Modernist Expert to Postmodernist Innovative Cultural Hermeneutist:
A Journey in Adult Education

A thesis

submitted to Massey University (Wellington)

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for

the degree

of

Master of Education

(Adult Education)

Ruwan Bandara Palapathwala

2004

Dedicated to the loving memory of my maternal grandmother,
Mrs. Gertrude Kulasena,
*who deposited the Christian Faith in me and cherished me and
tirelessly laboured for my primary school education*

"I call to remembrance the faith that first dwelt in thy grandmother"
(2 Timothy 1:5)

... Teaching is similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping.

Lord Buddha (*Alagaddupama Sutta 22: 13*)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contents

Abstract

The repercussions of the turbulent years of the greater part of the twentieth century have been responsible for the demise of both the Enlightenment project and the modern period which was its bearer. This modern period was characterised by legitimising grand metanarratives (*récits*) that were built on the foundations of rationality, optimism and progress in which reality was represented, understood and lived. Human emancipation was expected to be the ultimate goal.

An impressive modernist representative of these metanarratives in the field of my own academic expertise, theology, is the German philosophical theologian, Paul Tillich (1886-1965). His "theology of culture" was a significant theological adult educational project in which he had attempted to represent and convey reality (and meaning) to a generation of adults in the postwar era of the 20th century.

Postmodernism has come to be characteristic of our experience of the world and our present worldview. It questions the legitimacy of the modernist project and along with it the modernist approach to education.

In the context of discussing self-directed learning and its application in my own role as an educator, in this thesis I use Paul Tillich's "theology of culture" as an example of a collapsed modern metanarrative to examine how the educator as an "innovative cultural hermeneutist" would better reposition his/her   role   as   an   adult   educator   in   the   present.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: the Journey's Beginning

The Aim, Background and Contexts of the Thesis

The primary aim of this thesis is to investigate the question: "how can I be an effective adult educator in the present through my role as an innovative cultural hermeneutist?" In the thesis I have attempted to answer this question by discussing and applying the notion of *self-directed learning* to contemporary adult educational theory. The most effective method of demonstrating the ways in which the question of the thesis is addressed in this study is to anchor it in the contexts of my role as an adult educator, in which it has its genesis, and to suggest how I intend addressing it in the thesis, and to suggest how I intend to addressing it in this thesis.

This thesis is the final part of the Master of Education (Adult Education) degree programme which I commenced at the conclusion of what I had thought was the end of my formal education, namely the completion of a doctorate in Religious Studies.[1] In many respects, my doctoral project served as an important undertaking that consolidated my intellectual heritage which has been informed to a considerable extent by the study of religion, philosophy and theology. However, when I started my formal academic career at the turn of the new millennium I came to pose a series of questions in relation to my being an adult educator in theology and religion in the tertiary sector in the climate of the 21st century. These questions were raised on three fronts: i) my cultural heritage – which was coloured by a colonial history of

---

[1] *Paul Tillich and the new encounter of religions*, PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1999.

five hundred years and the formative influences it had on my worldview and practice as an adult educator, ii) the two immediate adult educational environments in which I lead my professional life as an educator in Christian theology and Asian religions, and iii) the Western cultural climate – which is characterised by postmodernism. Each needs explaining.

Context One

Cultural Heritage and Indoctrinated Baggage

My cultural heritage is that of the culture of Sri Lanka which is complex and multilayered. The chief reason for that complexity is its history (2500 years of recorded history), its multi-ethnic population and multireligious character. As a result, every custom, belief, taboo, pattern of thinking, linguistic expression, behavioural pattern, style of communication and aesthetic creation has been distilled through these ethnic groups and religious traditions over the centuries.

The Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka was one of the most powerful cultures which influenced my formative years and the worldview which grew out of those years. Since Theravada Buddhism has flourished since 300 BCE in Sri Lanka it has had a significant influence on my life. My study of Buddhism included its sublime philosophy, its traditions and various schools of thought, its influence in South and South East Asia, and its culture.

Hindu and Muslim cultures also had an impact on me. They became part of me –although not to the same degree as Buddhism and Christianity – through my schooling. Their greatest influence was exercised by my friends and respected teachers. Hindu tradition and its culture became a subsidiary influence on my thinking when I studied its philosophy and history as a major for my first degree. These multilayered traditions were the main sources of

wisdom that were embedded into my way of thinking throughout my formative years.

The culture of Christianity was among the many religious cultures which shaped my outlook and had a significant impact on my life. While it influenced my childhood as a "faith tradition" to which one may adhere, it influenced me mostly by opening up the world of the West to my thinking. This included the philosophy of the West, the thinking of the Greek philosophers and the early Church Fathers, the history of Western ideas, biblical criticism, the thought of the thinkers of the Enlightenment and the makers of Christian theology in the modern era, and lately, the postmodern movement in the West. In the main, it is the influence of the Christian culture on me that has become a focus in this thesis as I attempt to reconcile a version of its educational philosophy which has come to dominate in my role as an adult educator. How it came to be so needs explaining.

