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Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple and Architecture for Liberal Religion in Chicago, 1885–1909

Joseph Siry

Long recognized as a major early work of Frank Lloyd Wright, Unity Temple may be understood as the culmination of a series of experiments in a new architecture for liberal religion near Chicago around 1900. Its precursors included All Souls Church, Unity Chapel, and Abraham Lincoln Center, which embodied ideas for church design advocated by Wright's uncle, Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones. Unity Temple also signified the theological ideals of Rev. Rodney F. Jonhonnot, the minister of Unity Church in Oak Park, who helped to select Wright as architect and who articulated the religious symbolism of Unity Temple in terms of Unitarian and Universalist thought.

The Unitarian Universalist Church in Oak Park, Illinois, historically known as Unity Temple, has long been recognized as one of the major public buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright's early career. In accounts of Wright's work to 1910, Unity Temple is cited as innovative in its concrete construction, in its plan with a square auditorium, and in its architectural expression of its religious purpose. The design has been seen as a demonstration of Wright's organic theory and as a leading example of his individual style.¹ Unity Temple may be understood not

only as a decisive formal synthesis within the history of Wright's development, but also as the culmination of a series of experiments in an architecture for liberal religion which began twenty years before. In this light, Unity Temple reflects not only Wright's ideals for a new architecture, but also the theological beliefs and intellectual and social values of the Unitarian and Universalist faiths, as these had developed in and around Chicago from the mid-1880s.

One formative influence on Wright's view of religious architecture was his uncle Jenkin Lloyd Jones (1843–1918), a prominent leader of the Unitarian church in Chicago and its region, who advocated innovation in the design of churches as part of his broad program for a radical reshaping of Unitarianism in the West.² In November 1882 Jones founded All Souls Church in the Oakwood neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. In an inaugural sermon entitled "The Ideal Church," Jones envisioned the new institution as "a free congress of independent souls," which would "stand upon a grand emphasis of the great word of the century, UNITY. . . . This church will seek to welcome high and low, rich and poor, better and worse, believer and unbeliever."³ Though nominally Unitarian, All Souls Church did not ask members to subscribe to a creed. Wright's uncle imagined this new kind of church in an innovative type of building that signified its religious ideals. Jones set forth his views in a

A project grant from Wesleyan University supported research for this study in the summer of 1989. An earlier version of it was presented at the 1989 Annual Meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians in Montreal, Canada.

¹ The earliest accounts of Unity Temple from its design in 1906 include Jonhonnot; Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture," *Architectural Record*, xxiii, March, 1908, 212; "Unity Temple and Unity House, Oak Park, Ill.," *Inland Architect and News Record*, lvi, December, 1908, 77; *idem*, *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright* (1910), Palos Park, Ill., 1975, description of pl. lxiii; J. Wils, "Frank Lloyd Wright," *Elsevier's Geiellustreerd Maandschrift*, lxi, 4, 1921, 217–227, trans. in H.A. Brooks, ed., *Writings on Wright: Selected Comment on Frank Lloyd Wright*, Cambridge, Mass., 1981, 139–145.

Wright's later retrospective commentary on the building appears in "In the Cause of Architecture, I: The Logic of the Plan," *Architectural Record*, lxiii, January, 1928, 49–57; Wright, 176–184; and "Recollections—The United States, 1893–1920," *Architect's Journal*, lxxxiv, 16 July–6 August 1936, repr. in F. Gutheim, ed., *Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture; Selected Writings, 1894–1940*, New York, 1941, 177–191. In addition to his account of the design in *An Autobiography*, Wright assessed Unity Temple as his first work fully to express space in its form in the special issue of *Architectural Forum*, lxviii, January, 1938, 35, repr. in Gutheim, 231; "In the Realm of Ideas," *Two Lectures on Architecture*, Chicago, 1942, 25–26; and his talk to the Taliesin Fellowship on 13 August 1952, quoted in B.B. Pfeiffer, ed., *Letters to Architects: Frank Lloyd Wright*, Fresno, Calif., 1986, 48.

Later accounts of the building by others include those of Hitchcock, 53–54; Manson, 156–162; V.J. Scully, Jr., *Frank Lloyd Wright*, New York, 1960, 20–21; P. Blake, *The Master Builders*, New York, 1960, 328–332; H. Wright, "Unity Temple Revisited," *Architectural Forum*, cxxx, 5 June, 1969, 28–37; Twombly, 101–102; M. Davies, "The Embodiment of the Concept of Organic Expression: Frank Lloyd Wright," *Architectural*

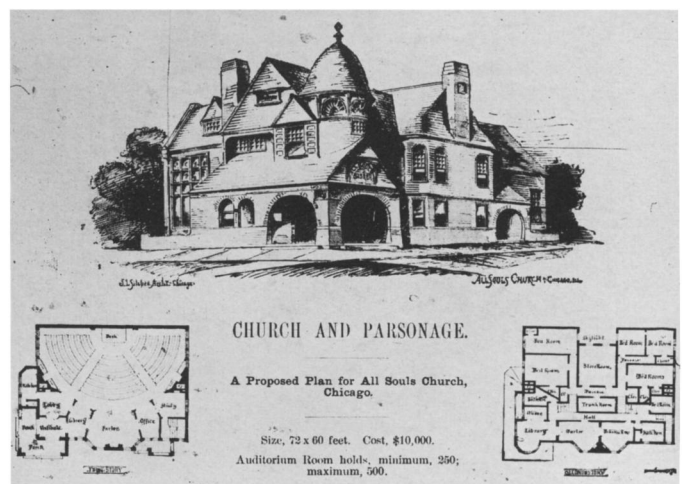
History, xxv, 1982, 120–130; O.A. Graf, *Die Kunst des Quadrats: Zum Werk von Frank Lloyd Wright*, Vienna, 1983, i, 124–260; B. Gill, *Many Masks: A Life of Frank Lloyd Wright*, New York, 1987, 173–184; and Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., *Unity Temple: Historic Structures Report*, Chicago, 1987.

² Biographical accounts of Jenkin Lloyd Jones are found in Lyttle, 117–162, 221–228; Robinson, 117–119, 284–285; S.A. Eliot, ed., *Heralds of a Liberal Faith*, 4 vols., Boston, 1910–52, iv, 164–173; and R.H. Thomas, "Jenkin Lloyd Jones: Lincoln's Soldier of Civic Righteousness," Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1967.

³ J.L. Jones, *The Ideal Church*, Chicago, 1882, 4, 5, 6.

sermon of May 1885 called "The New Problems in Church Architecture,"⁴ when he unveiled designs for a building for All Souls Church prepared by Joseph L. Silsbee. It was later noted, however, that "the conception and plan of the building belong to the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones."⁵ While Wright's uncle admired the original medieval cathedrals, he stated that "the modern church builded after the conventional cathedral type is an obvious anachronism."⁶ In his view, the faith of medieval times had emphasized devotional emotion rather than critical thought; hence Gothic cathedrals of that period "provided no seats for listeners, no light for readers, and the human voice was broken into unintelligent [sic] echoes among its arches. It was no place to listen, to work, or to think. It kindled a mystic imagination, but strangled the judgment. It was never meant to be warmed in winter or to be ventilated in summer. Its 'dim religious light' is an offense to the inquirer."⁷ Wright's uncle believed that in his time the idea of the church as cathedral was giving way "to the finer ideal of many smaller homes, where those of like mind and taste band themselves together with home-like ties. The individual will not allow himself to be lost in the crowd, not even a crowd of devotees. In the coming church the presence of each will be recognized, and the absence of any one will be felt."⁸ Jones reasoned that a church should be like a residence, believing that the congregation "is the larger family and its building must be made the larger home."⁹

In proposing such an alternative ideal for the design of churches, Wright's uncle stressed that he did not "advocate any change that will make the church less a shrine, less an altar, at which the soul confronts the solemnities of life. . . . We need indeed a sanctuary, literally 'a clean



1 Silsbee, All Souls Church, Chicago, proposed design of 1885 (from *Unity*, xv, 20 June 1885)

place,' 'a pure room.'"¹⁰ In this spirit, Jones then asked: "Would you build us a house of worship? O architect, build it low with humility, and make it warm with human tenderness." He commanded: "Build us, . . . O architect, a building whose very walls will be instinct with human fellowship and human needs. Flood it with sunlight and fill it with pure air."¹¹ Wright's uncle emphasized that he did not want the new church to be less beautiful than the old, for "the line of beauty ever tends to the line of truth. The rational faith will only demand that the architect recognize the broad distinction between the conventional and the genuine in art."¹²

In June 1885, Jenkin Lloyd Jones published the sermon containing these ideas together with floor plans of the proposed building for All Souls, and a perspective sketch of the design signed by Silsbee (Fig. 1).¹³ The site on the southeast corner of Oakwood Boulevard and Langley Avenue was then surrounded by trees, before its neighborhood was later built up—hence the image of the church as a dwelling in the country. The semicircular auditorium had a platform against the east interior wall, and it contained north and south walls of windows and a central skylight. Fireplaces stood toward the rear to either side of the outer ring of pews. A desk was placed

⁴ Jones (see Sources), 202–205.

⁵ "Religious News," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 September 1886, 11. Scholars have asserted that Silsbee's own Unitarian religion played a central part in his life (T.J. McCormick, "The Early Work of Joseph Lyman Silsbee," in Helen Searing, ed., *In Search of Modern Architecture: A Tribute to Henry-Russell Hitchcock*, New York and Cambridge, Mass., 1982, 175), and that Silsbee may have come to Chicago in response to the possibility of the commission for All Souls Church (Hitchcock, 4). Silsbee's father, Rev. William Silsbee (b. 1813), a Unitarian minister and from 1868 the pastor of the Unitarian church at Trenton, New York, may have been the connection between his son and Jenkin Lloyd Jones. On Sunday, 10 October 1886, two days before the dedication of the new All Souls Church, William Silsbee led a prayer from its platform. Jenkin Lloyd Jones commented that, "it is pleasant to think of him worshipping within the walls which his son as architect had so successfully shaped" (*Unity*, xvii, 16 October 1886, 91).

⁶ Jones, 202. In the course of his first trip to Europe, during the summer of 1882, Jenkin Lloyd Jones had toured the English cathedrals and abbeys of Winchester, Chester, York, Wells, Salisbury, and St. David's. On the Continent he also saw the cathedrals of Antwerp, Cologne, Strasbourg, Notre Dame in Paris, and ten to twelve other examples of the type (Jones, "Home Again," *Unity*, x, 1 October 1882, 310–312).

⁷ Jones, 203–204.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

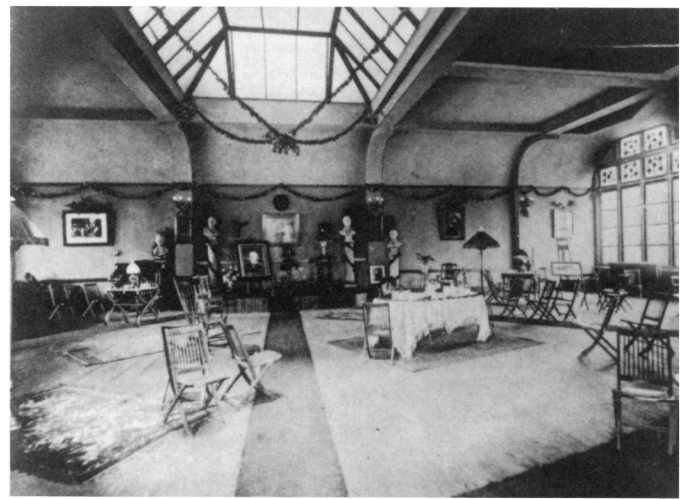
¹³ "Church and Parsonage. A Proposed Plan for All Souls Church, Chicago," *Unity*, xv, 20 June 1885, 202. Subsequent announcement of Silsbee as the building's architect appeared in *Inland Architect and Builder*, vi, August, 1885, 8, and *Building Budget*, i, October, 1885, 66. A drawing of what appears to be an earlier project for All Souls Church was published in *All Souls Church Second Annual* early in 1885, showing a structure of residential character similar to the domestic architecture of Silsbee when he first came to Chicago. On Silsbee's activity during this period, see S.K. Sorrell, "Silsbee: The Evolution of a Personal Style," *Prairie School Review*, vii, fourth quarter, 1970, 5–13. Other accounts of All Souls Church appear in Hitchcock, 4, and Manson, 15–16. The building's role in Jones's career is discussed in Lyttle, 158–160.



2 Silsbee, All Souls Church, Chicago, 1886, view from north-west (from *Abraham Lincoln Centre [and] All Souls Church; Reports for 1912*; courtesy Oak Park Public Library, Oak Park, Illinois)

on the front platform, with no altar. The auditorium's arrangement attests to Jones's interest in lighting and acoustics, while the seating may emphasize the fact that the church did not have individual pews rented by parishioners. At the rear, the circumference of the auditorium opened directly to a ring of rooms, including a parlor in the center. This arrangement was intended to permit later expansion of the auditorium through removal of the partitions between these smaller rooms, whose functions could be moved to spaces on the second floor.¹⁴

On 29 March 1886, Jenkin Lloyd Jones broke ground for the new All Souls Church, which was dedicated in October of that same year. Jones believed that, when finished, the building would stand "for a religious faith broader than its walls, simpler than even its architecture."¹⁵ Silsbee's final design for All Souls Church, like his earlier drawing, does not emphasize the auditorium on the exterior (Fig. 2). Instead, the visible street fronts on both levels convey the building's residential character. Wright recalled his first impression that Silsbee's design



3 Silsbee, All Souls Church, Chicago, photographed in 1891 auditorium (from *All Souls Church Eighth Annual*, 1891)

appeared "in no way like a church, more like a 'Queene Anne' dwelling."¹⁶ A view of the auditorium in 1891 shows a level hall for varied events, generously lighted by windows on its side walls and by the large central skylight (Fig. 3). It is as if the space had the character of an expansive parlor in order to express the church's motto, carved over a fireplace near its entrance, "Let No Man Be Stranger Here."¹⁷

A residential appearance without ecclesiastical imagery may have signified that All Souls served its community all through the week. By 1892 the church boasted study clubs, a library, a manual training school, and a kindergarten, all of which were "maintained for the benefit not only of the church but for the good of the neighborhood."¹⁸ Given this vision of a communal orientation for All Souls, Wright's uncle hoped that his building, because it did not have the architectural character of surrounding conventional churches, would appear as a nonsectarian meeting place for all nearby residents. The building's domestic image also signified that it was the residence of Jenkin Lloyd Jones, who broke with

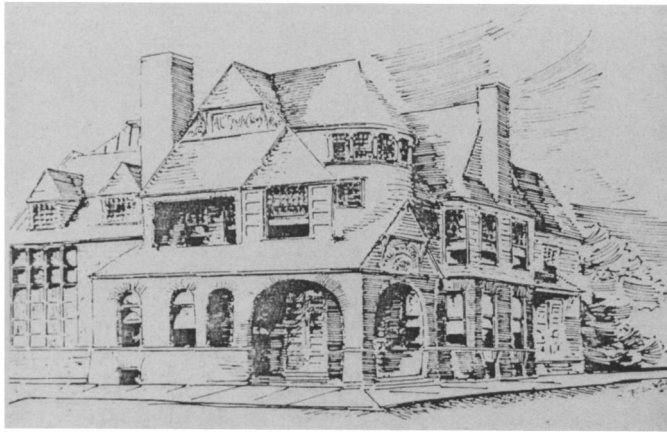
¹⁴ Jones, 205. The axial arrangement of the auditorium and parlor in Silsbee's preliminary plan for All Souls Church corresponds to that found in his Unity Chapel, as shown in Figure 7, designed at about the same time. An alignment of auditorium and parlor along a central axis recurs in Wright's plan for the Church of the First Unitarian Society of Madison, Wisconsin, built 1947–51.

¹⁵ "Notes from the Field," *Unity*, xvii, 3 April 1886, 65. Accounts of the opening and dedication of All Souls Church appeared in "Yesterday's Sermons," *Chicago Tribune*, 13 September 1886, 6; "Notes from the Field," *Unity*, xviii, 18 September 1886, 38; Jones, "The Church of All Souls," *ibid.*, 25 September 1886, 44; "A New Church Dedicated," *Chicago Tribune*, 13 October 1886, 3; "Dedication of All Souls Church, Chicago," *Unity*, xviii, 16 October 1886, 90; "Dedication of a Church," and "Financial Exhibit of All Souls Church," *ibid.*, 23 October 1886, 98–99; and "Scripture Selections," *ibid.*, 30 October 1886, 115–116.

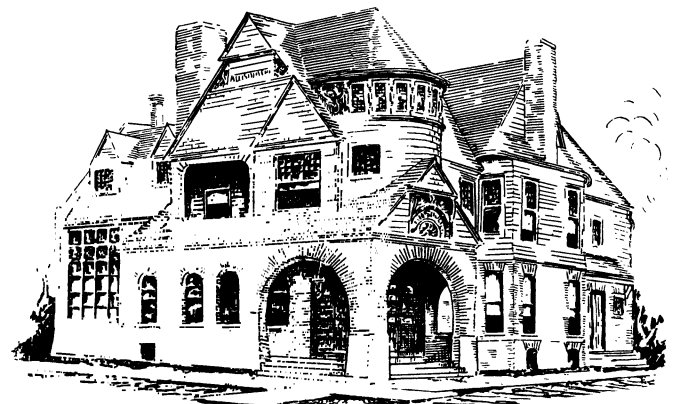
¹⁶ Wright, 91.

