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Korean Popular Culture: Pastoral Challenges And Opportunities For The Accompaniment of Young Catholics

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Abstract

Popular cultural phenomena originating in Korea, such as K-Pop and K-Drama, have become a global phenomenon that affects the lives of young people around the world, including young Catholics. The popularity of this culture presents a new dynamic in the lives of adolescents and young people, starting from the formation of identities, cultural consumption patterns, to the way they build community and social relationships. This research was conducted to discover how Korean popular culture can be a challenge as well as an opportunity for the implementation of pastoral assistance for young Catholics. The challenges that arise from this new culture including the risk of consumerism, idolatry, the disconnection of local cultural values, and the lives of young people who are increasingly moving away from spiritual life. However, this culture opens up a new and great opportunity for the Church to enter the world of young people with the language, symbols, and imaginations with which they are familiar. Through a qualitative approach, theological-pastoral analysis of the Christus Vivit document, and enriched by John Storey's popular cultural theory, this study highlights creative, contextual, and transformative pastoral mentoring strategies. The results of the research are expected to contribute to the development of pastoral models that are relevant to the contemporary cultural context, by integrating the values of faith with popular cultural interests, building an inclusive dialogue space. The final result of this study is a module designed for the assistance and guidance of young Catholics in a recollection.

Keywords

Identity, Korean Culture, Pastoral, Popular Culture, Young Catholics

INTRODUCTION

The popular Korean cultural phenomenon through K-Pop, K-Drama, and fashion and lifestyle trends, has become a global phenomenon that has spread to various parts of the world. The emergence of a cultural phenomenon commonly referred to as Korean Wave or Hallyu, is not only a new form of entertainment but also able to form a mindset, consumptive pattern, and social identity of young people. In Indonesia itself, this phenomenon is very felt and its impact is very visible,

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especially for the lives of young people, who are increasingly familiar with the symbols, language, and imagination typical of the cultural wave. This phenomenon first entered Indonesia in the late 1990s, and the term Hallyu was first popularized seeing the spread of very massive waves in the Southeast Asia Region, and East Asia.[1]

This phenomenon has a double impact not only positive but also negative. The boundary between the two is very narrow and if we are not able to filter the content, young people will be easily exposed to the negative things of the cultural wave. Korean popular culture presents quite serious challenges to the faith life of young Catholics. Consumerism, idolatry or celebrity worship of public figures, as well as the discontinuation of local cultural customs, and young people who are increasingly moving away from spiritual life are real challenges faced by the Church and of course young Catholics.

The real form of this challenge is that young people live more in the virtual world, in which they grow an excess love for their idols and make them forget to spend time with the community, as well as establish togetherness with the people around them.[2] On the other hand, this cultural wave not only brings challenges but also an opportunity for pastoral accompaniment for young people, and an entrance for the Church to build personal relationships with young people through symbols and imaginations that are close to their world.

This research departs from an awareness of the importance of a principle that the pastoral care of young people cannot be separated from the cultural context in which young people live, so that pastoral assistance is able to touch young people contextually and comprehensively. This research also aims to build a holistic understanding of how Korean culture affects the lives of young people, as well as what opportunities the Church can use as a strategy in response to building a Church that is open to a culture.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a primary focus on understanding the depth of the experiences, views, and dynamics of Korean cultural phenomena in the lives of young Catholics, as well as how the Church can respond to

[1] Zaini, "The Globalization of Korean Popular Music (K-POP) in the Context of Cultural Industries", *Multikultural* 2, No. 3 (2023): 374.

[2] Anjani and Wulanyani, "Celebrity Worship Behavior in K-POP Fans: A Literature Review", *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan* Vol. 10, No. 22 (2024): 607.

these phenomena through pastoral assistance. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explore meanings, experiences, and relationships that cannot be measured with numbers, but it is important to be understood through the context of experience.[3] In this study, the formulation of the problem is formulated, namely, The subjects of this study are young catholics who actively follow the development of Korean popular culture both through music (K-Pop) and film (K-Drama).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Korean Cultural Phenomenon

When discussing a cultural phenomenon that has emerged as a phenomenon that is mushrooming around the world. Of course, there needs to be a study of how the phenomenon initially developed. Similarly, if we discuss Korean popular culture. This section, will discuss the extent to which Korean popular culture developed as a national identity, due to the will of the Korean nation to rise4, and eventually become a global phenomenon that is able to affect people's lifestyles not only in Korea but throughout the continent.

