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Ethics and Morals of Christian Youth in the Digital World of the 5.0 Era: Analysis Based on Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

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Abstract

The development of digital technology in the Society 5.0 era presents increasingly complex moral challenges for adolescents, including Christian adolescents who live amidst a current of ambiguous values, moral relativism, and virtual social pressures. In this context, moral education is no longer simply understood as the inheritance of norms or adherence to rules, but rather as a mentoring process that helps adolescents develop reflective moral reasoning rooted in faith. This article aims to examine Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development as an analytical framework, analyze its implications for the moral formation of Christian adolescents in the digital era of Society 5.0, and formulate an integrative approach to Christian moral education that combines ethical reasoning and faith formation. This research uses a qualitative approach through literature review by analyzing relevant books and scientific articles in the fields of developmental psychology, moral education, and Christian education. The results of the analysis indicate that Kohlberg's theory makes an important contribution to understanding the stages of adolescent moral reasoning development, particularly in assessing ethical dilemmas rationally and reflectively. However, this theory has limitations when applied directly in the context of Christian faith because it tends to emphasize rationality and the principle of universal justice, while Christian ethics is rooted in a relationship with God, inner transformation, and the example of Christ. Therefore, this article emphasizes the importance of integrating Kohlberg's theory of moral development with Christian faith values through the role of Christian education in schools, the church as a faith community, and the family as the primary educational environment. This integration is expected to help Christian adolescents grow toward complete moral and spiritual maturity, enabling them to make responsible ethical decisions that reflect love, justice, and faith in the digital life of the Society 5.0 era.

Keywords: moral development, Lawrence Kohlberg, Christian adolescents, Christian education, Society 5.0

INTRODUCTION

The term morals etymologically derives from the Latin *mores* , which refers to habits, customs, or ways of life considered good within a social community. In practice, morals function as a set of values and rules that guide individual behavior so that life together can proceed in an orderly and meaningful manner. These moral values are formed and passed down through various social environments, such as family, school, church, and the wider community, each of which plays a strategic role in the character formation process (Fatoni et al., 2021). However, morality is not only related to compliance with external norms but also involves the process of internalizing values that influences how individuals assess and make ethical decisions.

In the context of the digital era of Society 5.0, the dynamics of adolescent moral formation face increasingly complex challenges. Adolescents live in a digital space filled with information, virtual interactions, and often ambiguous values. On the one hand, digital technology opens up vast opportunities for the development of knowledge and social relationships; on the other hand, it also presents ethical issues such as the misuse of social

media, the normalization of deviant behavior, decreased moral sensitivity, and the blurring of the boundaries between right and wrong. This situation places adolescents in a situation where moral decisions are no longer solely influenced by their physical environment, but also by a fast-paced, instantaneous, and often minimally reflective digital culture.

Therefore, adolescent moral formation cannot be understood simply as a process of inheriting values, but rather as a mentoring process that helps adolescents develop the ability to assess, sort, and be accountable for their moral choices. One theoretical framework widely used to understand this process is Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Kohlberg viewed moral development as a gradual process closely related to an individual's cognitive development, in which the ability to judge right and wrong develops along with the maturity of thinking. Morality, according to Kohlberg, is not solely shaped by socialization or adherence to rules, but through an increasingly complex and reflective process of moral reasoning. This framework provides an important contribution to understanding how adolescents understand norms, authority, and principles of justice in moral decision-making.

However, when this theory is applied to the context of Christian adolescents in the digital era of Society 5.0, critical questions arise regarding the adequacy of rational moral reasoning in shaping Christian character. Is the development of cognitively mature moral reasoning automatically in line with the growth of Christian faith and moral integrity? This question is the starting point of the analysis in this article. Based on this background, this article aims to: (1) examine Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development as an analytical framework, (2) analyze its implications for the moral formation of Christian adolescents in the context of the digital era of Society 5.0, and (3) formulate a strategy for Christian moral education that is relevant, contextual, and rooted in the integration of moral reasoning and faith formation.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative literature study approach. Literature study is a method carried out by collecting, reviewing, and analyzing various written sources relevant to the research topic, such as academic books, scientific journals, research reports, and other scientific sources (PGSD C, 2024). The research stages include identifying relevant library sources, analyzing the content of the literature, grouping main themes, and compiling a conceptual synthesis in the form of a scientific paper. This approach was chosen because it allows the author to gain a deep understanding of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development and its relevance to the moral formation of Christian adolescents in the digital era 5.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Gap Paragraph

