



Prayers in Stone: Christian Science Architecture in the United States, 1894-1930

Paul Ivey

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The classical revival style of architecture made famous by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago left its mark on one of the most sustained classical building movements in American architectural history: the Christian Science church building movement. By 1920, every major American city and many smaller towns contained an example of this architecture, financed by the followers of Mary Baker Eddy, the church's founder. These buildings represented a new, burgeoning American institution that appealed to business people and to young men and women working to succeed. Characterized by middle-class congregations that in the early part of the century were over 75 percent women, Christian Science suggested radical civic reform solutions based on an idealistic and pragmatic individualism. It attracted criticism from traditional churches and from the medical establishment due to its rapid growth and to its reinstatement of primitive Christianity's lost elements of physical healing and moral regeneration. "Prayers in Stone" spins out the close connections between Christian Science church architecture and its social context. This architecture served as a focal point for debates over the possibilities for a new twentieth-century urban architecture that proponents believed would positively shape the behavior of citizens. Thus these buildings played a critical role in discussions concerning religious and secular architecture as major elements of religious and social reform. Drawing on a wide range of documentary evidence, including material from the archives of the Mother Church in Boston, Paul Ivey uses Christian Science architecture to explore the social implications of architectural styles and new building technologies, to illuminate class-based notions of civic reform and beautification, and to investigate the use of architecture to bring about religious and social change. In addition, the book explores complex gender issues, including early attempts to define a professional space for women as Christian Science practitioners. Lavishly illustrated, "Prayers in Stone" focuses on four major city arenas of Christian Science building-Boston, Chicago, New York, and the San Francisco Bay area to demonstrate the vital intersection of architecture and religion at the so-called margins of American society.

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