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THE ROLE OF SYMBOL IN THE FAITH OF CATHOLICISM (CASE STUDY OF CHURCHES IN HANOI CAPITAL)

1. Something about the Catholic symbol

Symbol, in the Nguyen Van Hau's doctoral dissertation: *"About symbols in traditional folk festivals (Through a survey of traditional folk festivals in the Northern Delta of Vietnam)"*, is defined: "Symbol is a form of cultural expression, a meaningful sign. It was created thanks to the human power of «symbolizing», in the way of using the image to express the meaning, in order to discover a certain abstract value. The symbol is considered as the «basic unit» of culture and the first «social inheritance» core of humanity" (Nguyen Van Hau).

The author Nguyen Van Hau also explained more: Many things called "symbols" such as logos, signs, emblems, badges are not symbols and it just stops at the level of "expressing semiotics". Only "Significant signs" are truly symbols. The Significance Semiotics studies forms: "sign – meaning", it means super symbols.

Therefore, in this context, the Significance Semiotics means that the symbol carries in itself a multi-level meaning, not only stopping at the level of simply denoting but taking the image to show the other meaning.

Through studying the definition of symbols in the semiotics approach and studying the basic connotation of religion, the author would like to give the following interpretation of religious symbol: Religious symbol is the symbol to express the matter of doctrine and canon as well as the nature issues of outlook on life and worldview according to the conception of that religion to strengthen the religious affection and faith of believers.

Catholic symbolism is a link between people and God in a certain relationship. The invisible God becomes visible thanks to the symbol, and God is closer to man, no longer vague. People contemplate the beauty of God through symbols, love and pray God for good things in life. Thus, symbol helps strengthen the faith of the Catholicism in life, giving them absolute trust in God as well as paying respect to those symbols as reverence for him.

2. Overview of Catholicism in Hanoi Archdiocese

Hanoi Archdiocese is mostly located in Hanoi City (except for some districts that belongs to Bac Ninh and Hung Hoa Diocese), Ha Nam and Nam Dinh provinces (half of Nam Dinh City, My Loc, Vu Ban District and Y Yen district are parts of Hanoi Archdiocese), Hoa Binh (there are 8 parishes in 4 districts), Hoang Xa parish in Hung Yen City, with total area of about 7,000 km². The number of districts and parishes of the Archdiocese is as follows:

Table 1. Quantity of districts, dioceses in Hanoi Archdiocese

	District, diocese	Quantity
1	Cathedral district	21
2	Ly Nhan	27
3	Nam Dinh	22
4	Phu Ly	27
5	Phu Xuyen	17
6	Thanh Oai – Hoa Binh	38
Total		152

The parishioner quantity of Hanoi Archdiocese in 2009 is 337,000 With 152 parishes (statistic in 2010), the Archdiocese has 104 secular priests, 13 priests, 70 seminarians and 150 pre-seminarians. 20 male monks from 4 male orders and 400 nuns belonging to 20 female orders. There are long-standing catholic teaching orders in Hanoi, including redemptorists, the Hanoi Congregation of the Holy Cross Lovers and St. Paul Sisters of Chartres. The Archdiocese of Hanoi has 3 sanctuaries: the Thai Ha Temple of Our Lady of Perpetual Helping, the Temple of St. Peter Le Tuy in Bang So, Temple of St. Tu Dao So Kien¹.

In the area of Hanoi City, there are 3 districts: the main district, Phu Xuyen district, Thanh Oai district. Among them, the main district has 21 parishes, Phu Xuyen district has 16 parishes and there are 38 parishes in Thanh Oai – Hoa Binh, excluding 10 parishes of Hoa Binh province. The total number of parishes on the Hanoi City is 65 parishes, specifically as follows:

¹ <http://www.giaoxugiaohovietnam.com/HaNoi/01-Giao-Phan-HaNoi-LichSuGiaoPhanHaNoi.htm>, 17.12.2018.

Table 2. Parishes of Hanoi²

Nr	District	Urban district, Suburban district	Quantity
1	Main district	Ba Dinh	2
		Hoan Kiem	1
		Hai Ba Trung	2
		Dong Da	2
		Tay Ho	2
		Cau Giay	1
		Hoang Mai	2
		Ha Dong	1
		Southern Tu Liem	1
		Hoai Duc	4
		Dan Phuong	1
		Thanh Tri	2
2	Phu Xuyen District	Thuong Tin	6
		Phu Xuyen	10
3	Thanh Oai district	Thanh Oai	7
		Chuong My	11
		My Duc	7
		Ung Hoa	3
Total			65

3. Classification of symbols in Catholic churches in Hanoi

To learn about the symbol in the Catholic Church in Hanoi, we surveyed 31 typical churches in Hanoi, at various levels: the cathedral, the parish church and the church in the urban districts and some suburban districts. The churches we selected to survey have a period of construction that starts from the end of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century and each church has a unique style. Surveying the symbol of 31 churches, we classify and sort them into the following symbolic systems:

(1) The Trinity;

(2) Our Lady: Mary's Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of the Rosary, Our Lady of La Vang, The death of Our Lady, etc.