¹⁷ Eliot (as in n. 2), 169. A later description of the interior of All Souls Church noted that: "Large fireplaces give it an air of substantial comfort and warm the cockles of the heart of every one that will stop long enough to read the scriptural quotations cut into the wood of the mantels over the fireplaces" ("All Souls' Church," *Chicago Evening Post*, 12 September 1892, 5, repr. in "The Eozoic Age of the Lincoln Centre," *Unity*, lii, 17 and 24 December 1903, 256). One such fireplace, whose mantel is carved with the motto, "However things may seem, no good thing is failure, no evil thing success," is illustrated in *All Souls Church Tenth Annual*, 1893, 15. The practice of carving ethical and religious sayings in the mantels of the church's fireplaces may have inspired Wright's similar practice in his own home in Oak Park of 1889 and other works.

¹⁸ "All Souls' Church," *Chicago Evening Post*, 12 September 1892, 5.



4 Silsbee, All Souls Church, Chicago, drawing signed by Frank Lloyd Wright (repr. from *Prairie School Review*, VII, fourth quarter, 1970)



ALL SOULS CHURCH AND PARSONAGE, CHICAGO,
Cor. Oakwood Boulevard and Langley Ave.

5 All Souls Church, Chicago, drawing attributed to Silsbee (from *All Souls Church Third Annual*, 1886)

convention by putting the apartment of the parsonage on the church's second floor.¹⁹

Frank Lloyd Wright's contact with All Souls Church may have begun in December of 1884 when his father had preached there.²⁰ The *All Souls Church Fourth Annual*, dated 6 January 1887, was the first to list Wright as a member, with a Chicago address a few doors away from that of Jenkin Lloyd Jones.²¹ This implies that Wright came to Chicago during the year 1886. Such a date for Wright's arrival in the city corresponds to his recollection that he first saw All Souls in the process of construction,²² implying that he saw the building sometime between its groundbreaking in March and dedication in October 1886. That Wright began working with Silsbee while All Souls Church was being built is suggested by a drawing of the church signed by Wright (Fig. 4). This drawing resembles an unsigned sketch of the new church published in the *All Souls Church Third Annual* in the winter of 1886, which has been attributed to Silsbee (Fig. 5).²³ Silsbee's drawing, appearing just before construction began, shows the exterior almost as built, differing in a number of details from his earlier perspective published in June 1885.

If Wright came to Chicago to begin working for Silsbee between April and August 1886, he thus timed his entry into the architectural profession to coincide with his uncle's greatest influence with Silsbee, for Jenkin Lloyd Jones was then the client not only for All Souls Church (Silsbee's first commission for a church in Chicago),²⁴ but also for Unity Chapel in Helena Valley, Wisconsin, which Jones asked Silsbee to design by December of 1885 and which was dedicated in August of 1886. For some time before his death in 1885, Jenkin Lloyd Jones's father, Richard Lloyd Jones, had envisioned the construction of a chapel in his family's valley in Wisconsin that would serve as a place of burial and as a focus for gatherings of his clan.²⁵ The model for such a structure was probably the Unitarian chapel at Llwynrhydowen, Wales (Fig. 6), built in 1726 as a symbol of dissent by Rev. Jenkin Jones, great-grandfather of Jenkin Lloyd Jones.²⁶ On his first journey to Europe in summer 1882, Jenkin Lloyd Jones had made a pilgrimage to his homeland and preached in this chapel.²⁷ For Jones's colleagues in the Western Unitarian Conference, projects such as Unity Chapel were prototypes for smaller, inexpensive rural church buildings for liberal congregations elsewhere. Their forms

¹⁹ Jones, 205. Jones compared the inclusion of the parsonage in the same building as All Souls Church to medieval abbeys with their resident clergy, an idea that may be related to the motif of the porch with its round arched openings on the corner of the building as an allusion to Romanesque monastic architecture.

²⁰ *All Souls Church Second Annual*, 1885, 7, cited in Hasbrouck, 15.

²¹ *All Souls Church Fourth Annual*, 1887, 8, cited in Hasbrouck, 15.

²² Wright, 79.

²³ Hasbrouck, 14–16. The drawing of All Souls Church that appeared in its third annual of 1886 matches that published by Hasbrouck (p. 16), which he identified as a drawing done by Silsbee. In addition to Wright's and Silsbee's drawings, Hasbrouck also published another drawing that served as the worksheet from which Wright made his perspective of All Souls Church. Hasbrouck (p. 14) noted that Wright's drawing and worksheet were in "the files of Jenkin Lloyd Jones now

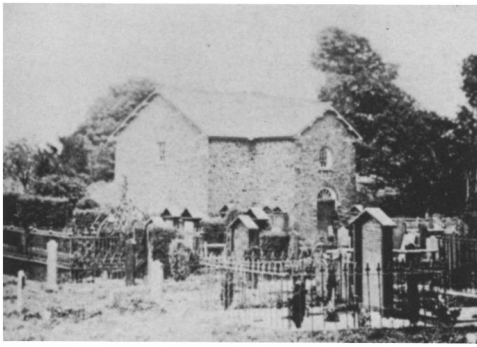
[1970] held in the collection of the Meadville Theological Seminary." My search of this collection in July 1989 did not reveal the location of the Wright drawing and worksheet.

²⁴ Twombly, 16–18, and Gill (as in n. 1), 57–59, have both speculated that Wright came to Chicago and began work for Silsbee on the basis of his uncle's patronage of this architect. All Souls is listed as Silsbee's first institutional commission in Chicago in S.K. Sorrell, "A Catalog of Work by J.L. Silsbee," *Prairie School Review*, VII, fourth quarter, 1970, 17–21.

²⁵ Thomas (as in n. 2), 24–25. See also W.C. Gannett, "Richard Lloyd Jones," *Unity*, XVI, 19 December 1885, 199.

²⁶ On the Unitarian Chapel at Llwynrhydowen, see G. Hague, *The Unitarian Heritage: An Architectural Survey of Chapels and Churches in the British Isles*, Sheffield, 1986, 114–15, and C.L. Jones, *Youngest Son*, Madison, Wis., 1938, opp. 16, 91.

²⁷ F.L. Hosmer, letter, *Unity*, IX, 16 August 1882, 256–257.

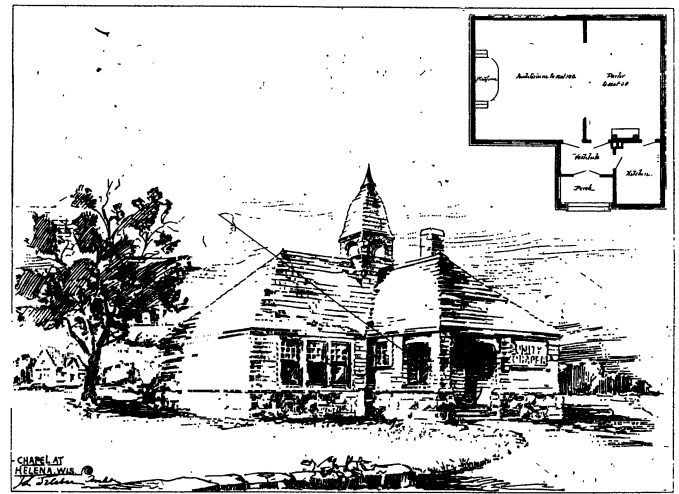


6 Unitarian Chapel, Llwynrhydowen, Wales, originally built 1726, with later remodeling (from C.L. Jones, *Youngest Son*, Madison, Wis., 1938)

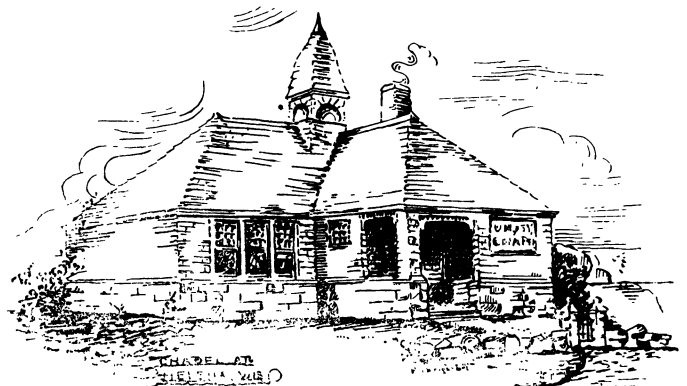
were conceived in symbolic terms so that "our church buildings will speak truly of our aims."²⁸

In August 1885 Jenkin Lloyd Jones held a large annual grove meeting near the site of the future chapel, announcing that \$600 of its projected cost of \$1,000 had been raised and expressing the hope that such a structure would be ready for dedication the following summer.²⁹ Jones's colleague and friend, Rev. William Channing Gannett, wrote an account of this meeting in which he indicated that the chapel was to be "a three-roomed church, to hold at minimum one hundred, and at maximum, by unfolding audience-room into parlor, two hundred, with a kitchen corner tucked in somewhere,—this cased in a form so simply pretty that it will beautify the hills, not blot them with another stiff church-box,—and all for \$1,000 or \$1,200,—this is our problem for the architects. . . . A thousand valleys are waiting for this type of churchlet to-day,—something homelike within, a grace without, and buyable with very humble means."³⁰

On 22 August 1885, within days of his uncle's meeting, Frank Lloyd Wright wrote to Jones his earliest known letter, noting that, "I have forwarded to you today my preliminary sketches for 'Unity Chapel.' I have simply made them in pencil on a piece of old paper but the idea is my own and I have copied from nothing. Any changes which you think proper or anything to be taken off if you will let me know I will make it to satisfy you. . . . Wise and I have figured it up and it can be built for 10 or 12 hundred."³¹ The drawings to which Wright refers are not known, and as late as October 1885, it appears that the chapel's architect had not been selected, for Jones then wrote that "they are only waiting for the plans at Helena, Wis., before beginning work on that model, three-room country church, . . . Where is the architect who will show us how to do something in this line, prettier and more practical than anything yet embodied between the Atlantic and the Pacific?"³² Shortly afterwards, however, Sils-



7 Silsbee, Unity Chapel, formerly in Helena, Wisconsin (from *Unity*, XVI, 26 December 1885)



8 Unity Chapel, 1886, drawing signed by Frank Lloyd Wright (from *All Souls Church Fourth Annual*, 1887)

bee had developed a design for the chapel, a perspective sketch and floor plan of which Jones published in December 1885 (Fig. 7).³³ The sketch, signed "J.L. Silsbee Architect," resembles another perspective of Unity Chapel later published in the *All Souls Church Fourth Annual* of January 1887, which Wright signed as delineator and which is cited as his first known drawing (Fig. 8).³⁴

In Silsbee's sketch, the chapel's plan shows an audience room with a round-edged platform at the front. At its rear, the main space could be expanded into a parlor equipped with a fireplace, to one side of which was a kitchen, porch, and vestibule. On the exterior, the chap-

²⁸ Letter, *Unity*, XVI, 7 November 1885, 126.

²⁹ W.C. Gannett, "The Editor's Vacation," *Unity*, XV, 22 August 1885, 320.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Wright to Jones, 22 August 1885, in B.B. Pfeiffer, ed., *Letters to Clients: Frank Lloyd Wright*, Fresno, Calif., 1986, 1. Wright wrote this letter on stationery of his employer in Madison, the engineer Allan D. Conover. Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Foundation, Fiche Id. No. J001A01.

³² Editorial, *Unity*, XVI, 3 October 1885, 62–63.

³³ "Unity Chapel for the Unitarian Church of Helena Valley, Wisconsin," *Unity*, XVI, 26 December 1885, 1.

³⁴ "Unity Chapel, Helena, Wis.," *All Souls Church Fourth Annual*, 1887. This drawing has been reproduced and discussed in Hasbrouck, 14–15, in Twombly, 17, and Gill (as in n. 1), 59.



9 Silsbee, Unity Chapel, 1886 (photo: Ernest Hailey)

el's "underpinning to the level of the window sill is of rock-faced broken ashlar, quarried in the neighborhood," while "the roof and exterior walls above the stone work are to be covered with stained shingles."³⁵ The chapel has hipped roofs which converge beneath a belfry set near a chimney in Silsbee's picturesque residential style (Fig. 9). These forms recall Gannett's comparison of the new chapel to a cottage or schoolhouse,³⁶ types of buildings wherein the local Unitarian congregation had met before Unity Chapel's completion. Natural materials in the building perhaps signified Jones's Unitarian interest in appreciation of nature as a source of divine revelation, while conventional ecclesiastical symbols, such as a spire or pointed arches, were omitted. Frank Lloyd Wright's direct involvement in the making of Unity Chapel is suggested in Gannett's account of its dedication in August 1886, which noted that both the parlor and auditorium "are wood ceiled, with the pine in its own color; one is calcimined in terra-cotta, one in olive green;—a boy architect belonging to the family looked after this interior."³⁷

By 1890, four years after Silsbee's Unity Chapel and his original building for All Souls in Chicago had opened, All Souls Church was contemplating purchase of the property on the northeast corner of Oakwood Boulevard and Langley Avenue as the site of a future structure to replace that of 1886, which was already proving too small to accommodate the church's rapidly expanding programs.³⁸ By September 1892 Jones envisioned his church meeting in a large auditorium in a seven-story building,

one that "would be really the first of its kind in the world."³⁹ Such a structure would be a variation on the then-emerging type of the institutional church serving as a communal center for its urban district. Wright's uncle stated that "we hope to build an institution that will appeal not to Unitarians alone, and whose work will not be distinctly Unitarian, but rather nonsectarian, humanitarian, a seven-day helper in the neighborhood, receiving support from many of differing faiths or denominational inheritances and helping many not affiliated with the Unitarian name or, necessarily, the Unitarian thought."⁴⁰ Toward this end, Wright's uncle initiated the withdrawal of All Souls from the Unitarian denomination in May 1894, and in January 1895 the congregation appointed a committee to begin the process of building a new church.⁴¹

On his own Frank Lloyd Wright had yet to design a large building of the type his uncle was imagining, yet Wright had worked on tall commercial buildings containing auditoria when he was employed with Adler and Sullivan. Specifically Wright claimed for himself a major role in the design of the firm's Schiller Building of 1892–93 on the north side of Randolph Street west of State in central Chicago.⁴² Yet by 1897 another architect, Dwight Heald Perkins, who was also a member of All Souls Church, had completed Steinway Hall nearby as a tall building containing a theater below multiple floors of offices.⁴³ By February 1898, Wright and Perkins were

James, "Jenkin Lloyd Jones and His Master Work, The Abraham Lincoln Center," *Arena*, xxxvii, April, 1907, 375–386; Lyttle, 221–224; "The Abraham Lincoln Centre," *Unity*, cxli, March–April, 1955, 1–17; and J.D. Wright, "Architecture and Liberal Faith: Three Unitarian Efforts to Build for Inclusiveness," Ph.D. diss., Meadville-Lombard Theological School, Chicago, 1988, chap. 2.

³⁹ "All Souls' Church," *Chicago Evening Post*, 12 September 1892, 5.

⁴⁰ Jones, "Never a Unitarian, Always a Unitarian," *Unity*, xxxiii, 21 June 1894, 258. For alternative examples of the institution Jones envisioned, see G.W. Cooke, "The Institutional Church," *New England Magazine*, xiv, August, 1896, 645–660.

⁴¹ "Notes from the Field," *Unity*, xxxiv, 17 January 1895, 632. In January 1898 the bylaws of All Souls Church were officially changed to declare it undenominational. See "The Abraham Lincoln Centre," *Unity*, lii, 17 and 24 December 1903, 243.

⁴² Wright, *Genius and the Mobocracy*, New York, 1949, 61.

⁴³ A biographical sketch of Perkins (1867–1941) appeared in *Brickbuilder*, xxiv, June, 1915, 146. Perkins perhaps advised Jenkin Lloyd Jones on Silsbee's 1886 building for All Souls Church (Perkins to Jones, 19 September 1886; Jenkin Lloyd Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard Theological School, Chicago). Steinway Hall, where Wright and Perkins shared an office shortly after the building's completion, is illustrated in *Inland Architect and News Record*, xxix, February 1897, and in E. Fuhrer, "The Cinema Unique," *Western Architect*, xxxix, November, 1930, 175–177, and N. Remisoff, "The Punch and Judy Theatre," *ibid.*, 182–183. On relations among Perkins, Wright, and architectural colleagues working in Steinway Hall, see H.A. Brooks, *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries*, Toronto, 1972, 27–31, 37–44. Wright himself wrote earlier to his uncle soliciting the commission for the building that became the Abraham Lincoln Center (Wright to Jones, 15 May 1894, Jones Collection, University of Chicago, Box 4, Folder 4).

³⁵ "Unity Chapel," *Unity*, xvi, 26 December 1885, 1.

³⁶ Gannett, "Christening a Country Church," *Unity*, xvii, 28 August 1886, 356.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 357.

