly, the order in which the three tiers were arranged give these pulpit complexes a clear front and back, so that the pulpit on the third tier faces over the two lower tiers, toward the congregation. Of course, it would still have been possible to arrange some pews behind the pulpit, where the view and the projection of sound would be obscured, as was done at St. Mary’s Whitby. However, the inconvenience of this arrangement determined, in all surviving churches with three-tier pulpits, that most of the pews were arranged facing the pulpit, which stood in front of the chancel, if there was a chancel. This was also the case in St. Mary’s Whitby, although, in the photo provided here, the pulpit obscures the chancel opening behind it.

7) *The location of the central heating grate, if it reflects the location of the original wood stove, would have been too close to a central pulpit.* Winter church attendance before the middle of the 19th century, when early central heating systems began to be installed in public buildings, was a chilly affair. It was common for parishioners to bring small stoves or pans of coals to heat their own pews, but this was supplementary to the main source of heat, a large wood-burning stove close to the centre of the church.² Pacey reports that this single stove was a source of controversy in the early 1830s:



Figure 9: Central heating grate

At a special pewholders meeting, on Jan. 4, 1830, the pewholders “near the stove” complained of being too hot. . . . Two years later, two more stoves

² Summer tourists are often surprised that, without an air conditioning system, the ground floor of the church is cooler than the outside temperature. This is because of the “chimney effect” of the cupola. Wind passes through the cupola, which specifically for this reason does not have glass blocking the passage of air, and creates low pressure which draws hot air up from the lower floors of the church and out the top. When there were wood stoves in the nave church releasing smoke above the heads of the congregation, the cupola did not only have a chimney effect, but was, effectively, a chimney.

were acquired to appease the occupants of the pews by the outer walls, who were complaining that they were suffering from colds due to the terrible weather! (66)

The current grates date from thirty years later (ca. 1863), when the stoves were replaced with “a single furnace of the largest description in the cellar” (Pacey 80) and a system of ducts. However, it is convenient to suppose that, since the location of the large central grate matches the description of the location of the original stove, the furnace and ducts replaced it very directly—which would also have prevented more ire from the “pewholders.” If the central stove was indeed at the location of the central grate, it would have been too close to the centre of the building to accommodate a three-tier pulpit at the centre, suggesting that the pulpit was not at the centre of the church.

For all these reasons, I argue that the pulpit in the original Round Church was located toward the western wall. But what is the theological significance of that location?

III. The significance of east-facing worship.

If, as Christians believe, God has revealed himself to the world in history, we relate to him in two primary modes: as the creator of the world, who governs and sustains it by the word of his power from his throne in heaven (Heb. 1.3), and as its redeemer, who descends into the world to bring it back into right relationship with its maker.

The former way of relating to God, as creator, treats God as God, that is, as the divine principle which is “over all, and in all, and through all” (Eph. 4.6), which is the object of philosophy. The creator God is only known through his effects. His nature is only grasped positively through the world that he made, and so the primary conclusions about this God are that he is wise, since his creation displays order, and powerful, since he made a world full of living, moving powers. God is life, and spirit, and light. In short, God the creator can be said to be like any thing that he made, because it is through the world that he is known. But, even more than being similar to particular things, God is over all things that he made. He is “the Whole,” or “the All,” who holds in his mind the world as it truly is. Yet even this is to understand God through his creation, as the unifier of the world’s diversity. Without relation to his creatures, God in himself is only known negatively, as being unlike them, since he is beyond them. So, for example, our first Article of Religion says that God is “without body, parts, or passions,” since these created things are emblematic of what God is not—that is, the whole bodily creation. God the creator is also God the Holy Trinity. However, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a mystery revealed for the sake of our salvation, and it is through sacred history that the doctrine of the Trinity is properly known, as I discuss below. So the Trinity leaves its mark on creation in precisely the same way that God the creator does: by the analogy of the effect to the cause, whether it be the three-fold structure in the creation of “measure, number, and weight” or “memory, reason, and will” (Augustine).

