The Millennials

1. The Demographic Cohorts after the II WW.

The Youth of today are generally called the "Millennials." Speaking about the "Millennials" inevitably brings us to the topic of "demographic cohorts". In demography and statistics, a "cohort" is a group of subjects who have shared a particular event together during a particular time span -- e.g., those who studied at the Gregorian University between 1960 and 1970; or those who were superiors general between 1990 and 2000.[1]

As we know, demographers and statisticians have grouped generations after the II WW, at least in the US and other Western countries, into cohorts, namely, the "Baby Boomers" (1946-1965), the "Generation-X" (1966-1985), and the "Millennials" or the "Generation-Y" (1986-2005).

1.1. Baby-Boomers.[2] Those born after the II WW (that is, between 1946 and 1965). This is the generation that is now in their 60's and 70's.

1.2. Generation-X.[3] This is the generation born after the post-war baby boom, between 1966-1985. They would be the ones now in their 40's and 50's.

1.3. Millennials.[4] This is the generation born between 1986-2005. They would be the ones now in their 20's and 30's – in other words, precisely the present formandi in our formation houses at the pre-novitiate, novitiate and post-novitiate levels. This generation is also called the "Generation-Y", that is, the generation that comes after "Generation-X". But it is better known as the "Millennials", in other words, those who were growing up as teen-agers and young adults at the turn of the millennium.

Other names for this generation are: the "Generation We", "Global Generation", "Generation Next", and the "Net Generation". Still another name is "Echo Boomers". Due to the increase in birth rates in the 1980's and 1990's, this generation is seen as an echo of the post-war "Baby Boomer" generation.

There are many ways of describing the characteristic traits of this generation. But one fundamental characteristic is that this is the generation that grew up in the context of "globalization".[5] As we know, globalization refers to the world being experienced as a global village. This is the result of the "revolution" brought about the epoch-making developments in the information, communication and transportation technology. Distances are cut down drastically. Peoples and places are linked to each other more easily. Living in

the world now seems like living in a village. Globalization may thus be defined as the contraction of time and space, resulting in the growing interdependence of peoples of diverse nations and cultures.[6]

Thus, this is the generation that grew up with the computer, internet, mobile phones, social media, virtual reality. This is the world they inhabit, the world that shapes their consciousness, their values and their attitudes. Thus, we can rephrase Descartes' *"Cogito, ergo sum"* into *"Colligo, ergo sum"*. I am connected, therefore I am. Individuals of this generation have to be connected with the internet, with the virtual world, with the social media. If they are not connected, they don't exist. They exist only if they are connected. *"Colligo, ergo sum"*.

2. The Post-modern Generation.

Another designation of the Millennial generation we are considering is the "post-modern generation", even if the term "post-modernity" or "post-modernism" has a wider meaning or application. Post-modernism, as the term implies, is a late-20th century movement in the arts, architecture, literature, music and philosophy which is a reaction to and a departure from "Modernism".

2.1. Modernism.[7] Modernism is a philosophical movement born out of the historical phenomenon of the Englightenment in 18th century Europe, with its optimism that it was breaking through barriers towards untold social progress. These barriers were external authorities imposed on the human mind, like tradition in general and the Church in particular. Thus, reason had to be emancipated from these barriers and given free rein to search for the truth without restrictions. Modernism was fueled by the Industrial Revolution which led to the wide-scale and far-reaching transformations in Western society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Among the factors, then, that shaped modernism were the development of modern industrial societies and the rapid growth of cities.

As a mode of thinking, modernism is characterized by "self-consciousness" or "self-reference". This entails a reliance on reason and rationality and an affirmation of the power of human beings to create, improve and reshape their environment with the aid of practical experimentation, scientific knowledge and technology.[8] But Modernism's reliance on reason and on the power of human beings to bring about progress collapsed with the two world wars. This horrible experience led to the emergence of post-modernism in the second half of the 20th century.

2.2. Post-Modernism. [9] By the very term itself ("post-modernism"), post-modernism is an affirmation that the Englightenment, and the modern world that was born out of it, were not working. Aspects of the "enlightened" or "modern" world which post-modernism rejects include the following:

(a) *An excessive reliance on the power of reason.* Post-modernists warn that reason is not the clear, pure, fail-proof light that will lead us to the truth once it is freed from the constraints of external authority. Indeed, reason can be contaminated and exploited, and can mean different things in different cultures.

