

the freedom he needs.

delights: chopped fish, pickled cabbage, rice casser- One thing we Russians have learned about drink-

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New Church Design: 'Rude, Brutal, Military, Uncivilized'

By Wolf Von Eckardt

The big concrete bunker going up at 16th and I Streets NW is a Christian Science Church and as a work of architecture I find it rude and disorderly.

That is not to say that there is anything wrong with building a brutal, seven-story, octagonal tower, with a carillon sticking out like an ear, for holding religious services. The interior may, in fact, turn out to be quite beautiful when the building is completed next spring.

There isn't anything wrong with wearing blue jeans either. But it would be very bad manners to wear them to a formal White House dinner—whether what is inside them is beautiful or not.

And the location of the Third Church of Christ, Scientist—as it is officially known—two blocks from the White House and along its most direct formal approach, is or should be, part of an architectural event of state. Any building that takes part in this event requires some architectural decorum. This is not the place to show off any stunt.

Nor is it only the isolated, almost windowless and arrogantly detached tower, with its concrete bell-studded billboard hanging out, that is out of place. The Christian Scientists are also building an office building on that lot which their architect, Araldo A. Cossuta, a partner of the famous I. M. Pei, treats as an entirely separate entity. He has made it an L-shaped structure that half frames the chubby pillbox with a plaza in-between and a parking garage below.

This plaza, too, is a rude, utterly inappropriate "faux pas." You just don't go around in a handsomely designed city and disrupt the order and integrity of a fine street as though you were out in suburbia.

If the beauty and amenity of the national capital were to require an open space at 16th and I Streets, a short block away from Lafayette Park, you can be sure Pierre L'Enfant would have provided for it in his layout. And quite without the belated help from Mr. Cossuta,

I know. The popular notion has it that cities need more open space. We are therefore supposed to cheer every time a New York skyscraper yields a little set-back plaza in exchange for greater height. But the plazas are becoming vacuous cliches that no one can do much with and Washington is not New York. Washington is essentially a garden city and has, if anything, too much open space in its monumental heart.

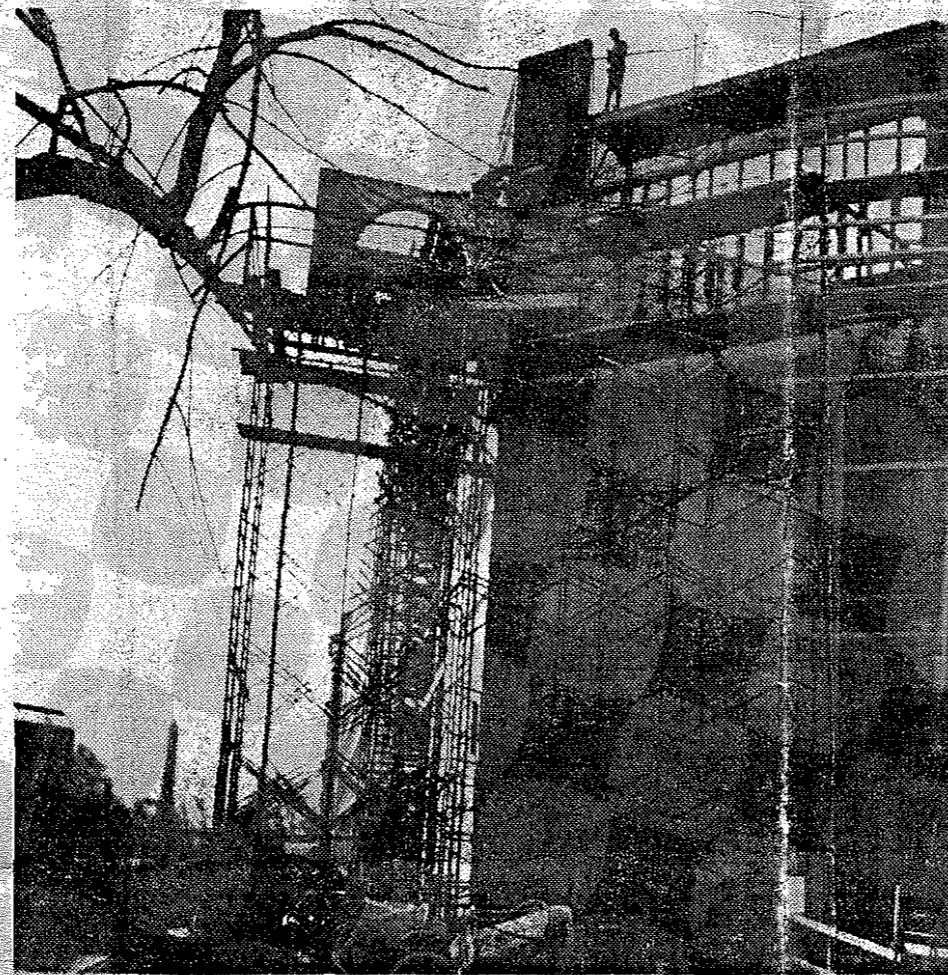
The open space we need is more social space, like playgrounds in Shaw and Anacostia. We don't need the expansive brick pavement with a triangular lawn on it which the Christian Scientists have in store for us. Though I am sure that if this plaza is anything like L'Enfant Plaza, which the same architects designed, it will be very elegant brick

pavement.

