

LINKING SACRED PLACE WITH NATURE: RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE OF TADAO ANDO AND RIDWANKAMIL

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Abstrak

Bertentangan dengan perspektif umum tentang tempat suci, yang wacananya biasanya mengecualikan alam dan lingkungan, tulisan ini mencoba untuk menghubungkan alam dengan tempat suci. Artikel ini menegaskan bahwa perspektif manusia tentang Tuhan pada dasarnya tidak mengecualikan hubungan manusia dan lingkungan. Alam adalah manifestasi dari Tuhan, dan manusia—sebagai bagian darinya—dapat mengekspresikan manifestasi tersebut ke dalam praktik ibadah dan ritual keagamaan. Dengan berfokus pada kajian seni keagamaan Tadao Ando dengan Gereja Air-nya dan Ridwan Kamil dengan Masjid Al-Irsyad-nya, artikel berusaha memotret bagaimana ekologi memiliki keselarasan dengan arsitektur keagamaan dan bagaimana perspektif ekologis seirama dengan ritual keagamaan. Tulisan ini juga akan mengulas konsep ekologi dengan melacak keterkaitannya pada keutuhan, intuisi, dan persepsi afektif dari kesakralan dan interkoneksi semua kehidupan. Pendek kata, ekologi yang mendalam mencoba untuk “menghidupkan kembali” persepsi manusia tentang dunia alam.

Kata Kunci: Arsitektur Keagamaan, Gereja, Masjid, Ekologi, Alam

Abstract

Contrary to common perspective of sacred place, which usually excludes nature and environment from its discourse, this paper attempts to link nature with sacred place. This paper asserts that human perspective of God does not essentially exclude human's linkage with environment. Nature is manifestation of God, and human—as part of it—can express the manifestation into practical chains of religious worship and rituals. Addressing religious art of Tadao Ando with his Church of Water and Ridwan Kamil with his Al-Irsyad Mosque, this paper aims to describe how ecology deals with religious architecture and how ecological standpoint fits to religious rituals. This paper will also refer to the concept of deep ecology that traces connection to the wholeness, intuition, and affective perception of the sacredness and interconnection of all life. Simply, deep ecology tries to “resacralize” human perceptions of natural world.

Keywords: Religious Architecture, Church, Mosque, Ecology, Nature.

INTRODUCTION

In his book, *Art and Architecture of the World Religions*, Leslie D. Ross (2009) define religious art as “any and all visible manifestations of belief.”¹ It is a very broad definition, but is necessary because religious beliefs and practices have been visually manifested in a great diversity of forms. However, the art of the sacred places—such as temples, shrines, synagogues, mosques, churches, and other worship environments constructed by human—has regularly been main topic or fascinating

issue among religious believers. To some extents, religious architecture was regularly ingrained with specific interpretation of religious doctrines.

In line with this, John R. Hinnells says “architecture determines the nature of worship conducted therein.”² In Christianity, for instance, the architecture of Catholic Church differs from that of Protestant Church and the architecture of GKJW Church varies from GPIB Church. In Islam, the architecture of Persian Mosque is different from Indian Mosque and the architecture of Indonesian Mosque is unique than Iranian Mosque. Differences do not only

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¹ Leslie D. Ross, *Art and Architecture of the World Religions*, (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2009), xv.

² John R. Hinnells, *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 516.

occur in the cross cultural and religious realm but also within the same culture and believe with different interpretation.

Some people assume the sacred place as a holy place that influences and shapes human connection with God. In Islamic tradition, it is often supposed to be the House of God (*Baitullah*) which should be managed and threatened holistically and divinely. Eventually, it excludes natural existence as a “profane” being. Currently, churches and mosques are regularly covered and protected from outdoor environment and nature. People overlook that the one who makes these places sacred is human itself. For this reason, Michael J. Crosbie reminds us, “We build our sacred places to God, to saints and mystics, to all that we deem holy. Yet we ultimately create them to deify ourselves. Into them we pour our hopes, dreams, fears, and wishes. Through them we hope to petition a creator whom we dare to impress with our own creations. These shells of faith then live beyond us in time and space.”³ When we perceive that we build the sacred places for God, essentially we build it for ourselves. The sacred space makes us human. Sociologically, the sacred place gives us an empty place to construct our dreams, imaginations, and perceptions of the ultimate being beyond our world. This is why the sacred places human create, such as church and mosque, are always fascinating.

