

The function of the churchbuilding as the centre of the parish

A study of ten modern churches in Helsinki

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INTRODUCTION

Church architecture has played a rather important part in the modernization of architecture in the years after the Second World War. Often architects have had great artistic freedom in the designing of a new church. This freedom involves for example the proportions of the building, the use of materials, the incidence of light and the place of visual arts. Striking modern churches have been built particularly in those countries where after 1945 a great deal of building was needed as a result of the war and where there were also sufficient financial means available. The latter is especially so in those countries where there are such strong ties between the church and the state that contributions to the church are collected by the tax authorities, as is the case in Germany and Scandinavia in particular. In these countries church membership is part of the common way of life, in other words: people do not necessarily leave the church even if they feel no longer connected with the church from a religious point of view. Thus, in the countries mentioned above, about 90 percent of the population belong to a church, while the churches play a greater role in social life than is the case in many other countries, like Holland for example. Youth work and care for the elderly are part of this role.

As far as modern architecture is concerned, Finland occupies an important place within Scandinavia. The works of, for example, Siren, Aalto, Suomalainen and Pictilä illustrate this. Several well-known architects have built churches as well, thanks to the system of competitions for a design. It is not only in Helsinki that interesting church buildings have been constructed, but also in cities like Tampere, Oulu and Imatra. One can ask to what extent is the value of the church as a place which the parishioners can use concomitant with the quality of the architecture. Use involves not only the space where services are held, but also the rooms for informal meetings, religious instruction, youth work and gatherings, in other words, for the complete pattern of life of the parish.

In order to further investigate that question, we visited ten modern churches in Helsinki in February 1991. In each church we talked with the pastor or a church worker, asking them about their experiences with the building on the basis of a questionnaire. Our opinion about the various rooms has been formed mainly on the basis of a checklist which takes into account measurement and proportions, the incidence of light, material and colour of floor, walls and furniture and, where visual arts are concerned, materials, subject matter and placement. The use of such a standard list is an important aid towards a balanced opinion; but does not prevent this opinion from being subjective rather than measurable and objective. Still, it has been formed after intensive study and comparison of the buildings and their rooms.

First of all we paid attention to the architecture and the location of the buildings and then we also had a thorough look at the various rooms in the buildings. In exploring the various rooms attention was paid to their character, their capacity and the nature of the use of the buildings while we also asked our interlocutors about wishes and problems with regard to the use of the buildings.

The following report can be considered as the description of a rough investigation, which, when being analyzed more closely, will undoubtedly have to be adjusted in certain parts. Among other things the criteria for the definition of the atmosphere in the rooms should be formulated more exactly.

In addition to this, figures with respect to the use of the various rooms would be necessary for a good analysis of the different churches in their function as a parish-centre. These figures would concern among other things the capacity of the rooms, the average number of visitors, the maximum and minimum number of visitors, the frequency and the nature of their use. Besides we would also need figures that give us a clear insight into the composition of the parish: the number of church members, the age structure, social structures and the like. If the data about the use of the building and the data about the parish are related to each other we will have at our disposal more exact material with regard to the functioning of the church building. These data may or may not confirm the first impressions noted down in this report.

We would like to express our gratitude to Pauli Lõija and Carl-Johan Slotte for all the help they have given us in this research. They selected the churches, made appointments with the pastors and accompanied us when we visited the churches.

LIST OF CHURCHES

Name	Architect	Date of building
1 Huopalahti	Mirja Castrén	1975
2 Pasila	Eric Adlercreutz	1985
3 Temppeliaukio	Timo & Tuomo Suomalainen	1969
4 Tapiola	Aarno Ruusuvuori	1965
5 Olari	Käpy & Simo Paavilainen	1981
6 Espoonlahti	Timo & Tuomo Suomalainen	1980
7 Kauniainen	Kristian Gullichsen	1983
8 Myyrmäki	Juha Leiviskä	1984
9 Vuosaari	Pirkko & Arvi Ilonen	1980
10 Matteus (Vartiokylä)	Pekka Tuominen & Stefan Ahlman	1985

The selection of these churches was made by Pauli Löija, assistant at the department of practical theology of the faculty of theology at Helsinki, and Carl-Johann Slotte, architect. Swedish parishes having private accommodation at their disposal have not been taken into account in this study.

1. THE BUILDING

In order to measure to what degree the church building attracts the attention of the people we work with the following definition: a building is recognizable as a church by the building style, its location and by religious symbols.

From the architectural point of view the Myyrmäki is most striking in its height-effect and in its wall structure. The Olari catches the eye by its massive outer brick wall and its glass wall to the inner court. The post-modern design of the Kauniainen and the conspicuous heavy grey block building style of the Tapiola are also impressive. The Espoonlahti and the Vuosaari attract attention not because of their size but because of their design. The Temppeliaukio should be mentioned with respect to its overwhelming interior design.

The location of the building adds to the attention it is given. The solid Olari is situated near a large roundabout, which intensifies its architectural impact. From the point of view of architecture the Pasila is less striking, being a low-rise building complex. Yet it catches the eye immediately because of the surrounding square and the encircling high-rise blocks. The Tapiola and the Myyrmäki are situated in more or less open spaces where they demand the attention because of their size. Optically, the position of the Matteus is little remarkable. Yet its connection with a big complex of facilities and shops make the building very accessible. With the other

churches the location aspect is hardly of any importance..

As churches most of the buildings scarcely attract attention: many times a cross has been fixed to the church and a tower in some form or other is present, but these are often not conspicuous. Only the Espoonlahti and, to a smaller degree, the Vuosaaren stand out for their design. With the Myyrmäki the architectural height-effect might draw the attention to the cross on top of it. Next to the Huopalahti the old tower still exists, so that here the identity of the building is immediately clear.

2. THE MEETING PLACE

The entrances to the churches differ strongly as to the degree in which they are visible and inviting. The entrances to the Huopalahti and the Matteus are very inviting, although the entrance to the Huopalahti can't be seen from the street. The entrances to the Matteus, the Vuosaari and the Espoon-lahti are clearly visible in contrast to those of the Myyrmäki and the Olari; even though the steps to the entrance of the Olari are very conspicuous. The wide and low entrance to the Tempeliaukio, the sober entrance to the Tapiola, and the arched framework marking the entrance to the Kauniainen are all unique.

The surface area of the meeting place in the Matteus is very large, while in the Pasila it is spacious. The Tapiola and the Olari have big corridors. The rooms in the Vuosaari, the Espoonlahti and the Kauniainen are somewhat smaller. The room in the Huopalahti is modest whereas in the Myyrmäki it is just a corridor. The reception room in the Tempeliaukio is of no importance.

In various churches seats can be found in the reception room, varying from a great many seats in the Matteus to a few in the Espoonlahti, the Kauniainen and the Vuosaari. The Pasila, the Tapiola and the Huopalahti stand midway between the Matteus and the Espoonlahti. As to the atmosphere in the reception rooms proportions, light, colours and materials matter a lot. The Huopalahti and the Matteus are warm and human. In the Matteus you can always get a cup of coffee. The Vuosaari and the Kauniainen are friendly and congenial. The Pasila is a little dull, whereas the Olari and the Myyrmäki have a chilly atmosphere in particular because of the high white walls. The Espoonlahti is so dark that one feels oppressed in it. The Tapiola with its dull long grey passageway is really unpleasant.