Through Russel in his book, the development of popular culture in Korea initially emerged in the 1960s as a form of art development as one of the aspects to revive the country's economy. The revival of popular culture was not only due to cultural development but because of the spirit to rise and progress after the downturn experienced by Korea after World War II and exacerbated by the outbreak of the Korean war which almost destroyed the Korean economy. The art path was chosen because at that time music became the most popular thing for young people, especially the music trends brought by America such as Punk, Rock, and Pop. However, entering the 1970s under the leadership of President Park Chung-Hee who was notoriously authoritarian, many workers engaged in the field of culture and art (including music) were imprisoned and the music industry at that time had to be closed.[5]

And modern Korean music that is currently famous emerged in 1992 when the group the Boyz released their first album and managed to dominate the music

[3] Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approach 4th Edition* (*Yogyakarta: PUSTAKA SISWA, 2023*), *247-248.*

[4] Russel, *K-Pop Now: The Korean Music Revolution* (*Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2014*), *18.*

[5]Russel, *K-Pop Now: The Korean Music Revolution* (*Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2014*), *19.*

industry at that time. The hip-hop music genre became a new thing and a fresh idea from Korean youth. The trend of the Korean music industry first went global due to the influence of Lee so-Man with SM Entertainment which he founded as part of his interest in music, giving birth to an opening for the Korean music industry to develop. This was later followed by Yang Hyung-Suk who founded YG Entertainment which also gave birth to many new idol stars who were able to bring the K-pop industry to the world.

This culture itself emerged in Indonesia in 2002, due to the influence of the FIFA World Cup held in Korea and Japan[6]. The emergence of this culture began with the broadcast of Korean dramas which were widely shown on television at that time[7], and through these broadcasts the television broadcasting ratings increased so that many televisions aired Korean dramas for a long time so that many people were interested, and finally the culture began to be known by many people in Indonesia.

In Indonesia itself, the enthusiasts of buday aini are teenagers to early adulthood[8], where there is a cultural shift, so there is a tendency for young people to leave the local culture. This is because, young people who like the culture feel that the melody, song plot, and story behind it are very relatable to them compared to what the local culture offers.

This is also felt by young Catholics, Korean popular culture, especially K-pop and K-Drama, has become a big trend that attracts Catholic youth in Indonesia. At first, many of them were not interested, some even had time to refuse, but their curiosity to see the trend favored by their peers made them try and finally fall in love. K-Pop songs with passionate lyrics, inspirational album storylines, and Korean dramas with touching life stories provide entertainment and motivation. In addition, Korean culture is seen as attractive because of the idol's hard work, fandom solidarity, cultural beauty, language, and even religious inspiration from Catholic idols who dare to show their faith. This phenomenon shows that Korean culture is not just entertainment, but also a space for identity formation and life inspiration for young people.

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[6] Zaini, "The Globalization of Korean Popular Music (K-POP) in the Context of Cultural Industries", *Multikultural* 2, No. 3 (2023): 376-378.

[7] Idola P. Putri et al., "K-Drama and the Spread of *Korean Wave* in Indonesia", *ProTVF* 3, No. 1 (2019) 68-80

[8] Hidayati and Kalla, "The *Korean Wave Phenomenon*: Adolescents in the Vortex of Korean Cultural Waves", *Journal of Diversita* 9, No 2 (2023): 207-217

This is explained by Hurlock in theories that state that adolescence is a period where people experience the process of searching for their identity and identity. This process is influenced by the environment, friendships, and popular culture that are developing during the period of adolescence[9]. Meanwhile, in Yusuf's explanation, adolescent development includes physical, cognitive, social, and moral aspects[10]. In this context, Korean culture plays a role in shaping the mindset, lifestyle, and values internalized by young people. Korean culture is one of the mediums that gives adolescents the opportunity to express themselves, try new things, and build self-image according to global trends.

This is in line with the young Catholics who are the resource persons in this study who feel that KPOP and KDRAMA are entertainment as well as motivation, helping them to be more open, dare to try new things, and build their ideals. Solidarity in fandom also provides lessons in togetherness across differences. Thus, Korean cultural phenomena can be understood not only as a global entertainment trend, but also as a psychological factor that affects the development of Catholic adolescents in Indonesia.

Expresssions of Young Catholics

The expression of Catholic youth in Korean popular culture is a tangible manifestation of identity search and self-actualization. Through KPOP music and Korean dramas, they channel emotions, build a spirit of life, and affirm the courage to present themselves in the community. This phenomenon, according to Storey, is in popular culture theory that sees culture as an arena for meaning, where young people interpret idol messages according to their identity needs[11].

From a postcolonial perspective, this expression shows three important dimensions: first, *hybridity*, which is the mixing of global values with local faiths, for example, adopting Korean musical styles and fashion but maintaining the norms of politeness and discipline of the Catholic faith; second, *ambivalence*, which is the tension between positive inspiration (motivation, solidarity, self-love) and negative risk (idolatry, consumptive love, hedonism); third, *the third space*, which is the birth

[9] E. Hurlock, *Child Development Volume 2 Edition 6* (*JAKARTA: ERLANGGA, 2011*)

[10] Syamsu Yusuf, *Psychology of Child and Adolescent Development* (*BANDUNG: REMAJA ROSDAKARYA, 2010*)

[11] Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction 6th Edition* (*NEW YORK: Routledge, 2012*)

of a new identity that is not completely local or global, but the result of negotiations between Korean culture and the Indonesian Catholic context[12].

