

# The Lectures of Rudolf Steiner

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## Architectural Forms

Considered as the Thoughts of Culture and World-Perception

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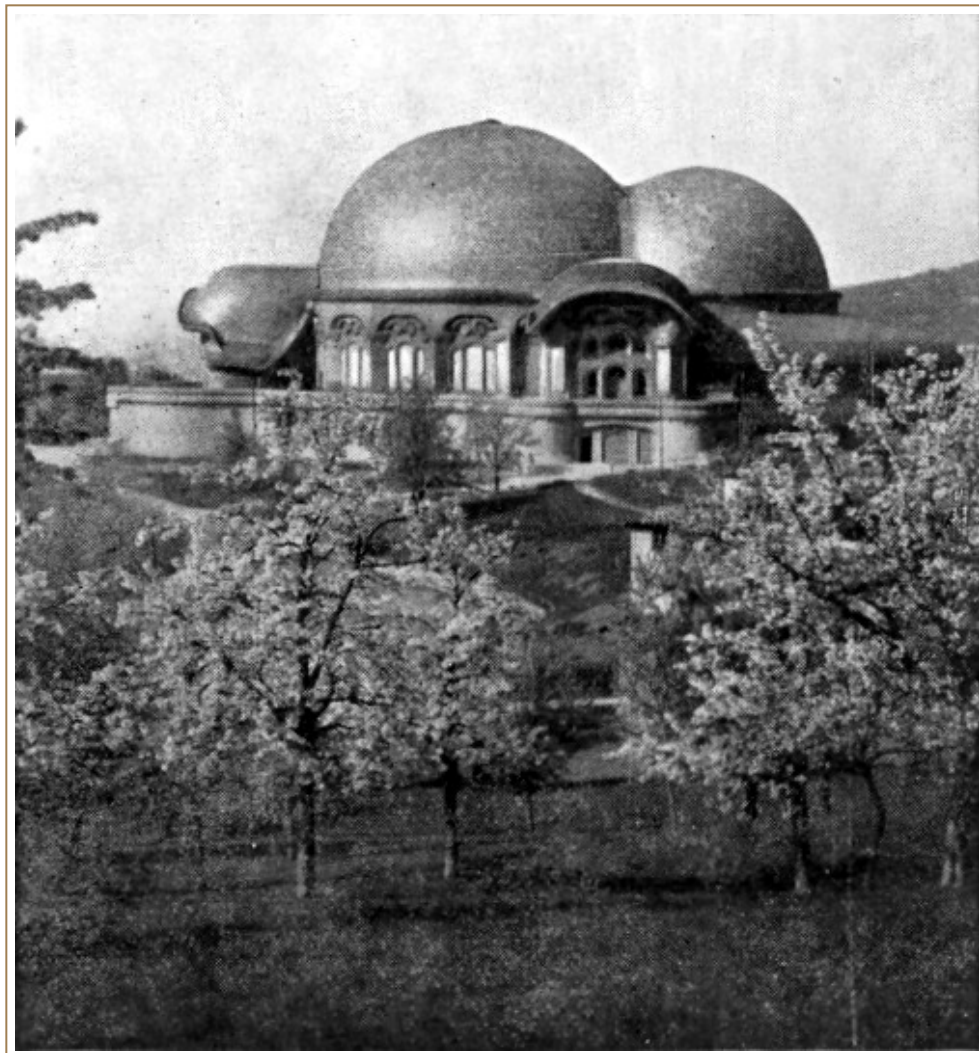
*Words of Rudolf Steiner on the Third Anniversary of the Laying of the Foundation Stone of the first Goetheanum at Dornach, 20th September, 1916.*

*This is the first of 6 lectures in the lecture series, Organic Forms in Architecture.*

