



FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST, LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA
ELMER GREY, ARCHITECT

The Style of Christian Science Church Edifices

BY ELMER GREY

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THE RAPID growth of Christian Science during the last few years and the chance of its equally rapid growth in the future, make the question of the character of its church edifices one that should attract all lovers of good architecture whether they are interested in Christian Science or not. Any one who has been observant must realize that the architectural aspect of our cities is being continually influenced by the rapid multiplication of the churches of this denomination. Many of these structures are very commendable in design, a few are unusually fine examples of church architecture, while it should be admitted that many might have been better. A truism is, that the healthful progress of any art is



THE AUDITORIUM, FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST, LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

furthered by intelligent criticism, by discussion between those who have acquired a more or less reliable judgment in such matters. Though tastes will differ even among critics, without the standard which the consensus of their intelligent critical opinions create, there would be no stable basis upon which to appraise the values of art.

Christian Scientists are slow to criticize, and architectural discussion does not enter into the text of their religious periodicals. Very little on the subject of their architecture has so far appeared in print. This article will attempt to discuss some points which heretofore seem either to have been misstated or not covered.

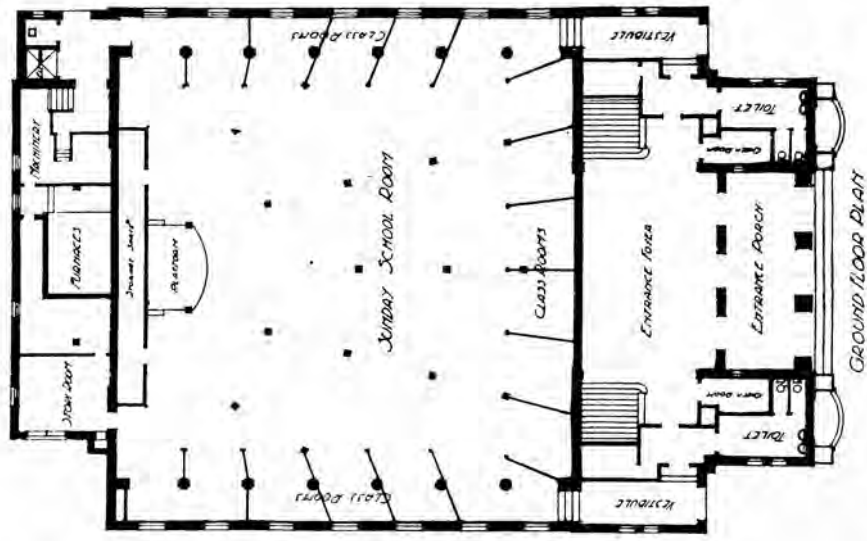
In order properly to consider the style in which these edifices should be built, it should be first borne in mind that Christian Science is, or at least claims to be the type of Christianity taught by Jesus. Ever since the formation of the first Christian Church there have been religions making a similar claim and it is no part of the present purpose to decide whether they were or were not what they claimed to be, or whether Christian Science is such. The pertinent fact here is that the latter faith does not pretend to be anything better than the religion of Jesus and that every Christian religion has also at least striven to be the same thing.

In the year 1 A. D. most of the world was pagan in its belief, and this belief found its most conspicuous architectural expression in the temples of ancient Greece. Jesus' followers first worshiped in cellars, in attics, in any places where they could safely congregate; but finally they became strong enough to erect houses of worship of their own, the first Christian church edifices. These early Christian churches followed the Roman basilicas in form, and these basilicas were not churches but halls of justice. This borrowed form for a church had, in the course of centuries of development, several noteworthy culminations in style, which distinctly showed that its buildings were to be used as churches and not as law courts. One of these styles was the Renaissance, a revival of the old Roman and Greek architecture which reached its highest perfection in such churches as St. Peter's in Rome, or Santa Maria della Salute in Venice. Another was the Romanesque, which is distinguishable by its liberal use of the round arch and the vault. Later on the Romanesque merged into the Gothic. The Gothic, almost losing sight of the motifs of Greek or pagan architecture, developed the arch and the vault to a high state of perfection, and reached its culminating glory in the cathedrals of France and England.

