

## Flatitudes and Floatitudes

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In a recent talk – Home Schooling to Rock the World – I mentioned some symptoms that a person may be suffering from ‘post-Enlightenment reduction syndrome,’ (PERS) or ‘flattening’. This is the atrophy of one’s analogic sense – a reduction in the metaphoric dimension of human being. The problem is a disconnect in the person’s capacity to relate concrete and abstract reality. Its source is the cultural vacuum caused by man’s attempt to believe there is no God. Man without a context for being (In Him I live and move and have being) is like an astronaut untethered from the space ship – dying for lack of a life-supporting atmosphere.

Of course this is a great over-simplification of an enormously complex problem. My hope was to point out to Christians that they, too, may (and probably do) have PERS to some degree. Here are a few ‘flatitudes’ – indicators of a flattened metaphoric dimension, or analogic sense. Each one has an opposite ‘floatitude’ – another way people avoid the tension and turbulence of the territory of freedom.

Sadly, people with far-advance PERS won’t be easily able to recognize these symptoms in themselves. But if we can all get honest about the ways we are compromised by and “conformed to the pattern of this world,” we can grow better able to rescue the perishing together, imho. That’s the world-rocking I’m talking about!!

FLATITUDE	FLOATITUDE
Lack of delight in nature; seeing man as a dominator, user of nature	Over-absorption in nature, seeing man as an enemy of nature
No interest in creating art forms	Over-awed by anything calling itself ‘art’; art for art’s sake
Inability to enjoy poetry, dismissive of art	Dismissive of religious or formal poetry
Legalism	Resistant to doctrine, rule, hierarchy; rebellious
Fear of people who disagree, or of disagreement/conflict in conversation	Ditto, hence polarization and demonization of ‘them’
Avoidance of challenging conversation (gossip, weather, media vs great ideas)	Demand that all conversation stay ‘positive’, non-confrontational
Knee-jerk acceptance of ideas; Knee-jerk rejection of ideas; red-flag words shut down conversation (NB: Acceptance of Catholic doctrine is not knee-jerk, but reasonable. Reason begins in trust.)	Ditto, see note on polarization, above

Little capacity for the tension of real listening, research, nuance, openness in dialogue – resisting emotional expression

Avoidance of failure, of doing poorly, being a beginner, looking stupid, being influenced.

Tunnel vision: the end, the goal, the product, the finish line is the only thing in view

Identification of self with occupation, possessions, externals

Limited capacity to be vulnerable, to surrender

Ideals disconnected from incorporation into life

Thin-or-no life lived in community

Acedia: distracted from spiritual goods

Difficulty surrendering self into literature, drama, music, or Liturgy

Oppressed by the hostility of popular culture

Suspicious of novel ideas

Over-reliance on experts, authority, credentials (Alisdair MacIntyre calls this a primary characteristic of 'organization man'.)

Demand for objectivity trumps the reality of the subject/person

Bored by talk of saints, faith, miracles

Surface interest in evangelization; suspicious of ecumenism

Avoidance of corporal works of mercy

Weak involvement in festivity, celebration (goes, obviously, with lack of depth in community life)

Ditto, but resistant to factual expression, word meanings, see 'red flag words' above

Inability to honor superiority, excellence, positional authority

Global vision: the journey only – no eternal destiny

Identification of self with peer group, emotions, images

Victim, weak self-boundary

Idealism – a subset of ideals lived without reference to others

Over-dependence on peer group

Acedia: disinterest in spiritual goods  
Over-projection of self into literature, drama, music, Liturgy; lack of critical judgement

Reactionary against historical culture

Suspicious of old ideas

Over-reliance on technology

Demand for subjectivity trumps the reality of objective, transcendent Reality

Sensationalism in talk of saints, faith, miracles (interest is in amazing supernatural phenomenon vs holiness)

Ecumenism becomes syncretism or devoid of religious truth – 'mere spirituality'

Avoidance of spiritual works of mercy

Over-invested in substitutes for celebration based in worship (demonstrations, parties, cultural events, worship of stars)

I imagine you get the idea: we Catholics have access to and support to move freely in the vast territory of human freedom. 'We' can usually see when 'they' move from freedom to 'license,' but are less aware when we ourselves have moved from 'free' toward 'tame' under the pressure of PERS. I believe that, if ever we become fully, abundantly free, the enormity of our joy, the magnanimity of our giving, the certainty of our faith, and the expressivity of our love would communicate Christ to the world!

Naturally, I'd love your thoughts on this. Sadly, one of the huge losses due to PERS is the lack of responsiveness to ideas...sigh...