

THE REDISCOVERY OF MEANING

by

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(ABSTRACT)

Job 32:8

But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.

Joshua 4:5-7

Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, "What do these stones mean?", tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.

Meaning is revealed in the inmost place of a man. Once that lamp of understanding is lit, it will never be extinguished. It is only our awareness of meaning that dims and fades, lost in a welter of imposing facts. The experience of built form can recall us to an awareness of associated meaning. It is in this renewed awareness that we rediscover meaning.

Romans 1:20

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so men are without excuse.

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INTRODUCTION

Meaning lies beyond fact and beyond semantic deliberations. Meaning necessitates events, pervades revelation and predicates understanding. It is the emissarial quality of order which predates time and informs the universe.

The universe, however, reflects meaning in an imperfect and incomplete manner, because chaotic forces fracture creation, splintering its intended wholeness. Therefore, our perception of meaning is fragmentary; individual truths are pieces of a complete order, now appearing disjointed and disarrayed. So meaning surfaces here and there in brief glimpses of light, revealing pieces of a totality.

Man is a part of the wholeness of the universe, created to play a role in reflecting the entirety of meaning. Now disconnected from the totality, man wanders as a lonely pilgrim to some half-forgotten shrine. But it is this former unity that gives man the ability to understand meaning. Not a memory of the past, but some morphological determination that provides an ability to comprehend meaning but does not guarantee that that will happen.

True comprehension of meaning now seems almost antithetical to the predilections of man, even though it should be so natural. When something of meaning is revealed to us, it becomes an elemental building block of our universal understanding. Once incorporated into our understanding, the awareness of this meaning grows less acute as the excitement of discovery fades. But often by the experience of associ-

ated events, one can be recalled to the meaning one knows already.

The Architect makes an object composed of events that through their association with meaning renew one's awareness of that meaning. He enters again into that which he never left and stands anew in light that already shines within him. This process of recalling strengthens and revitalizes our understanding.

This church celebrates the entrance into and the standing before the presence of God for the purpose of corporate worship, even though the worshippers have already entered His presence and have not, nor ever will, leave it. So this experience of entering and standing before comes from being recalled to the initial moment of faith, the actual entrance and standing before.

THE NATURE OF UNDERSTANDING

History remembers an occurrence and all the circumstances that surround it. By reading a scholarly account, one learns the who, the what and the where. But meaning is not thus remembered and cannot be so rotely learned. One can easily become an expert on the facts but still have no concept of what they mean.

PART ONE

THE PARADIGM

Worship is being recalled to one's understanding of who God is. At the root of true knowledge of God is awe and veneration for His holiness and majesty. This rediscovery is the paradigm for all rediscoveries of meaning.

Man is essentially a religious being, and having some belief system at the core of his identity is very natural for man. It is on this core of meaning that all additional understanding is built upon and made to conform to one's basic presuppositions.

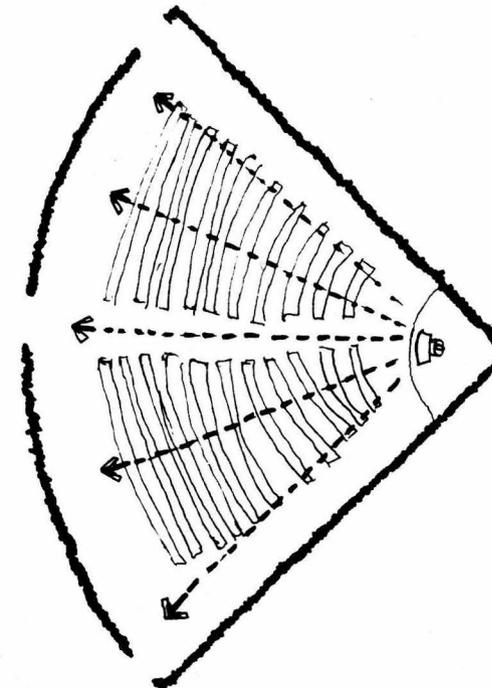
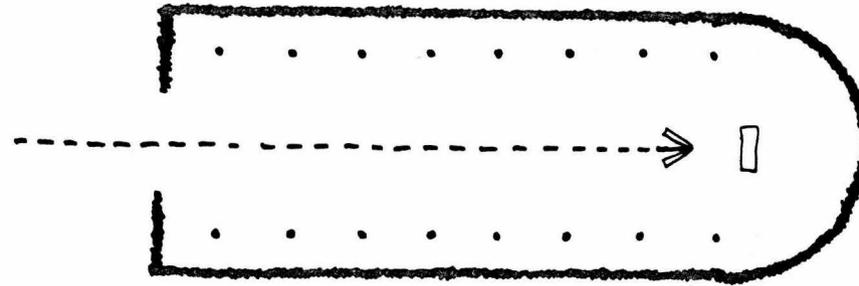
When one enters into God's presence through faith he has started a new existence that will not end. He does not come in and out of God's presence, but is constantly standing before God in faith. Coming to worship, then is a reentrance into a presence one has never left. Every time we are recalled to meaning, we reenter a presence that we already stand within.

MAJESTIC PRESENCE

When one worships, one enters and stands before a majestic presence. The perfection and splendor of that presence requires reverence and honor.

A church is a place of corporate worship. The faithful process into the building, recognizing His majestic presence, then stand together to worship God.

They physically enter in and stand before a presence which they are already in spiritually. The faithful congregate to physically represent their spiritual unity.

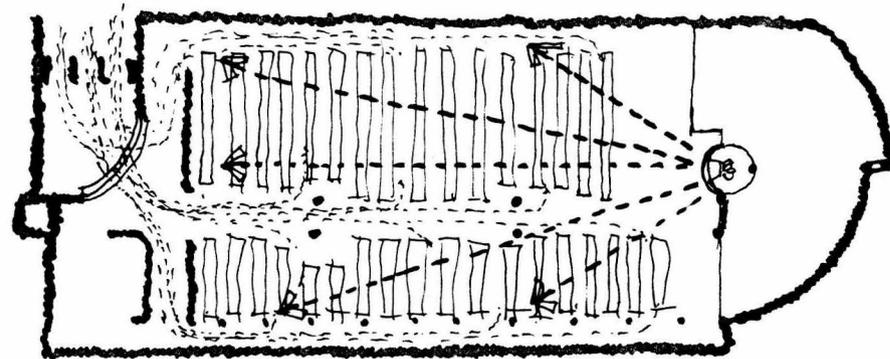
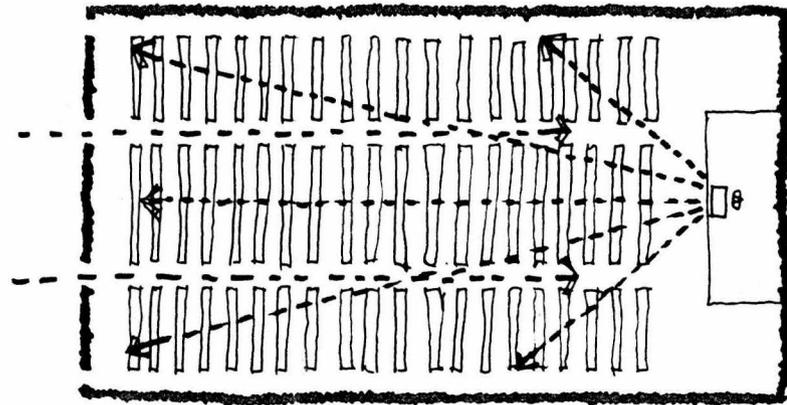


SPIRITUAL PRESENCE

God is omnipresent and He is just as present in a church as He is anywhere. God's presence is a spiritual one and knows no physical boundaries. Entering into God's presence is the establishment of a relationship with Him.

In the pre-reform church it was thought that Christ was physically present in the Holy Communion. The form of the Church was generated by a solemn procession that terminated at the altar where Christ was present.

The Post-reform worship service centers around the spoken word which represents the spiritual presence of God. The form of the church responded to the centrality of the preaching of God's word.



FORM MAKING

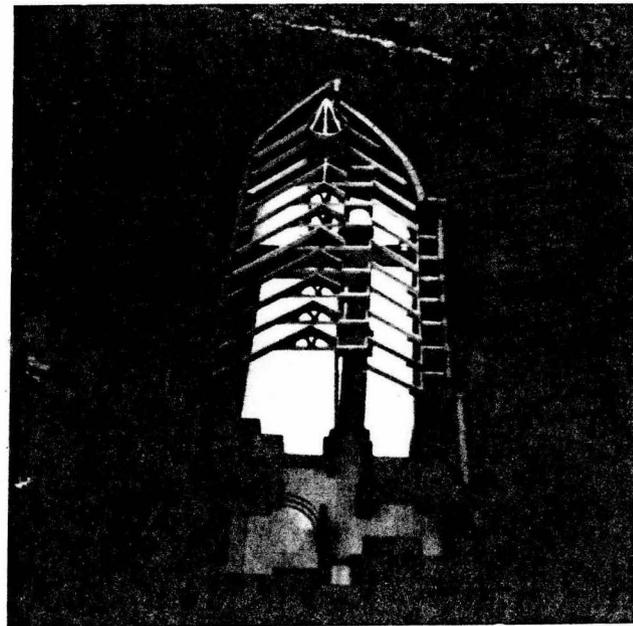
Form arises from the desire to recall the faithful to their knowledge of God. The building must do this in every part as well as in the whole.

Early American congregational churches maintained the processional quality of the pre-reform church, but moved the pulpit to the center and the aisle was moved off-center so the preaching of the word would clearly be the focus.

To reinforce the idea of procession, a hierarchy of aisles must be maintained. In this church, a main aisle is placed off-center from the pulpit. The dual axes create a balance between the need to process solemnly into a majestic presence and the need to express the preached Word of God as the physical manifestation of God's spiritual presence.

AN OBJECT MADE OF EVENTS

The Architect designs events that establish experiences that are connected by universal and cultural significance with meaning. These associative experiences recall one's awareness to a past understanding. It is by action, description and symbol that we experience the events of the building.



ACTION

An experience can be connected to meaning by performing an action that is generated by that meaning. This church makes a path that encourages people to enter by themselves to find their place in the church alone. These actions are generated by the idea of a personal procession readying one for worship.

