



SPIRITUALITY IN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

Twelve Years of the Walton Critic Program at The Catholic University of America

EDITED BY JULIO BERMUDEZ

Foreword by Thomas Walton

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INTENTION: Take 1

Our first and foremost task in life is to take hold of our spiritual destiny. ‘Spiritual destiny’ or ‘vocation’ are not words that are encountered often in educational circles. Nevertheless, we are beginning to see a concern in education that opens up the possibility of considering education as a spiritual venture.

Edmund O’Sullivan¹

How does spirituality enter the education of an architect? Should it? What do we mean by ‘spirituality’ in the first place? Isn’t architectural education a training ground for professional practice and, therefore, technically and secularly oriented? Is there even room to add something as esoteric if not controversial as spirituality to an already packed university curriculum? The humanistic and artistic roots of architecture certainly invite us to consider dimensions well beyond the instrumental, including spirituality. But how would we teach such a thing? And why, if spirituality is indeed relevant to learning architecture, have we heard so little about it?

“*Spirituality in Architectural Education*” addresses these and many other important philosophical, disciplinary, pedagogic, and practical questions. Grounded on the twelve-year-old Walton Critic Program at the Catholic University of America School of Architecture and Planning, this book offers solid arguments and insightful reflections on the role that “big questions” and spiritual sensibility ought to play in the architectural academy today. Using 11 design studios as stopping grounds, the volume takes the reader into a journey full of meaningful interrogations, pedagogic techniques, challenging realizations, and beautiful designs. Essays from renowned architects **Craig W. Hartman**, **Juhani Pallasmaa**, **Alberto Campo Baeza**, **Claudio Silvestrin**, **Eliana Bórmida**, **Michael J. Crosbie**, **Prem Chandavarkar**, **Rick Joy**, **Susan Jones**, and **Daniel Libeskind** open new vistas on the impact of spirituality in architectural education and practice. All this work is contextualized within the ongoing discussion of the role of spirituality and religion in higher education at large. The result is an unprecedented volume that starts a long-awaited conversation that will advance architectural schooling. ACSA Distinguished Professor **Julio Bermudez**, with recognized expertise on spirituality in architecture, will be the guide in this fascinating and contemplative journey.

¹ Edmund O’Sullivan, “Emancipatory Hope,” in *Holistic Learning and Spirituality in Education*, eds. By John P. Miller, Selia Karsten, Diana Denton, Deborah Orr, and Isabella Colalillo Kates (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), 69-78, citation in p.70.

INTENTION: Take 2

Spirituality is behind the best examples of architecture across space and time. In fact, it may well be what originated it — if we understand architecture to be more than physical shelter. The archeological evidence of Göbekli Tepe in Southeastern Turkey, a temple built for the worship needs of large numbers of prehistoric people, strongly supports this possibility.² Built 6,000 years before Stonehenge and the Giza Pyramids, more time had passed between when those ancient structures were built and Göbekli Tepe than between them and us! And ever since, the most accomplished works of architecture, regardless of place or culture (at least until the late 19th Century), have been overwhelmingly associated with spiritual drives. This is a fact that architecture educators and practitioners readily accept. Yet their consent doesn't translate into an openness to spiritual engagement. The reason may have to do with the way we approach those masterpieces: dispassionately, analytically, and, therefore, safely. Perhaps, we need to engage architecture, the world, and reality in ways that are intimate, open, and empathic. But who wants or needs to engage architecture or spirituality in such a personal way in our secular age?

It takes something extraordinary within to accomplish something extraordinary without. We know this to be true in our bones but, somehow, we need to keep reminding ourselves, don't we? And, if we sense this to be true, if we think, feel, or know that spirituality is at work in our best architecture (even today's), shouldn't we reexamine our discipline's attitude towards it?

For twelve years the Walton Program has been working with the conviction that spirituality is an important part of learning how to profess architecture. Because of its novel and untested nature, this effort started as and continues to be an ongoing experiment in architectural education. For this reason, traditional metrics may not be the best way to evaluate its success — not to mention that experiments may fail. Perhaps, the authenticity of the effort and what it teaches us should be used instead. By documenting eleven experimental trials and as many reflections, this book seeks to raise awareness, spark discussion, and offer a precedent for the role that spirituality can play in training future architects and, transitively, practice. May this work be a contribution, however small, to a world in dire need of spiritual sensibility.

²“Göbekli Tepe” in UNESCO World Heritage. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1572/> . See also Andrew Curry, “Gobekli Tepe: The World's First Temple?” *Smithsonian Magazine* (Nov 2008). URL: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/gobekli-tepe-the-worlds-first-temple-83613665/> (accessed Jan 19, 2023). Charles C. Mann, “The Birth of Religion,” *National Geographic* 219, no.6 (June 2011): 34-59.