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PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGNING A CHURCH IN MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Architecture

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To my dearest parents who always believe in me

To my wonderful sister whom has always been supportive

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ABSTRACT

Religious harmony in multicultural society is important. Throughout the history, religion is considered to be the fault line in diverse society. Malaysia is a multiracial country that embraces diversity but racial tensions still prevails. Unfortunately, the current churches in Malaysia are not reflecting the Christian image of interacting with multicultural society. The concept of Christianity as a harmonious religion has been taken lightly. On the other hand, church architecture style which is a reflection of the physical manifestation Christianity remained unchanged for centuries and imitated blindly constantly. The churches in Malaysia are not expressing a progressive image of Christianity towards diversity and universality. This research studies about the universal values of Christianity that is suitable for enhancing harmonious interaction with humanity, nature, and spiritual self. The objective of this research is to study the influence and applicability of Christian universal values into church architecture. The research uses case studies method to highlight the expression and characteristic of universal values in church architecture. The universal values are examined through traditional and selected modern churches. The findings revealed that there are four applicable principles when designing a church in multicultural society. The principles are: harmony with all men; harmony with nature; versatility in acceptance of others; and respect towards heritage or the past. These design principles and methods can be said to be timeless in nature, applicable to a church architecture in multicultural society.

ABSTRAK

Keharmonian agama dalam masyarakat majmuk amat penting. Sepanjang sejarah, agama dianggap sebagai pencetus konflik dalam masyarakat majmuk. Malaysia merupakan sebuah negara berbilang kaum yang harmoni tetapi ketegangan kauman tetap wujud. Tambahan, gereja di Malaysia tidak mencerminkan imej Kristian yang berbuka berbuka kepada masyarakat setempat. Konsep memaparkan agama Kristian sebagai agama yang harmoni telah dipandang ringan. Di samping itu, gaya seni bina gereja yang merupakan imej Kristian kekal tidak berubah selama ini dan gaya traditional ditiru dengan rakus. Sehubungan itu, gereja-gereja di Malaysia tidak memaparkan imej Kristian sebagai agama yang progresif dan mementingkan keharmonian kesejagatan. Kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji nilai-nilai universal dalam agama Kristian yang sesuai untuk meningkatkan keharmonian antara manusia dengan manusia, manusia dengan alam semula jadi, dan rohani sendiri. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji pengaruh dan kesesuaian nilai-nilai universal Kristian dalam seni bina gereja. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kajian kes untuk mengetengahkan ciri-ciri nilai universal terdapat dalam seni bina gereja. Nilai-nilai universal akan dikaji melalui gereja traditional serta gereja moden yang dipilih. Pendapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa terdapat empat prinsip berkenaan dengan nilai universal yang bentuk sebuah gereja dalam konteks masyarakat majmuk. Empat prinsip tersebut adalah: keharmonian dengan manusia; keharmonian dengan alam semula jadi; versatil dan terbuka kepada semua aspek; dan menghargai warisan tradisi Prinsip-prinsip reka bentuk dan kaedah dikaji boleh dikatagorikan sebagai prinsip yang abadi, serta sesuai untuk diaplikasikan pada seni bina gereja dalam masyarakat majmuk.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Problem

Malaysian society is divided by "walls" that insulate them from listening to what others have to say about us and about themselves (Chong, 2013). This proves that throughout more than a century of independence, our society is still divided along racial and religious lines which led to the attitude of ignorance, culture of exclusion, and unwillingness to listen to others who are different.

