



THE CONCEPT OF CATHOLIC SOCIETY BY SOEGIJAPRANATA 1940

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ABSTRACT

The Central Java Catholic community known as Vicariate Apostolic of Semarang had already 21 parishes when it was inaugurated on June 25, 1940. This year (2025) it celebrates its 85th anniversary and has developed into a modern religious organization managing more than 100 parishes, thus enjoying an almost 500% increase in the number of parishes. Unlike other Dioceses in Indonesia, the Semarang community has been led by an indigenous Bishops since its inception. This fact gives "Indonesian flavor" to the management of the local hierarchy since the beginning. Its first Bishop, Monsigneur Soegijapranata is a futuristic leader. As the founding father, he plays crucial role in putting foundation to the development of this organization in the following years. This article focuses on the vision statement of the Soegijapranata and argues that the concept of 'masjarakat katolik' he mentioned in his vision or 'the Catholic society' is best represented by Parish.

Keywords: Central Java, Catholicism, parish, Soegijapranata, religious organization.

1. Introduction

Catholicism started in the first century (around 33-36 AD) when Jesus declared His Kingdom and asked his disciples to spread it out till the corner of the world. What Jesus had erected was passed on to his followers and a new community started with the first followers lead by his disciple named Peter as the first leader. Later, the Roman Catholic Church lead by Peter, acknowledged as the First Pope continues until today at which the hierarchy now lead by its 267th leader: Pope Leo XIV. Catholic Church embraced “primus inter pares” principle meaning that Bishop, leader of local hierarchy namely Diocese or Archdiocese having the same position with other Bishops. The Pope himself is the Bishops of Rome but is chosen as the main leader among the Catholics in the world in the spirit of the primary among the others.

The Catholic community in Central Java, now the Archdiocese of Semarang is acknowledged as local hierarchy on July 1940. Researches about Catholicism in Central Java, as that in other part of Indonesia were mostly about the spread of the religion and were analyzed in the light of religious studies. It is still lack of studies of the institution at where this religion is attached to. This research offers a study of a religious organization focusing on the organizational aspect which serves as important aspect in the area of social, organization and economic-management studies.

Albertus Magnus Soegijapranata, SJ, the first native religious leader was passing through the period of World War II including the hardship during Japanese occupation in Java and war of independence. As a shepherd and leader in his community he faced difficulties due to the multifaceted group socially and economically. Famous for a slogan “to be 100% Catholic and 100% Indonesia” he died during the Vatican Council II in Rome, Italy and called home by Soekarno, the first president of the Republic of Indonesia, awarded as a National Hero and was buried in the National Hero Cemetery Garden in Semarang. In start of his bishopric he mentioned that a Catholic Hierarchy or a local Catholic Church would be sturdy if built (madeg djejeg) on fixed “tlasah”. Tlasah is an old Javanese word means foundation. In the Bible on Luke 7, a metaphor of a strong house built on the rock instead of on the sand and when the house hit by rain and windfall it still stands sturdy. This may have inspired Soegijapranata who wanted to build his hierarchy on a sturdy foundation like a rock. Other story is that Jesus want to build his church on the Peter whom he called as “the rock”. Like a building if people want to build something he first has to construct a solid foundation. The foundation of the hierarchy is a “masjarakat

katolik” or Catholic society. We may ask what is society? And what is exactly he meant of “catholic society”? This article argues that the concept of *masjarakat katolik* as a community is particularly mentioning the local community which have a(n) exact/ physical location to put its assets (e.g. land, building), people, assets, and “abstract” thing such as organization, leadership, management, the economic, social system, etc. which is best represented by a parish.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Central Java Catholicism*

Catholicism in Java was rejuvenating during 1800s when Herman W. Daendels took office as Governor General in the Dutch East Indies. It was a consequence of what happened in the center of power in the Netherland pertaining to the freedom of religion. With the permission of King of Holland, the Governor General allowed two Catholic priests arrived in Batavia in 1808 to start their missionary activities in Java, though limited just to serve the Dutch. Several years later the mission continued to Semarang and Surabaya in Central and East of Java.