My initial theological training in Sri Lanka took place in the late 1980s and was followed by a period of specialist study of Christian systematic theology and Asian religions. Except for the study of Asian religions, my "theological" education was informed by the predominantly colonial Christian education system that had been established in the country since the arrival of the Portuguese colonisers in 1505. Throughout, its style has been pedagogical and its content modern both during the period of British rule (1796-1948) and after it.

The Christian missionaries who arrived on the shores of Sri Lanka throughout the colonial period, and especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both represented and propagated an understanding of the Christian message which was very much coloured by the European Enlightenment project. In their minds, colonising the "world" went almost hand-in-hand with Jesus' Great Commissioning in St. Mark 16:15 where he is quoted as having said: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." Like some of the propagators of the Enlightenment, these missionaries too

believed that their values should be universally applied – they tended arrogantly to see Europe as the most enlightened and advanced part of the world. They perceived Europe to be more civilised than the rest of the globe which, in effect, led to the dangerous feeling that other countries and races must be colonised, exploited or bettered. These propositions were very much embedded in the theological education that I received.

Interestingly, this form of education has a familiar ring when considering the instructional processes that were developed as a result of some dominant philosophies of education in the West such as essentialism, for example. The aim of such philosophy has been the transmission of "cultural essentials" in shaping the knowledge and values of the individual. In the process of learning the emphasis has been on content mastery with instructors serving primarily as transmitters of knowledge. In this respect, scholars like John Dewey[2] of the last century have had a considerable impact on educational philosophy. He believed that education was a continuous process of reconstructing experiences and that the learners were capable of greater and more active roles in the learning process. He also felt that the instructor's or the educator's role is to guide the process of learning and that the school is a social institution which should reflect and influence culture.

Liberalism is another philosophical school that played a significant part in Western education.[3] From their origins in classical Greek philosophy, liberal education traditions became foundations for early Christian approaches to education which also had been my predominant approach to education. This emphasis on developing each individual's intellectual powers with liberal exposure to classical thinkers is partly what liberal education was about.

---

[2] See Dewey, *Experience and education* (New York: Macmillan, 1938) and Paterson, *Philosophy of education*. (New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams, & Company, 1956).

[3] J.L. Elias & S. Merriam, *Philosophical foundations of adult education* (Huntington, New York: Robert K. Krieger Publishing Company, 1980).

Interestingly, it was against this background that the theology of the German theologian, Paul Tillich, became both attractive and foundational to my theological education and the way in which I came to interpret culture and structure my teaching. Tillich's theology belongs to the liberal school and, as I will explain later, is essentialist in character and modern in content. His ontological universalism, christocentrism, eurocentrism and modernist outlook represent these Western philosophical trends and were a great attraction to me.

The impact of Tillich's theology of culture was so significant that it became the focus of many of my early academic essays and then of my Master of Theology degree which was undertaken as a research degree for the Melbourne College of Divinity, the University of Melbourne. In that study I argued that Paul Tillich's theological method of correlation was, in fact, a philosophical and modern restatement of the Pauline-Lutheran doctrine of justification.

My doctoral thesis was a study of the development of Tillich's theological thought during the last decade of his life (1955-1965). The research was undertaken for the Victoria University of Wellington at a crucial stage of my intellectual development during which I paid attention to my Buddhist heritage and the study of Asian religions. In many respects, it was also a stage during which I wanted to think through the predominantly Western theological education I had received in the light of Asian religions and the Asian styles of theological discourse. This led me to spend a three-month research period at the Paul Tillich archive at Harvard University where I was able to examine his unpublished writings first-hand and form my own impressions of Tillich and his contribution to theology and religious studies. In my doctoral thesis I suggested that during the last ten years of his life Tillich paid considerable attention to the challenge presented by Asian religious thought – and particularly Buddhism – to the modern Western form of systematic theology. In the thesis I demonstrated that, with a view to entering into a meaningful dialogue with the world's religions other than Christianity, Tillich's later thought

was an attempt to go beyond Western systematic theology's "theological provincialism".

Along with the significant development of my intellectual engagement with contemporary culture that started with my doctoral project, I came to develop a further interest in its relationship to adult education. It is that interest which led me to undertake the Master of Education (Adult Education) programme in which I began to engage with the issue of postmodern cultural hermeneutics and their relevance to adult education. It was this issue that led me to begin a new phase in my thinking and teaching which is andragogical in style and postmodern in content. This present thesis outlines the milestones of that journey.

Although I have mentioned hermeneutics I must state that this study is by no means an exposition of hermeneutics - which is beyond the scope of this brief study. As will become evident in the following pages, I am using the idea of hermeneutics to argue the relevance of interpreting the contemporary culture in the language of its present manifestation and experience which invite us to engage in its understanding.

Context Two

Adult Educator and Teacher of Contemporary Culture

At present I hold two lectureships: one at Trinity College Theological School, the University of Melbourne, and the other at the United Faculty of Theology, the Melbourne College of Divinity. My first lectureship concerns teaching students and preparing them for both ordained and licensed lay ministries in the Anglican Church of the Province of Victoria. In total contrast to the custom of the church of the middle of the last century of recruiting young and unmarried men to be trained for the ordained ministry, today we have both men and women aged from the mid-thirties to the late fifties coming to Trinity

College to prepare for ordination. In many instances these students are married and come to study theology after spending many years in other, "secular", professions which are as diverse as the students themselves. Many of the students also hold degrees, including masters and doctoral degrees, in their respective professional fields. Given the wealth of experience and knowledge these candidates for ordination already possess at the point of becoming students again, the members of Theological School staff are constantly challenged to provide a learning experience for them that both encompasses their existing knowledge and deepens their knowledge with "new information" that contains the wisdom of the church's tradition and its intellectual heritage.

