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Javanese Gamelan as Sacred Manifestation: Exploring Its Role in Catholic Liturgical Inculturation and Spiritual Dialogue

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Abstract: Javanese Gamelan, a traditional musical ensemble deeply embedded in Javanese culture, serves as a profound symbol of harmony and spiritual values, reflecting principles such as balance, restraint, and tolerance. Historically integral to religious and ceremonial contexts, Gamelan embodies a sacred medium through which the Javanese engage with the Divine, aligning with Mircea Eliade's concept of hierophany—the manifestation of the sacred in the profane world. Despite its rich cultural and philosophical significance, contemporary shifts have led to a decline in Gamelan's popularity and its associated values, impacting cultural practices, including the inculturation process within the Catholic Church among Javanese communities. This qualitative study, based on interviews, observations, and literature review, demonstrates that Gamelan transcends mere musical function, offering a theological and cultural framework that can enhance Catholic liturgical music. Integrating Gamelan into worship not only enriches faith expression but also fosters cultural identity and supports liturgical inculturation. The findings contribute to the discourse on cultural heritage preservation and religious adaptation by proposing a model that harmonises local artistic traditions with Christian worship, encouraging further interdisciplinary research and practical application.

Keywords: Hierophany; Javanese Gamelan; liturgical music; Mircea Eliade; the Divine.

Abstrak: Gamelan Jawa, ensambel musik tradisional yang sangat tertanam dalam budaya Jawa, berfungsi sebagai simbol mendalam dari harmoni dan nilai-nilai spiritual, mencerminkan prinsip-prinsip seperti keseimbangan, pengendalian diri, dan toleransi. Secara historis, Gamelan menjadi bagian integral dari konteks keagamaan dan upacara, mewakili medium suci melalui mana masyarakat Jawa berinteraksi dengan Yang Ilahi, sejalan dengan konsep hierofani Mircea Eliade—manifestasi yang suci dalam dunia profan. Meskipun memiliki makna budaya dan filosofis yang kaya, pergeseran kontemporer telah menyebabkan penurunan popularitas Gamelan dan nilai-nilai yang terkait dengannya, berdampak pada praktik budaya termasuk proses inkulturasi dalam Gereja Katolik di kalangan komunitas Jawa. Studi kualitatif ini, yang didasarkan pada wawancara, pengamatan, dan tinjauan literatur, menunjukkan bahwa Gamelan melampaui fungsi musik semata, menawarkan kerangka teologis dan budaya yang dapat memperkaya musik liturgi Katolik. Integrasi Gamelan dalam ibadah tidak hanya memperkaya ekspresi iman tetapi juga memperkuat identitas budaya dan mendukung inkulturasi liturgi. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada diskursus tentang pelestarian warisan budaya dan adaptasi agama dengan mengusulkan model yang mengharmoniskan tradisi seni lokal dengan ibadah Kristen, mendorong penelitian interdisipliner lebih lanjut dan penerapan praktis.

Kata Kunci: Hierofani; Gamelan Jawa; musik liturgi; Mircea Eliade; Sang Ilahi.

1. Introduction

Indonesia is blessed with cultural diversity that manifests in various forms such as customs, languages, traditions, musical instruments, dances, cuisine, and more (Fatmawati, 2021). These cultural elements form a rich mosaic that reflects the identity and uniqueness of the Indonesian people. In Indonesia, every cultural expression contains profound meanings and values. For instance, musical instruments are a form of artistic creativity and carry cultural messages, philosophical views, and even spiritual meaning. They are physical representations of belief systems, acting as sacred texts and links between the natural, human, and supernatural realms (Schreffler, 2023). In Flores, particularly in Maumere, musical instruments such as the *klekor* drum and the *gong* express a spirit of togetherness (Wiyati, Saptono, & Raharjo, 2023). The *sape* emits soft and calming vibrations among the Dayak community that give a sense of peace (Hartanto, Darmawan, Manalu, & Lenny, 2021). In Timor, the *sasando* produces distinct notes that serve as a medium for cultural communication (Ton, 2023). These instruments are more than just cultural artifacts. They represent the soul of the local communities that have preserved and inherited them.