Almost a century and a half, In 1940, a native Catholic priest, Albertus Magnus Soegijapranata SJ (1896-1963) was appointed as a Vicar of Semarang by the Pope in Vatican. He was the first native Vicar in charge in the Netherland East Indies where the area was still under control of the Dutch Colonial Government. He sat on his chair when he was 44 and keep on the position until his death at the age of 67. He grown up in Javanese family, educated and joining Jesuit priest during the Dutch colonial government, being a senior priest and was appointed as leaders of Catholics in Vicars of Semarang during the World War II, confronting with the Japanese Military administration while starting as leaders the hierarchy and continued in the early years of the newborn Republic of Indonesia. Those three distinct eras shaped his persona. As a native Javanese who was educated by Dutch system and embraced Catholicism he got colorful inputs which impacted his stance, policy, and decision during his leaderships. As a priest, he served the people in his Vicariate like a shepherd guiding the flock. Since the flock was ‘multifaceted’ the difficulties arose. There were: Dutch troops who wanted to keep in power in the area; ordinary Javanese who normally fight for freedom from any colonialism; and noble families in two kingdoms in the area with different political agenda.

2.2. *The Catholic Hierarchy*

Catholic hierarchy is managed like a kingdom whose followers around the world abide to the leaderships of the “Bishop of Rome” as the Pope. In every area of its service there is the local leader a representation of the world leader which called Bishop (or Vicars). These local leaders manage the hierarchy and guide the flock in his area of service to the goal as stated by the Pope. The bishops are traditionally directly appointed by the Pope.

The position of the bishop in the archdiocese is unique. He not only serves as the leader of the Diocese but he represents the unity with universal church lead by the Pope in Vatican. The definition of a diocese mentioning that:

“A diocese is a section of the People of God entrusted to a bishop to be guided by him with the assistance of this clergy so that, loyal to its pastor and formed by him into one community in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, it constitutes one particular Church in which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Christ is truly present and active.” (Flannery 1988, p.569).

2.3. *Self Sufficiency concept*

Subanar (2001, 2015) in his doctoral dissertation about missiology from Gregorian University, Rome, Italy mentions that the content is a comprehensive elaboration of three main focuses: the local church which is the Archdiocese of Semarang, the magisterium teaching on mission as a starting point of analysis and the missionary activity during the leaderships of the two native bishops. Subanar’s study focus on the mission activity and explicitly single out the focus of the study, as he noticed:

“... there are three perspectives of discussion. These are missiological, pastoral and ecclesiological. The foundation for the extension of the missionary activity has been laid by declaring the participation of the

entire People of God, even of the laity, in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ (LG12). ... Therefore, the thesis will discuss the dynamics of the Church from the perspective of missiology and pastoral theology.” (p.19)

“People of God” means all church members consisting of: the leaders (priests) and the people (the lay). He defines the ‘church’ is not just the hierarchy but also the people. In Catholic tradition, church member may have important role in the organization’s management. It is quite different from that practiced in business, social or other centralistic organization. To this extent, it can be understood that a policy or this organization may come from the top (as that in any organization) or may emerge from the bottom (as that in democratic society). However, the leader holds a veto to the implementation. The relationship between the leader and the people in Catholic Church takes example of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the people. It is pictured as a relationship between the bridegroom and the bride (See the Letters of St Paul in the Bible). “LG” means Lumen Gentium is a document released during Vatican Council II as one of guidance from world Catholic leaders for the catholic to live in the fast-changing world.

The “self-sufficiency” concept has been introduced in the book seen from the magisterium teachings, as he wrote:

“The process of self-sufficiency of the archdiocese is not according to the concept of the three self formula by Henry Venn. It is not also as proposed by the Third Assembly of the All Africa Church Conference of Churches, Lusaka, Zambia, 1974 which called for a moratorium to develop a self-reliance of the African Church. Nor is it according to the concept of developing Churches which refers to a psychological concept. The process of self-sufficiency here is as the goal of the foundation of the Churches in every place or space, historical situation and human culture.” (p.23-24)

There seems to be three previous definitions on self-sufficiency in the context of any church development. He mentions that based on the book of Verkuyl (1978: 52-52), Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson proposed the three-self formula in relation with the building of a Western Church: self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating. This three-self formula is not relevant for Catholic Church particularly on the self-governing aspect. It seems that Verkuyl wrote the book discussing the protestant church. The Catholic Church is different from that of the Protestants in terms of the acknowledgement to the central leaderships of Pope in Rome.