To explain possible linkage between religious architecture and nature, this paper will attempt to connect what people say as the sacred place with the nature surrounds it: the sacred place and the public space. I believe that nature is manifestation of God. Deep ecology teaches us that human being is part of nature and they can express their manifestation into practical chains of religious worship and rituals, including religious architecture. In this context, I will capture Tadao Ando’s work, the Church of Water, and Ridwan Kamil’s work, Al-Irsyad Mosque. In this paper, I will explain

³Douglas R Hoffman, *Seeking the Sacred in Contemporary Religious Architecture*, (Ohio: The Kent State University Press), x.

how ecology deals with religious architecture and how ecological standpoint fits to religious rituals. This paper will also refer to the concept of deep ecology that traces connection to the wholeness, intuition, and affective perception of the sacredness and interconnection of all life.

THE SACRED AND THE NATURE

It is rather difficult to connect ecological perspective with religious architecture. What Mircea Eliade stated as “the sacred” and “the profane” becomes a very basic deliberation and restriction for some people to separate between worshipping God and understanding nature.⁴ It drives people to distinguish religious adoration (sacred), including religious architecture of the sacred place, from the nature (profane). To counter this perspective, this paper captures two religious architecture from Christian and Islamic tradition to be a sample for linking religious architecture and the nature. The first is Tadao Ando’s work of Church of the Water which is perceived as “one of its most successful achievements which uses nature as an element involved in the design.”⁵ The second is Al-Irsyad Mosque, Ridwan Kamil’s work, in Bandung. This building was selected as “Five Buildings of the Year 2010” in the category of religious art.

*Tadao Ando and the Church of Water*⁶

Before his interest in architecture and building design, Ando has worked for several years (from 1951 to 1958) as a carpenter. He was working and learning to master wood design in the Japanese tradition. Ando was born in Osaka, Japan, in 1941. His work on architecture was begun when he obtained the books of Le Corbusier.⁷ At the time, he was

⁴ See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of the Religion*, (Florida: Harcourt Inc., 1987).

⁵http://en.wikiarquitectura.com/index.php/Church_on_the_Water

⁶In this chapter of Ando’s biography, I mostly refer to Charlotte Bell, “Tadao Ando Architect of Light”, *Journal of Modern Design and Architecture*, Fall 2005.

⁷Le Corbusier was born on October 6, 1887, and died on August 27, 1965. He was internationally influential Swiss architect and city planner, whose designs combine the functionalism of the modern movement with a bold, sculptural

about 18 years. Nevertheless, there are many architects that influenced Ando's talent, such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Alvar Alto, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Louis Kahn. Besides his self-motivation and self-taught, Ando apprenticed for brief periods with local designers and city planners. He drives himself by learning to the other's work and by reading, studying Japanese shrines and temples, and making study trips to view, sketch, and analyze some great buildings of the time.

In 1969, for the first time, Ando opened his architecture firm. He needed about seven years to be famous and well known by others. He attracted the world by making small row house in urban Osaka called *Azuma House*.⁸ From this time, Ando considered *Azuma House* to be one of the "point of origins" for his successive works. He stated his approach in *Azuma House*, by connecting the art of building to the art of living. Eventually, this principle became his perpetual vision. In his own words: "I try to relate the fixed form and compositional method to the kind of life that will be lived in the given space and to local regional society."⁹ Ando's concern to the nature, the life, grew from this small project of architecture. We can analyze

expressionism. He was the first architect to make a studied use of roughcast concrete, a technique that satisfied his taste for asceticism and for sculptural forms. His books, whose essential lines of thought were born of travels and lectures hardly changed at all in 45 years, constituted a bible for succeeding generations of architects. Among the most famous are *Urbanisme* (1925; *The City of Tomorrow*, 1929), *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches* (1937; *When the Cathedrals Were White*, 1947), *La Charte d'Athènes* (1943), *Propos d'urbanisme* (1946), *Les Trois Établissements humains* (1945), and *Le Modulor I* (1948; *The Modulor*, 1954). (See <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Le-Corbusier>).