Although studies on adolescent moral development have been widely conducted in the fields of developmental psychology and character education, most of these studies are still general in nature and have not explicitly positioned Christian adolescents as subjects whose moral formation is rooted in faith, relationship with God, and Gospel values (Santrock, 2015). In addition, studies of adolescent morality in the digital era are generally still framed in the context of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and digital literacy, without reflectively linking them

to the Society 5.0 paradigm which emphasizes the balance between technological progress and the restoration of human values that are in line with the principles of love, justice, and social responsibility in the Christian faith (Fukuyama, 2020). On the other hand, Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development is often used as a neutral and rationalistic psychological framework, but is rarely analyzed critically in dialogue with Christian ethics which emphasizes inner transformation, Christian character formation, and moral obedience born of faith and awareness of God's will. Therefore, this article aims to fill this gap by presenting a conceptual analysis that integrates Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development as the main analytical lens with Christian faith values, in order to formulate a more complete and contextual understanding of the ethical and moral formation of Christian adolescents in facing the challenges of the digital world in the Society 5.0 era.

Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development in Educational Perspective

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development is one of the most influential theoretical frameworks in the study of developmental psychology and moral education. Kohlberg developed his theory by starting from Jean Piaget's thoughts on cognitive development, by emphasizing that an individual's moral abilities develop along with the maturity of their thought structures. In this view, morality is not understood as a set of rules that are passively instilled through socialization, but rather as the result of an active reasoning process that develops gradually through the interaction of individuals with their social environment.

Kohlberg rejected the view that moral behavior is solely shaped by habit, punishment, or external reinforcement. Instead, he asserted that individuals actively construct their moral understanding through cognitive reflection on life experiences and the ethical dilemmas they face. Thus, moral development is understood as a process of rationally conscious internalization of ethical principles, rather than simply adherence to external norms or authorities. This perspective positions individuals as autonomous moral subjects responsible for the ethical decisions they make. In the context of education, Kohlberg's approach has significant implications. Moral education is no longer seen as sufficient if it simply emphasizes the dogmatic transmission of rules, prohibitions, or normative values. Moral education, according to Kohlberg, should encourage students to engage in reflective, critical, and dialogical moral thinking. Through discussions of moral dilemmas, students are encouraged to consider multiple perspectives, weigh the consequences of actions, and reflect on the ethical principles underlying their moral choices.

This approach makes Kohlberg's theory relevant in modern education, particularly in addressing complex social realities fraught with moral dilemmas. Adolescents, as an age group undergoing a transitional stage of cognitive development and self-identity, are often confronted with ambiguous ethical situations that lack clear-cut answers. In such situations, the ability to reason morally becomes more important than simply knowing what is right or wrong (Santrock, 2015). Therefore, Kohlberg's theory provides an analytical framework that helps educators understand how adolescents process and assess the moral issues they face.

One of Kohlberg's major contributions was his emphasis on the concept of justice as the core of morality. Kohlberg viewed mature moral development as characterized by an individual's ability to evaluate actions based on universal principles of justice, such as

equality, respect for human dignity, and protection of human rights (Kohlberg, 1987). This principle of justice is not only understood in legalistic terms, but also encompasses a human dimension that demands social responsibility and concern for others.

From an educational perspective, this emphasis on justice encourages students not only to comply with applicable rules but also to be critical of unjust social norms and structures. Moral education, therefore, serves as a means of developing citizens capable of ethical thinking and acting responsibly in social life (Nucci, 2001). This becomes increasingly relevant in the context of modern, pluralistic and dynamic societies, where individuals are required to make independent moral decisions amidst diverse values and interests.

Although Kohlberg's theory stems from a secular psychological framework, a number of Christian educational thinkers see a convergence between the concept of justice in Kohlberg's theory and Christian ethical values. The Christian faith places love and justice as fundamental principles of moral life, as reflected in Jesus' teachings about love for God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37–40). The principle of justice in the Christian faith relates not only to upholding the law but also to respecting human dignity as God's creation and the responsibility to build right relationships with others (Holmes, 2007).