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20 September 1916, Dornach

Translated by H. Collison



Three years have passed to-day since we last gathered together on this hill, where a number of our friends met to lay the foundation-stone of this building, which is to stand as a promise that into the recent development of culture there shall break those spiritual impulses which have become for it an absolute necessity; they have become a necessity because only from those impulses can we hope for that insight into life which is necessary for the very existence of mankind, and because from these impulses alone can we hope for that loving human understanding which is necessary for human life. Three years ago we held this celebration, feeling that we were experiencing a critical moment in that spiritual development which, some of us for a long time already, and some for a shorter period, we have had at heart as the persuasive power of our lives. At that time there passed through our minds all that the human heart can feel as the progress of mankind. We did not think of what, although it was to be foreseen, still was not — by the mysterious power that is hidden in thoughts — destined to be kept in mind; we did not think then of that time of suffering and pain which has since descended upon human life in Europe. There still lay in the future, though the near future, the most tragic experience of suffering that has befallen people on this earth in our time. Whatever pain they have had to suffer formerly, the experience which has since passed over Europe is enough to make anyone despair, who lacks that power of inner recovery which springs from a profound consciousness of the life and activity of the spiritual world.

Now that we have worked three years at our building it seems indeed no time for joyful celebrations. We should be untrue, in a way, to our own hearts, were we to allow even a suggestion of the festive mood. We must leave this for another time, and we shall do better, to-day, to dwell — in a few thoughts re-echoing what we have already said on just this very spot — about the ideals which filled us, to some extent as an historical moment in our movement, when we set ourselves to realise this building.

This thought arose from the self-sacrificing spirit in which many souls, or at least a number of souls, spent year after year, while our movement gradually took shape within them. The longing of our movement to build its own sanctuary arose most vividly and forcefully in the soul of our unforgettable Fräulein Sophie Stinde at Munich — and coincided later with our need for a place in which to hold our Mystery Plays and the ceremonies connected with them. In this way the thought was first conceived of building a sanctuary for our movement and the spirit that pervades it. And from this arose the other thought, of realising our spiritual movement in the form of this building; that is, of so building this place, that in its form, in its very essence, it should be to the world a visible representation of our spiritual movement. But to achieve this, the building had to be placed like a living, creative thing, not merely on a foundation of modern spiritual life, but on all the essentials, and potential essentials, of modern spiritual life. No ordinary building was to be created for our souls, but it must realise for them a cultural thought. A deep question then arose: What building does modern culture itself demand as a thought expressing modern culture? The answer depended on the knowledge that all truly fruitful thoughts in building, like all fruitful artistic impulses, have been bound up with contemporary spiritual movements, and above all with new, advancing ones.

One cannot think of Greek architecture without feeling that its very forms express the Greek experience of culture: they are this culture crystallised, moulded, made to live in forms. Whoever studies deeply the Greek style of architecture will find that the achievement of this pure Greek architectural style corresponds to the emotional expression of the Greek outlook on life; it corresponds to the answer the Greek found to his tremendous question about humanity: What powers are those which are active from the moment of the earth's existence, and support the human being, so that he finds himself placed harmoniously on the earth? If, creating the Greek again in

spirit, we see the ancient Greek moving through his Grecian land with his particular conception of the world, with his way of seeing the world in its substance, we feel how there lived in this Greek, more or less consciously, just that power, — sprung from the forces of gravity in the earth — which was to place this Greek upon the earth with just his Greek experience of life between birth and death. This Greek experience is reflected in the beautiful proportions, in the wonderful statics of Greek architecture; it lives in that inward compactness or completeness of Greek architecture, which gives its form the appearance of growing out of the mysterious forces of gravity and balance in the very body of the earth, out of the forces which, with inner, discreet harmony, suffuse and permeate the creations of the Greek tragic poets, of Homer, and Greek plastic art, even of Greek philosophy. A great tide in art can only come from a profound understanding of the world. The Greek wished to live in the Spirit of the Earth itself. Out of the Spirit of the Earth [Geist der Erde] he created his statics of architecture.

