







THE NEW EDIFICE OF UNITY CHURCH, OAK PARK, ILLINOIS.
FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, ARCHITECT. DESCRIPTIVE AND
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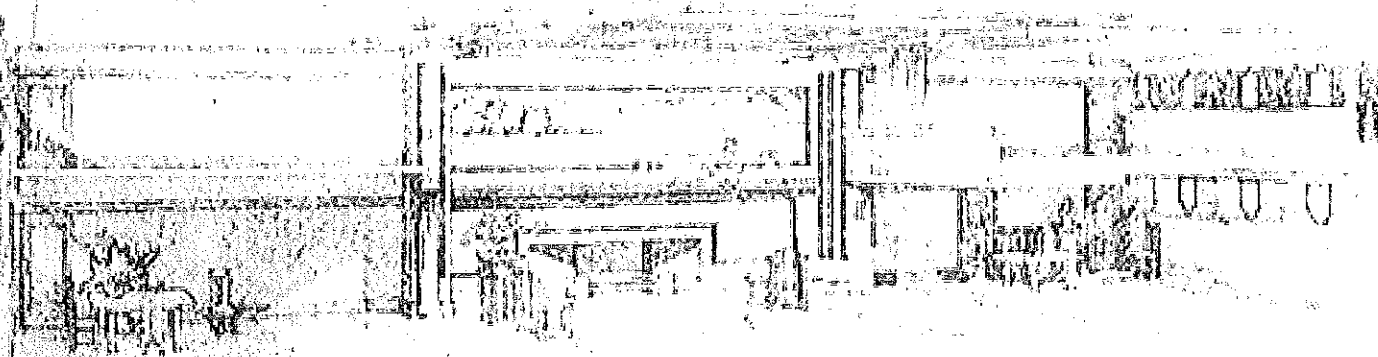
COMMITTEE ON BROCHURE

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INTERIOR OF UNITY HOUSE

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VERY radical departure from the customary must make its appeal to reason to determine its worth and truth. Without good reason we should not depart from the customary. Especially is this true in regard to things sacred. But if the change is governed by sound reason, it compels an adjustment of thought.

In the new edifice designed for Unity Church by Frank Lloyd Wright, so striking an innovation has been made in church architecture as to make desirable a public description of the design and a statement of the reasons for its adoption, in order that its meaning and *raison d'être* may be more fully understood.

DESCRIPTION

IN GENERAL

The fundamental principle of all architecture is that the form must fit the function; that is, a building must be adapted to the uses to which it is to be put and should express those uses in its form. A modern church building has a two-fold purpose; it is erected for the worship of God and for the service of man. These two functions demand a different



architectural treatment that each may best be served. While a house of worship may properly be used for other services in the interest of human welfare, it is desirable that a religious society in building should keep its house of worship distinct from those rooms which are used for social service. By dedicating a place distinctively to worship an atmosphere can be given to it which is highly desirable.

In the design adopted for Unity Church there are two distinct buildings, one designed for public worship and other suitable public meetings, and another for purposes of social service and religious meetings of a less formal character. They are, however, connected by a large Entrance Hall by which they are knitted together into a single integral and harmonious structure in outward appearance, thus giving unity to the two functions of a church, and guarding against the idea that the one purpose of worship is alone holy and the other common and unclean.

The name "Unity House" is given to the building used for social service, the name "Unity Temple" to the building used for public worship. While it is common among us to speak of our houses of worship as "churches," the use of the word "temple" is better for many reasons. It allows us to keep the word "church" to its distinctive meaning, namely, that of the body of Christian worshippers, and thus prevents much confusion resulting from the different meanings of the word. This usage also keeps us in line with the Biblical use of the terms; for in it the word "temple" is always used to designate a house of worship, while the word "church" always refers to the body of worshippers. The best lexicographers also recognize the fitness of this use of the word "temple," one of the definitions of the word in the Standard Dictionary being, "An edifice dedicated to Christian public worship." This building which is to be dedicated to the worship of the one true and living God in the spirit of Christian faith may then very properly be called a "temple." The term is further made specially fitting here because the building has the feeling and to some extent the form of an ancient temple.

IN DETAIL

The material used in construction will be concrete poured and tamped in forms *in situ*. The design is specially adapted to this form of construction and material and thus fulfills another fundamental principle of architecture.

The site of the building is a corner lot having a frontage of 100 feet on Lake street, the main street of Oak Park, and a depth of 170 feet on Kenilworth avenue.