(3) Apostle:

The four Evangelists: St. John, Luke, Mark, St. Matthew.

12 apostles of Jesus: St. Peter, St. Andrew, St. James – Son of Zebedee and brother of

² <http://www.giaoxugiaohovietnam.com/HaNoi/01-Giao-Phan-HaNoi-LichSuGiaoPhanHaNoi.htm>, 17.12.2018.

John, St. John, Saint Simon, St. Bartholomew, St. Thomas, St. James – Son of Alphaeus, St. Philipp, St. Judas, St. Luke St. Matthew.

(4) Worship objects: incense pot, holy water bottles, bells, candles, monstrance, holy grail, pyx...

(5) Animals and plants: Vine, sorghum, rose, chrysanthemum...

(6) Numbers, colors: Alpha and Omega, PX, M, LHS characters...

(7) Other symbols: Great saints in the Church such as St. Joseph, St. Anthony, and the saints chosen as the patron...

Among the churches we surveyed, there are many churches have almost full of symbolic systems as sorted above, but there are also some churches just have basic symbol systems. Through the survey, we have selected the symbols containing typical artistic icons of the following churches:

Table 3. Typical symbols in churches³

Nr	Name of cathedral	Year of building	Style	Typical symbols
1	St. Joseph's Cathedral	1884	Gothic	Statue of St. Joseph in the center of cathedral, holy paintings, stone alter with embossment of 12 saints, statues of St. Peter and St. Paul
2	Ham Long church	1934	Gothic	Statues of saints in The Order of Friars Minor, St. John, St. Anthony, crucifix, Teresa of Avila, Teresa of Lisieux, Jesus
3	Eglise des Martyrs or Cua Bac church	1925	Gothic	Glass paintings of Mary and saints, statues of France saints, statue of St. Anthony
4	An Thai church	1907	Renaissance	Statue of St. Paul Sisters of Chartres
5	Thuong Thuy Church	1890	Roman	Statue of St. Paul Sisters of Chartres, statue of Jesus
6	Phu Gia church	1927	Rococo	Statue of the death of Maria, symbols of Sacrament of Eucharist
7	Lang Tam church	1911	Gothic	Statue of Jesus' heart, statue of the Virgin of the Rosary in the center of the church, statue of St. Martino Ta Duc Thinh and his remain
8	Phung Khoan Church	1910	Rococo	Glass paintings of grief and joy, stone statue of Jesus outside the church
9	Nam Du church	2013	Gothic	Fourteen wooden crucifixes, glass paintings of holy family, statues of St. Simon and Paul on the sanctuary space

³ Gained statistic of author: September, 2018

Nr	Name of cathedral	Year of building	Style	Typical symbols
10	Dong Tri Church	1923	Gothic and Roma	Statue of St. Paul Sisters of Chartres on the center of sanctuary space, statue of the death of Maria at the end of the church, fourteen crucifixes
11	Van Phuc church	1908	Orientation – Occident mixed	Statue of Jesus in center of the church, illuminated wooden alter, statues of St. Simon and Paul
12	Ngoc Mach church	1952	Modern	Statue of Jesus bearing up under grievous made of plaster, statues of Maria and Jesus
13	Giang Xa church	?	Gothic	Statue of Jesus bearing up under grievous situated in the center of the church, statue of The Virgin of the Rosary, Statues of St. Simon and Paul
14	Di Trach church	1942	Orientation – Occident mixed	Statue of The Virgin of the Rosary
15	Lai Yen church	1916	Orientation – Occident mixed	Plaster statue of Jesus bearing up under grievous, statue of virgin Maria and the statue of grieving Jesus
16	Dong Lao church	1955	Roman	Bronze statue of Jesus bearing up under grievous, alter and stone Tabernacle
17	Cat Thue church	2003	Gothic	Glass paintings of the four: grief, joy, rejoice and bright; paintings of saints, Maria, lords; statues of the four in sanctuary
18	The church of Thach Bich	1904	Roman	Statue of The Virgin of the Rosary situated in the center of the church, statue of La Vang lady, the four Evangelists statues
19	Dan Gian church	1920	Renaissance	The statue of Maria – mother of god on sanctuary, the statue of apostles, sophisticated illuminated decoration on the sanctuary
20	Phuong Trung Church	1905	Gothic	Statue of Jesus bearing up under grievous situated in the center of sanctuary, statues of Maria and Jesus, Tabernacle and the stone book case to store holy book, in the sanctuary
21	Canh Hoach church	1903	Roman	Statues of 12 apostles, four saints, stone statues of prophets on the top of the church, glass illuminated paintings of four Evangelists situated in the sanctuary
22	Dai On church	1918	Gothic	Statue of Jesus' heart, the Virgin of the Rosary, statue of Jesus in the center of sanctuary