Surveying the centuries which follow, we find that again, although we must speak with the inaccuracy inevitable in such a cursory survey, there develop, under the influence of the Mystery of Golgotha and from the impulses which led a part of the human race to an understanding of this Mystery of Golgotha, new architectural forms. We see that man has discovered, in addition to his earlier experience, that he does not only stand rooted in an earth- spiritual existence that lasts from birth to death, but that the universal soul pervades and spiritualises, from above, all that man effects on earth. And as an external embodiment of this gift of the Spirit of Heaven to mediaeval mankind, as the Greek received his impulses from the Spirit of Earth, we see the rise of mediaeval architecture. Mediaeval architecture, again, is spiritualised, flooded, permeated by the forceful, powerful stream of the new conception of life which is passing through, and illuminating the world. I should have to go into great detail to show how the Christian spirit identified itself with art, to show how it found a home in Pre-Raphaelite, in Raphaelite art, in the art of Leonardo, of Michelangelo, in the Gothic architecture that aspires to heaven. I should have to enter into great detail were I to describe all the impulses which found such powerful utterance wherever it was sought to express, in form, the action and speech of the soul on the wings of the heavenly spirit; this expression found its consummation in Dürer and Holbein. For the soul that lives in Gothic architecture lives also in Dürer and Holbein.

With this hasty survey, certainly inexact, we come to modern times. And at this point the human spirit is, in a sense, brought to a standstill by the misery of the Thirty Years War which passed over Europe, particularly Central Europe, and had been preceded by a wonderful exaltation of all hearts to liberty, in such movements as that of Zwingli, Huss, and others like them. We see here, without yet being able to understand it completely, but so that it is clear, this whole misery of the Thirty Years War fanned and provoked by a spirit which already contained much of the later Jesuit spirit. And we see, under the influence of this impulse, ostensibly cultivating the spirit, just those forces grow up which have let loose materialism in Europe. We see that period approach, in which a philosophy of life, only directed, from the point of view of inner human perception, towards the material, cannot grasp the material, because it will not grasp the spirit in matter. We see a philosophy of life sweep Europe, denying freedom, because it desires to restrict everything that aspires to freedom within the limits of a rigid, blind obedience. We see the influx of a human perception — "all too human" — into the spirit that permeates history. And we see how there comes about, under this influence, the impossibility of realising the spiritual life directly in the forms of art.

Then there arose what one might call the ecclesiastic Baroque art, which is through and through a faithful expression of the new era, but in which human thoughts, human perceptions, are expressed in a subjectively arbitrary manner in artistic form and works of art. We no longer see the soul's urge to participate in the mysteries of earth-statics and earth-gravity, as it did when it built the Greek temple; we no longer see the soul directly expressing its experiences when it loses itself in heavenly heights, as it did when it created Gothic art, when Dürer adapted his profoundly expressive figures to

the experiences which saturated his soul. We see rather the attempt everywhere to imbue potential architectural thoughts with human reason, with human, all too human, feelings. We see introduced into the pillars, into the element of support, all kinds of figures which have no architectural function, which originate in human design and are there only for decorative effect. There is no knowledge of the clear distinction between a plastic and picturesque thought and an architectural thought, and yet no power to combine — because of the inability to differentiate between — these different kinds of themes. We see that there is now employed a sham inwardness to support a conception of life no longer filled with its own true inwardness. We enter many a church building whose pillars we no longer understand because they have not been constructed from a study of the objective facts of the world, but betray the fact that people's conception of the cosmos itself in all its spontaneous elementary power has vanished. Here we go along colonnades where pillars have shapes which are not architectural, but picturesque; recesses are marked by pillars in picturesque manner. But the secret and mysterious should speak from such recesses. And the way such pillars have to support what they have to support should look as a secret. We see human saints introduced in the most impossible places, not springing from a spontaneous architectural necessity, by which plastic art and painting grow out of the architecture with inevitable rightness. We see art expressing what has no direct connection with a vision of the world; we see the materialistic conception of the world develop, powerless, however, to create for itself a real, appropriate form of art.

It was not a long way from this to the path which led to the degeneracy of the Baroque style, that style which is so particularly interesting and significant because it shows how this later period desires to live itself out in its own unspiritual way — but how it is unable to find any sort of original artistic thought, but only the thought of the commonplace, with which people are filled and which they can express more or less inartistically. This is particularly clear when the Baroque style is, as it were, taken by force from the Jesuits by Louis XIV and translated into worldly terms. Certainly humanity was always aware that monumental art must be connected with the highest and best of which humanity is capable, when it sinks itself in the universe. But with the new human, all too human, perception, there was intermingled — in a somewhat frigid and academic form — a renewal of antique art, not more than a dash of it, with the Rococo, which we often see mixed grotesquely with the antique. Thus we see, precisely in the art connected with the name of Louis XIV, the apparent severely classical forms concealing all too human Rococo forms, where the human spirit is not seeking admittance to any universal mysteries, however close at hand, but is only desiring to perpetuate its whims and fancies, its everyday feelings and perceptions in the forms which appear around it on the walls.