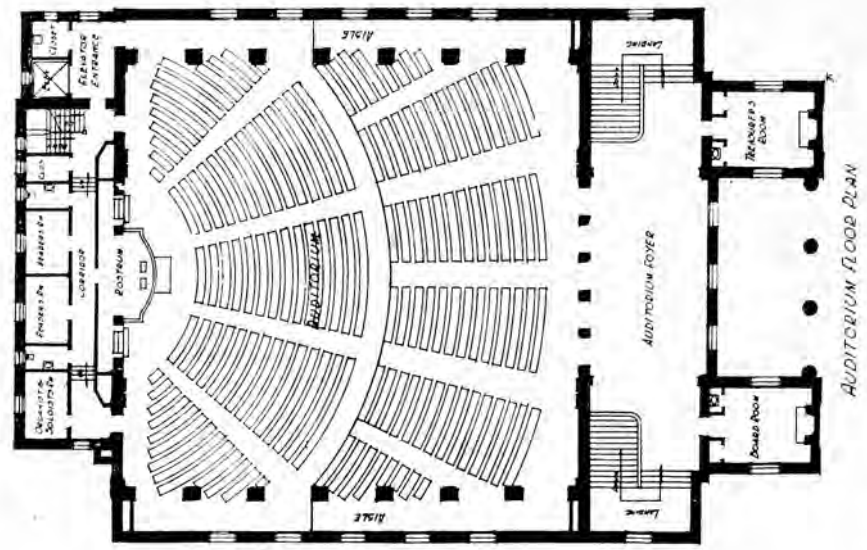
Nothing that has been done in church architecture since has equaled some of these original Renaissance, Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals and churches in point of beauty. They may well be taken as models, therefore, so far as their style is concerned, in designing Christian churches of to-day. This is not, however, what has always been done with Christian Science churches.

Many of them have attempted the Greek idea in their designs, various reasons being given for it. An objection commonly raised to the Gothic style is that it stands for the form and ceremony of the Orthodox church. It is contended that Christian Science is a considerable remove from Orthodox thought, and that this difference should show in the style of its church edifices. But the Renaissance stands for orthodox thought as truly as does the Gothic, as witness St. Peter's in Rome and numberless other Renaissance churches that have been built and are used to-day by one or another of the orthodox church forms. It has also been said that the idealism of Socrates, preached in pagan temple days, was nearer to the Christian idealism of Christian Science than is much of the later religion calling itself Christian, and that for this reason the Greek temples might appropriately be used as motifs for Christian Science architecture. But Greek historians tell us that the rank and file of the ancient Greeks were not at all the kind of people who were likely to have been followers of Socrates. They worshiped the gods and the oracles and participated in obscene rites. It is a question whether Socrates ever used the Greek temples for the purpose of promulgating his philosophy. And even if he did, even if we assume that the Greek temples stand for the thought of a few exceptional Greeks, a return from orthodox Christian thought to theirs would, as an editorial writer in the *Christian Science Journal* (May, 1908, p. 75) once made clear, be no advance.

Notwithstanding this fact, a magazine article once appeared stating that the Greek type of edifice is symbolical of Christian Science. We are glad to be able to give the opinion of a prominent Christian Scientist that there is absolutely no authority for such statement. He writes: "Mrs. Eddy has not, to my knowledge, even suggested that such a type be considered Christian Science architecture. The original Mother Church, built in 1894, upon Mrs. Eddy's suggestion and upon which she devoted much time and energy, is Romanesque. The church in Concord, her gift, erected in her home city, dedicated in 1904,



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



AUDITORIUM FLOOR PLAN



FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST, NEW ORLEANS
SAM STONE, JR., ARCHITECT

is a Gothic edifice. The immense new edifice of the Mother Church, dedicated in June, 1906, is of Italian Renaissance. These three buildings, one her gift and the other two suggested by her, seem to show that she has preferred the type of building which, when seen at such a distance that no inscription or title can be observed upon its face, is known immediately as a church edifice.