Similarly, Javanese Gamelan holds a central place in the life of the Javanese community. Gamelan produces beautiful and harmonious sounds as a traditional ensemble of musical instruments made of bamboo, metal, and wood. The composition and arrangement of the instruments are designed in such a way that each has its role and contributes to the overall harmony. The *gong*, for instance, marks the end of each long rhythmic cycle, helping to stabilize the tempo of the performance (Iswantoro, 2018). Gamelan is an art form and a medium of spiritual expression. For the Javanese, Gamelan is part of life; it speaks through musical notes reflecting a peaceful rhythm. It aligns with the views of cultural observers and religious thinkers who see Gamelan as a form of religious expression that can manifest the Sacred, in Eliade's terms, through symbols and rhythms that reflect divine harmony.

Faith is not something that grows in a vacuum. Faith grows, lives, and is expressed through the local culture. Culture is the "mouth" of faith. Culture allows faith to be expressed in language, symbols, and ways close to its adherents' daily experiences. Therefore, the inculturation of liturgical music is not just a matter of adopting cultural elements into liturgy, but rather allowing the liturgy to speak in the cultural language of the people. As part of Javanese culture, Gamelan is a relevant medium for the inculturation of Catholic liturgical music. When culture is preserved and appreciated, faith becomes more rooted and authentic. Music that arises from the life philosophy of simplicity, harmony, and tolerance can serve as a means to express theological values in forms that are close and familiar to the faithful.

Long before the arrival of Islam, the Javanese people already had high cultural abilities in the arts, including wayang and Gamelan. Their cultural taste had been refined, and they greatly appreciated the performing arts (Oktavia, Gandamiharja, & Akbar, 2013). Gamelan is not just music; it contains philosophy and values. It teaches harmony in social life, the balance between emotion and reason, and self-control. Using the Javanese language with refined vocabulary in Gamelan lyrics shows how language and music unite to convey ethical and aesthetic messages. According to Asmara, Susilo, & Mahasinul A (2020), the creation of gending or Gamelan music is often inspired by life events, expressions of the soul, love, longing, and even prayer. Krishna (2019) states that Gamelan music can create a hypnotic and spiritual atmosphere. Imaniyyah, Prameswari, Zahra, Adibah, & Maulana (2024) also note that Gamelan music is repetitive but not boring, and this repetition brings the listener into a meditative and contemplative state.

However, the popularity of traditional music is now declining. Young people tend to be more familiar with modern musical instruments and less interested in learning or understanding traditional instruments. This reality results in the loss of philosophical values embedded in traditional music. Putra, Budiono, & Budianto (2022). Found that the low interest of children in traditional musical instruments in general is due to the dominance of modern musical instruments. It causes the younger generation to be unfamiliar with the depth of meaning in traditional music. This phenomenon has implications for the inculturation of liturgical music in the Catholic Church. Hardawiryana (2009) states that inculturation is not just adopting cultural forms into the liturgy but allowing the liturgy to grow

from within the culture. When the community is alienated from its own culture, inculturation becomes difficult. Gamelan can only become a medium of inculturation if the people are culturally connected and understand its values.

This article aims to uncover the concept of hierophany, or the manifestation of the Sacred in Javanese Gamelan music through Mircea Eliade's perspective. As a religious philosopher, Eliade sees that religious symbols and practices often represent something Sacred, transcendent, and eternal. Gamelan music, with its harmony, repetition, and symbolic structure, can be interpreted as a hierophany—a manifestation of the Sacred in cultural form. The relevance of this topic is increasing, especially in the context of liturgical inculturation in the Catholic Church. As a Church that grows and serves in various cultural contexts, Catholicism needs to speak in the cultural language of its faithful. Through the approach of hierophany, Gamelan music can be understood not only as a cultural product but also as a religious symbol with deep meaning.

Several studies have previously examined the relationship between Gamelan and spiritual experience. Yahya & Utomo (2017) argue that Gamelan music can lead to mystical experiences due to the harmonization of feelings, imagination, and expression in the form of gending. Darmawan & Krishna (2019) explain that in the Lontar Aji Gurnita, which is a cultural text from Bali, the sounds of Gamelan are considered sacred sounds that represent the presence of the divine. The number of tones in the Gamelan instruments also has symbolic meaning and is linked to the cosmology and beliefs of the Balinese community. These perspectives show that Gamelan is not merely music but a medium that can manifest the Sacred and connect humans with higher realities.

Puguh et.al (2023) further emphasises that Gamelan functions not only as a musical ensemble but also as a medium of contemplation and religious expression, particularly within Javanese rituals and ceremonies. According to her, Gamelan's structural and rhythmic unity reflects the Javanese cosmological order, linking musical performance with metaphysical harmony. Similarly, Hananto (2020) underlines the philosophical dimension of Gamelan, stating that Gamelan serves as a cultural expression of olah rasa (aesthetic sensitivity) and inner balance. He identifies Gamelan as an embodiment of symbolic communication that conveys values of harmony, humility, and spiritual discipline rooted in the Javanese worldview.