Nr	Name of cathedral	Year of building	Style	Typical symbols
23	Yen Kien church	2003	Gothic	Statue of Jesus bearing up under grievous situated in the center of sanctuary, painting of Jesus Christ, St. Simon and Paul, big statues of Maria, Jesus and Paul
24	Bang So church	2014	Gothic	Paintings of Jesus and saints, made in France, wooden statue of Jesus bearing up under grievous in the center of sanctuary, statues of Maria, Joseph and Paul.
25	So Ha church	1917	Orientation – Occident mixed	Illuminated sanctuary, La Vang lady statue, wooden carved paintings of four seasons on the pillars
26	Ha Hoi church	1903	Orientation – Occident mixed	Statue of the Virgin of the Rosary in the center of sanctuary, paralleled sentence of catholic faith, relics of Guise Nguyen Dinh Nghi
27	Ke Nghe church	1913	Gothic	Statue of Joseph in the center of sanctuary, glass paintings of four famous saints
28	Phu My church	1908	Gothic	Statue of the Virgin of the Rosary situated in the center of sanctuary, embossment of forty crucifixes, and embossment of Mysteries: joy, grieve and rejoice
29	Ha Thao church	1919	Gothic	The statue of lady – the God's mother in the center of the sanctuary, bronze embossment of Simon and Paul
30	Thao Noi church		Orientation – Occident mixed	Statue of The Virgin of the Rosary
31	Chuyen My Church		Roman	The statue of lady – the God's mother , vine and rice flower on the alter, fourteen inlay with mother-of-pearl crucifixes

4. Characteristics and role of symbols in the faith of Catholics in Hanoi

4.1. Characteristics

Through the survey (31 parishes / 66 parishes in Hanoi City), we generalize some of the characteristics of the symbolic system in Catholic churches of Hanoi as follows:

- 1) The scale, as well as the certain positions of the churches greatly influences the layout, arrangement, decoration and quantity of symbols. In the process of surveying the churches in Hanoi, we found out that the Hanoi cathedral will have more and more diverse symbols than other churches because this is the main cathedral of other diocesan churches. The parish churches have a more symbolic system than

the simple churches, such as the Phu My parish church has a more symbolic system than the Giang Xa church.

- 2) With the same content but not every church has the same decoration, each church has a style, size, color, material that represents its own symbol.
- 3) This depends on the characteristics of each church. For example, Bang So church, because of its economic resources, being a large church and a pilgrimage center of Hanoi Catholics, so the symbols are very big, the colors are very bright. Besides, Dong Lao parish church is a small church; the quantity of parishioner is small so the symbols are smaller in size.
- 4) The number of decorative symbols in Catholic churches in Hanoi is not very dense. This is a characteristic that we learnt when surveying some Catholic churches in Bui Chu and Phat Diem dioceses. The churches at Bui Chu and Phat Diem dioceses have a system of symbols with a higher density than the churches in Hanoi.
- 5) Symbol decoration is still at a rudimentary level, unsophisticated, has not yet reached a high artistic level.
- 6) There are many very important symbols in Catholic churches around the world but Hanoi does not have. This is partly due to the characteristics and funding of each Catholic Church in Hanoi.
- 7) The symbols are expressed both inside and outside the church; however the symbols are concentrated into the heart of the church and the sanctuary. Because inside space of the church and the sanctuary is the center, where the priest celebrates the Sacraments and is where the parishioners attend.

4.2. The role of symbol in faith

The symbol in the Catholic church is not only decorative schemes that adorn the beauty of the architectural work but also the representative of the sanctified faith, fulfilling its own specific functions in the "God's house". We implemented in-depth interview with 10 fathers and 40 followers to understand more and to get multidimensional knowledge about the relationship between faith and symbol.

Vatican II defines faith as: "A supernatural virtue, thus with the grace of light and help of the God, we believe in what God has revealed, not because of natural reason made us realize the intrinsic truth of things, but because of the power of God himself, who cannot be mistaken nor deceive". (Vatican II)

In Catholicism, there are truths that are perceived by science but there are also truths that are only perceived by faith. Therefore, without a solid, complete faith, believers can hardly become righteous and honest.