The Temple is a cruciform building, 67 feet on each axis and 47 feet high. The form of the cross, however, is made less apparent externally, owing to the spaces between the arms being filled with square stairchambers which rise nearly to the roof. The Temple stands in the center of the lot at the front. In the rear, with its main axis crossing the lot, is Unity House, 50 x 90 feet. These two buildings are knit together into one integral structure by a large Entrance Hall standing between the two buildings. The depth of the whole structure on its main axis running through the Entrance Hall is 143 feet. The two buildings are still further integrated by parapets extending forward from the ends of Unity House and enclosing in their broad arms the rear of the Temple and connected with it by wide flights of steps facing the main street.

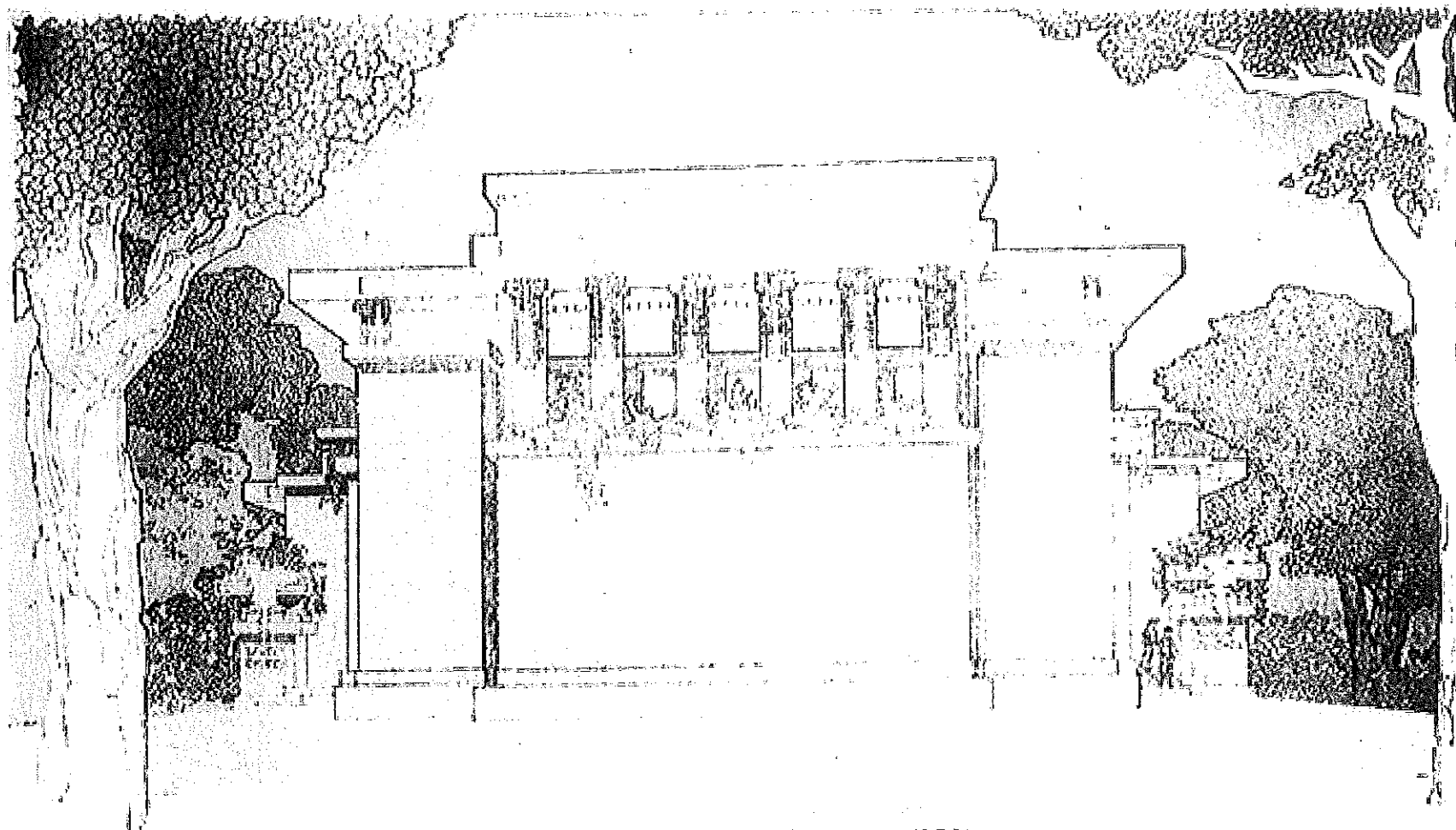
Both the Temple and Unity House are lighted mainly from the top through large sky-lights shielded beneath by glass ceilings. A crown of windows also extends around the Temple beneath the broad projecting roof. Taking the light from above is an ideal method for practical purposes and it also embodies a fine religious idea. With the exception of narrow windows set deeply into recesses between the cruciform mass and the stair-chambers, the lower portion of the Temple is unbroken by doors or windows, save where it opens into the Entrance Hall. This preserves the mass of the building and by means of quiet surfaces and unbroken lines gives great dignity to the structure. This method of construction serves the further purpose of keeping out the noise of the street cars, thus securing a quiet and restful interior. At the height of 22 feet the wall of the Temple is recessed to carry columns extending to the roof, thus affording the necessary ornamentation and beauty to what would otherwise be a too severely simple facade. Behind these columns is a continuous sweep of windows. At a lower level the ends of Unity House are recessed and set with columns backed by windows in the same way.