Vanderkwaak’s meditation on the roundness of St. George’s, upon which this paper builds, dwells primarily on the way that the building prays to God its creator. He notes that, although the building is three-tiered and therefore has a Trinitarian exterior structure, inside the building one is impressed simply by the circularity of it. This circularity makes the inside of the church into a complete cosmos, a world bounded on every side. It is a world contained within God, and limited by the perfection of the Whole. And, by drawing one’s vision up into the circular dome overhead, the building draws the worshipper up into the perfect life of God. On the ground, the proclamation of the word is the reason

that the congregation gathers, or, to put it philosophically, the word of God creates not only the material cosmos, but also the human world of society and politics.

Vanderkwaak offers a profound treatment of St. George's "vertical" orientation, focusing on the way that the building draws the worshipper up into the dome and its symbolic meaning. By contrast, this paper will reflect on the "horizontal" direction, and how the building draws the worshipper into the chancel. The purpose of the historical section of this paper is to show that, from the very beginning, worship at St. George's has always had a horizontal dimension as well as a vertical one, embodied in the congregation's orientation toward a pulpit (and today toward an altar) on the geographical west side of the church. This end is called the "liturgical east" because the location of the altar is normatively at the east end of the church. So, in the case of St. George's, which follows the old Roman pattern of having an eastern gate and a western altar, liturgical "east" is geographic west.

The east-west horizontal orientation corresponds to our second way of relating to God, through his saving actions in human history. History is the principal site of our encounter with God.³ Although philosophy reaches toward God, and its analogies for the divine nature, drawn from creation, might be turned into means for genuine (although ultimately disappointing) worship, the final philosophical word about God is that he is *not* like his creation. All the natural analogies break down in the face of a God who is beyond analogy, who "dwells in deep darkness" (1 Kings 8.12), or, for another analogy to the same effect, who "dwells in inapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6.6). We therefore know God not because we could ever attain final knowledge of his nature through his effects, but because he reveals himself in the world that he made. This revelation, too, is made up of analogies and symbols, since that is the language of creation. But these analogies are different from the former ones. God promises that his word and sacraments will always be privileged meeting-places between him and his creation which, because of its error, cannot generally profit from the symbols of nature. Revelation provides a way of salvation because creation has erred from following the path of salvation intended for it, namely obedience to its own nature.

Concretely, this revelation happens in Christian worship, in word and sacrament, and in the words of the liturgy itself, which depend on both word and sacrament even while it contains them. Of course, every Christian liturgy hearkens back to the Incarnation, the historical manifestation of God as a human being, and to "sacred history," the events of Israel's and the church's past. However, in liturgy, the distinction between sacred history and sacred action is abolished. The proclamation of God's word is never, "God saved," but always, "God saves." Likewise the celebration of the sacraments never assures us only that "God gave himself for us," but also, "God gives himself to us." In liturgy, the events of sacred history are renewed in the present, so that our historical moment is also redeemed, and we come to live in sacred history. We are Israel, the people who have been prepared to see the grace of God in a human face; we are the disciples, who encounter the Lord himself in his body and his word; and we are the early church, which looks forward expectantly to the bodily return of Christ, whose spiritual presence is nonetheless still keenly felt.

³ However, we must always remember that this encounter takes places in a world which God created before we had the encounter: God is first our creator, and then our redeemer. The danger of forgetting the priority of cosmos over history is that, if we disregard the infinity of God the creator, we might mistake any current and finite idea of God for the whole thing, the final word on God, and start worshipping an idol—a false image made to resemble human beings (us) even while it bears a divine name—rather than the living God.