3. THE CHURCH HALL

With regard to the atmosphere of the church halls attention should be drawn first of all to two churches with spacious white interiors. The interior of the Myyrmäki church, in which an intriguing action of light has been created by the variation in the wall construction, is imposing. Different shades of white are the predominant colour, with tapistries adding light colour accents that take away the harshness. It is a lofty room with a "playful sacredness". The Olari church has also got a sacred atmosphere, but does not have the sublimity of the Myyrmäki. The wall structure and the incidence of light are straighter, giving the whole a somewhat clinical and alienating impact, which is intensified by the strong length-effect of the room.

In the second place attention should be drawn to two churches with unpainted stone walls and a large volume. With its rock-wall the room of the Temppliaukio church radiates an elementary power. It is a solid wall, not built out of bricks or piled stone, but like a mountain-side. Far from being flat and dull, it has got a multi-coloured appearance created by its rough surface and the diversity of the colour-effect in many shades of brown, black and yellow. All this is more intensified by the light from above, which accentuates the dark and light spots on the wall. This room also has a special character because of its circular shape with the domed roof of red copper over it. It is a wide cave with a warm loftiness, a sacredness in which one feels at home. Thus it is quite different from the church of Tapiola with its almost square room with high grey concrete walls. Architecturally, the Tapiola presents a clear unity, but its atmosphere is rather cool and clinical.

In the third place attention should be drawn to the churches that are all of them smaller in size and that have a room on a more human scale. This means that their atmosphere is not created by the height or the width of the room, but that the atmosphere is mainly defined by the relative proportions, the materials used, the incidence of light and by works of art.

The Kauniainen church is dominated by the altar wall which could be characterized as an abstract work of art. The white area with in it accents a row of small windows, the pulpit against a slightly projecting part of the wall, and a high narrow vertical stained-glass window over the font, is predominant. It is a strong authentic unity giving the room a sense of sacredness, but as the parishioners felt it lacked warmth a painting was hung up afterwards.

The Vuosaari-church also has white walls but it strongly differs from the Kauniainen-church. Here the interior is defined by the colour of the light plain wood of the pews, the ceiling and the organ-front. Furthermore, in this church, which was mainly built longitudinally, the "altar wall" has

been provided with three rows of stylized figures which have been created out of white plaster. They portray a number of central stories from the New Testament. It is not a lofty room, but it is indeed one of a warm human simplicity.

The Matteus-church has rather massive dark-red brick walls, lending the room a private character, but at the same time giving it a somewhat oppressive character too. The church of Pasila has lightly plastered walls, but shows little variation, and this is why it looks a bit plain and dull.

The church of Espoonlahti is a little chilly and dark due to its fairly high concrete walls and its "altar wall", the lower half of which has been erected out of natural stone. The simple room of the Huopalahti-church is unpretentious, but congenial.

It is remarkable that five out of ten churches do without works of art in the church halls and that art is of little importance in the other five churches as well. Pictorial language is most noticeably present in the Vuosaaren-church with its line drawings on the "altar wall". They are simple and intelligible, but consequently little intriguing in the long run. In the Myrämäki-church the soft-coloured tapestries have no representations on them and they serve to intensify the atmosphere of the room. At the back of the Matteus-church a remarkable baptismal room has been created with a wall of coloured ceramic representations, among which are the symbols of the four evangelists. In the Huopalahti-church a traditional painting of Christ giving his blessing, has been hung on the altar wall. In the Kauniainen-church art was originally limited to a narrow strip of stained glass, but by special request of many parishioners a painting, a work of the well-known artist Lennart Segerstråle was hung up in the room. In the Tapiola-church, with its straight bare walls, the need for visual arts on the altar wall has also arisen. Some designs have already been drafted, but it has proved difficult to reach a compromise between the ideas of people who would like to maintain the original architecture completely and the ideas of those who want to create a certain warmth with the help of art.

Except for the Pasila-church and the Temppeleaukio-church all churches have the possibility of extending the church hall when there are more visitors than usual at the service. In most cases this is effected by pushing aside the folding wall between the church hall and the community hall.

In this way the church hall in the Matteus-church can be extended from 200 to 350 seats and the church hall in the Vuosaari-church can be extended from 270 to 500 seats.

Capacity church hall**Capacity community hall**

1	Huopalahti	250 (*)	100 (*)
2	Pasila	110 (*)	60 (*)
3	Temppeliaukio	940	130
4	Tapiola	600 (*)	200 (*)
5	Olari	500	100
6	Espoonlahti	410	300
7	Kauniainen	350 (*)	150 (*)
8	Myyrmäki	430 (*)	270 (*)
9	Vuosaari	270	230
10	Matteus	200	150

(*) - means that the figure originates from an oral source. The other figures have been taken from written sources.

4. THE COMMUNITY HALL

In each of the ten churches there is a hall where congregational meetings can be held. Their seating capacity varies from about 60 seats (Pasila, Olari, Myyrmäki) to approximately 200 seats (Tapiola, Vuosaari, Matteus). In most cases the community hall is next to the church hall and the two halls can be linked by pushing aside a sliding wall.

In several churches the atmosphere of the community hall resembles the atmosphere of the church hall, but in some cases they are clearly different.

Huopalahti: social and informal, just like in the church hall.

Pasila: though the community hall has white walls, its atmosphere is more congenial than that in the church because of its relative proportions, the furniture, the plants and the fireplace.

Temppeliaukio: practical, bright, thus different from the church.

Tapiola: straight grey walls like in the church; a certain warmth has been created by means of a colourful tapistry and colour accents near the lamps.

Olari: bright white creating an impersonal atmosphere which is somewhat softened by three colour etchings.

Espoonlahti: dark and oppressive, like in the church; here, too, two colourful tapistries give the room a bit more atmosphere.

Kauniainen: a bright white room with a warm character effected by the use of wood in part of the walls, a rather low ceiling, wooden furniture in light colours and some paintings.

Myyrmäki: a lofty, unsegmented, white room and consequently

rather cold and impersonal.
Vuosaari: a simple, friendly but very large room.
Matteus: a great contrast to the church; here no dark red walls, but bright white ones; not closed but partly with windows; warm because of the light wooden furniture; it also has a much lower ceiling.

It is noticeable that in those cases where works of art have been installed this has clearly contributed to a warmer, more congenial atmosphere.

5. THE REMAINING ROOMS

In most of the churches the young people have a room of their own at their disposal. The atmosphere in these rooms varies greatly. The atmosphere in the Huopalahti is social, unordered, informal, in short such that the young people can do as they like and can change the room according to their own wishes where design and decoration are concerned. The youth centre in the Olari is at the other extreme; a clinical rectangular room with bare white walls to which only a few posters can be affixed. It is doubtful whether this is made up for by the fireplace in the equally white and neat hall of the building. The atmosphere in the youth centres of the other churches varies between these two extremes.

