

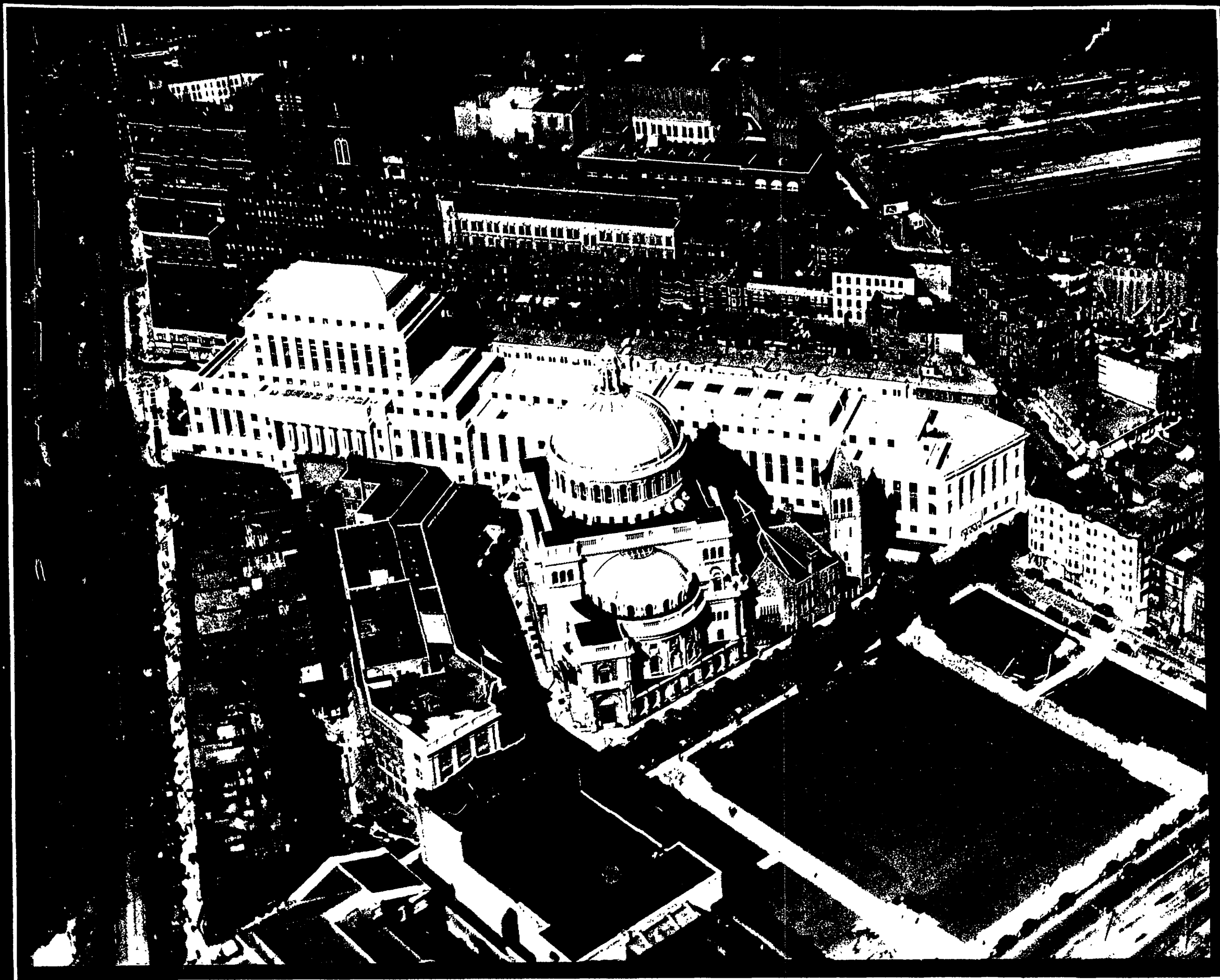
An Architectural Critic Views the New Publishing House

By Kenneth Kingsley Stowell Editor, The Architectural Forum

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THOUGH beauty is proverbially only skin deep, the full beauty of an architectural accomplishment embraces at least the three dimensions, and even the fourth. The new publishing house is an architectural achievement; one that not only commands one's attention and admiration, but which reveals its organic beauty as one progressively enjoys, studies and analyzes it as a vital, living, functioning building. From first impression, as seen incompletely from a distance, to the most painstaking inspection tour, the new home of the Publishing Society gives one the same feeling—that here is architecture, monumental in character, rhythmic in composition, masculine in detail.

One is first struck by the compelling dignity of the building as it masses up behind The Mother Church, its colonnades in harmony with the style of the church, a rich sustaining note of modulated light and shade, a shield behind the more elaborate late Italian architecture of the older edifice. The massing of the tower portion is especially well handled, rising as it does through the transitional stories which form its base as they step back.