Vanderkwaak notes that the three-fold structure of the church's exterior symbolically represents the way in which the created cosmos, symbolized by the circle, is incorporated within the life of God the Holy Trinity. However, as I mention above, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is revealed for the sake of our salvation, and is not primarily a mystery of creation. We encounter the second and third persons of the Trinity in their work for the sake of our redemption from sin, and through that redemption discover that they, as divine persons, were always working in and through creation, bringing about its redemption in the non-moral sense, that is, maintaining the world in the lively order established by its creator. The Trinitarian mystery, therefore, is first of all the mystery of sacred history, of God intervening in human life by the sending of his Son and Spirit. The symbolism of worshipping God facing east within a building whose structure speaks of God the Holy Trinity is entirely apt; our hope for final redemption is possible because God, in his inner life, already goes forth in the Word and returns to himself in the Spirit. The Trinity is the great mystery of sacred history, and sacred history is the perspective emphasized by east-facing worship.

From the time of the earliest records until the recent past, most Christians have prayed and worshipped facing east. The reasons for this orientation have to do with the place of the church in history—that is, they have to do with revelation. The precedent for east-facing worship is not merely or even mostly traditional, adhering to the customs of the past simply because they have been passed on, but are biblical. Of course, they are not biblical in a literal way. Nowhere does Scripture command us to worship God facing east.⁴ Rather, the biblical precedent is in the form of overlapping symbols associated with the east, all of which point toward the east as the direction of eschatological expectation and salvation, which is *our* expectation as living participants in sacred history. I will discuss the most important of these references, in biblical order.

1) *The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden (Gen. 2.8)*. From the very beginning of the biblical narrative, east is the direction of paradise and of creation. To call Eden “eastward” already assumes the perspective of Israel, of the people of God, who also identify the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers as two of the four rivers of Eden, placing Eden in Mesopotamia. In the first twelve chapters of Genesis, the Mesopotamian east is identified as the birthplace of Israel's ancestors in three respects: it was the place where the Lord created the first human beings, a paradise from which they fell and were exiled into wandering in the west; it is the place where, in Babylon, people first gathered to build great cities, which also became sin for them and they were scattered throughout the world, especially to the west; and it is the place where Abram heard the voice of the Lord and began his long sojourn in a new, wild land. Further, it was in and after the Babylonian exile that Israel completed the current form of the book of Genesis, making Babylon the birthplace of Israel in a fourth sense. The people of Israel, as the Letter to the Hebrews (11.16) says, are a sojourning people who “seek a country.” They seek the heavenly country even while God gives them an earthly country to live in. The heavenly country's symbol is the paradise in the east, the original birthplace of Israel, which is as unattainable as heaven itself. So, in some Greek patristic interpretation, most notably in Origen (*De prin.* 4.16), Eden is heaven itself, and represents the intellectual creation in which God first made man, which only becomes the

⁴ The closest that the Bible approaches to making this command is to assume in several places that God's people will—as Jews still do—pray toward the temple in Jerusalem (e.g. Ps. 138.2). This leads to the common misunderstanding that this is the primary reason for Christian east-facing worship. Although it is true in Europe and North America that to face east is to face toward Jerusalem, the practice of facing east was originally more common in the eastern churches, for whom Jerusalem was north, south, or west, than in Latin churches for whom Jerusalem was east.

physical creation and enters into historical time when it falls. So, for Origen, the pilgrimage to heaven is the return to paradise, to the garden “in the east.”

Keeping this in mind, I argue that the persistence of the idea that worship at St. George’s was originally centralized is not due to Cunningham’s testimony, but from the way that this idea can function as an Edenic myth for our particular congregation. Worship around a central pulpit imagines a world in which the word goes forth and creates a world, evenly bounded on every side and complete, without any need for priestly mediation or eschatological hope. It is a world that has not fallen into historical time, existing in the beginning before any robust historical record exists, accessible only to intellectual vision, and not accessible to empirical analysis. By contrast, the east-facing worship of the present church, especially in an era after east-facing worship is no longer the norm, embodies the struggle to maintain the worship of God against the forces of error and history. The myth that the church was originally centralized grounds the meaning of our east-facing worship: we worship facing east here below to express our hope that, when God brings historical time to an end, we will again worship toward the centre in the heavenly rose.^{5,6}

