

THE POSTMODERN MIND AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Daniel Franklin Pilario, C.M.
St. Vincent School of Theology
Adamson University

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Since I was asked to talk about this topic I kept asking myself the question “why was I invited here”. I stand in front of you today not as an authority on postmodernity nor on education but as one like you – and educator whose only wish and dream is to be able to form young people entrusted to my care towards a full life. I stand in front of you today also as a student of life trying to make sense of the questions we all encounter as we come to school each day. I myself have been a student and a product of Catholic schools from high school to college up to my graduate degrees – from the small RVM school in the remote and sleepy town of Oslob, Cebu, to the portals of big universities like Adamson and UST, up to my postdoctoral studies in Belgium (all except the one were members of the CEAP). All of these schools, with their varied philosophies and myriad discourses, their openness and fidelity, have one description: “Catholic”. Maybe some of you in the audience were my teachers or principals before or maybe our Treasurer who received the promissory notes that my parents signed, “thank you”. My standing in front of you today is an act of gratitude for your generous act of forming me. Without those open minds and dedicated lives, I would not be here in front of you.

But I also stand in front of you as your co-teacher trying to make sense of these challenging times which our young people want us also to listen to, their time! To be honest with you, I have never liked to be a teacher because my father was. When he comes home from a barrio elementary school in the mountains of my little town bringing all his test papers for us to check (which also means there is no playtime for us), I told myself that early, I will never be a teacher. So, I decided to become a priest! But on my ordination day, my Superior announced in front of everybody – my father included – that I am assigned to teach in our college seminary. From that time until today, I have always been a teacher. My father was just quiet that day but I know deep inside him, he was smiling. Siguro sinabi niya sa kanyang sarili: “Beh, buti nga!” Thus, his questions and yours, have also become mine. I think the core question for any teacher is just one: “How can I best understand my student so that I can share with her in the best way I could what I need to teach?” Though simple, it requires a lot of patient listening and continuous learning even from those whom we teach. This conference is my feeble attempt to listen.

There goes my social location. I do not want to burden you with personal information but in the postmodern discourse, it is also necessary to mention from the start one's social location, the ground from which one stands. It is from this specific standpoint that I would try to reflect on the question assigned to me in this conference: "What challenges does the postmodern mind pose to Catholic education and mission today?" In order to do this, I will proceed in four steps: I will (1) present Facebook as a postmodern icon; (2) enumerate some characteristics of postmodernity in popular culture; (3) attempt to see the philosophical underpinnings of the postmodern mind; (4) spell out some repercussions of this to Catholic education in our postmodern context. Please be patient with me as we navigate through this unfamiliar terrain.

1. Facebook as Icon of Postmodernity

Let me start with a common experience for most of us – Facebook. Are you postmodern? If you have a Facebook account, I guess you are. So, welcome to the postmodern world. If you have none, open an account later. Like many of you, there was a time in my life that I refused to register in Facebook. I told myself there is already email and text messaging, maybe that is no longer necessary. But to listen to my students' discussion and jokes without me understanding them because they all came from Facebook, I told myself I think I need to be where my students are. Only to find later that Pope Benedict XVI has already been registered on Facebook! Do you know that at the moment, the Philippines ranks number 8 in the countries which has the most number of Facebook users? There are 2.9 million Philippine Facebook users – not yet counting the OFWs – 82% of whom comes from ages 13-30, our students. Ahead of us are big countries: US, Brazil, India, Mexico, Turkey and UK. Vatican is the last in the list with 20 users but Benedict XVI already has 5-6 accounts. All of it, of course, is a Fan Page – one of which has 5000 "likes". I don't know if he has a personal account, at least, he has not befriended me.

Let me single out two features of Facebook which I would like to reflect on: "profile" and "friends". If you have Wi-Fi connection in this hall at the moment, I don't mind if you log in to FB so that you would know what I am talking about. One test of a postmodern mind is multi-tasking: that you can both listen to me and chat online. I hope you can still follow. If you don't, then you are not postmodern enough.