³⁸ *All Souls Church Ninth Annual*, 1892, 6–7, and Charles P. Parish to Jenkin Lloyd Jones, 10 July 1890; Jenkin Lloyd Jones Collection, University of Chicago, Box 3, Folder 9. Histories of the institution eventually built as the Abraham Lincoln Center are found in G.W.

collaborating on a design for a new All Souls building, though at that time Wright, in correspondence with his uncle, claimed to have borne all the expenses of the project's development, presumably as principal designer.⁴⁴

Wright's letters indicate that by August 1898 drawings had been made for an eight-story project with auditorium and church rooms on the first three levels and five upper floors of offices for rent.⁴⁵ A comparable project was published in the church's seventeenth annual early in 1900, showing the building's west front on Langley Avenue (Fig. 10).⁴⁶ Its walls of brick bearing piers suggest a massive structure.⁴⁷ Above the base rose seven stories fenestrated like offices, giving almost no hint of the auditorium on the second floor. If the All Souls Church of 1886 assumed the appearance of a house, so the project of Wright and Perkins for the expanded institution resembled a tall office building, another nonecclesiastical type that would signify the church as a civic meeting place for all the people of Oakwood. To Jones, the historicist ecclesiastical architecture of nearby churches bespoke a removal from daily life, whereas the modern and secular associations of his new building represented for him the involvement of his church in everyday urban life. As Robert C. Spencer wrote, the new church was to house "the practical Christianity that could fraternize with the commercialism of the time for the sake of a more intimate cultivation of a higher and better commercialism."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Wright wrote to Jones, 25 February 1898: "If I can be of service to you in further promoting the interests of the 'Church scheme' let me know what I can do and it shall be done—Perkins has no complaint as he has done nothing but the talking, so far all the expense has been borne by me"; © Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation 1990, Microfiche Id. No. J001B01. Jones's interest in a new building for All Souls Church may have been heightened by his second tour of Europe from February through April 1897, documented in a souvenir book in the Jones Collection, University of Chicago, Box 6, Folder 13.

⁴⁵ Wright to A.P. Mackinnon, Chicago, 5 August 1898; © Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation 1990, Microfiche Id. No. J001B03. The foundation's archives contain three undated sets of plans and two undated elevations for presumably earlier designs for the Abraham Lincoln Center, catalogued as drawing nos. 9702.001-9702.013 and 0010.002. See Y. Futagawa, ed., *Frank Lloyd Wright Monograph 1887-1901*, Tokyo, 1987, 108, 164-169. Notices of Wright and Perkins as the associated architects of the new building for All Souls Church appeared in *Brickbuilder*, vii, November, 1898, 240; *ibid.*, viii, January, 1899, 17-18. An account of Wright and Perkins's collaboration on this work is in Manson, 156-158.

⁴⁶ "Lincoln Centre," *All Souls Church Seventeenth Annual*, 1900, 73-75. The same rendering was published with plans in the *Chicago Architectural Club Annual*, 1900, 82-84, and in R.C. Spencer, Jr., "The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright," *Architectural Review* [Boston], vii, June, 1900, 71-72.

⁴⁷ Spencer, 71; *Brickbuilder*, viii, January, 1899, 18.

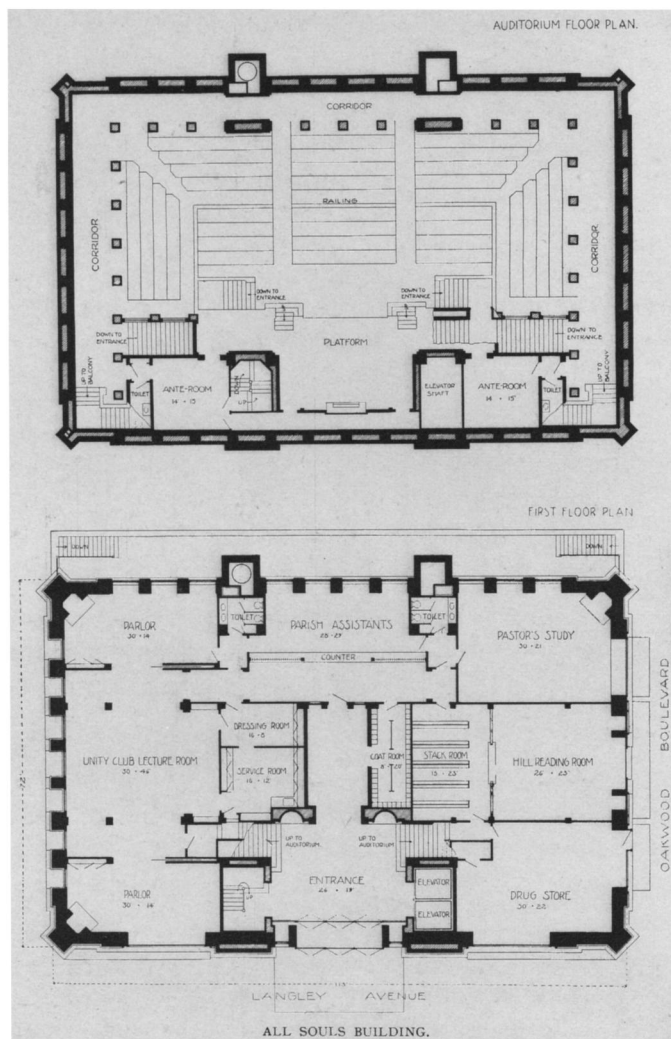
⁴⁸ Spencer, 71. Among religious structures in the district surrounding Abraham Lincoln Center upon its completion were the Roman Catholic Holy Angels Church, Isaiah Temple, the Memorial Baptist Church, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Oakland Methodist Church, Kehilath Anshe Ma'ariv Synagogue, South Park Congregational Church, and the Forty-First Street Presbyterian Church. Leaders of these institutions



10 Wright and Perkins, All Souls Building, Chicago, project of 1900 (from *Chicago Architectural Club Annual*, 1900)

Plans of the entrance and auditorium floors of the project published in 1900 (Fig. 11) show an auditorium on the second floor. One ascended to this major space using either of two main staircases, which led up from either side of the entrance foyer on the first floor below. At the top of these stairs, one could go around the raised periphery of the auditorium floor along what are labeled on the plan as corridors. These run behind the piers that were to support the gallery on three sides of the room. The level of this gallery would correspond to the third floor of the building on the exterior. On the main floor of the auditorium below, the peripheral corridors would be on the same level as the upper rear tiers of seats around three sides. Railings separate these upper tiers from the central lower tiers of seats. Ramps lead down from the upper to the lower tiers of seats. From either side of the

spoke at "The Social Dedication of Abraham Lincoln Centre," *Unity*, lv, 8 June 1905, 245-252. On the building's role as a meeting place for its urban community, see H. Rosenfels, "Fifty Years of a Living Democracy," *Unity*, cxli, March-April, 1955, 7-9.



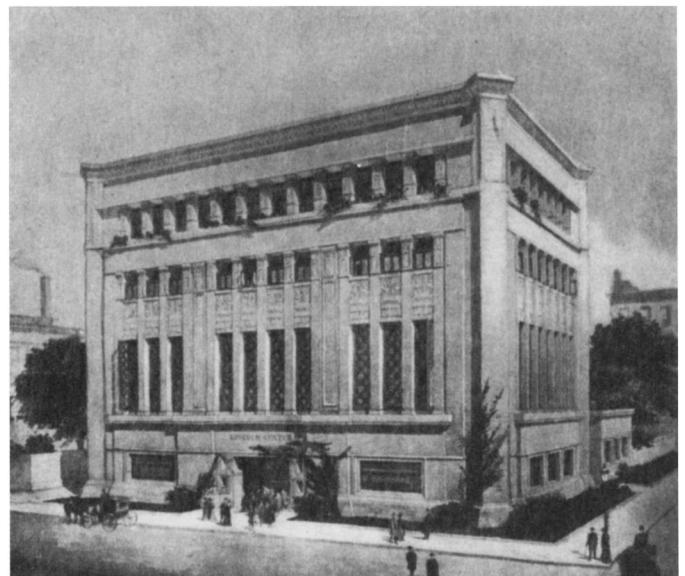
11 Wright and Perkins, All Souls Building, Chicago, project of 1900, plans of entrance and auditorium floors (from *Chicago Architectural Club Annual*, 1900)

main speaking platform, steps lead down to the level of the lowest tier of seats where two other sets of exit stairs to either side lead back down toward the first-floor entrance foyer, joining the two main stairs from the foyer at landings. Although the auditorium is the principal space in plan, with its main level on the second floor, almost no hint of its existence appears on the exterior elevations. These show an undifferentiated rhythm of windows at this level and that of the gallery above. In the elevation, the building's base and attic are emphasized as part of a conventional compositional treatment of a tall office building based on Adler and Sullivan's Wainwright.

In March 1901, at the request of Jenkin Lloyd Jones and William Kent, chairman of the church's building commit-

⁴⁹ Wright and Perkins to Ernest Flagg, 4 March 1901, © Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation 1990, Microfiche Id. No. F001A01.

⁵⁰ On Flagg's approach to religious architecture, see M. Bacon, *Ernest Flagg: Beaux-Arts Architect and Urban Reformer*, New York and Cambridge, Mass., 1986, 107–112.



12 Wright and Perkins, Abraham Lincoln Center, Chicago, project of 1902 (from *Chicago Architectural Club Annual*, 1902; courtesy Art Institute of Chicago)

tee, Wright and Perkins sent the plans for their project to the architect Ernest Flagg in New York.⁴⁹ Flagg, one of the most important yet also one of the most innovative Eastern architects trained at the École des Beaux-Arts, had made highly publicized designs for the national Episcopal Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Washington, D.C. in 1895. In connection with this project, Flagg had argued in favor of centralized auditoria rather than longitudinal naves as the preferable spatial form for Protestant churches on the basis of their better visibility and acoustics.⁵⁰ Flagg had tested these ideas in his design for the Farmington Avenue Church in Hartford, Connecticut of 1897–99, whose auditorium is clearly legible from the exterior as the main spatial form.⁵¹ In sending their plans to Flagg, Wright and Perkins called their project “a housing for a practical educational institution in this Machine Age, [which] tries to make something dignified of it honestly.”⁵² Flagg soon replied that, “the exterior does not tell the story of the interior, there is nothing to indicate the presence of the great hall. . . . I must say that I am unable to place myself quite in what appears to have been your point of view. It seems to me that the design is too coldly logical, and that you have reasoned all the poetry out of it.”⁵³ On 8 May 1901, Jones wrote to Wright that he had been reading Flagg's response. Jones proposed numerous revisions of the design, noting that, “I

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 109–112. See also “Improvements in Church Architecture; Hartford's Unique House of Worship,” *Congregationalist*, LXXXIV, 16 November 1899, 740.

⁵² Wright and Perkins to Ernest Flagg, 4 March 1901, © Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation 1990, Microfiche Id. No. F001A01.

⁵³ Flagg to Wright and Perkins, 20 March 1901, Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard.

do believe that somehow the auditorium ought to shine on the outside."⁵⁴

Wright and Perkins exhibited a revised project at the Chicago Architectural Club in March 1902 (Fig. 12).⁵⁵ The upper floors of rented offices in the earlier scheme were eliminated. Now a building of four stories housed church offices on the ground floor, the auditorium on the high second floor, study rooms and quarters for resident workers on the third level, and a fourth floor divided into large halls with a gymnasium on an upper mezzanine.⁵⁶ The exterior was now a horizontal block with varied fenestration on successive floors to indicate the position of different functions. The auditorium was expressed by tall windows set below cast concrete panels with inscriptions and figurative reliefs. The rhythm of vertical piers around the body of the building was echoed by a crowning loggia of smaller piers with plantings, a motif that Wright later reinterpreted at Unity Temple on a smaller scale. The new scheme conveyed the institutional character of the center, as distinct from the taller, more commercial structure envisioned earlier.

In a letter to Wright of 13 January 1902, Jenkin Lloyd Jones offered detailed criticism of a revised design for the building, citing features that match those shown in the drawing exhibited two months later. Jones asked his nephew, "to humor me, just for pencil experiment, throw away those short pillars, thirteen of them on the Langley Avenue side, that give the loggia effect to the upper story, and bring the windows out flush. The fine belt of plain wall which you have given them above and below will mean the more when you get those meaningless pillars that hold nothing up, out of the way. Do not be fooled by your window gardening, for we are not in Italy. . . . I believe you can scrape off several thousand dollars worth of minor lines, counting the four sides, and still retain the major lines or something better."⁵⁷ In an undated response whose points correspond to those that Jones raised in his critique, Wright replied that, "the loggia is essential to the life and character of the building, the feature calculated 'to lend verisimilitude [sic] to an otherwise bald and uninteresting narrative' . . . I know and would stake my life that you will like it when you know it."⁵⁸

While Wright and Perkins were preparing their revised scheme early in 1902, Jenkin Lloyd Jones delivered

a sermon in February of that year originally entitled "The New Cathedral," in which he presented his architectural and social vision of the new center as a building whose communal purpose made it comparable to the great medieval churches. Jones noted formal and symbolic criteria for the building on which he may have based his criticism of Wright's design. For the cathedral of the present, Wright's uncle wrote that, "I am thinking of a building of modern architecture, gracious though not gorgeous, representing in its lines dignity, hospitality and service, a building with four faces, each honest and clean, no pretense on the boulevard that is shamed by a slovenliness on the alley."⁵⁹ Jones proposed that the center's name be changed from All Souls Church to the Abraham Lincoln Center to signify that the institution's life would typify the inclusive compassion for humanity that Jones believed to have been personified by the president whom he had served in the Civil War.⁶⁰

By the summer of 1902, the center's building committee had lost faith in the design of Wright and Perkins, which they believed could not be built for the \$100,000 that had been raised for the project.⁶¹ A competition to solicit designs from other architects was favored, but Jenkin Lloyd Jones persuaded his building committee to give Wright and Perkins one more chance.⁶² On 2 August 1902, Jones thus wrote to his architects that to come within the cost limit,

There must be radical revision, and these revisions must not be in the direction of mutilating the interior accommodations, but in every way possible to simplify construction and exterior. So I beg of you to throw to the wind once and forever all thoughts about 'monumental' construction, effects, and the like. My monument will not be built, I trust, in brick and mortar—certainly you have no commission of that kind. So throw away as much of the present exterior as you possibly can based on that idea. I have pled for simple lines, plain exterior, for artistic and ethical reasons as well as *economic*. If the first reasons did not carry with you, the last must.⁶³

⁵⁹ Jones, "The New Cathedral: A Study of the Abraham Lincoln Centre," *Unity*, XLVIII, 6 February 1902, 358–362. This sermon was published as a pamphlet under the title, *The Abraham Lincoln Centre—A Sermon*, 1902; Jones Collection, University of Chicago, Box 6, Folder 4.

⁶⁰ Jones, "Cathedral," 263, and "Social Dedication" (as in n. 48), 252.

⁶¹ William Kent to Jones, 7 July 1902; Kent to Wright, 9 July 1902; Kent to Perkins, 9 July 1902; Kent to Jones, 9 July 1902, Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard.

⁶² Kent to Jones, 16 July 1902 and 17 July 1902, outlined plans for a competition. Kent to Wright and Perkins, 21 July 1902, stated requirements for revision of their design, while Jones to Wright and Perkins, 22 July 1902, wrote that Kent's letter of requirements was "really a concession to my desire that your plans and you should have one more fair test"; Jones Letter Book, 18 June 1902–17 June 1903, 40; Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard.

⁶³ Jones to Wright and Perkins, 2 August 1902, Jones Letter Book, 18 June 1902–17 June 1903, 66–69; Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard.

⁵⁴ Jones to Wright, 8 May 1901, Jones Letter Book, 13 April 1900–25 June 1901, 558; Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard.

⁵⁵ "The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright," *Chicago Architectural Club Annual*, 1902, 58.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* The archives of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation contain undated drawings (nos. 0010.021-0010.038) of this version of the project, except that these drawings show the building's main front turned south onto Oakwood Boulevard.

⁵⁷ Jones to Wright, 13 January 1902, Jones Letter Book, 9 July 1901–18 June 1902, 334–336; Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard.

⁵⁸ Wright to Jones, undated, © Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation 1990, Microfiche Id. No. J001C01.



13 Abraham Lincoln Center, view from southwest, with All Souls Church at right; Jenkin Lloyd Jones at center, with ministers at National Unitarian Conference, 1909 (Jenkin Lloyd Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard Theological School, Chicago)

By September of 1902, Wright succeeded in presenting a revised design whose costs were within acceptable limits and he and Perkins were retained.⁶⁴ Yet in June 1903 Jones contracted individually with Perkins to complete the project as the sole architect responsible, succeeding Wright and Perkins.⁶⁵ Building began by June, and in December Jenkin Lloyd Jones published a detailed description of the building as built, wherein nearly all the

⁶⁴ Jones to Wright, 23 September 1902, Jones Letter Book, 18 June 1902–17 June 1903, 192; Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard. One subsequent design for the exterior of the Abraham Lincoln Center was published in the *All Souls Church Twentieth Annual*, 1903. At this time Wright and Perkins were still identified as its associated architects. The archives of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation contain a set of drawings (nos. 0010.001, 0010.003–0010.020) of this version of the project approved by Jenkin Lloyd Jones on 4 February 1903. Eight of these have been published as pls. 351–358 in Futagawa (as in n. 45), 164–169.

