
THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION



This important new book brings together a set of essays previously unpublished in book form many of which are translated into English for the first time. Taken as a whole they provide a clear introduction to, and development of, Freire's work on adult literacy and the nature of learning.

Individual chapters draw out the connections between Freire's work and a range of radical theories in education, development and theology and suggest how it may be applied in different societies and situations. The book concludes with a substantial new interview with Paulo Freire in which he reassesses his life and work.

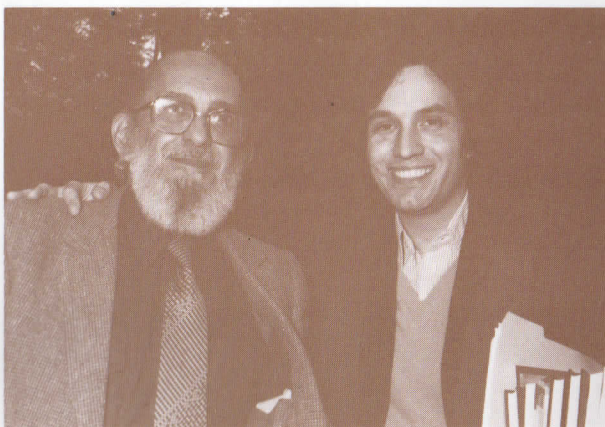
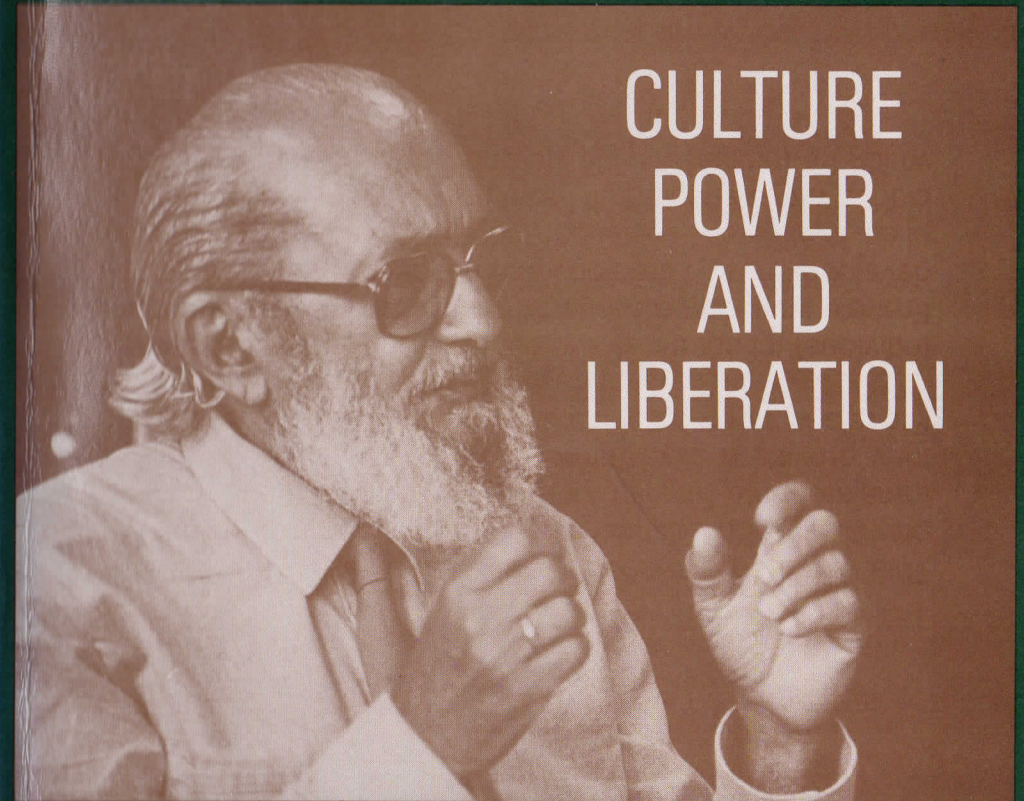


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Paulo Freire with Donaldo Macedo

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THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION



CULTURE
POWER
AND
LIBERATION

PAULO FREIRE

INTRODUCTION BY HENRY A. GIROUX

TRANSLATED BY DONALDO MACEDO

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Translator's Preface

A central theme in Paulo Freire's work is his insistence on the need for readers to adopt a critical attitude when reading a text. That is, readers should critically evaluate the text and not passively accept what is said just because the author said it. Readers must always be prepared to question and to doubt what they have read.