Walls of shrubbery will extend from Lake street on each side of the lot at its outer edges to the parapets leading from Unity House. Within these walls of shrubbery and extending past the Temple on both sides, walks will lead up to the broad steps rising two and one-half feet to the large courts

formed by the parapets and the adjacent walls of the buildings. From these courts on either side one passes into the Entrance Hall, 24x30 feet. Three sets of doors on each side, with a combined width of 30 feet, give hospitable welcome and abundant facilities for exit. This Entrance Hall affords an admirable opportunity for all the congregation to gather socially after services of worship.

Passing into Unity House from the Entrance Hall, one is faced by a large fire-place at the opposite side. Behind this fire-place is situated the kitchen with a large serving room at each end. The central portion of Unity House extends upward to the ceiling light, 17 feet, but at the ends the length of the room, 84 feet, is broken by galleries 25 feet deep. By means of folding partitions class rooms are formed below the galleries or the whole lower floor may be thrown open for banquets and other purposes. Above the kitchen is a work-room for the ladies on the same level as the galleries and connecting with them so the whole upper floor can be used for social purpose without descending to the lower floor to pass from one gallery to the other. This upper floor is reached by stairways from the Entrance Hall, and also from the interior of Unity House. A rear door connects the kitchen with the street and gives entrance to the rooms for storage and heating purposes in the basement. Two toilet rooms and large closets are also provided.

To enter the Temple one passes from the Entrance Hall, at the right or left, into a cloister 13 feet wide from which flights of steps lead up to the nave four feet above. At the rear of the cloister other steps lead up to the alcoves surrounding the nave and to the galleries. Once within these cloisters one is practically in the auditorium but is screened from observation by the raised floor and piers of the nave. They serve the purpose of sequestered aisles in entered the audience room. The outer sides of the main floor are raised four feet higher than the level of the nave over the cloisters and in the rear opposite the pulpit, making three alcoves separated from each other by the piers and stairways at the corners, and seating 54 persons each. This gives a clear view of the pulpit from the rear and sides of the room without the expedient of banking the floors. The level of the alcoves is reached by steps from the nave or directly from the cloisters by flights of stairs at the rear. These stairs are screened by large piers which carry the roof and support the floors of the alcoves and the galleries. These piers, four in number, one at each corner of the nave, also contain the ventilating and heating flues.



LAKE STREET ELEVATION

The choir is placed on the side next to the Entrance Hall in an alcove similar to those at the rear and sides of the nave, and on a level with them. These four alcoves form the arms of a Greek cross. The organ is directly behind the choir, but on a higher level, while the pulpit-platform is in front of the choir and separated from it by a high rail and at a lower level, projecting into the nave. Behind the organ are rooms for the choir, trustees and pastor's study, which are reached from the choir-alcove. They form the second story of the Entrance Hall. A gallery is carried around the three sides of the

nave above the alcoves but is cut away on the fourth side above the choir to give room for the organ. This provides accommodations for 153 sittings when needed. A total capacity of 450 is thus obtained, while a smaller audience can be seated on the main floor without the appearance of an empty church. The front of the gallery being carried on the large corner piers, these form the boundary lines of the nave. By recessing the gallery in this way the ordinary unsightly projection into the nave is obviated and the gallery made to form an integral part of the construction.

