DSPACE

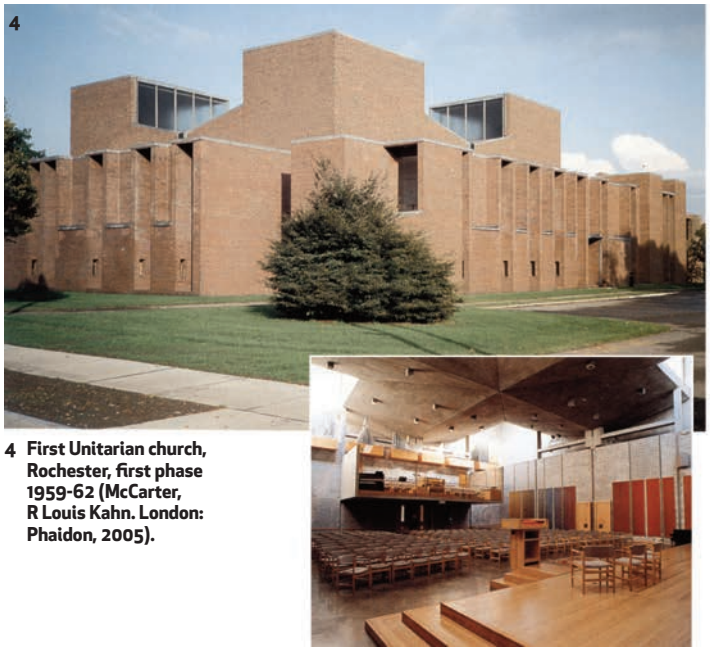
https://dspace.org/

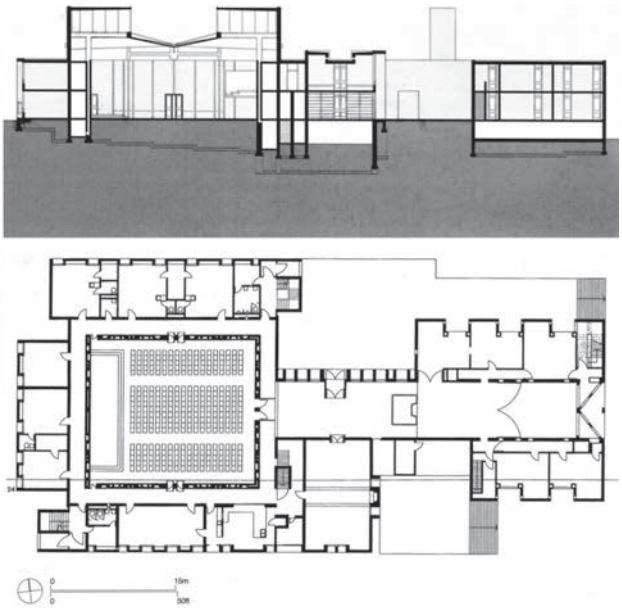
N G KERK WELKOM- WES: REFORMING UNITY TEMPLE. Part 1 : What the building wants to be.

Kotze, Paul

2013-01
Picasso
http://hdl.handle.net10539/13506
Peters,Walters and Kotze,Paul.2013. N G KERK WELKOM- WES: REFORMING UNITY TEMPLE. Part 1 : What the building wants to be. Architecture SA 2013:Jan/Feb. p 35-45

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/





4 First Unitarian church, Rochester, first phase 1959-62 (McCarter, R Louis Kahn. London: Phaidon, 2005).





5 Van Zyl apparel shop, Paarl, recipient of the Bronze Medal of the Cape Provincial Institute of Architects in 1964 (SA Architectural Record, June 1965, p41).



PRECEDENTS FOR THE DESIGN OF WELKOM-WES CHURCH

While Le Corbusian precedents loomed large in the oeuvre of Uytenbogaardt (Elliott, 1987: 929), the genealogy of the design concept of the church at Welkom-Wes can neither be found in the works of that master nor of Moerdijk, De Ridder and Koorts. Instead, wrote fellow Kahn graduate, Danie Theron (1936-2011), Welkom-Wes *is baie verskuldig aan* (owes a huge debt to) Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, 1904-6, and to Louis Kahn's First Unitarian church in Rochester, 1959-62 (extended 1965-69), and headed his article with a provocative if factual summary, *contra mundum* (against the world) (CRE-DO, October 1969)(Fig 2).

Like the NGK, the Unitarian church lays primary emphasis on the word and also has a table in lieu of an altar, thus both precedents identified by Theron were liturgically appropriate for emulation. Wright was a Unitarian and had, as a member of the local congregation, received the commission for the rebuilding of the church at Oak Park. While parishioners had hoped for a traditional church with spire, Wright questioned the preconceptions and insisted that '…the design must be developed from within – from the idea of a space for gathering…' and advised: 'Let the room inside be the architecture outside' (McCarter, 2005: 79).

Yet, as McCarter points out, Wright was actually following the reasoning of his Renaissance predecessors who deemed centralised plans with geometrically perfect forms as the appropriate spaces in which to worship, and the exteriors literally reflected this arrangement. Consistently, the generator for the design of the "noble room for worship" (Curtis, 1996:127) at Unity Temple is the square on plan, and its cubic volume is measured from the floor to the plane of the glass skylights in the ceiling. Access ways and galleries surround the nave like the arms to a shallow Greek cross in two tiers on three sides, and are half-size double cubes of 1:2 proportions (McCarter, 2005: 81), served by enclosed staircases at the four outer corners of the composition (Fig 3).