2) *In the heavens hath God set a tabernacle for the sun * which cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course. / It goeth forth from the uttermost part of the heaven, and runneth about unto the end of it again * and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof (Ps. 19.5-6, BCP).* Worship toward the east is, naturally, worship toward the rising sun. The sun also obeys the pattern of recapitulation discussed above: it originates in the unreachable east beyond the horizon, and travels through the whole west so that it can return to the place from whence it came. But, more particularly, Jesus is associated with the sun. The prophet Malachi (4.2) says that he is the “sun of righteousness,” but the association has mostly to do with Psalm 19, which is a psalm about creation and the law. It interprets the excellent orderliness of the world as a testimony to the excellence of God’s commandments. Christ is, according to 1 Cor. 1.24, “the power of God and the wisdom of God,” the one whose wisdom and power is on display in God’s creation, since in him all things “live and move and have their being” (Acts 17.28). Psalm 19 therefore magnifies the glory of Christ. Moreover, the sun is itself a symbol of Christ, which leaves the secret heaven at the Father’s side, travels through the creation, and then rejoins his Father, and whose return to earth in a new dawn is eagerly expected. Jesus Christ, at his second appearing as at his first, will be “the dayspring from on high.” Therefore worship in the direction of the rising sun is also an expression of eschatological hope, hope for the consummation of historical time at Christ’s second coming.

3) *I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ... Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar (Isa. 6.1, 6).* Although Isaiah’s vision is not eastward but upward, the association of heaven with the east is made by the references and arguments above. Here, though, the association between an eastern chancel and the heavenly worship is particularly clear. When we look into the chancel and “lift up our hearts” we are meant to see the heavenly temple and praise God “with angels and archangels,” who

⁵ This inversion happens in the Divine Comedy when Dante, whose journey has hitherto been a linear one through the earth, up mount Purgatory, and toward the outer heaven, suddenly appears, in *Paradiso* 30, as a heavenly rose with God at its centre rather than at its extremity.

⁶ It is particularly clear in Islam that directional (east-facing) worship expresses the hope to someday return to centralized worship, since Muslims pray toward Mecca in the hope that, at some point during their lifetimes, they will make their *hajj* (pilgrimage) to the Mecca, where they will worship by circling around the Kaaba seven times.

cry, “Holy, holy, holy.” The choir, arranged on either side of the altar, represent the angels. The bells, when they ring, represent the temple shaking “at the voice of him that cried,” the incense is the smoke which “filled the house,” and, at the centre, there is the heavenly altar which cleanses unclean lips. Making an eastern chancel the site of the apocalyptic vision directs us forward into that vision; it is a vision of what is, but also of what will be, as is more clear in the revelation of St. John: “I will show thee things which must be hereafter.” Our eschatological hope is for the heavens to be opened, so that the earthly sanctuary, by its imitation of the heavenly worship, is an image of the final consummation of all things, into which we make our pilgrimage when we approach the altar to receive Communion.

4) *As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be (Matt. 24.27).* Jesus’ words are the most clear and literal reason for associating the east with eschatological hope. When Jesus speaks about his return as if he is to come from the east, he echoes the visions of Ezekiel, in which the eastern gate of the temple is the entryway of the Lord (44.2). Using the image of lightning, Jesus speaks about the suddenness of his return. These themes coalesce when we hear Advent resonances in words such as those of the prophet Malachi, “The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple,” or when we use Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the Temple as the Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent. The Lord’s final return to visit his temple shall be through the eastern gate, appearing in the eastern sky like a flash of lightning.

5) *There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2.5).* Although Christ will appear in the east when he comes a second time to represent his Father by judging the world, in his first coming he came to represent erring humankind to the Father. The cross is the best example of this mediation: Christ offers himself to God for us so that we, being “united to him in his death” (Rom. 6.5) can in him make the perfect self-offering of “our selves, our souls and bodies” which we could not have made by ourselves, our sins being too great for any except God to bear. Further, our new life in God is possible because, sharing in the humanity of Christ, we can also share in his divinity. In the whole work of redemption, Christ is the mediator between God and man, satisfying the righteous indignation of a holy God towards erring humanity, and reconciling humanity to serve a God of whom it is not worthy. The Letter to the Hebrews is the greatest biblical testimony to this act of mediation. Drawing on the sacrificial system of Old Testament, Hebrews tells us that Christ is both priest and victim, both the human being whose liturgical action on behalf of the whole people satisfies divine justice, and the object of sacrifice which bears the people’s sin. Jesus Christ is a mediator both in the substitutionary sense of “taking our place” in atoning for sins, and as our representative and advocate, making intercession for us with the Father, and acting as the *totus Christus*, the whole church embodied in his person.