Pope Francis wrote in Christus Vivit that young people are the visualization or embodiment of God in the present, because young people are the "Present of God" and therefore their existence must be appreciated[13]. In addition, the Church also needs to listen to them[14], including listening to the expression of their identity as young people through popular culture, one of which is Korean popular culture. Young people with energy, creativity and courage, they emerge to give new things, they feel involved and involved when their expression is valued[15]. Therefore, Pope Francis emphasized that the Church should be present in a real way and not close herself[16] off, providing assistance so that this expression becomes the path to Christ.

It is getting stronger with empirical data. Through a survey conducted by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of South Korea with KOFICE, it shows that Indonesia is the country with the largest number of K-pop fans in the world with a percentage of enthusiasts of 86.3% higher than any other country[17]. This fact confirms that the expression of Korean popular culture among young Indonesians is not a small phenomenon, but a major trend that shapes lifestyles and identities.

The resource persons showed the same thing: KPOP and KDRAMA for them are not only entertainment, but also motivation, a means to be more open, dare to try new things, and build ideals. Solidarity in fandom provides a lesson in togetherness across differences, while religious inspiration from Catholic idols affirms faith. However, they are also aware of the challenges of addiction, extravagance, and values that are contrary to the Church's teachings.

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[12] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (*NEW YORK: Routledge, 1994*)

[13] Pope Francis, Apostolic Appeal After the Synod *of Christ Vivit* (March 25, 2019), Art. 67

[14] *Christus Vivit*, Art. 68

[15] *Christus Vivit*, Art. 69

[16] *Christus Vivit*, Art. 70

[17] Fikri Irhamni, "Korean Wave Survey: Indonesia Becomes a Hallyu Central Country with the Highest Korean Cultural Enthusiasm in the World", GoodStats, November 16, 2024, https://goodstats.id/article/survei-korean-wave-indonesia-jadi-negara-pusat-hallyu-dengan-antusiasme-budaya-korea-tertinggi-di-dunia-9f0mf.

Pastoral Analysis: Pastoral Challenges and Opportunities

The phenomenon of Korean popular culture among young Catholics presents a complex pastoral dynamic, full of challenges and opportunities. Pastoral challenges arise in the form of addiction tendencies and fanaticism, where emotional attachment to idols or fandom can disrupt the balance of spiritual life. In addition, there is a risk of values that are contrary to the Catholic faith, such as a consumptive lifestyle, hedonism, idolatry, and even content that is not in harmony with the Church's teachings.

Popular culture ambivalence is also real: on the one hand it inspires and motivates, on the other hand it can lead to unhealthy behavior. The resource persons himself admitted that there is a danger of extravagance, idolatry, and extreme fanaticism that can distance them from faith.

However, behind these challenges, there is a great pastoral opportunity. Korean popular culture can be a bridge of communication between the Church and young people. Song lyrics, drama quotes, or album storylines can be used as pastoral illustrations that are relevant to their lives. Positive values such as hard work, solidarity, healthy self-love, commitment, and courage can be integrated into faith building. In fact, Catholic idols who dare to display their faith are real examples for young people.

In Christus Vivit, Pope Francis said that young people who are "God's present" must be appreciated, that the Church needs to listen to their voices, recognize their energy and creativity, and accompany their cultural expressions in order to be the path to Christ[18]. Meanwhile the synod of bishops affirmed that the Church must be present in the world of young people, including the space of popular culture, with an attitude of listening and dialogue[19].

In addition to emphasizing the assistance of the Church, the synod of bishops also sees the importance of continuous accompaniment, so that the expression of young people does not stop at mere entertainment, but is directed at the growth of faith and the strengthening of vocations[20], and the need to present a friendly, open,

[18] *Christus Vivit,* Art. 67

[19] Synod of Bishops, Document *of Young People Faith and Vocational Discerment* (27 October 2018), Art. 45

[20] *Young People Faith and Vocational Discerment,* Art. 47

and supportive community, so that young people feel welcome in their expressions and are able to integrate the values of faith into daily life[21].

Thus, pastoral analysis shows that Korean popular culture is an ambivalent space[22]: presenting challenges in the form of addictions and values that are contrary to faith, as well as a great opportunity to make popular culture a medium of evangelization. The Church is called to be present creatively, accompanied by a "filter of faith", so that this expression truly enriches the spiritual life and strengthens the vocation of young people.