The basic Catholic doctrine also affirmed the role of faith: "With faith, we receive the power of believing in God and in everything he has revealed through Christ and

the Church. Faith helps us to see that God is extremely good and true. Faith also helps us to entrust ourselves to God fully. Without faith, we can never believe in God or believe in what he revealed. Therefore, faith is necessary for being salvaged; faith makes us righteous and honest before God". (Bosco 2011, p. 75)

The main content of Catholic faith refers to the following Mysteries:

Mystery involves the creation of the universe;

Mystery involves Christ's work of redeeming mankind by His death and resurrection;

The Mystery involves the full entrustment of the people to God;

Mystery relates to God's love, to talk to God, it is praying. (Bosco 2011, p. 76)

The role of symbols in faith is expressed as follows:

4.2.1. The link between the visible and the invisible

Throughout the process of Catholic development, there are always visible and invisible sides. In Catholic faith, God is the beginning of all things, creating tangible, intangible things from nothing, in time, sacred creatures like angels and materials like the universe. Therefore, God is the transcendent who transcends space and time. He transcends all things and all areas of man and all tangible and intangible creatures. Therefore, it is difficult for people to feel the presence of God in the eyes of the natural reason but the perception by the eyes of faith. Even so, in order for God to be visibly present in the eyes of the faith of the followers, the Church has used the system of symbols to make God most clearly present in the lives of the followers.

One of the functions of the symbol to the lives of the parishioners is the bridge between the visible and the invisible. Because of the revelations of God in the eyes of the entity are few, in the stories of the Old Testament, there are very few visible appearances of God, only flames in thorns bush, etc. God, who is invisible, no one can see God and cannot draw his true face. Until the New Testament, when the son of God – Jesus came to earth, the presence of the Trinity is increasingly clearer and the word of God the Father said from Heaven, after Jesus received John's baptism at the Jordan River. Jesus himself has a physical human body to express the invisible Father. However, for the Church, if only using the Bible to talk about God's presence in the universe and the development of human history is difficult to describe. Therefore, the Church has made historic decisions are to allow the creation of symbols of God as well as saints to more vividly describe God for its parishioners.

People can hardly use the rational eye to feel the visible presence of God. However, when contemplating the symbols in the cathedrals, parishioners feel God being visibly present but this tangibility is not the movement or contact of those symbols with humans but a tangible feeling by faith. They believe that those symbols have the presence of the invisible God and His power is manifested under the eyes of faith. For ex-

ample, the statue of Jesus crucified at the cathedrals, when the followers contemplate that symbol they see the Jesus' life as well as the victory of his. Or just look at the symbols of the holy grail and the sacred bread (the Eucharistic symbol) like the glass painting at the Hanoi Cathedral, all Catholics think that it is you and the blood and body part of Jesus has been tear out to save humanity. The symbol of the dove presented in most cathedrals those surveyed by the author, but it is the invisible embodiment of the Trinity. A Catholic parishioner, Do Manh T. said: "When I came to the church I just saw the 3-circle symbol, I immediately thought of the Mystery of Trinity, which is an easy trait to recognize Trinity. Or when I see a dove in the church, I think of the Holy Spirit immediately, because it is one of the symbols representing the Holy Spirit. Therefore, through those symbols we can recognize our invisible God"⁴. Belief does not need to see God but only to feel by the call of God, in the heart of that person, but when added symbols, that belief is more visible, more vivid.

Symbols in Catholic churches show the relationship between the visible and the invisible. The symbol is the visible and the object that the Catholics can see and perceive through the naked eye. But that visible thing containing the invisible, the invisible is what followers feel when they contemplate those symbols. They see God's divine presence in those symbols, which is the perception of the mysterious sacred invisible in the eyes of faith. It is the perception of the invisible in each individual being of each individual. However, if contemplating the symbol with perceives of the visible, those symbols are simple and not a religious symbol. But when perceiving the visible and see the embodiment of the invisible, the symbol becomes lively, having the right meaning and role of the religious symbol. The beauty of the religious symbol in general and the Catholic symbol in particular is reflected in the combination of visible and invisible. The visible is the bridge for people to touch the supernatural invisible. The invisible is hard to perceive but the invisible is easily perceived by the visible of the symbol. For example, the Alpha and Omega symbols: The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and these two letters represent the eternal nature of Jesus.

About this matter, Father Joseph Vu The T. said: "It is very difficult for people to recognize the invisible God through their naked eyes. However, when Jesus embodied the Father into the world, the image of the visible God was revealed in the most specific way. However, when the God returned to Heaven, the apostles preached the word of the God everywhere in the world and created a universal church. In order that believers could know the invisible God in the best way in the sense of faith; The Church has allowed creating symbols to revere, worship and to recognize God, and through visible symbols that humans recognize an invisible One. Through this, the faith of the

⁴ Interview by author, September, 2018.

followers is firmly reinforced on the basis of the Bible, the doctrine and the system of symbols in the cathedrals”⁵.