The national curriculum is not putting much effort in religious education and the schools are not promoting a multiracial environment and the importance of youth's social development. Coupled with the effect of globalization, the Malaysian society is becoming increasingly materialistic and consumerism has made the people more individualistic and lacking in the spirit of togetherness in our society. Thus the advancement in lifestyle has given rise to "the culture of exclusion" according to Pope Francis in his World Day of Peace speech (Sri, 2014).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although religion is a universal practice, often societies view religion as something that is private. Especially in Malaysia's multi-cultural society, churches are moderately expressing faith outwardly in politic, culture and society (Khuen, 2009). Multicultural society is the special characteristic of Malaysia where multiracial co-exists in a country. Unfortunately, churches in Malaysia are not

expressing a progressive image of Christianity towards diversity and universality. Fundamentally, Christianity affirmation of universality is clearly expressed in its Scripture and doctrine.

> *"In the Last Days, I will pour out from my Spirit upon everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days"* - Prophet Joel (New International Version, 2011).

Christianity provided a set of universal values as the code of conduct in Holy Bible. The Ten Commandments laid down norms about how human beings should relate to God, to the cosmos, and to other human beings which guide human life towards truth, justice, peace and love. Most of these universal values relevant to current diverse society are not clearly celebrated and expressed in most churches in Malaysia.

Unfortunately, most Malaysian churches are imitating the image, typology and languages of Western churches only but there is no single style or image imposed by Christian doctrine. Churches are free to express itself according to conditions of people and the needs of rites as long as the church architecture honor the sacredness of building and rites (Stroik, 1998).

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to identify a set principal S and languages that are suitable for designing a church for youth in multicultural context of Malaysia. In order to achieve this aim, this research argues that the universal principles can be identified through the characteristics and components of church architecture. The aim described above is explored within the following three research objectives:

1. To investigate the general expression of Christian universal values in traditional church architecture

2. To examine the manifestation of Christian universal values and concepts from modern church architecture.
3. To propose a set of church architectural principles and language that are suitable for multicultural context.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the background studies, the following are the research questions:

1. What are the Christian universal values in traditional church architecture?
2. What are the Christian universal values affecting the characteristic and expression of modern church architecture?
3. How to design a church which is suitable in a multicultural context?

1.5 Significance of Study

The significance of this study is to demonstrate the universality of church architecture. Churches especially Asian churches need to recognize the plurality of its context and respond to it. A suitable church architecture that blends well into local context without losing the originality of church sacredness is important. Thus, this study is important to find the appropriate architectural language to showcase Christian as a harmonious religion.

1.6 Scope of Research

Throughout the study of the universal values in Christianity, the concept of Nature, Democracy and Freedom is prominent. According to Kevin Nute (1996), the concept of nature is the environmental adaptation with architecture. The concept of democracy and freedom are the metaphysical and social interpretation within architecture, and the holistic approach in designing architectural aesthetic wholly.

Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier have already implemented these universal concepts in their respective sacred buildings especially the Unity Temple in Wisconsin and Notre Dame du Haut in Roncham (Siry, 1996; Dummett, 2007). Therefore, this research will study on the modern 20th century churches designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier.

This research does not scope down to any specific Christian denominations and intend to respond to the Christians at large.

1.7 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of 6 chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the intention of the research and the overview of it. The chapter explains the problem background, problem statement, research aim, research problems, research objectives, and scope of study.

Chapter 2 is the literature review of the study. The literature review covers the background of universal values in Christianity and church architecture. The first section explains meaning of universal values in Christianity and the relevance to diverse society. The following sections review the characteristic of church architecture in relation to universal values in Christianity and the applicability of the values.

Chapter 3 discussed the research methodology of the study and explains the procedure in conducting the research to achieve the research aim. Chapter 4 is the study of selected modern church architecture relevant in this research. The case studies are conducted according to the framework derived from methodology and scope of literature review. Relevant information and aspect regard
ing the research will be highlighted for further analysis.