1.1. "Profile": Fluid Identities

Your profile tells something about yourself. With it, you are presenting yourself to the world of your choice. That is not new. We do this every day, for instance, when we present ourselves to our teacher, our boss, the parents of your would-be wife, etc. Like these everyday introductions, we have carefully chosen the picture for people to see. The sociologist Erving Goffman once said that what we do in everyday interaction is like performing in a 'stage' in front

of an audience. Some images may better be left at the backstage. We also do that in Facebook. But more than that, we also experiment with our identities in FB. Some change profile pic every week. Some of us have two or three accounts with different names. Others have changed their names or placed their favorite Korean actress photo or another avatar. Many manipulate their information (school, job, status, address, etc.). Even their so-called "families" have become fluid in FB. For instance, I was once 'invited' to be a "father" to one young girl I do not personally know. When I checked, she already had 3 fathers and 3 mothers plus 30 siblings. Facebook has actually changed the notion of family and identity.

This is one characteristic of postmodern lifestyle. Life has become fluid. It spills, seeps, flows. You cannot pin it down. Unlike our grandparents who have hardly left our local village, people today have become mobile and have taken on fluid identities. Zygmunt Bauman, a postmodern thinker, calls our times "liquid modernity". Is this good or bad? For many, this has become a liberating experience. Try to imagine a battered housewife who had a chance to go abroad and earn a new sense of freedom from her abusive husband. Try to imagine a talented young man from a squatter's area who could not land a job because of prejudices of local companies. A new identity afforded by postmodern mobility gives him a new chance for life advancement. As Facebook exemplifies, we also need to take on new roles we have never taken before, to imagine ourselves differently, to reinvent ourselves time and again. In postmodern times, identities are never laid out for us. We create it ourselves as we go along.

1.2. "Friends": Virtual Communities

We are so grateful with Facebook because there we have met classmates and friends we have never seen for ages. There are people who invited me to be their friends, many of them I do not really know. As of this writing, my Facebook page says I have 2,634 "friends". But are we really "friends"? If I refuse or ignore an invitation to be "friends", would that make me "unfriendly"? Moreover, I am in contact with people whom I have formed interest groups with, had a lot of exchanges but we will never meet in person the whole of our lives. Some of their profiles may be their real photos but who would know? Some I just know through their avatars. Can we call our group a "community"? Or, if I play "Chefville", for instance, where a master chef will teach me how to cook, ask from a friend's garden some tomatoes and invite her to dine with me in FB, will that really fill my hungry stomach? What purpose does it serve me?

Facebook has actually challenged the notion of community. Does it do us any good? I think yes. Technology has solved the problem of distance (and the financial considerations that come with it). Imagine thousands of OFW families whose relationships are saved by Skype, YM or Facebook. Technology has also solved the problem of time. We can respond more rapidly to calamity despite the distance. When I posted the pictures of the victims last Habagat flood in Manila, my friends in the US and Canada right away responded even before the floods have

subsided. Life as image is not useless at all. You might have heard of a poor old grandmother who was looking for her husband by posting her picture on a poster which she hang on her neck as she walked. Someone took a picture of her and posted it on website with a plea to help her. In no time, the couple was reunited. More recently still, someone posted a Philip Morris agent insulting and slapping an MMDA as he was doing his job. It went viral so much so that the next day, he was sacked from his job and lost his driver's license. The overflowing sentiments and appreciation for the late Jesse Robrido and his legacy would not have been possible without the social media. Moral advocacy, fight for justice and responding to calamities have become more alive among virtual communities.

But virtual existence is also ambivalent. Facebook has generated a new term – “friending”, that is, to make someone a friend by one click. However, I can also easily “unfriend” someone through another click without much loss and consequence to my person. Human bonds born out of a long process of “taming” envisioned by the Little Prince have been sacrificed in the altar of instant interactivity. “What must I do, to tame you?” asked the little prince. “You must be very patient,” replied the fox. “First you will sit down at a little distance from me – like that – in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words are the source of misunderstandings. But you will sit a little closer to me, every day...”

2. The Youth and Postmodern Spirit in Popular Culture

Let me extent the discussion to other areas of postmodern life and try to enumerate some of its characteristics present in popular culture. It might be good to know that these attributes are very close to the hearts of our young people. Since it is in their blood, we might as well listen.