This article offers a new perspective by integrating Mircea Eliade's theory of the Sacred with a case study approach. The research focuses on Gamelan learning activities conducted by Mr. Oktavianus Eko Saputro, S.Sn.., a Gamelan instructor, along with four students—Maria Timbuleng, Agata Lelang Aya, Sundari Laura, and Maria Adeirma Mnesta Timo—at Yos Sudarso Catholic Senior High School in Batu City, East Java. Data were collected through participatory observation during Gamelan practice sessions held on March 7, 2024, from 09:00 to 11:00 am. and through semi-structured interviews with the instructor and the participating students. The analysis employs a descriptive qualitative method, emphasizing the interpretation of religious symbols and meanings within the Gamelan learning experience, guided by Eliade's theoretical framework on the manifestation of the Sacred in cultural expressions.

2. The Sacred Identity of Javanese Gamelan: History, Space, and Myth

Gamelan musical instruments have a long history. It is believed that before the influence of Hinduism, the Javanese recognised ten key skills, including the skills of making and playing wayang (puppets) and the art of Gamelan. Although Gamelan is found in various parts of Indonesia, such as Bali, Madura, and Lombok, Javanese Gamelan specifically refers to the original form from Central Java (Burtchaell, 1990). The appearance of this musical instrument is estimated to have existed in Java since around 404 AD, as evidenced by the carvings on the reliefs of Borobudur Temple and Prambanan Temple. Javanese Gamelan, with its soft rhythms, is generally used to accompany puppet shows and dance performances. However, it can also be performed as a standalone musical presentation featuring singers or sinden. Over time, the art of Gamelan has transformed, particularly in its methods of construction and performance, with some elements being integrated into modern musical genres (Putra et al., 2022).

> "Etymologically, the word Gamelan derives from the Javanese *gamêl*, meaning 'to hit' or 'to beat,' referring to the mallets used to strike the instruments. The addition of the suffix 'an' turns it into a noun. The term *karawitan* refers to classical Gamelan music and performance practice, stemming from the Javanese word *rawit*, which in turn is derived from Sanskrit and means 'intricate' or 'well done.' The word *pengrawit*, also from this root, refers to someone with refined musical skill and is used as a term of respect when discussing Gamelan performers. In Javanese *krama* (refined) language, Gamelan is also called *gangsa*, which comes from the words *tiga* and *sedasa*, referring to its components made of three parts of copper"(Oktavianus Eko Saputro, personal communication, March 07, 2024).

A space specifically used for housing Gamelan instruments is often called a *pendopo* or Gamelan room. In many traditional Indonesian cultures, Gamelan is frequently played in such a *pendopo*—an open or semi-open structure with a roof supported by columns. These spaces can be found in temple complexes, traditional houses, or other buildings designated for cultural and religious activities. In contemporary settings, Gamelan rooms may be part of arts facilities, auditoriums, or special rooms within educational institutions and cultural centres (Arif, Wibowo, & Nada, 2022). As Mr Oktavianus remarked, this space is considered sacred, especially in Javanese.

> "*Gamelan asring disimpen ana ing pendhapa utawa bangsal. Ruang kuwi dianggep sakral amarga dadi papan panggonan* Gamelan *kang kudu dijaga resik lan adhem. Wong Jawa percaya yen ora sembarang uwong bisa mlebu utawa mindhahake* Gamelan *tanpa ijin lan upacara tartamtu. Ing wektu tartamtu, ruang* Gamelan *uga di-sajen-i minangka bentuk pangurmatan marang roh leluhur lan danyang* Gamelan"
> "Gamelan is often kept in a pendhapa or ward. That room is considered sacred because it is a special place for Gamelan that must be kept clean and holy. Javanese people believe that not everyone can enter or move the Gamelan without permission and certain rituals. At certain times, the Gamelan storage room is also given offerings as a form of respect to the ancestral spirits and the Gamelan's supernatural guardians" (Oktavianus Eko Saputro, personal communication, March 07, 2024).