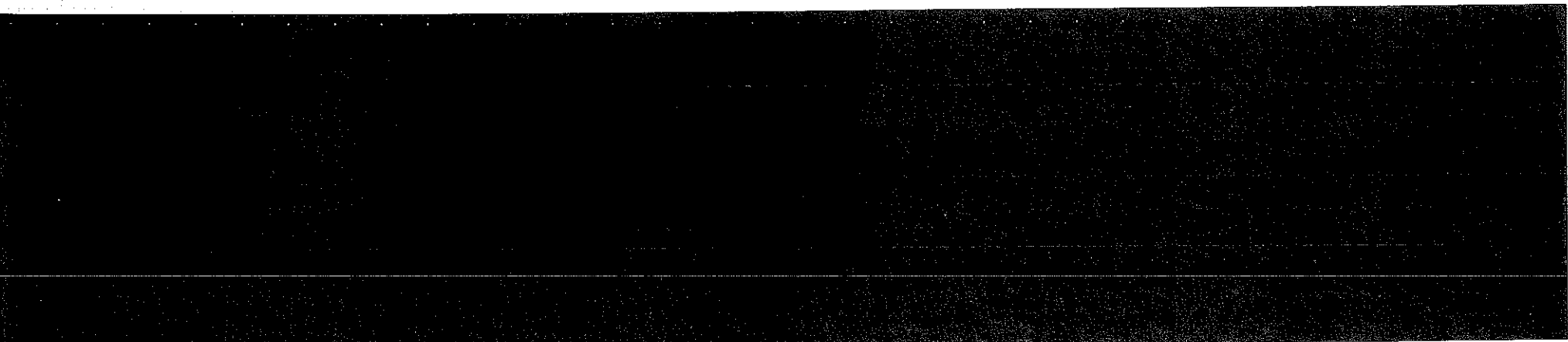
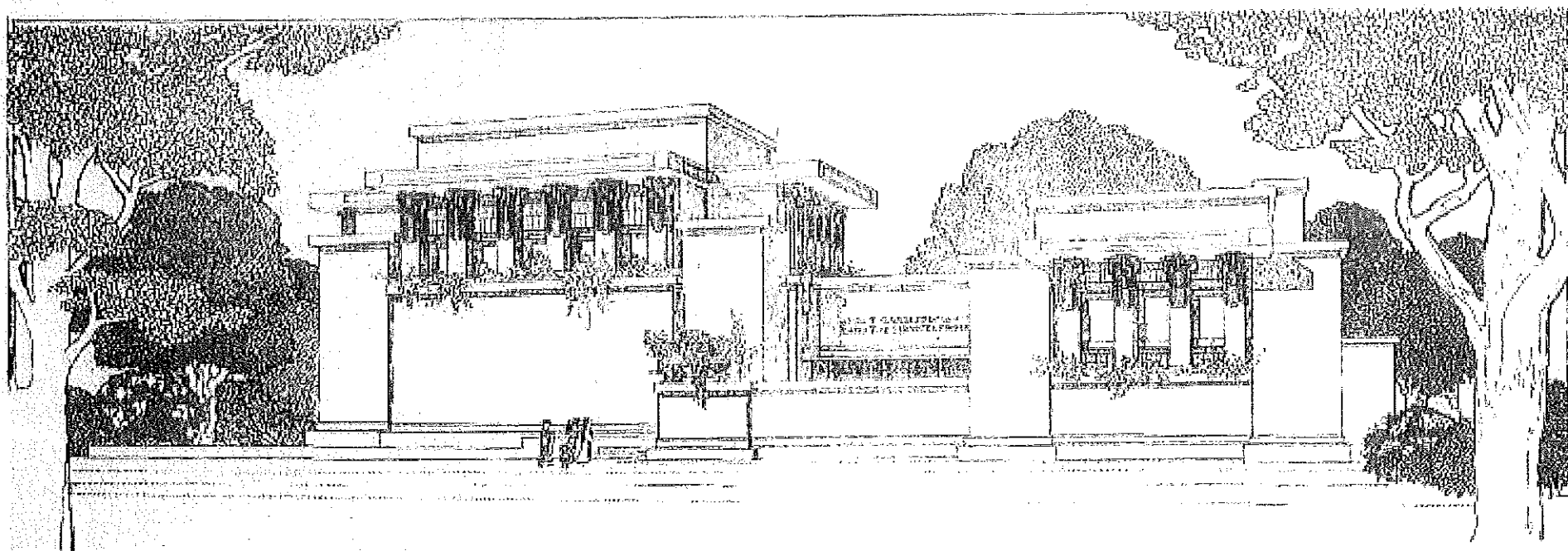
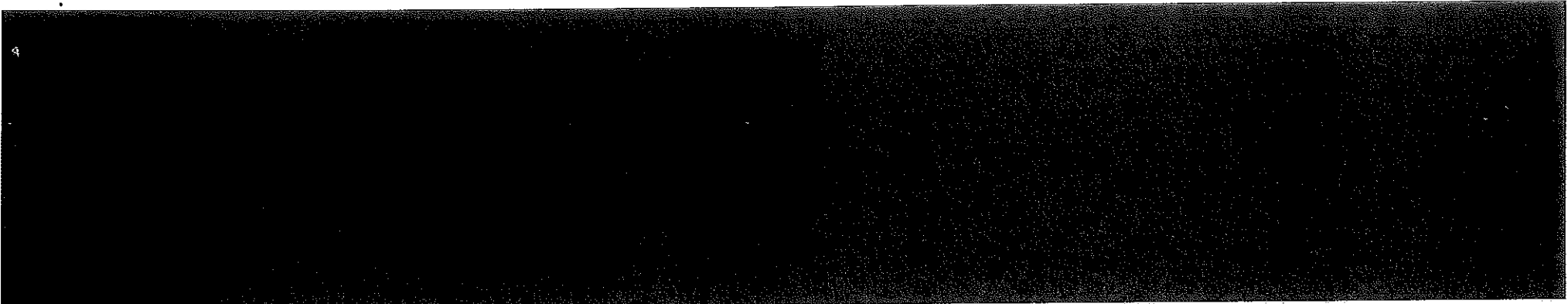
An interesting feature of the interior arrangement is that the congregation in passing out, at the close of services, move toward the altar instead of away from it, thus contributing a fine religious conception and also adding to the social function of the service by making it easy for pastor and officers to meet all members and strangers without effort. Additional exits for this purpose are provided by wide steps leading past the pulpit into the Entrance Hall. These stairways are closed by outer doors and will not be used for entrance at times of regular services; but they may be so used when desired as upon occasions of funerals, when the casket can be brought before the altar and taken out without being carried through the aisles.