In this context, Kohlberg's theory can be understood not as a concept that contradicts Christian faith, but rather as an analytical tool for understanding the process of individual moral reasoning development. Christian education can utilize Kohlberg's framework to understand the stages of moral development of students, while complementing it with dimensions of faith, spirituality, and holistic Christian character formation (Knight, 2006). Thus, Kohlberg's theory serves as a pedagogical tool that helps Christian educators design moral learning strategies that are appropriate to the level of cognitive and moral development of adolescents.

Furthermore, in the digital era and Society 5.0, the relevance of Kohlberg's theory in education is increasingly apparent. Adolescents live in a digital space that offers freedom of expression, but also harbors various ethical challenges, such as moral relativism, virtual social pressure, and the normalization of problematic behavior. In this situation, moral education that focuses solely on rule-abidingness becomes inadequate. Adolescents need the ability to assess and reflect on actions ethically based on mature and internalized principles (Fukuyama, 2020). By utilizing Kohlberg's theory of moral development, education, including Christian religious education, can help adolescents develop the ability to reason ethically and responsibly. However, in the context of the Christian faith, this process needs to be directed not only at achieving universal justice but also at developing character that reflects love, truth, and responsibility as a living manifestation of faith. Therefore, Kohlberg's theory becomes relevant and meaningful when used critically and integratively within the framework of moral education oriented towards the formation of the whole person.

To understand Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development more fully, it is necessary to examine the conceptual basis and theoretical assumptions underlying his thinking. Kohlberg not only established stages of moral development as a psychological classification, but also developed a framework that positions morality as the result of an individual's active reasoning process that develops with cognitive maturity. Therefore, the

following discussion outlines the conceptual development of Kohlberg's moral theory, including how he understood morality, justice, and the ethical decision-making process, as an important foundation for analyzing its implications for adolescent moral formation, particularly in the context of Christian education and faith formation.

Theory Development Moral Lawracane Kohlberg

Kohlberg developed a theory of moral development that refined and perfected Jean Piaget's ideas in psychology. According to Piaget and Kohlberg, a person's ability to understand and assess morality depends heavily on their level of cognitive maturity. In other words, a person doesn't immediately grasp moral concepts simply because they are taught by their social environment, but rather because they are able to actively process the information. The social environment only serves as a provider of experiences and rules, but how a person understands, interprets, and applies moral values depends entirely on their mental development.

This theory asserts that morality is not simply formed from habits, culture, or rules passed down through generations. Morality develops through a process of thinking that continues to improve with age and experience. Kohlberg emphasized that moral development is the result of reasoning or critical thinking, not simply following rules without understanding the rationale behind them.

In explaining this moral thinking, Kohlberg used the term "moral construct." A construct is something more than just an abstract concept. While a concept merely describes something in general, a construct has a more complex structure and can be further developed. For example, in psychology, the concept of "achievement" describes the results of a person's efforts in learning or working. However, in the context of a construct, an idea is not only described in general terms but also analyzed in more depth and can be measured. For example, intelligence in psychology is not just an idea of how smart someone is; it can be tested and measured using various methods, such as IQ tests.

Furthermore, Kohlberg emphasized that morality is not simply a matter of good or bad behavior based on social customs or norms. He viewed morality as something deeper, with philosophical and ethical foundations. From his analysis, he concluded that the core of morality is the principle of justice. This principle is based on two main aspects: equality and reciprocity. Equality means that every individual has the same right to be treated fairly, without discrimination or unfair treatment. Reciprocity refers to the concept that one should treat others as one would like to be treated.

With this principle, Kohlberg demonstrates that a person's moral development is not simply about following rules or prohibitions, but rather about how they understand the concept of justice and apply it in their daily lives. True morality is the result of mature thought, deep reflection, and an awareness of rights and obligations in relationships with others (Setiono, 2009).

The theory of moral development developed by Lawrence Kohlberg is formally called *the Cognitive Developmental Theory of Moralization* . This theory is rooted in the thinking of Jean Piaget, who argued that a person's moral development proceeds in tandem with cognitive (thinking) and affective (feeling) development. This means that as a person

ages and their thinking skills develop, their ability to assess and understand morality improves.

However, at that time, many psychologists believed that morality was more influenced by social and psychological factors, such as cultural norms and customs taught in society. In contrast, Kohlberg focused on how people reason morally, not simply how they behave.

