

# The Role of Light in The Worship Space In Culture and Religion Context

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## Abstract

Light has a very important role in creating the atmosphere and experience of the sacred space in the prayer room. The Catholic Church in Bali has a lighting design designed with a touch of local culture to convey its symbolic meaning, so it is necessary to study the role of light in cultural and religious contexts. This study aims to obtain a conceptual framework regarding the role of light in the worship space of Catholics in Bali in supporting religious aspects. The research method used is a literature review to get an in-depth understanding of the role of light as a paradigm in assessing the existence of light aspects in the religious buildings of the Catholic Church in Bali. The type of data used is secondary data in the form of theories obtained to be calculated, analyzed, and concluded to understand the role of light from various paradigms. The results of this study explain that the existence of light from a cultural and religious perspective is similar to the notion of light in Catholicism which refers to something spiritual and sacred. Light is described as a manifestation of God who gives light in the dark as a guide for humans to a better direction.

**Keywords:** *lighting, cathedral church places of worship in Bali*

## 1 Introduction

Light is an important aspect in creating an atmosphere (sense of place) and experiences of sacred space in a space of worship for people who interact in it. This view is reinforced by Sari's in [1] statement that lighting is a dominant variable and acts as a medium in creating a sacred atmosphere in a prayer room so that humans will feel themselves small in front of God through the experience of space created by interactions between humans and these variables. The existence of light in the church room as a means or instrument should be able to accommodate all the activities of the people at the time of worship and communicate its religious meaning in realizing active participation for the faithful.

In understanding the existence of light in the Catholic Church in Bali, it is necessary to explore the role of light in two different paradigms, namely in the context of culture and religion. The light in the teachings of Catholicism is described as a symbol of the presence of Christ in the midst of the people to illuminate human life. Meanwhile, the light in Balinese culture that originates from Hinduism is described as a manifestation of God who gives enlightenment in the dark, besides giving spirit to this universe by Bawa in [2]. Based on this explanation, this research becomes interesting and important to be studied in depth to understand the role of lighting in the Catholic church in Bali in both of these understandings.

## 2 Research Method

This study aims to obtain a conceptual framework regarding the role of light in the worship space of Catholics in Bali in supporting religious aspects. This research method is based on a literature review to get a deep understanding of the role of light as a paradigm in studying the existence of light aspects in the religious buildings of the Catholic Church in Bali. The type of data used is secondary data in the form of theories obtained to be calculated, analyzed, and concluded to understand the role of light from various paradigms. This study aims to explore the role of light in the worship space of Catholics in Bali in supporting the religious aspects both from a cultural and religious point of view. The type of data source used is secondary data in the form of theories or collections of studies used to understand the role of light from two different paradigms.

## 3 Discussion

In carrying out every activity, all living things need the existence of light as a means of lighting in their lives. Rea (2002) states that light has a fundamental function to illuminate an object around it so that it can be seen through its practical function by Wibisono in [3]. The presence of light in a space aims to illuminate an object with various forms of elements that are in the space so that objects can be observed, feel the atmosphere visually and help space users to be able to carry out their activities properly. Thus light is one of the important aspects of human life as a fulfillment of the most essential needs in accommodating all human activities to be able to interact with the environment. The role of light in space is fundamental and has an important role in architectural and interior design and design in a building function by Savitri in [4].

In its development, light in accommodating the function of a building besides involving its practical function as a source of light, light is also used for its psychological and symbolic functions. The psychological function of light can create a spatial atmosphere by causing the spatial effect desired by space users in its application, while its symbolic function is to produce meaning in a space, especially the application of natural light applied to places of worship. In understanding the existence of light in the worship buildings of the Catholic Church in Bali, the Catholic Church needs to understand the culture surrounding the place where it stands and enrich itself with local values known as cultural inculturation. This statement is expressed in the *documents* of the Second *Vatican Council* in [5] that the Church is entrusted with broadcasting the mystery of God, which is the ultimate goal of mankind, which is expected to be able to forge fellowship with various cultural patterns, so that both the Church and various cultures are enriched.

