The Roman Catholic Church And Reasons To Attend It

In today’s day and age, the Roman Catholic Church is witnessing a series of renewal in the realms of culture and power. It would much rather be shaping society than following its standards, but pop culture is prominent in the everyday life of a religious individual from television commercials to radio station songs. The last thing that any church or religion wants to be seen as is a source of entertaining or adapting pop culture in modern society. From an article on World Policy Journal, it explains how the Roman Catholic Church influences events and ideas in the contemporary world, and its position to do so flows from its cultural power (Budde). More than one billion individuals worldwide have some type of relation to the Catholic Church. With this statistic on hand, Catholics are fully aware that pop culture itself surrounds us and shapes us in many ways, but is it a good thing or a bad thing? Is it a method that takes those who follow God away from the Gospel or can it be used to advance the Gospel in the New Evangelization?

In Christ and Culture by H. Richard Niebuhr, it affirms that the exchange between the staid followers of Jesus and human culture has been an lasting issue. In this book, Niebuhr professed how believers of Christ who systemized themselves for and on a godly basis, connect to a world whose culture is overshadowed by 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life' (Niebuhr). This means that Catholics and other Christians who do follow the practices and teaching of their faith and religion are trapped in a world full of sin, lust, and temptation. As an on growing society in the twenty-first century, it can be clearly portrayed and identified in pop culture, which can be a positive or a negative. The church claims that cultural industries are turning into cultural parasites, as they gain the revenue from the symbolic meanings and cultural practices they did not create. From the viewpoint of firms, seizing control of religious symbols makes a good business sense since the leading religious traditions (that are Catholic and Protestant) have made Christianity's stories, images, and motifs familiar enough to resound and reproduce, but not so meaningful in offend when used for commercial purposes. A religious symbol, metaphor, or song has also made its way into sale campaigns in various ways like never before. The Catholic Church has been unable or unwilling to protect their sacred stories from this exploitation, and none of them would be keen to see an image of Jesus used to pitch laundry detergent or dishwasher soap anytime soon.

Michael Leo Budde of the World Policy Journal explains in an article he wrote in how the Catholic Church is sort of like a market for pop culture. Budde explained that one example this can be seen is is in the news, and how most news organizations have eliminated specialized coverage of religious affairs. When religion does make an appear in news media, the focus are on some controversy, scandal, or something peculiar and unusual. The coverage of certain content and information is never helping in disciplining someone who is trying to understand their faith through media. This is also why the article points out that most adult Catholics in the United States have been formed more thoroughly in their affections and desires by television culture than by the gospel. Thus, most American Catholics will not read books on contemporary or classical Catholicism or even subscribe to Catholic periodicals to even attempt or familiarize themselves with their faith. (Budde). It has also been estimated since 1998 by the World Policy Journal that only 3% of active Catholics spend as much time per month on church activities as the average American (Catholic and non-Catholic alike) spends watching television per week.

This may produce large numbers of experts on sitcoms and televised sports, but it will not provide experts in the narratives, or symbols of the Catholic culture.

There are man in the Catholic Church, including myself, that participates reluctantly in Christian pop-culture. The motive for why most people do, it is for outreach and evangelism. People listen to “Christian Contemporary” or “Christian Rock”, wore Jesus tees, or own some obligatory cross tattoos. A good amount of people do this but do not step a foot into church more than once or twice a month. Some people do this in attempt to have the teachings and messages of Jesus reach to people wherever they are, in any type of form. This can be beneficial but also detrimental by being another loophole to making profit out of a religion. Billy Kangas of Relevant Magazine talks about this controversy and how it arises in the context of American evangelicalism. He explained how religious images can be seen as failed pop-culture depictions of the faith, from its symbolic indications. People begin to see Jesus primarily through the lens of materialism and pop-culture. As a result, Kangas explains how the Catholic faith “becomes a fad, salvation is turned into a style, and how praise is a phase.” The Church employs superficial symbols to interact with the Gospel, which can only take hold of people on a superficial level. Kangas made the statement on how a “slogan-branded faith cannot connect to the depth of the mystery of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.” (Kangnas). If this can be seen on clothing and music, and even tattoos, then it would expand onto more communication outlets such as television and social media pages. More and more, the creators of these contexts are going to try their best to relate with the audience they are trying to sell or promote their products to. This proves the point that organizations makes profits out of the Catholic faith, and do not even send a dime back to the church.

It is safe to say that the popularity of non traditional and non denominational groups is a symbol of the increasing interplay between pop culture and religion, especially on the busiest days of the year for the Catholic Church. Among any other age group, fewer young adults attends mass. According to Ron French of The Detroit News with the statics of one church-wide survey, 30% of Americans between the ages of 18 to 29 attend mandatory Sunday mass, compared to 40% of Americans who attend to Sunday mass overall. Many drift away from the routine of Sunday services while some don't come back at all. The number of Americans who say they have no religion has increased from 9% to 14% in ten years. Among those born after 1980, 27% said they had no religion (French).

Most of these modern start-up churches have replaced traditional church services, making unneeded changes within the facilities that sound more like nightclubs than houses of worship. With their emphasis on relaxed settings and teen-baiting websites, the churches may represent the next wave of evangelical worship. (French). 'We're trying to help you feel it, smell it, see it and, most of all, make it (religion) relevant to your life,' said Dave Wilson, pastor at a Kensington Community Church in Troy, the largest postmodern church in Detroit, Michigan. Kensington Community Church includes Beatles references in their sermons and Led Zeppelin songs being played on the electric guitar for services. About 8,000 people attend services weekly at Kensington’s two locations, and the main church in Troy has five huge video screens. This again demonstrates that traditions are remarkably untraditional growing 'postmodern' churches, which are successfully marketing themselves.