2.1 Interactivity

Those of us from the older generation are afraid to click a mouse or experiment with a gadget because we think that when we hit the wrong button, it is going to explode. This is not a problem for young people. They want it “hands on”. They need to touch the screen, to manipulate the program, to make it work. Interactivity develops a sense of control. But it also makes one contribute to the ongoing conversation. One consequence of interactivity is the leveling off of knowledge production process in our times. What pulls people to these spaces is the democratized way of information sharing where each one can contribute what one knows from the distinct location where one speaks. Against the lonely voice and imposing authority of the teacher, the scientist or the expert, everyone is happy to contribute. The social media (Twitter, MySpace, Flickr, Google, LinkedIn, You Tube, etc.) makes possible knowledge generation from all directions, thus, erasing the boundaries between expert knowledge and mass culture, between “high” and “low”, etc. What emerge are the different voices all contributing to knowledge

production. As we say in English: “the more, the merrier.” This also happens in “blogging” where each one can react to one’s ideas, in “Wikipedia” for instance where even you can contribute to defining or describing something and in YouTube where each one can post any personal video as part of one’s self-expression. This was how Arnel Pineda of the American rock band, Journey and Charice Pempengco, once unknown, came to international stardom.

2.2 Playfulness

The second characteristic is playfulness. Gone are the days when we have to sit straight, all lined-up, properly smiling when we take photos. *Para tayong nasa firing squad!* We are now in the times of “wacky” shots, distorted faces and jump shots. Playfulness is in the air, even in architectural designs where the postmodern movement first made its conscious expression. In contrast to modern designs which are merely functional and minimalist making it dry and boring, postmodern architecture is playful, interposing past and present, the classic and the contemporary, making lines flow aside from mere squares or triangles (show samples). Nearer to home, while SM North EDSA is too modern, Trinoma wants to be postmodern – so much so that SM needed to add later on its Sky Garden to break its modernist monotony. The labyrinth of Eastwood is more postmodern in contrast to the well-manicured and measured spaces of Luneta.

2.4 Pastiche

A third characteristic of postmodernity is pastiche and bricolage most often acting as works of satire and parody. A pastiche is one work of art coming from a combination of different genres from different sources, taken out of their original contexts and “hodge-podged” together. In short, *halo-halo*. An example in music is the famous song by Queen, the Bohemian Rhapsody. In the movie, what comes to mind is “Forrest Gump”. Forrest Gump’s story, played by Tom Hanks, is the story of any ordinary man. Forrest had a very low IQ of 75 yet he helped changed the world without him knowing it, or so the movie goes. In the movie, history is spliced randomly, inserting Gump into some crucial moments of American history – as he shook the hand of John Kennedy, reported the Watergate scandal as he was disturbed by the flashlights in a nearby office or was an investor of Apple computer which he thought was some sort of a fruit company. All these are expressions of postmodern pastiche and bricolage. What is parodied is the arrogance of science and knowledge to the exclusion of simple people who in fact create history itself. As Gump told Jenny: “I am not a smart man but I know what love is.” There is no grand story of the American dream, no definite ends or grand climax, just the lightness of being shown in the free falling feathers from the start of the movie. As Gump’s mother used to tell him: “Life is like a chocolate. You never know what you’re gonna get.”

3. Engaging the Postmodern Mind

How do I understand in a wider and more critical perspective these everyday observations? I thought maybe a little philosophy would help. "What are the philosophical underpinnings of the postmodern mind? How do contemporary thinkers make sense of what is happening in popular culture today?" Sometimes, in our experience, the word philosophy already makes us doze off to sleep. I hope I can make this simple enough and redeem philosophy from its pretentious esoteric tendencies.

First, we will try to understand the term 'postmodern'. In the level of etymology, the postmodern 'comes after' the modern. That is why it is a 'post'. In the past, when one tells you, you are so 'modern', it means you are so fashionable, up to date, trendy, contemporary. Today, if someone tells you are so 'modern', please don't be too happy. That is not a compliment. That means you are outdated, outmoded, out of trend, OT (Old Testament), or in the internet language of online chatrooms – "off topic". Ironically, to live in the contemporary (the original meaning of modern) is not longer to be 'modern' but to be postmodern. *Sabi ng mga kabataan: "Kaya kung modern ka pa, pinaglipasan ka na ng panahon, Ate!"*