The sanctity of the Gamelan room reflects the belief that Gamelan is not merely a musical instrument but a cultural entity imbued with spiritual significance. The word 'sacred' refers to something perceived as holy or connected to divine or spiritual realms. In Indonesian culture, Gamelan is used for entertainment and is closely associated with religious ceremonies, rituals, and cultural events of spiritual value. Spaces designated for Gamelan are often designed with special reverence, much like places of worship. It is because Gamelan is believed to facilitate a connection between humans and the spiritual or sacred dimension (Saptono, Haryanto, & Hendro, 2019). Thus, the Gamelan room is not merely a training ground for musicians but also a space that upholds respect for cultural heritage and local musical traditions. It serves practical and spiritual purposes, underscoring the reverence for Gamelan as an essential aspect of Indonesia's cultural and religious life.

Gamelan embodies significant aesthetic, spiritual, moral, and social values in Eastern societies. Apart from its use in educational settings and traditional ceremonies, Gamelan also plays an important role in religious rituals, particularly within the Hindu-Buddhist traditions of Indonesia. Its distinctive sound creates an atmosphere of sacredness. In certain communities, Gamelan is believed to possess magical or spiritual powers. Some instruments are considered sacred and may only be played by designated individuals during religious ceremonies. It imbues Gamelan performances with a profound spiritual dimension, particularly for participants in traditional rituals and belief systems (Hananto, 2020).

According to traditional beliefs, Gamelan is thought to have *danyang*—guardian spirits that must be treated with respect. Gamelan instruments are sometimes ceremonially bathed (*jamas*) at specific times, such as on the night of 1 *Suro*, as a sign of spiritual reverence (Maria Timbuleng, Agata Lelang Aya & Sundari Laura, personal communication, March 07, 2024). Many Javanese people believe that the sound of Gamelan serves as a medium between the human world and the realm of spirits or

ancestors. For this reason, Gamelan is often featured in traditional ceremonies, rituals, and sacred performances such as *wayang kulit*. In Javanese culture, there is a well-known saying: *Gamelan kuwi ora mung wesi lan gangsa, nanging ana nyawane*, which means, "Gamelan is not just metal and bronze, but it has a soul." It reflects the idea that Gamelan is not simply a tool for entertainment but a symbol of culture embedded with spiritual and mystical meaning (Oktavianus Eko Saputro, personal communication, March 07, 2024).

In traditional Indonesian spirituality, instruments such as Gamelan are perceived as a medium to connect with the divine or spirit world. They are believed to carry magical or supernatural powers that grant access to higher spiritual dimensions. Javanese Gamelan music is deeply intertwined with myth and sacredness, featuring legendary narratives about its origin and functions. These myths often involve deities, royal figures, or mystical powers believed to reside within the music and influence human life (Fisabilillah, Yunitasari, Rengganis, Dayanti, & Darmadi, 2022). The notion of sacredness reflects the reverence and majesty attributed to Gamelan instruments, which are far more than conventional musical tools. They are integral to rituals, traditional ceremonies, and spiritually charged performances. Gamelan players and craftsmen often hold esteemed roles as cultural custodians and spiritual figures. In this sense, Gamelan is not merely an art form or entertainment—it is a cultural medium through which beliefs, spirituality, and the human connection to the unseen world are expressed and preserved (Sunardi, 2024).

3. Hierophany and Symbolism: Understanding the Sacred through Eliade's Lens

Mircea Eliade, born in Bucharest, Romania, on March 9, 1907, displayed an early passion for knowledge, especially in philology, philosophy, and comparative religion. He pursued his studies at the University of Bucharest, focusing on the Platonic tradition of the Italian Renaissance. Later, he continued his academic journey at the University of Calcutta, where he deepened his understanding of Indian spirituality and spent time at the Rishikesh ashram to study yoga. In 1946, Eliade published his dissertation Yoga: An Essay on the Origins of Indian Mystical Theology (Fiamrillah Zifamina, 2022). Throughout his career, Eliade rejected reductionist approaches that rely solely on sociological, anthropological, or psychological frameworks to study religion. Instead, he emphasised the importance of understanding religious phenomena from within, through religious adherents' lived experiences, myths, languages, and symbolic systems. His guiding principle asserts that "the scale creates the phenomenon" (Eliade, 1959), indicating that religious phenomena must be understood on their terms.