In some instances the students already hold a primary degree in theology. When preparing the course work for these students, our task is to provide advanced theological information through "tailor-made courses" of study where the students are given the opportunity to integrate their total learning experience into the new vocation for which they are preparing themselves.

Being the staff member of the faculty concerned with the contemporary cultural aspect of the learning experience of the students, I play a significant role in all the said areas of formation and their concerns in curriculum design and teaching.

Besides teaching, my responsibilities include assigning these adult students to field placements where they are exposed to a multitude of practical experiences. Again, in total contrast to the traditional practice, today not every student is appointed to a parish or a church congregation for his/her practicum – students are also placed in "secular" agencies to actively engage in understanding the disposition of the culture in which they are called to "minister" as the agents of the church. My task is then to evaluate their journals, reports and assignments from these placements, challenge the students and provide them with further academic learning and integrating opportunities in the classroom. It is in these tasks that Malcolm Knowles' assumptions concerning andragogy – which I have outlined in Chapter Two –

have become important to me as I fulfil my educational and formational responsibilities.

Then, whether it is in curriculum design or planning "field work", in every instance, I view the challenge with these adult students as not so much to impart knowledge and information as to enable them to know why they need to learn something and empower them to learn experientially, and to approach learning as problem-solving. I facilitate their learning by demonstrating that the subject or topic in question is of immediate value. In my context of teaching, all of these facets are concerned with the contemporary culture and its issues. It is in this intense engagement with educating adults that I have come to ask fundamental questions concerning the place of hermeneutics in interpreting and understanding contemporary culture, which can then be utilised for effective adult education. Some of the most important questions that I ask are:

"what are the key themes that network in the postmodern experience of our world today?"

"to what extent could these themes be identified so that they allow interpretation of certain attitudes and views about life at present?"

"what are the ways in which these themes govern and inform the validity or the invalidity of knowledge that is being received from the past?"

"what constitutes adult education?" – a "body of knowledge" or a process by which the adult gains the capacity to understand and interpret his/her experience of the world in order that he/she may live more meaningfully?"

"do adults need information as education, or rather the tools and skills to interpret information?"

It is questions such as these that I have channelled as challenges to my own development as an educator and have abridged to the question of this thesis:

"how can I be an effective adult educator through my role as an innovative cultural hermeneutist?" In effect, it is this question which is concerned with my own development that is being explored with reference to self-directed learning as a tool for innovative cultural hermeneutics. The sense in which I have used the phrases "cultural hermeneutist" and "cultural hermeneutics" is explained at the beginning of Chapter Two.

Context Three

Adult Educator and Teacher of Contemporary Religions

My second lectureship in the United Faculty of Theology involves my teaching two subjects and providing supervision for masters and doctoral degrees in related areas.   The two subjects I teach are: Contemporary Religious Traditions of South and South East Asia and Groundwork for Christian Ministry in the 21st Century. These two courses are taught for the Bachelor of Theology degree and also for a number of Masters' degrees that are constituted by the Statute of the Melbourne College of Divinity: Master of Arts, Master of Theology, Master of Divinity, Master of Theological Studies, and Master of Ministry.   The two units are also taught online via the web as integrative units for the Master of Divinity degree which is open to enrolment by graduates in nontheological disciplines.

The Religious Traditions course is taught with a strong emphasis on the style in which these religious traditions are understood, practised and expressed not only in their native lands but also in contemporary Western societies. The purpose of such an approach is to educate students to find out for themselves the answer to the question "what is it about contemporary Western societies that causes Asian religious traditions to flourish?" As one may suspect, this study outcome is engineered by me to encourage these adult students to "read" the culture and its dynamic manifestations. With such an aim, I have almost

abandoned teaching religions as "cults", "bodies of knowledge", "metaphysics" and "doctrines." I attempt to teach religions as expressions of sacred traditions that give shape to cultures that order life in social organisations and politics with the ultimate goal of providing answers to the human predicament.

Besides these teaching responsibilities at the United Faculty of Theology, I also teach, supervise and facilitate an annual Master of Ministry Collegium on Theology, Ministry and Culture for the Melbourne College of Divinity. Once again, the approach I take is similar to the one concerning teaching religions – the students are given not information, but tools for interpretation. In terms of educational style I am concerned about andragogy and not pedagogy.

In this teaching environment I am privileged to teach a host of multicultural, multi-faith local students in Melbourne as well as another significant group of postgraduate students from all the states of Australia – and indeed from the international community – online. Teaching these two somewhat contrasting units is deliberate on my part to assist students to depart from the traditional study of "systematic theology" and "comparative religions" which, in my opinion, does not correspond to the understanding and processing of knowledge in the postmodern educational context.

