

Three Buildings, Three Ages

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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THREE worlds—past, present and future—meet in one of New York's most unusual vistas. It is formed by an old church and a new skyscraper seen together with Buckminster Fuller's "geodesic" dome, one of the startling structures currently on exhibition in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art.

Representing the past is St. Thomas Church, whose soot-blackened stone walls and stained-glass windows stand, in this picture, just beyond the dome. This nineteenth-century church in the Gothic style, at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-third Street, provides through its traditional, massive masonry a spectacular foil for the present.

Speaking for that present is the starkly simple, modern skyscraper at 666 Fifth Avenue. This building replaces the traditional brick and stone with steel and aluminum, permitting the thirty-nine-story office building to soar higher than the most aspiring Gothic cathedral. Because its stamped metal walls are factory-produced, it has a flat uniformity characteristic of much architecture today.

THEN, suggestive of the future, there is the revolutionary plastic dome shown in the foreground of the picture. It holds the promise of buildings even lighter, stronger and larger than the steel-framed skyscraper of today. Constructed according to the most advanced engineering principles, it confronts the viewer with an unconventional shape, an abstract geometric design, in sharp contrast to the machine-made wall patterns of the present and the hand-carved Gothic traceries of the past.

This dramatic juxtaposition shows three ages of architecture at a glance.