In each church there is a room for children between ages 4 and 10, who stay there in different groups for a couple of hours a day. In each building there are rooms for administrative work, which is connected with the fact that registration of the population is carried out by the church. In churches like the Tapiola, the Olari and the Myyrmäki several of such rooms can be found.

While we were looking for a room for pastoral conversations with the religious leader of the church it appeared that in half of the churches we visited these conversations have to take place in the room which also serves as a sacristy, as is the case in the Espoonlahti and in the Kauniainen. We do not think the need for a conversation room which is really suitable for its purpose was taken into consideration everywhere at the stage of planning.

If one takes a look at the ground-plans of the churches it soon becomes evident that several churches have a large number of small and large rooms. A number of these rooms are destined for hobby-clubs for music, photography, woodwork and the like. The Myyrmäki beats all the other churches. On the ground-floor in particular dozens of rooms have been created, among which a sauna room. The multitude of rooms in the church buildings creates the possibility for the church to fulfill a sociocultural role. Most churches are financially able to engage the required staff for this.

6. NON-ECCLESIASTICAL USE OF THE CHURCH

It is not very simple to determine to what extent the church buildings are used for civil activities. As it happens it requires a definition of what is meant by ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical which takes into account the Finnish situation, which is considerably different from the Dutch. In Finland almost 90 per cent of the population are members of the Lutheran Church and in all kinds of ways the church is closely tied up with social life. In Rovaniemi in February 1991, 500 soldiers had to take an oath of allegiance to the state; this took place during a divine service on a Thursday morning. In the same place a fellowship weekend of scouts from all over Lapland was held in the buildings of the church and conducted by youth workers of the church, while many of the boy-scouts attended the divine service on Sunday morning. The choir of the Olari-church have their own professionally equipped room for choir practice in the church building and they make concert tours in their own country and abroad; in other words they are much more than a church choir. In many churches complete kitchen units have been built in which can provide two or three hundred people with their dinners. This happens among other things at family-parties and community-parties, which are often held in the community hall of the church. The registration of the population is carried out by the church. In Holland a number of this kind of activities would not be classified as ecclesiastical, but in Finland this is different.

In general the church halls are hardly used for civil purposes, partly because there is no demand for such use, partly out of principle. The pastor of the Kauniainen-church informed us that for theological reasons the church hall is not available for non-ecclesiastical use and that this is conscious policy. The Temppeliaukio-church is an exception. The principal room is very frequently used for multifarious cultural activities, in particular concerts. Not so long ago this was also the case with the Olari-church, but things have changed since a cultural centre became ready for use in Espoo.

The church hall of the Huopalahti-church is used as an extension of the community hall. This was taken into consideration when the room was being furnished: all the liturgic furniture is movable.

With regard to the use of subsidiary rooms the distinction between clerical use and civil use is difficult to make, especially in terms of Finnish criteria. Most of the pastors with whom we talked about this could not give but a few examples of civil use. When we asked about non-ecclesiastical use of the Myyrmäki-church, a church which is often used for all kinds of activities, they only mentioned the use of the church by the Alcoholics Anonymous. The hall of the Matteus-church is open all week as a meeting-place where people come for a cup of coffee. They can help

themselves to coffee and cake. The church is situated quite close to the shopping-centre. There are good reasons for considering this service, too, as part of the ecclesiastical use of the church.

7. SOME CONCLUSIONS FOR EACH CHURCH BUILDING

- Huopalahti:** The informal, friendly character is notable. The building has no pretensions as to architecture, which may contribute to its accessibility. The church hall is used for extension of the community hall, which is mostly the other way round.
- Pasila:** the church is situated in an isolated position in a plain and empty square amidst blocks of flats. The furnishing of the building is rather austere and functional: a place where church rituals are conducted in an efficient way.
- Tempeliaukio:** imposing its interior architecture and consequently one of the most frequented touristic objects of Helsinki. The church room has a unique character and atmosphere, in which the parishioners feel at home and where many cultural activities take place.
- Tapiola:** the parishioners miss a certain atmosphere in the high grey church hall; here the architecture has prevailed over the human aspects which ought to be present in a church.
- Olari:** situated outside the centre and built like a stronghold with a church hall which has a rather clinical atmosphere. In this church as well it is obvious that here, too, the wish of the architect to build a construction that would be esthetically sound has prevailed.
- Espoonlahti:** the expectations which the architect of the Tempeliaukio-church had raised have not been fulfilled. The inner rooms are rather dark and oppressive.
- Kaunianen:** a marvellous building as far as architecture and interior design are concerned. The church hall is of great esthetic value, but here, too, it is a border line case as to what the parishioners expect a church hall to be like. However the place is more human than, say, the Olari this is because of its smaller proportions. The atmosphere in the subsidiary rooms is congenial.
- Myyrmäki:** imposing because of its architecture and the interior design of the church hall. In the church hall the light effects in particular prevent the room from being cold and clinical. It is a "playful heavenly sacredness". The

building is marked for its great number of subsidiary rooms in which nearly all sociocultural activities one can possibly think of can take place.

Vuosaari: a church built on a human scale with a light simple church hall and equally simple works of art.

Matteus: an accessible building near a shopping centre; the spacious hall is clearly a meeting centre all during the week. The dark red brick walls give the church hall a somewhat oppressive character.

8. SOME GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

1. Most of the churches testify of the high quality of modern architecture in Finland. Partly due to the system of competition at the design and due to the abundant financial means very beautiful buildings have been constructed.
2. The functional quality of a church does not always run parallel to the quality of its architecture. It is obvious that in the case of many designs it was the esthetic value rather than the functional value that was primarily taken into account, for instance where the atmosphere in the church hall was concerned. With some churches the beautiful architecture has an inhibiting effect.
3. Most of the churches have good facilities for informal meetings.
4. The rooms for young people aged in between 14 and 18 were often designed without taking into account the special requirements with regard to the atmosphere in these rooms. Most of them are too clinical and impersonal.
5. Almost every church lacks a small meditation centre. It is not clear whether there is no need for them or whether they were simply not thought of at the stage of design.
6. Only a few churches have a separate room for baptism, although this ceremony usually takes place with a small group of people outside the church service.
7. Only a few churches have a room that has been equipped for pastoral conversations.
8. Office rooms are in general abundantly available.
9. For the greater part art is of secondary importance or totally absent.
10. Most of the churches are equipped with a kitchen with comprehensive facilities, including those for serving meals. This contributes in an important way to the multifunctional aspect of the church.
11. The diversity in the use of the church centre indicates a strong integration of church and society in Finland.