The Easter candle in Catholic churches is reminiscent of Jesus’ words: “I am the light of the world” (Ga 8, 12).⁶ When there are two candles placed on the altar, they symbolize the nature of human and the God Jesus. It represents the light of Jesus because he brings light to the dark world. At Phung Khoang parish church, there is always a huge candle placed at the space of baptism, this candle is blessed on the day of Easter, so it is called an Easter candle. That Easter candle reminds the parishioners of the saving light of Jesus brought to the world, brought eternal life to man. About this matter, Nguyen Thu L., a parishioner of Phung Khoang parish, said: “There must always be an Easter candle in every church in the world and Vietnam, as it represents the light of Jesus, the light that He brought to this dark world. Many people asked me why I believed that a candle was the embodiment of God. I have always believed that God himself is there, in visible objects that we cannot see with our naked eyes”⁷.

The visible and invisible are always closely related in a religion and symbol is the bridge that brings these two elements closer together to have the invisible felt in the best way in their religious life, that is, a firm sense of a supernatural force affecting religious life. The symbol gets the visible and the invisible linked together, making the life of faith more mysterious and sacred. Therefore, these symbols make the cathedral sacred when parishioners come to celebrate religious activities. All theologians think that these symbols help people to love invisible God more and more, a love that surpasses the space and time of human.

4.2.2. *The bridge between earthly life and heaven*

Parishioners always believe that earthly life is only temporary, a journey towards heaven and life in heaven is the true life, the life that all Catholics all towards. It has become a justification for living, a future orientation that adjusts their behavior in the relationship between man and man, and between man and God. Earthly life is the purification of believers to prepare to enter an eternal life in Heaven. Heaven has many different interpretations. For Catholics, Heaven is a state of immunizing against evil and suffering, acquiring goodness and where God dwells with his Angels and saints; the place is only for those who have an honest life in the earthly world, living and following God’s teachings. It is not for sinners who did wrong things in the earthly world. Therefore, in the lives of Catholics, they always warn themselves not to violate the doctrinal rules and the commandments of God.

⁵ Interview by author, September, 2018.

⁶ Interview by author, September, 2018.

⁷ Interview by author, September, 2018.

Heaven cannot be seen when people live. Only after death can they see it. This makes parishioners feel anxious even though they have been strengthened by the Bible and the doctrine to be able to imagine Heaven where awaits the honest men. In order to strengthen faith for the followers as well as the trust of eternal life, the Church used paintings to describe the heaven where God dwells, and used church space and symbols to describe the heaven in the most authentic way. Scenes of the majesty of the sky and the presence of the Trinity in the cloud and the saints prostrating in front of God help people imagine scenes of heaven as described in the Bible. Through contemplating those symbols, believers envision a scene in Heaven where God dwells with his saints, like the symbols in the church are arranged according to the general rules of the Church.

In addition to the system of symbols contributing to the connection between the earth and heaven, some churches decorate the symbols of Heaven directly with pictures, reliefs, as in Phu My church has two reliefs showing the life of people after death, a painting is about Hell and the other one about Heaven. This helps parishioners see the best of Heaven, where good things are shown and expressed through these symbols.

Under the earthly eyes, Heaven is described as a fairy-tale realm and the doorway is held by St. Peter. In Heaven, there is a throne of God, light shining and the aura of smoke spreading, angels are flying and singing, saints are going in or kneeling and praising God ceaselessly!... There are also seats for the saints, martyrs and virgins... just like mythical movies. Heaven appears before the eyes of people with the most beautiful and happiest prospect that the imagination of painting can draw. The number figures are also like that, when people talk about the Trinity, they suggest the image of a happy old man holding the Earth in his hands and being happy with the product he creates; there is a middle-aged man sitting on the right and holding a cross – a sign of salvation, above him is a shining dove represents the story of the day on the banks of the Jordan River. Therefore, when coming to the church, parishioners contemplate the symbols like their thoughts of Heaven, which have been described in the Bible and doctrine, making the parishioners feel like they are being living in Heaven with the presence of Peter and Paul outside the church door, with the presence of the Trinity, the serving Angels and Saints. This does not stop at ordinary feelings; it also turns into actions, affecting human behavior in life. Those who do bad things must change the way of life to be better in order to enter the Kingdom of God. Those who have lived well must continue to develop and do good and virtuous things to expand the Church of God, so that they may enter into Heaven, live an eternal, solid life. Therefore, these symbols are like a link between the earthly life of the parishioner and a happy life in heaven.

Vu Dinh Ch., Parishioner of Ke Set said: “When I go to church, I almost enter the sacred place where my God created. Furthermore, I am also contacted with the symbols of the Trinity, the Angels, and his Saints, this make me happy as if I were in Heaven, coming back to the One whom I loved and worshiped. But it doesn’t stop there, the

feelings of Heaven's life help me live better in the earthly world, so I can enter Heaven after my death to get God's grace, because that's also the purpose and the truth life of mine, let me light my purpose in my faith journey"⁸.

