



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARCHITECTURAL FORM AND MEANING IN SANTA THERESIA CATHOLIC CHURCH, JAKARTA, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

As a reaction to the phenomenon of the desacralization of Catholic church architecture after the Second Vatican Council, many studies have examined the relationship between the liturgical activities and the architectural form of the Catholic church. However, the research that addressed the issue about the meaning of Catholic Church's architectural form is still a rarity. This study aims to explicate the meaning of architectural form in one of the oldest Catholic churches in Jakarta, Indonesia, namely the Santa Theresia Church. The analytical steps were to describe all the composition and property in each scope of the building, then interpret the meaning that is expressed based on the theory of meanings in architecture. Based on this theory, it can be seen whether the meaning displayed by the Santa Theresia church architecture tends to be perceptual, cultural, or ideological. The analysis showed that the dominance of the Catholic symbol supported by site composition, building mass, the inner space and building elements act as the basis for the appearance of the divine ideological meaning. In addition to enriching the realm of substance and methods of architectural knowledge, this research is also useful for practitioners and stakeholders involved in the design of the Catholic Church

Key words: Architecture Church, Form and Meaning, Elements

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council was the 21st ecumenical council, which was opened by Pope John XXIII on October 11th 1962 and closed by Pope Paul VI on December 8th 1965 [1]. This period was marked by the increasingly strong growth and development of the post-war Church. The council, which aims to enrich and strengthen the Catholic faith, raises two critical points: Firstly, the spirit of renewal (*aggiornamento*); and secondly, awareness of the importance of active participation (*participation actuosa*) of all faithful about their role in the Church and liturgy [2].

Decision makers and practitioners who design new churches [3] often misunderstand this spirit of renewal. This is shown through the architectural form of Catholic Church, which is considered not capable of expressing the sacredness of liturgical activities. In fact, this spirit of renewal is not meant to change the basic structure of the liturgy; so that similar principle should also apply architecturally. The fading of sacred expressions on the Catholic Church's architectural form is a matter of concern to the highest leadership of Catholics, Pope Benedict XVI, especially in the form of Church architecture with modern styles [4].

Desacralization in the form of Catholic church architecture also rise the concerns of academics. This is indicated by the number of studies that have reviewed the relationship between liturgical activities and the architectural form of the Catholic church. [5-9] One of the existing studies on the Catholic church in Jakarta reviews the suitability of liturgical activities with the form of Catholic church architecture. In the study, it was stated that the architecture of the Santa Theresia church is one that is in line with its liturgical activities [10].

Although the research is a comprehensive review of how architectural forms are able to support liturgical demands, there has not yet been an in-depth discussion of the aspects of meaning expressed by architectural form of the church. This understanding becomes important because the success of an architectural work cannot be separated from how one experiences architecture and understands the meaning expressed by the architectural form [11]. This academic publication aims to continue and complete existing research on the architecture of the Catholic church by exploring the relationship of liturgical functions and architectural forms of the Catholic church with its meaning. Through these research, the meaning as expressed by the architectural form of catholic church could be analyzed in-depth. This resulted in the understanding on how the building composition and its properties were influential in creating a sacred atmosphere.

This study is expected to benefit the knowledge of religious architecture theory, especially the architecture of the Catholic church in Indonesia. Specifically, the benefits obtained are: Firstly, this study presents the possibility of holding other studies with similar characters. A large number of academic publications certainly could enrich the realm of substance and methods of architectural knowledge, especially the knowledge about the architecture of the Catholic church. Secondly, through the identification of the meaning and its relation with the form of Catholic church architecture, it can be known the meaning of what is expected to be expressed by the architectural form. Similarly, the architectural composition and property, which is capable of expressing the specific meaning, could also be identified. Thus, this research is also beneficial for practitioners and stakeholders who are involved in the design and construction of the Catholic Church. This is important because in line with technological developments, the shape of the Catholic church's architecture will be increasingly diverse.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Case study

As stated in the introduction, the study discusses the form of Therese church architecture. In 1930, the city of Jakarta was expanded by developing the Menteng and Gondangdia areas, so that catholics who inhabited the area had to travel a considerable distance to reach the only Catholic church in that period, the Cathedral church. Departing from the need for the presence of a church that is close to the area, the management of the Cathedral church then looks for a site to build a church. The church which was in the parish classification and fostered by the Jesuit priests appointed Saint Therese (Theresia) to be the protector of the parish, so that it was known as the Saint Theresia Church [12].