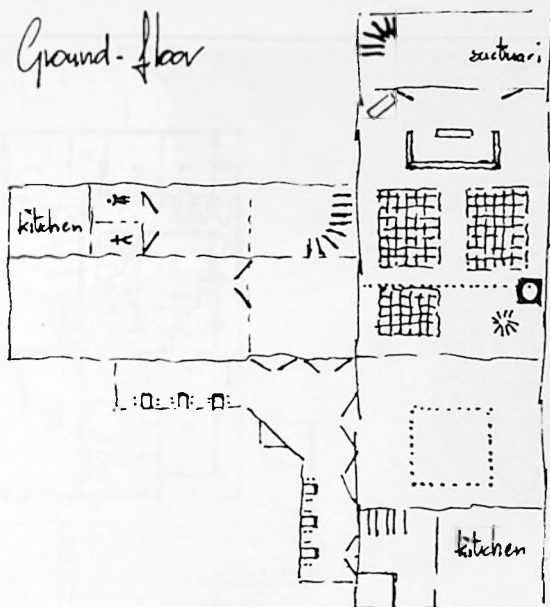
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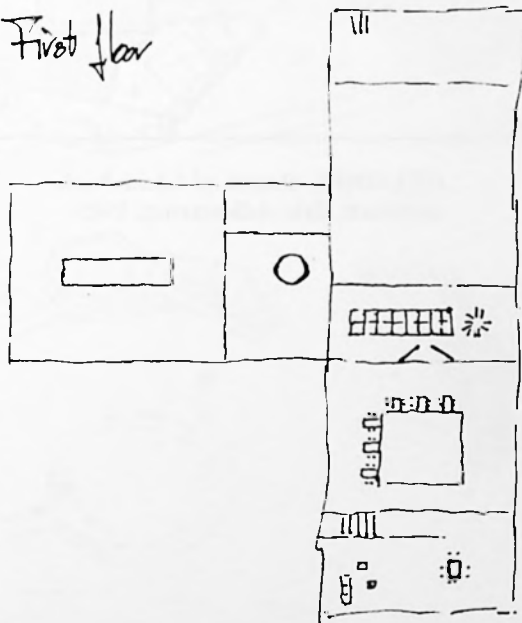
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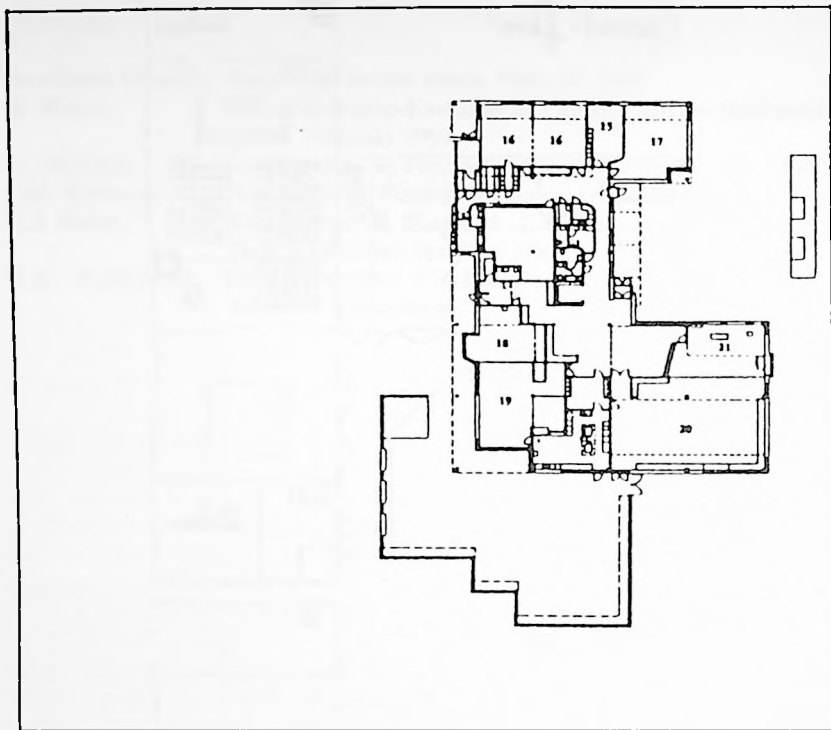
Ground-floor



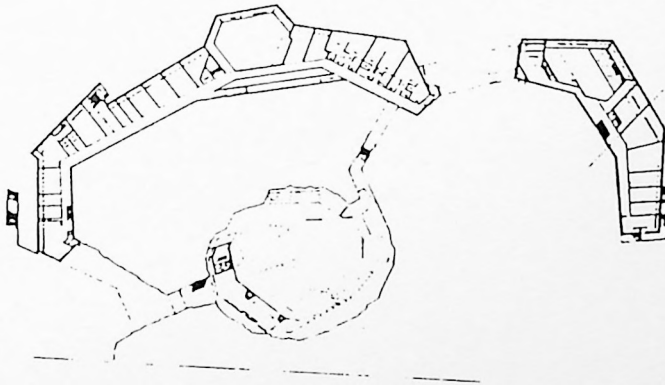
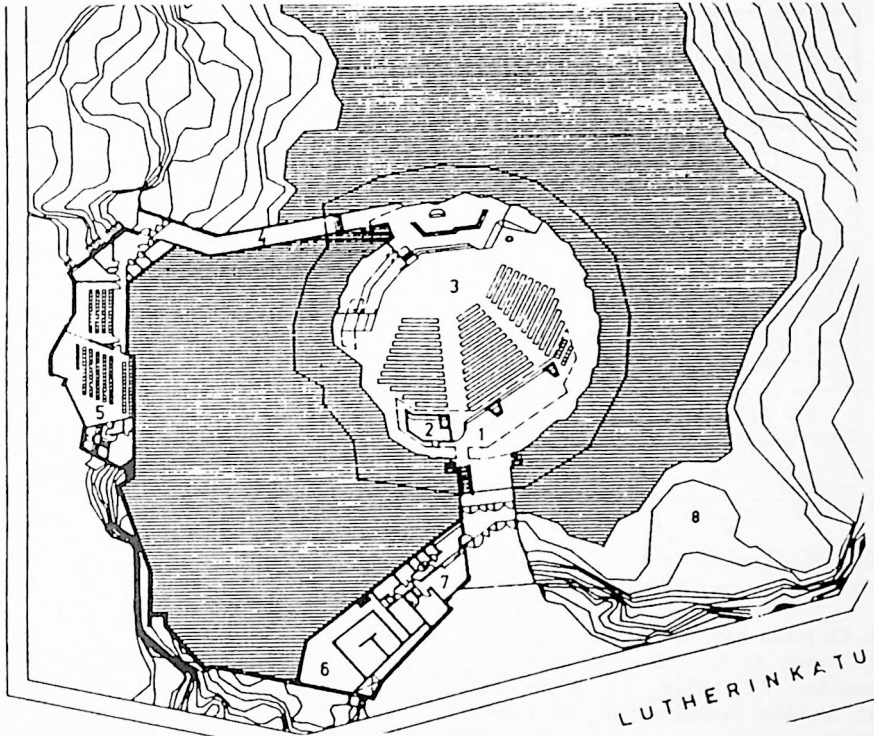
First floor