A central concept in Eliade's thought is hierophany, which refers to the manifestation of the Sacred in the profane world. Derived from the Greek terms *hieros* (holy) and *phainein* (to reveal), hierophany describes moments when divine reality becomes present within the material world (Adon & Renda, 2022). These manifestations may take various forms—spiritual experiences, divine appearances, or miraculous events—that allow individuals to encounter the transcendent amid ordinary life. By dissolving the boundary between the sacred and the profane, hierophanies enable humans to feel the divine presence through dreams, visions, meditative states, or even daily occurrences imbued with spiritual significance (Matei, 2014). In many religious traditions, hierophany represents a pivotal experience that transforms an individual's spiritual awareness and deepens their connection with the Sacred (Rennie, 2007).

Religious Man

Eliade's analysis of the religious person—referred to as "homo religiosus"—emphasizes a unique orientation toward life and existence. In The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, he argues that religious people perceive the world, themselves, and others through a sacred framework. In this context, religion functions not only as a system of beliefs but as a revelation that connects humanity to a mythic origin and evokes awareness of transcendent dimensions (Codoban, 1998). For Eliade, the Sacred represents an irreducible core of human experience. Historical, social, or psychological interpretations cannot adequately explain it. Religious individuals perceive the Sacred as central to existence, expressed through experiences such as kratophany, hierophany, and theophany. These

experiences shape their worldview and define their understanding of being. From this perspective, nature is not merely physical; it possesses a spiritual quality that reveals the Sacred. Eliade emphasises the dual nature of the Sacred: it is both awe-inspiring and comforting, mysterious yet accessible, destructive and life-giving (Desanti, 2023).

The opposition between the Sacred and the profane becomes a fundamental distinction in Eliade's framework. Religious individuals seek to maintain proximity to their sacred sources, which confer meaning and order upon their lives. Their engagement with the world reflects this orientation. They interpret their roles and responsibilities not merely through social or ethical norms, but through a cosmic lens. In doing so, they experience life as a spiritual journey rather than a sequence of secular events. This attitude influences how they interact with others and respond to cultural and historical contexts. Unlike non-religious individuals, they evaluate human experience by its relation to divine reality and see themselves as participants in a larger sacred order (Widyaputra, 2021).

Sacred Space and Natural Holiness

Eliade further explores how religious people perceive space. For them, space is not homogeneous; certain places possess a distinct sacred quality. These sacred spaces exhibit order and orientation, contrasting to profane space's chaotic and undifferentiated nature. Through hierophany, a sacred space emerges as the centre of the world for religious individuals. This orientation provides existential security and enables individuals to find meaning and structure in their surroundings (Berek, 2021). For instance, when Yahweh declares a site holy in Genesis 28:12–19, the sacredness of the space becomes apparent through divine revelation. Such moments reveal absolute reality and interrupt the homogeneity of profane space.

The experience of sacred space, therefore, grounds religious life. It affirms a sense of place and direction. Without such orientation, meaningful action becomes impossible. Sacredness may arise not only through hierophany but also through signs. For example, the Marabouts in North Africa recognise sacred places by observing signs such as a rooted and sprouting stick. They often perform rituals, such as animal sacrifice, to consecrate space. These acts signify a process of spiritual orientation. Sanctity can extend through rituals to various objects and living beings, even when no hierophany occurs. The cosmos reflects divine holiness because it shares in the Sacred One's essence (Fiamrillah Zifamina, 2022). For Eliade, the cosmos is not just alive and real but holy, embodying the intersection of ontophany and hierophany. Even those who do not identify as religious often attach deep meaning to certain places—such as birthplaces or significant locations—showing that the distinction between sacred and profane continues to influence human experience, albeit in different forms.

Symbol

Given the transcendence of the Sacred, direct access remains unattainable. Limited by temporality, humans rely on symbols to engage with the divine (Kusumawati, 2013). These symbols emerge through revelations—such as hierophany or kratophany—that encode divine messages in symbolic language. In religion, symbolic expression becomes central; it mediates between the human and the divine. Sacred trees, stones, or ritual acts are not worshipped for their physical properties but for their symbolic representation of the Sacred (Damayanti, 2023). Through symbolism, ordinary objects or events become infused with spiritual meaning, transforming perception and deepening awareness of cosmic realities.

Religious symbolism thus plays a vital role in shaping human understanding of existence. It connects the personal with the universal, allowing individuals to recognise themselves within the divine order. Symbols enable people to transcend their subjective boundaries and grasp deeper truths. They possess internal logic and structure, offering a universal language communicating sacred realities (Jesus, 2021). Unlike discursive reasoning, symbolic expression captures paradox, mystery, and spiritual truth in a form accessible to human consciousness. Symbols not only communicate meaning but also embody ontological depth. Through them, religious individuals articulate complex, often ineffable experiences. Eliade underscores the symbolic imagination as central to spiritual life, enabling humanity to comprehend and participate in the Sacred in ways no other medium allows (Berek, 2021).