The foregoing discussion highlights a wider educational issue concerning the differences among educators of adults regarding beliefs related to the adult as learner. Some believe that the role of education is to develop adults into mature individuals who will contribute to society in positive ways. Other educators hold the view that the aim is to liberate or free the individual mind. Still others believe that the education of adults implies keeping abreast of some institutional, occupational, or technological change. There also are many educators who fall somewhere in between these various beliefs or who have been affected by behavioural, humanistic, or radical beliefs. In addition,

people like Cropley,[4] Gross[5], Hiemstra,[6] and McClusky[7] have prompted a belief that learning must be lifelong in nature.

Consequently, many instructors of adults have become eclectic in their philosophical bases by choosing those aspects of various doctrines, philosophies, and approaches that fit a situation or individual educator's needs. If it has not become obvious already, stating this helps me to label my own beliefs regarding instruction and learning as being very eclectic in nature in that I draw on various philosophies to build my own individual approach. As is evident, I am greatly influenced by humanistic beliefs, such as helping learners to play a larger role in the educating process and viewing myself as an educator who facilitates.

In these many roles that define my role as an educator that I am constantly challenged to both learn from and be a resourceful teacher for my adult students. The subject matter and the context of my teaching are such that they make adult education in contemporary culture a substantial concern – which automatically raises the question: "what degree of innovation is needed in the understanding of the contemporary cultural situation to be an effective adult educator in the present?" More pertinently, the question is: "what intellectual facilities and tools need to be available to the individual educator and learner to enable them to decipher the ambience, the conditions and the frameworks within which knowledge/education is imparted in the present?" In addition to the challenge posed by the earlier context of my work, these

---

[4] A.J. Cropley,*Towards a system of lifelong education* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980).

[5] K.P. Cross, *Adults as learners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981).

[6] R. Hiemstra, *Lifelong learning* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Professional Educators Publications, 1986).

[7] H.Y. McClusky, "The coming of age of lifelong learning," *Journal of research and development in education*, 7/4 (1974), pp. 97-107.

questions underline the concerns of my own development that correspond to self-directed learning.

Context Four

The Present Cultural Situation – the "post" of "isms"

The cultural milieu that we witness today has emerged from antifoundationalist "movements" such as *post*modernism, *post*structuralism and *post*colonialism. It is an important stage in the intellectual history of the West during which it has come to appraise its turbulent experiences – the devastation both in the 20th century as a whole and in the present – to accommodate itself to a future that is being both occasioned and promulgated by advances in technology and globalisation. To that extent, the prefix "post" in the terms that describe the mood of the present does not indicate a complete break from the past, but rather hints that we are in a process of ongoing transformation and change.

The present stage in the cultural history of the West can be explained in two ways. On the one hand, it has been occasioned as a sociopolitical and economic event, brought about mainly by the spread of mass industry. In this respect, globalisation can be seen as the force behind these economic and political processes[8]. Globalisation has created a crisis by integrating all

---

[8] See for example, Hugo Radice, "Taking Globalism Seriously," in *Global capitalism versus democracy: The social register 1999,* Leo Panich & Colin Leys (Eds.) (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999) & Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and its discontents: Essays on the new mobility of people and money* (New York: New Press, 1998) propagate an economic theory of globalisation scholars such as Kenichi Ohmae propagates a political theory. See Ohmae, *The end of nation-state: The rise of regional economies (*New York: Free Press, 1995).

scientific, cultural, political and economic activities of humanity into one worldwide network.

The fundamental challenges these developments have presented to the West in particular, and to all humanity in general, have drawn academics engaged in all cultural domains (e.g. education, politics, technology, sociology, theology and so on) into the vortex of the present crisis.[9] Related to this process are technological transformations – cyber-technology, the miniaturisation and commercialisation of machines for instance – have already changed the ways in which knowledge is represented and learning is acquired, classified, made available and exploited.

Furthermore, as a clear indication of detaching from the modern frame of logocentric single meaning structure, the present Western culture is also experiencing an explosion in matters concerning sexuality, gender, ageism, ethnic minorities and other such current issues.

On the other hand, the mood of the contemporary culture has come about as a result of significant changes in what we may call "cultural matter," that is, changes in the arts which have had a profound effect on the notions of *meaning* and *reality*. The term *postmodernism* is used to describe these changes in "cultural matter" and is therefore seen as referring to cultural and artistic developments, social conditions and the mood to which these conditions give rise. Generally, while the term *postmodernism* refers to the changes in the cultural domain and the term *postmodernity* refers to the social domain, recent literature on the subject does not strictly adhere to this distinction, but uses *postmodernism* to describe both expressions. Thus, for

---

[9] In this respect, it is of interest to note that *futurism* was the first "modern" attempt to reorganise art and society around technology and the machine ethic and include poetry, literature, painting, graphics, typography, sculpture, product design, architecture, photography, cinema and the performing arts and focus on the dynamic, energetic and violent character of changing 20th century life, especially city life.

16

the purpose of consistency in this thesis I will also follow the practice of using *postmodernism* to describe the two.