Below the main floor is a cloak room, 31 feet square, which opens into the Entrance Hall, and is provided with toilet rooms in the rear.

While this edifice is a wide departure from the ordinary forms of church architecture, both in interior arrangement and exterior appearance, the design is simple, truthful, dignified, and reverent in feeling and the plan is finely adapted to the work of the church.

THE CONDITIONS DETERMINING THE DESIGN

The plan and style of architecture have been determined by no desire to create something unique, but are founded upon substantial reasons; they are the natural and even necessary outcome of existing conditions; the rational solution of a given problem.



THE CONDITIONS OF THE PROBLEM

These consisted in the limited financial resources of the society; the nature of the location and environment; and the desire to express in the form and nature of the structure the faith held by the church erecting it.

The financial resources of the church limited it to a building costing not more than \$40,000. The location on the main street of the village in the midst of a group of many fine public buildings, none of which cost less than \$65,000, and others from \$75,000 to \$100,000, imposed the civic obligation of creating a building worthy of its environment. Several of these edifices are churches forcing a competition in kind. In the front and rear are several car lines whose noise must be shut out.

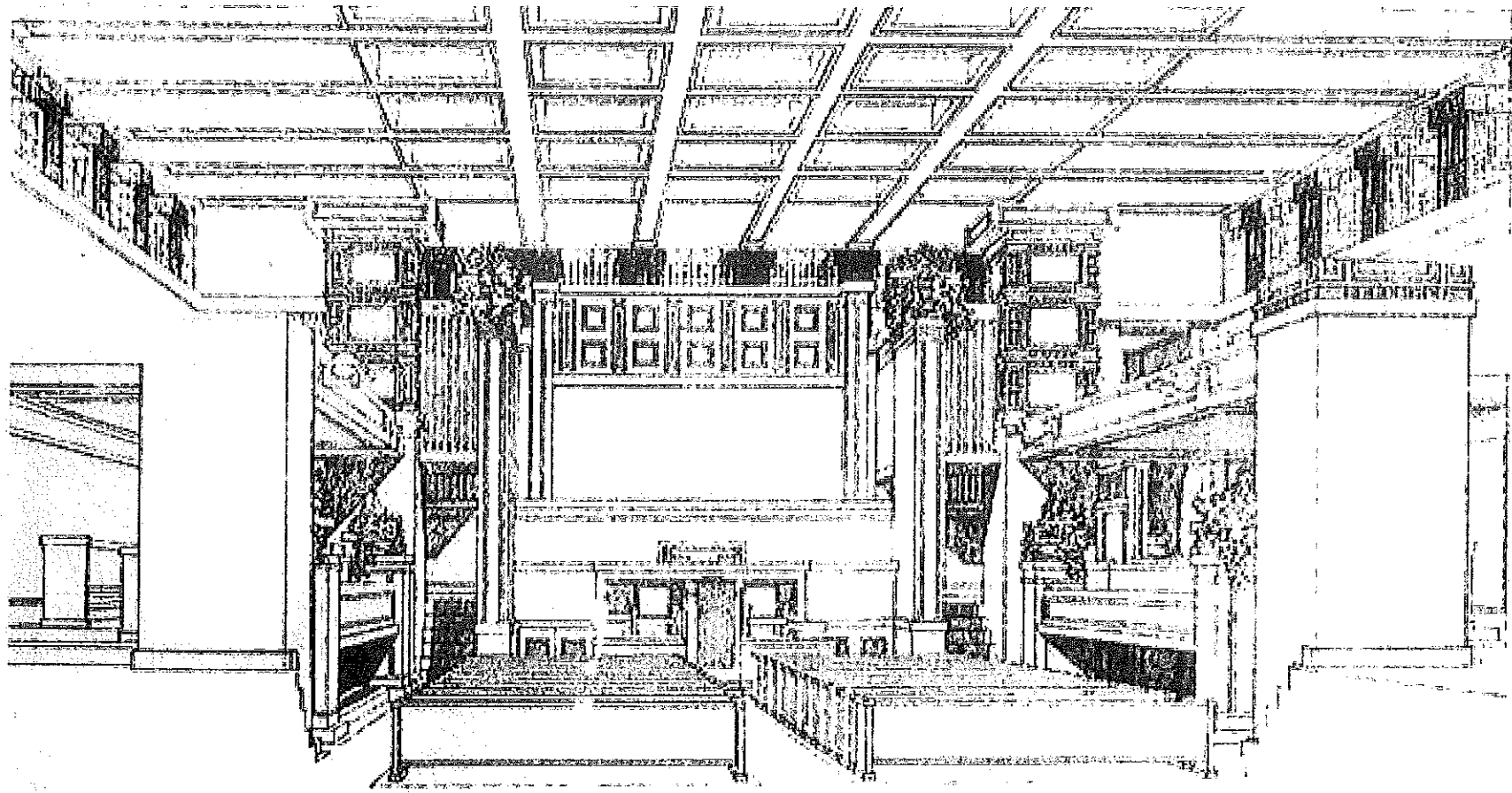
These conditions created a most difficult problem. It could not be solved upon the lines of traditional and customary church architecture, since a building of the same kind as those surrounding it, but cheaper, would suffer by comparison. A direct entrance would also let in the noise.

HOW THE PROBLEM WAS SOLVED