Thus we see how edifices arose — for certain reasons I do not wish to mention individual buildings, because they are not properly judged by our times and my valuations therefore would not be understood — which, judged by the inner necessities of art, are simply human champagne-whims poured frothing into forms. We see the Rococo Voltairianism of thought reappearing in countless places in the Rococo treatment of artistic form. This, however, is not adapted, like Greek or Gothic forms, to the very essence of man's conception of the world, but is like an external copy of human inner experience.

Then we see, in surveying further the development of human art, that in the eighteenth century a human yearning turns to the past to revive the Greeks — Greek taste, Greek art. We see a spirit such as Winckelmann seeking a truly religious consecration in an understanding of the Greek spirit, of the Greek art-spirit. We see the nineteenth century, inspired by Winckelmann, aspiring to recreate those artistic forms. But the philosophy of materialism was never able to win the power, the inner power, by which what is thought, felt, inwardly experienced, is so deeply thought, felt, and experienced, that it overflows as though of itself into its own forms, as it did with the Greeks, as it did with Gothic art.

Thus we see, in the nineteenth century, that wonderful, yet, after all, curiously superficial, aspiration of an Overbeck, of a Cornelius, to create forms, to create artistic figures, yet without that permeating impulse of a world-vision. Old motifs, old philosophies are hunted out; old ideas are to live again.

It was architecture that chiefly suffered under this powerlessness of modern materialistic thought. Beauty — beauty, in the grand style, was achieved by the architects of the nineteenth century in the revival of antiquity. But everything is prompted by the impulse just described. Study such a wonderful revival of the Renaissance as that brought about by Gottfried Semper — you can study it at the Polytechnic in Zurich — and you will see that it is impossible for the deliberate architectural thought to catch that spirit of which it should be an expression.

Thus we see the time approach, when architecture, with a certain greatness, because it has wonderfully studied old forms and can use them, reveals its impotence in the face of the higher impulses of human development. We see Greek forms, just like an outer husk, built round those great buildings which actually only shame what they do not understand, as many a modern architect has done, when he has evolved Greek forms like husks round modern Parliaments. Or we see architects, with a profound knowledge of Gothic art, yet far removed in heart and soul from Catholicism, build Gothic forms around what should be the essence of the Gothic building, but which is completely foreign to their feeling and perception. Thus we stand before these buildings with a finer sense of art if we can feel: these were built by people who are really far removed in their hearts and perceptions from the sacrifice of the mass and all that is celebrated here.

What a different experience is ours in the buildings raised by those who still had sympathy with the old Christian feelings, common in the times when the Host was elevated for Consecration with different emotions from those of a latter day; what a different experience, where mysticism was incarnate in the building, compared with the cold life of the present age expressed in the structure of the spiritual-social life of humanity; how different are the buildings where, in the fitting in of stone to stone, there is no flowing in of sacred action or of the tremor of emotion in the human soul. One often feels about art of this kind — if one really contemplates art with sympathy — that an atheist is painting a Madonna.

Only from this kind of discrimination could there proceed the impulse to the cultural thought necessary for our building. The old impulses can no longer be brought to that degree of vitality at which they can live themselves out in forms. Anything created in the old forms can only be antiquated. But we may well believe that our spiritual science has such an inner vitality as to be able to give birth to forms of its own; such forms, indeed, as we believe to have proceeded through an inner living process from our spiritual scientific conception of the cosmos, and as desire realisation in our building. These forms should manifest again that connection between art and the cosmic conception, which is inherent in the fact that only he can paint a Madonna who has an impulse in his soul towards the feelings for a Madonna. People to-day cannot feel this impulse in their soul to the extent that they can truthfully create artistic forms from it. If mankind does not wish to reduce itself *ad absurdum* new impulses must come through spiritual science into humanity. We must therefore make a start with new artistic forms which must be the natural fruit of a new world- outlook. Whoever wishes to understand rightly the meaning of the building whose foundation-stone we laid three years ago, must understand it by a living understanding of our spiritual scientific conception of the world, must understand how this, no more than a beginning, flows from a synthesis between a comprehension of heaven and earth, which we call the spiritual scientific conception of the world. This should arise just as Greek architecture sprang from the Greek conception of the earth, and as Gothic architecture grew from the conception of heaven held by mediaeval Christianity. We should be stupid indeed to imagine that anything considerable, in the highest sense, not to mention anything perfect, could be achieved at one stroke. We shall never be able to do otherwise than admit that

