Notes on the Calling of on Architect

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I. INTRODUCTION

Architecture is the unavoidable art. Nobody has to listen to music, go to museums, or attend the theater. Everybody, however, must live with architecture. Virtually all architecture is public architecture because its external forms are part of everybody's landscape. Thus, architecture is important among the arts and the enterprises of society.

II. THE UNIQUE CALLING OF ARCHITECTURE

In a good society, all people have a right to health care, equal justice, freedom of religion, and an environment of order and beauty. Health is the province of the profession of medicine. Justice is similarly the responsibility of the calling of law. Truth, in its eternal aspect, is the interests of the clergy. The ordering of the environment, similarly, is the duty of architects.

The Roman writer, Vitruvius, identified the basic elements of
architecture as, "commodity, firmness and delight," words that are familiar to every freshman architect. Commodity refers to the appropriate deployment of spaces and parts. Firmness refers to constructional reliability and durability. Delight refers to beauty. In Vitruvius, *venustas* implies attention to two things: first, attention to precedent, custom, and propriety; second, the appeal of pleasure and sensual delight. The concept of beauty is not always Vitruvian. For instance, modern artists do not pay much attention to propriety. Beauty is, nevertheless, a persistent and ubiquitous value around which the arts gather.

The first two legs of Vitruvius’ tripod—functional efficiency and constructional skill—are technical and engineering matters. Architects deal with these factors constantly and are expected to have a high degree of competence. But in our society they share the responsibility for these factors with engineers and technicians of many kinds, who are often equally or more skillful and responsible. But the third leg is uniquely the architect’s province. Nobody in the construction industry—engineer, builder, financier, or technician—has a burden for a beautiful environment. Beauty is attached solely to the profession of architecture.

III. CLASSIC VALUE IN ARCHITECTURE

Vitruvius identified the elements of architecture; there is another classic triad naming the values against which architecture can be assessed: Goodness, Truth and Beauty. Goodness in a work of architecture can be seen in how well it meets its purposes—good like a servant can be good. More importantly, a building can be like a good host, offering generosity, grace, and dignity—all those things associated with hospitality. In contrast, buildings can be impersonal, overbearing, boring, and even brutal.

Architecture can deal with truth in the senses of both authenticity and integrity. At the simplest level, materials must be genuine and the structures appropriate to them. The complexity of the question recognizes an internal integrity relating all the features of a building as a whole, as well as a contextual integrity relating a

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2. See id. at 8. Vitruvius’ understanding of *venustas* as inclusive of propriety is developed frequently and at length. See id.
Goodness and truth are ethical and metaphysical issues related to an architect's obligations to society. Creating environments that are both good and true is very difficult. The need for knowledge, skill, sensibility, and understanding is limitless. Architects can undertake to deal with goodness and truth because they are definable, at least in theory.

Beauty, on the other hand, is a mystery. It cannot be formulated, synthesized, defined, or rationalized. Beauty is recognized, discovered, or apprehended, not by the mind, but by the sensibilities at levels of consciousness other than reason. It is affective, not discursive, and it is infinite in variety. To set a high value on beauty is in the nature of being human and of a humane society.

Architectural registration laws generally obligate the professional with the protection of the "health, safety, and welfare" of the public. No direct mention is made of beauty. Perhaps this is because beauty is hard to define, is such a personal experience, and is so often subject to dispute that to use the word in a legal context would be foolish. Yet, enthroned, surrounded by other benefits, within the word "welfare," sits beauty.

There is a remarkable analogy between the beautiful and the holy. Both are mysteries; the encounter with each is intuitive, not rational. Each is infinitely diverse and discovered or revealed, not invented or achieved. Beauty is surely the only good metaphor or symbol of the Divine. For these reasons, priests and artists are so often companions.

There may be no direct path on which architects can meet their public calling to supply beauty. Andre Gide wrote in a commentary on a work of Saint Exupery, "A man's happiness lies not in freedom but in his acceptance of a duty." Others have also observed that happiness is a byproduct. And so is beauty. Beauty is a butterfly—to grasp at it is to miss it. People who work hard at capturing beauty most often achieve the sentimental, the bathetic, the trite or the merely attractive.

Architects still have goodness and truth on which to concentrate their minds and efforts. It is likely that Eric Gill's statement is an architect's best hope. "Take care of truth and goodness," he
said, "and beauty will take care of herself." Thus, an architect must pay intense and profound attention to all aspects of the useful, the hospitable, and to a comprehensive understanding of integrity in order to arrive at beauty.

IV. SOME PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

The architectural expressions of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty are discerned through understanding, sensibility, and taste. Although the ability to discern is one which architects are supposed to possess in higher degree than their clients, this is not always true. Even when it is true, some clients dispute their architect's judgment. Serious disagreements are not expected, however, because clients who care about these values usually choose likeminded architects. Some architect-client relationships are terminated, however, because of disagreements. For instance, a famous architect once resigned from a church commission because the controlling bishop required that a basement level be provided under the place of worship. To the architect this was a breach of integrity. He asserted that when people assemble to do such a serious thing as entering the presence of God their feet should be on the earth.

Architects are not often called on to make such elegant decisions. But because their efforts also focus on matters of efficiency, durability, and many other factors included under Vitruvius' *utilitas* and *firmitas*, they are inevitably involved in compromises. Like politics, architecture can be called an art of the possible.

To be licensed by the state is to accept a fiduciary responsibility for the public good, and it is a burden that many architects take seriously. One result is that a considerable quantity of pro bono work is done for the public good. Architects answer their public calling by serving on public boards, commissions, and other public service projects where their training and skill are an advantage.

5. ERIC GILL, BEAUTY LOOKS AFTER HERSELF 245 (1933).