



Evangel United Methodist Church- Symbolism In the Architecture of the Church



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“Approaching the main entrance, one is immediately conscious of the cross and crown above it. One also feels the group of three openings under the wide spreading arch: and perhaps wonders at the grotesque animals sort of thrusting themselves out at each flank of the archway. These are evil spirits seeking to keep the worshipper away from the cross. Then one’s mind rests with a feeling of delight in the group of seven bays filled with translucent glass above the entrance, which in turn is arched with segmental Gothic forms that lift into the heights the peaks of the gable in which is set a niche protected by an overhead canopy.

“The cross and crown is readily understood by most people, the cross as standing for the sacrifice of Golgotha and this naturally means love, the love that Christ had for the people for whom he gave his life. The crown is an emblem of victory for it is the prize for which every Christian should be striving, not in the sense of a reward such as we look upon it here, but in the sense of satisfaction in having the power to, and being given the opportunity to sacrifice for others that they may live. At the foot of the cross are four flowers, each flower divided into four petals. The numeral four has always stood for the world. Any square form is collapsible. It can be formed into a rhomboid or distorted in many different ways and therefore is a very fitting number for this representation, because you and I are very susceptible to fluctuations, variations and distortions. Therefore these four flowers as representatives of the world are placed at the foot of the cross. In contrast with this figure four, think of the figure three which represents the Trinity. You know that the figure three is indivisible except by the unit one or by itself. The triangle is a strong form that cannot be collapsed and it is therefore used by engineers in the building of trusses, bridges and long span construction. The figure three of the triple units appear everywhere about the church. If you will look carefully you will find it in various forms and various shapes.

“In this connection it would also be well to refer again to the main entrance. Here you find three openings. Three openings standing, as indicated above, for the Christian faith and for the open door that is provided through the Christ to new life. You will notice that in these three openings there are four doors; in other words, it is necessary for us, through our earthly life, to prepare ourselves for the better life or the later life that we talk so much and dream so much about.

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“Above the entrance arch you will find three bays in the center panel of the window flanked with two other bays on each side, making a total of seven in all. Seven has always been recognized as a complete number; witness the seven days of the week, the seven years of the old period of grace of the Mosaic regime, and numerous other applications which will come to your mind.

“Upon entering the church, you will find that the figure two, that is, ornamentation in pairs, appears occasionally along with the division in three. Two has always stood for male and female principles throughout life, and has stood for the two contending things, good and evil striving one against the other, and for that which is terrestrial and that which is celestial.

“It is to be noted that numerous shields have been used about the decoration. The shield is a decorative feature that came gradually into ornamentation. It began back in the days of chivalry when the knight would come in and hang his shield and sword at the entrance before entering into holy place, then later, after he had become a hero and he had accomplished some special deed, then his shield was given a place of honor within the nave of the building and sometimes in the sanctuary.

These shields emblazoned with armorial bearing gave considerable color to the medieval settings in which they were placed. This has come down to us and appears in the decoration of the modern Gothic structures. In the two canopies in the upper part of the organ will be found some foliated ornaments, which to the unobservant will just simply mean ornamentation, To one who looks well he will notice there is a cross member so that in each facet of the canopy there appears a foliated cross. Note well this is not the cross of Calvary, which is straight, sever, drab, even nude in its starkness, but it is flariated, the beautiful cross of the Easter morn, the day for which the Christian sings praises to the risen Lord. I repeat, not the cross of Calvary but the cross of the risen Lord.

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“In the windows themselves, facing backward toward the balcony, you will find that the right and left of the first windows opposite the platform Alpha and Omega, Greek letters for the beginning and the ending. In the next windows are a sheaf of wheat and a bunch of grapes, representing the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. In the next window stands the shield of Luther, At least the emblem that he adopted as his seal which represents in this particular interpretation as the time and period when the shackles were stricken from the Christians’ ankles and wrists so that they might worship as they might worship as the believed was the proper way, in the true interpretation of the scriptures. Opposite this symbol is the open Book, very fitting that it is set opposite this other emblem of freedom. In the last window under the balcony is found the anchor of hope and the crown, in this particular use most appropriately symbolizing faith.

“In the main window over the entrance one finds an oil lamp and a star, indication that light which you and I may carry about with us for the benefit of our neighbors, and that light which sets above in the heavens that we may all have the pleasure of seeing alike, the star being indicative that even in the darkest period of the twenty-four hours light is given us. Between these two emblems is placed the two tablets of stone, reminding us of the ancient law, and above it the open Bible on which is emblazoned what has been called the little Bible. John 3-16.

“Shields, patterns and crosses are used in various forms. The foliated decorations are conventionalized forms of the vine leaf and the leaf of the oak.

“All the decorative forms are not subject to symbolical interpretations, but it is interesting to state that the normal church, divided as it is by vestibule, auditorium and choir, stands for the ancient narthex, nave or shop and sanctuary. Here the number three appears again. So one might carry on and elaborate this description, but it would also be possible to read interpretations into things that really do not belong, the above emblems and the architectural forms as suggested with their derivations are true interpretations of symbols as they have been developed and established by Christian thought.

“Modern thinking and modern teaching will in due time develop their symbols also, although the necessity for this language is past, in that everyone reads and writes, which was not the case when Gothic architecture bloomed forth in the most exquisite architectural sculpture and decorative forms as exemplified in the Cathedrals of the Old World.”