Implications for the Church and Pastoral Accompaniment of Young Chatolics

Through the document Christus Vivit, Pope Francis gave many affirmations for the Church to always accompany the journey of young people. Accompaniment to young people must be done with patience, listening, and guiding them to be able to make wise life choices[23]. Mentoring is not just about giving direction, but a process that respects the inner dynamics of young people, including their expression through popular culture. This requires the Church to be authentically present, not as a controller, but as a companion of the journey of faith. Theologically, pastoral care is understood as "care of souls" according to Paul Tillich[24], or in simple described by Clinebell as an accompaniment that helps a person to grow and develop in faith, relationships and the necessities of life[25]. Therefore, pastoral care for young people means accompanying them in the process of finding identity and integrating the values of faith in the midst of global cultural currents.

According to Erikson, youth is a period of forming an identity in which individuals seek to answer the question of "who am I" through interaction with the environment, culture, and community[26]. Korean popular culture became one of the mediums through which young Catholics negotiated their identities, forming a "third space" between the global and the local, between entertainment and faith. Meanwhile, Maslow emphasized that young people need a self-actualization that is

[21] *Young People Faith and Vocational Discerment,* Art. 48
[22] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (*NEW YORK CITY: Routledge, 1994*)
[23] *Christus Vivit,* Art. 204
[24] Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (*OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1959*), *32-33*
[25] Clinebell, *Basic Type of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (*NASHVILLE: Abingdon Press, 1984*), *26-28*
[26] Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (*NEW YORK: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968*), *128-135*

able to encourage them to seek inspiration, enthusiasm, and solidarity[27]. Popular culture such as Korean culture (K-Pop, K-Drama, and Korean Fashion) gives them the motivation to dare to try new things, build ideals, and strengthen their courage in facing life's challenges.

The resource persons showed in their statements that Korean popular culture for them is not only entertainment, but also motivation, a means to be more open, dare to try new things, and build ideals. Solidarity in fandom provides lessons in togetherness across differences, while religious inspiration from Catholic idols affirms faith. However, they are also aware of the challenges of addiction, extravagance, and values that are contrary to the teachings of the Church. Christus Vivit reiterates that mentoring is not just about giving advice, but building authentic relationships, where young people feel heard and accepted[28].

Meanwhile, the synod of bishops gave further views and affirmations that the Church must provide a space in which young people can express themselves freely and responsibly[29], the importance of personal accompaniment that helps them strengthen their [30]vocations, and the need for a friendly, open and supportive Church community. So that young people feel accepted in their expressions and are able to integrate the value of faith into their daily lives.[31].

With that, the implications for the Church are clear: Korean popular culture has become a space of expression of identity and motivation for young Catholics, and the Church is called to be present as a companion who listens, filters, and affirms. Pastoral assistance must be rooted in the pastoral understanding of "care of souls," which is able to affirm the real experience of young people. The church needs to be a welcoming, open, and relevant community, so that this expression of popular culture truly enriches the spiritual life and affirms the vocation of young people.

CONCLUSION

Through this discussion, it can be concluded that the involvement of young Catholics with K-pop and K-drama is not just an entertainment trend, but a space for

[27] Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (*NEW YORK: Harper &Row, 1954*), *92-94*
[28] *Christus Vivit*, Art. 211
[29] *Young People Faith and Vocational Discerment,* Art. 52
[30] *Young People Faith and Vocational Discerment,* Art. 54
[31] *Young People Faith and Vocational Discerment,* Art. 56

expression of identity, motivation, and solidarity. Korean popular culture became a medium where they negotiated identities, found inspiration, and built communities across differences. However, this phenomenon also presents ambivalence: on the one hand it gives life spirit, courage and positive values such as hard work and solidarity; on the other hand, it has the potential to plunge into addiction, consumptive and values that are contrary to faith[32].

The Church affirms the need for accompaniment. Chrsitus Vivit affirms that the Church must accompany young people with patience, listening, and building authentic relationships[33]. And the synod of bishops emphasized the need to provide a space for free and responsible expression, provide personal assistance, and build a welcoming and supportive community[34]. The theories of experts also provide a clear and highly relevant view, as well as reinforce that youth is a phase of self-discovery and self-actualization, so that popular cultural expressions become part of their development process.

The expectations that emerged from the reasource persons were very clear: pastoral assistance specifically for young people who use Korean popular culture as their medium. They want a community forum where Korean culture lovers (K-Popers and K-Drama Fans) can express themselves with their identity as fans of Korean culture, as well as be guided to find God through the things they love. Thus, the Church is called to present a creative, relevant, and welcoming pastoral space, so that popular culture does not become a threat, but rather a bridge to Christ that affirms the faith and vocation of young people.

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[33] *Christus Vivit*, Art 204, 211

[34] *Young People Faith and Vocational Discerment,* Art. 52, 54, 56

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