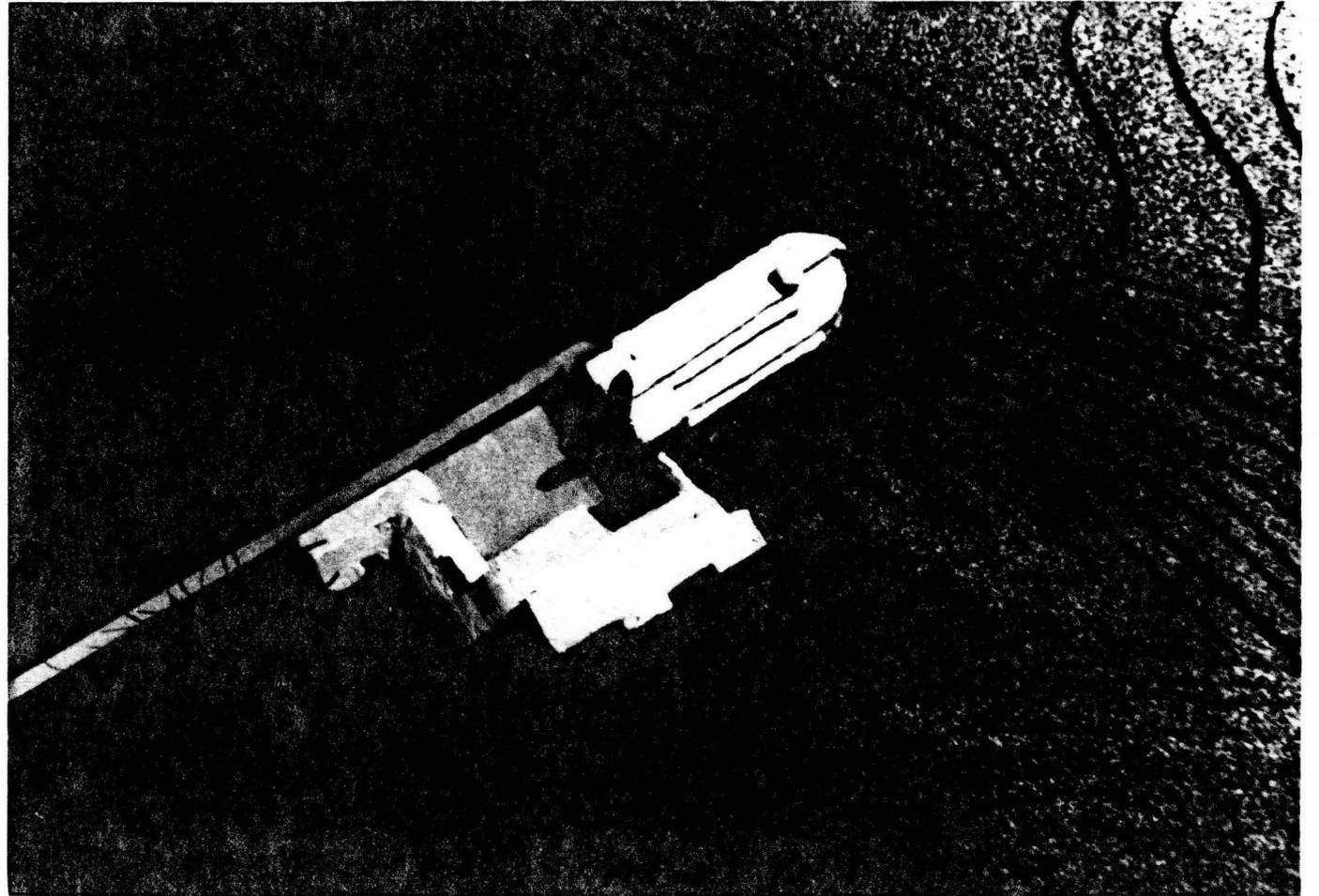
DESCRIPTION

Built form can express meaning in a visual, descriptive manner. The building becomes a storyteller, and through signs instead of words, explains its purpose. The narrowness of the doors, and the tallness of their opening visually express the solitude and individual nature of the entry.

SYMBOL

Lastly, meaning is associated with experience by symbol. The personal procession is symbolized by the side entry to the church. To enter, one must change directions and this symbolizes the turning from sin to enter into God's presence for the first time.

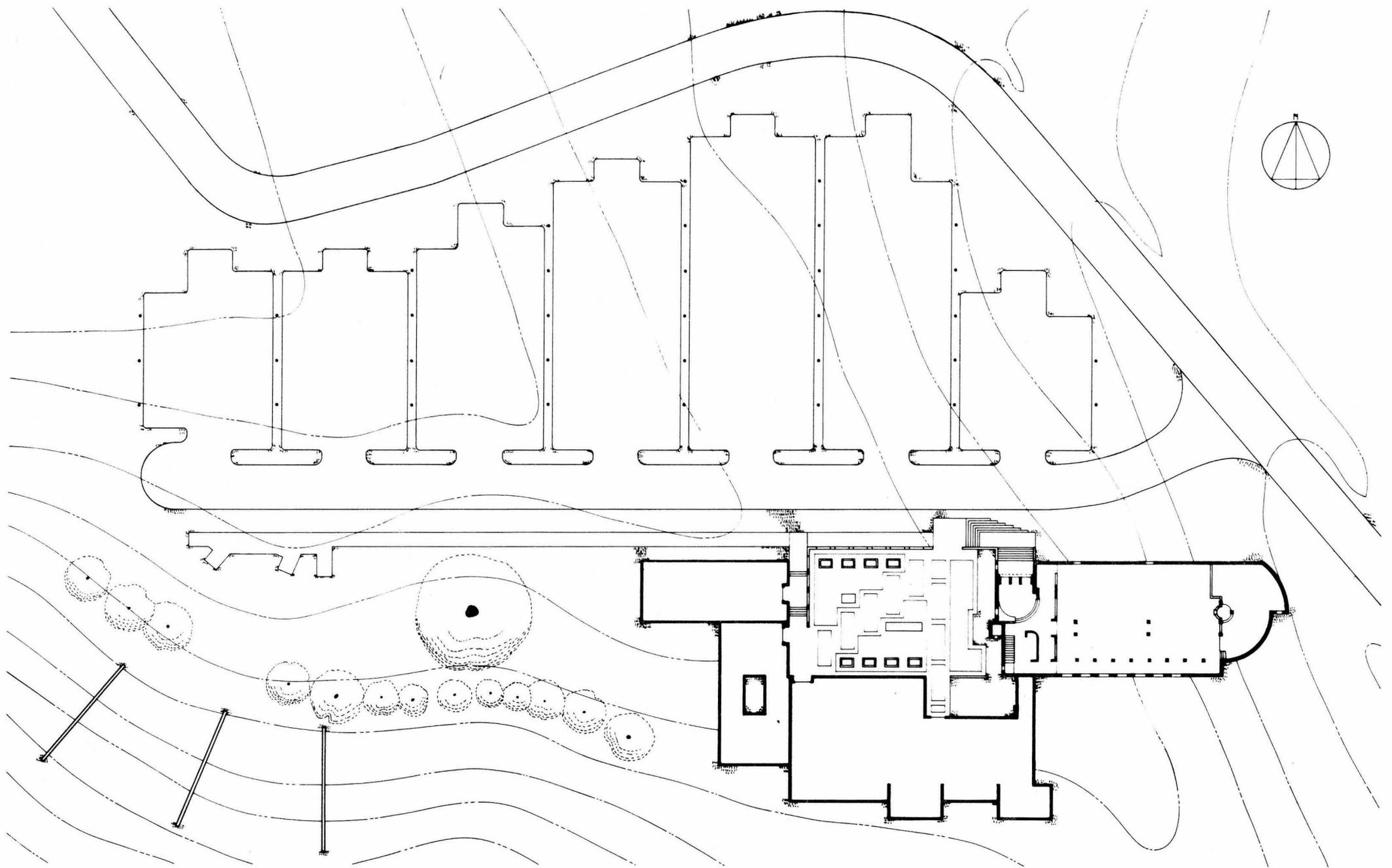
PART TWO



ACTION

DESCRIPTION

SYMBOL



ACTION

The church is oriented along the east-west axes. This enables the building to receive a strong southern light that illuminates the interior with a warm, vibrant light that enhances the idea of celebration.

DESCRIPTION

The east-west orientation of the church reminds the congregation of Christ's earthly mission in Jerusalem.

SYMBOL

Through the centuries the east-west orientation has become a symbol for Heaven's axis and by aligning the church with this axis we symbolize ones own alignment with God.



ACTION

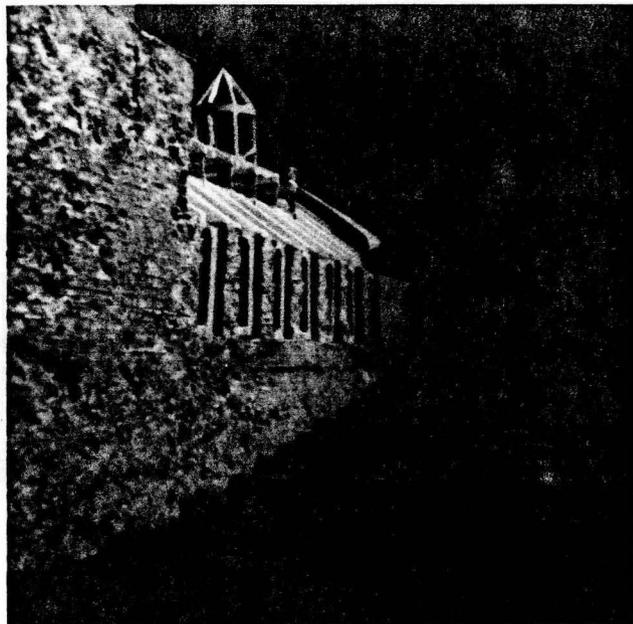
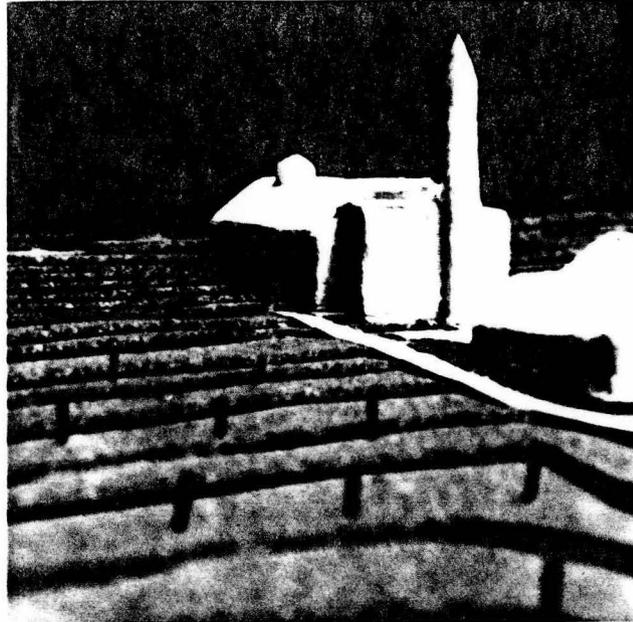
The bell in the tower calls the faithful to worship and the tower itself serves as a visual guide to the church.

DESCRIPTION

The tower reaches up towards heaven, pointing up to God, just as the worshipers inside are looking to Him.

SYMBOL

The tower is an icon for the entrance into God's presence.