In this sense, religious symbolism serves as revelation and invitation, guiding humanity toward deeper spiritual insight and communion with the transcendent.

4. Gamelan as a Medium of Spiritual Experience and Cultural Values

As discussed earlier, Mircea Eliade's concept of hierophany—the manifestation of the Sacred in the profane world—provides an apt framework for understanding how the Sacred is manifested through Javanese Gamelan. In Javanese cosmology, Gamelan is not merely a musical instrument but is considered a gift from the divine realm—a celestial music believed to descend directly from heaven. It is thus regarded as a sacred manifestation of the Divine, or in religious terms, as a revelation of God (Oktavianus Eko Saputro, personal communication, March 07, 2024). According to Eliade, hierophany renders ordinary space or objects sacred under divine manifestation. In the context of Gamelan, the Divine is perceived to reveal itself through tangible, symbolic forms that bring harmony, peace, and prosperity to human life.

This belief is embedded in Javanese traditions that assign sacred status to the music and the musicians. Gamelan performers are often regarded as spiritual custodians and cultural elders—individuals entrusted with preserving tradition and embodying spiritual authority (Berek, 2021). Furthermore, within traditional cosmology, Gamelan instruments are believed to possess an inner essence or indwelling spirit (*isi* or *danyang*) and thus are treated with ritual respect (Maria Timbuleng, Agata Lelang Aya & Sundari Laura, personal communication, March 07, 2024).

The concept of sacred space is also central to this understanding. As Eliade posits, a hierophany sanctifies an object and consecrates the surrounding space. The *pendopo*, a traditional Javanese pavilion where Gamelan is stored and performed, is imbued with sacredness precisely because it houses these divine instruments (Ruslan 2017). During religious rituals and traditional ceremonies, the *pendopo* assumes a sanctified status, meriting reverence and offerings, including ritual *sesaji* (offerings) to honour the ancestral and supernatural guardians believed to dwell there (Oktavianus Eko Saputro, personal communication, March 07, 2024). Thus, the Gamelan and its spatial context serve as a religious medium, bridging the human and the spiritual realms.

Moreover, the ritual of *penjamasan* (bathing the Gamelan), especially on spiritually significant nights such as 1 *Suro*, reflects the sacralization of the instruments. According to Eliade, such rituals symbolise a return to the original creation time (*in illo tempore*), reiterating a primordial sacred event and renewing the connection between the sacred and the profane (Arifianto, 2017). Here, the ritual bathing functions as a reenactment of hierophany—an act of spiritual purification that underscores the metaphysical significance of the instruments.

Eliade views the cosmos as a divine creation filled with holiness; in this worldview, all elements participate in the sacredness of the Creator. Javanese Gamelan, then, is not merely a tool for producing music but a spiritual conduit. Through the performance of *gending*—musical compositions that often mirror human life events such as ceremonies, devotion, relaxation, or artistic reflection—the sacred is expressed in melodic and rhythmic forms (Oktavianus Eko Saputro, personal communication, March 07, 2024); (Ananda, Martini, and Herminasari 2022). These compositions are imbued with philosophical meanings and life values, such as harmony, discipline, and spirituality.

The music of Gamelan encapsulates fundamental values. First, harmony is reflected in the consonant interplay of instruments, symbolising the ideal of harmonious human and environmental relations. Eliade explains that the cosmos, in its sacredness, reveals both the modalities of being and holiness—what he terms ontophany and hierophany (Susanto, 1987). In this context, Gamelan becomes an artistic expression of a sacred ontology.

Second, based on an interview with Oktavianus Eko Saputro, three core values are found within the Gamelan tradition: cooperation, discipline, and humility. The coordinated effort among Gamelan players emphasises collaboration and shared purpose. The complex musical structures require discipline and perseverance, while the humble demeanor of performers promotes mutual respect and recognition of each individual's role (Oktavianus Eko Saputro, personal communication, March 07,

2024). These values align with Eliade's assertion that sacredness is associated with permanence, stability, and the pursuit of perfection.