It can be said that earthly life is a journey of faith into eternal life in Heaven. It is the connection between past, present and future. The parishioner, on his journey to search for the Kingdom of Heaven, is often in crisis and bewildered if this search is true or not. But that doubt was most firmly reinforced when parishioner contemplates the symbols in the cathedrals and practice rituals. This seem to makes them strengthen their faith in life after death and can see Heaven in the simplest way under the naked eyes of the earthly people.

4.2.3. The bridge between the faithful and the God

In Catholics, believers are often called with an affectionate name, the faithful (in Vietnamese is called the sheep). The matter why Catholics are called sheep is derived from the Jewish society; the sheep is a very gentle, close and intimate animal. The sheep is used as a symbol of gentle, simple, moral people. Catholic originated from Judaism, God's own people, chosen by God. So Catholics are called "the sheep of God". The image of sheep symbolizes Catholics as the unity in a flock. Jesus is the shepherd and He gathers all the sheep in one unified flock. When it comes to the "pious lamb", it refers to Catholics who have a firm faith in God, trusting in the power of God and living in harmony with everyone in society. Therefore, when we talk about sheep, we think immediately of Catholics who put all their faith in the shepherd, Christ.

The sheep and the Lord always have a close relationship with each other as the shepherd and the flock. The shepherd is Jesus who cares for each of his sheep. He loves every sheep so that no one will lose his/her flock. Therefore, sheep are parishioners who want to be close to God and accompany them in life. But it is easy to see that sheep are difficult to know God visually. The sheep of God uses deductive methods to recognize God though it is not the perfect method, but it helps the sheep to know the truth. It was the first process that God used to reveal himself to his sheep in the Bible. However, this way of thinking makes sheep difficult to recognize God in the best way. Stemming from practical needs in the life of sheep, the Church took new movement to meet the needs of sheep, it allowed the use of tangible symbols to express faith as well as narrowing the gap between the sheep and God, making the connection in the same faith stronger and more stable.

The sheep comes to God is to come to the churches where God dwells, where the sheep show his respect to God. When coming to the church, the sheep seems to be closer to God and connected with Him by love. This intimate connection is expressed

⁸ Interview by author, September, 2018.

through prayers, listening to the word of God, the teachings of the priests, and participating in the Breaking of the bread, etc. But the sheep is not only exposed to the activities of religious rituals but also to the system of symbols related to the Trinity, re-expressing the life of Jesus in the earthly world; symbols of Mary, angels and saints, etc. These symbols partly describe the contents of the Bible as well as Christian Mysteries when celebrating Service. This makes God appear closer, no longer strange, no longer confusing but present under visible symbols.

Ms. Le Thi V.A said: “When talking of Catholicism, the first symbol emerges is the Cross because it is considered a symbol of Catholicism, the love of the great king Jesus who sacrificed himself to redeem humanity. Another great symbol is the cake and cup of wine. This symbol represents the Body and Blood of Jesus and it is also the great sacrament for Christians because of their participation in this sacrament they get his Blood and Body into their mind. Besides, the Rosary, to me, is also considered a symbol of Catholicism. The Rosary is tied to the prayers of mankind and transmitted the prayers to Mary. The rosary is also associated with many historical stories and Mysteries in the history. Within the symbols: Cross, Cake and Wine, Rosary, the Cross is the most important symbol and is the center of Christian faith. If without Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection, everything is meaningless and humanity would not get his salvation. The religious symbol carries the meaning and also belief of a religion into the Supreme Being – God. Through these symbols, religious educators can explain and spread faith easily. And because these are typical symbols, for the young and newcomers, these typical symbols will create more curiosity and desire to explore so that they will go deeper into the Catholic Mystery, increasingly imbued with faith and transform their lives day by day”⁹.

The Church allow these symbols to only make the sheep be able to visualize their God in the most tangible way and explain the mysteries that God has established in the Church. For example, when seeing the wheat and grapes symbols, the parishioner will immediately think about the mysteries that God establishes as the Eucharist. Wheat: symbolizes Jesus’ body, the wheat also symbolizes Christians against “weeds” – the heresy; Grapes is the symbol of the Jesus’ blood pouring down to redeem for human sin. Grapes are also a symbol of success in Christian life. Or when seeing three interlocking circles: Often used to symbolize the Trinity. The circle symbolizes the eternal nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The three interlocking circles remind the believer that the God is the one in spite of being separated into three beings (Trinity). Through it, believers can be best in imagining the Mystery of the Trinity. In the process of our survey at Chuyen My parish church, there are many symbols of the Trinity such as symbols on the church’s bell tower, which has the symbol embodying dove

⁹ Interview by author, September, 2018.

into the Holy Spirit, or circles on doorways symbolizing the Father's creation. In this regard, Mr. Tran Van T. – a parishioner in the Chuyen My parish said: "In the Chuyen My parish we see a lot of Trinity images such as the image of a dove at the end of the church symbolizing the Holy Spirit, the symbol of the sheep at the foot of the altar symbolizing Jesus, etc. These symbols help us to see the presence of God in the cathedral, making us feel God so close, and it is not difficult to understand as in the Bible, because our parishioners' knowledge are not very high, so these images serve as our connection with God"¹⁰.