ACTION

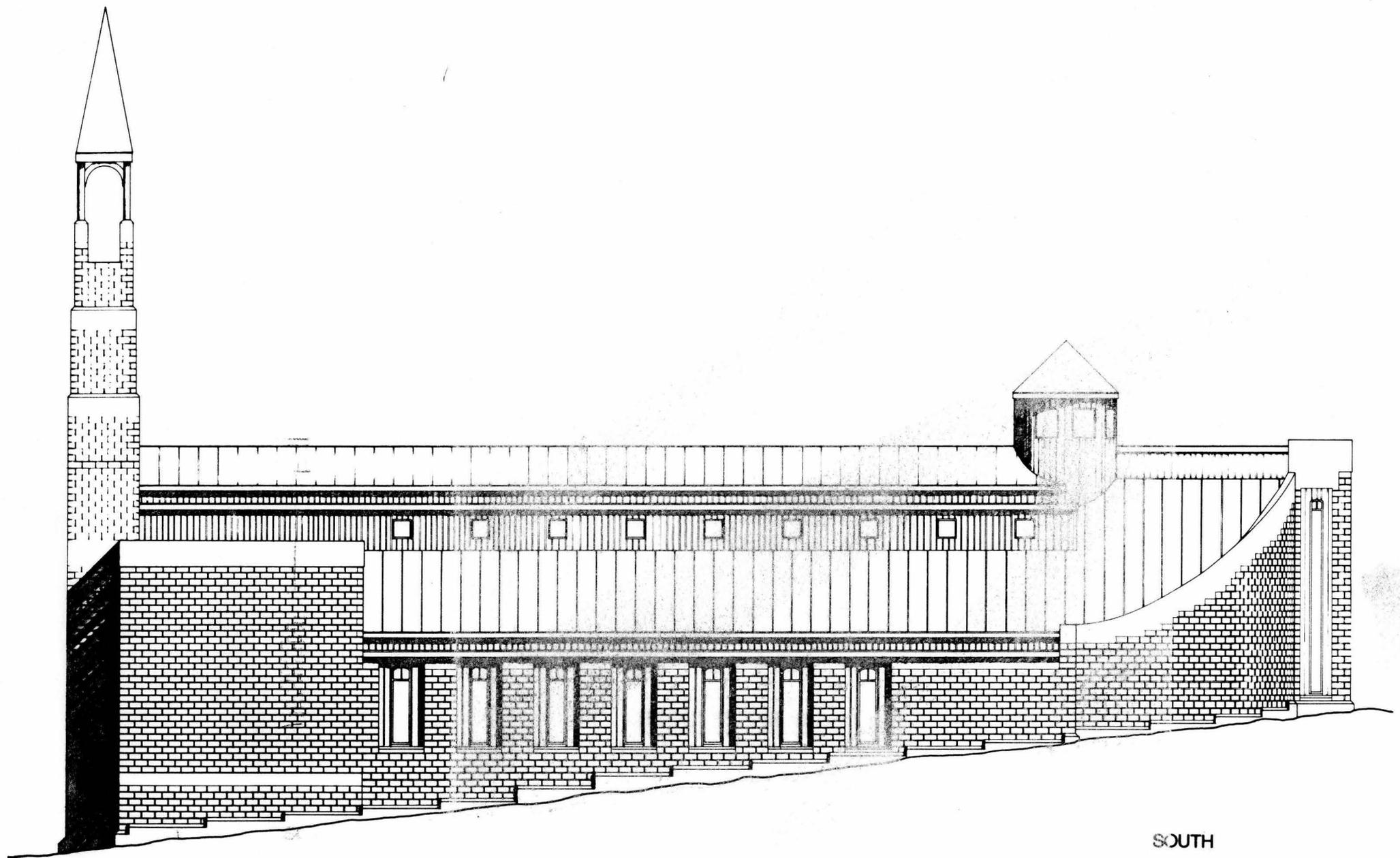
The building cuts into the earth so the floor of the Sanctuary sits on solid ground, but the entry is across a wood platform.

DESCRIPTION

The building appears to be an outcropping on the side of the hill. This describes the firm foundation on which the faith is built.

SYMBOL

The church's partially buried form symbolizes the burial of Christ, and death to oneself.



SOUTH

ACTION

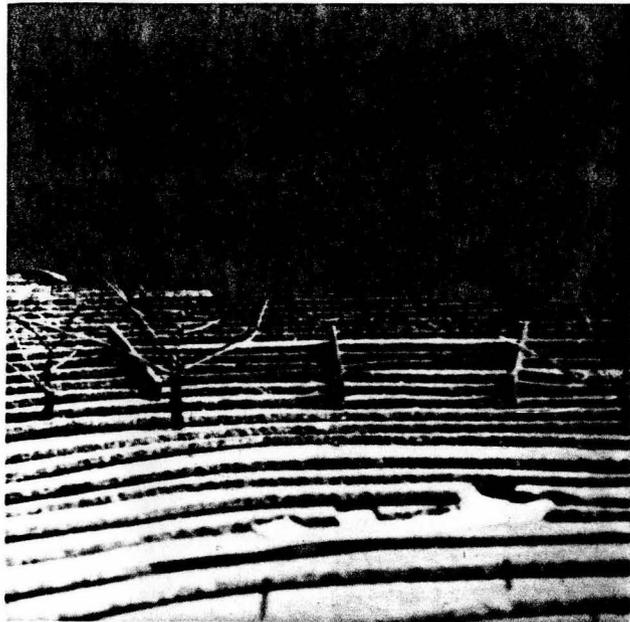
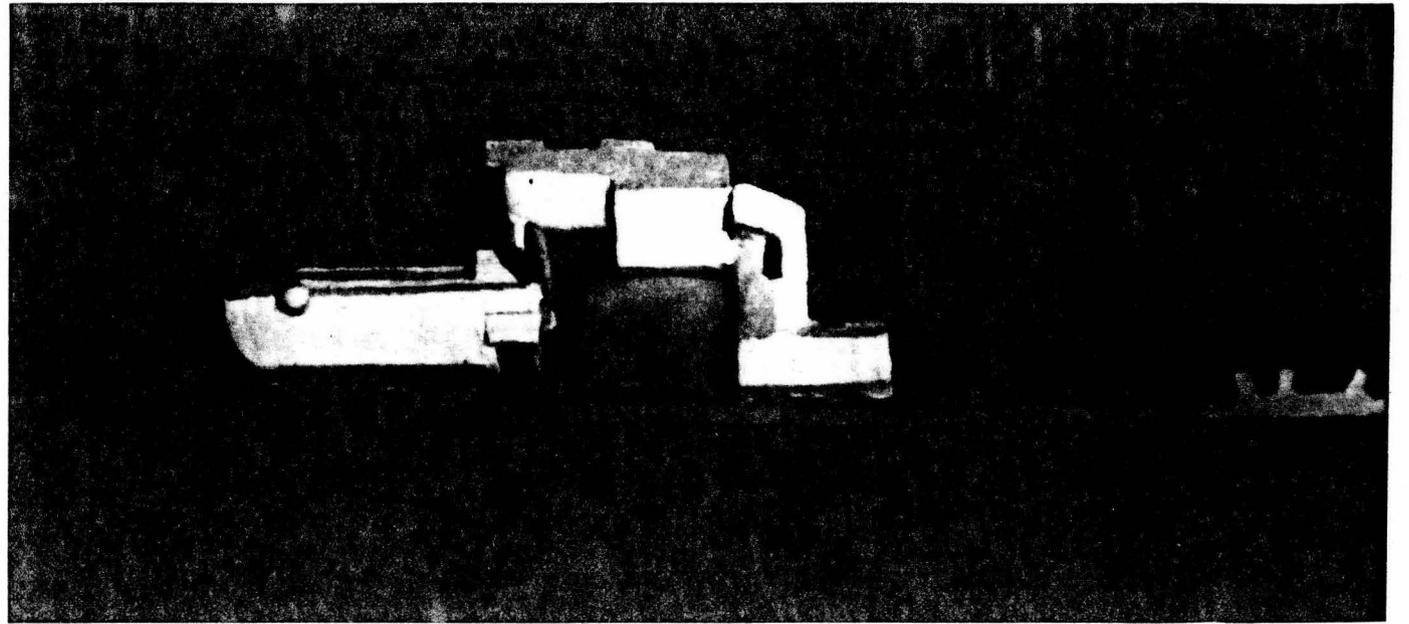
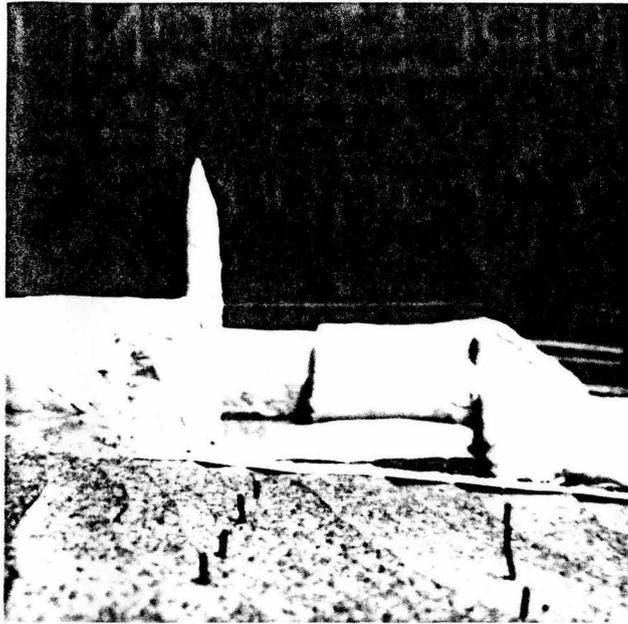
The south wall allows the southern light to filter in and fill the interior.

DESCRIPTION

The exterior of the south wall expresses the openness and warmth that are created inside by the southern lighting.

SYMBOL

The wood openings for light become a symbol of heaven, so the entire south facade reveals the meeting of heaven and earth that happens inside the church.



ACTION

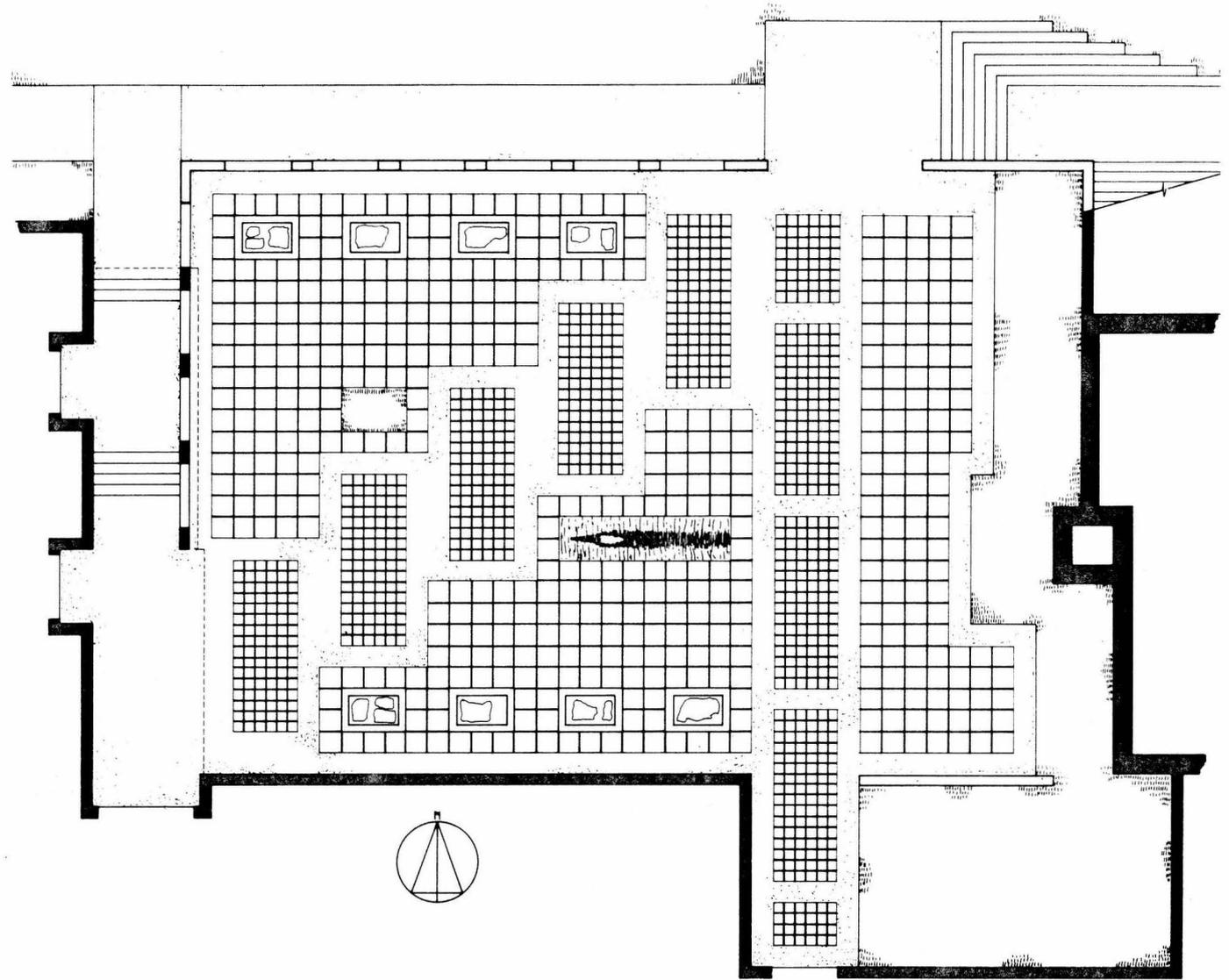
The memory walls, ramp and parking columns all direct the worshiper towards the church.