At the risk of sounding simplistic, it might be good to outline three cultural worldviews: the pre-modern, the modern and the postmodern. The pre-modern mindset believes that absolute truth is achievable because God reveals it so. Such a worldview was prevalent in the medieval times, in most of the Christian tradition where all things lead to God as the sole authority of reality. This belief was debunked during the modern times when, in the Enlightenment, people began to question both authority and tradition, and the so-called objective truth that it proclaims. In its stead, it trusts human reason and science. Objective truth is found on empirical facts, not on God. Modernity places its hope in the capacity of human reason to be able to know this truth. While in the medieval times, theology/religion was the queen of sciences, in modern times, it was science. In a way, all needed to be 'scientific'. Our present educational system is grounded on this belief –the belief in human reason. Consequently, the whole modern world was very optimistic with progress, scientific research, industrial revolution, development, growth – thanks to the all-powerful capacity of human reason. But in our postmodern times, these optimistic dream of a better world brought about by rationality was put into question. Human reason could not deliver. Think of Hitler's Nazism, the USSR Communist project, the two World Wars, the Third World development program. All these started as modern scientific projects. But what are their by-products? Holocaust and 6 million Jews sent to gas chambers, Gulag and millions who rot there unknown to the world; Hiroshima and 45,000 of decimated bodies just on that day alone! Thanks to science and human reason. Postmodernists are disenchanting modernists because modern science did not and could not fulfill its promise.

This brings me to my next point. Let me mention three philosophical reflections on the postmodern worldview as articulated by three contemporary philosophers.

3.1 The End of Grand Stories: Jean-Francois Lyotard

Jean-Francois Lyotard, a contemporary French philosopher, defines postmodernity as "incredulity towards metanarratives". This is the first description of postmodernity: disbelief in grand stories. Our young people today do not quite believe in grand stories anymore. Let me think of an everyday example: *Maririnig natin minsan ang mga matatanda: "Papunta ka pa lang. Ako'y pauwi na. Kaya, huwag ka nang magtanong. Sumunod ka na lang."* *Narinig ko ang isang teenager na sumagot: "Alam ko pong pauwi na kayo. Pero pwede nyo ba akong hayaang hanapin mag-isa ang landas papunta?"* Our young people do not want the imperialism of our self-assured stories. They want to experience the stories themselves. In a more philosophical language, we have seen how the modern worldview has been dominated by metanarratives of progress through universal human reason. This grand story of progress, in Hegel, for instance, legitimates all the claims of science. In level of society, for instance, Marx wants us to imagine the grand story of the communist utopia and prescribes for us the dialectical way to that vision. In the level of development, we were once made to believe that if we follow Western prescriptions of technological progress, we would be as affluent as the First World soon. And all that we needed do – whether a street demonstration or bloody revolution, be it mining or logging – find their legitimation in these metanarratives of social progress, either in their leftist or rightist varieties. Yet all this promise of progress falls flat on our faces mainly in our century, thus, the consequent disbelief. In this same context, when religion has functioned as a metanarrative of 'eschatological progress', as a legitimating narrative of colonialism, authoritarianism, marginalization and exclusion, the same incredulity is felt. This skepticism in young people is expressed in a phrase they love say: "*Weh, di nga!*" Or, as the Cebuanos love to taunt: "*Estoryahe!*"

If there are no more grand stories in postmodernity or no one believes in anymore, what do we have left? According to Lyotard, all that we have are little stories – *les petit récits* – diverse narratives most often provisional, contingent, relative and temporary. In my classroom experience of more than 20 years, I have observed that our young people do not like long discourses, high-sounding lectures or magisterial treatises. But they listen to little and disjointed stories, morsels of wisdom, fragmentary images, short sound bites. Students today do not easily comprehend logical synthetic outlines; all they understand are "fragments". What does this tells the educators of our time? I will come back to this later.