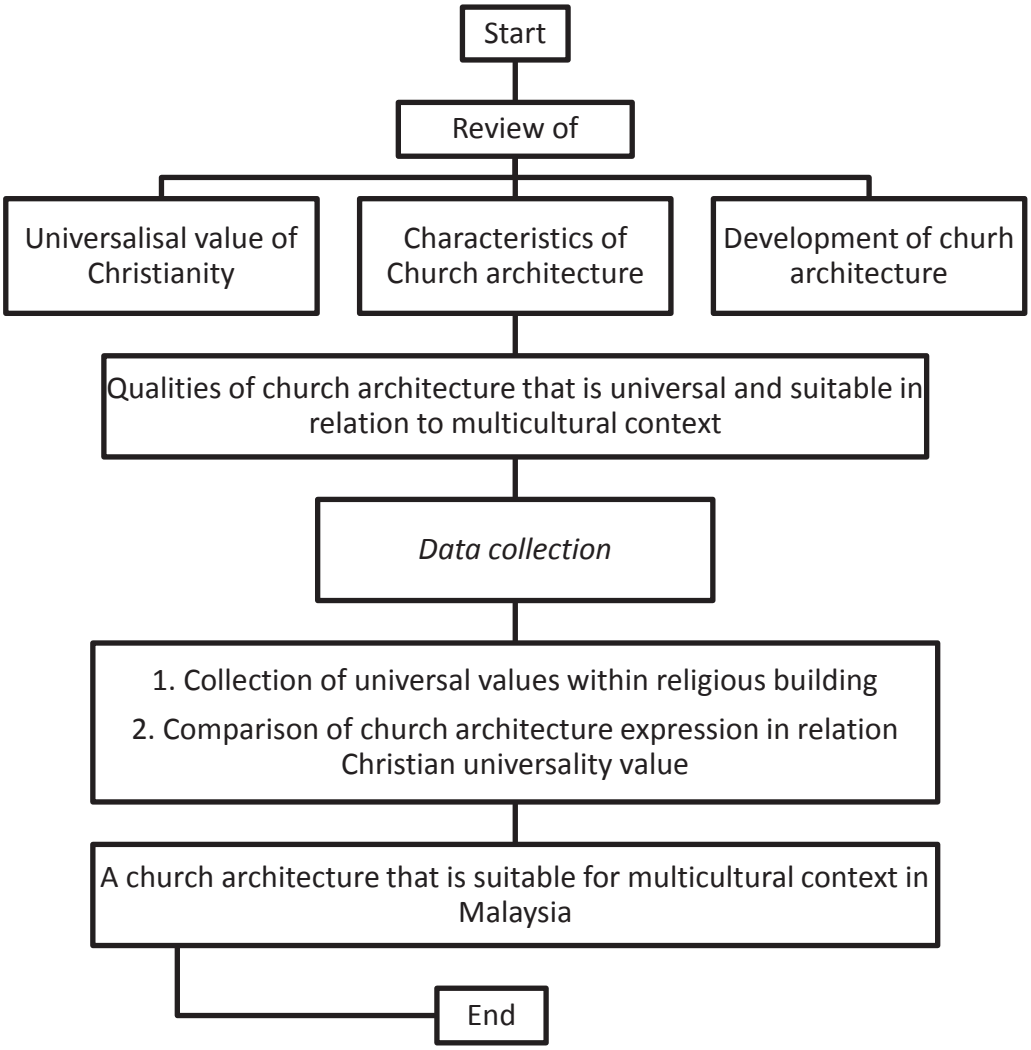
Chapter 5 presents the findings and analysis of case studies. Data will be analyzed and explained to achieve the aim. The chapter ends with architectural principles in line with the research to propose design strategies to achieve the aim. Chapter 6 is

the summary of all chapters and the research. Findings from the research will be summarized. Limitation and recommendation for further studies will be presented as well.

1.8 Research Operational Framework

The flow of the research is explained in the following Table 1:

Table 1: Thesis flow chart (Source: Author, 2016)



1.9 Summary

This study explores the adaptability of church architecture in multicultural context. This chapter heighted the focus on the study of universal values in Christianity and the applicability of it in church architecture to create a church that is suitable in c multicultural context.

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