DESCRIPTION

These three elements also illustrate the procession to the church.

SYMBOL

The walls which commemorate deceased members are connected by the ramp to the entry of the church to show that our final entrance is in death.



ACTION

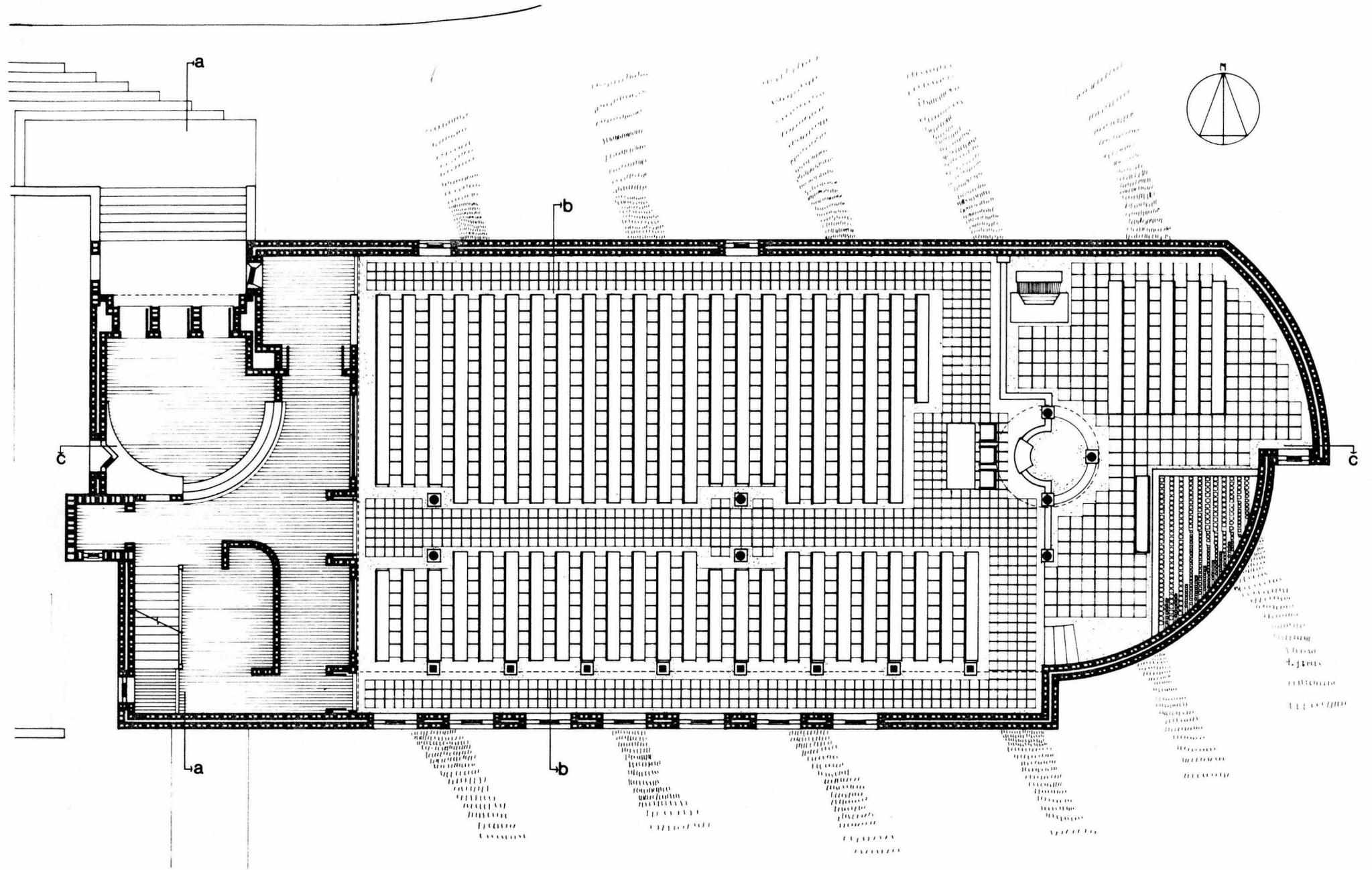
The courtyard creates a place of gathering for after worship.

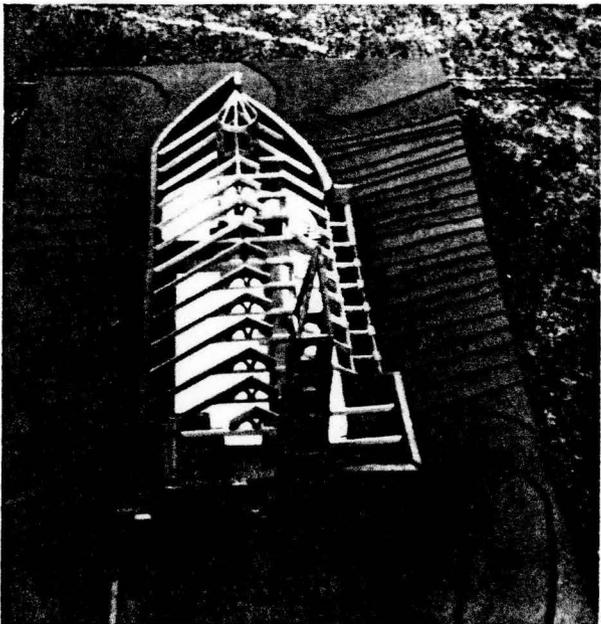
DESCRIPTION

The paved, elevated courtyard is of an urban quality, reflecting the public nature of the courtyard.

SYMBOL

The courtyard transcends its rural site and becomes a symbol for the centrality of God's church and the urban ideal of heaven.



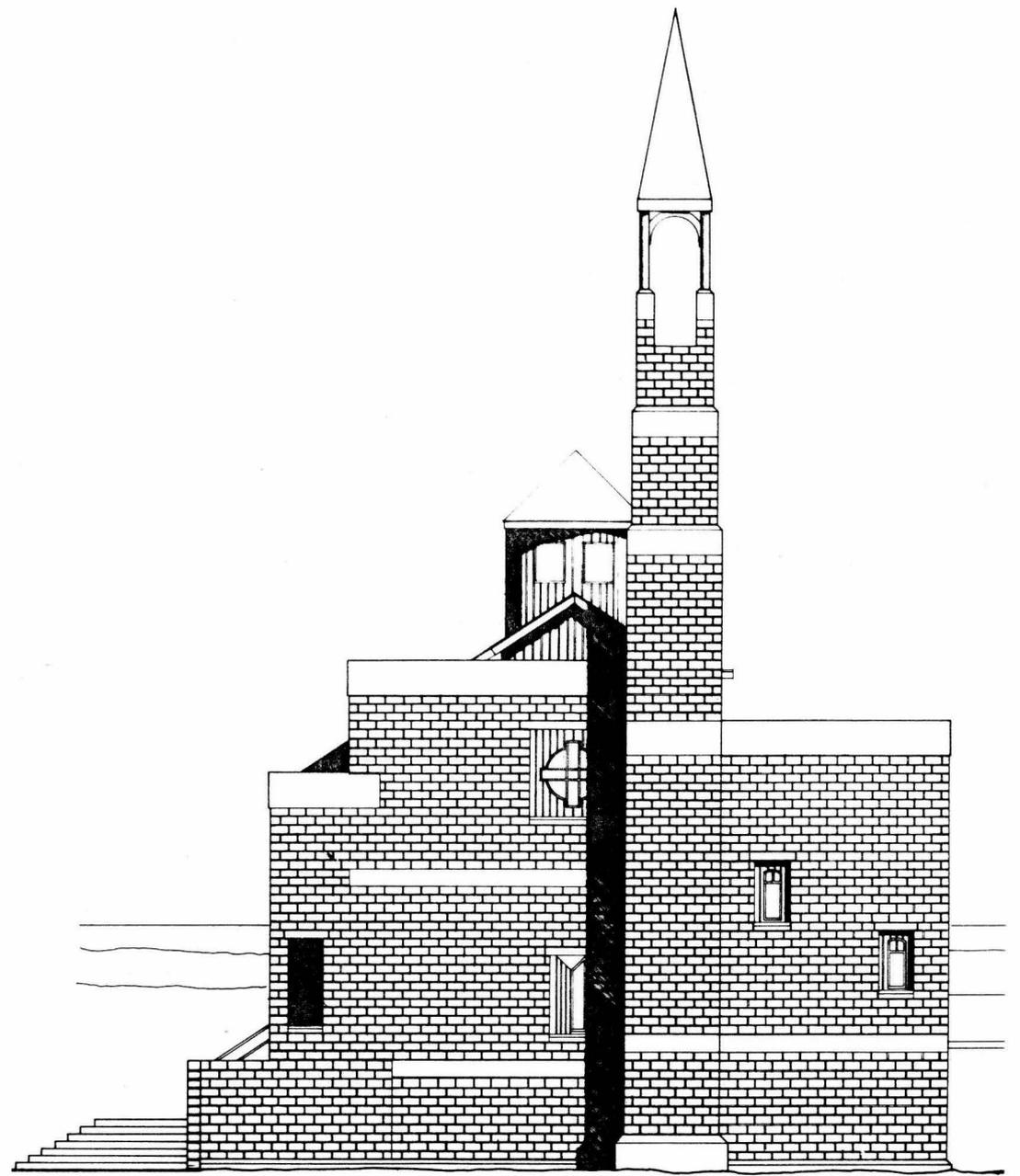


ACTION

The opening in the west facade that reveals the entrance porch visually connects worshipers walking up the ramp with those entering the church.