For this reason, east-facing worship, versus another orientation of worship, is principally a matter of which direction the priest faces, rather than the direction in which the people face. Indeed, almost all congregations—with the notable exception of monastic congregations celebrating the daily offices—still have the people face toward the altar, even when the priest faces the congregation. At St. George’s, where the priest faces toward the altar with the people, the role of the priest as mediator is clear. The priest speaks in the people’s voice. He does not offer any prayers that are not the people’s also, but, acting as the head of the congregation in the way that Christ is the head of the church, he prays on behalf of the whole, and all pray by sharing in his prayer. Since this prayer is offered to God,

who symbolically dwells in the east, the priest also must face east, aligning himself with the direction in which the people pray. The tradition calls this symbolic headship the role of the priest to act *in persona Christi*, “in the person of Christ.” At the literal level, the priest is a mediator between God and man only as a representative, not as a sacrificial substitute. This role of representation might be reduced to mere functionality; someone must read the prayers. And, indeed, this is not entirely amiss. The priest is merely the vessel of Christ’s action, an ordinary person set aside by God for a holy function. It is not the priest in his own person, but always Christ who performs the offering at the altar, and who says, “This is *my* body,” and, “This is *my* blood.”⁷ When the priest faces toward the congregation, the priest’s role as representative of the people, and his role as the representative of Christ who lives in and among them, is symbolically broken. Moreover, a new symbolic order is established, in which the priest is a representative of God the Father to humanity, rather than a representative of God the Son to the Father. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger argues that this has led to an unprecedented wave of clericalism since east-facing worship was largely abolished in the Latin churches (*The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 79-80).

IV. Conclusion.

The Round Church “prays” in two respects. By virtue of its structure and arrangement, it converts the material creation into a word about God, and this drawing-upward is prayer. It also prays by drawing the congregation into prayer, providing for them a symbolic path into the mysteries of the faith. In *Sacred Geometry*, Vanderkwaak discusses the vertical aspect of St. George’s, its construction under a dome, and the prayer related to it. But how does the horizontal aspect of the church, its east-west axis, also pray?

The building itself prays by orienting itself toward the east, the direction of eschatological hope, in earnest expectation of the return of the Lord which it serves. Being oriented toward the coming kingdom of God, the building prays for that coming. The building also locates itself in the history of salvation, remembering the lost paradise of Eden, and looking forward to the new paradise as something not yet fully accomplished. However, by being the meeting place between God and his sojourning people, where the sacraments are celebrated as he present realizations of a future not yet realized, the Round Church also prays in the most sacramental sense: it identifies itself as the place where what has been, what is, and what is to come all meet. This is the same identification which the individual must make in sacramental prayer: to identify oneself with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection, through an act of memory. In the case of the Round Church, that memory is an embodied one, solidified in wood and plaster.

The Round Church also leads the congregation in prayer, and provides a way for them to follow in their pilgrimage into the presence of God. The congregation prays by way of a mediator, a human priest whose liturgical action symbolically identifies him with Jesus, the great high priest, the mediator between God and man. Moreover, the sanctuary is for the congregation an icon of heaven, where the angels worship God, saying, “Holy, holy, holy,” which is in the east in the biblical imagination, and they are invited into that heaven when they approach the altar to receive Communion. There, they are made participants in the life of him who “was, and is, and is to come” (Rev. 1.8), and yet return, after receiving, into the realm of history and hope for final redemption.

⁷ St. Augustine’s *dictum*, important for all future sacramental theology, was, “It is Christ who baptizes.”