In the book "Inside the Catholic Church", there is the idea of symbolism as the bridge between the sheep and the God: "The signs and outside and inside symbols are to arouse spiritual reactions within us. They can lift our souls and bring us to distant, unknown God, but He is everywhere and full of compassion"¹¹. The symbol plays a role as a rope connecting believers to God, is an intermediary element for believers to meet their God. That meeting seems like an exchange with full of love between believers and God. Believers will meet God and ask Him their own needs and God will respond with the voices of the soul through faith.

4.2.4. Strengthen faith, reliance, and love

For Catholics, every life relies on God, being strength and end. Christian life comes from God and is organized according to His will. The life of a religious person is closely related to God and deeply rooted in Him. Christians believe that people are called to live in intimacy with God, for God created the universe of all living creatures to unite all people and individual into His life. The life of Catholics is firmly reinforced by the sense of faith, reliance and affection in the one they are worshiping.

For Catholics, faith, reliance, and affection are the three most important virtues in the lives of parishioners. It is a guideline for parishioners to live and practice their virtues. To become a Catholic follower, one must have these three virtues and they have to be acquired through the process of experiencing religious beliefs, it means the practice of religious life. At the same time, they are strengthened through the education of the truths that the Church has concluded in the doctrine.

These three virtues have a close relationship and complement each other in the lives of Catholics. Faith is the expression of one self's faith in God. But faith is not enough without reliance, it means when we believe in God, we need to have a firm reliance on God in any situation. After the faith and reliance being built steadily, affection acts as a link among the virtues through the affection for God.

¹⁰ Interview by author, September, 2018.

¹¹ Interview by author, September, 2018.

In the life of Catholics, to obtain these three virtues they must go through a process of being educated and reinforced their beliefs by doctrine. However, in order to consolidate the three virtues in the best way, the Catholics felt with the symbols in the cathedral where they performed rituals of worshipping God.

First, when contemplating those symbols, their faith is more firmly reinforced. Because these symbols describe biblical matters in the most honest ways as well as helping parishioners see God, the invisible being they are worshipping. For example, when believing in the Trinity, if only being received through the Bible, it is very difficult for them to understand and recognize God, but when contemplating the symbol of the Father that is illustrated by an old man, the Son by Shepherd and The statue of God suffering, ... The Holy Spirit by the dove, the mystery of the Trinity is clearly concertized, making the faith of the parishioner much stronger when they approach Church doctrines. The symbol turns towards the perception of faith, also is part of the fulcrum of faith and is reinforced through tangible artifacts. Faith is an invisible supernatural, cannot be seen, but the symbol makes that faith more visible and can be perceived by the simple eye.

Second, the symbol consolidates trust more. The reliance connects human hopes and gives them a divine dynamism, asserting that the greatest faith will not be disappointed. Catholics will put all their trust in the invisible God even though their beliefs have changes and movements. In the eyes of the parishioners, symbol is the fulcrum of reliance, through the symbol the parishioner expresses their reliance on God through various actions, which may be prayers in front of symbols when they face difficulties in life or thanksgiving to God when they get good things and it helps their hope more stable. Standing In front of these symbols the parishioners are exposed to the invisible God with the beliefs and expression of trust in Him, with different attitudes and behaviors. Mr. Do Van D, a parishioner in the Chuyen My parish, said: "I am a Catholic, we not only have faith but also have reliance, and it means believing in our God absolutely. Reliance makes us more stable in our faith journey. Especially, when we are contemplating the symbols in churches, I feel I get more strength and absolutely believe in God. You can see, there are many different symbols in our church, but when I contemplate the symbol of suffering in the center of the church, I feel like I am more confident of the God's power"¹².

Thirdly, the symbol makes the affection more passionate. Through the symbol, parishioners express their affection in different ways. This affection depends on the different feelings of faith, but for God, this love is always unique. For example, when seeing the symbol of thorn crowns: Believers are aware of the symbol embodying Jesus' pain and suffering, evoking Jesus' sacrifice to redeem the sins of mankind.

¹² Interview by author, September, 2018.

In the process of surveying churches in Hanoi, the author found that, due to the love to Maria, parishioners always took the central positions of the cathedral to place the symbol of her. It could be the Most Holy Rosary of Mary, Our Lady of La Vang, the Mother of the Soul to heaven, the immaculate Virgin Mary, etc ... not stopping there, this affection is also manifested by respecting actions. Every time they touch the symbol, they want to touch it with their hands and rub it on their face as an act of showing their love and wish for their blessing in life. Or the symbol as statue of Our Lady at the Tam village, due to the love to the Lady, every time attending Mass they touch its feet, causing the feet of the statue to be smoothed out. These are acts of showing affection for God and his saints, but through the presence of those symbols, this love is more like adding, making the love more abundant and passionate. Loving God with all heart but not being able to express it with actions, symbols have helped these actions to be expressed. In supernatural virtues, affection is the highest virtue because Affection is not separate from sanctifying grace, intimately connecting followers with God and others, prompting followers to comply with the Law of God and do good things and forever follow that direction. The Affection is the foundation of Christian's perfection. And the symbol makes the Affection most fully expressed through the manifested acts of love. However, the Affection is strengthened through symbol but not converted into fanatical acts.