⁸The house is a simple, narrow concrete rectangle with living spaces surrounding an interior courtyard. The design serves two purposes. First, the plain unpunctuated façade creates a private barrier between the urban street and the interior living spaces, offering respite from the hectic city life. Second, the inner courtyard opens to the sky, admitting abundant light and providing a direct connection with the outdoors. The open courtyard allows residents to experience nature without the distractions of the city. Ando's intention in creating this design was to return to a traditional Japanese life-style of "contact with light, air, rain, and other natural elements" within the confines of a small physical space. The house, in essence, reinstates a traditional model using a modern vocabulary. In 1979, Ando received the top prize of the Architectural Institute of Japan for *Azuma House*.

⁹Charlotte Bell, "Tadao Ando Architect of Light", p. 2.

here that Ando attempted to construct the linkage between urban life with the natural experiences.

Ando designs are unique. It is independent of any movement or school of architecture. He builds his own vision of architecture based on the dynamic of the nature: light, wind, water, etc. He is playing with juxtaposition design. Charlotte Bell says that Ando's work "flows from inside to outside, across levels, and through space." Indeed, Ando's work is timeless and universal. Although the primary material of his work is concrete, but he uses also crafted wooden form and combines it with large faces of glass and steel frames. In addition, he often juxtaposes these elements with natural rock and flowing water.

One of his most successful works which uses nature, especially water, as element involved in the design is the Church of Water in Hokkaido, Japan. In this building, Ando sustains his concern to link religious architecture with the nature. Like the church of light, the church on the water shows Ando's emphasis for combining "a simple but masterful concepts on the profane and the sacred, the artificial and natural, and closed above the vacuum and infinity."¹⁰ When the common church usually have pictures of a certain divine religious significance in the front wall, Ando replaced it with the water: the nature. He seems to remind us that the nature is a more powerful and brighter representation of the God: the creator of the nature.

To portray the design of the church of water comprehensively, here I quote several passages from acrhdaily.com:

"To the west, the church is surrounded by hills and trees, and a resort hotel lies to the east. The church, with a form of two overlapping cubes, faces a large pond which steps down towards the small natural river. The larger of the two cubes serves as the chapel, and meets the entrance of the smaller cube with a semi-circular spiral

¹⁰<http://architectuul.com/architecture/church-on-the-water>

staircase. In order to separate the church from the hotel that rests behind it, a long, L-shaped wall runs alongside the south and east of the buildings that line the edge of the pond. To gain entrance to the church, the visitors enter under a glass and steel cube at the northernmost end which houses four large concrete crosses that pull the gaze upwards. The path leads up and around these crosses, and then down the connecting dark spiral stairway into the larger cube of the chapel below. Upon entering the chapel, visitors are struck with the view of the pond and surrounding trees and hillside through the operable glass wall. The other three walls are made of concrete, which also frame a steel cross placed in the middle of the pond.”¹¹

Ando succeeded to connect between the indoor religious place with the outdoor natural space. The water, as a representative of natural element and the creation of God, presents itself in this church as part of “religious symbol” within “religious worship”.

Ridwan Kamil and Al-Irsyad Mosque

For the people of Bandung, Ridwan Kamil is not only an architect but also a politician. Since 2013 he was elected as a major of Kota Bandung with his vice major, Oded Muhammad Danial. He was born in Bandung, October 4, 1971. He earned his bachelor at Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB), 1995, and continued his master degree at the University of California, Berkeley, 2001. With his colleagues, he founded *Urbane*, the firm for architecture design in Bandung. As an architect, Ridwan has numerous achievements, such as Top Five Best Building of the Year from ArchDaily (2010), the winner of International Young Design Entrepreneur of the Year from British Council Indonesia (2012), Web Heroes for Indonesia Berkebun from Google Chrome (2012), Indonesia Green Award “Penghargaan Penginspirasi Bumi” from Green Building Rasuna Epicentrum (2012), etc.