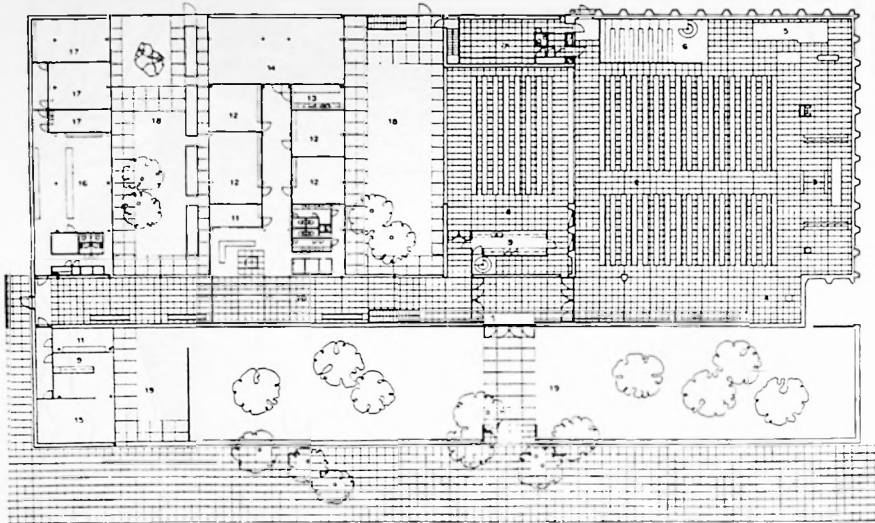
HELSINKI, Church of Huopalahti
Architect: Mirja Castren, 1975



HELSINKI, church of Länsi-Pasila
architect: Eric Adlercreutz, 1985

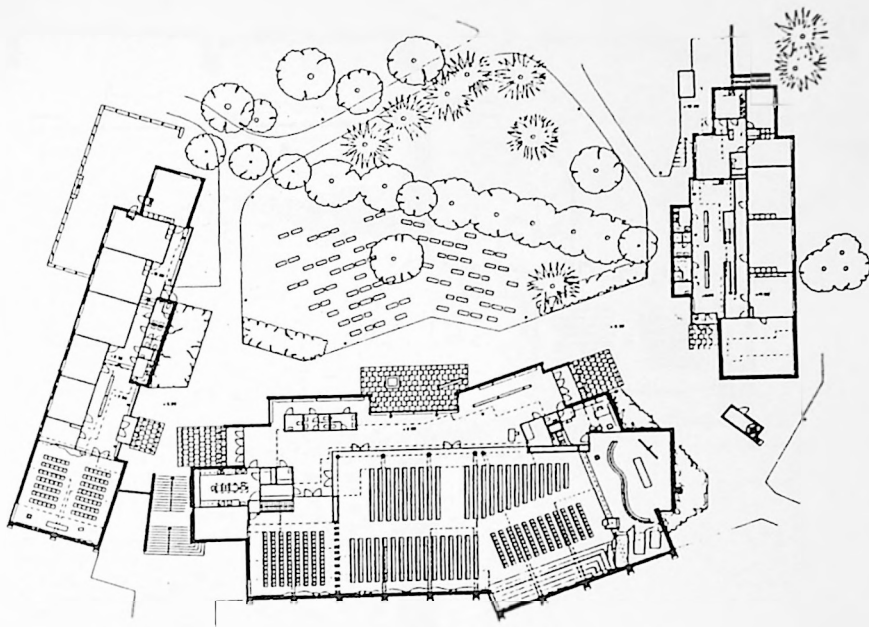


HELSINKI, Tempeliaukio-church
architects: Timo and Tuomo Suomalainen, 1969

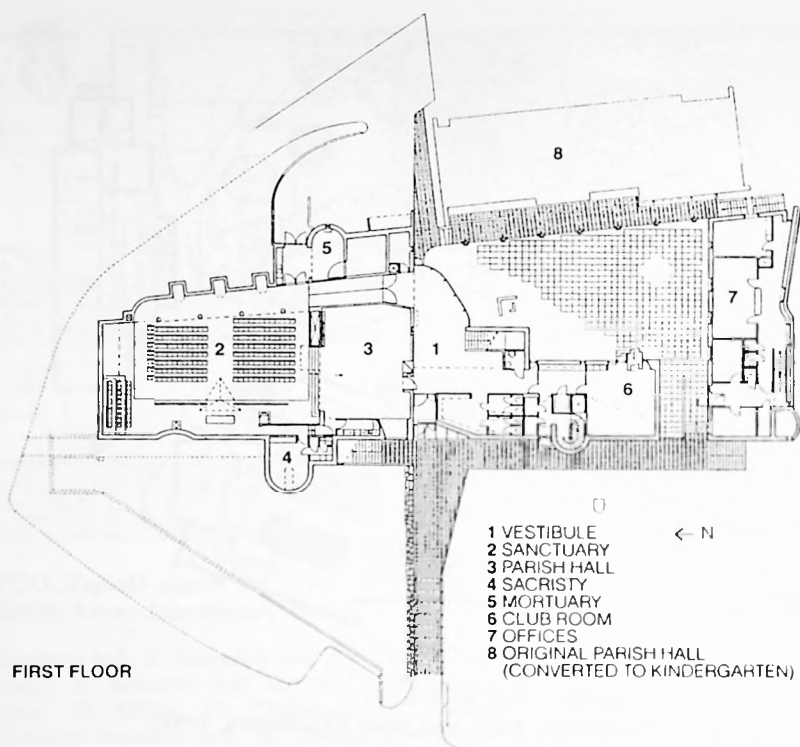


ESPOO, Tapiola church
 architect: Aarno Ruusuvuori, 1965

1. Entrance hall, 2. Assembly hall for 600, 3. Altar, 4. Chapel, 5. Organ, 6. Choir,
7. Vestry, 8. Assembly hall for 200, 9. Refreshment kitchen, 10. Communication corridor,
11. Office, 12. Clubroom, 13. Kitchen, 14. Bible-reading classroom,
15. Swedish assembly hall, 16. Finnish pastors's office, 17. Office, 18. Inner yard,
19. Forecourt.