⁶⁵ Perkins to Jones, 3 March 1903, refers to Jones's characterization of him as his "constructing architect," presumably to distinguish Perkins from Wright, who was the designing architect of the building up to that time (Jones to Perkins, 30 August 1902; Jones Letter Book, 18 June 1902–17 June 1903, 120). Perkins to Jones, 28 April 1903, wrote that, "I have had a long conference with Frank Wright; . . . I have told him that the reason you asked me to do this was for the purpose of expediting the deal, which you do not feel could be done by him with sufficient promptness. I believe that is the only reason why I am engaged to do the work and have so explained to him"; Perkins to Jones, 15 August 1903, included a copy of the contract of 8 June 1903 between Perkins, Jones, and the Building Committee for Lincoln Center; Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard.

architectural refinements of the earlier schemes were removed in favor of an exterior of deep red brick above a base of dark brown brick, with the same dark brown brick used for horizontal courses through the upper stories below the terra-cotta cornice (Fig. 13). Jones had repeatedly instructed that all four fronts of the building be treated in the same single material, suggestive of the monolithic ideal of construction that Wright later rendered in concrete for the exterior of Unity Temple. Of the final design, Jones wrote that,

The building will be of fire-proof construction, built "four-square," the same material and architectural honesty carried all around. The severest simplicity has been aimed at; no money will be spent on exterior embellishments, because all will be needed to furnish the interior with the tools and life that will justify the expenditure. It is hoped that "the building will be emblematic of the hearty, straight-forward ideal of the man for whom it is named," and that when completed "it will have a soul, the light and beauty of which will shine through and beyond its walls."⁶⁶

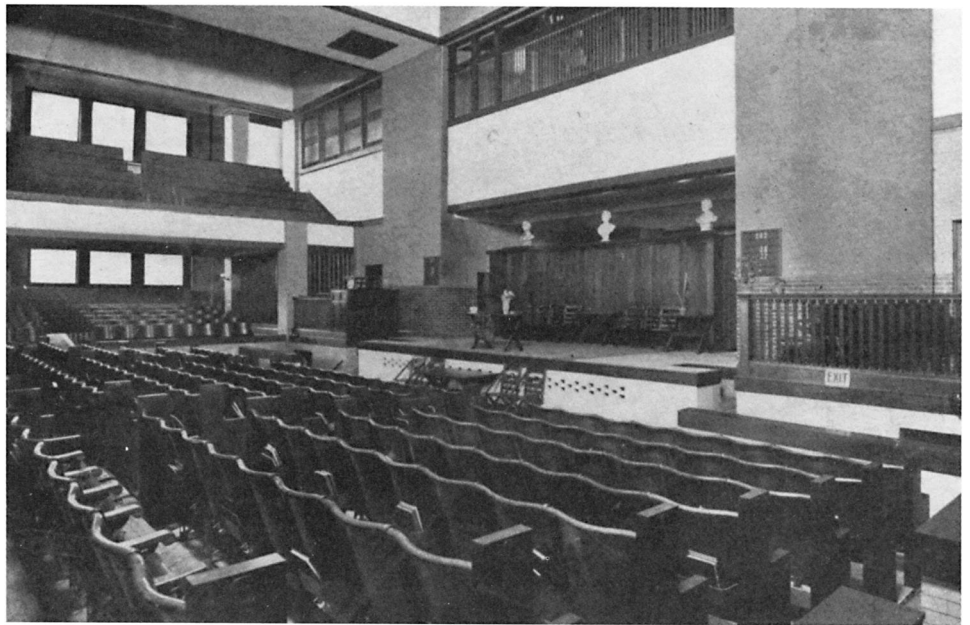
A completed Abraham Lincoln Center was dedicated on 29 May 1905.⁶⁷ Fifty years later Frank Lloyd Wright recalled that, "it was my first commission for so large a building, . . . the interior is mine but the exterior belongs to my uncle Jenkin Lloyd Jones and Dwight Perkins."⁶⁸ The interior of the auditorium as completed in 1905 (Fig. 14) anticipates Wright's treatment of Unity Temple's auditorium (Fig. 15). In the Lincoln Center, four hollow piers of brick house the auditorium's mechanical services, much like the four hollow square columns of concrete in Unity Temple. In the Lincoln Center, the central floor of seats facing front is surrounded by raised tiers of peripheral seating on three sides, below a three-sided seating gallery. The space recalls the three raised alcoves below galleries around the central floor of Unity Temple. Both interiors feature bands of light plaster framed by dark oak trim, though the auditorium of the Lincoln Center also had surfaces of light brick. Both the rooms had wood screens for their organs above their respective frontal platforms, with windows running above the upper galleries on three sides. The auditorium of the Lincoln Center may thus be understood as Wright's earlier essay in the same kind of architectural space whose formal details he would later integrate more thoroughly in Unity Temple.

⁶⁶ "The Abraham Lincoln Centre," *Unity*, LII, 17 and 24 December 1903, opp. 256.

⁶⁷ "Into the Abraham Lincoln Centre," *Unity*, LV, 27 April 1905, 155–156; "Lincoln Center Flag Up," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 May 1905, 8; "Church in a New Home," *ibid.*, 29 May 1905, 14; and "Dedication of the Abraham Lincoln Centre," *Unity*, LV, 1 June 1905, 229–230.

⁶⁸ Wright to Curtis W. Reese, *Unity*, CXLII, March–April, 1955, 15. As of 1990, the structure originally built as the Abraham Lincoln Center houses the Center for Inner City Studies of Northeastern Illinois University.

14 Wright and Perkins, Abraham Lincoln Center, auditorium as built (from *Abraham Lincoln Centre Chicago*, n.d. [1905?]; Jenkin Lloyd Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard Theological School, Chicago)



15 Wright, Unity Temple, auditorium (from *Inland Architect and News Record*, LII, December 1908)



On Sunday, 5 June 1905, one week after dedication of the Abraham Lincoln Center, the steeple of old Unity Church in suburban Oak Park was struck by lightning and the building soon burned to the ground.⁶⁹ From its founding in 1871, Unity Church had included more Universalists than Unitarians.⁷⁰ The Universalist church,

whose origins in New England dated from 1770, derived its name from the then radical belief in universal salvation, meaning that after death all persons would eventually be reconciled with their creator. Toward the end of the nineteenth century Universalists shared with the Unitarians an emphasis on the concept of salvation not as

⁶⁹ "Unity Church Fire," *Oak Leaves*, 10 June 1905, 12–14; "Churches Hit by Bolts," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 June 1905, 4.

⁷⁰ Chulak, 1–3. In 1882 a group of Unity Church's members formed a Universalist society within the church in order to maintain denomina-

tional affiliation with the Universalist Church, and all but one of the church's ministers through the term of Rodney F. Johnson were Universalists. *Year Book and Manual of Unity Church, Oak Park, Illinois, 1904–1905*, 5, 7–8; Unity Temple Historical Files, Oak Park, Ill.



16 Unity Church, Oak Park, Illinois, 1872 (from *Year Book and Manual of Unity Church 1904–1905*, Unity Temple Historical Files, Oak Park)



17 Unity Church, auditorium (from *Year Book and Manual of Unity Church 1904–1905*, Unity Temple Historical Files, Oak Park)

In 1872 Unity Church completed its first building, near the southwest corner of Wisconsin Avenue and Pleasant Street in Oak Park (Figs. 16–17), modeled on the Universalist church of St. Paul in Chicago.⁷³ This first Unity Church had a tall steeple over its entrance, windows with pointed arches, board and batten exteriors, and buttresses along the flanks of the nave as well as on either side of the steeple's base. Inside the main space for worship was an auditorium raised on a second floor with a massive organ at its west wall instead of a conventional altar. This was the Unity Church that Frank Lloyd Wright had known since he moved to Oak Park with his mother in 1887 and which he joined with his wife in 1892.⁷⁴ In that spring Unity Church had called the Rev. Rodney

a blissful heavenly afterlife, but as the perfection of human character in an earthly lifetime. The more liberal members of both traditions also shared a belief that divinity resided not in a celestial heaven but in souls of human beings.⁷¹ One significant difference between the liberal religion of Chicago Universalists and that of Jenkin Lloyd Jones was that the Universalists retained ties with a national denomination, whereas Jones sought independence.⁷²

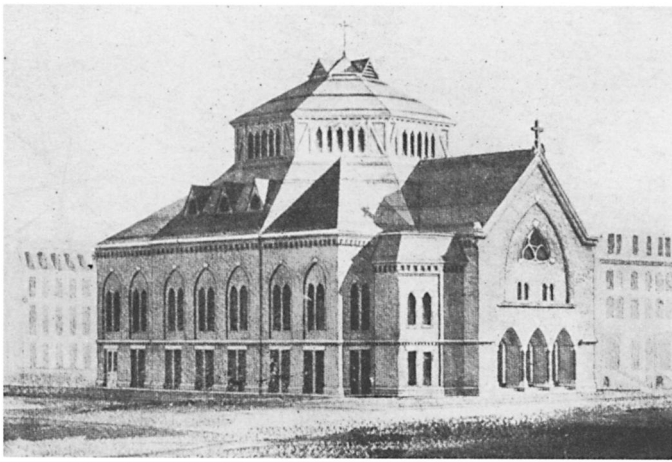
⁷¹ On the theological differences between the Unitarian and Universalist churches in America, see Robinson, 3–8. The most complete history of Universalism in the United States is R.E. Miller, *The Larger Hope*, 2 vols., Boston, 1979 and 1985.

⁷² One critique of Jones's antidenominational tendencies is R.F. Johnnot, "The Policy of the Liberal Congress," *The New Unity*, xxxv, 27 June 1895, 295. In 1897 Johnnot wrote that Jones "was pushing the anti-sectarian idea with great vigor. Now I believe in denominationalism; at least in this way. A denomination is simply an organization for promulgating certain ideas; it is a machine for doing a work; and in these modern days a machine is necessary for success. I care nothing for the sects except as machines. The influence of [Jones's] *The New Unity* is for breaking up these old machines and hence seems to me to conflict

with our present denominational interests"; Johnnot to Alfred C. Clarke (publisher, *The New Unity*), n.d. (1897?); Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard.

⁷³ Chulak, 2–5. The exterior of the Unity Church of 1872 resembles the second building of St. Paul's Church of the First Universalist Society, Chicago, built 1856. See "St. Paul's Church Buildings," *Universalist*, ix, 17 December 1892, 5. Abram Gale had helped to organize this church in 1841, before his move with his son, Edwin O. Gale, to Oak Park in 1863. Edwin O. Gale gave over a third of the funds for building Unity Church in 1872. He later sold the church the site for the new Unity Temple in 1905 (see n. 89).

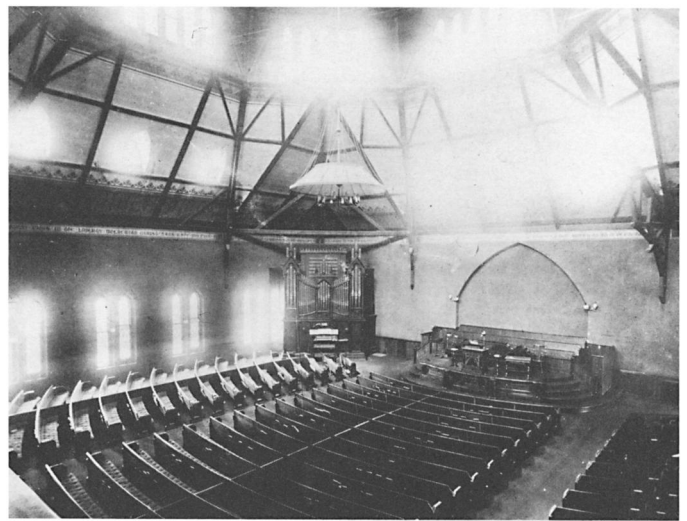
⁷⁴ Unity Church, "Members Signatures," 2–3, in Unity Church Historical Files. Wright also retained his membership in All Souls Church. The Wrights were probably a part of Unity Church's congregation from their move to Oak Park in 1887, when Anna and her children first lived with the Rev. Augusta Chapin, Johnnot's predecessor, from the summer of 1887 until Wright purchased the house next to the site for himself in May 1889. On Augusta Chapin (1836–1905), see C.F. Hitchings, "Universalist and Unitarian Women Ministers," *Journal of the Universalist Historical Society*, x, 1975, 43–44. On her service at Unity Church, see Chulak, 11–13. On Anna Lloyd Wright and her family's residence at the home of Augusta Chapin, see Wright, 101, and M.W. Barney, *The Valley of the God-Almighty Joneses*, New York, 1965, 127–128. In 1887 Anna L. Wright was listed as residing at Rev. Chapin's address at 214 Forest Avenue in Oak Park; *Oak Park Directory*, Oak Park, Ill., 1887, 30, 54.



18 Isaac B. Samuels, Church of the Disciples, Boston, 1868–69 (courtesy Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities)

Fuller Johonnot (1855–1932) to its pastorate.⁷⁵ A native of Maine, Johonnot had given up a legal practice in Boston in 1885 to study for the Unitarian ministry at Harvard Divinity School. Johonnot was influenced by the Rev. James Freeman Clarke (1810–1888), a preeminent American Unitarian of the nineteenth century and an innovator in congregational organization as minister of the Church of the Disciples in Boston from its founding in 1841.⁷⁶

In his autobiography, Wright identified Rev. Johonnot as a minister who knew only one style of church building, “that of the little white New England church, lean spire pointing to heaven—‘back East.’”⁷⁷ This was not the case, however, because Johonnot had decided to begin his theological studies while worshipping in James Freeman Clarke’s new building for the Church of the Disciples, designed by Isaac Samuels at West Brookline Street and Warren Avenue in Boston’s South End, begun in 1868 and completed the following year (Figs. 18–19).⁷⁸ This structure was eighty-five feet square, with walls of brick and Quincy granite surrounding a main auditorium on the second floor. Its octagonal roof was framed in iron and wood to create a sunlit clerestory above the centralized space, with Clarke’s favorite biblical mottoes inscribed all around the ceiling. The building embodied Clarke’s ideal of a church structure whose “auditorium is large, cheerful, perfectly easy to speak in, a pleasant



19 Samuels, Church of the Disciples, interior looking north (courtesy Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities)

room to look at.”⁷⁹ Clarke conceived of his Church of the Disciples as a meeting house designed to be inexpensive and functional rather than monumentally ostentatious.⁸⁰ In its distinctive spatial form, Rev. Clarke’s building would have logically been a typological precedent, if not the stylistic one, that Johonnot would have had in mind when faced with the question of a new building for Unity Church in Oak Park.

In terms of membership, finances, contributions to the well-being of the community, and vitality of spiritual life, Rev. Johonnot’s ministry in Oak Park was highly successful. His preparation for the position was unusual in that he had been ordained as a Unitarian minister in 1886, and then also became a Universalist minister in 1889, retaining fellowship in both churches thereafter.⁸¹ From his arrival in Oak Park, Johonnot knew Jenkin Lloyd Jones as the dean of local liberal religion “who had on many occasions given his time and service in the interest of Unity Church.”⁸² Thus Johonnot was familiar with the architecture of the Abraham Lincoln Center. In Oak Park Johonnot had urged the start of a building fund for Unity Church in the spring of 1901, four years before the fire.⁸³ In May 1904 he presented a case for a new structure in a sermon entitled “Building a Temple Unto God.” While praising the devotion that had reared the first Unity Church in 1872, Johonnot asserted that, “since that day

⁷⁵ Chulak, 13, 29; “Churches, Ministers, and Conventions,” *Universalist*, ix, 12 March 1892, 5; *ibid.*, ix, 14 May 1892, 5; “Dr. Johonnot,” *Oak Leaves*, 2 May 1902, 3–4; “Dr. Rodney F. Johonnot,” *Christian Leader*, xxxv, 16 April 1932, 494–495.

⁷⁶ On Rev. James Freeman Clarke’s work at the Church of the Disciples in Boston, see E.E. Hale, ed., *James Freeman Clarke: Autobiography, Diary, and Correspondence*, Boston, 1891, and A.S. Bolster, Jr., *James Freeman Clarke*, Boston, 1954.

⁷⁷ Wright, 177.

⁷⁸ On the Church of the Disciples, built in 1868–69, see Hale (as in n. 76), 211–212; Bolster (as in n. 76), 298–300; and *King’s Handbook of Boston*, 7th ed., Boston, 1885, 177, 191. On Johonnot’s attendance, see “Dr. R.F. Johonnot,” *Lewiston Journal*, 7 April 1932, 2.

⁷⁹ James Freeman Clarke to his sister, 14 March 1869, quoted in Hale, 211.

⁸⁰ Bolster, 300.