His concern to the nature inspired him to run the green project and urban farming under

title of “Indonesia Berkebun”. This movement drives and encourages people to understand, save, and retain the nature. This movement deserves to get Web Heroes from Google Chrome in 2012. In his architecture, Ridwan contains ecological and natural perspective as significant element. One of his green buildings that link the architecture with the nature is Al-Irsyad Mosque, Bandung. This mosque was elected as Top Five Best Building of the Year from ArchDaily (2010). In its official website, ArchDaily describes Al-Irsyad Mosque:

“The architecture of the KBP (Al-Irsyad) Mosque is unique in that it uses stacked stones as the main façade to create tectonic effect, while embedding Islamic text/calligraphy on the façade as a graphic element and reminder prayer. The primary shape of the mosque takes the form of a square, which seems the most efficient since Muslims pray in straight rows facing a specific direction or the *Qiblah*. The structural columns are arranged in such way that the façade seems like it is not supported by any frame. This shape also alludes to *Ka’bah*, the most important structure in the Islamic world, to which all Muslims’ prayers are directed. The tall pole-like structure next to the square building form is called the minaret, an important element for mosque. It was used in the past for someone to call out to all Muslims to prayer on top of the minaret whenever prayer time has come. Today, the minaret still serves the same function, except loudspeakers used instead. In a way, the minaret has become an icon of mosques; anyone searching for a mosque can one from afar. With a capacity to accommodate approximately 1,000 people, the mosque is also designed to “blend in” with nature. The stacked stones allow for natural ventilation without the need for air-conditioning. Surrounded by water, the ambient temperature around the mosque will be lower during the hot season. Once

¹¹<http://www.archdaily.com/97455/ad-classics-church-on-the-water-tadao-ando>

inside, the people are able to look out and appreciate the external scenery.”¹²

ECOLOGIZING THE SACRED

Looking from the discourse of deep ecology and Gaia, we can say that Tadao Ando and Ridwan Kamil’s work can witness possible connection between religious architecture and ecological concern. Religion should not be separated from the nature. This work can also bridge paradigmatic distinction between the sacred and the profane, between religion and ecology.

Explaining the theory of Gaia, Bruno Latour gives us two extreme choices: ecologize or modernize. *Ecologize* means that industry and technology should consider natural existence and sustainability, while *modernize* means that focus of human progress is modernity: human dignity. This theory shows us contemporary essential paradigm on seeing modernity and ecology. Currently, human life challenges the industrial development, which tends to eradicate natural consideration. Indeed, it causes environmental crisis.

Modernization places nature, to some extent, face to face with industry. In other word, having modern society drives human to disregard natural and environmental sustainability. In this context, discourse of anthropocentrism emerges. Human being put themselves as a center of nature, and become the one who is responsible for saving life. In their perspective, God creates everything for human’s sovereignty and dignity. For some believers, this faith has been legitimated by religious texts. Based on religious doctrines, they easily exploit and destroy the nature only for their advantage and profit. Mary Evelyn Tucker elucidated this phenomenon on his article, “Overview of World Religion and Ecology”:

“Others such as the medieval historian Lynn White have suggested that the emphasis in Judaism and Christianity on

the transcendence of God above nature and the dominion of humans over nature has led to a devaluing of the natural world and a subsequent destruction of its resources for utilitarian ends. While the particulars of this argument have been vehemently debated, it is increasingly clear that the environmental crisis presents a serious challenge to the world’s religions. This is especially true because many of these religions have traditionally been concerned with the paths of personal salvation that frequently emphasize other worldly goals and reject this world as corrupting.”¹³

In their works, Ando and Kamil insisted that must be a connection between religious architecture and the nature. Ecology should be involved in the realm of religion. In the design of the church of water, Ando has incredibly put the nature as the main element of the architecture by involving water as a main focus. In Al-Irsyad Mosque, Kamil construct his architecture by connecting the building with the environment and nature around it. There are at least three points which capture this connection.