Kohlberg wanted to understand how people make decisions in situations involving moral dilemmas. Therefore, he designed a study that examined how people think when faced with moral dilemmas. In his research method, a person is presented with a situation involving a moral conflict and then asked to explain how they would resolve the problem and the reasons behind their decision. In this way, Kohlberg not only assessed a person's actions but also examined the moral considerations and reasoning used in decision-making.

For example, imagine a child and an adult. Both refuse to steal a mango. On the surface, their behavior appears to be the same as not stealing. However, are the reasons behind their decisions also the same? A child might think, *"I won't steal because I might get scolded or punished. "* Meanwhile, an adult might think, *"I won't steal because stealing is unfair and could harm others."*

From this example, it's clear that even though their actions are the same it doesn't steal their levels of moral maturity differently. Children think in terms of immediate consequences (fear of punishment), while adults consider deeper ethical values, such as justice and social responsibility.

Therefore, Kohlberg also paid little attention to whether someone verbally stated something as right or wrong. A child and an adult could both say, *"Stealing is wrong,"* but what mattered to Kohlberg was the reasoning behind their statement.

Kohlberg's research shows that when someone provides a specific reason for their moral decision, their moral level can be determined from that reason. For example, some people say that cheating is wrong because they could be caught and punished. Others say that cheating is wrong because it can damage trust and honesty in society. From this, we can see that someone who avoids cheating simply because they fear punishment is still at a lower moral level. Meanwhile, someone who avoids cheating because they understand that honesty is important for social life is at a higher moral level. With this theory, Kohlberg emphasized that moral development is not just about following rules, but about how a person understands and reasons for moral values in their life. The more mature a person's thinking, the higher their moral development (Hasanah, 2019).

Understanding Moral

The term moral comes from the Latin word *mores* , meaning manners, customs, traditions, and behaviors considered appropriate in a society. Morals can be defined as values and norms that guide a person's actions and behavior. According to Sjarkawi, morals are views on good and bad, right and wrong, and boundaries regarding what is permissible and what is not permissible in social life. Every individual, especially children, has a different moral development. Some children demonstrate good moral development, but others experience difficulties in understanding and applying moral values. A child's moral development can be

understood in various ways, including direct education, namely by providing teaching and guidance about moral values from an early age; identification, namely when children learn morals by imitating or modeling the behavior of adults around them, such as parents, teachers, or community leaders; and *trial and error,* namely children learn from direct experience, both through the mistakes they make and the consequences they receive. Through this process, a child will increasingly understand the norms and values that apply in society and be able to apply them in everyday life (Rahman et al., 2020).

Education in moral or religious values is very important for the upholding of a nation. Without education in moral values (religion, character, ethics) it is very likely that a nation Can destroyed. Education character very play a role in form personality student US agent change (Nawawi, 2018).

Definition of morality according to experts (Putra et al., 2020):

a. According to Merriam-Webster, morals refer to the principles that distinguish between right and wrong in human behavior. Something is considered moral if it conforms to the ethical standards prevailing within a group or society.

b. The Psychology Dictionary defines morals as aspects of morality that are in line with social norms, laws, or customs that regulate a person's behavior in social life.

c. Hurlock explains that morals are behaviors that conform to a social group's code of ethics. Morals encompass the procedures, customs, and traditions adopted within a community.

d. Dian Ibung stated that morals are a set of values that apply in the social environment and function as guidelines in regulating individual behavior.

e. Russell Swanburg defines morals as the basis for determining good and bad behavior, which is obtained through observation of human actions based on reason and rational thinking.

f. Gunarsa explains that morals consist of a set of values that must be adhered to in various aspects of life to maintain social order.

g. According to Kohlberg, human moral development occurs in three stages that align with cognitive development. The more a person's thinking skills develop, the better their ability to assess and understand moral values.

h. A person's ability to assess moral aspects is greatly influenced by education. During the learning process, teachers often pose questions about the concepts of good and bad, right and wrong, to help children develop a more mature understanding of morality. Over time, children will become more skilled at assessing moral situations as their abilities are continuously honed through learning and social interactions with their surroundings.