3.2 Knowledge and Power: Nietzsche and Foucault

Central to modernity is scientific knowledge. "Knowledge is power," Francis Bacon once said at the early stages of the Enlightenment. For the modern mind, once you have gotten the facts right, you would know what is true and what is the best thing to do. The postmodern

mind turn Bacon on his head and asserts that “power is knowledge” – which means to say that he who has the economic and political power also has the control of what would pass as scientific knowledge. As Kuya Kim says: “Ang buhay ay weather weather lang.” Thus, the mistrust of grand stories is founded on the suspicion that these stories were backed up with political and economic power. Among the more famous thinkers who theorize along this line were Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault – both of whom are sources of postmodern thought. Both of them put into question the foundations of modern knowledge. For instance, Nietzsche says: “Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, poetically and rhetorically intensified, became transposed and adorned, and which after a long usage by a people, seemed fixed and canonical and binding on them. Truths are illusions which one has forgotten as illusions.” What is crucial to assertions of truth, therefore, is the will to power. To put it simply, truth is the voice of those who can project a more powerful sound or a larger image. To bring my point closer to home, just think of TV ads. Why do we think that when you drink Starbucks you are “cool”? Or, why do you think EPAL politicians spend millions to put their big faces on billboards?

The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, pursued this same direction. He thinks that power does not only reside in kings or the police; it is everywhere. For instance, it is in the institutions of society – in prisons, schools, families, churches. These bureaucracies act as instruments of social power in the imposition of a specific truth which this specific society tries to uphold. In the process, agents became faceless bureaucrats only doing what the system programs them to do. A good example in work of Foucault is his study of the panopticon in his book, *Discipline and Punish* (1977). A panopticon is a modern architectural design to serve as a watchtower in the middle of a round prison. You only need few watchmen in the center to watch hundreds of inmates. Moreover, the watchmen are invisible and surveillance is round the clock without the knowledge of the prisoners. For Foucault, the panopticon is a metaphor of power in modern societies: power permeates the whole of society without being seen. The more disguised, the more effective. You no longer need prison cells or chains. Panoptic structures are everywhere – think of surveillance and CCTV cameras in public places. But also think of the internet and how it tracks down your consumer choices. That is why when you next look at your Facebook, the ads at the side of your opening screen has some relations to the sites that you or your friends have visited. Without your knowing it, you are being watched. You are being watched so that you can continuously buy what’s on offer. That brings me to my next point.

3.3 Hyperreality: Jean Baudrillard

I think all of us had this funny experience the first time we watched a 3-D film. *Di ba umilag ka rin noong makita mong papunta ang bala sa 'yo seeming coming out of the screen?* Welcome to the world of simulation and virtual reality. The postmodern world is replete with these virtual experiences: a Skype conference with your parents; online games where you only

know your playmates through their avatars; reality TV (like the Big Brother shows); virtual tour of cities, museums or tourist spots, etc. Beyond entertainment and keeping our social life alive online, these technological developments are useful to learning processes today: for example, distance learning; access to resources not available before; simulation learning, etc. However, some philosophers alert us to the ambivalence of simulation. Jean Baudrillard talks about 'hyperreality' – that moment when the sign (simulation screens) become real in themselves without any reference to the so-called 'reality'. In short, the reality has become fiction and image which is a fiction has become real or, better still, hyperreal. Think of your students being hooked up on online games that the avatars have become more real than their friends in the same room. That is why we tell them: "Get a life!" Think of Disneyland or Las Vegas. You are made to walk through recreated Egyptian pyramids or medieval castles – all perfect representations of real castles that no longer exist. Now, the fake has become real, even more real than the original. And here is the rub: as we enter these air conditioned sites, all you find are shopping markets luring your senses to endlessly buy and consume. This consumerist "society of spectacle", to use a phrase of Guy Debord, has transformed human relations into relationship of commodities which are accessible only to some and not to others. This is called the "digital divide". It might be good for us to know that even if the Philippines is "wired" with 8.3 million internet users, it is in fact only 9% of the whole population.

Let me summarize our image of postmodernity so far by contrasting it with the modern worldview. While the modern is rigid, authoritarian, centralized; the postmodern is flexible, fluid and open. While modernity is characterized by reverence for science and high culture; the postmodern is expressed in pastiche, playful interactivity with the ordinary. While the modern deals with the real; the postmodern lives on the virtual. While the modern believed in universal grand stories; the modern is satisfied with heterogeneous fragmentary histories. But we have also seen the ambivalence of the postmodern mind: the erosion of human bonds, the mistrust of anything that speaks of vision, consumerism and unequal access to technology, etc.

4 Catholic Education in Postmodern Contexts

How do we as Christians respond to the postmodern challenge? What implications does this have to our work in education in general and to Catholic religious education in particular? These are the last questions I would like to tackle today.