3. Research Methods

This research is historical (Pranoto, 2010; Sjamsuddin, 2016) and employs interpretive approach for the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a history study, it uses archives as sources of data. Documents relevant to the study were explored to answer the research question or the topic to discuss. Several publications were also observed to sharpen the analysis.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1. Research Findings

4.1.1. Soegijapranata’s Vision

Vision, or some may say ‘dream’ reflects a passion to achieve ideal condition. It contends “spirit” and power that if communicated well it may impact others to move towards the common goal. An ideal vision contains idealistic state and quite challenging to achieve. An easy-to-get goal tends to not motivating people to achieve it. Conversely, a too difficult – impossible dream would also not motivate people to run for it. A medium (tend to be high) goal but achievable is truly an ideal one and is an effective way to motivate people to run for it. Statement by influential leaders may motivates people to work together and reach the goal.

In September 1940 Soegijapranata wrote his first pastoral letter right after the inauguration of the New Vicariate Apostolic of Semarang. He posited that the new hierarchy should be supported by good people who had been mature in faith, understand his duty as citizen as well as member of the church and moreover had become independent in his living. He also noticed that the hierarchy should embrace all

layers in the society. Historian Gregorius Budi Subanar mentioned that this vision was pointing to a “self-sufficient” entity. This “self-sufficient” concept was directly meant as an independent in economy. However, as he was a nationalist it could also be interpreted as a foundation for “other” independence such as: freedom of expression and freedom of political orientation where those two were limited by the colonial government. He explained preconditions for a local hierarchy to be stood up for the coming church (written in Javanese language) as follows (Subanar, 2001: 137):

“Wruhanamu Hierarki katolik iku bisane madeg djedjeg mung ana ing saduwure tlasah kang kukuh, jaiku masjarakat Katolik kang sentosa mungguh ing piandel lan kawruhe mungguh ing kasusilan sarto karohanene, apa maneh mungguh ing banda, radja-darbe, arta, ilmu ekonomi, organisasi lan papan – lungguhe ana ing tanahe.

Dene kang dibutuhake minangka dadi dasare Hierarki, kang mbesuk kudu madeg ana ing tanah kene, jaiku masjarakat Katolik kang njrambahi sakehing lapisan kaya dene kantja buruh, tani, krija, punggawa maneka warna, ahli kartijasa, para djuragan, dagang lan sudagar. Masjarakat Katolik kang njangga Hierarki ku kudu masjarakat sing wis diwasa, kang bisa mentas dewe, kang pana marang kuwadjibane lan tetanggugane ing ngatase kawulaning Nagara lan warganing Pasamuwan Sutji”

Above vision statement can be translated as follows:

“The only way a Catholic hierarchy be solidly grounded is on the foundation of Catholic society (people) strong in faith and knowledge, in morality and spirituality, and moreover possessing their own material resources, financial resource, economics, organization and place to live built upon their own land.

What is needed as the foundation of the next hierarchy on this land is catholic people (society) covering every stratum such as workers, farmers, officers, artists, merchants etc. Catholic people who will sustain the hierarchy must be sufficiently mature, independent in living and understand well about his duty as citizen of this country and as member of the Church.”

Soegija mentioned that a Catholic Hierarchy or a local Catholic Church to point the Archdiocese of Semarang would be sturdy built (madeg djejeg) on fixed foundation “tlasah”. Tlasah is an old Javanese word means foundation. Like a building if people want to build something he first has to construct a solid foundation. The foundation of the hierarchy is a “masjarakat katolik” or Catholic people (society). The discussion that follow will discuss about the society the “catholic society” he proposed.