what we have begun is very imperfect; a first tentative groping towards forms which must arise and yet in very many ways be completely different from those evolved by our building. But it is at least easy to see from our building that it is a trial of the spontaneous growth of artistic forms from the urge and the perception that pulsate through our vision of the world. It is because so much in it is new that those who will never tolerate anything new cannot understand — and naturally so — anything so different from what has hitherto been experienced in the former kind of plastic art and painting. Only if we humbly see imperfection, and an inadequate beginning in our building shall we develop the right feeling, with which the beginnings of any evolution should be regarded, when the imperfect beginning is nothing but a stimulus to so much that is still to be created.

We have now worked three years at the building, and those whose hearts are bound up with the ideal it expresses will now be filled with a warm sense of gratitude towards all those who have made their sacrifice to bring this about — a sacrifice in one form or another — and who have further expended their energy upon it — for a great deal of beautiful, splendid work has flowed into the building which we see before us on the Dornach hill. If these three years have also brought with them difficult food for thought and difficult experiences for our movement, we can still say: Whatever turn things may take, whatever may be in store for our movement in the lap of Karma — what we have been able to experience in connection with this achievement is precisely a profound experience flowing from the very essence of our movement and can be reckoned among the most beautiful fruits of modern experience. We have seen many a metamorphosis of this experience; we have seen, for instance, many people, like our unforgettable Fräulein Stinde, whose whole heart and whole soul were bent upon erecting this building in Munich, sacrifice their desires with deep devotion in order to participate in the transformation of their plans destined by Karma. Whether the resolutions formed at that time, to effect this transformation, were absolutely right, only the future can show, when the facts prove how far the culture of the present day is taking up the anthroposophical movement. Much of what could be expected is still unfulfilled, and it would sound like foolish boasting if I were to mention only some of the expectations which could rightly be described as disappointed.

The building was there. It revealed even in its outward forms the existence of a movement of some kind. Let anyone turn to the bibliography of our movement in many languages in the educated world to-day, and let him see from it how much opportunity there was of understanding our movement, how much opportunity was given of connecting the building on the Dornach hill with certain essentials in our cultural movement. It was all the more to be expected that, at the present time, which has imposed so severe an ordeal on mankind there should be heard, precisely in view of this difficult time of suffering, expressions of sympathy with the deeper cultural significance of this spiritual scientific trend. Of such voices we can say that not a single one was heard from outside, during the terrible time of suffering and war; only a few isolated voices were raised within the anthroposophical society itself, and, because the outside world showed so little understanding for the movement, these died perforce on the wind.

Thus, to-day, when we wished to look back to some extent on the impulses which inspired us three years ago, we can only pledge ourselves anew and with the greatest solemnity to remain true to that impulse, to win understanding for the contribution of this spiritual scientific conception of the world, and all that it involves, to the development of humanity.

From outside Europe, from distant Asia, opinions are being formed on the European situation which are in a way more illuminating than the war that is raging through Europe. But just these opinions show that the re-birth of Europe is only possible through the spiritual scientific conception of the world. May this eventually meet with understanding. We suffer from the Karma of thoughtlessness, that thoughtlessness which is at the same time I brutal, because it desires everywhere to crush underfoot any glimmering of the spiritual necessities underlying the

development of our time. It is remarkable. The yearnings — as I have often said — are coming to the surface everywhere, yearnings which do not understand themselves because they do not know what they want, and because they cannot, in the brutality of the times, find the way to the vision of the world of which our building is a monument. Whoever contemplates this age at all finds many signs of the times; but they are all signs of longings.