Stages of Moral Development and Dynamics of Christian Youth

Lawrence Kohlberg proposed that individual moral development proceeds through three main stages: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional, each consisting of two stages. This division emphasizes that a person's moral judgment develops gradually along with

cognitive maturity and social experience, rather than solely determined by biological age or formal moral instruction (Kohlberg, 1987). In the context of adolescent education and development, understanding these stages is crucial for interpreting the moral dynamics experienced by adolescents more accurately and contextually.

Preconventional Level and Moral Reality of Early Adolescence
At the preconventional level, individuals judge right and wrong based on the immediate consequences of an action, particularly punishment and rewards. Moral orientation at this stage is egocentric, with actions being judged right only to the extent they benefit oneself or prevent the individual from being punished (Kohlberg, 1976). At this stage, adherence to rules is driven not by moral awareness but by fear of punishment or the desire for rewards.
In the context of adolescence, especially early adolescence, preconventional moral reasoning patterns are still common. Adolescents may exhibit "good" behavior in certain settings, such as school or church, but this behavior is not driven by deep moral convictions, but rather by pressure from authority or social control. Santrock, (2015) notes that during this phase, adolescents tend to adapt their behavior to immediately visible consequences, while long-term ethical reflection has not yet developed optimally.

For Christian adolescents, this situation has important implications. Adherence to Christian values in the pre-conventional stage is often external and situational. Moral values are adhered to only when there is control from parents, teachers, or church leaders. Without proper guidance, faith values risk being understood as a set of rules that limit freedom, rather than as a meaningful calling. Therefore, faith education at this stage needs to be gradually directed toward a more reflective and internal moral understanding.

Conventional Level and Social Compliance of Christian Adolescents
The conventional level is characterized by an individual's orientation toward social norms, environmental expectations, and the need for social acceptance. At this stage, individuals begin to consider the views of others when evaluating an action and view adherence to rules as a form of loyalty to the social group (Kohlberg, 1987). Morality at this level serves to maintain social order and harmonious relationships.

Most adolescents are at the conventional level, primarily because adolescence is a phase of identity development that is heavily influenced by social environments, such as family, peers, school, and religious communities (Santrock, 2015). Adolescents begin to judge right and wrong based on what is considered normal, acceptable, or expected by the group they belong to. In the context of Christian adolescents, the conventional level is often reflected in adherence to church teachings, faith traditions, and Christian family values. Adolescents participate in spiritual activities, adhere to moral norms, and avoid certain behaviors because they want to be seen as "good kids" or "true Christian teenagers." However, at this stage, moral obedience is not always accompanied by critical understanding or deep reflection on faith (Knight, 2006).

This situation presents a unique challenge in the digital age. Social pressures no longer stem solely from the physical environment, but also from virtual communities and social media, which shape new moral standards. Christian adolescents may experience value

conflicts when church and family norms collide with more permissive digital norms. If morality remains conventional, adolescents tend to conform to the dominant group's norms, including digital norms that do not always align with Christian values (Nucci, 2001).

Post-conventional Level and Challenges to Achieving It
The postconventional level is the highest stage in Kohlberg's theory of moral development. At this level, individuals judge actions based on internal, universal moral principles, such as justice, human dignity, and ethical responsibility, even when these principles conflict with social norms or positive law (Kohlberg, 1987). Morality no longer depends on social approval but rather on a personal commitment to consciously held ethical principles.

Kohlberg emphasized that not all individuals reach the postconventional stage. Achievement of this stage is greatly influenced by opportunities for moral dialogue, engagement in ethical reflection, and exposure to moral dilemmas that challenge conventional thinking (Kohlberg, 1976). In education, this emphasizes the importance of a learning environment that encourages open discussion, critical thinking, and reflection on values.

For Christian adolescents, the post-conventional stage holds significant strategic significance. At this stage, faith is no longer lived as a social obligation or family tradition, but as a conscious personal commitment. Christian values such as love, justice, honesty, and responsibility are not simply adhered to because of church rules, but because they are believed to be a calling of faith stemming from a relationship with God (Holmes, 2007).

However, without adequate guidance, many Christian teenagers risk stalling at the conventional stage. Morality tends to be understood as formal adherence to religious norms, rather than as a reflective and transformative expression of faith. In this context, Christian religious education plays a crucial role in helping teenagers move toward a more mature morality, one born of an awareness of faith and personal responsibility before God (Pazmino, 2008).