Saint Theresia Church was built in 1933 based on the design of a Dutch-born architect, J. Th. Van Oyen. Unlike the Cathedral Church which shows a variety of Neo-Gothic ornamentation, the economic crisis at that time led to a simplification in the design of the Theresia Church; which appeared in the Modern Indische style. Until now, this church is still functioning well; as well as the shape of the building has not changed much because this building is also included in the classification of cultural heritage buildings [13]. Here is the location [e.g Fig. 1a] and a 3-dimensional picture of the Santa Theresia church building [e.g Fig. 1b].



Figure. 1a. Location of Santa Theresia Church

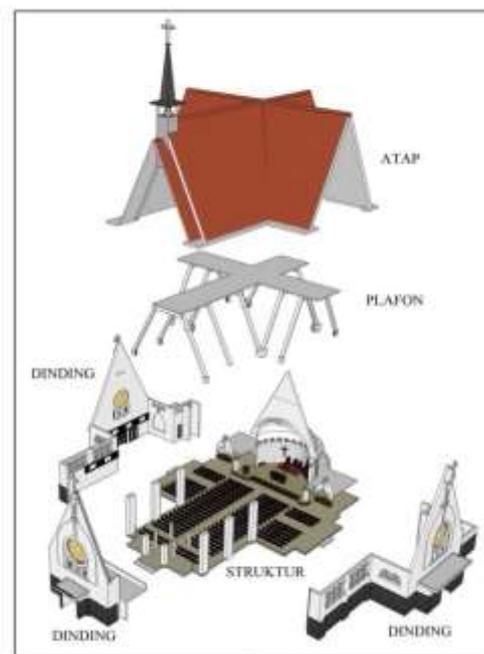


Figure. 1b. Three-dimensional drawing of Santa Theresia Church

3. METHODS

This research was based on the theory of architectural function-form-meaning proposed by Salura [14]. The creation of architectural works is based on the need for a container of activity that also expresses specific messages. Whether the designer intended to communicate the message or not, this message is always interpreted by the observer and users. The interpretation process allows observers and users to reveal the meaning behind the expression of building's architectural form. It could be said that the architectural form is analogous to a sign that expresses a certain meaning.

Based on this approach, the steps to analyze the case study were arranged as follows:

Firstly, to describe the composition (position and configuration) as well as the building element properties [15]; both observed in the context of its environment, site, and building's interior [16,17]. Based on this description, it can be seen whether the building is dominated by composition or by its properties.

Secondly, to interpret the meaning expressed by composition and building properties. Various meanings expressed through building forms can be classified into three [18]. First is the perceptual meaning that tends to be universal, regardless of the influence of the background and understanding of observers regarding the function of the building. Secondly, in addition to the universal meaning, it is believed that a culture rooted in a specific society will greatly influence the meaning of humans towards architectural work. In other words, the interpretation of architectural work is strongly influenced by an observer's knowledge of cultural values. In this layer, the meaning that emerges is cultural meaning. Thirdly, in addition to both, there are also ideological meanings, which based on knowledge about the results of agreements (conventions) that apply in certain societies.

Religion is considered as one of the conventions in society. In connection with its function as a place that accommodates sacred activities, the important aspect of the church building is determined by the sacredness expressed by the building [19]. Ideally, the architecture of the Catholic Church building is able to convey a specific ideological meaning of God which specifically contains Catholic values. Moreover, the building of the Catholic church acts as a place for liturgical activities, in which the celebration of the liturgy forms the foundation of the Catholic Church itself [20, 21]. Thus, the composition and all building properties of Catholic Church must be able to bring all faithful to this awareness.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The analysis of building composition and properties in the environmental and site scope

The church site is triangular and separated by three main roads. This position supports the church building to be seen from a distance. From the overall shape of the building, the most dominating view is the tapering shape of the roof of the tower with the Catholic cross at its peak [e.g Fig.2]. The tapered roof is not only an icon of Gothic architecture; it is also universally believed to be a symbol of human desire to "reach" the sky so that it is closer to God. Therefore, generally religious buildings use a roof like this. The cross itself is believed to be the most sacred symbol in Catholicism; because it is believed to be a symbol of Christ's victory.