Inculturation in the Catholic Church is a process of intercultural encounter, bringing together Christian values brought by Western nations with local cultures so as to give birth to various patterns of inculturation by Martana in [6]. Various attempts were made by the Catholic Church to inculturate with strong local cultural patrons such as Bali, both from a ritual perspective and an architectural perspective, particularly in lighting. In an effort to understand the existence of light in the religious buildings of the Catholic Church in Bali, an evaluative study is needed to determine the role of light in cultural and religious contexts through the following theoretical explanations:

### a. The Role of Light in a Religious Context

In addition to having a practical function as a means of lighting, light also has a psychological function that can create an atmosphere or space atmosphere, and a symbolic function, namely that light can provide symbolic meaning through the presence of light it perceives. Light is seen as very important in Catholic teachings because light is described as a symbol of Christ, namely God who is recognized by Catholicism by Stemp [7]. A sentence in the New Testament in [8] which states: "I am the light of the world, and whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but he will have the light of life" (John 8:12). This statement explains that Christ is the light of the world which is depicted through the presence of light as a candle or lamp which symbolizes the presence of Christ in the midst of people to illuminate human life in darkness. Thus the above explanation strengthens the existence of light in a Catholic church not only has a denotative meaning, but has a symbolic meaning as victory and hope through the true meaning of light for Catholicism by Stemp in [9].

The existence of light through its symbolic function is represented by the human relationship with the transcendent God. God, who is depicted as a distant and inaccessible figure for His people, can only be reached through the application of natural lighting which can give a sense of attachment in the form of faith experiences that are formed in a worship room in the form of a church. The suitability of the feelings created in the church space to the situation can be analyzed in terms of supportive lighting. Thus, the existence of light present in the interior space of the Catholic church is considered important and has a big impact on the people as its users because it can provide a religious experience to the people who interact in it through the attainment of a sacred and contemplative atmosphere generated by the concept of natural lighting applied in the space.



**Figure 1.** The role of light as a practical and psychological function in religious activities that take place at the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Denpasar (Source: Personal Documentation, 2020)

The experience of the sacred space is an experience that is essential and pure. According to Kieckhefer (2004), light is the most fundamental medium for communicating transcendental reality through the creation of a sacred atmosphere by Bestari in [10]. Light in the church is a space forming element that can communicate a message through the bonding relationship between humans and God by creating experiences of their religious space. In accordance with Seasoltz's statement, Kevin (2005) explained that light functions as a medium in conveying messages about divine presence and power to Christians. The presence of light in a prayer room must be able to convey a religious message that can be realized in a concrete form through the right light arrangement so that the message is responded to by the people and understood in the church as a religious setting by Wibisono in [11]. The setting of a religious space that is formed through

the right organization of light will create a different spatial impression for each individual. Thus, religious messages must be conveyed to every people through the existence of light in the worship space that can communicate transcendental reality through an atmosphere of deep reflection.

Light according to the Bishops' Committee is seen as one of the elements forming space in the form of elements of the built environment of the church which make an important contribution in creating the overall spatial experience by Bestari in [12]. The lighting applied to the church building should be able to display and communicate religious meanings that can increase the faith of church members in liturgical events and create active participation for the faithful. Rasmussen and Eiler, Steen (1959) explained that light also affects the appearance of a building from the outside and its interior, which is formed specifically by how light enters space by Wibisono in [13]. The role of light in worship spaces through its architectural and interior appearance will give character to the church space which can provide spatial experiences for people in conveying religious meaning. The arrangement of the location of the building and the position of the openings that can affect the way in which light enters and falls into the space is important for its existence, because light can create a religious setting in a place of worship through the characteristics of the space formed.

Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that several views about light from a religious perspective, especially Catholicism, are as follows:

1. The existence of light in Catholic teaching is not only limited to practical functions and psychological functions, but light with its symbolic function can describe the presence of Christ who illuminates human life in darkness.
2. The existence of light has a crucial role in the Catholic church to present a transcendental atmosphere and experience in the space of worship that can be felt and interpreted by every congregation.