4.1.2. The Statistic and Experience

Before the inauguration of the Vicariate of Semarang, Mgr P. Willekens on March 1, 1940 as the Vicars of Batavia, proposed the separation of the vicariate with aim to better serve the people (Subanar 2001:138) as follows:

- a. The Vicariate Apostolic of Batavia consisted of the municipalities and regencies of Batavia, Buitenzorg, Sukabumi, Cianjur and Serang
- b. The Vicariate Apostolic of Semarang consisted of municipalities and regencies of Semarang, Surakarta, Yogyakarta, Kudus, Magelang, Salatiga, Pati and Ambarawa

He stated that the adherents in Central Java were about 30.000 people for both European and the indigenous (the locals). The number was reported to exceed those in West Java that with the detail presented on Table 1 (See also Moedjanto et al., 1991).

Table 1
Population and number of Catholics in Regency and Municipality on the area of Vicariate Apostolic of Semarang 1940's

No	Place	Population	Number of Catholics	
			European	Indigeneous
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1	Semarang	217.796	6.830	1.658
2	Surakarta	165.484	2.070	2.279
3	Yogyakarta	136.649	2.226	9.730
4	Kudus	54.524		
5	Magelang	52.944	1.717	922
6	Salatiga	24.274	1.090	140
7	Pati	22.444	132	145
8	Ambarawa	19.480	751	665
	Total	692.515	14.816	15.339

Source: P. Willekens SJ, March 1, 1940, p.3 (as cited in Subanar 2001, p.144)

From the data we can see that almost half of the Catholic Europeans were residing in Semarang area while more than half of the Catholic indigenous were living in Yogyakarta area. Table 2 informs details of the statistics of the population and the Catholics (adherents) in the parishes.

Table 2. Catholics in the Vicariate Apostolic of Semarang 1941

No	Parish	Native	European	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1	Ambarawa	731	730	1.461
2	Atmodirana	381	2.500	2.881
3	Gedangan	1.433	2.413	3.846
4	Karangpanas	213	514	727
5	Pati	134	82	216
6	Randusari	325	1.150	1.475
7	Salatiga	498	624	1.122
8	Ungaran	319	325	644
9	Magelang	985	1.458	2.443
10	Mertoyudan	82	21	103
11	Borobudur	799	30	829
12	Muntilan	3.627	78	3.705
13	Rawaseneng	224	73	297
14	Bintaran	3.004	0	3.004
15	Boro	2.832	11	2.843
16	Kidul Loji	175	1.434	1.609
17	Kotabaru	7.090	850	7.940
18	Pugeran	1.319	0	1.319
19	Sedayu	475	0	475
20	Klaten	3.535	571	4.106
21	Purbayan	2.279	2.070	4.349
	Total	30.460	14.934	45.394

Source: Jaarboek 1942 as cited by Subanar in page 195

Different presentation between Table 1 and Table 2 reveals different geographical classification made by the colonial government and the hierarchy (the church). A Parish usually covers an area of a district, sometimes larger. It usually conducted based on the availability of the local hierarchy's leader (the priest) as a representation of the Bishop/ vicars in the area, the people (adherents) and the church facilities (building, council, etc).

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. The Hierarchy: Society and Catholic Community

His vision pointed out the people. It is not just people but a community where there are exact/ physical location (with land and building), people, assets, and “abstract” thing such as organization, leadership, management, the economic, social system, etc. Soegijapranata mentioned that the ideal people who “built up” the community are described as having:

- Strong faith and knowledge, both in morality and spirituality.
- Physical- material possessions: having their own material resources, financial resource, economics. The people should be independent, autonomous in term of financially and economically.
- Good organization and place to live build upon their own land. For the “local organization” it is the Parish and its subdivision such as “*Lingkungan*” and other social, professional, political organization, etc. *Lingkungan* is an Indonesian word translated as “neighborhood”; defined as a community consisted of up to 40 families in a parish.
- Piety and is a nationalist. Other qualitative characteristics: understand that he is citizen of a country (the republic) as well as a member of the flock of the church. To be a good citizen must obey all Indonesian rule and law and pay tax. As a pious adherent he should contribute to local church as well as the global church.