4.1 Christian Responses to the Postmodernity

What is the Christian stance towards postmodernity? If we are to make the Christian faith viable in this changing context, what options do we have? There are libraries of books written on this topic to date but this is not the venue for their hair splitting distinctions. At the risk of

oversimplifying, let me just mention three existing Christian options today. Whether they are viable or not, it is up to you to decide. The first option is “to retreat”; the second option is “to join” the game; the third option is “to be critically engage”.

I call the first option the movement for a “restoration theology”. It says: let us go back and restore our lost glory. The world around us is not only playful; it is hedonistically playful, sinfully playful. The experience of plural voices, manifold faith-claims and multiple convictions are not good for our souls. There is so much noise and spiritual pollution. We are in a “culture of death”; in a “dictatorship of relativism”. The unexpected questions posed by new contexts borders on defiance or insubordination. The option is therefore is to retreat, to go back to a known past, and from this secure citadel, assert once more the truth, coherence and beauty of the Christian message. Old liturgies, big candles on the altar, black sotanas, Gregorian chant! Rigid intolerance, coercive power, steadfast order! Jesus is the answer. He is our personal Lord and Savior. He defeats all evils.

The description I just gave is all around us in its Catholic, Protestant or evangelical variety. They are a sign of a threatened church that retreats back, not even to the rational religion of the modern world, but to the self-assured authority of the premodern society. It believes that there is nothing wrong with our faith. It is the present culture that alienates itself from it. So, we need to go back. I could almost hear the nostalgic words of my grandfather: “Mas mabuti pa ang panahon namin. Pero ang mga kabataan ngayon...” then goes the litany of postmodern woes which is the reason of all the flood or typhoon that we experience only now. Tinanong ko siya kailan po ‘yong panahon na yon? Panahon ng Hapon! I can only imagine that during that time, his grandfather was also blaming him and the ways of the youth of that time as the source of its society’s woes, maybe as the reason for the Japanese invasion. When will this nostalgia end? All the way to Paradise before the apple event? But even there, there was still the serpent!

The other option is “to join them” all the way. One author calls this the campaign for a “weak theology” (Caputo, 2006). Coming from the postmodern philosophy of “weak thinking” (Vattimo), this type of Christianity renounces the God of power and enthrones the “weakness of God” (1 Cor. 1:29). It proclaims a Christianity which is non-dogmatic, non-foundational, non-confessional, inclusive and pluralist. It proclaims the virtues of weakness, hospitality, forgiveness, openness and tolerance. Come on board; everyone is accepted. Sabi nga ng marami ngayon: “Relihiyon? Pare-pareho lahat yan!” One expression of this is the Christian acceptance of New Age spirituality – then one hears the words “the force”, nirvana, universal love, holistic healing, synergistic thinking, cosmic energy, global harmony, awakening of consciousness. Not that these practices and beliefs are evil but they flatten and homogenize our divergent experiences and historical narratives of God. No different from the previous option, what started as respect for difference ends up as one universal non-foundationalist unitarian religion for all.

The third option is the movement for a “critical theology”. As we have seen earlier, postmodernity is ambivalent. There is some good thing happening in postmodernity but not

everything is acceptable. If we need to be Christians today, we first need to listen deeply and learn how to separate the “grain from the chaff” (Mt. 3:12). Education therefore is to teach people the “art of winnowing” and that is the most difficult thing to learn. Ang tawag nito sa Tagalog ay pagtatahip – kung paano ihihiwalay sa tahip sa bigas. Sa Binisaya “alig-ig” - kung unsaon pagbulag sa tahop, sa tiktik ug sa binlod. I suggest “winnowing” is a good metaphor for discernment, for critical thinking, even for education in general. It would have been easier to tell students just to follow. But to be critical? That is the most difficult thing to do. We will attempt at winnowing in the next points.