Noting the extent of changes in contemporary culture, it is correct to state that while the terms *postmodernism* and *postmodernity* in the academic literature of the last three decades or so have attempted to precisely describe deep structural changes in thought and cultural expressions, they have also become descriptive terms for all sorts of shifts and transformations in contemporary Western societies and cultures at large. Thus, among their various themes is their well-expressed pessimism about the way in which the "modernist" thought of the last three hundred years has fashioned Western society, and the undisputed faith it placed in technological progress. The difficulties these shifts and transformations have caused vary from issues such as problems with realty, representation, language, personal identity, meaning, values, ethics and morals to promises of high-tech efficiency and complacency. Whether they are seen as positive or negative influences, one cannot deny that they all have a direct impact on the process of adult education.

Having mentioned, in a cursory fashion, the problems which postmodernism raises it is important to note that, at the beginning of the third millennium of the Western calendar, the world is still in its early stages with regard to assessing what the postmodern criticism of modern ideology entails in its totality. What is evident, however, is that postmodern criticism has questioned the most fundamental thought categories such as *self, history, knowledge, God* and *meaning* which were foundational to the birth of the modern West. The postmodern criticism of modernity and what it had represented and constructed in terms of metanarratives which were then embodied in the cultural narrative of the West presents us with a platform on which to articulate the uncertainties, fears, and meaninglessness that permeate our generation. It also has challenged us to rethink every category, value and truth that has been part of the basis of the teaching and learning of our former generations.

From a theological perspective, both postmodern criticism of modernity and the process of globalisation have presented a series of challenges that are targeted at the understanding of "reality." Technically, while the inquiry into the understanding of reality is generally seen as the task of the philosopher or the theologian, the questions of reality and how it is represented have become major questions for the contemporary cultural critics such as Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida and the like. The refined Western scholastic expression of reality is found in ontology (derived from the Greek terms *On,* being, and *logos,* word or science). Ontology fundamentally deals with the question of *being* and *nonbeing.* As is evident in the great treatises of Western civilisation, it is with this question by which all thinkers – the ancient philosophers such as Plato, the Stoics, the early Church Fathers, the great Medieval and Enlightenment thinkers and their inheritors who have contributed to the thinking of the past three centuries – have been captivated in one way or another. In South Asia, sages have engaged themselves with the questions of *Sat* (Sanskrit, *being* and *asat, nonbeing*) and *Atman* (Sanskrit, the Ultimate Soul).

While it is no longer the case, since Western civilisation and its intellectual heritage by and large had expressed itself in "Christendom" in the last two millennia, the most popular expression of this inquiry into reality is found in the concept of God. This concept, however, highlights to some extent the confusion about the "reality" that it conceptualises and God has become a name to a large number of people, particularly to those who live in the Western world. While there is an extremely complex history as to how the question of reality evolved in the West, suffice is to say that, following the experiences of the last century – the two World Wars on the political front and a major shift in the arts on the cultural front – this question has become an enigma in the present times. Then, from a theological point of view, one is able to see the relevance of postmodern criticism of modernity to adult theological education in the West.

Various issues that these contexts present raise a series of complex questions concerning what it means to be an adult educator/theologian in the

18

present.   My stated role as an adult educator is also seen as being interchangeable with the notion of the "intellectual" of the academy. Hence, in this thesis I will use the expression "adult educator" to mean the "theologian" who is an "intellectual" in the university.

These are the main issues that have provided the immediate background for me to undertake this project to both work through and articulate the context in which I may develop my adult educational practice in tertiary education. The issues outlined highlight the importance which I ascribe to postmodern thought and to associating myself closely with it. I have done so deliberately because in the postmodern form of thinking I have recognised an invitation to question both the modern worldviews in which my theological education was grounded and the metanarratives that had given legitimacy to it.

The association with the postmodern movement has not been an easy one; for it has occasioned an "intellectual crisis" in my being an effective educator and theologian in the present cultural context. The crisis was created by questioning all thought forms that were foundational to my education, thinking, biblical and theological hermeneutics, intellectual inquiry and teaching tertiary students. Another way of describing this "crisis" is to say that, through the postmodern criticism of the modern worldview, I came to recognise that the place of the theologian in the present historical moment has become problematic. It is so because the modernist conceptual bases that were fundamental to both the identity and legitimising of the notion of "theologian" have significantly changed.

On the one hand, the conceptual bases have changed along with the significant shifts in semantics, *logocentric* and *phonocentric* frames of reference. On the other hand, due to the media saturation of postmodern popular culture, the theologian's place – and, as a matter of fact, the place of the "intellectual" in general – has been almost completely usurped by broadcasters, TV journalists, sports personnel, celebrities and the like who now set trends, define morals, break stories, and champion worthy causes. The values, moral standards and expert knowledge and opinions that were

once represented by the church or the academy have declined. The rift between the contemporary culture on the one side and the church and the academy on the other seems even greater than that between the church and the academy that resulted in the period of the Enlightenment in Europe.