DESCRIPTION

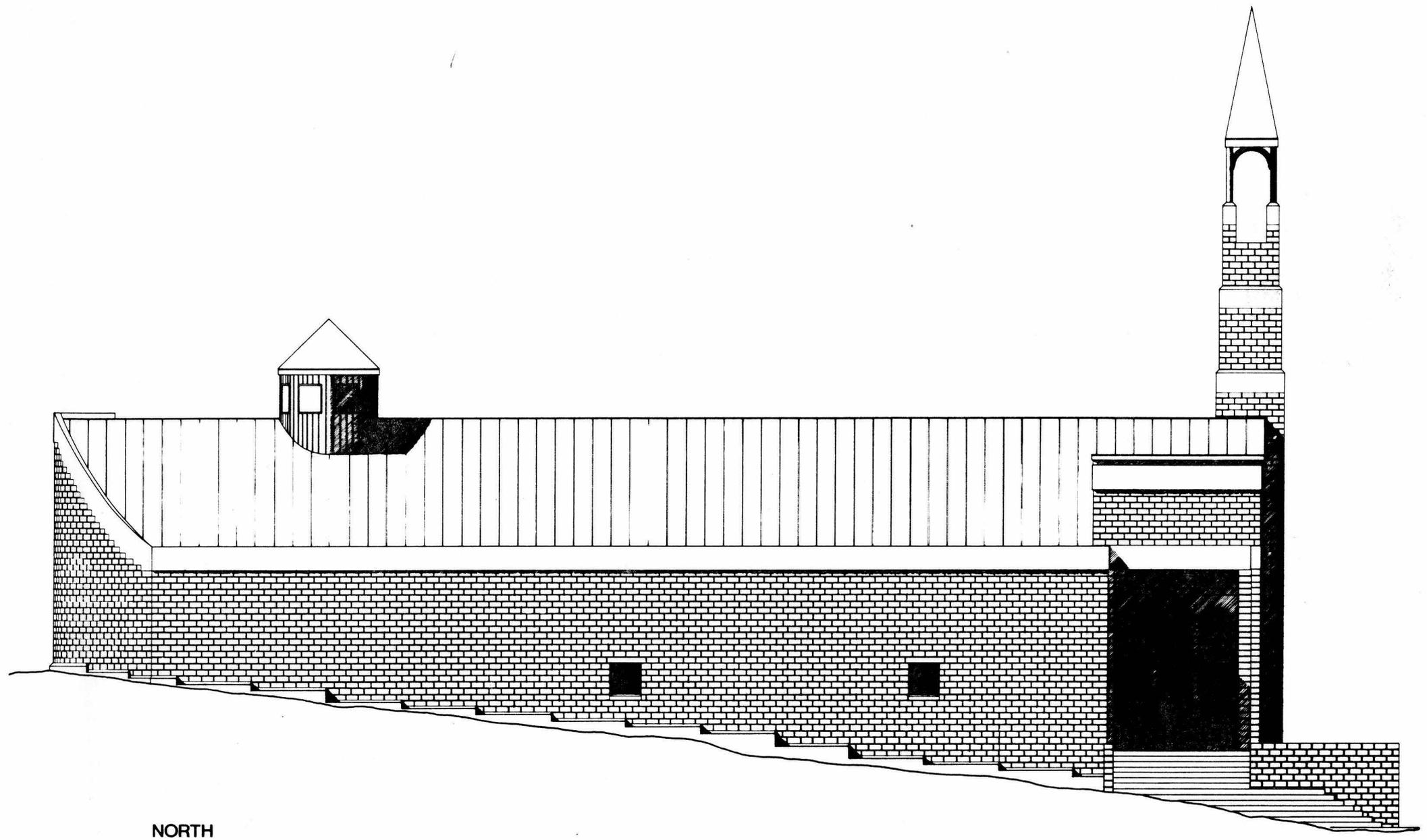
This opening frames the motion of entering for those coming up on the ramp to see.



WEST

SYMBOL

By celebrating the moment of entrance, this opening is connected to the moment of faith.



NORTH

ACTION

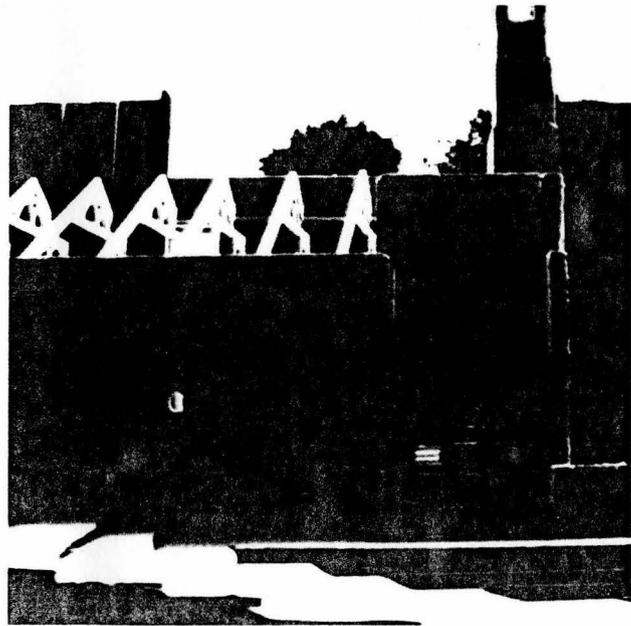
The north elevation is mostly a solid concrete block wall. This responds to the coldness of the north side of the site.

DESCRIPTION

The stark wall presents a barrier to cross to enter into the warm inside.

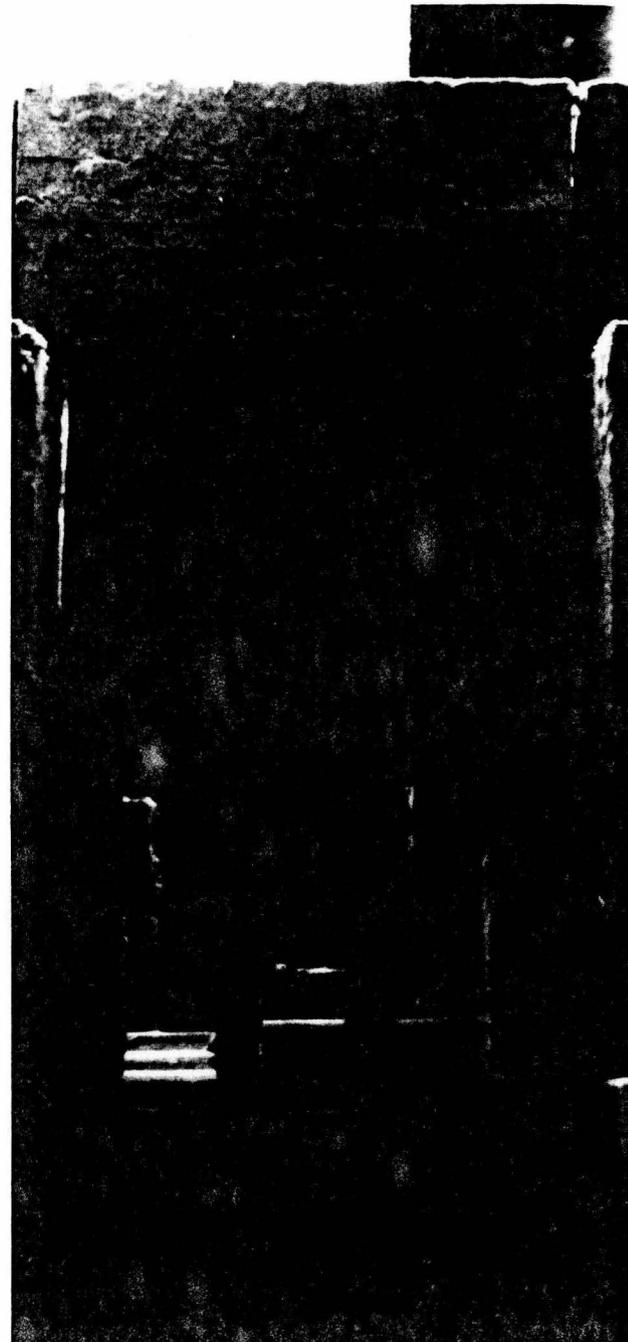
SYMBOL

The wall becomes earth and our earthly life, a barrier to the next life.



ACTION

The three equally sized doors encourage one to enter alone.



DESCRIPTION

The narrowness of the door opening depicts the solitary nature of entrance.



SYMBOL

The contrast between these three equally sized doors and the historical large center door and two smaller side doors symbolizes the idea of a personal procession.



ACTION

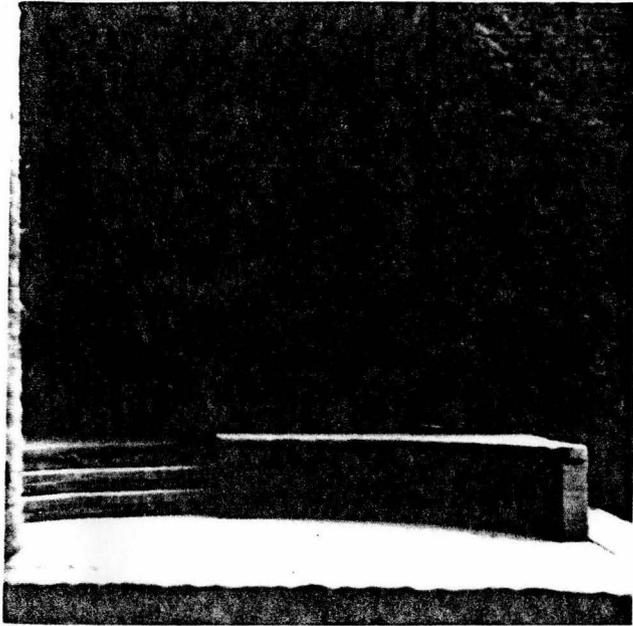
The window in the entry area helps to change one's direction, both by its form and the light it allows in.

DESCRIPTION

The intruding form of the window and the directional light it accepts into the room describe the turn the worshiper is about to make.

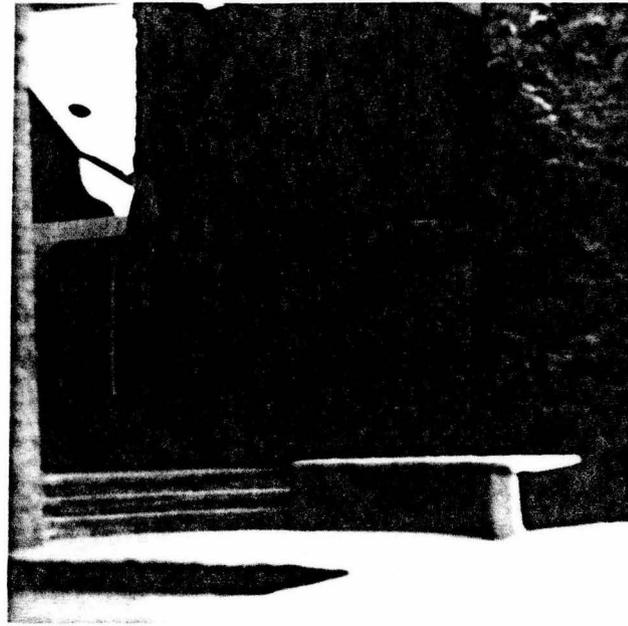
SYMBOL

The light from this window represents the force which guides us into God's presence.