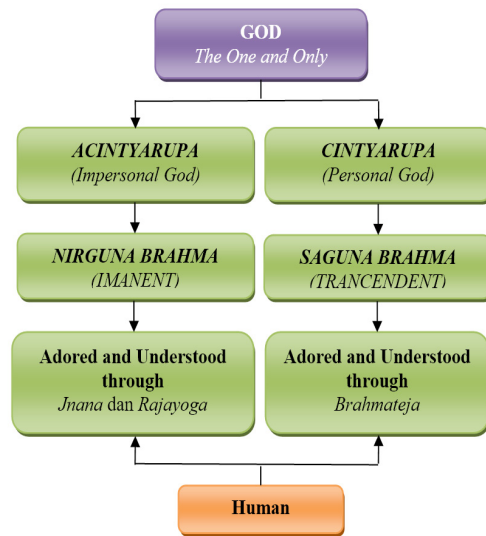
#### **b. The Role of Light in Cultural Context**

According to Gelebet, et.al in [14], culture is the result of a relationship with its natural environment, and its birth is motivated by religious norms and is based on local customs. Thus, the understanding of light in terms of cultural aspects, especially Balinese culture, its existence cannot be separated from the influence of Hindu religious teachings that govern the entire life system of Balinese people. The concept of Divinity in Hinduism is described in the Vedic scriptures which state that God Almighty is called a god or god, which means light, sparkle, sparkling light, all of which are aimed at His manifestation and to the sun, sky, moon, wind, fire, lightning, water, planets and the entire universe, as objects or media connecting to Him. Suhardana in [15] explains that Dewa comes from the word '*Div*', in Sanskrit which means light. Gods are the manifestation of the holy rays of God Almighty who give strength to the perfection of life to every being. God does not have a concrete form, but is described as a brilliant light that is abstract and eternal.

In connection with the discussion of the existence of light, Aditya or Raditya, the term for the sun, is a manifestation of God as God. Surya is an aspect of God as a witness, the giver of light in darkness, in addition to giving spirit to this universe by Bawa in [16]. According to Chandra (1977) in Regweda, implied a statement that reveals that the god Surya is described as the supreme god, namely the god of all gods as the source and support of life who gives bright light and joy, eliminates the darkness of ignorance, imparts knowledge to every being and gives light to the planet. -planet in the universe at night by Titib in [17].



**Figure 2.** The role of light (natural light) with its practical function in Hindu worship activities at Tirta Empul Temple (Source: Personal Documentation, 2020)



**Chart 1.** Descriptions of God Almighty in Sanskrit literature (Source: Theology in Hindu Literature (Titib, 2011: 41))

Light or rays are also described as Atman. Atman is also called jivatman or soul which comes from Sanskrit, which is 'jiv' which means to live on. Atman is a spark of holy light of the greatness of God Almighty which is eternal as well as God Almighty by Suhardana in [18]. According to Sivananda in [19] light is in humans because every human being needs light to overcome obstacles that are obstacles in his life. Light is described as a brahman or Absolute who manifests itself as a soul or individual soul, God and the universe. Brahman is the only reality in life in this world present in the mind of the individual which can give pleasure-pain, bondage-liberation, right-wrong as well as time, space and cause.

In Hindu theology which is based on the Vedas, Titib in [20] argues that the Almighty God is described as a transcendent figure (Impersonal God) and Imanen (Personal God). The transcendent figure is depicted in an intangible form in both thoughts and words, while the immanent figure is depicted as being that is Great, Most Loving, Most Great, and so on. Hindus generally view God Almighty as an immanent figure who is perceived as a God who is noble, holy, sublime, great and high and is far from the reach of his people. Chart 2. explains that God Almighty in Hindu Vedas and Centers is always manifested as Deities. Almighty God who is absolute and transcendent has never been presented in human life in any form, because the majesty of God Almighty cannot be reached by the human mind. Gods as His manifestation in the form of light, play a role in fulfilling the interests and needs of humans to worship His majesty so that mankind can feel intimacy with Him by Titib in [21].

The discussion of light in Balinese culture can also be related to the concept of cosmology which is closely related to the existence of lighting in the church room and is manifested through the concept of Dewata Nawa Sanga which means Nine Gods.

