

Architecture: Toward the New World in Building

Two Federation Shows With Similar Bases

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

ANYONE interested in the kind of traveling exhibition that the American Federation of Arts sends around the country in its large and varied program can catch two in New York this week—one coming and one going, both on architecture.

Leaving Saturday: "The Architecture of Wood," which can be seen at the Architectural League, 115 East 40th Street. Opening tomorrow: "Churches and Temples—Postwar Architecture," in the ground-floor exhibition space of the Pepsi-Cola Building on Park Avenue at 59th Street, through Feb. 1.

In spite of the different titles and subjects both shows are basically about the same thing. "The Architecture of Wood" presents the inventive and expressive ways in which today's architects are exploring new forms, concentrating on a single material. "Churches and Temples" is concerned with the inventive—and expressive—ways, etc., as seen in a single problem, religious architecture. The theme is the strength and the weakness of both shows, as well as of much contemporary building.

No era in history has made the architect so much the creative artist as the mid-20th century. Never have materials been more flexible and responsive or their range wider; just about anything can be built. Of no other age could this be said.

Never have there been more new building types or more freedom in fulfilling a growing variety of functional needs, from rocket installations to corporate palaces. And never has the architect let himself go quite so completely and unabashedly in his pursuit of daring and imaginative ways of using the new materials, techniques and purposes for a brilliant, bewildering and romantic array of buildings, from triumphant to appalling, from success to catastrophe.

By and large, the successes

have been culled for these two shows. There is one overlap, the Newport United Presbyterian Church in Bellevue, Wash., by Grant, Copeland, Chervenak & Associates, an unusually handsome and tasteful structure in a field dominated by acrobatic exhibitionism, that also displays a thoroughly sensitive use of wood.

Building in wood has been a great American tradition. It includes the elegant severity of New England clapboards and the intricate boardwork of the later 19th century "stick style" seen so frequently in country churches and the large Victorian homes of the 1880's.

There are the shingled, turreted forms of the comfortable, rambling houses along the Eastern shore around 1900, and the marvelous rusticity and evocative suggestions of Japan in the beautiful design and joinery of the West Coast in the early years of this century. All of these traditions can be seen in the modern work that is the subject of the exhibition.

Among new uses—churches

in the wood show by Edward D. Dart and in the church show by Victor Lundy, have sweeping laminated arches of considerable dramatic grace and beauty. Plywood is set up like a pack of cards on a frame; wood is forced into pagoda shapes and slung into hammock roofs for houses.

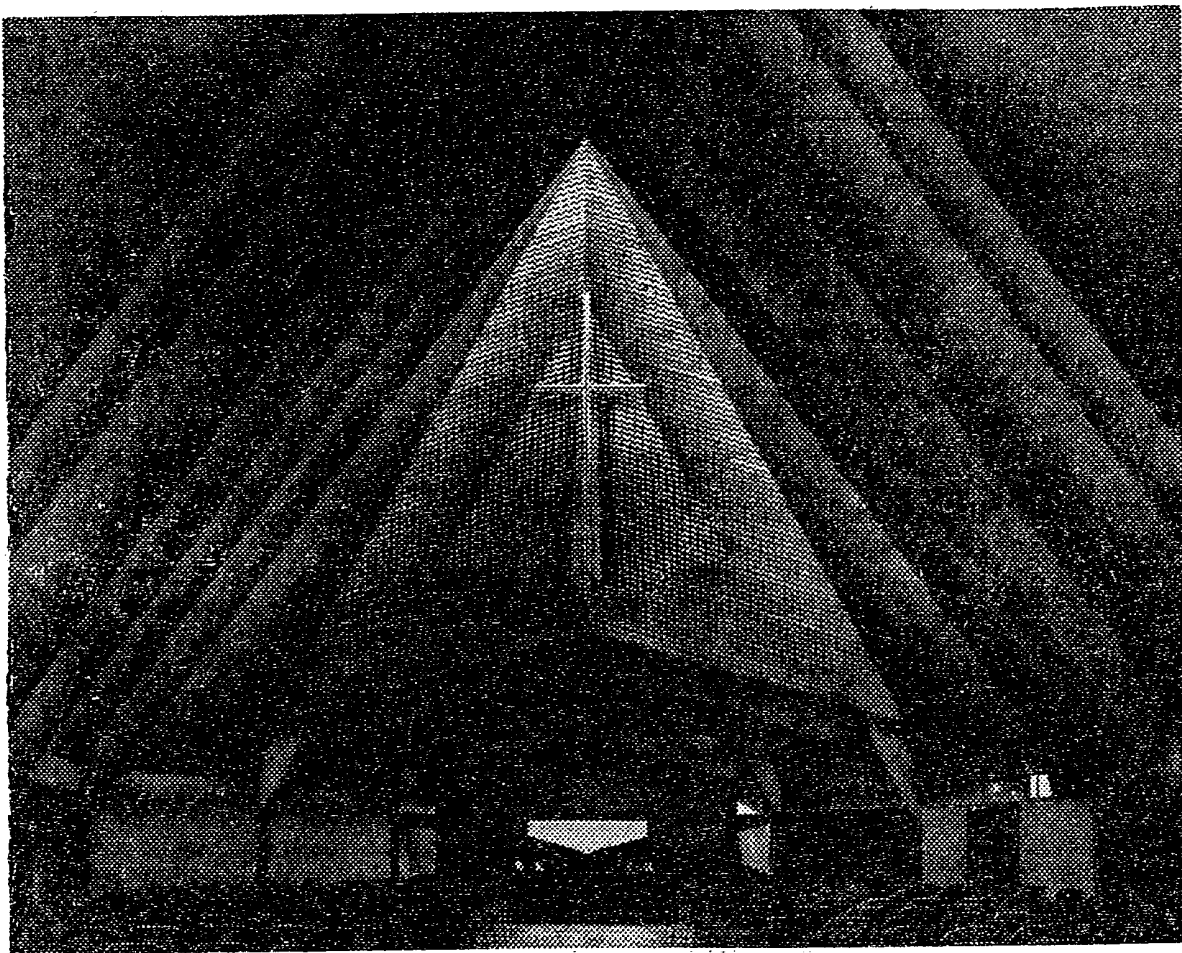
"Churches and Temples" extends the experimental search to concrete, brick and stone. The title panel sums up the range of exploration: from the fussy "updating" of traditional cathedral architecture at Coventry, by Sir Basil Spence, to Le Corbusier's startling revelation of a completely new statement of the religious theme in the chapel at Ronchamp. Between the two lie—and frequently fall—a good number of the 21 examples in the show, which represent about equal measures of striving and success.

The church and temple exhibition was produced by the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Archi-

tects for the American Federation of Arts, with an excellent text by James T. Burns Jr., and handsome panels by John Dixon and Norval White. Its most serious shortcoming is that the selections were made from submitted material, rather than from a comprehensive survey of the field.

The wood show was assembled for the federation by Minor L. Bishop of the Architectural League. The architects were given standard specifications to make up their own panels, an economy measure that is frequently used for these exhibitions. The result is marred and confused by a diversity of lettering sizes and styles, something that could be corrected by specifying type as well as the panel and picture requirements.

It's too bad that the federation doesn't have the budget for more preparation and less pot luck. Both shows are reasonably informative within limits, of the new world that architects are building.



Newport United Presbyterian Church in Bellvue, Wash., which can be seen in two architectural shows here this week. Architects are Grant, Copeland, Chervenak & Associates.