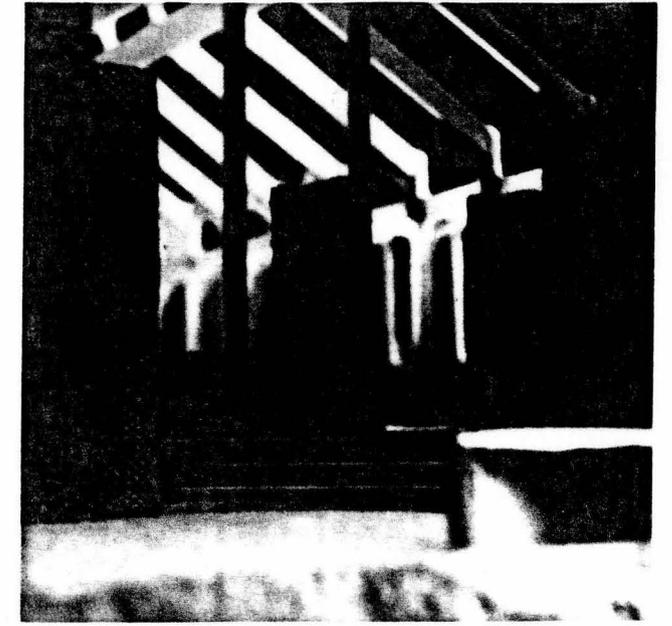
ACTION

The curved stairs tend to disperse people as they fan out across the stairs seeking the end to their personal procession.



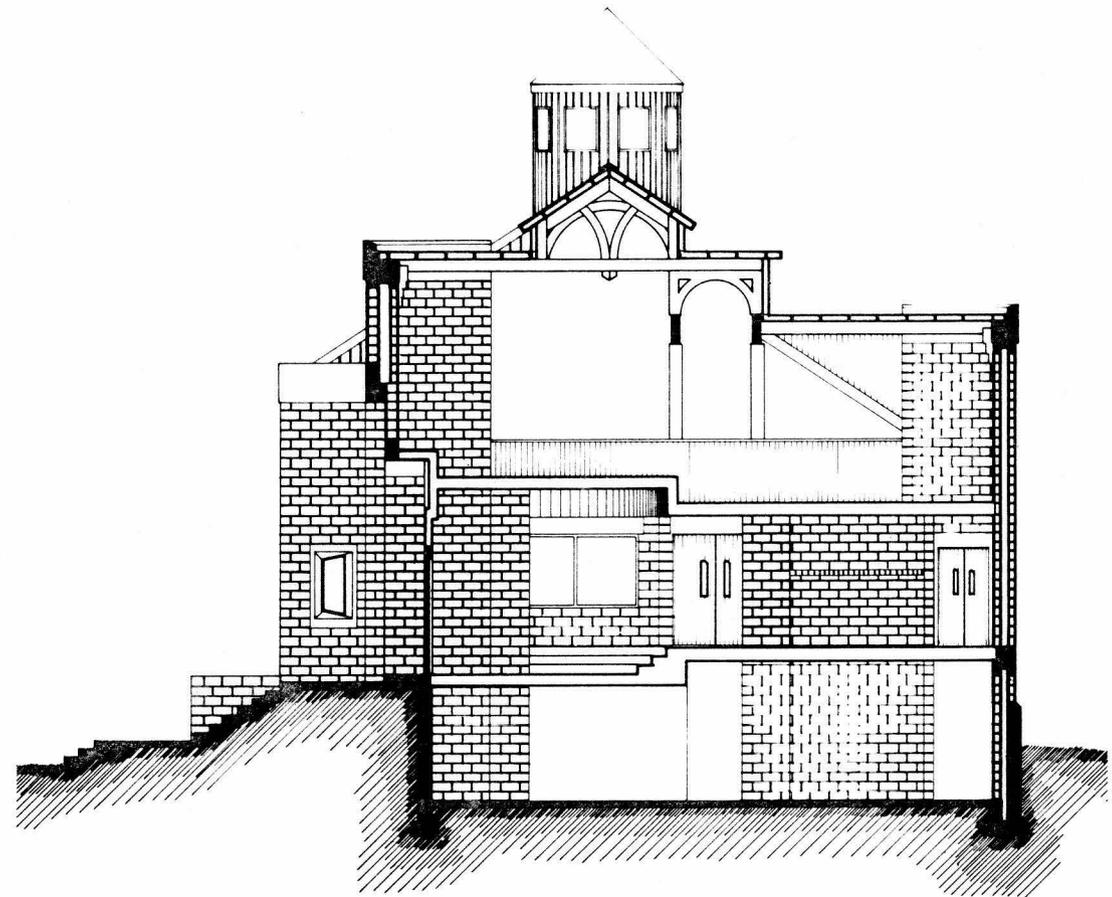
DESCRIPTION

The form of the stairs spreads out as it climbs up.



SYMBOL

The quarter circle of the stairs are echoes of our own procession.



a:a

ACTION

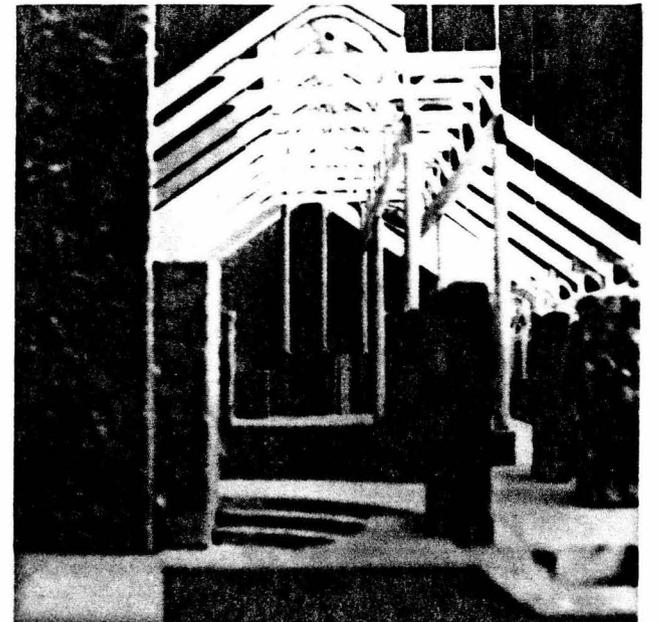
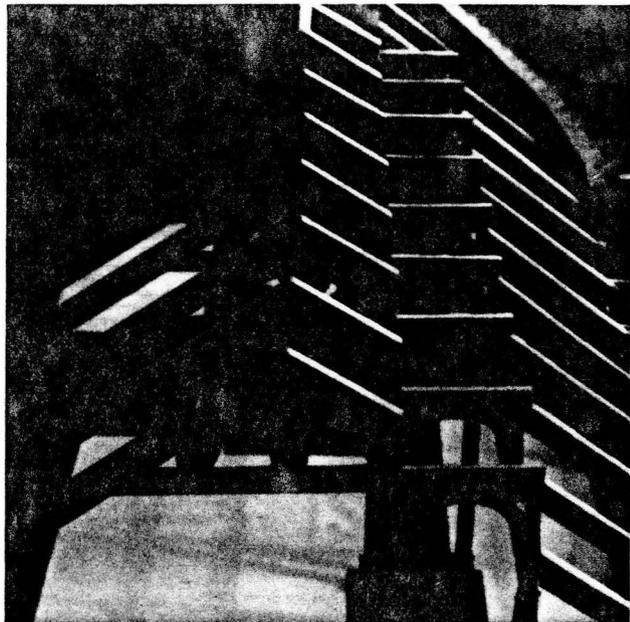
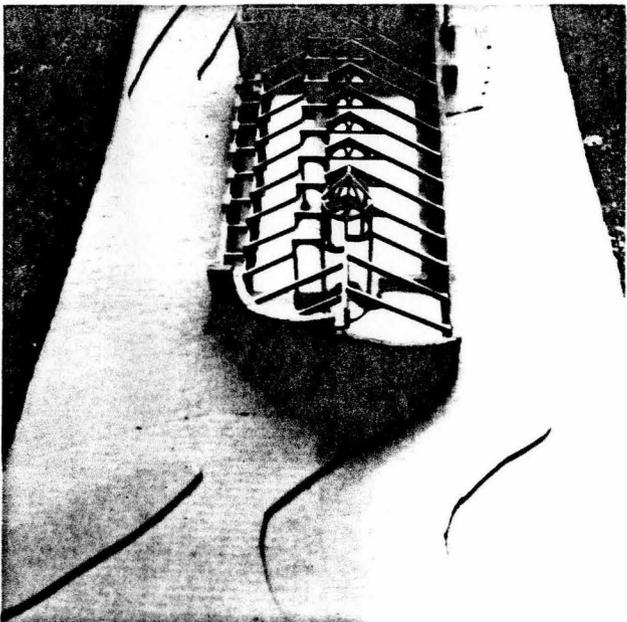
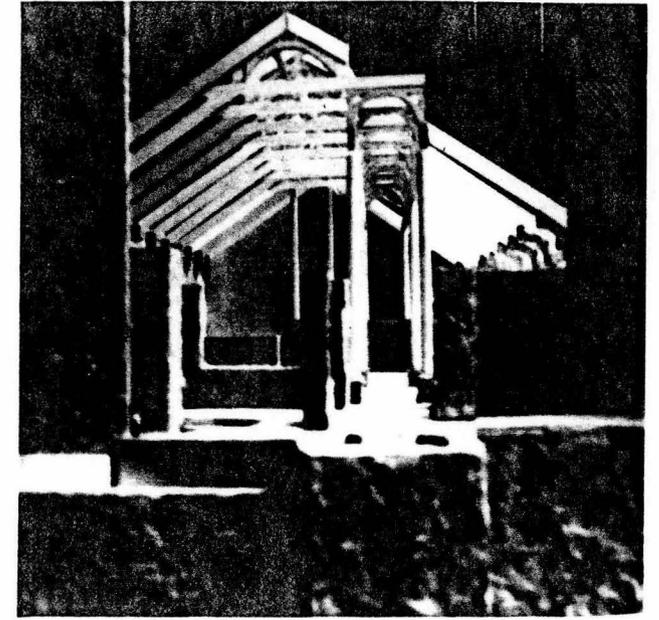
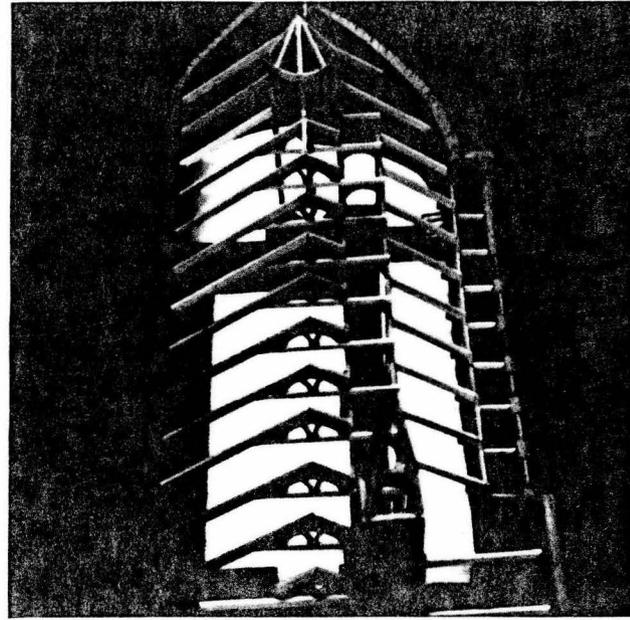
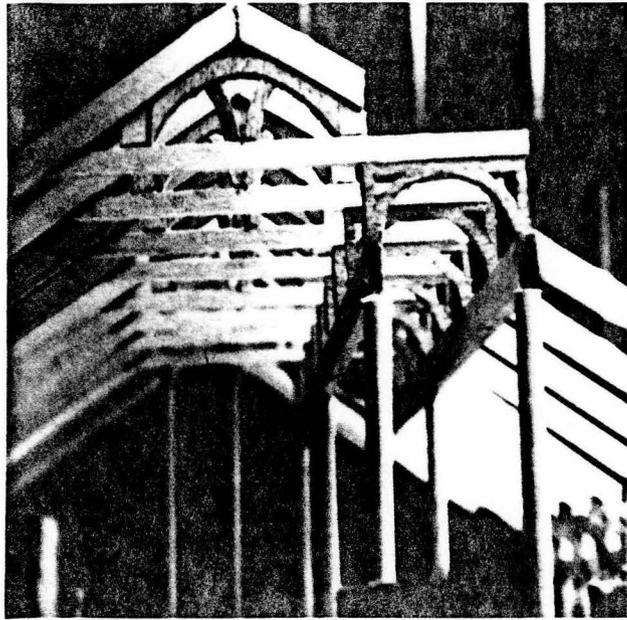
The ceiling and floor move closer together before one enters the worship space. This constriction makes one aware of the threshold of entry.