Mr. Vuong Tung L. – a Catholic parishioner in Bang So said: “The lives of Catholics in particular and Christians in general express belief and the contents of faith and mystery in the religion through material symbols. Thereby it is possible to divide symbols of the religion into two categories: (1) the symbol of popular moral. This symbol group is used to express the contents of the Bible for the purpose of everyday activities, decoration, and education like the Christmas tree – the symbol of the forbidden fruit in the book of Genesis, the Noel star – the image of the leading star in the Gospel, ... (2) The symbol associated with the liturgical rites of the Church. This symbolic group is used in the official liturgical rites of the Church which partly reflects the meaning of the mysteries, faith in the religion such as the resurrection candles, crosses, altars, holy oils, sticks of bishop, The Church, to meet the Parishioner's needs, allows expressing the mysteries and faith through visible symbols. Therefore, holy symbols are a tool of the Church to partly express their faith, describe out the contents of the Bible and the mysteries in the religion so that believers can focus their mind on the content and understand God's plan of salvation. Not only does it show the content, the symbols also help to show the faith of believers, the symbols have different meanings but are all about the same goal is to help improve the faith of believers, help them to declare faith and turn to worship the only Trinity. Attached to the liturgy, holy symbols help

believers pray for help offer their asking and are means of God to communicate the holy grace helping believers on the journey of faith”¹³.

These three virtues help Catholics to be steady in their journey of seeking the truth in God. At the same time, the symbols in the cathedral are like luggage to strengthen and lead them to walk under the universal truth of light and sooth.

Conclusion

Thus, for Catholics, symbol plays an important role in their life of faith. The symbol is like a rope linking God to man. God is present invisibly on these visible symbols, and man sees his God while contemplating the symbols at the church. It is a meeting of faith, which cannot be perceived by the naked eyes of man. The symbol makes faith more imbued with the thoughts of the Bible that God wants to speak to man. It almost performs the function of educating faith visually and vividly, which the conveying of the Bible content in preached words is difficult to obtain.

These symbols were originally made solely for the purpose of meeting the needs of the parishioner and serving the mission of the Church. But when taken into the church and considered it as a sacred symbol, those symbols have a huge effect. It changed the life of the Church and the Church is fortified in difficult times. Especially, in the lives of the parishioners, they are strengthened in faith, reliance and affection (Love) for them to step on the earthly journey, putting completely their faith in God and adjusting their behaviors and orientations for the future, leading to a real place where every Catholic is heading, Heaven. The symbol also makes the churches a sacred space, worthy of being house of God. Because these symbols help the churches have more mysterious atmosphere when the parishioners come to practice faith in daily life by the actions and gestures showing respect in front of those symbols.

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¹³ Interview by author, September, 2018.

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The role of symbol in the faith of Catholicism (Case study of churches in Hanoi capital)

Summary: Starting as part of Tabernacle, through many historical periods, the Catholic Church is an important component of the religious life of the Catholic faithful around the world. The Catholic Church or The house of God is the place for the faithful to gather and show their faith to God. The symbol in the Catholic Church is not only a church decoration scheme, each symbol and symbolic combination also represents theological value and plays a big part in the faith of the followers. In this article, I used methods of field research and in-depth interview to explore the role of the symbol in the Catholic faith by surveying some Catholic churches in Hanoi.

Keywords: symbol Catholic Church, faith, church

Rola symbolu w wierze katolickiej (studium przypadku kościołów w Hanoi)

Streszczenie: Kościół jest od wielu wieków ważnym elementem życia religijnego wiernych katolickich na całym świecie. Kościół katolicki lub Dom Boży to miejsce, w którym wierni gromadzą się i manifestują swoją wiarę w Boga. Symbole w wierze katolickiej nie są rozpatrywane jedynie jako elementy dekoracji kościoła. Każdy symbol, a także ich grupy reprezentują również wartość teologiczną i odgrywają ogromną rolę wśród wiernych. W badaniach, które zostały opisane w niniejszym artykule wykorzystane zostały metody badań terenowych oraz wywiadu pogłębionego. Posłużyły one zbadaniu roli symboli w wierze katolickiej. Obszar badań obejmował kościoły katolickie w Hanoi.

Słowa kluczowe: symbol, Kościół katolicki, wiara, kościół