We find, however, a queer fish of a fellow, a simple journeyman carpenter, who is a living refutation, through what he became, of the senseless idea of modern times that spiritual science is only for educated people and not for simple souls. This is a senseless idea; for just the simplest souls are aware of those longings which could actually be satisfied within them if they were not repressed by the so-called brutal culture of the times. What longings are voiced in words like these of a simple carpenter, who has read a few books and taken stock of the aims and possibilities of the present day, and who expresses himself in these lines:

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In the sphere of dream and spirit  
I am now, it seems, absorbèd,  
And there whisper billows, orbèd  
With their countless secrets strange.  
And the sounds of life come welling  
Out of Nature's inmost place,  
Clouds of mist behold dispelling  
From the infinite mystery's eternal trace.

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Let us go out to meet the longings, and find the way to those whose hearts are full of yearning. We can look from this simple journeyman carpenter, a queer fellow, as I said, who tried to fight through from knowledge to contemplation — to the man whom I have mentioned before, Christian von Ehrenfels, who is Professor at the University of Prague, and who attempted in his *Cosmogony* to imagine a "Retrospective Vision," in which we see longing, inclining towards the attainment and acquisition of what can only be attained and striven for precisely through spiritual immersion in a backward-looking vision. The thick night of modern so-called philosophy naturally allows such spirits only a limited vision, while permitting occasional glimmerings to shoot up within them; but the stultifying culture of the age restrains them from an understanding of spiritual science. Their longings get no farther. But these longings are sometimes quite curious. And this *Cosmogony* of Christian von Ehrenfels has a remarkable conclusion. This professor attempted, in his way, to contemplate the world and the course of the universe, he attempted to get a clear conception of the needs of the present day by studying the course of history; and what is his final word? — "In this sense, and from this point of view, I have sought to understand the history of mankind, and have come to the following conclusion — which, however, I am enabled to impart for the first time without the armour of scientific argument, and simply as the result of expectant awareness;

"In God, with the elevation of the human intellect (and probably with similar processes on other heavenly bodies) consciousness awoke and a deepening process began in His activity.

"In, and with man, God is seeking a guiding principle capable of directing this hitherto impulsive creation into paths of conscious design.

"This principle is not yet found."