(b) *The primacy and reliability of empirical data.* Modernism assumes that if we can get the facts and "nothing but the facts", then reason can analyze them and lead us to clarity that all can see. Post-modernists retort that there is no such thing as "nothing but the facts". Facts always come in different cultural guises.

(c) *The exclusion of mythical-mystical views of the world.* Another assumption of modernism is that science, with its empirical method, is the final arbiter on how things really are. Post-modernists question this normative authority of science. They suggest that there are other ways of knowing the world which cannot be measured or put into formulas, like myths and mystical experience.

(d) *The quest for universal truths.* The often implicit goal or quest of modernism is to move beyond narrow-minded local views to get at the big picture of what we really are. The search is for truths and understandings that apply to everyone and be recognized by everyone so that everyone will finally be able to agree and live with everyone else. Post-modernism warns that this is not only impossible but also dangerous. People, and their cultures, are more different than they are alike.

This last point could be considered the main pillar of post-modernism, namely, that universal truths are dangerous and differences are life-giving. Thus, post-modernism is characterized by the dominance of diversity. We cannot get away from diversity. Different things may be interrelated, connected, integrated, but never to the point where diversity is lost. Diversity always has the last word, or diversity always has an additional word. Diversity dominates unity, and we should be happy about this. For otherwise, life and its evolution would get dull and wither away. Remove diversity and you remove vitality.

Thus, post-modernism sees the world in a state of perpetual incompleteness and permanent unresolve. Post-modernism promotes the notion of pluralism; that there are many ways of knowing, and that there are many truths to a fact. From a post-modern view knowledge is articulated from perspectives, with all its uncertainties, complexity and paradox. Thus knowledge is relational and all realities are woven on local linguistic "looms".

3. An E-P-I-C Culture.[10]

A simpler and more popular way of describing the post-modernist culture is to call it an EPIC culture, namely, E=Experiential, P=Participatory, I=Image-based,

and C=Connected. In other words, Experiential rather than rational, Participatory rather than representative, Image-driven rather than Word-based, Connected to Others rather than Individual.

Thus,
3.1. *Experiential* (From Rational to Experiential).

The shopping Mall is not just a shopping center, but an experience. People go to the mall not just to buy things or watch a movie, but to have an experience – family bonding, meeting old friends, making new friends, watching people, window-shopping, relaxing. That's why malls do not just have stores and shops but entertainment facilities. And stores do not just offer products but an experience.[11]

3.2. *Participatory* (From Representative to Participatory).

The post-modern culture is a culture of choice. Thus, it is also participatory. But not just simple participation. Participation needs to be interactive. You do not just choose from a menu, you change the menu itself. You do not just transmit tradition or culture, you transform and customize it. It is no longer enough to possess things or to enjoy events. One has to be involved in bringing about those things or events.[12]

3.3. *Image-driven* (From Word-based to Image-driven).

The Modern culture was word-based. The post-modern culture, on the other hand, is image-driven. Propositions are lost on post-modern ears, but metaphor they will hear, images they will see and understand. Image dictionaries are replacing word dictionaries, and image banks are becoming as valuable as money banks. Images are humanity's universal language. All 6,500 languages of the world share one common language: the metaphor. Indeed, cultures are intricate, interwoven webs of metaphors, symbols and stories. Metaphors are more than just decorations. They are the most fundamental tools of thought. Human beings think in images, not in words.[13]

3.4. *Connected* (From Individual to Individual-in-Community).

Two favorite words in the Web are "connected" and "community", which have become one in the new word "connexity" – I.e., making connections and building communities. "Connexity" demonstrates that the Web is less an information source than a social medium. It is the new town square for the global village. It is the new "public space" and the new marketplace. The paradox is that the individualism that is sometimes fostered by the internet has led to a hunger for connectedness, for communities not of blood or nation, but communities of choice. The post-modern sense of community is less nation-driven than culture-driven. The rise of private communities is an indication this

-- condominium cooperatives, home-owner associations, the environmental community, gay community, etc. A true website is a gathering place, a watering hole where people go to in order to meet other people.[14]

Conclusion

To conclude, it is said that there are usually five coping mechanisms for relating to any transition[15] – "holding out", "keeping out", "moving out", "closing out", and "reaching out". Hold out = reject the new by holding on to the old. Keep out = hunker in the bunker, or deny the new and hide in the old. Move out = relocate and run away from the new. Close out = toss in the towel and admit defeat. Reach out = engage the new and respond to it creatively.