⁸¹ “Dr. Johonnot,” *Oak Leaves*, 2 May 1902, 3–4; “Dr. Rodney F. Johonnot,” *Christian Leader*, xxxv, 16 April 1932, 494–495. Assessments of Johonnot’s ministry at Oak Park are found in “Johonnot Resigns,” *Oak Leaves*, 5 June 1909, 3; “Dr. Johonnot and Oak Park,” *ibid.*, 12 June 1909, 11; “The General Convention,” *Universalist Leader*, xii, 3 July 1909, 857; “The Testimonial,” *Oak Leaves*, 9 July 1910, 4; and “Chicago Letter,” *Universalist Leader*, xiii, 16 July 1910, 874–875.

⁸² “Unity Dedicated,” *Oak Leaves*, 2 October 1909, 4.

⁸³ “Church News,” *Universalist Leader*, iv, 13 April 1901, 475.

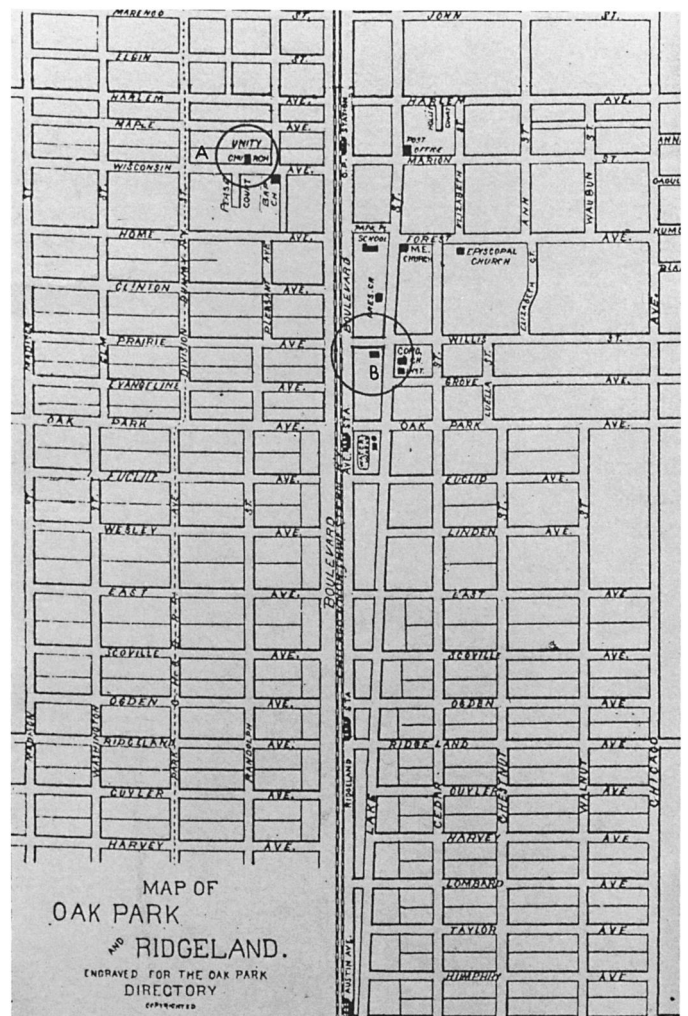
there had been great development in church construction and new conceptions of art and architecture which could not be ignored."⁸⁴ He stated that the new church, when built, "must be durable and permanent, a type of the stability of the work to be done," and "it must be beautiful, a type of the high character of the ideals for which it stood."⁸⁵

When the Abraham Lincoln Center opened in spring 1905, Johonnot sent Jones a congratulatory letter, yet by the time Jones replied, old Unity Church in Oak Park had burned down. Thus, on 14 June, Jones replied to Johonnot:

I am almost tempted to return the compliment by congratulating you over your smoke. I am sure this like most fires of the Almighty has a benignant side to it. You have a chance now to express yourself in a new building. I am more and more persuaded that my contention of the last fifteen years and more is a vital one—that new occasions teach new duties architecturally, and the coming church must find more adequate expression of its purpose and meaning in the brick and mortar and cement. Beware of architects but rejoice in their power and make them go in the right way.⁸⁶

Unity advised Johonnot and his congregation against "slavish or reckless obedience to the conventional or the mere artistic without reference to the many-sided necessities and opportunities of the modern church."⁸⁷

On 11 June, within a week of the fire, the trustees of Unity Church appointed four different committees related to rebuilding: a first on ways and means for raising funds; a second on site, to select a location for the new building; a third on plans, chaired by Rev. Johonnot, to engage an architect and decide on a plan; and a fourth on construction, initially chaired by Charles E. Roberts.⁸⁸ Before an architect was chosen, the church, on the recommendation of its site committee, acquired the southeast corner of Lake Street and Kenilworth Avenue for its new building, the site that Rev. Johonnot had preferred (Fig. 20).⁸⁹ The relocation would make Unity



20 Oak Park, map showing locations of (a) original Unity Church and (b) Unity Temple (adapted from *Oak Park Directory*, 1889)

one of four central churches in Oak Park, signifying Johonnot's aspiration that his liberal congregation be an equal partner in the civic and religious life of the suburb along with wealthier and larger churches of the more conservative denominations.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Johonnot, quoted in "Annual Sermon," *Oak Leaves*, 13 May 1904, 15.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Jones to Johonnot, 14 June 1905; Jones Letter Book, 14 June 1905–28 March 1906; Jones Collection, Meadville-Lombard.

⁸⁷ Editorial, *Unity*, LV, 29 June 1905, 291.

⁸⁸ Meetings of the Board of Trustees, 11 June and 3 September 1905, *Record*, 124, 134; Unity Temple Historical Files. See "Church Will Build," *Oak Leaves*, 10 June 1905, 3, and "Unity Church Committees," *ibid.*, 24 June 1905, 7. The board's charge to the plans committee might have been a response to Johonnot's request for "instructions as to the scope and authority of the committee's work; especially as to whether it has power to decide on an architect and to accept a plan"; Johonnot to Board of Trustees, 13 June 1905; Unity Temple Historical Files.

⁸⁹ "Unity Church Site," *Oak Leaves*, 12 August 1905, 3. The church bought the plot, which measured 100 feet on Lake by 150 feet on Kenilworth, from a member, Edwin O. Gale, for \$10,000, a price that represented an undervaluation of the land amounting to a donation of about \$5,000 to the church. Later in 1905 Gale donated an additional

twenty feet of frontage on Kenilworth Avenue to increase the depth of the site to 170 feet ("Gives Land to Unity Church," *Oak Leaves*, 9 December 1905, 8).

⁹⁰ A new Unity Church would be "directly opposite the First Congregational church and will form one of the group of fine public buildings in the central part of the village. These two churches, on opposite sides of Lake street, will form a good balance for the two other churches standing in like relation to each other, the first Presbyterian and the new Grace Episcopal church, directly opposite each other a little farther west on the same street" ("Unity Church Site," 3). The relationship between Unity Church and other churches in Oak Park was a consistent emphasis of Johonnot's ministry, as noted in "Religious News," *Universalist*, x, 16 December 1893, 5, and "Unity Church," *Oak Leaves*, 27 April 1907, 101. In order of their dates of foundation, the principal congregations in Oak Park at the time of Unity Temple's design were the First Congregational (1863), First Methodist (1870), First Baptist (1873), Grace Episcopal (1879), and First Presbyterian (1883).

In his autobiography Wright recalled: "A competition was first thought of for Unity Temple, but the idea was abandoned and the commission was given to me after much hesitation and debate among the committee."⁹¹ In his own account, Wright refers consistently to his work with a single building committee comprising Rev. Johonnot, Charles E. Roberts, T[homas] J. Skillin, and four additional members whom Wright does not name.⁹² Unity Church's records show that, while nominally separate, Roberts's and Johonnot's two committees, which together numbered seven individuals (apart from Skillin, who was president of the board of trustees in 1905–06), did sometimes meet together with the trustees.⁹³ As chair of the committee charged with the selection of an architect, Johonnot was invited to give the trustees a first informal report at their meeting on 30 August 1905.⁹⁴ He stated that his committee,

Had visited quite a number of churches and had talked with and had spent an evening with several architects namely Mr. E[mory] S. Hall, Mr. [William G.] Williamson, Mr. E.A. Mayer, Mr. [John] Sutcliff[e], Mr. [Henry P.] Harned, Mr. Dwight H. Perkins, Frank Lloyd Wright, William A[ugustus] Otis, and Mr. [Normand S.] Patton. When asked if the committee could reduce the number to three or four [Johonnot] said that the committee gave preference to the last four. Each one of these men was then discussed by Dr. Johonnot and the other members of the committee, enumerating points for and against each one showing the thorough and painstaking way in which the committee [had] gotten the situation in hand and giving the board of trustees a clear insight [in]to the situation.⁹⁵

Of the nine architects mentioned, Emory S. Hall (1869–1939) is perhaps best known, having designed the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Chicago.⁹⁶ William G. Williamson (1861–1922) was the Chicago architect who designed the new Richardsonian First Presbyterian Church in Oak Park at 931 Lake Street, a block west of Unity Temple, completed in 1902.⁹⁷ E.A. Mayer is uniden-

tified. John Sutcliffe (1853–1913), a resident of Oak Park, was well known as an ecclesiastical architect, having designed the Grace Episcopal Church, built in 1901–05 at 930 Lake, across the street from First Presbyterian.⁹⁸ Henry P. Harned (1849–1934) was a member of Unity Church.⁹⁹ Perkins was presumably known as the architect of Abraham Lincoln Center, though he had also spoken at Unity Church on Chicago architecture in 1902.¹⁰⁰ William A. Otis (1855–1929) had designed the Hull Memorial Chapel for the First Unitarian Society of Chicago in 1896–97.¹⁰¹ Normand Patton (1852–1915) was a resident of Oak Park where he collaborated on the design of its high school in 1905. His firm also designed the Memorial Baptist Church in Chicago of 1899, which stood across Oakwood Boulevard from the Abraham Lincoln Center.¹⁰²

Wright had worked on the Abraham Lincoln Center until 1903, but no church had yet been completed to his designs. Wright did, however, design three houses in Oak Park for members of the Gale family, who had been prominent founding members of Unity Church.¹⁰³ Wright had also designed a house for the Unity Church member George Smith in Oak Park in 1898.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps most important, Charles E. Roberts had commissioned Wright to design a house in 1892, and later employed him to remodel the interiors of an existing house in 1896.¹⁰⁵ In

⁹⁸ Obituary of John Sutcliffe in *Oak Leaves*, 23 October 1913. See "Open Grace Church," *Oak Leaves*, 2 December 1905, 7–10, and "Grace Church," *Oak Leaves* (Fifth Anniversary Number), 27 April 1907, 118–119.

⁹⁹ Mr. H.P. Harned listed in "Parish Directory," *Year Book and Manual of Unity Church, Oak Park, Illinois 1904–1905*, n.p., n.d.

¹⁰⁰ "Fellowship Club," *Oak Leaves*, xxi, 5 December 1902, 4. Perkins's talk, "The Architectural Future of Chicago," was hosted by Mr. O.W. Nash, whose wife was later a member of the plans committee for Unity Temple. Perkins's cousin, Marian Mahony, had been the architect of the All Souls Unitarian Church in Evanston, Illinois, of 1902–03, whose minister, Rev. James Vila Blake, was a friend of Jenkin Lloyd Jones. See D.T. Van Zanten, "The Early Work of Marion Mahony Griffin," *Prairie School Review*, III, second quarter, 1966, 6–9.

¹⁰¹ Withey (as in n. 96), 450. On the Hull Memorial Chapel, see G.A. Lane, S.J., *Chicago Churches and Synagogues*, Chicago, 1981, 188.

¹⁰² On Patton, see Hasbrouck, and P.E. Sprague, *A Survey of Historic Architecture of the Village of Oak Park, Illinois*, Oak Park, 1974, 21. On Memorial Baptist Church, see Commission on Chicago Landmarks, Form No. 38-04-14-004.

¹⁰³ See n. 73. Wright's three houses for the Gales were the Thomas H. Gale House, 1019 Chicago Avenue, Oak Park, 1892; the Walter Gale House, 1031 Chicago Avenue, Oak Park, 1893; and the Mrs. Thomas H. Gale House, 6 Elizabeth Court, Oak Park, 1909. See Hitchcock, 18–19, 45, and W.A. Storrer, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1978, 16, 20, 98. Realtor Thomas H. Gale also commissioned Wright to build the R.P. Parker House, 1027 Chicago Avenue, 1893. Wright's Pebbles and Balch Shop, 1107 Lake Street, Oak Park, 1907, may have been done for Frank M. Pebbles, also a member of Unity Church in 1904–05.

¹⁰⁴ Wright's George W. Smith House of 1898 at 404 Home Avenue, Oak Park, is noted in Hitchcock, 110, and in Storrer (as in n. 103), 45.

¹⁰⁵ Wright's project for a house for Charles E. Roberts is documented in drawings published in Futagawa (as in n. 45), 19. Wright's remodeling of the interiors of Charles E. Roberts's house at 317 North Euclid Avenue, Oak Park, is noted in Hitchcock, 109, and Storrer, 40.

⁹¹ Wright, 177.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 177–184.

⁹³ Members of the four committees related to the building of Unity Temple, as of June 1906, and the board of trustees for 1905–06 and 1906–07 appear at the end of Johonnot, 1906.

⁹⁴ Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 30 August 1905, *Record*, 132–133; Unity Temple Historical Files.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ H.F. and E.R. Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects* (1956), Los Angeles, 1970, 257. On the Tabernacle Baptist Church at 3300–08 West Monroe Street, see Commission on Chicago Landmarks, Form No. 27-27-13-001.

⁹⁷ Illustrations of the First Presbyterian Church in Oak Park appeared in *Inland Architect and News Record*, xxxix, May, 1902. See also D.C. Grant, "First Presbyterian Church," *Oak Leaves* (Fifth Anniversary Number), 27 April 1907, 113, 115.

his autobiography, Wright identified Roberts, an inventor and mechanical engineer, as the strong individual whose enlightened views dominated the committee and enabled Unity Temple to be built.¹⁰⁶ As president of the American Steel Screw Company, Roberts was a major benefactor of Unity Church and he had also served as the devoted superintendent of the church's Sunday School for over twenty years until stepping down early in 1904.¹⁰⁷ Roberts perhaps influenced the choice of Wright, for at the trustees' meeting of 30 August, "after all questions had been answered the [Plans] committee asked that the Building committee be associated with them in some way in formulating the plans of the church."¹⁰⁸ This suggests that Johonnot's and Roberts's committees may have collaborated on the selection of Wright. The later joint meetings of these committees may explain why Wright recalled that he worked with a single committee, which included both Johonnot and Roberts, on development of the design. The possible role of such a combined committee in selecting Wright as architect is, however, not recorded.

On 3 September the trustees authorized Johonnot's plans committee "to employ an architect" and "to cause plans and specifications to be made for the new church edifice."¹⁰⁹ The trustees told the committee that the new building must contain a space for worship, another for the Sunday School, and a secular meeting room.¹¹⁰ At this time the trustees specified that the designs be prepared "for the new church edifice to cost not exceeding \$30,000 including decoration, the seating of the auditorium, and the equipment of the building for lighting and heating and excluding the organ and other furnishing."¹¹¹ Finally, on 16 September 1905, it was announced that Frank Lloyd Wright had been selected as the architect for Unity Church, whose members intended "to construct a church which will be dignified and devotional in aspect and also suited to the working needs of a modern church. The reputation of the architect assures the people of Oak Park of an artistic edifice in which all can take pride and which will be an ornament to the village."¹¹²

The first published description of Wright's intentions for the new building appeared in Chicago's *Construction News* of 23 September 1905, which noted that Wright had "prepared plans for a church to be built in Oak Park for

the Unity Church. It will be 1-story and basement of brick and stone, have probably a slate roof, hardwood finish, steam heat, electric wiring for light and cost \$35,000."¹¹³ In his autobiography, Wright had stated that church funds were \$45,000, which presumably included the \$10,000 cost of the land at the new site.¹¹⁴ Wright maintained, however, that such a budget had forced him from the outset to choose concrete as the main material for the building because it was less expensive than traditional masonry.¹¹⁵ Wright evidently developed his design through the fall of 1905, for at the trustees' meeting of 17 December 1905, Rev. Johonnot reported that his plans committee "had employed Mr. Frank L. Wright as architect, and submitted to the board plans which had been prepared by Mr. Wright under the direction of the Committee and recommended the adoption and acceptance of such plans."¹¹⁶

In his autobiography, Wright stated that he developed the design for Unity Temple independently from the building committee, and that he initially shared his plans only with Roberts, who was delighted with them and suggested a model to show to the building committee. Wright wrote that such a model was made and that when the committee of seven came to see it, he and Roberts won over a third unnamed member while Rev. Johonnot, initially impressed but cautious, was soon convinced by the scheme and worked for its realization.¹¹⁷ Wright named Mr. Skillin as the member of the committee who remained hostile to the design for fear of its poor lighting and acoustics, so that "the commission to go ahead [was] formally given over his dissent and warnings."¹¹⁸

The trustees, without the building or plans committee, held meetings about the plans on 2 and 4 January 1906, the first in President Skillin's home and the second in Wright's office, yet these occurred after Johonnot had presented the design to the trustees in December as already reviewed and approved by his plans committee. At the meeting of 2 January it was noted that "there were some details not entirely clear to the Trustees and some question regarding lighting and ventilation of the first gallery in the auditorium and of two rooms in Unity house. The seating capacity and arrangement of seats in the auditorium. Whether concrete construction would be satisfactory etc etc."¹¹⁹ At the second meeting at Wright's office, "the plans of the new church were carefully

¹⁰⁶ Wright, 177, 182–183.