Dynamics of Christian Youth: Morals, Faith, and Identity
Adolescence is a transitional period marked by the search for identity, including moral and spiritual identity. Erikson referred to this phase as the stage of identity search versus role confusion, where individuals seek to integrate their values, beliefs, and social roles into a coherent identity (Erikson, 1968). In this context, moral development and faith development are closely intertwined. For Christian adolescents, the dynamics of moral development are inseparable from the process of faith maturation. Without a space for reflection, dialogue, and spiritual guidance, Christian values risk being understood superficially and normatively. Conversely, when moral and faith education are directed in an integrative manner, adolescents have the opportunity to develop mature moral reasoning as well as a personal and responsible faith.

Thus, understanding Kohlberg's stages of moral development provides a useful framework for Christian educators to realistically interpret adolescent moral dynamics. However, this framework needs to be integrated with faith formation so that moral

development does not stop at ethical rationality but develops into a life commitment that reflects Christian character in real-life contexts, including in the digital world of Society 5.0.

Moral Challenges for Christian Youth in the Digital Era 5.0

The digital age 5.0 presents a new social space that is virtual, fast, and without geographical boundaries. Social media, digital platforms, and the massive flow of information provide significant opportunities for self-development, but also pose significant moral challenges. Christian teenagers live in a reality where moral values are often relative and influenced by popularity, algorithms, and instant culture. One major challenge is the blurring of the boundaries between private and public spaces. Behaviors previously considered inappropriate can now be easily displayed and normalized in the digital space. In this situation, teenagers are required to have mature moral reasoning skills so they can judge actions not only based on trends or social pressure, but also based on ethical principles they believe in.

Furthermore, digital culture often encourages quick and reactive responses, reducing the space for moral reflection. This has the potential to hinder adolescents' moral development, especially if they are not equipped with critical and reflective thinking skills. In this context, Kohlberg's theory provides a framework for understanding why some adolescents tend to make shallow moral decisions, namely because their moral reasoning processes are not yet optimally developed.

Integration of Kohlberg's Theory and Christian Faith Values

The integration of Kohlberg's theory of moral development with Christian faith values is a crucial step in formulating a contextual approach to moral education. Christian faith emphasizes inner transformation and character formation rooted in love for God and neighbor. These values align with the goal of the postconventional stage in Kohlberg's theory: the ability to act based on internal and universal moral principles.

However, Christian moral education cannot rely solely on doctrinal teaching. It requires a pedagogical approach that encourages dialogue, reflection, and active engagement among adolescents in addressing real-life moral dilemmas. Case studies, biblical reflection, and experiential learning are effective strategies for helping adolescents develop more mature moral reasoning. By integrating Kohlberg's theory, Christian educators can understand the stages of adolescent moral development and design learning strategies appropriate to that stage. This approach allows Christian moral education to move beyond external obedience and toward internalizing faith values, embodied in ethical actions in the digital world.

From a Christian perspective, moral reasoning as explained in Kohlberg's theory needs to be complemented by *spiritual discernment* , namely spiritual sensitivity to distinguish God's will in concrete and complex ethical situations. *Discernment* does not eliminate the rational process in moral decision-making, but rather enriches ethical reasoning through reflection on faith, a personal relationship with God, and openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that moral decisions are not only based on the principle of universal justice, but also on love, truth, and responsibility as the calling of the Christian faith (Nouwen, 2013).

A Limited Critique of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development from a Christian Faith Perspective

Although Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development makes an important contribution to understanding the individual's moral reasoning process, particularly in explaining how a person judges right and wrong through stages of cognitive development, this theory is not free from a number of limitations when viewed from a Christian perspective. Kohlberg views moral development primarily as the result of an individual's cognitive maturity and rational ability to assess ethical dilemmas based on the principle of universal justice (Kohlberg, 1987). This approach, although valuable for moral education, tends to emphasize the rational dimension and human moral autonomy, and pays relatively less attention to the spiritual and relational dimensions that are central to Christian ethics (Nucci, 2001).