The reference to the concept of *culture* in terms of the "contemporary culture" in this thesis in many respects epitomises an issue that is at the heart of the inquiry of this thesis. That is, a recognition of how the present cultural ethos has come to problematise the task of education for the theologian in particular and the intellectual in general. Michael Peters expresses this irony well when he writes:

> The turn to culture and to the attempt to re-theorize culture as a central category in the humanities and social sciences is primarily a response to changing historical conditions that allegedly have given the notion of culture an autonomy and potential basis for a new politics, while emphasizing a historicism that denies claims to universality, to universal experience and to universal history. Culture, in other words, has become more anthropologically differentiated and a much more complex concept.[10]

These broad and complex issues provide the conditions under which I have attempted to answer the question of this thesis. My introductory and autobiographical notes to the thesis can now lead to introducing the parameters within which this study has been conducted.

My specialised field of teaching theology to adults falls into the category of what is known as "the theology of culture" which is the kind described by Paul Tillich. The *theology of culture* is not the same as the intellectual inquiry which is known today as *cultural theory*. While the theology of culture pays serious

---

[10] *Postmodernism, politics and education* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Bergin & Garvey, 1996), p. 49.

attention to the issues raised by contemporary cultural theory, its predominant focus is an educational one. As will be explained in Chapter Three, in addition to having a "theological" understanding of culture, the theology of culture adds to itself the dimension of religion. In doing so, the educational process of the theology of culture is made apparent – it employs a hermeneutic to interpret the present historical moment to facilitate a dialogue between culture and religion.

In the brands of philosophy of religion and the theology of culture in which I have been educated religion is seen as the meaning-giving substance to a culture which, in turn, informs all the spheres of cultural life. In the theology of culture, the appropriation of the religious material to the culture can be understood as conveying and representing "reality" – God and his ultimate purpose for the world – through the church and its symbols which are the instruments by which this reality is disclosed and channelled. This task of representing and conveying reality is understood as the educational function and duty of the professional theologian. In conventional terms, one may say the theologian's function is to interpret God's revelation to the public. That such was seen as the primary educational task of the intellectual is obvious if one surveys the genesis of, and the background to, the most notable educational institute both in the West and in the East.

In this context, discussing education as conveying reality needs clarifying. The phrase "conveying reality" or "truth" seems to connote religious overtones. Without defining the word, postmodern commentators and cultural critics favour phrases such as "real" and "reality" to mean whatever claims actuality, authenticity, trueness, and legitimacy. For a thinker such as Jean-François Lyotard it is matter of the status of knowledge.[11] Whatever the case may be, the postmodern claim is not so much whether anything is "real" but rather the

---

[11] *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). Lyotard's analysis of the situation is not altogether original. He seems to be drawing on postindustrial society as outlined mainly by Alain Touraine, Daniel Bell and others.

assertion that there is no simple, direct relationship between reality and its supposed representation. If this complicated issue could be circumscribed for the purpose of this thesis, I could justifiably argue that, as a theologian, when I use a phrase such as "conveying reality", "truth", or "representing" or "imparting" knowledge I am assuming the educational task of representing and conveying meaning. While there are semantic difficulties in using words such as "reality" "truth" and especially "knowledge," to incorporate various nuances and connotations assigned to these words in postmodern literature, I will use them in different parts of the discussion to underline the particular facet of the problem with reality being represented.

Given my background in theology, I have chosen Paul Tillich's theology of culture as a starting point – more correctly, as a basis – from which to argue this thesis. To that extent, the discussion on Tillich in this thesis is by no means an attempt to elucidate his theology. In this study I have outlined only the main features of his theology of culture which are the themes of his theological commentary on culture which expose a modern narrative of education.

His theology of culture is an important representation of a twentieth century theological adult educational project in which Tillich had attempted to represent and convey reality (and meaning) to a generation of adults in the period that followed the two great World Wars. That it was an adult educational project is apparent when, explaining the meaning of theology, Tillich says: "theology is the methodological interpretation of the contents of the Christian faith."[12] According to Tillich, the contents of the Christian faith are expressed in its symbols. This being the case, theology is said to be a function of the church which *must* serve the needs of the church. Therefore, the theological *system* is built to serve the church in two ways: "the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for

---

[12] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology – 1*, (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1953), p. 18. Hereinafter referred to as *ST-1*.

every new generation."[13] The Christian message is one pole, the "situation" is the other pole of all theological work, and the task of the theologian is to speak to the "situation."

In these ways Tillich's cultural discourse represents one of the impressive modernist intellectual systems of knowledge that is prescriptive of the modern framework of adult theological education.[14] Besides being an ingenious user

---

[13] Ibid., p.3.

[14] Besides Tillich having been openly celebrated as the "outstanding" or the "the foremost Protestant thinker of the United States," especially during his Harvard years and thereafter, he has been acclaimed with other appellations. For example, he has been called "a modern Thomas Aquinas" (1); "the most enlightening and therapeutic theologian of our time" (2); "an apostle to the skeptics, the intellectuals, the disillusioned of our era" (3); a "landmark and turning point in the history of modern theology" (4); a modern Renaissance man in the best possible sense of that term"(5). He was called also the "most philosophical of the theologians of our century,"(6) and as a "stroke of good fortune for our day (ein Grenzfall, ein Sonderfall, ein Glücksfall)"(7)., and as the "master of mediation." (8) It is reported that scholars have compared Tillich's system to a pyramid and to an ocean, (9) and declared it to be "beyond doubt the richest, most suggestive, and most challenging philosophical theology our day has produced."(10).