4.2 Postmodernity and Dominant Educational Theories

One Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, once wrote: “*Caminante, no hay camino. Se hace camino al andar*” (Traveller, there is no road. You make your path as you walk). I once asked a group of young people going for a vacation one summer: “Where are you going and for how long?” Their reply was: “Well, we do not know yet? All we know is our first stop. We will see when we get there.” This is how our young people think – unless you have already trained to be OCs! My next question is: how does the postmodern talk of fluid identities, playful interactivity and pastiche points to a crucial mindset among the youth today affect the way we do education in the Philippines today? Gone are the days when education is seen as handing over of certain truths with secure foundations backed up by solid traditions. Like the grand stories, the foundations are put into question. In our times, teachers are not the only source of knowledge. Facebook, Google and Yahoo competes with her – and most often puts her position into question. Those among us who were used to speaking “ex cathedra” feel lost. We are not used to making the paths as we walk. We have been trained to know where we are going and the steps to get there. How does this impact on our educational philosophies?

At the outset, I acknowledge that I am not an authority on curriculum development. So what follows here is my personal reflection as a teacher on dominant educational frameworks in our midst. I can sense that the Philippine educational scene is happily moving from the content-centered to student-centered educational models. We now talk about “educational and learning outcomes” not so much about “inputs” and syllabus coverage. You can also see that a lot of people are crazy about the OBE (Outcome-Based Education) or the UbD (Understanding by Design) as these are sanctioned by CHED, DepEd and the major accrediting bodies. In a sense, this is a positive development. For a classroom teacher like me, it tells me that I do not have the monopoly of knowledge that needs to be handed down. It is the student and his needs for the future that is central to the educational process. And as I teach I should be clear about the specific and measurable learning outcomes so that I can evaluate him not against his classmates but based on the projected outcomes I have laid down for them in my course. My learning strategies

have become varied and flexible with only one intention – that my student achieve the standards set so that he or she will be competitive in the future.

Since everybody is crazy about it, let me act as a devil's advocate. "Who formulates the outcomes? Who are setting the standards? Should all the standards be measurable?" For me, these questions are crucial because I am afraid that we are back to a very modern model of educational programming, planning, centralization and system-building. For instance, how can the human virtues of imagination, critical sense, aesthetic sensibility, discernment, creativity, ethical sense be measured? In fact, teaching them could hardly be programmed. It can only be born out of dialogical learning between the teachers and the student in a specific learning context. Is this programming not the result of what Jürgen Habermas calls the positivist invasion of "instrumental rationality" in education characteristic of high modernity? From where do the standards come from? Our purpose is laudable: that the students land in a job after their graduation. Everyone should be competitive for that. Fine! So, we ask the corresponding industries to tell us what kind of people they need – of course, tailored to their consumerist projects. So, is education producing people for the multinational corporations? No wonder, we are teaching English for 'global competitiveness'. Think about call centers! Gone are the days when "English and literature" are core courses for social criticism. I am not only talking about English but also engineering, nursing and what have you. In this context, education thus becomes an obedient servant of corporations and multinational companies who dictates to us what kind of young Filipinos we need to produce for them. Here, we remember Baudrillard: we enjoy playing with the hyperreal images and without our knowing it, we are already led to the altar of the global market ready to be sacrificed. We are duped to thinking that we are spousing postmodern flexible alternatives in the educational curriculum but without our knowledge, a new metanarrative has entered through the back door, that of global capitalism.

Why are these questions crucial for me? It is because I have in mind the millions of children who could no longer compete from the start. By their social location, they are already disqualified from the race of global competition from the start. I am thinking of the many schools in our country who in order to teach computer have to make do with cardboard models for keyboards. I am thinking of the many teachers whose salaries could not even sustain their basic needs. I am thinking of small schools in some whose meager budgets are only matched by a file of promissory notes. If Foucault believes that power engenders knowledge, I am afraid that the knowledge we want to impart to our students in these times of globalization does not take into account the voices of these people. Why? Because they are not useful to the global capitalist agenda. As one author says: "They are the wastes of capital".

I am sorry that these are all questions and I could not provide some answers. But maybe it is a good thing to ask. It is also good that there is a devil somewhere, I mean, a devil's advocate!

4.3 Postmodernity and Religious Education

While I was addressing the administrator in you in the previous point, now I would like to address the teacher in each of us, especially in the area of religious education. Let me do so on two points: on narrative and ethics, if you want, on story and action.

