

An Unusual Manifestation of Spirituality: Kamppi Chapel of Helsinki

Authors : Emine Umran Topcu

Abstract : In both urban design and architecture, the primary goal is considered to be looking for ways in which people feel and think about space and place. Humans, in general, see a place as security and space as freedom and feel attached to place and long for space. Contemporary urban design manifests itself by addressing basic physical and psychological human needs. Not much attention is paid to transcendence. There seems to be a gap in the hierarchy of human needs. Usually, social aspects of public space are addressed through urban design. More personal and intimately scaled needs of an individual are neglected. How does built form contribute to an individual's growth, contemplation, and exploration? In other words, a greater meaning in the immediate environment. Architects love to talk about meaning, poetics, attachment and other ethereal aspects of space that are not visible attributes of places. This paper aims at describing spirituality through built form with a personal experience of Kamppi Chapel of Helsinki. Experience covers various modes through which a person unfolds or constructs reality. Perception, sensation, emotion, and thought can be counted as for these modes. To experience is to get to know. What can be known is a construct of experience. Feelings and thoughts about space and place are very complex in human beings. They grow out of life experiences. The author had the chance of visiting Kamppi Chapel in April 2017, out of which the experience grew. The Kamppi Chapel is located on the South side of the busy Narinkka Square in central Helsinki. It offers a place to quiet down and compose oneself in a most lively urban space. With its curved wooden facade, the small building looks more like a museum than a chapel. It can be called a museum for contemplation. With its gently shaped interior, it embraces visitors and shields them from the hustle bustle of the city outside. Places of worship in all faiths signify sacred power. The author, having origins in a part of the world where domes and minarets dominate the cityscape, was impressed by the size and the architectural visibility of the Chapel. Anyone born and trained in such a tradition shares the inherent values and psychological mechanisms of spirituality, sacredness and the modest realities of their environment. Spirituality in all cultural traditions has not been analyzed and reinterpreted in new conceptual frameworks. Fundamentalists may reject this positivist attitude, but Kamppi Chapel as it stands does not look like it has a say like "I'm a model to be followed". It just faces the task of representing a religious facility in an urban setting largely shaped by modern urban planning, which seems to the author as looking for a new definition of individual status. The quest between the established and the new is the demand for modern efficiency versus dogmatic rigidity. The architecture here has played a very promising and rewarding role for spirituality. The designers have been the translators for human desire for better life and aesthetic environment for an optimal satisfaction of local citizens and the visitors alike.

Keywords : architecture, Kamppi Chapel, spirituality, urban

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