

RISE AND FALL OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN INDONESIA: IS THERE DEMOCRACY IN OUR SCHOOLS?

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Growing up in the late 1960s Indonesia, my generation, like that of my then non-Catholic parents and of their parents believed in two kinds of private institutions, i.e. Protestant-run hospitals and Catholic schools, given our distrust of public services which were often synonymous with being poor, unprofessional, and lacking discipline. But the table is now turned: The best-equipped hospitals in big cities, albeit their human service, belong to the government; and Catholics schools' popularity is gradually in decline even among Catholic families.

Especially with regard to educational preference, many Catholic parents do not feel obliged anymore to send their children to missionary schools. They make attempts instead to have their children enter the top-ranked public schools which they consider as the golden bridge to the prestigious higher education especially at the university level. While affordability is often a non issue for some well-to-do and middle income Catholic families, they prefer the putatively inexpensive government-run schools to the Catholic schools. Indeed, Catholic schools cannot help being "expensive" these days with the dwindling students enrolled, non-subsidiary quality teachers, and little access to BOS [Indonesian government aids for school operational costs]. It has become a cause of concern that such competitive edge –thus far inherent in Catholic schools– as a source of faith formation, academic excellence, discipline, and democratic values seem now insufficient to attract parents to continue to have confidence in Catholic education.

When pious Catholic parents entrust the education of their children to public schools, the reputation of the Catholic schools that serve as a living model of the Church at large is indeed at stake. When Catholic schools gradually lose their Christian identity in order to fit in with the public school's yardstick/national standardization such as accreditation, certification, state examination, to name but a few, ignorant Roman Catholics are the least desirable persons needed in the democratic battlefront. It becomes even more complex when this phenomenon is situated within the context of democratization in the nation-state of Indonesia – a predominantly Muslim country. Catholic schools, in this case, are one among the formal ways in which the history, traditions, experiences and, in particular, the teachings of the Catholic Church are duly preserved and promoted among the young generation within the diverse communities.

Thus, at this particular juncture, it is important to ask a self-reflective question as to whether Catholic schools in Indonesia so far uphold and impart principles of democracy with which they may not only attract students from different faiths and backgrounds, but also participate in creating a more humane and prosperous social order. Here, democracy can be understood as what Pope John Paul II hitherto conceptualizes as the "virtue of solidarity", i.e. the essential link between the life of virtue and commitment to the common good (McLaughlin and O'Keeffe, 1996). Indeed, it is democratic values of this kind that make Catholic schools distinct from others.

As such, three pertinent questions can be raised herein as preliminary diagnoses. First, how does Catholic education in Indonesia perceive or conceptualize democracy? Second, to what extent has Catholic education thus far helped influence (or otherwise) the

public policy making in democratic issues? Lastly, what is the social praxis of the Catholic education today with regard to democracy?

Research Objective

This research therefore seeks to explore the “lived experience” of the Catholic education stakeholders, i.e. three generations of Catholic school goers in Jogjakarta. As such, the dynamics of the Catholic education is examined through the lens of the behavioral patterns of the quotidian experiences of the Catholics in questions with regard to their educational preference. Known as the “City of Students”, Jogjakarta is used as the research setting to help reveal the interplay between the decreasing popularity of the Catholic schools and the urgency to uplift their position and roles as well as reputation in creating a society with pluralistic values. The objective of this research is to describe the participants’ meaning making of their educational experience in Catholic schools.

Methodology

Phenomenological investigative techniques will therefore be used in this research. Parents-children-grandchildren as research participants are chosen in order to contextualize each unique and engaging story they unravel with the specified time of their schooling. These narratives then will help us measure the “rise and fall” of the Catholic education in Indonesia.

As for the data-gathering method, unstructured in-depth phenomenological interviews and observations of the research participants will be used. The ‘bracketing’ of phenomena and inclusion of the researcher’s position in the field of study (Groenewald 2004), will dominate the observation and gathering of the story on the participants’ everyday practice. For the purpose of “data explication” – not the otherwise “data analysis”, to follow Hycner (1999), non-Catholic students (and their parents) will also be involved to help validate the truthfulness of some specific accounts on the Catholic schools under study.

Research Schedule

Year 1 – (primarily research-based)

- Preliminary experimentation into the research participants’ practical concepts (e.g. choice of educational activities, preference of schools, perception of democracy in school practice, etc.)
- Review of relevant literature and of the work and practices of other researchers

Year 2 – (primarily research-based)

- In-depth interviews and observations
- Close analysis of theoretical ideas relevant to the emerging practice in order to deepen the practice and illuminate research issues

Year 3 – (practical and theoretical)

- Reflection on practical research

- Research results dissemination and
- Completion of the written research report.

Anticipated Outcomes

This research will produce an approximately 25,000 to 40,000-word research report elucidating the interconnections between the waning popularity of the Catholic schools and the urgency of upholding them again as part of the democratization efforts. The completed research should create not only a prototype for future similar studies across the nation, but also a body of knowledge to increase practical and theoretical understandings in locating the Catholic education within the contemporary democratic culture.

Academic Contribution

There is a large body of literature that integrates theological, philosophical and educational perspectives on Catholic education in Indonesia, but attention to the fluctuation thereof is still rare.

Since the 1998 Reform, the Indonesian people has persistently been in pursuit of Democracy, Justice and Human Rights; and education is one of the many ways to achieve this end as shown by numerous articles appeared in Sanata Dharma University publication series. Among the useful collections are *National Education in Political and Social Reform* [Pendidikan Nasional dalam Reformasi Politik dan Kemasyarakatan] (Ed. Rahmanto et al, 2005) and *Democratic Basic Education* [Pendidikan Dasar yang Demokratis] (Ed. Suparno et al., 1999). Another important work is a collection of essays written by the educational expert J. Drost, SJ (Ed. Rahmanto et al, 2005). Worthy of mention is St. Sunardi's *Three-legged Throne* [Tahta Berkaki Tiga] (2004) that provides recommendation for the roles and responsibilities of universities in post-Suharto Indonesia to become the guardian of intellectuality, morality, and autonomy. None of these important works, however, describe in detail about the dynamics of the Catholic schools in the country. This present research will be important in this aspect.

Another strand of scholarship is historical studies on the Catholic missionaries' significant roles in establishing numerous Catholic schools and training centers throughout Indonesia, for instance the recently published *Van Lith, the Pioneer of Teacher Training in Java: History of the 150-year Jesuits in Indonesia* (Rosariyanto, 2009). Very few studies have focused on the ordinary people who likewise have participated in the history of Catholic education in the country. History from below is especially scarce. Hopefully, this present research will address these local perspectives that have been relatively neglected.

Publication Outlet

Widya Dharma (Sanata Dharma University journal on education published twice a year)

Journal of Contemporary Asia (International refereed journal on Asian studies published quarterly)