In the Christian faith, morality is not merely understood as the result of logical reasoning, but rather as a response of faith to God's love and will manifested through inner transformation. Christian moral formation is rooted in a personal relationship with God, the renewal of life through the work of the Holy Spirit, and the example of Christ as the center of ethical life (Rom. 12:2; Gal. 2:20). As emphasized by Knight, (2006) Christian education views morality as part of a holistic character formation, which includes cognitive, affective, spiritual, and practical aspects. Therefore, the ability to act morally from a Christian perspective is not only determined by the level of moral reasoning, but also by one's spiritual growth and depth of faith (Pazmino, 2008).

In addition, Kohlberg's theory tends to view morality as a universal construct that is religiously neutral, so it does not accommodate transcendental values originating from divine revelation (Pazmino, 2008). In the context of Christian religious education, this approach needs to be complemented with the understanding that moral obedience is not only aimed at achieving social justice, but also reflects love for God and others as a call of faith (Matthew 22:37–40). Holmes, (2007) emphasizes that Christian ethics cannot be separated from the human relationship with God as the source of the highest moral values. Thus, Kohlberg's theory can be used critically as an analytical tool to understand the stages of adolescent moral development, but it needs to be integrated with the values of Christian faith so that moral formation does not stop at ethical rationality, but rather leads to the formation of a complete Christian character.

Implications for Christian Education, the Church, and the Family

Based on an analysis of Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development theory and its critique from a Christian perspective, the moral formation of Christian adolescents in the digital era of Society 5.0 demands a more holistic and integrative educational approach. Kohlberg's theory makes an important contribution to understanding how individuals develop moral reasoning skills through stages closely related to cognitive development. Particularly in the post-conventional stage, individuals are expected to be able to assess actions based on internal, universal moral principles, such as justice, human dignity, and social responsibility. However, from a Christian educational perspective, mature moral reasoning skills do not automatically produce a complete Christian character without being accompanied by faith

development, conscience formation, and inner transformation (Zubaedi, 2015). Emphasized that moral education that overemphasizes cognitive and rational aspects has the potential to produce individuals who are able to distinguish between right and wrong theoretically, but are not always consistent in real action. In the context of Christian faith, morality is not only related to the ability to reason ethically, but also to a life orientation rooted in a relationship with God and obedience to His will. Therefore, Christian moral education cannot be reduced to the development of ethical thinking skills alone, but must be directed toward the formation of Christian character that reflects love, justice, and responsibility as a living manifestation of faith.

Implications for Christian Education in Schools

In the context of formal education, particularly in Christian schools, these implications require the design of a Christian Religious Education (PAK) curriculum that goes beyond the delivery of normative doctrines and moral rules. Sidjabat, (2021) emphasizes that Christian education essentially aims to shape the whole person, namely an individual who develops cognitively, affectively, spiritually, and morally. Therefore, PAK learning needs to provide sufficient space for students to engage in ethical dialogue, critical reflection, and processing the concrete moral dilemmas they face in everyday life, especially in the digital world.

The Society 5.0 era presents a digital reality rife with value ambiguity, where adolescents are confronted with various ethical issues such as social media abuse, the normalization of unethical behavior, moral relativism, and virtual social pressure. In this situation, learning that solely emphasizes memorizing Bible verses or moral prohibitions without context risks losing its relevance. Christian education needs to help adolescents connect faith values to the concrete realities they experience, so that faith is not understood as a set of rules separate from life, but rather as an ethical lens for assessing and making moral decisions.

Kohlberg's moral development framework can be used as a pedagogical tool to understand the stages of moral reasoning in students. Through this understanding, Christian educators can adapt learning strategies to the level of moral development of adolescents. However, as emphasized by (Khan, 2024). This approach must be complemented by theological and spiritual reflection so that the moral thinking process does not stop at rational justice, but is directed towards love and responsibility as the core of Christian ethics. In other words, Christian moral education needs to integrate moral reasoning with faith formation so that students are not only able to judge an action as right or wrong, but also understand the ethical and spiritual meaning of those moral choices.