Entering the site, the presence of open space in front of the building with a large distance allows the building to be observed as a whole. Thus, visitors can see all building elements, which ornamented with the Catholic symbols. In addition to the roof of the tower, which is, now seen more clearly, the windows on the side and face of the building dominate the view

(e.g. Fig 3). Right at the top of the door, there is a window with a combination of circle and square shapes. With the pointed arch (pointed arch) on the wall, the shape of the window characterized Gothic style architecture. At that period, tapered arches aimed to create an upward (vertical) impression, so that it could be interpreted as a composition for religious building that contains sacred activities. In addition to having similarities with windows that breathe Gothic architecture, the shape of this curved window symbolizes the unity between humans (which is illustrated in a square shape), and the circle forms which represent God. The combination of both symbolizes unity between humans and God. In the window there is an ornamentation with a flower with a large circle surrounded by 12 (twelve) elliptical shapes called the *rozet* windows. At the bottom of the circular window, there are three glass windows; the window in the middle part depicts a Christmas star as a symbol of the birth of Jesus Christ, and the writings of S and M as an abbreviation of Santa Maria in the right and left window.

Based on this analysis, it could be interpreted that both observed at a distance in the context of the environment and in the context of the site, the most dominant form of the building expressed the meaning of Catholic values and ideologies.



Figure 2. Santa Theresia Church in the context of its environment (observed from a far)



Figure 3. Santa Theresia Church in the context of its environment (observed from a far)

4.2. The analysis of building composition and properties in interior space and building enclosures

The floor plan of Theresia Church resembles the shape of a cross with the elongated side facing the southeast-northwest side. The church building can be accessed through three entrances (e.g. Fig. 4). However, when going to follow the liturgy, people are encouraged to enter through the main door of the building in the middle of the building's facade. Cross-shaped plans that tend to be symmetrical with the entrance positioned on the axis allow the position of the altar and liturgical equipment to be identified very clearly.

Observed from the church entrance, it can be seen that there is a column as a support for the balcony, which also signified the boundary between the *narthex* (less sacred area) and nave (sacred area). From this point, it could also be observed the aisle as the axis which gives the impression of being elongated, and towards the sanctuary with the altar that is at the end of the axis. The separation of *narthex-nave* area, which is only marked by columns but without walls, confirms the spatial hierarchy without breaking the visual sequence. Thus, when the people make a sign of the cross before entering the nave area, they can look directly at the altar and the cross of Jesus that is not exactly one axis with the altar, but on the left side of the altar. On the opposite side of the cross of Jesus there is a tabernacle. It also appears that a half-domed roof (e.g. Fig. 5) shades the entire sanctuary (the most sacred area). The roof intersects with a rectangular wall. This form can be interpreted as a symbol of the union of God (which is symbolized by the form of a circle) and human (which is represented by a rectangular form).

In Catholicism, liturgy is carried out in five stages, which include preparation stage, opening rites, sermon, Eucharistic liturgy as the culmination of liturgical celebrations, and closing rites. All stages in the liturgy symbolize the human journey from the profane to the sacred in order to receive God's plan of salvation. In the Santa Theresia church, the *narthex* area as a place of preparation has a lower elevation compared to the *nave*, while the altar as the place for liturgical celebrations is positioned at the highest elevation (e.g. Fig. 6). This hierarchy is not only distinguished by elevation, but also through the use of floor covering material which tends to be rough in the *narthex* area until it becomes finer in the *sanctuary*. Thus, the composition of spatial configuration, the building elements, as well as the difference between each properties can also play a role in conveying the symbolic meaning, that the faithful is carrying out a spiritual journey that starts from the profane to the sacred realm.

5. CONCLUSIONS

From the result and discussion on the meaning of triangular shape in Indonesian moque and Sundanese culture, this paper concluded as follows. Firstly, the triangular shape can be accepted as the form of mosque architecture, due to the meaning of the triangular shape in Sundanese culture and also has relation to the symbolical meaning in Indonesian vernacular mosque. Secondly, from formal aesthetic approach revealed that the triangular shape does not derived from church architecture but as A-frame construction that could be found in vernacular architecture and the common roof style in tropical region. Thirdly, architectural form of Al Safar mosque beside designed with the concepts of form derived from the Sundanese physical culture that is traditional headband and diamond cut chape, but with output that shows the triangle shape composition, could be related to the symbolical meaning of triangle shape in Sundanese culture. Fourthly, the results of this research could be used as an input that would enriched theoretical and empirical knowledge on the basic shape of contemporary architecture in Indonesia. Fifthly, study of the meaning of a form, will

enrich the repertory of architectural forms, becoming more diverse according to the very colorful Indonesian cultural conditions.

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