Firstly, Ando and Kamil are replacing religious ornaments and pictures which are commonly placed in front of the main wall in the church and the mosque with landscape of the nature. In the church of water, Ando construct pool of water to be an outlook for the attendant and worshiper inside the church. Ando gives an open space for the attendant and link their eyes directly to the nature. It looks to reveal disparities between the sacred place and the public space. In Al-Irsyad Mosque, Kamil also open front view and unblock the *mimbar* or *mihrab* with the outside scene. Kamil deconstructs common architecture of the mosque which generally set Arabic calligraphy in the front wall of the mosque. Both of them play with their imagination of God’s creation represented in the nature. They involve nature

¹²<http://www.archdaily.com/87587/al-irsyad-mosque-urbane>

¹³Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, “Overview of World Religion and Ecology”, Yale University Forum, 2009.

within religious ritual, Christianity and Islam, by linking and opening the distance.

Gregory says, “for a picture is provided in churches for the reason that those who are illiterate may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books.”¹⁴In the context of Ando and Kamil’s work, they call people to “read” the nature and “think” the creation of God ecologically. The message is clear: ecology and cosmic are a symbol of the God. It is interesting to quote Syriac hymn that illustrate the beauty of the cathedral of Edessa:

“Wonderful it is that this building in its smallness resembles the wide world, not through its size, but in its character: water surrounds it, just as the ocean surrounds the world; its roof is wide like heaven, without pillars, vaulted and everywhere closed, and decorated with golden mosaics as is the firmament with shining stars. Its noble cupola resembles the heaven of heavens. The upper part of the building rests on the lower part like a helmet. Its wide and splendid arches represent the four sides of the world. Through their multiplicity, its colours recall magnificent rainbows.”¹⁵

This illustration shows us that classical religious building also has close connection with the nature: the water surrounds it. Like the classical church, the classical mosque also develops an open space that link religious architecture with the nature surrounds it. In his book, *Dictionary of Islamic Architecture*, Andrew Petersen describes the first mosque built in Islam that preserves an open space that connect the sacred place with public space. Moreover, the mosque at the time is also become “natural place” for meeting and discussing any social problems.¹⁶Religious

building ethically should preserve public space and connect itself with the nature.

Picture 1



Mihrab view of Al-Irsyad Mosque

Picture 2



Front wall view of the Church of Water

Secondly, Ando and Kamil display religious symbol in their work and link it with the symbol of nature in the same manner. In other world, their architecture place religion and nature in equal position. They exclude reductionist view of the sacred and the profane, the culture and the nature. Religious understanding should connect with understanding of the nature, and vice versa. Ando present the water in his work to perform close relationship between religious ritual and natural existence. He builds his church in the hill to represent relatedness between nature and what human perceived as the sacred. Ando attempts to state that “sacredness” is human construction, and they can also perceive nature as the sacred: caring, loving, and saving it. In his book *Sacred Places*, James Swan delineated three types of sacred places: the natural setting that derives its sacred identity from nature itself; the places

¹⁴Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Heritage or Heresy Preservation and Destruction of Religious Art and Architecture in Europe*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 57.

¹⁵Edward Goldsmith, “The Cosmic in Art, Architecture and Ecology in the Millenium”, in David Cadman and John Carey, *A Sacred Trust: ecology and Spiritual Vision*, (Tanemos Academy Papers, 2002).

¹⁶Andrew Petersen, *Dictionary of Islamic Architecture*, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 195-196.

where the larger whole seems condensed into a symbolic statement; and the human-crafted building that is marked as special place for religious reasons.¹⁷ In the first type, nature is also become a sacred.