I believe the last mechanism should be our way of responding the post-modern generation, that is, "reach out" by affirming and enhancing what is good and positive, and purifying and transforming what is negative and destructive. Emphasizing the mystic and prophetic dimensions of the religious life is a way to doing this. Mysticism affirms and enhances what seems to be good and positive in post-modenity, particularly the "E" (or, experiential) and "I" (or image-driven) characteristics of the EPIC culture, while Prophetism purifies and transforms what seems to be negative and destructive in post-modernity, particularly, the consumerist lifestyle and the "selfie" and narcissistic tendency of the EPIC culture.

E N D N O T E S

[1] Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cohort_(statistics).

[2] Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baby_boomers. The post-war years witnessed a boom in births, with the birth rate beginning to drop around the 1960's. Thus, the term "baby boomers."

[3] Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation_X. The term "Generation-X" was coined by the Hungarian photographer Robert Capa. He used it as a title for a photo-essay about young men and women growing up immediately after the II WW. Describing his intention, Capa said "We named this unknown generation, The Generation X, … " The term was popularized by Douglas Coupland in his 1991 novel, entitled *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, concerning the lifestyle of young adults in the late 1980's. This eventually became the meaning of the term, i.e., the generation after the baby-boomers.

[4] Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennials. Various authors differ slightly in the dates they assign to the beginning and the end of this generation. Some say "the early 80's to the early 2000's". Others refer to this generation as those who were between the ages 10 and 20 by

September 11, 2001 (or the 9/11 tragedy). So they call this generation the "9/11 Generation". My designation of this generation as those born between 1986-2005 comes from Harvard Center for Housing Studies of the Harvard University, which assigns equal 20-year periods for each of the generations after the II WW. Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation_X.

[5] Cf. USG (Union of Superiors General), *Inside Globalization: Toward a Multi-centered and Intercultural Communion,* (Roma: Editrice "Il Calamo", 2000), pp. 10-21; John Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, (Manila: Logos Publications, 2000), pp. 107-108; SVD XV General Chapter, "Chapter Statement", *In Dialogue with the Word,* No. 1, Sept 2000, pp. 16-20; John Allen, *The Future Church* (NY: Doubleday, 2009), pp. 256-297.

[6] Cf. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990). Or, "The growing planetary interconnectedness driven by technology, communications, travel, and economic integration". John Allen, *The Future Church*, p. 257.

[7] Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernism. Also Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), pp. 173-177; Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2001), pp. 55-91, 124-157.

[8] Modernism was not confined to philosophy. It also found expression in other areas of life – the arts (Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso), literature (Fyodor Dostoyevsky and T.S. Eliot) music (Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner) drama (Georg Kaiser and Arnolt Bronnen), architecture (the construction of skyscrapers).

[9] Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism. Also Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), pp. 173-177; Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2001), pp. 55-91, 124-157; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

[10] Cf. Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2000).

[11] It is said that, toward the end of his life, St. Thomas Aquinas had a direct experience of God's love. From that moment on, he stopped writing and called everything he had written "all straw". It is one thing to talk about God, and quite another thing to experience God.

[12] In a representative culture, people want and need to be controlled and have decisions made for them. The task of leadership is to administer guidance and regulations. On the other hand, in a participatory culture, people want to make their own decisions and have multiple choices. Leadership is emboldening and empowering others to lead. The cultural shift is from passivity to

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interactivity. TV watching has dropped among the youth of today, because it is not nearly interactive enough. Instead the time spent on the computer has risen dramatically. As Steve Jobs of Apple once remarked: "You go to your TV when you want to turn off your brain. You go to your computer when you want to turn on your brain." With the TV, you are merely an observer. With the computer, you can be a programmer.

[13] That's why the power of the liturgy is so immense. Joseph Stalin was an ex-seminarian. From the Orthodox Church he learned the power of icons. That's why he littered the Soviet landscape with pictures of himself. The first Christian icon was a textless, wordless symbol – the fish, for *ichthus* (iota, chi, theta, upsilon, sigma).

[14] If one asks the question, what accounts for the most time spent on the internet, the response is the chat room – 26% of all time spent on the internet. Where else can people tell the stories most central to who they are and find people eager to hear them than the internet? This is the new thing about the internet – even when I am most alone, "I" can be connected to a global mix of "us". The more connected we become electronically, the more disconnected we can become personally. Post-modernism is characterized by a certain dyslexia: me/we, or the experience of individual-in-community. Post-moderns want to enjoy a self-identity within a connectional framework of neighborliness, civic virtue, and spiritual values.

[15] Cf. Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), pp. XIV-XV.