The skill of the architect has been shown by the successful meeting of these conditions. First, by the use of concrete poured and tamped in forms as a building material; second, by a design perfectly adapted to this kind of construction; third, by the adoption of a new and distinct style of architecture; fourth, by the method of approach and entrance.

Concrete is much less expensive than stone, yet treated in this way gives an equally dignified and substantial structure. Walls, floors and roof will be built out of it, thus involving little skilled labor and the employment mainly of but one set of workmen. This construction also gives a building absolutely fireproof. The style of architecture eliminates the cost of spire, tower, and expensive roof and lends itself to the material and construction used. Thus the problem of a dignified and substantial building at a comparatively small cost is met.

By adopting a distinct and characteristic style of architecture the building stands on its own merits and frees itself from any depreciatory contrasts with the other costlier churches. The beauty of the



INTERIOR OF THE TEMPLE

classic design meets the civic obligation imposed by the location and environment. The style of the architecture gives a religious effect, expressing faith, aspiration, and reverence without the adjuncts of a spire, tower, or soaring roof, which are commonly used to express these sentiments. The problem arising from the noise of street cars has been solved, and a quiet restful interior insured by carrying the entrance away from the street-front and by keeping the lower walls at the exposed front and sides unbroken by doors or windows, the light being taken from the top.

The religious feeling which every house of worship should express has been reached in this structure not by the adoption of the traditional form of architecture to which we are accustomed, springing out of the Gothic style of the Middle Ages, but by a frank return to the simpler and more ancient forms of religious architecture.