DESCRIPTION

The contrast between the closed low ceiling of the entry and the high ceiling of the worship space depicts the release and freedom one finds in coming before God.

SYMBOL

The constriction of the entry comes from an idea of birth.



ACTION

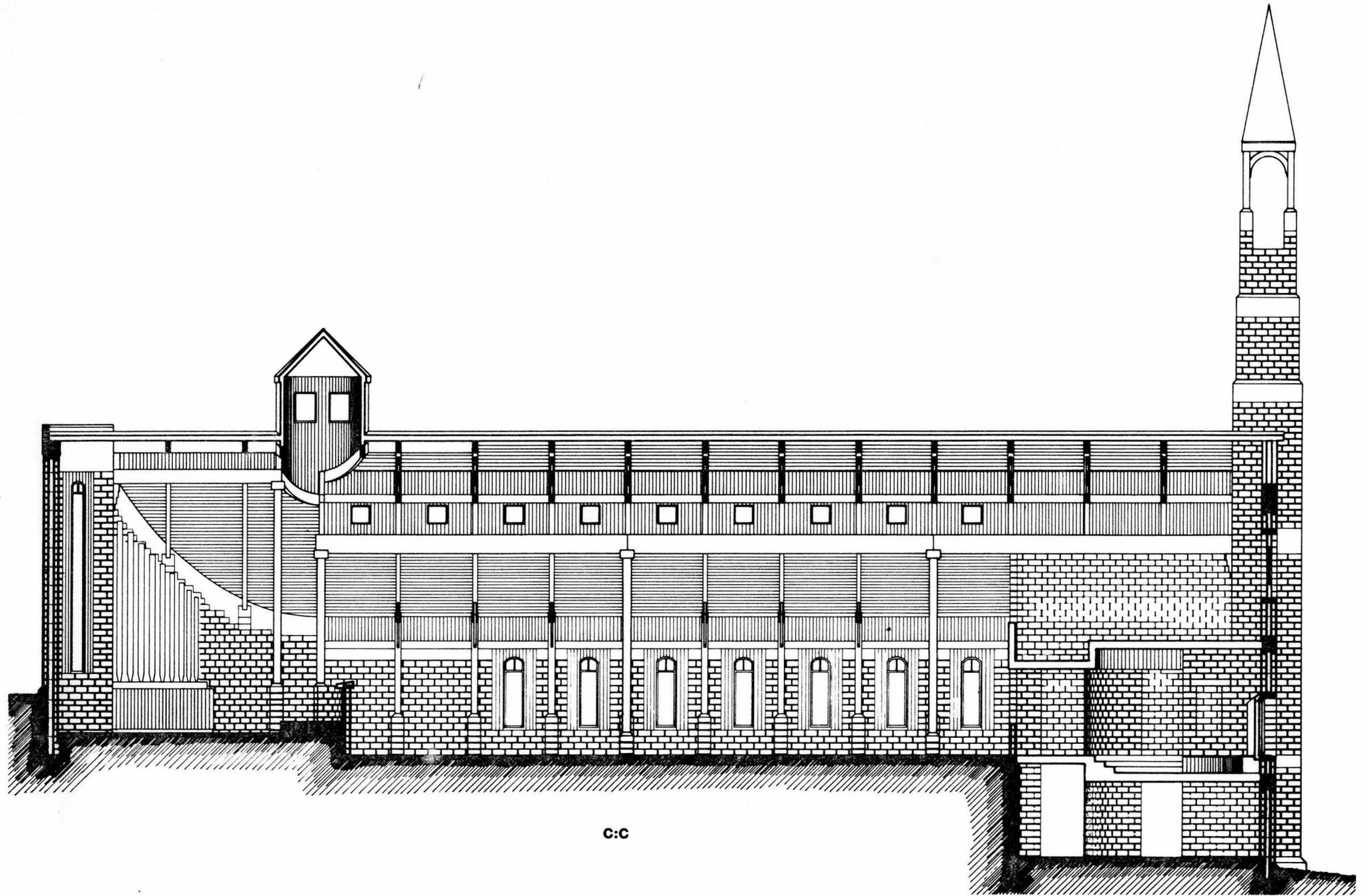
The heavy timber frame roof creates a rhythm that reinforces the idea of procession.

DESCRIPTION

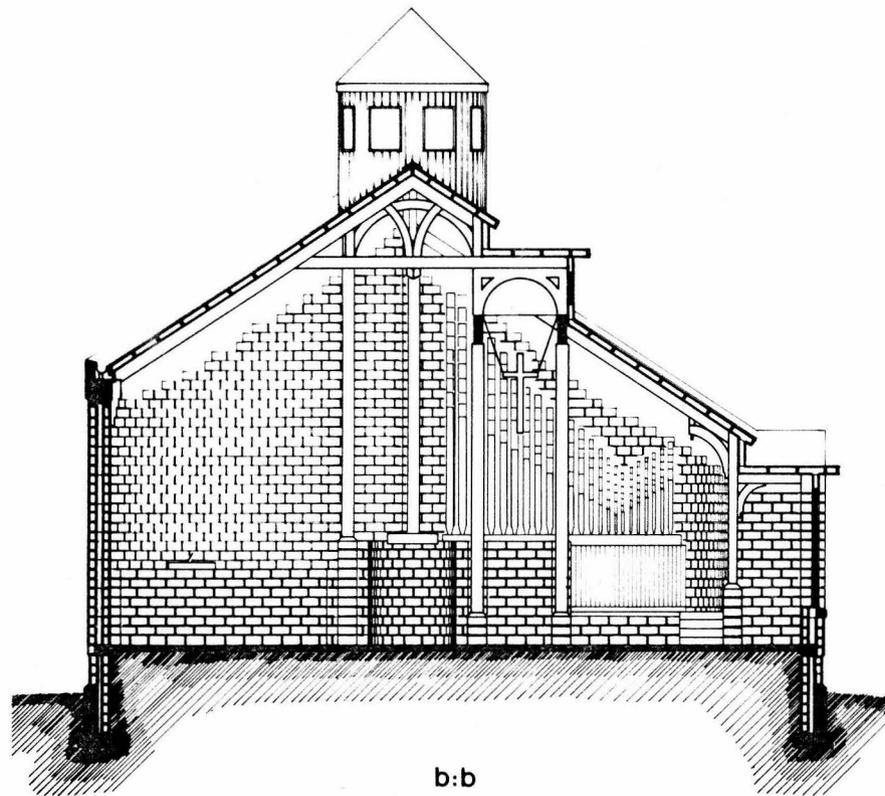
The main aisle is carved out of the roof and marked by the columns that support the roof.

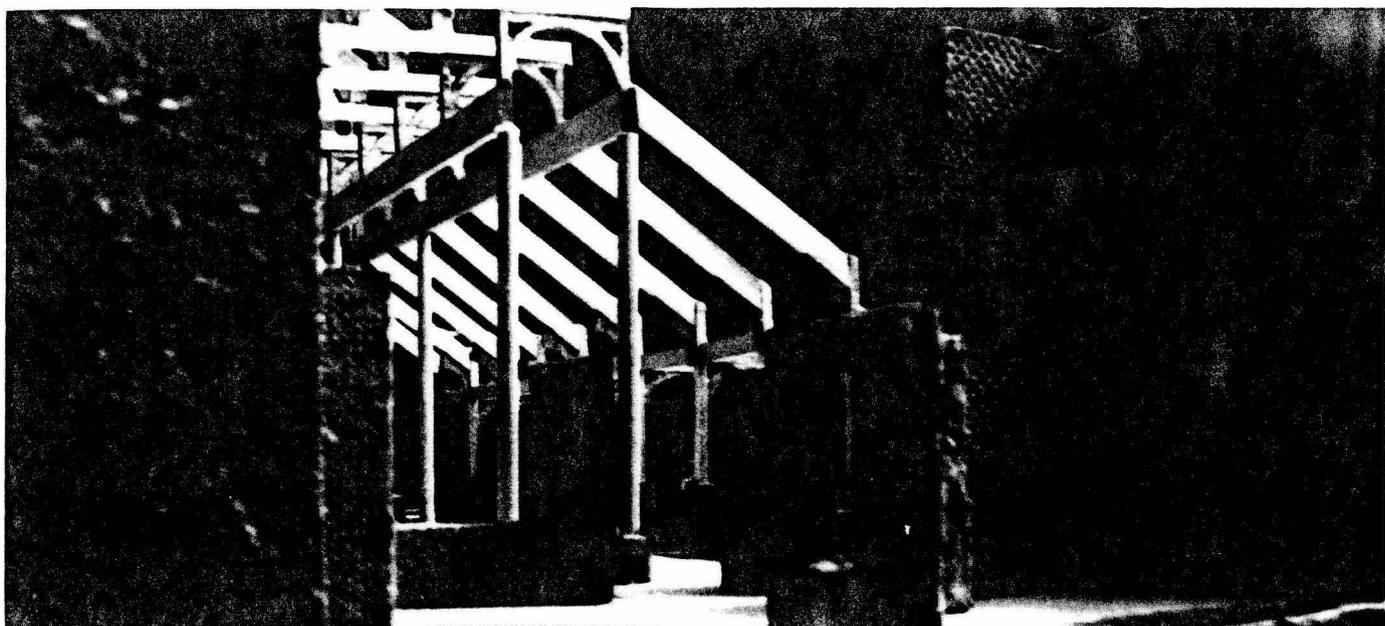
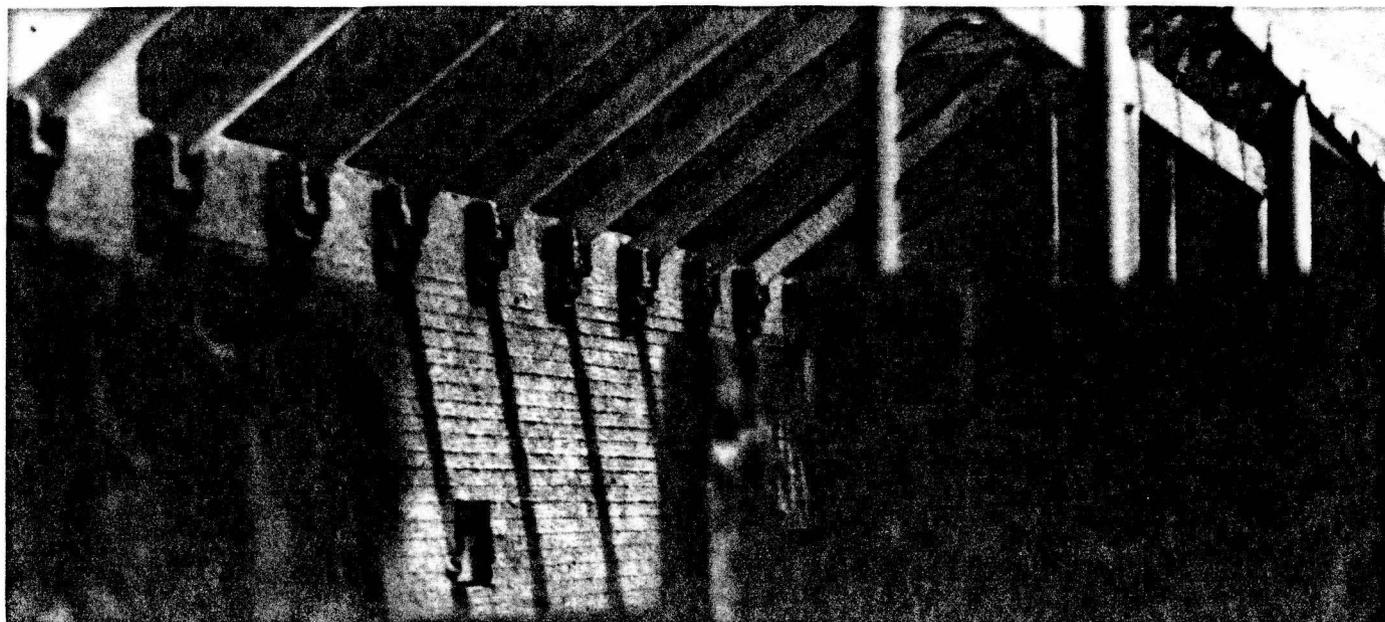
SYMBOL