In the tower design, as throughout the entire exterior, the best precedent of the Italian Renaissance has been freely drawn upon and boldly interpreted in the modern manner, not in dry archaeological or stereotyped copying of detail. One notes in the capitals of the tower pilasters a fresh variation of the graceful scroll motif so reminiscent of Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome, but here they take on an almost Greek purity and are detailed with the requisite strength to make their character evident even at a distance, for of necessity they must be seen from far streets. The broad frieze above these pilasters is accented only at the corners, and then by chaotic lettering of carefully chosen and expressive words, Peace, Faith, Justice, Health, Love, Purity, Hope and Mercy. The cleanly delineated mutilated cornice is accurately proportioned to the three-storied pilaster order which it crowns. Above this the tower steps back in two attic stories so related to the masses below that they add strength without imposing a sense of weight. The classic antefixa of the final story is a fitting touch of richness forming the transitional element between the limestone and the sloping roof of ochre colored tile.

We may be pardoned for considering the tower thus first in detail, for it is the feature of the building which first attracts attention as one normally approaches the building, but for a more full appreciation of the architecture, we must consider the problems which the architect and his engineers and builders had to solve. The purposes and the limitations imposed must of course be taken into account in formulating an intelligent judgment. In the first

place, the problem is unique in regard to purpose—that of housing a threefold publishing organization engaged in the production of a daily newspaper, weekly and monthly periodicals and bound books—and as the building forms a part of the natural center of interest and affection for all Christian Scientists, adequate and hospitable provisions for the visitors from all over the world are essential.

To provide for the efficient working of all the various departments—executive, administrative, editorial, advertising, engraving, composing, printing, binding, mailing and the others—was a task in architectural planning that required the highest type of analytical mind. The coordination of the departments physically in such a way as to produce the smoothest possible functioning of the organization was finally achieved. While this is not as obvious an architectural accomplishment as a monumental exterior, it is the crux and raison d'être of the entire project; the planning problem comes first, the decorative last. The architectural solution stands or falls on the efficiency of the plan. And the planning is always subject to the shape and size of the lot on which the building must be placed. In this case the plot available was long and narrow, some 600 feet by about 110 feet (and not rectangular at that), a fact which added to the architect's difficulties, for great care had to be taken to provide for the continuous flow of activity to save all possible time and to eliminate all unnecessary travel.

Without going into too detailed an analysis of the plan, the building is divided into two distinct though coordinated parts functionally, physically and architecturally: first, the main portion with its tower and second the continuation which extends on to Falmouth Street. The former provides for the reception and comfort of visitors, for the general, executive, and business offices, and the latter for what might be termed the manufacturing elements.

The main façade is dominated by an octastyle columnar portico which emphasizes the central motif by its deep shadow in contrast with the flanking motifs which echo the columns in their two-story pilasters. The unfuted columns remind one of the later works of Bramante, the more classical of his Roman palaces. A single triglyph over the end columns and the lettering add interest to the frieze of the main denticulated cornice. Above, the incised lettering of the name of the Society serves as the only decoration of the attic. The first story forms the base of the classically proportioned façade, strengthened by horizontal rustications, pierced by the windows and enriched only at the entrances. The triple entrances themselves carry out the strong

Italian Renaissance feeling, though it would be hard to find their exact prototypes in every detail; the designing has been carried out so thoroughly in the spirit of the style rather than the letter. This can also be seen in the splendid bronze twin lanterns which flank these entrances. Paneled bronze doors of quiet dignity admit one to the great reception hall.

Spacious and rich in marble and mosaic, this welcoming lobby consistently derives, in a modern adaptation, from the chosen style. The two-storied motif of pilaster and arch, surmounted with pilaster and centered column, recalls again the inspiration of that master Bramante, who first was daring enough to rest a column over the center of an arch in his court of the Church of Santa Maria della Pace in Rome. But here again the skill of the modern interpretation gives a freshness and vitality expressive of the present. The mezzanine around three sides of the lobby is an attractive feature to which the architectural motif is well adapted.

To the left one enters the large reception room, comfortable and inviting, so simply paneled in dark walnut. The great expanse of its west window gives full view of the refreshing green of the high-walled sunken garden with its walks, fountain and splendid gateway, a welcome oasis and retreat. One can almost imagine that one is in a quiet old Italian palace garden. On the exterior, the garden wall serves to carry on the line of Massachusetts Avenue, which runs at an angle to the street on which the building fronts, an ingenious and attractive solution to an awkward situation caused by the irregular lot.

Off the reception room will be the unique globe-of-the-world room where one passes through this great luminous sphere of glass and bronze, on a bridge of glass and light. The bridge leads to the main stair hall and stairway.

The various offices and their reception rooms open off the elevator lobbies on each floor. Each office and meeting room has been designed for appropriateness to its use so that we find an interesting variety of style and material, from rich antique deal paneling and carving to the simplicity of the most modern expression of the "international style," all of which are described more fully elsewhere.

The building which houses the Monitor printing plant and its services is an integral part of the whole composition continuing the pilaster motifs of the flanks of the main building and crowned by the same cornice. The long central portion sits back from the street far enough to allow an adequate planting strip for shrubs and grass and to insure an abundance of light for the interior working areas. High ceilings, most of them sound absorbing, give a sense of spaciousness and freedom. Even in these entirely utilitarian areas the scrupulous attention to excellence of detail is found.