(1) H.Lilje, cited in Schmitz, Die Apologetische Theologie Paul Tillichs (Mainz, 1966), p. v; (2) Theodore Green, "Paul Tillich and our secular culture," Theology, p. 50 ; (3) Introduction by the editors to Theology of Paul Tillich (Revised Edition). Kegley, Charles, W. Ed., (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), p, xi; (4) Niebuhr, cited in C. Rhein, Paul Tillich, Philosophie und Theologie (Stuttgart, 1957), p. 195; (5) Dillenberger, in Ferré, Paul Tillich, retrospect and future, p. 36; (6) C. Hartshorne, in Ferré, Paul Tillich, retrospect and future, p. 28; (7) Hartmann, in H.J. Schultz, ed., Tendenzen der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundret (Stuttgart, 1966), p.270. All references cited by Ronald Modrash, Paul Tillich's theology of the church: A catholic appraisal (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976), p.168. (8) Gilkey, Langdon. "Tillich: master of mediation." Theology of Paul Tillich (1982), p.26, (9) Wilhelm & Marion Pauck, The life and thought of Paul Tillich. (San Francisco: Harper & Row

of the philosophical concept of "being", Tillich developed a "theological system" which is one of the most remarkable discourses that engaged with the twentieth century Western culture.

As Christendom's influence in shaping the Western civilisation since about the 3rd Century CE until about the middle part of the 20th century is an obvious fact, while it is ironical, it also justifies employing Tillich's avowedly "theological" system to argue the thesis of this study. To that extent, one cannot overlook the fact that the notions such as God, *self,* spirit, symbol, sign and religion have been significant aspects of the Western metanarrative. They have been the concepts that have both constructed and represented the modernist worldview.

In spite of some events which are best described in theological terms, it must also be said that some phases in the history of the West in the last two centuries represent a series of events that are descriptive of the modern understanding of twentieth century Western culture. In this respect also Tillich's theology of culture is significant because the context of his cultural hermeneutics was the modern cultural background that reflected the consequences of radical changes which took place in Europe and America from about the middle of the nineteenthcentury to the middle of the twentieth century.

Having outlined all that concern my role as an adult educator, my own educational background and the significant part of Tillich's theology of culture in it, the purpose of this thesis can be summed up along the following lines. *Tillich spoke of the truth as expressed in the Christian message to the postwar generation. To do so he employed a hermeneutic which was modernist and this was successful with the generation he taught. As an adult educator and a theologian I am also keen to speak and teach the truth to my*

Publishers, 1989), p. 245; (10) J.H. Randall, Jr., *Journal of religion* 46/1 (1966): p. 223, cited in ibid.

generation. My generation is postmodern and I need to employ a hermeneutic which enables me to interpret and learn from the cultural situation which is characterised by the postmodern experience so that I may be successful in being an educator to the present generation. This, then, concerns becoming an innovative cultural hermeneutist through a self-directed learning exercise which must be conducted in respect of exploring wider adult education themes. It is this exercise that has been personalised to the question of this thesis: "how can I be an effective adult educator through my role as an innovative cultural hermeneutist?"

In many respects, the chapters of this thesis represent the stages of my own intellectual journey – the self-directed learning process – as an adult educator and a theologian. And as a theologian it is an adventure to step outside the "theological circle" (Tillich's phrase) and fathom the wider issues which inform the outworking of theology in the present, so that I may be effective in problem-solving and developing an andragogical style of educating adults. In doing so I may become an educator who adopts the role of facilitator or resource rather than lecturer or grader. This also marks the shift from a position of being the "learned theological educator" to being an "innovative cultural hermeneutist".

Methodology and Research Concerns

Methodologically, the argument of the thesis and its presentation have been both andragogical and self-directed. In this context, by *andragogical* I mean constantly processing the researched material in the confines of my study as well as in the classroom. What has been learnt through research has been tried out in the classroom and whatever results it achieved in the classroom have been processed and re-presented as the argument pursued in the thesis. It is also self-directed to the extent that the whole project has been guided by motivation and volition in initiating and maintaining the task of

learning to which I have committed myself through this thesis. In these respects I have attempted to exercise a great deal of independence in setting learning goals and deciding what is worthwhile learning as well as how to approach the learning task within the framework that I have detailed.

In approaching the thesis in these ways, I have engaged myself in the study to go against my background and schooling in the academic disciplines of theology, philosophy, education, contemporary culture and religious studies. To that extent, besides drawing on a multitude of literature, I have carefully utilised manifold facets of thinking and intellectual inquiry represented by these schools of thought.

In carrying out this study, I have also used my training in theological and religious studies to explicate the arguments and broader issues that are related to the postmodern discourse and themes of adult education.

I have written this thesis as an academic who has been committed to teaching and research for the last ten years. Hence, some limited base material found in the thesis have been written or presented in a different – or another – form elsewhere. They include some small sections of my previous works on Tillich such as writings, numerous lectures given in classrooms, seminars and also some limited material from one of my publications.[15] Besides, as this study is not on Paul Tillich, I have drawn on – and rewritten – some of this material because, within the confines of this thesis, it is not possible to say anything original about Tillich's ideas in a way that I had not read them for the last twenty years. To attempt to say anything original about Tillich would be to step outside the defined premise of this thesis.