By the simplicity and beauty of the design and by its departure from traditional lines, the simplicity and freedom of the faith held by the members of Unity Church is outwardly expressed; the architecture thus typifies the faith of the church.

By these means every condition has been successfully met and the difficult problem confronting the architect truthfully solved. The society secures a building at an expense within its resources, ample in size, an ornament to the village, religious in feeling, fitted to the uses and work of the church, and typical of its characteristic spirit of simple faith and freedom.

THE EDIFICE EXPRESSIVE OF THE FAITH

Mr. De Kay has raised the question whether a church edifice ought not to express the special faith of those who worship in it. This thought certainly lies in line with the fundamental principle of church architecture. He says, "Perhaps we are on the threshold of a new era in ecclesiastical architecture, when one congregation will not copy another as one man copies another's coat, but the architect will be asked to say something to the point which can not be misunderstood by believers."

This thought has entered into the architecture of this edifice. The attempt has been made not merely to create a religious structure, but one that fitly embodies the principles of liberal Christianity for which this church stands.

These principles may be said to be unity, truth, beauty, simplicity, freedom and reason.

UNITY

The building is a harmonious unit; the style fitting the material and the material the form. While the structure is adapted to the various function of a church, the purposes of worship and services are clearly integrated, while separately set forth.

Informed by the same spirit which characterized the ancient temples, this structure typifies the thought that "while religions are many, religion is one," and that the vital power and superiority of Christianity consists in its ability to absorb, perfect, and use whatever was good in all preceding forms of religion. The past and the present forms of religion are thus brought together in a spirit of unity. The temple form is especially fitted to a liberal church whose faith is that all religions are of God, are the attempts of man to feel after and find Him "in whom we live and move and have our being."

TRUTH

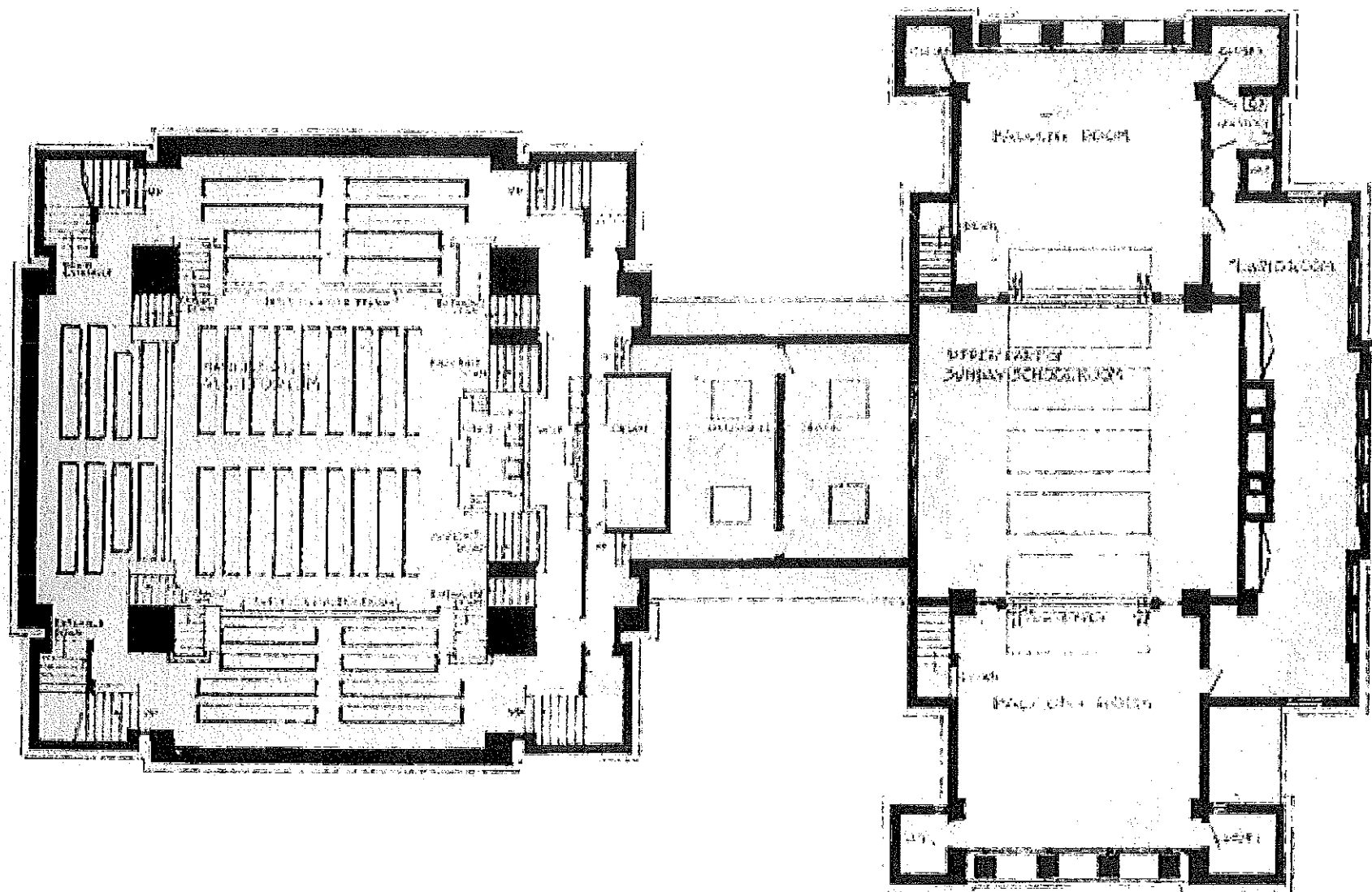
By fitting the organic nature of the design to the material of which it is built, by using the same material in every wall of the building, making the rear as good as the front and the whole logically consistent, the edifice stands for loyalty to truth. By the durable character of this adamantine concrete, used in this direct way, it also typifies the permanence of truth. It is honest in all its construction.