"Arguing the question from the point of the reflection of religion upon architecture it can truly be said that the Greek style of architecture is no more the interpretation of Christian Science into architecture than is the New England meeting house. If the Greek type for Christian churches had not appeared in this country or in Europe, and Christian Scientists were the first to erect such edifices then there might be some excuse for stating that they felt it to be typical of their religious belief. But scattered over this country and over Europe are hundreds of churches of other denominations built after the Greek style."

One writer has objected to the Gothic style because of its "symbolism." But all forms of art are symbolic, anything that expresses thought: language, music, all styles of architecture. The Bible is full of it, the Book of Revelations is almost entirely made up of it. It is not a question of symbolism, but of the kind of thought expressed by it. The Gothic for centuries stood for the only form of Christianity then existing. True, it was not Christian Science; but much of it was sincere reaching out for the Christ truth, earnest clinging to all of that truth then discerned; and were it not for those earnest efforts toward perpetuating Christianity, Christian Science might not be known to-day. Symbolism has been used by Christian Scientists in places, and with a freedom which should go far toward warranting its further use. In the original



FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST, GERMANTOWN, PA.
DAY AND KLAUDER, ARCHITECTS

Mother Church the "Director's Rose Window" is almost entirely symbolic. In Mrs. Eddy's room is another window of that nature. "Instead of symbolism declining with the growth of Christian Science," writes one Christian Scientist, "I feel that the case will be exactly the reverse; that there will be other symbols added to those that have accumulated during the last nineteen hundred years, for Christian Science will find new expressions and will take from those of the past the ones which appeal to it as higher types by their suggestiveness of spirituality."

The whole subject of style for Christian Science churches rests upon the question of how much Christian Science is allied to other Christian denominations. On this point Mrs. Eddy has said: "As the ages advance in spirituality Christian Science will be seen to depart from the trend of other Christian denominations in no wise except by increase of spirituality." (Miscellaneous Writings, p. 21.) Since Christian Scientists will be the last to question this statement, does it not seem that their edifices should follow the styles of other Christian churches? More than that, should they not, if possible, be an improvement upon, a perfection, of the beauty of those styles? Surely they should show that Christian Scientists as a class sympathize with the Christian history of the past, should impress outsiders as being the buildings of a great and permanent Christian church organization rather than those of a society having limited sympathies and hence limited capacities for good. Unless they do plainly tell this it should be easy to see how even the religion they represent might often be misjudged in consequence.

The Grecian style would be more acceptable with many for the purpose if it lent itself more readily to modern churchly expression. But the plan of a

Greek temple was so entirely different from that of a Christian Science church plan that it cannot consistently be used as a model for the latter. The arch, the vault and the dome, for instance, were unknown to the Greeks. Their columns and, in fact, their entire buildings were enormous in scale compared with what are required nowadays. They did not superimpose one story upon another as is now done, and their temple halls were always entered from the level. What has resulted when the Grecian style has been attempted for Science churches is really a nondescript, much more nearly resembling the work of the Romans than that of the Greeks. Some examples of it, skilfully handled, have been effective, but few are readily distinguishable as Christian churches and some are travesties on Greek architecture. (See *Encyclopedia Americana*, "Architecture," by Russell Sturgis.)

Just where the Renaissance, the Gothic, the Romanesque, or some other appropriate style should be used is, perhaps, often a matter of taste, but it also should frequently be governed by environment. The style of most of our business buildings is of either Roman or Greek origin (commonly grouped together under the term "Classic"). Such surroundings, and especially if they include tall office-buildings are apt to overpower the more delicate beauty of Gothic design; and often, in such cases, the Classic would be more appropriate. In New York, for example, we know how Trinity has been dwarfed by the tall buildings of Broadway, while the new Madison Square Presbyterian Church, amidst similar surroundings, appears quite at home. On the other hand the Gothic or Romanesque seems peculiarly fitted for suburban localities, where its spires may rise clearly above surrounding objects. No one, for instance, would wish to see Salisbury Cathedral removed from the green fields and spreading trees that surround it to the crowded thoroughfares of that part of London where St. Paul's stands. In such a locality as Salisbury's site, or even in the residence district of a large city where the surrounding buildings are not high, and where there are gardens, trees and lawns, the formal Classic is apt to appear, as compared with Gothic or Romanesque, cold, inhospitable, severe.

