

LE CORBUSIER: Nothing is transmissible but thought

The following was written by Le Corbusier one month before his death. It is the last thing he ever wrote.

It reads like an autobiographical monograph, like an intellectual testament, or like the dialogue of a man with himself in act of summing up his life's work. The following text is an excerpt.

I am 77 years old, and my moral philosophy can be reduced to this: in life it is necessary above all to act, and by that I mean to act in a spirit of modesty, with exactitude, with precision. The only possible atmosphere in which to carry on creative work is one in which these qualities prevail: regularity, modesty, continuity, perseverance.

I have already written somewhere that constancy is a definition of life, for constancy is natural and productive. In order to be constant, one must be modest, one must be perseverant. It is a mark of courage, of inner strength, a property of the nature of existence itself. Life comes into the world through the agency of human beings, or if you will, human beings come, are born by life. In this way all kinds of events come into being. Consider the surface of the waters ... Consider also the entire world rounded by the azure sky replete with the good that men will have achieved ... far, after all, everything returns to the sea. And, when you finally get down to it, the dialogue, the basic confrontation, can be formulated like this: man alone face to face with himself, the wrestling of Jacob and the angel within the human soul. There is only one judge. One's own conscience, that is yourself. One may be a nobody or a somebody, but one can go from the repellent to the sublime. It depends on each individual, from the very beginning. One can choose the worthy direction, one can act from one's conscience, but one can also choose the opposite: interest, money.

My entire life has been taken up with discoveries. It is a question of choice. One can drive wonderful Cadillacs or Jaguars, but one can also be passionately devoted to one's work. The quest for truth is not easy. For truth is not to be found at the extremes. The truth flows between two banks, a tiny rivulet or a mighty torrent ... and different every day. As for me, I have devoted fifty years of my life to the problem of housing. I have brought the temple to the family, to the domestic hearth. I have re-established the conditions of human nature in the life of man. I never could have achieved what I have without the wonderful assistance of the young people in my atelier, 35, rue de Sèvres: passion, faith, integrity. I thank them all. It will remain there, everything we have done a useful sowing. Perhaps in years to come, they will think a little of Père Corbu, who now tells them: „We work in terms of our conscience ... The human drama unfolds within this closed circle.

The monument of the Open Hand, for example, is not a political emblem, a politician's creation. It is an architect's creation; this creation is a specific case of human neutrality; whoever creates something does so by virtue of the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, ethics, aesthetics

all unified together in one single sheaf: a house, a city. This Open Hand, symbol of peace and reconciliation, is to be erected in Candigarh. This emblem which has haunted my thoughts for many years ought to exist to bear witness that harmony is possible among men. We must cease preparing for war, the cold war should cease providing a livelihood for men. We must invent, decree the projects of peace. Money is nothing but a means.

There is God and the Devil, the forces confronting us. The devil is simply in the way: the world of 1965 is capable of living in peace.

There is still time to choose, to equip ourselves rather than to arm.

Yes, nothing is transmissible except thought, the crown of our labour.

This thought may or may not become a victory over fate in the hereafter and perhaps assume a different, unforeseeable dimension.

All this happens within a brain, gets formulated and grows little by little in the course of a life that flits by like a vertigo, the end of which comes before we realize it.

Paris, July 1965