¹⁰⁷ Editorial, *Universalist Leader*, VII, 9 January 1904, 38. On Roberts, see L.K. Eaton, *Two Chicago Architects and Their Clients: Frank Lloyd Wright and Howard Van Doren Shaw*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972, 77–79.

¹⁰⁸ Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 30 August 1905, *Record*, 132–133; Unity Temple Historical Files.

¹⁰⁹ Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 3 September 1905, *Record*, 134–135; Unity Temple Historical Files.

¹¹⁰ Chulak, 22.

¹¹¹ Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 3 September 1905, *Record*, 134–135; Unity Temple Historical Files.

¹¹² "Frank Lloyd Wright Chosen," *Oak Leaves*, 16 September 1905, 13.

¹¹³ *Construction News*, xx, 23 September 1905, 235.

¹¹⁴ Wright, 178. Discussions of the project's cost recur in minutes of Unity Church's trustees' meetings of 2 January 1906 and 14 January 1906, where the cost of the site is noted as \$11,000; *Record*, 140–141, 149–153; Unity Temple Historical Files.

¹¹⁵ Wright, 178.

¹¹⁶ Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 17 December 1905, *Record*, 143; Unity Temple Historical Files.

¹¹⁷ Wright, 183.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 2 January 1906, *Record*, 140–141; Unity Temple Historical Files.

examined, the members of the Board asking questions and Mr. Wright explaining. After the Board had exhausted its list of questions and objections to details thought to be weak the meeting adjourned informally.¹²⁰ The trustees continued their discussions of the design, meeting twice with members of both the plans and building committees, until on 7 February, with Wright and Johonnot present, the trustees approved the plans that Wright had drawn and that Johonnot's committee had endorsed. The trustees then moved that the plans be "referred to a special committee consisting of the Plans Committee, the Building Committee and the Trustees," which would "cause to be prepared detailed drawings and specifications."¹²¹ These were approved by the board on 28 April 1906,¹²² and ground was broken for the new building in May.¹²³

Construction of Unity Temple continued until the first service in its new auditorium was held, on 25 October 1908, though Wright's building was not formally dedicated until 26 September 1909, after the installation of its organ.¹²⁴ In their meeting of 4 March 1906 the trustees appointed Rev. Johonnot, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Charles S. Woodward, a member of the ways and means committee, as members of a special committee to publish a booklet on the building.¹²⁵ This brochure was entitled *The New Edifice of Unity Church, Oak Park, Illinois. Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect. Descriptive and Historical Matter by Dr. Rodney F. Johonnot, Pastor. Published by the New Unity Church Club, June, Nineteen Hundred and Six*, just after building had begun. As a type of publication, this booklet differs from those issued by churches to commemorate the laying of a cornerstone for a new structure, such as the publication of 1904 of the Church of the Disciples in Boston when its new building was begun.¹²⁶ What distinguishes Unity Temple's booklet is the degree to which the text is devoted to explaining the form of Wright's building in terms of the tenets of a liberal faith. Certain key ideas and descriptive passages in this brochure were taken directly from Johonnot's own earlier statement on

the design, which was published in February 1906, shortly after the trustees had approved Wright's plans.¹²⁷ Johonnot's statements were linked to the denominational cultures of both Unitarianism and Universalism around 1900. Study of this intellectual context for Unity Temple reveals how ideas for the building that Wright later claimed as his own were in fact rooted in liberal religious thought of the period.

In February 1906 Johonnot noted that a principal reason for the church's style of architecture had been "the desire to make the building expressive of the faith held by the worshippers."¹²⁸ For Johonnot, the question of expression in all religious architecture was "whether a church building ought not to set forth by its form the character of the faith it represents."¹²⁹ Johonnot wrote of Unity Temple: "While departing widely from the traditional forms of a church architecture the building is distinctly reverential in feeling and spirit. . . . Informed with the spirit which characterized the ancient temples, it thus becomes associated with that spirit of worship which has caused men in all ages to rear temples unto God."¹³⁰ Wright's later descriptions of Unity Temple in his article, "In the Cause of Architecture" of March 1908, and in the Wasmuth folio of 1910, noted that it is "a frank revival of the old temple form, as better suited to the requirements of a modern congregation than the nave and transept of the cathedral type" (Fig. 21).¹³¹ In his autobiography, Wright later recalled that he had begun the process of designing Unity Temple with the idea of eliminating the traditional church steeple pointing to heaven. Instead, he asked, why not "build a temple to man, appropriate to his uses as a meeting-place, in which to study man for himself for his God's sake? A modern meeting-house and good-time place."¹³²

The use of an auditorium rather than a nave as the main spatial form in a church for liberal religion was a solution that Wright had already explored in his designs for the Abraham Lincoln Center, and which had appeared earlier in All Souls Church. This idea had also been pioneered in James Freeman Clarke's Church of the Disciples in Boston which Johonnot had attended in the 1880s. Wright's decisive step in the design of Unity Temple was, as he later described in his autobiography, to "let that sense of the great room shape the whole

¹²⁰ Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 4 January 1906, *Record*, 145; Unity Temple Historical Files.

¹²¹ Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 7 February 1906, *Record*, 160–162; Unity Temple Historical Files. The board's action followed an inspection of the building's plans by seventy-five members of Unity Church at Wright's studio on 31 January; "Unity Church Men See Plans," *Oak Leaves*, 3 February 1906, 12.

¹²² Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 28 April 1906, *Record*, 169–171; Unity Temple Historical Files.

¹²³ "Unity Church," *Oak Leaves* (Fifth Anniversary Number), 27 April 1907, 102.

¹²⁴ "Temple and Faith," *Oak Leaves*, 31 October 1908, 3, 8–10; "Unity Dedicated," *ibid.*, 2 October 1909, 3–6; "Unity Church, Oak Park, Ill.," *Christian Register*, LXXXVIII, 14 October 1909, 1107; "The New Unity Temple," *Universalist Leader*, xii, 16 October 1909, 1323–24.

¹²⁵ Regular Monthly Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 4 March 1906, *Record*, 165; Unity Temple Historical Files.

¹²⁶ *Laying the Corner-Stone, Church of the Disciples [Jersey and Peterboro Streets], October 14, 1904, Boston, 1904.*

¹²⁷ Johonnot's statement on and description of Wright's design was published in "Unity Plans Unique," *Oak Leaves*, 24 February 1906, 3–7, the day before he delivered a sermon entitled "The New Spirit of Church Architecture," *ibid.*, 29.

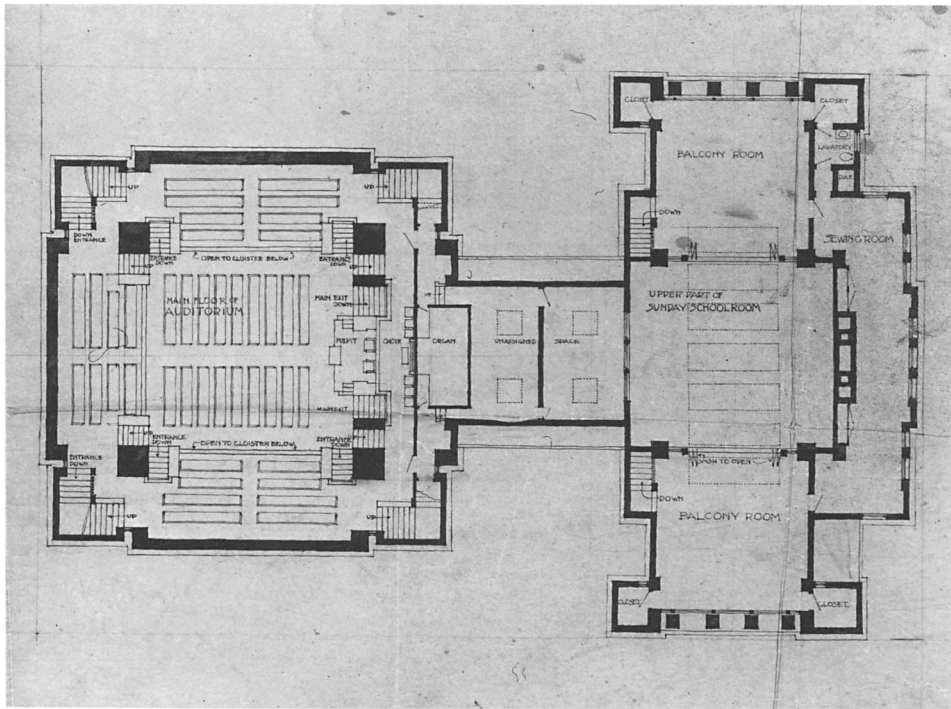
¹²⁸ Johonnot, quoted in "Unity Plans Unique," 3.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* In support of the concept that a church building should express the particular religious ideals of its congregation, Johonnot cited C. De Kay, "What Do Our Church Buildings Express?" *Review of Reviews*, xxxii, December, 1905, 689–698.

¹³⁰ Johonnot, quoted in "Unity Plans Unique," 5.

¹³¹ Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture," *Architectural Record*, xxiii, March, 1908, 212, and *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe*, description of pl. LXIII.

¹³² Wright, 178.



21 Wright, Unity Temple, plan of main floor of auditorium (Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Drawing No. 0611.065, © Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation 1986)

edifice. Let the room inside be the architecture outside."¹³³ Wright may have owed this architectural concept to Flagg's critique of Wright and Perkins's 1900 design for the Abraham Lincoln Center. In suggesting the clear exterior expression of a major interior space, Flagg was recounting a time-honored Beaux-Arts principle of design, which was consistently evident in his own architecture. The exterior form of Clarke's Church of the Disciples likewise clearly conveys the shape of the interior auditorium, though this church appears to combine historical references to both meeting houses and to such churches as S. Vitale in Ravenna. Thus, in Unity Temple, Wright did not invent a new type of room for worship, nor did he apply a new concept of expression in the exterior legibility of its interior spaces. Instead, in this church, his process of design was perhaps to condense typological models known from historical and contemporaneous architectural culture into a formal synthesis that bears the stamp of the distinctive individual style found in Wright's other works of these years. His design was no less creative, if it emerged from such a process; rather, its creativity was based less on invention *de novo*, as Wright claimed, than on his assimilation of multiple sources into a personal idiom.

Wright's substitution of the auditorium for the steeple as the major architectural form legible on Unity Temple's exterior may represent his reinvestigation of the meeting house as an architectural type in light of liberal theology around 1900. In Wright's autobiographical account of why he proposed to omit a steeple, he described the story he told to the building committee of a holy man who yearned to see God, climbing to the top of the highest tree on the highest mountain. There he heard a

voice instructing him to go back down into the valley, where the face of the divinity could be seen in the faces of humanity.¹³⁴ Wright's tale was representative of his liberal contemporaries' preoccupation with the theological meaning of the spire in older Eastern meeting houses. A Chicago Universalist writing in 1892 noted how, almost a century earlier, meeting-house steeples were the architectural forms that signified a belief in the reality of heaven as the realm of the soul's salvation.¹³⁵ However, such a view ran counter to the Unitarian ideal that Johnnot had earlier proposed to include in Unity Church's articles of faith, namely that "salvation comes by godly character achieved and is an educational process."¹³⁶

By 1900 the spire's implication of belief in a superhuman divinity residing in a supernatural heaven ran counter to the views of a nascent Unitarian humanistic school of theology which preached the natural existence of God in the souls of human beings.¹³⁷ Thus Wright's

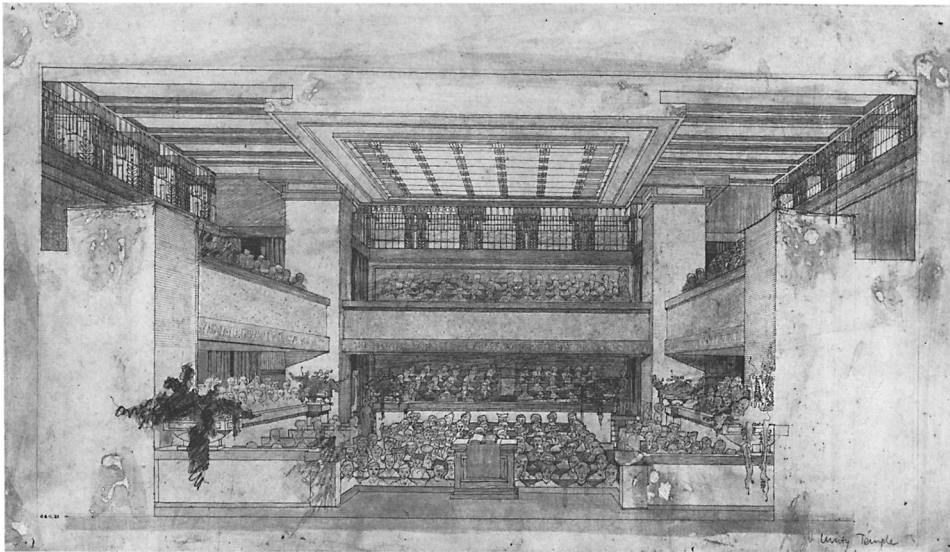
¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ S.T. Perry, "In the Old Meeting-House," *Universalist*, xi, 25 June 1892, 6.

¹³⁶ Chulak, 14.

¹³⁷ On theological humanism among Unitarians in the early 20th century, see Lyttle, 243–249, and Robinson, 143–150. An influential figure of the time was a follower of William James, Professor Frank C. Doan, who held the chair in the psychology and philosophy of religion at the Meadville Theological School from 1904 to 1913. His principal work was *Religion and Modern Man* (1909). Doan expressed his views in such addresses as, "Unitarian Theology: The Idea of God as Human," *Christian Register*, LXXXVIII, 7 October 1909, 1063–65. Rev. Johnnot had earlier commended A.W. Alcott, "Universalism, a Progressive Faith," *New World*, iii, March, 1894, 38–55, as a statement of the Universalist position (Johnnot, "The Outlook in the Universalist Church," *Unity*, xxxiii, 29 March 1894, 55–56).

¹³³ *Ibid.*



22 Wright, Unity Temple, preliminary drawing of auditorium (Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Drawing No. 0611.017, © Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation 1986)

decision to omit the spire was an act of removing a traditional symbol of faith in the supernatural. His replacement of the spire by the auditorium as the main architectural form presented this space for human worship as the container of divinity living naturally in humanity. In May 1905, in the context of a sermon urging that Unity Church construct a new building, Johonnot implied that faith in the supernatural was characteristic of conservative religious sects, whereas his congregation's special liberal mission was based on "the freest and largest interpretation of religion; whose foundation is . . . the natural relationship of God to man."¹³⁸ Affirming belief in the ancient origins of such a natural religion, Johonnot concluded that "here is a foundation more stable than any other and antedating all scripture and creeds."¹³⁹ The humanistic focus of a liberal religious faith appears as one of the concluding ideas in the 1906 booklet on Unity Temple, which notes that: "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."¹⁴⁰

The central importance of this idea for the development of Unity Temple's design is suggested by one of the drawings for the interior of the auditorium, which has been dated to 1906 (Fig. 22).¹⁴¹ This drawing shows a design for the skylight that differs from the ceiling as built and as shown in the working drawings dated March 1906; thus it is presumably a drawing that dates from an earlier stage in the design.¹⁴² The style of

draftsmanship duplicates that evident in other renderings of the building that have been attributed to Wright, though they, like this drawing, are unsigned and may reflect the work of more than one draftsman on each sheet.¹⁴³ The inscription "Unity Temple" in the lower right appears to be in Wright's hand, though it may date from a later time. The drawing is a view of the auditorium filled with the congregation seated on the main level and in the raised alcoves and galleries on three sides of the space between the main piers. The viewpoint selected for this drawing reverses the convention of depicting ecclesiastical interiors from the rear of a nave looking forward toward an altar. Instead, here the artist presented a tableau of the seated congregation seen from an imaginary viewpoint behind the lectern. This image of the populated space suggests the liberal ideal of the divinity present in assembled humanity.

The drawing also evokes Wright's later characterization of Unity Temple as "a modern meeting-house." In English usage, "meeting house" usually referred to a type of building used for worship only by a group that dissented from the Church of England, whose buildings were called churches.¹⁴⁴ Hence the type of the meeting house came to be associated with such disparate sects of dissenters as the Puritans and the Quakers. At Unity

¹³⁸ Johonnot, "The Gain of a Continued Pastorate," quoted in "Thirteen Years," *Oak Leaves*, 13 May 1905, 12.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Johonnot, 1906, 18.

¹⁴¹ Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Foundation, drawing no. 0611.021, published as plate 238 in Y. Futagawa, ed., *Frank Lloyd Wright Monograph 1902–1906*, Tokyo, 1987, 141.