Another consideration is geographical location. Some localities have historic traditions or climatic characteristics which not only is it good taste to respect, but skilfully recognizing them often results in buildings that harmonize far better with their environments than do others that have slavishly followed the architecture of dissimilar localities. In warm countries, for instance, no matter what style is followed, because roofs are not required to shed snow they may be made less steep than those of colder climates and because in such countries protection from the sun's rays is often desirable, cornices should project further. In California, suggestions of the architecture of Spain, Italy and Mexico (where similar climatic conditions prevail) have been so successfully interwoven with some architectural work as to have excited widespread admiration, and even to have given rise to the idea that there is being created there a distinctly local style.

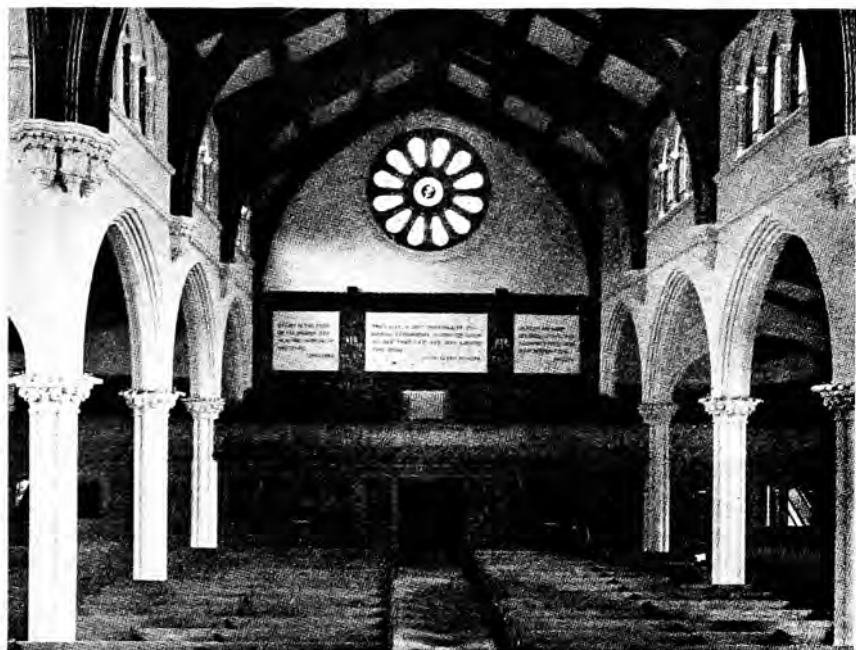
There is a practical side to Christian Science, which finds expression in its church edifices. They are to some extent, not alone places of worship, but also places where its healing work is often discussed. That is, Christian Scientists seem to have more reason than do most people for the informal chat after church meetings. These conditions have been met in many cases by the adoption of a vestibule or foyer enlarged over that usually provided in Christian churches. Oftentimes the basement or ground floor has been used for the

purpose, the main auditorium above being approached through it by means of a stair-well or wells, cut through the center of the seating space. A better way of accomplishing the same result is to have the stairways lead into a vestibule above, from which vestibule the auditorium is entered; the object being to have the auditorium and its approach both on the same level. The most effective way is to have the entrance, the foyer, and the auditorium all on the same floor, but it requires more room, and consequently, sometimes a larger lot and increased expenditure. At least the arrangement by which the stair-wells are cut up through the auditorium floor should be avoided, as it is an undignified way of entering a large audience room and especially a church.