SIMPLICITY AND BEAUTY

The basic faith of Unity Church is that God is our good father who, by his love and his power, will bring all his children unto holiness and happiness. The simplicity and beauty of this faith are fittingly embodied in the simple design and chaste beauty of its edifice.

REASON AND FREEDOM

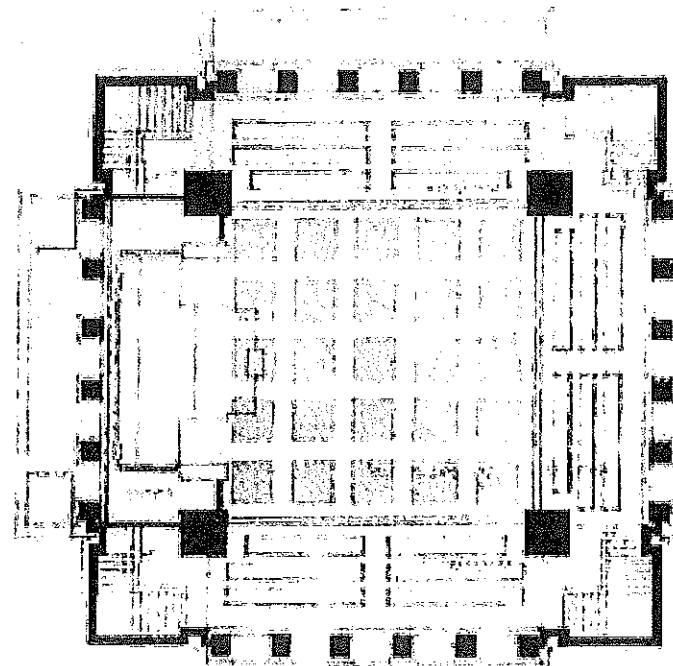
Liberal Christianity stands for freedom from the traditional, when tradition is not supported by good reason. Not blind authority but open-eyed truth and reason must control our creeds and our deeds. By cutting free from the customary forms in order to solve a difficult architectural problem, by adopting a design based wholly upon what is reasonable and fitting under existing conditions, the church has expressed its faith in the very form of its edifice. The building is an example of freedom based upon reason. It is an embodiment of the rational position that the vital question about a church edifice



PLAN OF THE TEMPLE FLOOR

is not, Does it look like other church buildings? but rather, Is it genuine, is it rational? Is it true to conditions? Its religious character is to be tested not by its resemblance to other churches, but by its possession of the qualities of reverence, dignity, and aspiration which belong to a house of worship.

These qualities are present in this edifice in a marked degree. Without tower or spire it expresses the spirit of the ideal. By its form it expresses the thought, inherent in the liberal faith, that God should not be sought in the sky, but on earth among the children of men. His word is not in the heavens that we should say "who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us that we may hear it and do it," but his word is very nigh unto us in our hearts. This building conveys the sense of dignity and permanence befitting a house of religion. It has the feeling of reverence and seems to say "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." It is informed by that spirit of beauty which led the Psalmist to say, "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."



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