¹⁴² The skylight as built is shown in longitudinal (0611.016) and cross sections (0611.017), included among the eight working drawings for

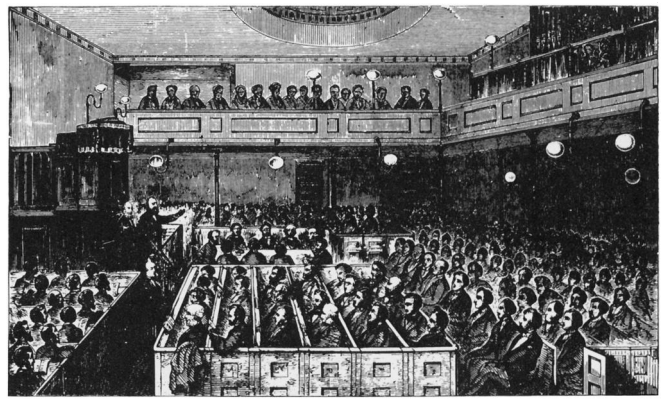
Unity Temple dating from March, 1906, published as pls. 229 and 237 in Futagawa (as in n. 141), 132, 140. The earlier skylight design shown in drawing no. 0611.021 appears in an undated longitudinal section of Unity Temple, drawing no. 0611.054, one of an earlier set of presentation drawings.

¹⁴³ Drawings of Unity Temple whose draftsmanship resembles that in drawing no. 0611.021 include the rendering of the Kenilworth Avenue front of the building, known as drawing no. 0611.003, published as pl. 27 in Y. Futagawa, ed., *Frank Lloyd Wright: In His Renderings 1887–1959*, Tokyo, 1984.

¹⁴⁴ In Colonial New England the distinctive connotation of the term "meeting house" was that it referred to a building that was alternately used for secular and religious purposes, whereas a church was a house of worship. E.W. Sinnott, *Meeting House and Church in Early New England*, New York, 1963, 5.

Temple, Wright's plan for seating alcoves below galleries around three sides of a square room recalled the form of such Unitarian meeting houses as that of Essex Church, London, built in 1774 as the first structure in England designed for Unitarian worship, shown in Figure 23 at the time of its centenary service in 1874.¹⁴⁵ In both this English precedent and in Wright's design for Unity Temple, the focus of attention is one central pulpit at the front of a raised platform, rather than one central altar at a platform's rear with a lectern and a pulpit in front of the altar and to either side. Jenkin Lloyd Jones had a similar minimal lectern near the frontal center of a raised platform in the Abraham Lincoln Center. In the drawing of Unity Temple, a cloth is draped over the lectern on which there appears to be an open Bible, the one traditional religious object that Wright deemed essential for Unitarian places of worship.¹⁴⁶

In Unity Temple, as in Essex Church, galleries enabled members to sit close together on more than one level within sight of each other and near the voice of the speaker, whose rostrum is set forward into the space, as if to reinforce a feeling of communal solidarity among the congregation. One account of the first service of worship at Unity Temple in 1908 noted that, "the grouping of the people about the pulpit brought all within easy reach and gave to all a sense of nearness to preacher and choir, and of intimate and even family relations with one another."¹⁴⁷ This description of the completed auditorium echoes Johonnot's criterion for the building expressed in his sermon of 1904, "Building a Temple unto God," when he stated that if a new structure was to be adapted to the community of Oak Park, "it was a family church that was called for."¹⁴⁸ In Wright's first comment on Unity Temple that he published under his own authorship, he too noted that, "the speaker is placed well out in the auditorium, his audience gathered about him in the fashion of a friendly gathering, rather than as fixed in deep ranks, when it was imperative that the priest make himself the cynosure of all eyes."¹⁴⁹ Such allusion to a tradition of religious dissent in Wright's characterization of the space corresponds to Rev. Johonnot's admiration for the galleried King's Chapel in Boston as a model of earlier American religious architecture. King's Chapel was the building in which a definitively Unitarian doctrine was first preached in the United States in the 1780s



23 Essex Church, London, 1774, interior of first chapel in 1874 (from M. Rowe, *The Story of Essex Hall*, London, 1959, repr. in G. and J. Hague, *The Unitarian Heritage*, Sheffield, 1986)

by Rev. James Freeman, a grandfather and namesake of Rev. James Freeman Clarke, Johonnot's original mentor in the liberal ministry in the 1880s.¹⁵⁰

The drawing of Unity Temple's interior shows a biblical quotation from Isaiah 40:8 inscribed along the lower edge of the upper galleries around the room. This passage is the same one that Wright remembered his grandfather, Richard Lloyd Jones, stressing when he addressed gatherings of the Lloyd Jones family and its neighbors in his early church in Ixonia, Wisconsin. In his autobiography, Wright wrote that, "grandfather preached as Isaiah preached. 'The flower fadeth, the grass withereth—but the word of the Lord, thy God, endureth forever.' His children had to learn that chapter of Isaiah, the fortieth, by heart so they could recite it."¹⁵¹ Although Wright himself did not like this text's implicit deprecation of the forms of nature, Isaiah was a favorite biblical author of Jenkin Lloyd Jones.¹⁵² This prophet's name was also adopted by one of Chicago's reformed Jewish synagogues, Isaiah Temple, whose building, among the last designed by Dankmar Adler, was cruciform in plan, not unlike Unity Temple's auditorium.¹⁵³ Jenkin Lloyd Jones had attended the dedication of Isaiah Temple in 1899 and had praised the architecture of its sanctuary.¹⁵⁴

When Unity Temple's design was first published locally in Oak Park in February 1906, it was described as "the most radical departure from traditional church architecture ever attempted."¹⁵⁵ In Johonnot's accom-

¹⁴⁵ Hague (as in n. 26), 108.

¹⁴⁶ The nearly focal position of a Bible in this drawing of Unity Temple calls to mind Wright's later purchase of an illustrated Bible for placement on the central pulpit of the First Unitarian Society's new church in Madison, Wisconsin, which was built in 1947–51. While this church was being completed, Wright is said to have stated to its minister: "I am a Unitarian, descended from Unitarian ministers on both my mother's and father's side of the family. The Bible has always been a part of our background" (quoted in Pfeiffer [as in n. 1], 244).

¹⁴⁷ "Temple and Faith," *Oak Leaves*, 31 October 1908, 3.

¹⁴⁸ Johonnot, quoted in "Annual Sermon," *Oak Leaves*, 13 May 1904, 15.

¹⁴⁹ Wright, *Ausgeführte Bauten* (as in n. 1), description of pl. LXIII.

¹⁵⁰ Created in 1749–54, King's Chapel was acknowledged as both the first Colonial church built of stone, with its body and tower of Quincy

granite (W.H. Pierson, *American Buildings and Their Architects*, I [1970], Garden City, N.Y., 1976, 145–146), as well as the first Unitarian church in the United States while under the leadership of Freeman (Robinson, 259–261).

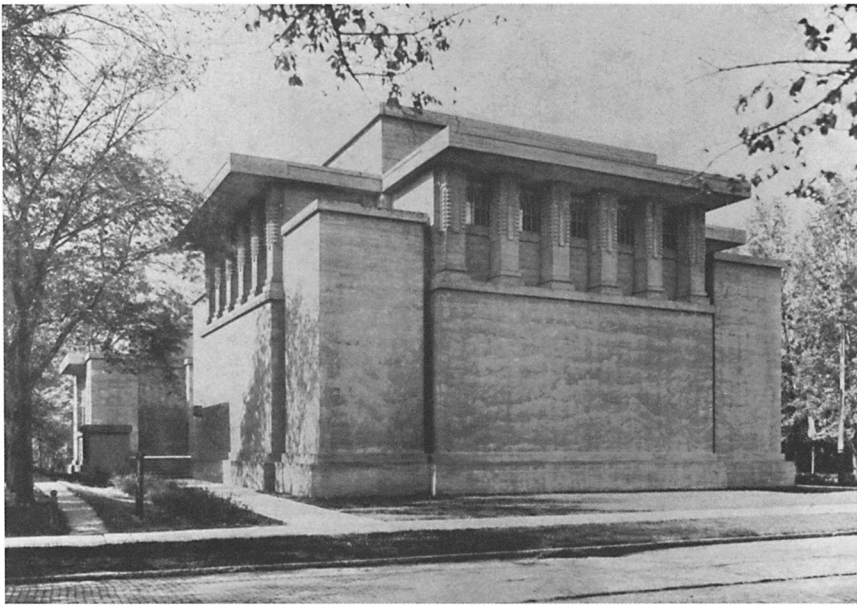
¹⁵¹ Wright, 27.

¹⁵² Jones, "The Great Unknown," *Unity*, XLIII, 9 March 1899, 30.

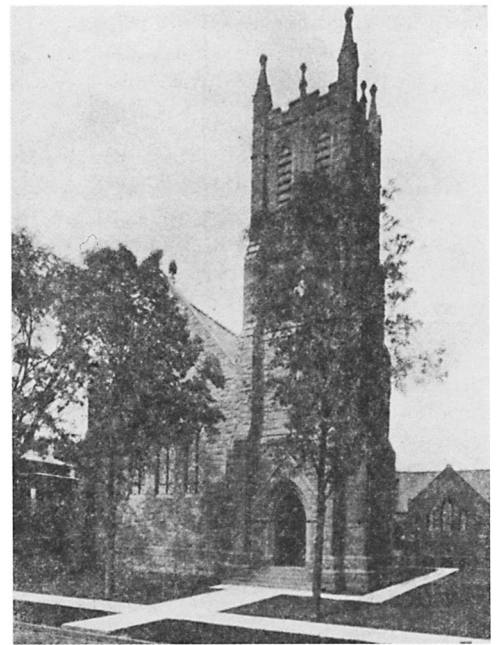
¹⁵³ Spertus Museum of Judaica, *Faith and Form: Synagogue Architecture in Illinois*, Chicago, 1976, 48.

¹⁵⁴ "Dedication of Isaiah Temple, Chicago," *Unity*, XLIII, 23 March 1899, 75.

¹⁵⁵ "Unity Plans Unique," *Oak Leaves*, 14 February 1906, 3.



24 Wright, Unity Temple, from the northeast (courtesy Frank Lloyd Wright Archives)



25 Hobart Upjohn, All Souls Universalist Church, Watertown, New York, 1907 (from *Universalist Leader*, x, 19 October 1907)

panying statement on the design, he had defended its innovative character because such forms resulted from a consistently reasonable series of decisions, and such rationality in design expressed an ideal of reason central to liberal religion. Johonnot wrote: "It is fitting that Unity Church, which represents a faith based upon reason and not upon tradition nor precedent, should depart from traditional forms of architecture. Refusing to be bound by mere precedent in theology, it may properly depart from the conventional form of architecture, if there is good reason for so doing. True originality in architecture is as desirable and inspiring as in other forms of art, if its basis is rational and the result is beautiful."¹⁵⁶ Just as Jenkin Lloyd Jones had defended an unconventional design for his All Souls Church of 1886 as an expression of liberal rationality, so Johonnot presented the case for Wright's design as signifying the role of reason in his liberal church. This concept had been emphasized in the statement on Unity Church's faith published in 1904, which asserted that "reason is recognized as the ultimate basis of authority in religion as in all things else; only such religious beliefs are to be accepted as are sanctioned by reason."¹⁵⁷

In invoking reason as the ultimate test of ideas either in religion or in architecture, both Jones and Johonnot were echoing a distinctly Unitarian point of view, which may have sanctioned earlier innovations in church architecture such as Rev. James Freeman Clarke's Church of

the Disciples. Yet, while Unity Temple may have had Unitarian precedents like Clarke's church, Wright's design was unique among works of Universalist architecture elsewhere in the United States. On the whole, Universalism was a less wealthy and urbane sect than Unitarianism, and had yet to develop a denominationally distinct tradition of church architecture even by 1900. To a degree this may reflect the fact that, apart from its idea of universal salvation, Universalism was not as socially and theologically radical a movement as Unitarianism was.¹⁵⁸ In 1909, the Rev. William D. McGlauflin, the Universalists' national superintendent who officiated at Unity Temple's opening, published a book on Universalist activities around the country. Among the Universalist church buildings illustrated in his volume, Unity Temple was described as a "unique design" (Fig. 24).¹⁵⁹ A more typical example of Universalist church architecture was a building such as the All Souls Universalist Church in Watertown, New York, dedicated in October 1907 (Fig. 25), while Unity Temple was still under construction. The Watertown building was the work of Hobart B. Upjohn, grandson of Richard Upjohn, who modeled it on English Gothic churches of the late thirteenth century. Hobart Upjohn said it had been "the sincere desire of the architect to design a building which will impress those entering that they are in God's house, and there has been no desire on his part to surprise with novelties."¹⁶⁰ The rector of the neighboring Episcopal church in Watertown

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3–5.

¹⁵⁷ "Position of the Society More Fully Defined," *Year Book and Manual of Unity Church* (as in n. 99).

¹⁵⁸ Robinson, 5, 7.

¹⁵⁹ Rev. W.H. McGlauflin, *What the Universalist Church Is Doing: 1907 to 1909*, Boston, 1909, 40.

¹⁶⁰ "The New Church at Watertown, N.Y.," *Universalist Leader*, x, 19 October 1907, 1327.

commended Upjohn's design at its dedication, stating: "I am glad to be here because since it has been started it has looked like a church."¹⁶¹ The *Universalist Leader*, the denomination's national publication, cited this remark in the context of an editorial praising Upjohn's building.

The implication that a building had to be Gothic in its style in order to be typologically legible as a church drew a spirited response from Rev. Johonnot, who, writing to the *Universalist Leader* in December 1907, countered this view with a statement of ideas underlying Unity Temple. He was "fully in sympathy with the idea that a building erected by a religious body for the uses of worship should 'look like a church,' and should not look like a theater or a town hall. . . . A house of worship should indeed by its very form embody the ideas of reverence and aspiration; it should be invested with dignity and beauty; but it need not be 'Gothic' to set forth these ideas nor be modelled after the great cathedrals."¹⁶² For Johonnot, Gothic convention would "not stand the test of rational criticism."¹⁶³ To model modern churches on the Gothic style of architecture was, to him, "unjustifiable by any canon of art. First, because the style of architecture which befits a great cathedral is wholly unfitting to a little church edifice. . . . In the second place, the cathedral style of church, even when we can erect a good copy, does not fit our modern functions of worship. This style of building was born out of a time and conditions wholly unlike our own."¹⁶⁴ To uphold exclusive preference for the Gothic style as the one means to make a new building look like a church was, in Johonnot's mind, "to take a very limited historical view of church architecture," for "churches of other types had existed in Europe for more than a thousand years before the cathedral type was born."¹⁶⁵

Johonnot mentioned the Church of the Madeleine in Paris and King's Chapel in Boston as admirable modern examples of religious architecture in a classical style.¹⁶⁶ Johonnot in this context was not against historicist architecture per se; rather, he frowned on medievalism because he regarded its connotations of religious mysticism as antithetical to the liberal ideal of rationality. He may have supported the design for Unity Temple because its logical plan and clear massing exemplified the lucidity of Western classicism, the stylistic tradition that best conveyed such an ideal. Wright's ministerial client asked why only the Gothic style was regarded as suitable for churches, stating that, "it is not because it is by its nature more religious, nor because it is better fitted to our church uses, but merely because we are more accus-

tomed to it. . . . To my mind it is time for us Protestants, and especially for us who are protestants of the Protestants, to cease from harking back to ancient forms simply because they have the stamp of custom, and to begin to put thought into our church buildings, to make them embody the ideas for which we stand."¹⁶⁷

Unity Temple has often been cited as a pioneering early example of modern architecture in reinforced concrete,¹⁶⁸ and its design and construction in this material represented a rational solution given limited funds. However, the choice of concrete and Wright's treatment of the material also had religious significance. In 1906 Johonnot had written that the concrete was to be "poured and stamped in forms, making a structural monolith of the whole, thus, in another way, typifying unity."¹⁶⁹ In 1908 Wright similarly described the church as "a concrete monolith cast in wooden molds or 'forms'. . . . After removing the forms the exterior surfaces are washed clean to expose the small gravel aggregate, the finished result in texture and effect being not unlike a coarse granite."¹⁷⁰ In 1908 a Chicago trade journal for the concrete industry praised Unity Temple as the finest example of architecture in this new material in the world. This account described how Unity Temple,

. . . From foundation to roof, with all its floors, pillars, beams and galleries, including the pulpit, is one piece of concrete—just like a great building hewn out of a cliff of granite. As you stand in the auditorium, beholding the wonderful work, you feel the impressiveness of this fact, and something of the unity spirit, the Oneness spirit, steals into your soul. When a style of church architecture is so pronounced in character as to impress one with the very creed taught within its walls there need be no question or even discussion of its propriety, for it is a masterpiece.¹⁷¹

At the time of Unity Temple's dedication, Jones's *Unity* offered editorial praise for the building's material form as "probably the most deliberate, elaborate and successful attempt yet made to apply the 'new construction' to church architecture. The building is entirely constructed of re-enforced concrete so that now in its completed state it is one solid monolith. It is not only built on the rock but it is a rock-built church."¹⁷² One local writer saw Unity Temple's concrete as an allusion to the biblical metaphor of the rock of Abraham as one origin of humankind described in the poetic prophecy of Isaiah. By analogy, the image of Wright's building as a monolith was inter-

¹⁶¹ "Editorials," *Universalist Leader*, x, 19 October 1907, 1317.

¹⁶² Johonnot, letter, *Universalist Leader*, x, 21 December 1907, 1617.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Hitchcock, 53; P. Collins, *Concrete: The Vision of a New Architecture*, London, 1959, 142–144.