Implications for the Church as a Faith Community

In addition to schools, churches play a strategic role in bridging the gap between moral reasoning and adolescents' faith. Churches are not only religious institutions that impart moral teachings, but also faith communities that shape the ethical consciousness of their congregations through fellowship, teaching, and the practice of living together. Borrong, (1999) emphasizes that the church functions as an ethical community that helps its members internalize Christian values in concrete social relationships. In the context of youth

development, the church needs to provide a safe and reflective space for adolescents to discuss the moral issues they face, including digital ethics issues. Pastoral care, youth development, and open faith dialogue enable adolescents to integrate Gospel values into everyday moral decision-making. This approach helps adolescents understand that Christian faith does not conflict with critical reasoning but rather enriches the moral judgment process through love, conscience, and social responsibility. The church also needs to avoid a moralistic approach that emphasizes only prohibitions and sanctions. Such an approach risks keeping adolescents at a conventional stage of moral development, where obedience is driven by social pressure or authority, rather than by a personal sense of faith. Instead, the church is called to help adolescents grow toward moral and spiritual maturity, where Christian values are lived out as a lifelong commitment born of a relationship with God and concern for others.

Implications for the Family as the Primary Educational Environment

The family, as the primary educational environment, plays a fundamental role in the moral formation of Christian adolescents. Homrighausen, E.G. dan Enklaar, (2013) emphasize that faith and moral education cannot be separated from the exemplary behavior of parents. Christian values are taught not only through words, but primarily through attitudes, relationship patterns, and moral decisions demonstrated in everyday life.

In the digital era of Society 5.0, the role of the family is becoming increasingly complex. Parents are not only required to teach moral values but also to guide their children in using digital technology wisely. Open communication on moral issues, discussions about digital content, and empathetic guidance help adolescents develop mature moral reflection skills. Through this process, Christian moral values are not merely understood as external rules but are internalized as part of adolescents' identities. Synergy between school, church, and family is key to ensuring that the moral development of Christian adolescents does not stop at the conventional stage. When these three educational environments work in harmony, adolescents have a greater opportunity to develop mature moral reasoning as well as a personal and responsible faith. Thus, the moral formation of Christian adolescents in the digital era produces not only ethically competent individuals but also individuals of faith capable of embodying love, justice, and responsibility in all aspects of life.

CONCLUSION

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development makes a significant contribution to understanding how individuals, including adolescents, develop moral reasoning skills through stages closely related to cognitive development. In the context of the digital era of Society 5.0, this framework helps explain why adolescents often face difficulties in making ethical decisions amidst value complexity, virtual social pressures, and increasing moral relativism. However, the analysis in this article shows that Kohlberg's theory has limitations when applied directly in the context of Christian faith education. The strong emphasis on moral rationality and the principle of universal justice does not fully accommodate the relational and transcendental dimensions that are at the heart of Christian ethics. Christian morality is not solely based on the ability to reason ethically but is rooted in a personal relationship with God, the renewal of life through the work of the Holy Spirit, and the example of Christ as the

center of moral life. Therefore, the integration of Kohlberg's theory of moral development and Christian faith values is an urgent need in the development of Christian adolescents in the digital age. Kohlberg's theory can serve as an analytical lens for understanding the stages of adolescent moral development, but it must be used critically and complemented by faith formation so that moral development does not stop at social obedience or mere ethical rationality. Integrative Christian moral education is expected to help adolescents move towards moral and spiritual maturity, so that they are not only able to judge right and wrong rationally but also live as individuals of faith who reflect love, justice, and responsibility in all aspects of life, including in the digital world of Society 5.0.

BIODATA

Sarah Gracia Lumbantobing is a lecturer at the Sekolah Tinggi Teologi (STT) Mawar Saron Lampung who is highly dedicated to Christian Religious Education. She completed her Bachelor's degree at the Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung (IAKN) and continued her Master's studies at the Universitas Kristen Indonesia (UKI) Jakarta in 2022. In addition to teaching in an academic environment, she is also active in children's ministry at her church, particularly through Sunday School. She views educational and spiritual ministry as one integrated calling, educating not only to increase knowledge but also to shape character and faith. As a writer and educator, she continually strives to integrate faith, education, and technology into the learning process, especially for today's Christian youth. For Sarah, teaching, writing, and serving are three facets of the same calling: building lives rooted in Christ and making a difference in others.

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others. In his role as an educator, the author continues to strive for continuous personal growth, both in knowledge and attitude, as well as spiritual maturity, so that everything he teaches remains rooted in Christian values and reflects the love of Christ in concrete actions. Through this book, the author hopes that readers will not only gain knowledge, but also be encouraged to view education and ministry from a deeper, more loving, and Christ-centred perspective. May this book be a blessing, strengthen hearts, and inspire every reader to continue to grow in faith and ministry.

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