**Table 1.** The Goddess of Nawa Sanga with the Eyes of the Wind

Name of God	Wind Direction
Wisnu God	North
Sambu God	Northeast
Iswara God	North
Maheswara God	Southeast
Brahma God	South
Rudra God	Southwest
Mahadewa God	West
Sangkara God	Northwest
Siwa God	Middle of it

(Source: Theology in Hindu Literature (Titib, 2011))

*Dewata Nawa Sanga* as the embodiment of the holy light of the greatness and power of God Almighty (*Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa* or *Brahman*), plays a role in protecting the universe and controlling the nine directions of the wind with different color representations by Suhardana in [22]. These colors are a representation of light, because the color occurs due to the presence of light, so it can be concluded that light is the same as color.



**Figure 3.** The Gods of Nawa Sanga (Source: Paramita Publisher, Surabaya, 2002)

The concept of *Dewata Nawa Sanga* can be represented as a *bhuana agung*, likewise the light in the church room which functions as a means of lighting that can dispel darkness can be represented as a *bhuana agung*. While humans who are active in the worship room are representations of *bhuana alit* which are described as the contents of the universe. Thus, *Bhuana Agung* and *Bhuana Alit* have a very close relationship because they have the same elements contained in the *Panca Tanmatra* and *Panca Mahabutha* in creating harmony, harmony and balance between the two realms.

Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that several views about inner light according to cultural understanding are as follows:

1. The existence of light for Hinduism which is the basis for Balinese culture has an important role in accommodating all human activities in religious activities, in the form of religious ceremonies which are generally carried out in temples that have open areas.

2. Light in Balinese culture which philosophizes Hinduism besides seeing light through its practical function, light is seen through its symbolic function. Fire is the physical form of God or the manifestation of God Almighty in the form of gods and Atman whose presence is absolute in every ceremony and prayer. In addition to its function of providing lighting and life, fire in Hinduism has important roles, namely fire as a priest, as the leader of the ceremony, as an intermediary for worship, exorcising evil spirits, and witnessing ceremonies in life.

Based on the explanation about the role of light in the context of religion and culture, several views can be explained through the following presentation:

**Table 2.** The conclusion of the role of light

<b>The Role of Light</b>		
Religion Context	Culture Context	Conclusion
<p>The existence of light for Hinduism has an important role in accommodating religious activities that tend to be carried out in a building.</p>	<p>The existence of light for Hinduism which is the basis for Balinese culture has an important role in accommodating all human activities in religious activities, in the form of religious ceremonies which are generally carried out in temples that have open areas (outdoor).</p>	<p>The existence of light both in Catholic teachings and in Balinese culture has a very important role, especially in supporting religious activities through its functional aspects (practical functions) as a means of lighting in the prayer room. The Catholic prayer room uses natural and artificial light to support worship activities which are held in the morning and early evening. Meanwhile, the presence of light in Balinese culture uses natural light more because of the many activities carried out in open areas.</p>
<p>The existence of light in Catholicism is not only limited to its practical function, but also has a psychological and symbolic function.</p> <p>The existence of light has a crucial role in the Catholic church to present a transcendental atmosphere and experience in a space of worship that can be felt and interpreted by every congregation through its psychological function.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the existence of light through its symbolic function acts as a symbol in describing the presence of Christ who illuminates human life in darkness.</p>	<p>Light in Balinese culture which philosophizes Hinduism in addition to seeing light through its practical function, light is seen through its symbolic function. The light that comes from the fire is symbolized as the physical form of God or the manifestation of God Almighty in the form of gods and Atman whose presence is absolute in every ceremony and prayer.</p>	<p>The role of light in Catholicism and Balinese culture both has a practical function as a means of lighting which emphasizes its functional aspects as well as its symbolic function which both have a strong and spiritual and sacred influence in depicting the manifestation of God Almighty in worship activities.</p> <p>However, there are differences between the two when looking at the role of light in terms of its psychological function. The role of light in Catholic worship spaces is designed by considering its psychological function as ambient lighting so that a contemplative liturgical atmosphere is created. Meanwhile, in Balinese culture which is rooted in Hinduism, the role of light through its psychological function is not a major consideration in designing religious buildings.</p>

## 4 Conclusion

Light from a cultural and religious perspective has an important role in human life, namely through practical functions, psychological functions, and symbolic functions. The existence of light in their view has almost the same understanding and essence, which refers to something spiritual and sacred. Light is described as the embodiment of God who provides light in the dark as a guide for humans in carrying out their spiritual life as a fulfillment of religious needs towards a better direction.

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