The mythic origin of Gamelan as a divine instrument further reinforces its sacred character. Eliade considers myth not as a fiction but as a sacred narrative that reveals the origins of the cosmos and human institutions. Myths recount primordial events enacted by gods, offering existential and moral paradigms for human behaviour (Fiamrillah Zifamina, 2022; Wiranata, 2011). In the case of Gamelan, the myth situates it within a sacred narrative, thus legitimising its ritual functions and spiritual authority.

In Javanese philosophy, Gamelan symbolises a mode of life characterised by restraint, tolerance, and balance between thought, speech, and action (Widyaputra, 2021). These values are internalised through ritual and cultural practices, becoming ethical frameworks guiding everyday life. The *pendopo* becomes a locus of sacrality, marked by *pamali* or taboos, such as the necessity to show reverence before entering the space—an act of acknowledging the sacredness of both the place and the instruments within (Oktavianus Eko Saputro, personal communication, March 07, 2024).

From Eliade's phenomenological perspective, sacred symbols such as the Gamelan are not sacred but become so through the Divine's manifestation. Thus, material objects such as stones, trees, and musical instruments can become sacred when they serve as media for divine manifestation (Muhammad & Utomo, 2017). In this context, Gamelan music, although produced through material instruments, is regarded by the Javanese people as sacred because it expresses and facilitates profound spiritual experiences (Maria Timbuleng, Agata Lelang Aya, & Sundari Laura, personal communication, March 7, 2024).

5. Relevance for Liturgical Inculturation in the Catholic Church

Based on the previous discussion and through the lens of Mircea Eliade's thought, Javanese Gamelan emerges as a musical form imbued with profound spiritual significance. It is not merely an aesthetic or cultural artifact but a medium through which the Sacred manifests itself—a hierophany, in Eliade's terminology (Sunardi, 2024). In this sense, Gamelan becomes a spiritual bridge, connecting the human and the divine. It offers existential meaning for the Javanese people who engage with it in daily and ritual life.

Given this sacred character, Gamelan holds particular potential within the context of liturgical inculturation in the Catholic Church. Inculturation refers to integrating local cultural elements into the expression of the Christian faith, especially in worship and liturgical practices. This concept, which gained prominence after the Second Vatican Council, underscores the church's commitment to cultural openness and dialogue with local traditions (Réjasse, 2011).

In Indonesia, inculturation includes incorporating indigenous artistic and musical traditions—such as Gamelan—into Catholic rituals, making the faith more resonant with local sensibilities (Kristanto, 2023; Widyawati, Lon, & Midun, 2025). The Catholic Church in Indonesia actively supports these efforts as a theological mandate and a means of preserving cultural heritage in a pluralistic society. It is particularly important in a multicultural nation like Indonesia, where religious and cultural identity are often deeply intertwined.

Javanese Gamelan is deeply embedded in the cultural and religious life of the community and is frequently performed during sacred ceremonies, both in traditional and spiritual contexts (Kurniawati, Yuniarno, Suprapto, & Soewidiatmaka, 2023; Rumiwiharsih, 2024). Its incorporation into the Catholic liturgy could foster a deeper cultural harmony between Indonesian Catholics and their indigenous heritage, reinforcing that Christianity does not estrange them from their ancestral traditions. The calm, meditative, and solemn tones produced by Gamelan instruments are also congruent with the contemplative atmosphere of Catholic worship, which emphasizes silence, prayer, and reverence (Firmanto, 2023).

Furthermore, the use of Gamelan in Catholic liturgy allows believers to express their faith in a way that maintains continuity with their cultural identity. This approach affirms that the celebration of the Eucharist can be both authentically Catholic and genuinely Indonesian. It aligns with the broader goal

of liturgical inculturation: to ensure that the Gospel is proclaimed and internalised within a culturally resonant framework (Widyawati et al., 2025).

The incorporation of Gamelan also functions as a strategy for religious socialisation. As a prominent element of Javanese cultural life, Gamelan is an accessible entry point for local communities to engage with Christian practices (R. Hardawiryana, 2009). It fosters a sense of inclusion and belonging, encouraging active participation in the liturgy while enriching the faithful's spiritual experience through melody, rhythm, and harmony.

The Catholic Church, through its official teachings, affirms the use of various artistic expressions in worship, provided they align with liturgical norms and contribute to the glorification of God and the sanctification of the faithful (Malla & Manik, 2023). This openness is especially significant in mission territories, where music traditions are integral to local spiritual and communal life. The church thus encourages indigenous musical forms like Gamelan to be adapted appropriately for Christian worship, preserving both liturgical integrity and cultural authenticity (Astari, Mayasari, & Saddam, 2024).