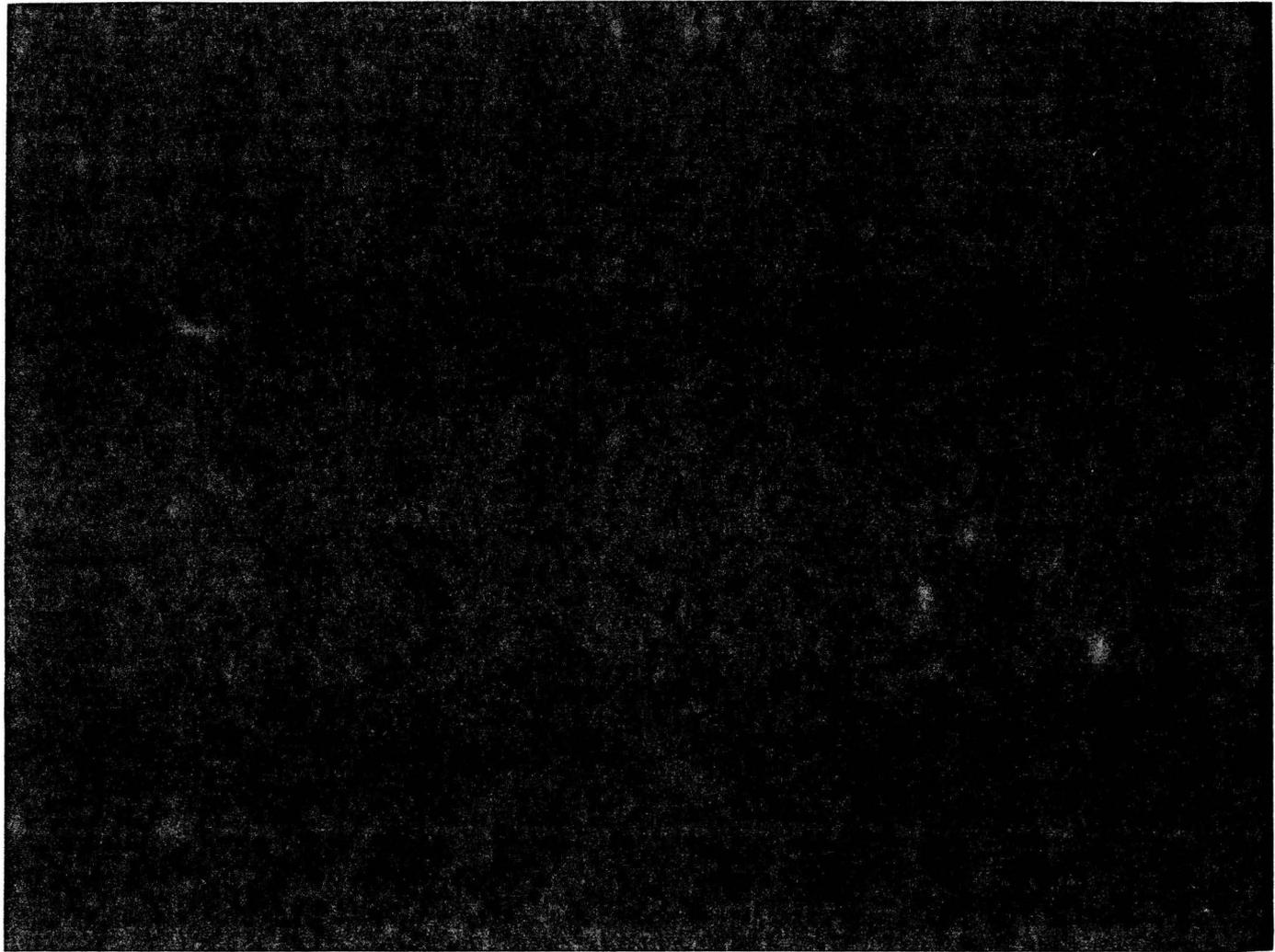
The wood roof comes down onto the concrete block wall.

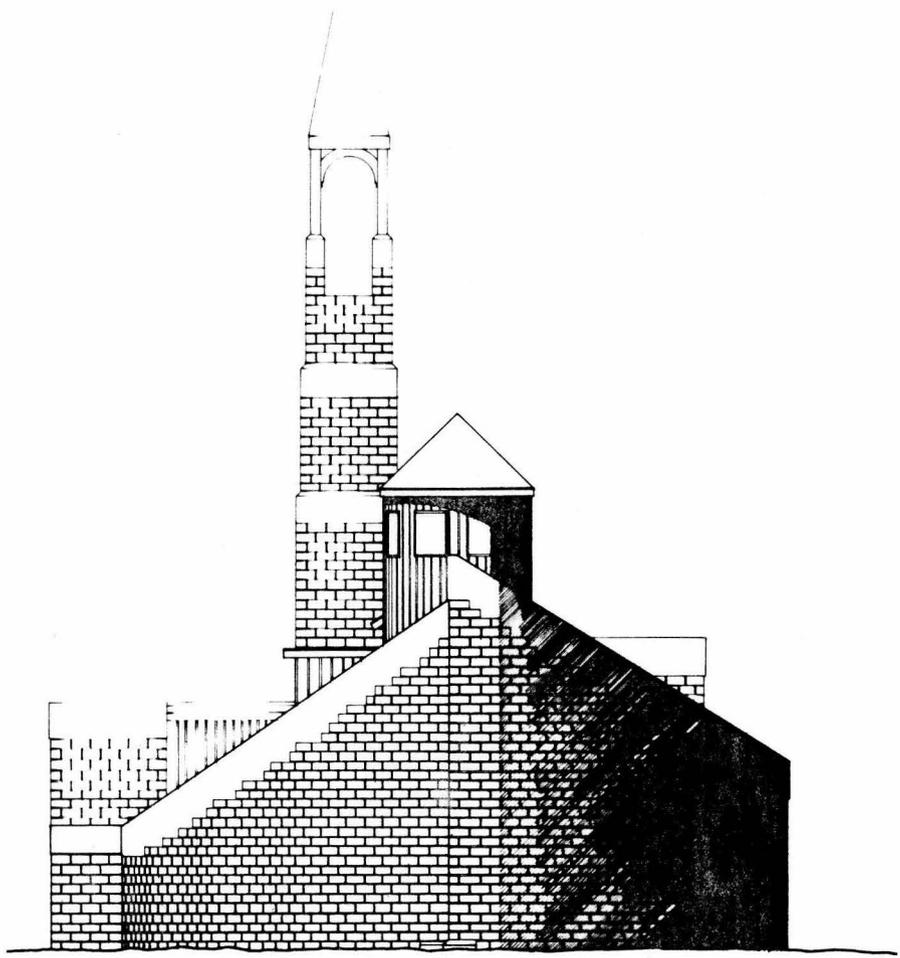
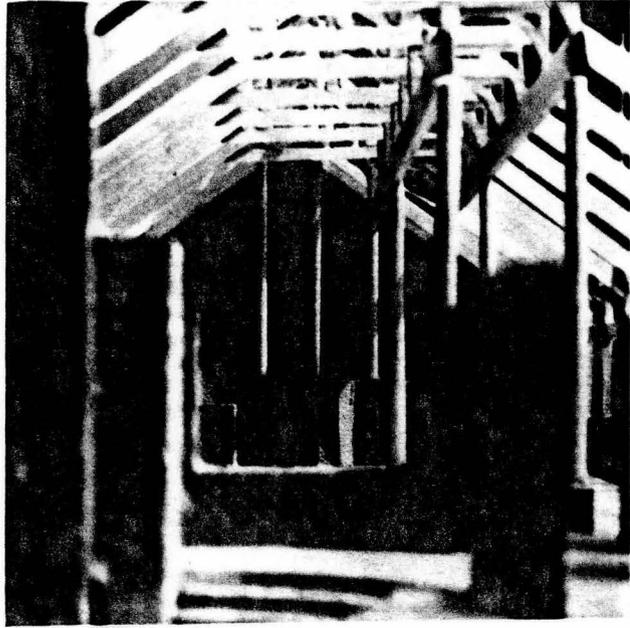


C:C









EAST

CONCLUSION

Architecture can recall us to what we already understand. Built form is rich with historical, cultural and universal association. Shape, texture, weight and warmth are some of the qualities of built form that carry deep memories. As we experience the places made up of these qualities, we are gradually lead on a journey of reawakening. It is in the total experience that meaning is finally revealed.

Recalling one to his faith proves to be a model for every rediscovery of meaning. The centrality of faith to one's perception makes it the cornerstone of all our understanding. The entering into and standing before God, which is faith, illustrates the way we come into all understanding.

The column, the wall, the spire, the step and the light that makes them, all together recall the faithful to their faith. The faithful renew their awareness of a truth they already knew, and grow in their understanding. Man, a part of a broken unity, reunites again with meaning and by transcending this fractured world, he sees the final order.

REDISCOVERING MEANING

We have lived in a universe of order and chaos. A universe where certain laws hold for certain things most of the time. As children, we eagerly looked for patterns, for some sense of order in the world. Along the way, meaning was revealed to us, the partial understanding of a partial order.

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