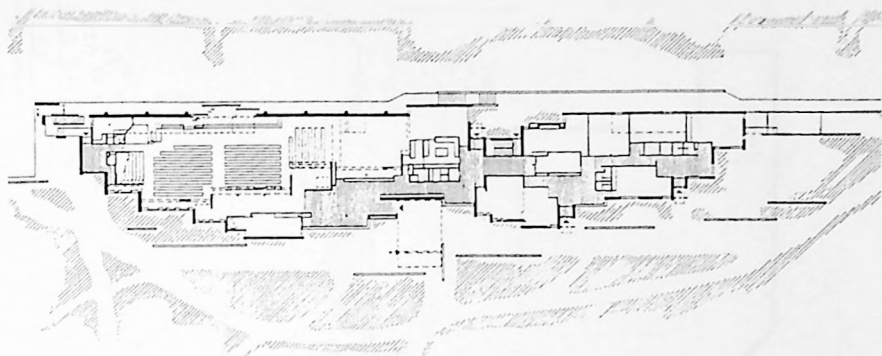
ESPOO, Olari church
architects: Käpy and Simo Paavilainen, 1981



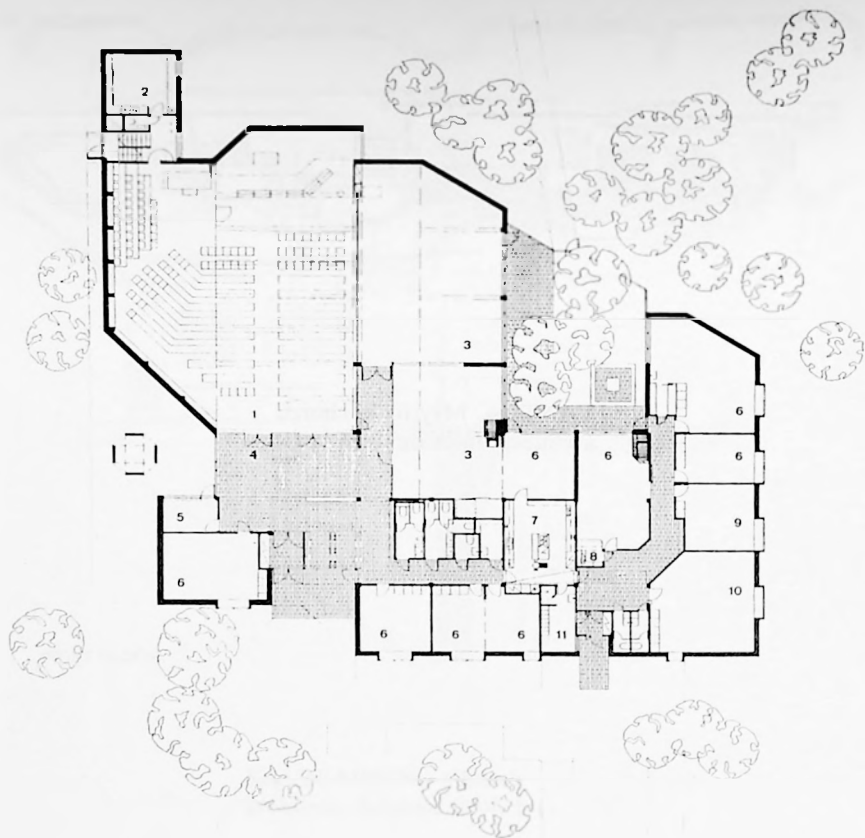
FIRST FLOOR

- 1 VESTIBULE
- 2 SANCTUARY
- 3 PARISH HALL
- 4 SACRISTY
- 5 MORTUARY
- 6 CLUB ROOM
- 7 OFFICES
- 8 ORIGINAL PARISH HALL
(CONVERTED TO KINDERGARTEN)

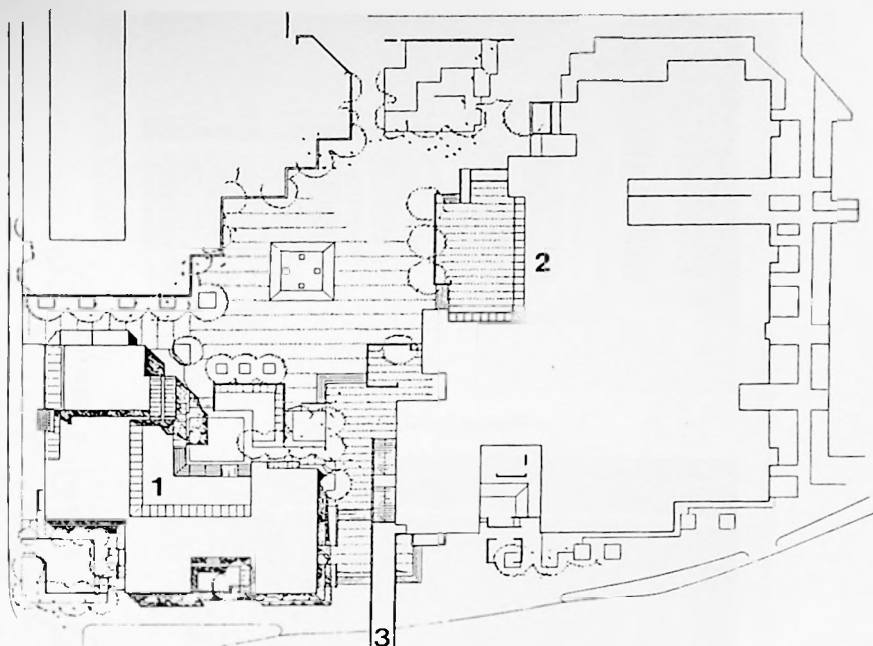
KAUNIAINEN - Church
 architect: Kristian Gullichsen, 1983



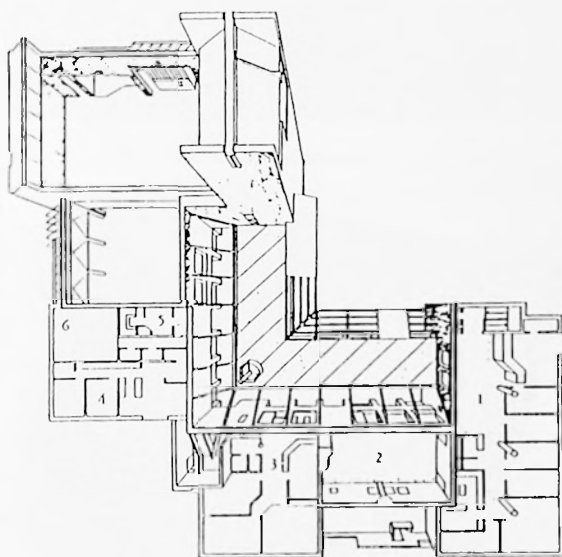
VANTAA, Myyrmäki church
architect: Juha Leiviskä, 1984



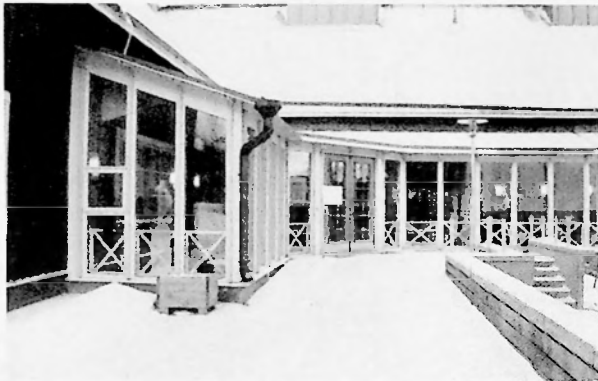
HELSINKI, Vuosaari - church
architects: Pirkko and Arvi Ilonen, 1980