Importantly, liturgical music is not meant to entertain but to facilitate full, conscious, and active participation in worship, especially for the marginalised and those with simpler devotional expressions. Therefore, liturgical music must be rooted in local musical treasures that embody simplicity and spiritual depth (Nara, Sudhiarsa, & Yuniarto, 2024). From a philosophical standpoint, Heidegger asserts that liturgical music's essence lies in its capacity to foster communal participation in the mystery of salvation, rather than in its technical sophistication (Riyanto, 2001).

Overly elaborate music may risk alienating congregants, turning them into passive spectators rather than active participants in worship (Sudhiarsa, 2021). In contrast, Gamelan's tonal and structural characteristics—marked by subtlety and repetition—promote meditative engagement rather than distraction. Such qualities align well with the Catholic Church's pastoral aim to create worship spaces that are inclusive, spiritually nourishing, and participatory.

Examples of successful inculturation initiatives include the St. Antonius Purbayan Catholic Church in Surakarta, which integrates European and Javanese cultural elements in its architecture and liturgical practices (Sulistyono, Purwasito, Warto, & Pitana, 2022). The church exemplifies how liturgical space and soundscape can reflect local culture without compromising Catholic identity. Likewise, the Sendangsono pilgrimage site illustrates how Christian devotion and Javanese cultural values coexist through ongoing cultural negotiation and celebration (Beck, 2018).

In these contexts, inculturation not only fosters cultural preservation but also promotes interreligious harmony. Gamelan music and Javanese aesthetics in Catholic spaces invite dialogue and mutual respect, as seen in the supportive relationship between the Purbayan Church and the surrounding Muslim community (Sulistyono et al., 2022). Thus, liturgical inculturation with Gamelan does not merely enhance worship—it also cultivates social cohesion in religiously diverse settings.

The work of musicians like Paul Widyawan further exemplifies how inculturated liturgical music can serve as a tool for evangelisation and reconciliation. His compositions, which blend Catholic liturgical texts with Javanese musical forms, invite participation across cultural and religious boundaries (Susanti, Susrijani, & Sudhiarsa, 2019). Such efforts demonstrate that good liturgical music must embody both technical adequacy and inculturative value—that is, it must respect cultural uniqueness while conveying spiritual truths with clarity and accessibility (Lailisna, Bashori, & Budiarti, 2024).

Javanese Gamelan can contribute to the inculturation of Catholic liturgical music in Indonesia. By harmonising the richness of local culture with the universal message of the Christian faith, Gamelan enhances the depth of liturgical experience and reinforces the cultural identity of Indonesian Catholics. It thus facilitates a more profound appreciation of the Eucharist and fosters a faith authentically Catholic and deeply Indonesian (Handoko, 2001).

6. Conclusions

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that Javanese Gamelan possesses aesthetic and cultural significance and profound spiritual meaning, serving as a medium that connects individuals with transcendent reality. In Mircea Eliade's thought framework, Gamelan functions as a hierophany—a manifestation of the Sacred—through which musicians and listeners are led into deep spiritual engagement. This symbolic dimension of Gamelan facilitates a heightened awareness of divine presence and contributes to the cultivation of moral and spiritual values. As such, Gamelan is not merely a musical instrument but a conduit through which the Javanese people—and by extension, other communities—experience and internalise the Sacred in their everyday lives.

Given its spiritual depth and cultural rootedness, Javanese Gamelan holds significant relevance for the inculturation of Catholic liturgical music in Indonesia. Gamelan is well-suited to be integrated into Catholic worship as a hierophanic expression of the Divine within Javanese culture. Its incorporation into the liturgy can foster cultural harmony, enabling Indonesian Catholics—particularly those of Javanese heritage—to experience a sense of continuity between their cultural identity and religious faith. Moreover, Gamelan music's contemplative and meditative qualities are compatible with the solemn atmosphere of Catholic liturgical practices, enhancing the depth of prayer and reflection during worship.

This study is limited in several respects. It does not examine the perceptions of Catholic communities regarding the use of Gamelan in the liturgy, including potential theological or pastoral objections. It also does not compare the spiritual experiences of worshippers in liturgies with and without Gamelan music. Furthermore, the gender dynamics within Gamelan practice—such as the roles of men and women and their impact on the instrument's perceived sacredness—remain unexplored. These limitations highlight the need for further research to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Gamelan's role in Catholic liturgical inculturation, particularly through empirical studies, theological reflection, and practical liturgical applications.

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