Involving the nature in the design of the sacred place strengthens the position of the sacred itself. In Islamic mysticism, cosmic or the nature can also be assumed as “macro humanism”, while the human itself is perceived as “micro cosmic”: *al-insān huwa al-ardh aṣ-ṣaghīrah wa al-ardh wa al-insān al-kabīr*.¹⁸ This belief reconstructs traditional view that place human being as a center of cosmic: anthropocentrism. It delineates that there is always an equal connection between human being and the nature. Moreover, human is part of the nature itself: from anthropocentrism to eco-centrism. Everything is important in this connection. Bruno Latour acknowledges his actor network theory (ANT) that affirms complex connection between things in the world. ANT, as explained by Latour, delineated a very important challenge to more traditional ideas, reduced what is called as a ‘science’ to realities and ‘facts’ that human produced.¹⁹

Thirdly, Ando and Kamil’s work remind us to deeply understand what deep ecology is. Religion, with its various manifestations, should also be aware for environmental crisis and ecological problem. Religion should also recognize sustainability of the nature. In doing so, religion should admit to the history of nature. David Landis Barnhill, in his book *Deep Ecology and World Religions New Essays on Sacred Grounds*, reminds us that “fundamental to the perspective of most religions, after all, is the notion that they embody a timeless truth, one derived either from a divine Source or from insight into an unchanging Reality. It is therefore a challenge for religions to admit that something absolutely basic to the world has changed. In response to the transition from nature to environment and the corresponding

threats that are posed to humanity, religious values must themselves be closely examined. In this light, religious traditions need to examine their own role in creating the disaster, rethinking the anthropocentrism of all our major religious traditions. Further, it must be admitted that whatever their theological attitude toward the earth, religious traditions were pretty much blind to the environmental crisis until it was pointed out to them by others.”²⁰

Referring to Warwick Fox, David Landis elucidates that deep ecology has at least three principle meanings. First, it refers to deep questioning about environmental ethics and the causes of environmental problems. Rather than simply adjusting existing policies or amending conventional values, such questioning leads to critical reflection on the fundamental world views that underlie specific attitudes and environmental practices. Second, deep ecology refers to a platform of basic values that a variety of environmental activists shares. These values include an affirmation of the intrinsic value of nature; the recognition of the importance of biodiversity; a call for a reduction of human impact on the natural world; greater concern with quality of life rather than material affluence; and a commitment to change economic policies and the dominant view of nature. Various religious worldviews can form the basis of these values, which can lead to a variety of different types of environmental activism and spiritual practices. Third, deep ecology refers to different philosophies of nature (sometimes-called ecosophies) that arise out of that deep questioning and that are in concert with the values associated with the platform.²¹

In his book, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, Arne Naess explains that the basic need to solve current environmental problems is human understanding and concern for ecology. Furthermore, Naess states

¹⁷Hoffman, *Seeking the Sacred*, p. 2.

¹⁸Mukti Ali, *Islam Mazhab Cinta*, (Bandung: Mizan, 2015).

¹⁹Anders Blok and Torben Elgaard, *Bruno Latour: Hybrid Thoughts in a Hybrid World*, (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 29.

²⁰David Landis Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb, *Deep Ecology and World Religions New Essays on Sacred Grounds*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 2.

²¹Barnhill, *Deep Ecology*, p. 5.

that ecological understanding must become a way of life that influences human activities.²² Ecosophy is more than a wisdom that drives people how to deal ecologically with the nature. In this context, religious architecture that link with ecological awareness represents human understanding of deep ecology. It also implies criticism to shallow ecology that assumes that environmental crisis is only mechanical and instrumental problem. It does not relate to human understanding and lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

Religious architecture, as one of religious manifestations, has been perceived as sacred place and it, referring to John Hinnells, “determines the nature of worship conducted therein.” It is a place where people can reflect themselves. Tadao Ando says, “A living space should be a sanctuary. It has to be a place where you can reflect on your life.” The prophet Muhammad states that everywhere in the world is a mosque: a place where every Moslem can pray and worship God. Indeed, church and mosque—as religious architecture—should be a reflective and representative place to express religiosity and spirituality. When religious architecture was connected with nature or when the nature was involved in design of religious architecture, it creates a space where religion and ecology can meet: where religious faith and environmental consciousness encounter. Tadao Ando—with the Church of Water, and Ridwan Kamil—with Al-Irsyad Mosque, express their ecological consciousness and succeed to link the sacred place and the nature. They delineate deep ecology through their work, their vision, and their expression.

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²²Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

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