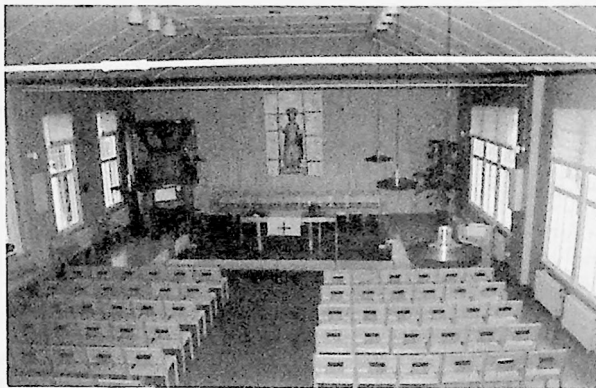
HELSINKI, St. Matthew's church



HELSINKI, St. Matthew's church
architects: Veli-Pekka Tuominen and Stefan Ahlman 1985



1. **Huopalahti, entrance.**



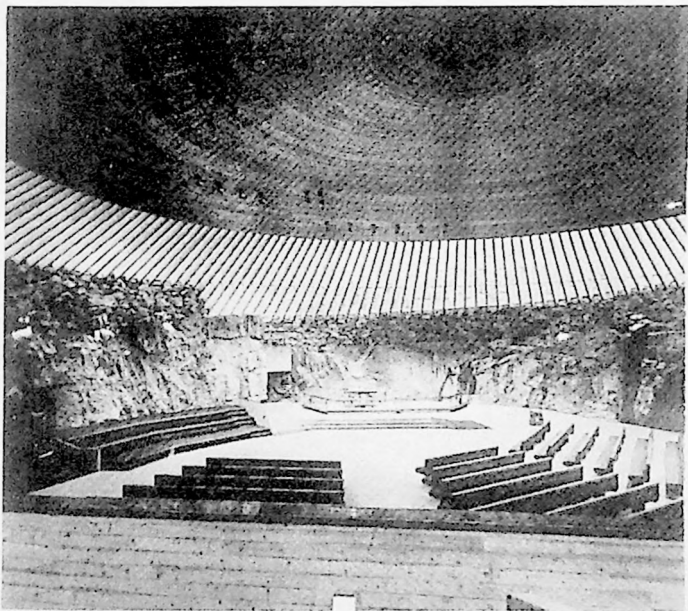
2. **Huopalahti, church hall**



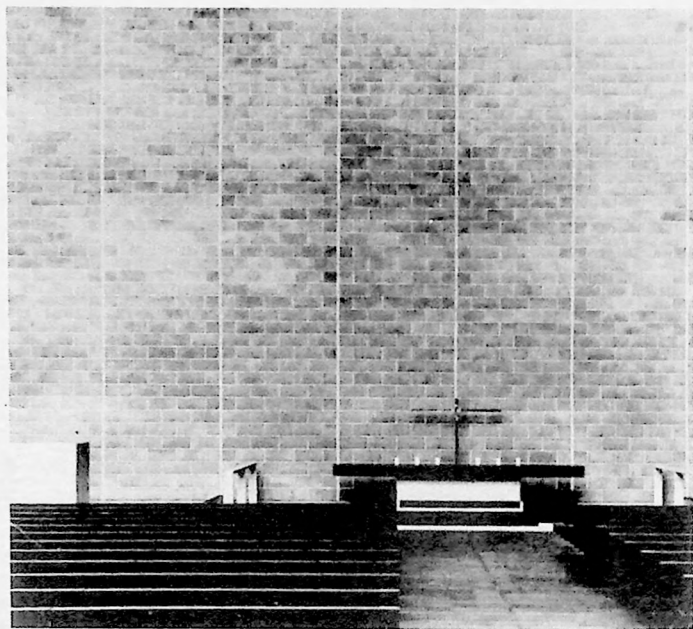
3. **Huopalahti, meal in the community hall**