Another fallout the Catholic church has with the mix of pop culture are holidays. Popular examples are Christmas, Easter, St. Patrick’s Day, Halloween, and more. Most people do not even know that Valentine’s Day is named after Saint Valentine of Rome who was condemned

to death for his Catholic faith, beaten with clubs, and finally beheaded on Feb. 14, AD 270. For a recent example, St. Patrick’s Day is a cultural and religious celebration for families of Irish descent to spend a family oriented holiday together and attend a feast day mass, but is often seen as an free-for-all event for teenagers and young adults to get absolutely wasted and extremely rowdy in the public eye for no absolute reason. Plus, it is extremely unlikely that the vast majority who participates in these ‘traditions’ are even Irish. The church does not propose to commence this type of behavior during what is a celebratory feast day dedicated to a saint, but teen culture today misinterprets this as an opportunity to act out of order, especially the Catholic holidays that are glorified in pop culture. Another example of this can be Easter. There are families on Easter morning that simply just go to church, and then spend the day after watch a random move like The Matrix. Or just watch a stage-created rain shower of assorted confetti on a parade of moving floats. It is a common theme for Easter to be a day for children to find various colored Easter eggs in broad areas and eats unhealthy amounts of chocolate while taking images of a human sized white bunny rabbit. That is not what the Easter season is truly about, but American pop culture often misinterprets Catholic holidays and does not seem to find the cultural importance within it.

Despite pop culture and Catholic values clashing, there are also some benefits and perks that can be seen from the issue. In some instances, it can bring more people to the Catholic church and help it expand. Pope Francis, the current pope and the head of the of the Catholic church, makes a statement on this saying, ”each particular Church should encourage the use of the arts in evangelization, building on the treasures of the past but also drawing upon the wide variety of contemporary expressions to transmit the faith in a new ‘language of parable”. We must be bold enough to discover new signs and new symbols, new flesh to embody and communicate the word, which are valued in different cultural settings but particularly attractive for others (Staudt). As being the leader of the catholic church, Pope Francis is quite knowledgeable about pop culture and its appeal. The pope has amassed 10 million plus Twitter followers, has made a cover appearance on The Rolling Stone magazine, and is the fuel behind a bustling trading business of fridge magnets, postcards, and souvenirs with his image featured in St. Peter's Square. According to the Christian Science Monitor, parish priests has claimed that this 'Francis effect' has had a big impact on ordinary Catholics. A survey by Famiglia Cristiana, an influential Catholic weekly magazine, found that 69% of the people polled said their faith had been bolstered since the election of Pope Francis. 57% said they prayed more and 39% said they now go to church more often.

The main reason to attend church is to go worship God, and the church has a mission to make modern-day disciples. This is why everything in the church must be done for God and God’s glory. With the church being aware that it needs to reach out to all age ranges, it should never compromise its beliefs. Catholics specifically are very strict on not seeing the church as a place of entertaining or adapting a pop culture. Arguments arise on how can the church become fashionable when fashion changes every few years, and the rules of the church does not. Especially since the church is built on the Bible and the Bible doesn't change (Lynch).

Catholics though are aware that they have the option to try to understand cultural trends in arts and music and use that knowledge to make the Gospel come alive in relevance to the modern world and in pop culture. Reverend Tim Stevens of Indiana believes that churches who remain hostile to pop culture risk being shunned by people who think Christianity is irrelevant to their lives. Him and Reverend Mark Beeson of Granger Community Church discovered that the key on digging popular culture into the church is to look for messages that affirm biblical principles.

That search often sends ministers such as Stevens to the cinema or to CD shelves at the local big box store to see what filmmakers and songwriters have to say about spiritual matters (Duke). Another example that Reverend Stevens found is from groups like The Beatles, who’s songs touches humanity's need for love, community and other topics addressed in the Old Testament and the Gospels. Howard Dukes, a writer for the Sound Bend Tribune in Indiana, went to ask Reverend Stevens about an instance where this happened. For one of the Beatles songs that has the theme of loneliness, Reverend Stevens said that he talked about the fact that there are so many lonely people, especially during the holidays, and what the church can do to help these people (Duke). They even make references to modern-day movies such as Spiderman 3. Spider-man's struggles with revenge and bitterness provide pastors with a tool to talk about temptation Reverend Stevens concluded that spirituality is a constant theme in popular culture, and he realizes some songs and movies are inappropriate because their messages undermine the spiritual message the church is trying to promote. 'There are a lot good things in many of these songs and movies,' Stevens says. 'These artists are talking about the same issues that we are talking about' (Duke).

In order to spread the Good News of evangelization, we may need to engage into certain aspects of pop culture to understand where people are coming from, as well as assist those with that experience to help them see their faith more clearly. The Catholic church has the strong ability to help and encourage others in having a more profound experience. In doing that, we need to lean onto wholesome and simple ways and methods that do not harm religion or strip away the true meaning of Catholicism. There are certain outlets that wrongly portray and promote the Catholic church from marketing ploys to misinterpreted celebrations, but educating the youth about the things they buy and holidays they celebrate can give the Catholic faith better exposure. While people say they want spirituality, get spiritual tattoos, and like inspirational Bible quotes on social media, they aren't going to church. Pop culture needs to bridge the gap if they are willing to embrace those things that can help them spread the Gospel's message. Therefore, pop culture is not the end to spreading the Catholic faith, but an important tool as we work for the renewal of culture. Let’s hope that we can end up creating a new pop culture, instilled with better values and enriching people’s lives all the more.