¹⁶⁹ Johonnot, quoted in "Unity Plans Unique," *Oak Leaves*, 24 February 1906, 3.

¹⁷⁰ Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture" 1908 (as in n. 1), 212.

¹⁷¹ "A Masterpiece in Concrete Work," *Cement World*, II, 15 February 1909, 747.

¹⁷² Editorial, *Unity*, LXIV, 30 September 1909, 484.

preted as a reference to the modern Abraham—Lincoln—whose monument in Chicago was the foursquare rock of Jenkin Lloyd Jones's center.¹⁷³

The one explicit reference to Unitarian theology in the design of Unity Temple is the inscription set in bronze lettering over both the east and west doors to the vestibule between the auditorium and Unity House (Fig. 26). Johonnot was named one member of a special committee on the selection and design of this message,¹⁷⁴ which reads, "For the Worship of God and the Service of Man." This identification of the building's dual purpose corresponds to its binuclear plan, with the auditorium for divine worship to the north of the doors, known as Unity Temple proper, and Unity House for social occasions, to the south side of the entrance.¹⁷⁵ On another level, the choice of this particular inscription may have been a reference to the words that Jones's All Souls and other churches of his Western Unitarian Conference had included in their covenant since the late 1880s: "In the freedom of the Truth and in the spirit of Jesus Christ, we unite for the worship of God and the service of man."¹⁷⁶

To Western Unitarians the words affixed to Unity Temple referred to what were conceived to be universal principles of human religions, which transcended any one denominational tradition.¹⁷⁷ Consciousness of the devotional and ethical similarities of faiths everywhere was heightened in Chicago by the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, one of whose principal organizers had been Jenkin Lloyd Jones. While the parliament drew primarily leaders of American Christian and Jewish movements, there were delegations from the worldwide Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Anglican churches, as well as representatives of the Shinto, Buddhist, and Muslim religions, and of other faiths from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.¹⁷⁸ Jones wanted the meeting to show



26 Wright, Unity Temple, west patio (courtesy Frank Lloyd Wright Archives)

"the essential unity of all religious faiths at their best."¹⁷⁹ After the parliament Jones wrote: "It will be the business of the Fifth American Century to create . . . the religion of humanity, the universal religion that will seek in the thought of diverse humanity a sense of the infinite God."¹⁸⁰ Johonnot participated as a Universalist at the parliament and referred to its themes in his later sermons, such as one of the first which he gave in the newly built Unity House in the fall of 1907, entitled "The Movement Toward a Universal Religion." He noted that "there is a movement going on in the Christian world and also in other religions toward the development of a universal type of religion true for all times and peoples, based, on the one hand, upon the moral and religious nature of man and, on the other, upon his longings after union with the infinite."¹⁸¹

For Johonnot, Unity Temple's allusion to the form of an ancient temple perhaps had different levels of significance, one linked to the origins of liberal religion and the other related to his anticipation of future human religious unity. Regarding the origins of liberal religion,

¹⁷³ C.H. Fitch, "Interprets Unity," *Oak Leaves*, 22 January 1910, 22. Fitch cited Isaiah 51:1–2 as source for the metaphor of the rock of Abraham, and Galatians 3:6 as one basis for characterization of Lincoln as a righteous figure like Abraham. The recurrent allusions to granite in descriptions of the concrete work of Unity Temple may relate to Rev. Johonnot's citation of King's Chapel, Boston, which, as the first American church built of stone, was also of Quincy granite, the same stone later used with brick in Rev. James Freeman Clarke's Church of the Disciples of 1868–69.

¹⁷⁴ Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 20 May 1906. *Record*, 178–179; Unity Temple Historical Files.

¹⁷⁵ Johonnot, quoted in "Unity Plans Unique," *Oak Leaves*, 24 February 1906, 5–6.

¹⁷⁶ This covenant was cited in one of the most influential statements of the Unitarian position in the late 19th century, William Channing Gannett's "Things Commonly Believed Among Us," first presented at the annual meeting of the Western Unitarian Conference of 1887 at All Souls Church in Chicago (Lyttle, 189–190). The significance of this statement in the ecclesiastical history of the period is clarified in W.H. Pease, "Doctrine and Fellowship: William Channing Gannett and the Unitarian Creedal Issue," *Church History*, xxv, September, 1956, 210–238.

¹⁷⁷ Gannett, quoted in Pease, 218, 219.

¹⁷⁸ On the World's Parliament of Religions, see Rev. J.H. Barrows, ed., *The World's Parliament of Religions*, Chicago, 1893; W.R. Houghton, ed., *Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions*, Chicago, 1893; and Jones, *A Chorus of Faith*, Chicago, 1893.

¹⁷⁹ Jones, *Chorus of Faith*, 11, quoted in T. Graham, "Jenkin Lloyd Jones and the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893," in *Association for Liberal Religious Studies, Collegium Proceedings*, 1, 1979, 78.

¹⁸⁰ Jones, "Four Hundred Years of America," 23 October 1892, quoted in Graham (as in n. 179), 69.

¹⁸¹ Johonnot, "Universal Faith," *Oak Leaves*, 19 October 1907, 15–17.

Johonnot earlier had described Unitarianism as "an ancient faith, much older than Christianity," while he saw Universalism as "one of the most ancient phases of Christianity."¹⁸² In reviving an older form of the temple, Wright's design thus alluded to the antiquity of liberal ideals. In this sense, Johonnot's reference to the building as like an ancient temple may be linked to biblical and Early Christian examples of the type. Yet Unity Temple's evocation of an ancient temple may relate to comparative studies of the world's religions undertaken by Unitarian leaders like Clarke and Jones before 1893, which had formed the intellectual background for the parliament of religions.¹⁸³ In this tradition of ideas, the temple would be seen not as an exclusively Western type, but one that had existed in ancient times the world over as architectural evidence of the universality of human religions. In 1906 Johonnot wrote of the new Unity Temple: "Informed with the spirit which characterized the ancient temples . . . it thus bears witness to the great truth of the unity of all religions, that, while religions are many, religion is one."¹⁸⁴ Thus Wright's design may refer to the ancient temple as the architectural type whose ubiquity signified the oneness of humanity's religions, the oneness that liberal leaders of 1900 like Jones and Johonnot believed would be realized.

Liberal interest in Western as well as non-Western ideas of religion may have converged with Wright's own aesthetic program at the time he was designing Unity Temple. Johonnot and Jones viewed Gothic as inappropriate in a building that was to express liberal religion. Yet his writings show that Johonnot was not averse to classicism, nor was Jenkin Lloyd Jones, who praised the Parthenon as an architectural paradigm among ancient temples and wrote a favorable editorial on the replica of the Parthenon at Nashville, Tennessee.¹⁸⁵ Both older and recent studies of Wright's early work have shown how around 1900 he was tied stylistically and theoretically to classical architectural culture,¹⁸⁶ and Unity Temple is susceptible to convincing formal analysis as a classically conceived building, just as it has been analyzed as a model of Wright's distinctively three-dimensional aesthetic.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Johonnot, *Unity Church, Oak Park, Illinois*, n.d., 3, 4; Unity Temple Historical Files. This document bears the handwritten note: "This pamphlet was issued about 1903 or 1904 as I recall. R.F. Johonnot Nov. 1, 1919."

¹⁸³ See J.F. Clarke, *Ten Great Religions*, 2 vols., Boston, 1871–73, and Jones, *Religions of the World*, Chicago, 1893.

¹⁸⁴ Johonnot, quoted in "Unity Plans Unique," *Oak Leaves*, 24 February 1906, 5.

¹⁸⁵ Editorial, *Unity*, xxxix, 18 March 1897, 35, and "Observations by the Way," *ibid.*, 12 August 1897, 503.

¹⁸⁶ H.R. Hitchcock, "Frank Lloyd Wright and the 'Academic Tradition' of the Eighteen-Nineties," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vii, 1944, 46–63, and N. Levine, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Own Houses and His Changing Concept of Representation," in C.R. Bolon, R.S. Nelson, and L. Seidel, eds., *The Nature of Frank Lloyd Wright*, Chicago, 1988, 20–69.

¹⁸⁷ O.A. Graf, *Die Kunst des Quadrats: Zum Werk von Frank Lloyd Wright*, Vienna, 1983, I, 124–260.



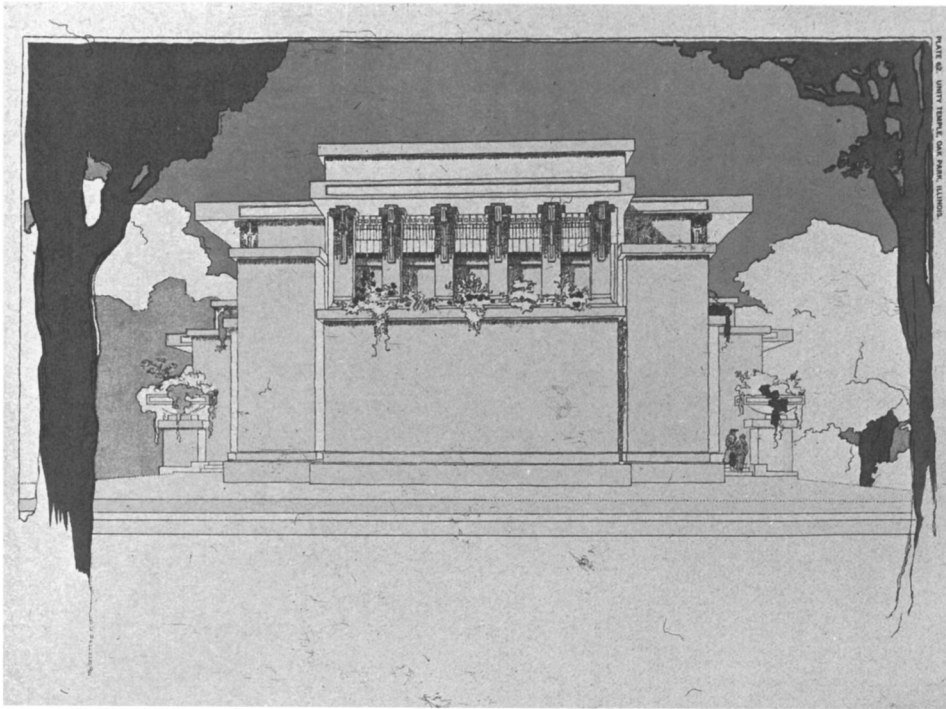
27 Wright, photograph of Honganji Temple, Nagoya(?), Japan, taken 1905 (Slide No. A/04335/1987, Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio Foundation, Oak Park)

If classical models underly Unity Temple's form, then perhaps its classicism was not only characteristic of the substructure of Wright's style, but was also meant to evoke the type of the ancient temple so as to convey the antiquity of Unitarian and Universalist beliefs. Unity Temple serves to signify liberal religion in a suburban context of churches based on medieval styles, to which its classical repose is a vivid contrast and thus an effective statement of religious ideology. Looking at Unity Temple, one would not think that Unitarianism and Universalism emerged during the eighteenth century, hence postdating the medieval Christianity to which nearby churches alluded. Instead, Wright's building appears to identify its congregation's faith as authoritative in its antedating of the different denominations housed around it.

Among non-Western traditions of religious architecture, the Japanese perhaps served as a source for Unity Temple, as Wright designed the building within months of his first trip abroad to Japan, from February to May 1905.¹⁸⁸ By then Japan had been the focus of liberal missionary efforts by American Universalists since 1890, when such a program was advocated in sermons at Unity Church by the Rev. Augusta Chapin, the predecessor of Rev. Johonnot and a friend of Wright's mother.¹⁸⁹ In the context of liberal interest in non-Western religions, the extended Japanese tradition of temple architecture bore witness to the type's universality. Among the many photographs that Wright himself took in Japan, there survive several views of religious complexes. One of these has been identified as a view of the Honganji Temple in Nagoya (Fig. 27). The building's monumental presence and flared roofs may be compared to the Lake

¹⁸⁸ On the dating of Wright's first trip to Japan in 1905, see K. Smith, "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Imperial Hotel: A Postscript," *Art Bulletin*, LXVII, 1985, 298.

¹⁸⁹ C. Seaburg, *Dojin Means All People: The Universalist Mission to Japan, 1890–1942*, Boston, 1978. Notice of Rev. Augusta Chapin's support of the Japan mission appeared in *Universalist*, vii, 11 January 1890, 4, and "Our Japan Sunday," *ibid.*, vii, 1 February 1890, 4.



28 Wright, Unity Temple, Lake Street front (from Wright, *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe*, 1910, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, © Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation)

Street elevation of Unity Temple, with its enlarged scale and cantilevered roofs (Fig. 28).

In March 1906, the same month as the working drawings for Unity Temple were being prepared, Frank Lloyd Wright hosted a Japanese social for the Unity Club of Unity Church, which financed publication of the booklet on Unity Temple. Wright used lantern slides to illustrate "a very interesting trip through Japan."¹⁹⁰ In April Wright's wife, Catherine, gave a lecture to the local Nineteenth Century Club on the architectures of China, India, and especially Japan as the country that had "at last touched hands with America and thus completed the circle of the world."¹⁹¹ Thus Wright's exposure to and interest in Japanese architecture coincided in time with his design for Unity Temple, yet ideologically the design also corresponded to liberal interest in religious unity and the ubiquity of the temple as an expression of human faith. In the exterior and auditorium of Unity Temple Wright may have sought to synthesize a range of references to different traditions of religious buildings. Instead of seeing his design solely as unconventional, one can also understand its form as a condensed transformation of multiple sources.¹⁹² What informed Wright's selection and investigation of types as a basis for design was presumably the liberal program for a new religious architecture in which he had been immersed for over twenty years, from his initial work with Silsbee as the architect of All Souls Church and Unity Chapel in 1885–86, through his five years as chief designer of the

Abraham Lincoln Center for Jenkin Lloyd Jones in 1898–1903, up to the point when he began developing the design for Unity Temple in 1905.

The project of reviving the type of the ancient temple had considerable ideological significance for Johnson, but it also had artistic importance for Wright, who was concerned with sustaining and renewing the tradition of architecture. Decades later Wright described his strong response to Victor Hugo's well-known chapter, "Ceci Tuera Cela," or, "This Will Kill That," meaning the printed book will kill the building, from Hugo's novel *Notre-Dame de Paris*.¹⁹³ In this chapter Hugo described how architecture's preeminence as the chief medium of human expression in ancient and medieval societies had been superseded by printed books since invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century. Hugo implicitly focused his analysis on the temple as it developed in varied civilizations. In his view, examples of this architectural type had been the great symbols of religious thought before the age of the Renaissance. Wright later maintained: "For the first six thousand years of the world, from the pagodas of Hindustan to the cathedrals of Cologne, architecture was the great writing of mankind."¹⁹⁴ He recalled that: "When sixteen years old, I used to read the great 'modern' of his day—Victor Hugo. Reading his discursive novel, *Notre-Dame*, I came upon the chapter, 'CECI TUERA CELA.' That story of the decline of architecture made a lasting impression upon me. . . . I saw the life-blood of beloved architecture slowly

¹⁹⁰ "Unity Club of Unity Church," *Oak Leaves*, 24 March 1906, 12.

¹⁹¹ "Fifteenth Annual," *Oak Leaves*, 28 April 1906, 11.

¹⁹² On this issue in Wright studies, see V.J. Scully, Jr., intro., in C.R. Bolon et al., eds., *Nature of Frank Lloyd Wright*, Chicago, 1988, xiv, xviii.

¹⁹³ On Wright's response to Hugo, see N. Levine, "The Book and the

Building: Hugo's Theory of Architecture and Labrousse's Bibliothèque Ste.-Geneviève," in R. Middleton, ed., *The Beaux-Arts and Nineteenth-Century French Architecture*, Cambridge, Mass., 1982, 140–141.

¹⁹⁴ Wright, *The Future of Architecture*, New York, 1953, 122.

ebbing, inevitably to be taken entirely away from the building by the book." Wright lamented that, "I saw that architecture, in its great antique form, was going to die. Ghastly tragedy—I could hardly bear the thought of the consequences."¹⁹⁵

In Unity Temple, Wright may have sought to further his program for the renewal of his art by creating a design that called to mind the idea of the temple as the general type in architecture conveying religious sentiment the world over. Wright's desire to restore architecture's central symbolic function and hence its cultural identity in modern times thus coincided in the design of this church building with the distinctive religious ideals of Johnnot. In the process of conceiving and realizing this major work, both architect and minister were carrying forward a program of Jenkin Lloyd Jones, who had pioneered a new relationship between liberal religion and its expression in built form. In his autobiography, Wright recalled that he had borrowed Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* from the library of his uncle's All Souls Church in Chicago shortly after his arrival there to begin his career in architecture.¹⁹⁶ In this building, Wright had first seen an attempt to revive the significance of architecture in the service of new ideals. Twenty years later he

designed Unity Temple as an expression of his program for his art and as a symbol for liberal religion.

Joseph Siry's Carson-Pirie-Scott: Louis Sullivan and the Chicago Department Store was published by the University of Chicago Press in 1988 [Art Department, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn. 06459-0442].

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¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁹⁶ Wright, 99–100.