In short, the vision mentions that the local hierarchy is built upon the catholic society possessing four characteristics:

- a. That the local church is built upon solid catholic people strong in faith and knowledge both morally and spiritually
- b. That the catholic people should be wealthy enough
- c. That the church should covers all strata or professions
- d. That the catholic people should understand well about the duty of a good citizen and a faithful church member.

4.2.2. Bishop as the local leader

The position of the bishop in the archdiocese is unique. He not only serves as the leader of the Diocese but he represents the unity with universal church lead by the Pope in Vatican. A diocese based on Vatican Council II documents mentioning that:

“A diocese is a section of the People of God entrusted to a bishop to be guided by him with the assistance of this clergy so that, loyal to its pastor and formed by him into one community in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, it constitutes one particular Church in which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Christ is truly present and active.” (Flannery 1988: 569)

Within the diocese there are parish as sub-community. This community is headed by a priest (pastor) who served as “shepherd” of the “flocks” of local adherents (Catholic believers in an area). This person is appointed by the bishop to lead the flock in certain area and he should report his work to him as he is responsible to the bishop. In Catholic tradition, parish as the second level in the hierarchy has certain degree of autonomy, under the supervision of the bishop. The strong local hierarchy mentioned by Segijapranata could be interpreted to be autonomous in nearly everything, except for the teaching. If it is analyzed there are three main components: people (human resource), assets (material resource) and knowledge and management. Thus, by above explanation, it can be said that Parish is a clear representation of what is meant by “catholic community” by Soegijapranata functions to support the archdiocese.

4.2.3. Self-sufficiency in Catholic Church

In Catholic tradition, a hierarchy in parish level has certain degree of autonomy but should be implemented under the supervision of the bishop. The strong local hierarchy mentioned by Segijapranata could be interpreted to be autonomous in practically everything:

- (Catholic) community or people as a group which have strong in faith and knowledge, in morality and spirituality
- Society that possess their own material resources, financial resource, economics, organization and place to live, build upon their own land – as a group
- Coverage. The community should cover all strata of people: workers, peasants, officers etc.

The Vicariate of Semarang consists of 8 municipalities and regencies (see Table 1) had already had 21 parishes (see Table 2). Reflections based on previous experiences when the parishes were managed under the Vicariate of Batavia since 1850s truly gave lesson that those parishes have supported the Vicariate (for example see Prapdi et al., 2010; Purnomo, 2012; Rosariyanto et al., 2010; Sukristiyono et al., 2008; Nugroho, 2008 also Panitya 180th Gereja St Joseph, 1988). This fact (and data) gave Soegijapranata confident that, even though, not mentioning parish but the ‘catholic society’ is best represented by parish.

5. Conclusion

This paper tries to analyze the vision of the first native bishop in Netherland East Indies (now Indonesia), Mgr. Albertus Magnus Soegijapranata, SJ. It focuses on his notion of an ideal ‘catholic society’ (masjarakat katolik) as the foundation (tlasah) of the local hierarchy. New interpretation of the term “masjarakat katolik” (the Catholic society) is a Catholic community in the form of a parish. On the parishes, a diocese can stand and has sturdy foundation. From an organizational perspective, a diocese has no true congregation. It can be said that the congregation of the bishop is the parish priests. It is the parish priest who possesses “grass root” congregation where he deals with day-to-day flock’s business and life. Therefore, this “intermediary hierarchy” connecting the bishop and the congregation, the parish, serves as the foundation (or tlasah in Soegijapranata’s term) for the hierarchy (the diocese).

The parish is no less important than the congregation. A parish is a legal entity that can act “like a human being,” possessing “faith”, spirit, belongings (assets), management procedures, etc. Some points of the vision directly address the characteristic of a parish (for example, the concept of “coverage”). The role of the parish priest is as an extension of the bishop. As parish is an ‘abstract’ entity where real people are gathered in, future research can be addressed such as to study the ideal qualification of the people as the member of the “catholic society”.

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