Some limited material found in the section on postmodernism in Chapter Four also comes from a number of sources which are mine. In Chapter Four I have

---

[15] Ruwan Palapathwala, Beyond Christ and system: Paul Tillich and spirituality for the 21st century. *Religion in the new millennium*, (Eds.), Frederick J. Parrella, & Raymond Bulman (Mercer University Press, USA, 2001/2002), pp. 205-219.

developed and used brief notes from my classroom lectures and seminars which contain a significant part of my ideas which have gradually developed through my engagement with the question of this thesis since commencing it three years ago. Over those three years, as a result of being engaged in self-directed learning, my ideas concerning postmodernism and adult education have significantly shifted and developed as I have put them to the test in my classrooms and advanced seminars conducted for graduate students. All this does not mean that I have "cut and pasted" my previous writings, lecture and seminar notes. That would have been impossible as my ideas on the same subject in different pieces of writing are now either significantly different, or have progressed to a new dimension of understanding.

I have also tested my ideas in public lectures that I have given in the last three years in the university setting. Such exercises were consciously and subconsciously guided by my work for this thesis and the thesis question I am attempting to answer here. In that respect it has been impracticable to separate the writings I have done for this thesis and a lecture or a seminar that I had prepared with the issues I am discussing in this thesis as my guiding principles. For instance, some material in Chapter Two was written both for this thesis and for an advanced seminar I conducted on Paul Tillich last year. The discussion on *self* in Chapter Four also was written for this project as well as for my 2002 Noel Carter Public Lecture: "Buddhist and Christian Perspectives on Human Suffering" in which some assumptions I make in this thesis were put to the test.

Having confessed to the methodological approach I have utilised in this thesis, it must be also said that what is original in this study is the way in which I have *re*-sourced and devoured the literature at my disposal to *re*-think and interpret my present circumstances and role as an adult educator. In that way, in the practice of my teaching, learning and research this three-year-long project has certainly shifted and directed me to a new position of integration and understanding of something new in relation to adult education. Therefore, the entire experience and the methodology followed in writing this

thesis have been a profound learning experience in the continuum of my life as an adult educator.

Given that this thesis is written for a master's degree in adult education, it is also imperative to note that the predominant concern of the thesis is how I can be effective as an *adult educator* through my role as an innovative cultural hermeneutist. To that extent, while I am a theologian capitalising on Tillich's project, I will not occupy myself in discussing or resolving "theological issues" in relation to postmodernism in this thesis. In other words, while I am a theologian, the irony of this thesis is that I am not approaching it with the concerns of a "professional theologian" or a "teacher of religious education." At best, I am approaching it as a "theologian of culture" whose primary concern here is not *theos (*God), but *culture.* To that degree, I have confined the issues discussed in the thesis as they apply to the teaching tasks in which I have found myself at present and explained earlier in this chapter. Whenever my views on theological matters are discussed and elaborated on with respect to Tillich, especially in the two chapters to follow, I have assumed that I am revealing only a certain model of hermeneutic – inevitably a theological one – to which I am not "committed" but about which I am ambivalent in view of the said aim of this thesis.

The Structure of the Thesis

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two discusses the two important adult education concepts: *andragog*y and *self-directed learning*. The two concepts are discussed in Chapter Two to both justify my own self-directed learning process through dealing with the subject of this thesis and demonstrate the relevance of self-directed learning for the educator's role as an innovative cultural hermeneutist.

Chapters Three, Four and Five present the ways in which my self-directed learning process has been undertaken in the contexts of my academic expertise and teaching. The three chapters have brought the issues that

need apprising to the fore. Chapter Three discusses Paul Tillich's theology of culture with a view to exposing the main themes of his thought in which his hermeneutical style of interpretation is seen at work.

Chapter Four will demonstrate the particular way in which Tillich employed the themes of his theology within a modern framework to carry out an educational task – to convey the truth of the Christian message with a particular style of interpreting culture. Through a brief discussion of Tillich's method of correlation and its underlying assumptions, this chapter also demonstrates the extent to which concepts such as reason, *logos*, revelation, truth, and God were utilised to construct a certain modern version of a "cultural narrative" – a Christian narrative – within which his hermeneutic is employed for the theological educational task. In the case of both Chapters Three and Four, implicitly, I am also revealing the hermeneutical style to which I have accustomed myself with in my role as an educator.

In the relatively long Chapter Five the issues that inform the themes and concerns of the postmodern experience on which grounds I am arguing for a new hermeneutic by departing from the old hermeneutic are discussed in detail. The chapter discusses these themes as characteristic of the postmodern condition and highlights their implications for the role I am coming to assume as an innovative cultural hermeneutist in the contemporary cultural context of education in the West in general and in my own educational setting in particular.

Chapter Six concludes with a summary of the thesis and a brief discussion of the issues which it has raised, followed by an account of how it has assisted my self-directed learning experience in the metaphor of "journey" and my transition from being a modernist expert to a postmodernist innovative cultural hermeneutist. How the learning which I have acquired from this study has contributed to the effectiveness of my role as an adult educator is also discussed.