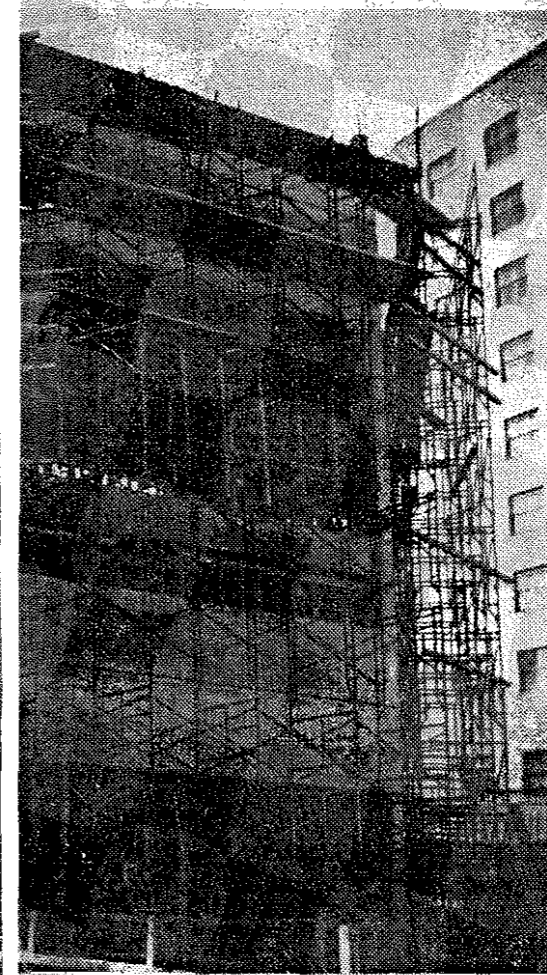
In fact, I. M. Pei and his group are not only famous but also often very good. This "sculptural church building," as Cossuta calls it, is unquestionably ingeniously designed.

There is a skylight all around the perimeter of the roof of the structure, so that great shafts of light flood the walls five stories down to the entrance lobby. The floor of the auditorium on the second level, as well as its balconies seem to float within this dramatic light well. The auditorium is 34 feet high and seats 416 persons. On the fifth floor is a Sunday School for 75 pupils, a lending library and offices. The Sunday School opens out on terraces sheltered by high perimeter walls.

Yes, ingenious. Perhaps even quite beautiful. And



The Third Church of Christ, Scientist, being constructed at 16th and I Streets NW: a "rude, utterly inappropriate 'faux pas'?"



By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

Critique

yet I can't help but feel that all this promising drama might have been expressed with far more humility and far less brutality.

It seems the curse of our age that our artists and architects insist on overcompensating their insecurity with a whistling-in-the-dark kind of bravado. They are whistling, I fear, because they still keep denying tradition and historic continuity in their art and their architecture and are therefore lost. I can just hear the designers play rock 'n' roll at deafening decibels on the drafting room radio as they sketched this assertive bunker.

So what we have here, though perhaps not quite as assertive, is a building some-

what akin in spirit to Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum, a building that might have been superbly daring out on a green hill in suburbia somewhere but that simply clobbers the street on which we have to live with it. And this defiant lack of appropriateness, as someone said about the Guggenheim, seems to me defensible only from the military point of view.

But why should the Christian Scientists and Mr. Cossuta take it upon themselves to defend the White House against a revolution that might march down 16th Street?

New York's Fifth Avenue can take a Guggenheim and Madison Avenue can take Marcel Breuer's Whitney Museum. But I fear for Washington, which is not a city of strong, brutal buildings, of experimentation and

individual self-expression. Raw concrete in unrestrained mega-sculptures and elevated freeways can kill it.

Washington is still the most civilized city in the country (now that they are ruining San Francisco with skyscrapers);—civilized in the 19th century sense, in the sense that motivated Thomas Jefferson and that Pierre L'Enfant surely shared. This view saw civilization in the words of philosopher John U. Nef, as "a condition of humane laws, customs and manners of relatively tender human relations, and of restraints on warfare," as a condition that "engendered the hope, and sometimes the conviction; that man's intelligence was getting the upper hand over his violent propensities."

This view put science and industry in the service of

man's endeavors, but if controlled them. It governed communication and the approach to the design and building of man's environment. It was a view that sought to harmonize things, rather than see them clash for the sake of material progress, innovation and variety.

The tragedy of Washington is that its urban design never quite achieved this harmony, even in the monumental center. At 16th Street and Lafayette Square we almost had it a hundred years ago when both were lined by fashionable townhouses, their brick garden walls defining the square and the street. Benjamin H. Latrobe's St. John's Church—the church of the Presidents—provided all the variety needed without competing with the White House. But that design was never quite completed. There were vacant lots—big holes.

Then came "progress" in the form of the Hay-Adams House which replaced Henry Adams' civilized house on the same site and now it seemed that we might go for a kind of Boulevard Haussmann of restrained hotels and indifferent office buildings with uniform cornice lines and some sort of order amidst reminders of 19th century charm as exemplified by the Tuckerman House. But then the AFL-CIO decided to introduce a rather ugly Mussolini modernity and Jack Valenti of the Motion Picture Association decided to replace the Tuckerman House with a bigger, rather flashy and more profitable building on insipid pseudo-stilts.

Well, we might live with that kind of building if we have to. The trees tend to hide the mediocrity.

But now the Third Church of Christ disrupts the not yet accomplished new harmony with piece of brazen sculpture. Are we off on another round?

I hope not. Why suburbanize a city that wants to and needs to be a city. The concrete sculptor will tell you, of course, that their design is gutsy and exciting and oh so urban.

Would it were also urbane.