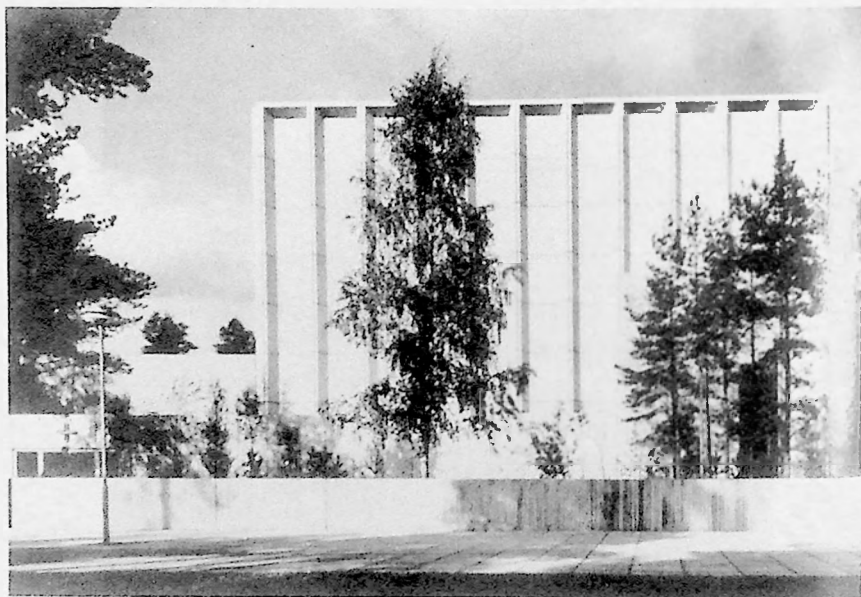
4. Pasila, exterior



5. Tempeliahukio, church hall



6. Tapiola, altarwall in the church hall



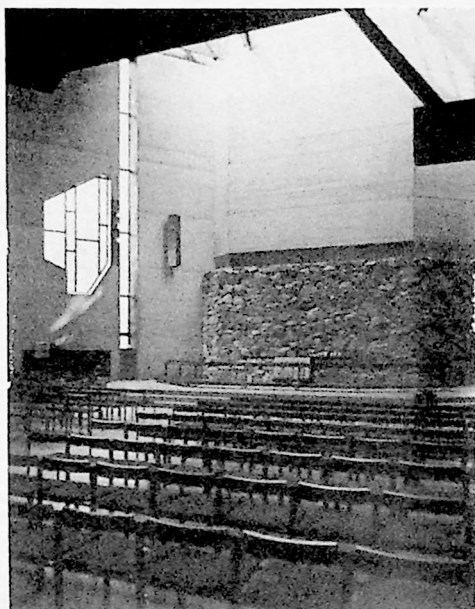
7. Tapiola, exterior



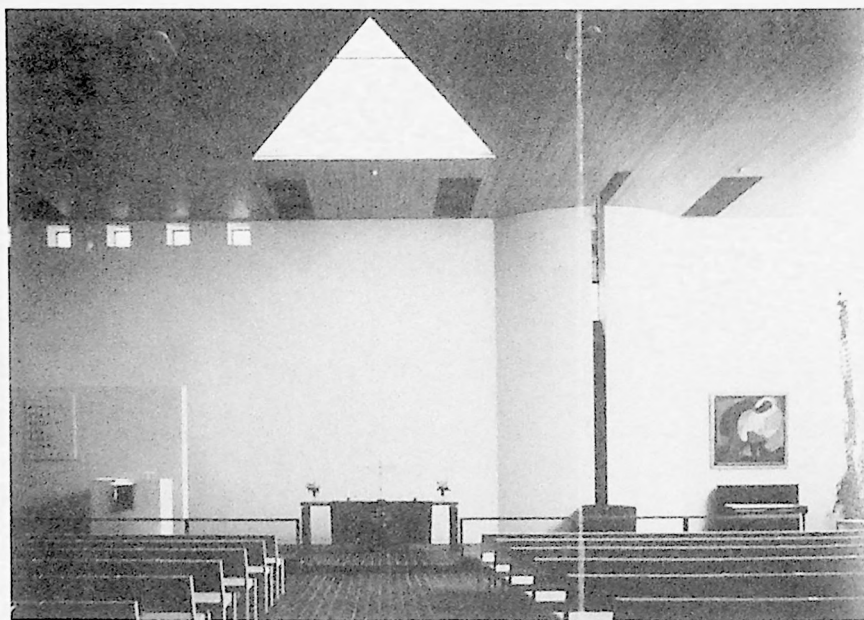
8. Olari, church hall



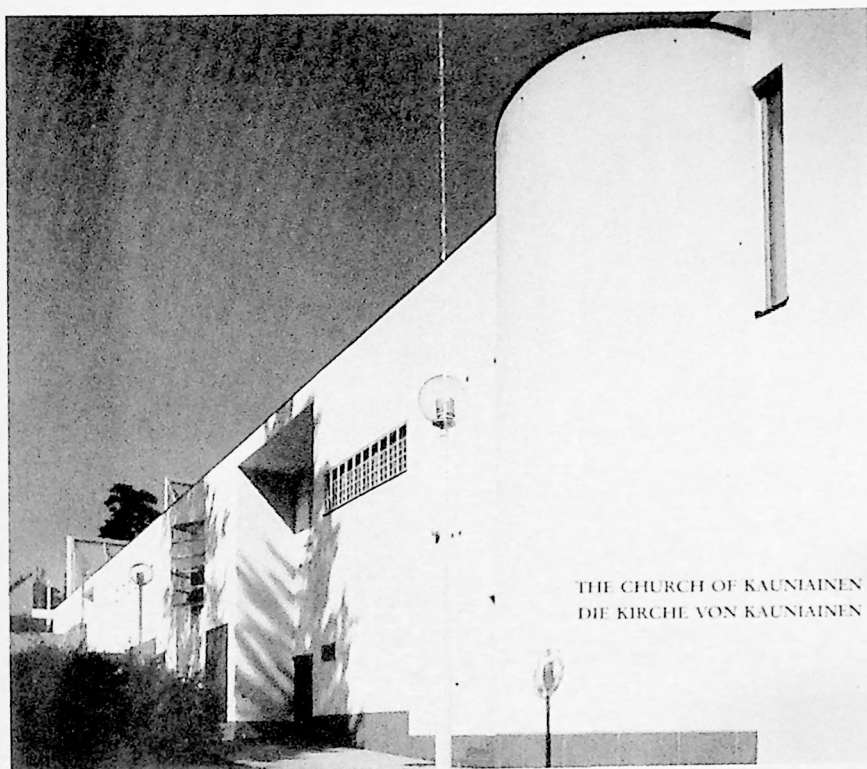
9. Olari, exterior



10. Espoonlahti, church hall



11. Kauniainen, church hall



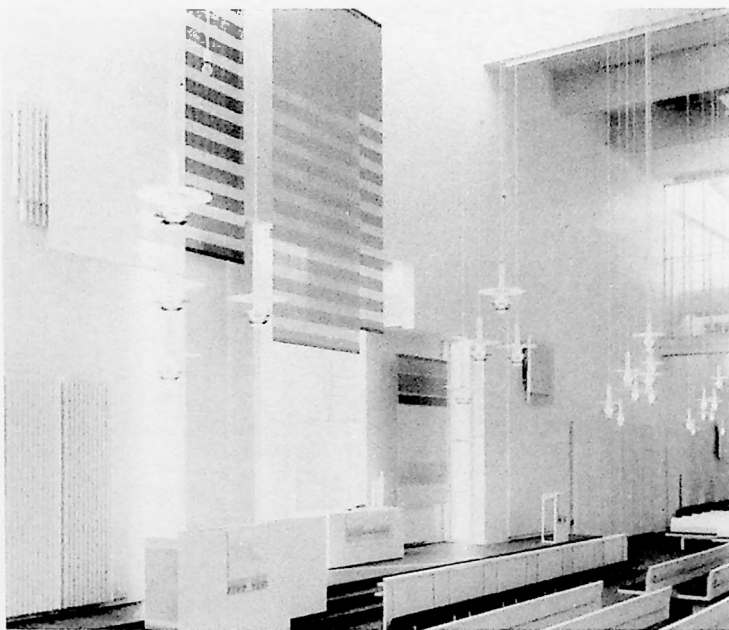
12. Kauniainen, exterior



13. Kauniainen, exterior



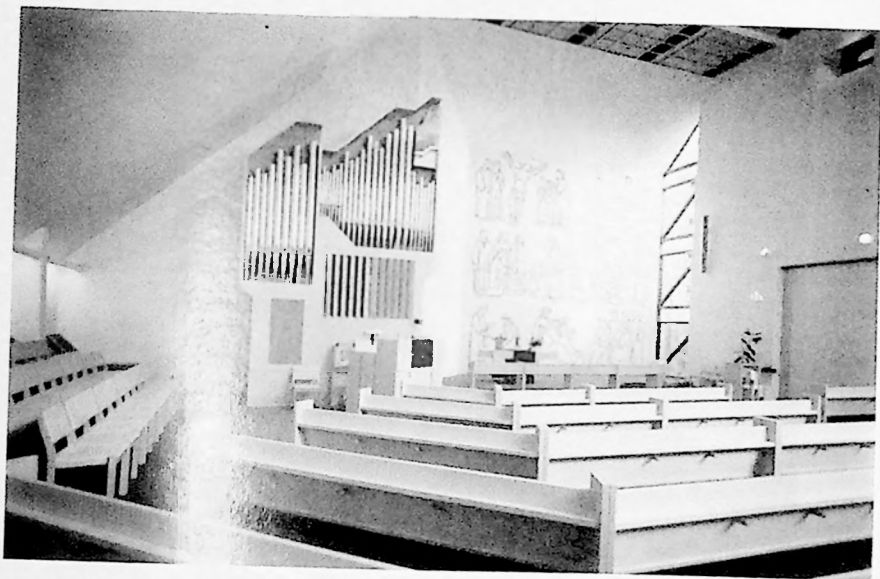
14. Myyrmäki, exterior



15. Myyrmäki, church hall



16. Vuosaari, exterior



17. Vuosaari, church hall



18. Matteus, exterior



19. Matteus, baptismal room.