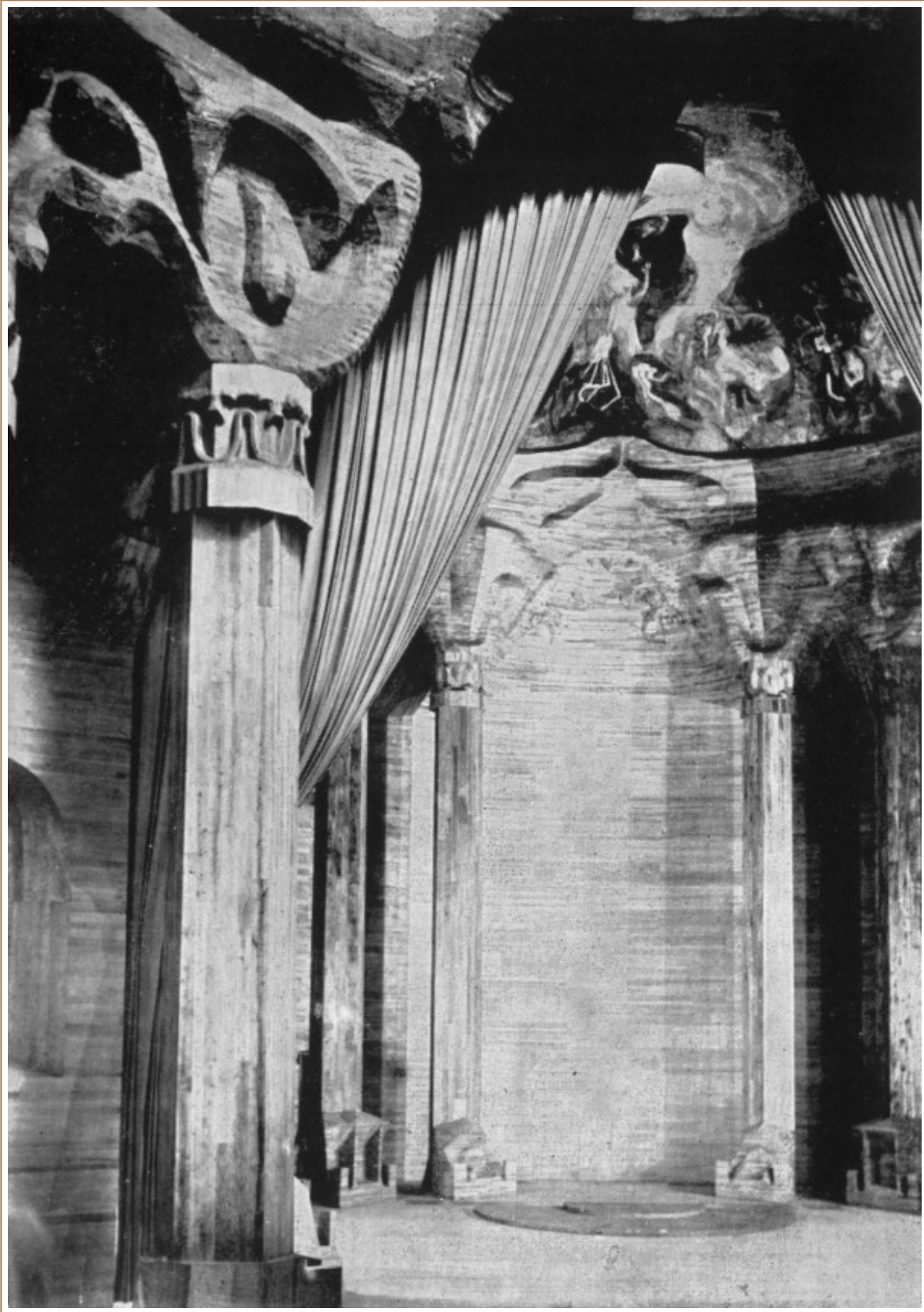
You must remember, such a man naturally calls the nearest spirit he senses his God, as does, for that matter, the whole present age. But he understands from history that he lives in a time when this spirit, near him, has some plan for mankind and stands at a critical turning point. So he says: "In God Himself a phase of deepening has dawned in His activity." He feels so much. "In and with man" (he goes on) "God is seeking a guiding principle." As a man he feels himself incapable of thinking out guiding principles, guiding purposes; but he senses a God who seeks guiding principles "capable of directing His hitherto impulsive creation (the Creation of God) into the paths of conscious design. This principle is not yet found." This is how the book closes: may some God, hovering somewhere about, find a guiding principle somewhere in His impulsive will. This is how a philosophical book ends, and one that has been written in the immediate present.

Wherever we look — the two examples I have taken, that of a journeyman carpenter and that of a university professor, could be multiplied by hundreds and thousands — everywhere we should see that there are longings to be satisfied by the message of our building. When people understand how this building had to be kept free from all conventionality, and that thus only the spontaneous perception flowing from the spiritual scientific conception of the world can be embodied in it — when people understand how, on the other hand, we had to keep ourselves unsullied by that superficial symbolising practised everywhere by abortive, superficially occult societies and societies aspiring to occultism — when people understand, how, between the conventionality and the shallow symbolism of the present day, we had to seek truth in this architectural thought, people will at last discover in this memorial the fruitful seeds and productive impulses of spiritual science.

If, with all that the future may bring forth, we absorb this desire, this experience in our soul, the building will be for us, even in what it has been since it was built three years ago, the beginning that we felt it to be, when we laid the foundation-stone, at a time when we were filled with our spiritual scientific ideals. Let us feel this particularly in the midst of an age in which quite a different impulse is reducing itself *ad absurdum*: let us try to feel how one thing is connected with another: we shall see that we can feel this if we will. Much, indeed, has not yet been brought to pass through this experience. But in many of our souls an honest, genuine will is alive; and this honest, genuine will, if it is true to itself, will add understanding to its honesty of purpose, and then in all our souls there will be formed that other foundation-stone, which will bear into the world, spiritually and in abundant variety, the building that we strove to raise up for our ideal — over the physical foundation-stone which we entrusted reverently to the earth upon this hill three years ago.

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The Stage of the First Goetheanum



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