First, we have seen that our youth are in love with stories, in postmodern language, narratives. But the more I preach, the more I discover that it is not only our youth but adults, too. Maybe abstract thinking is only a plague of the Western mind. Filipinos do not understand abstract concepts; they love personal testimonies, stories of witnesses, fables. However, unlike the long and winding stories of our grandfathers – *mula pa sa panahon ng Hapon* – young people today only tell in fragments, little stories. I am sometimes amused when a young friend on Facebook will write on her wall just these two sentences: “Nalunglungkot ako. Bakit mo ginawa ‘yon?” without even mentioning who. And the trending continues; her friends telling their own fragmentary stories of betrayal or words of consolation.

What relevance does this have for us? For religious teachers among us here, we already have model – the parables of Jesus. Short stories of life, not long discourses. So, Jesus is a postmodern guy after all. His parables are mini-narratives that open up the closed lives of others to newer and better horizons. Unlike modern grand stories that dominate and kill others, parables are open narratives – one that transform both the audience and the storyteller. After hearing a parable, no one leaves unaffected, including Jesus. Remember the Syro-phenician woman who answered Jesus about dogs and scraps from the masters’ table? That woman changed Jesus. In a way, she “converted” Jesus. What do Christian teachers learn from here: that our narratives should be open so much so that as we tell our Christian story, it is also ready to be interrupted by the stories of the “other” who is different from us. We cannot remain unaffected when we try to consider the “other” as real persons whom we care about.

In order to bring home my point, let me just share a true story. The Daughters of Charity in Indonesia decided to serve the poor in Aceh after the Tsunami in 2004. They decided to build a hospital there to be of help to the victims. As you know Aceh is almost 100% Muslim. When they asked the local government for permission, they found out that if they want to build a hospital, they also need to build a mosque. That was a great dilemma for the Catholic sisters. Spending their money for the health of poor Muslims is not a problem. But a mosque? But since they felt that the situation really called them to be there, they agreed to build a mosque in the center of the hospital facility (while for their chapel, they assigned a little room along one of the hospital corridors). Today, the mosque has become the center of worship where both for their staff and patients can rest and pray. A sign of a Christian narrative totally open to the “other” – so much so that it has changed us!

The second and last point is ethics. What do we need to do? As we have seen, postmodernity is characterized by mobility, fluid identities, liquidity. Thus, young people are open to new ideas, cultures, experiences. But since they are so mobile, you can hardly pin them down. No commitments, no social agenda, no talks of justice and equality. You hardly hear that from students today. Everyone is busy clicking the playful images of hypermodernity. It is here that the Christian tradition can exercise its prophetic function. We need to do something beyond passing photos of misery and calamities online. For sometimes, even online advocacies for the farmers, for ecology or for whatever, remain just as they are – digital bites! Sometimes, we are lured to thinking we are helping change the world only to realize that the virtual is not the real. Last night, I was reading the results of the first CEAP Convention in May of 1941. Archbishop Michael O’Doherty, then the archbishop of Manila, called on all schools to promote Catholic Action – the only paradigm for social advocacy during that time. In whatever form it may take today, this challenge of the founder of CEAP remains the same: the criterion for admission into God’s Kingdom is not words but action: that the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the imprisoned are freed.

Let me end my reflection with a story. Six years ago, I had a young student from Myanmar. Her name is Monica. Her English was really bad. Most often she is just quiet; sometimes I see her crying. I was really worried about her. Her one-year non-credit course was over and she needed to go back home. I did not hear anything from her since then. I really thought that course was a failure. Until cyclone Nagris struck Myanmar in 2008. Thousands were killed and millions lost their homes. She and her group of Catholic youth went out to those difficult places and helped all they can. Months later, Monica asked a nun-friend who was coming to the Philippines to tell me something. She said that she remembered something I said in the classroom years ago: “In front of someone in need, wherever you may be, please do something. Whatever it is, just do something.” And Monica said: “Sister, when you see Fr. Danny, please tell him that here in Myanmar today, I am doing something.” When I heard that I felt deeply happy. My fellow teachers, you very well know that the joy of a teacher is not so much in being remembered by our students but in knowing that in their own way they start to live the vision we once imparted – in ways we do not plan, in instances we could not even imagine.

Thanks for your patient listening. Daghan salamat!

Daniel Franklin Pilario, C.M.
St. Vincent School of Theology
Adamson University
<danielfranklinpilario@yahoo.com>