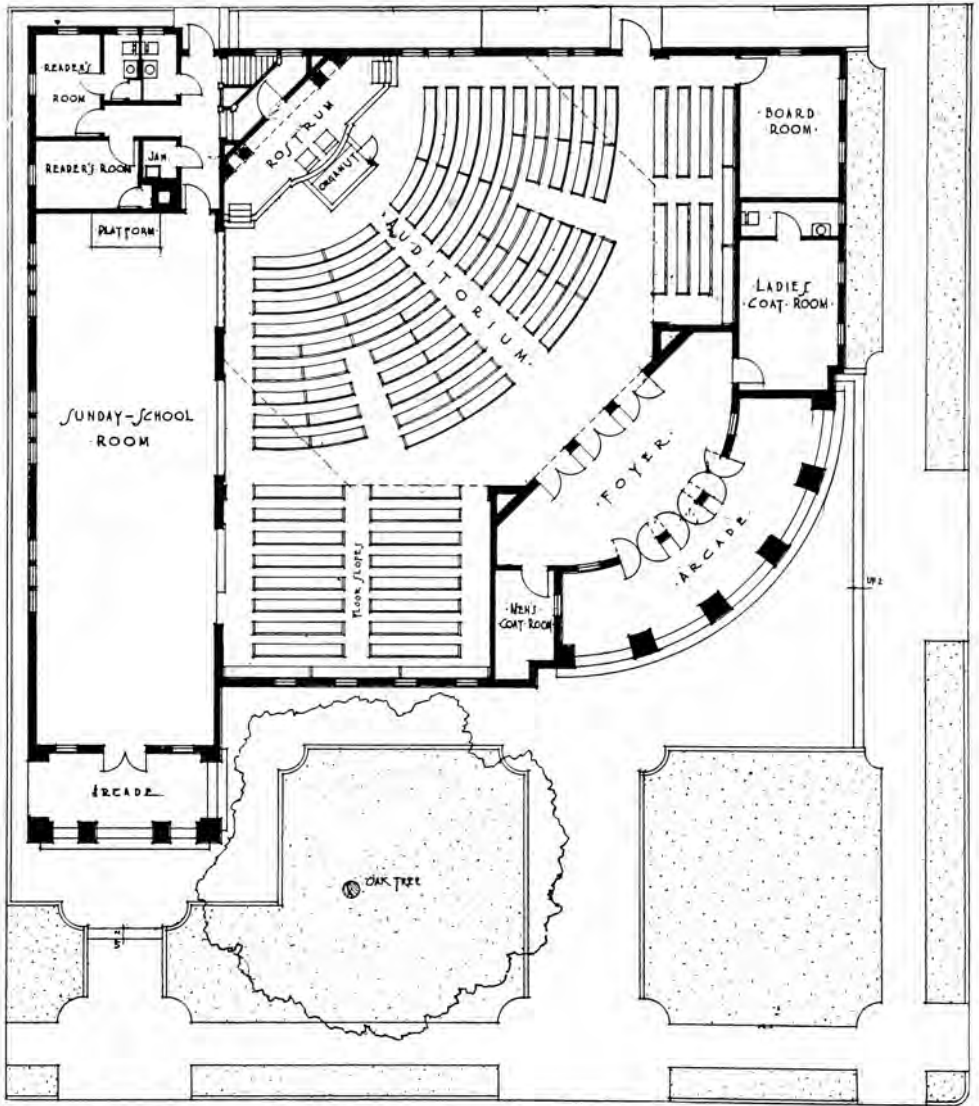
The church at Concord is a good way-mark. It is distinctly a Christian church. That it was done by one of the best firms in the country is attested by their subsequently winning against several distinguished competitors the commission for planning the Union Theological Seminary of New York. Many other cities also have Science churches that are a credit to them and to Christian Science. Recently there seems to be a desire to return to first principles. Many Scientists, as well as many others who are interested in Christian Science, have not been altogether proud of some of its architecture, and feel that its edifices should look less like library buildings, lecture-halls or banks than many of them do.

It is to be hoped that as Christian Science continues to grow, its architecture, by expressing more clearly a broad Christian character, may also grow—in truth and hence in real beauty.

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ALLEN AND COLLINS, ARCHITECTS



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