Though I have long been inspired by Freire's challenge, I must admit that I did not so profoundly understand the significance of his insistence that readers be critical and predisposed to question and doubt until I confronted the many dimensions of Freire's thought while translating the contents of this book. To avoid committing serious and unforgivable translation errors and distorting his brilliant and forceful ideas, I was forced to meticulously read and reread each word, each sentence, and each paragraph, in order to engage in a deeper dialogue with the author through his book. I had to understand deeply and experience his concepts in order to render them into English, preserving the same force without sacrificing the music and the poetry of his eloquent prose. This has been a far from easy task. As Edwin and Willa Muir remind us,

doing a job of translation was like breaking stones, but of course I was wrong to say so. Translating a foreign language into one's language is as fatiguing as breaking stones, but there the resemblance ceases. One is not dealing with blocks of words that have to be trimmed into other shapes; one is struggling with something at once more recalcitrant and more fluid. The spirit of a language, which makes thought flow into molds that are quite different from those of one's native speech. The very shape of thought has to be changed in translation, and that seems to me more difficult than rendering words and idioms into their equivalents."¹

The translator must be given the freedom to recreate, as Chukovsky succinctly pointed out: "The most important thing for the translator to achieve is to recreate in his version of the text the thoughts of the translated author, his 'face,' his 'voice'. . . ."² With the help of many friends, particularly Paulo Freire himself, Henry Giroux, and Jack Kimball, I have tried to re-create the author's voice.

The translation of this book posed a constant and provocative challenge; how to preserve the force of Freire's thoughts, in English, while maintaining the fluidity of his writing. In cases where thought was pitted against form, I opted for the former. This is particularly true of terms that are not readily translated into English—terms like *mechanicist* and *technicist*. As originally used, these terms mean more than "mechanical" and "technical," respectively. They embody an ideology with underlying interests that legitimize specific forms of social relations. In our discussions about the translation, Freire insisted that unless North American readers begin to accept the coinage of foreign words in English just as other languages readily incorporate English terms, they will develop a form of linguistic colonialism.

There were other terms that I could only give a close approximation of in the English translation and still others that were untranslatable. A definition of these terms is in order.

The *asentamiento* is an economic organization of agricultural production adopted as an experiment in Chile, and probably in other countries, during the period of agrarian reform. In these organizations the property belongs to the community, and the management of the production process is controlled by the peasants. A *culture circle* is a group of individuals involved in learning to read and write, as well as in the political analysis of their immediate reality and the national interests. In culture circles, reading demands more than decodification of linguistic symbols. It is viewed as a social and political "reading" of the world. The *central team* refers to coordinators responsible for literacy and other activities of culture circles. *Latifundium* is a Spanish and Portuguese word of Latin origin and means a large, privately owned landholding.

This translation would not have been possible without the generous cooperation of many friends. I am grateful to my colleagues at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, particularly Mary Anne Ferguson, Neal Bruss, Gilman Hebert, and Vivian Zamel, who provide me with a stimulating environment and support highly conducive to academic pursuits. I would like to thank my friend and mentor, Henry Giroux, for his guidance and, above all, his faith in me. My thanks also go to Jack

Kimball, a poet, who understood the importance of preserving the force of Freire's thought in English without sacrificing to any great degree the poetry of his prose. Without him, many obstacles that I faced in the course of this translation would have been difficult to overcome. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dale Koike for her careful reading of the manuscript and her invaluable comments and support. Last, but not least, I would like to express my appreciation to my family for their patience and enthusiastic support.

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NOTES

¹Edwin and Willa Muir, "Translating from the German," in *On Translation*, (ed.) Reuben A. Brower (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

²Kornei Chukovsky, *A Noble Art* [Vysokoe iskusstvo] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo "Khudozhestvennaia Literatura," 1941).

Introduction

by HENRY A. GIROUX

Paulo Freire's newest book appears at an important time for education. In the United States schools have become the subject of an intense national debate forged in a discourse that joins conservatives and radicals alike in their denunciation of public schools and American education. While specific criticisms differ among the diverse ideological positions, the critics share a discourse steeped in the language of crisis and critique. For conservatives, the language of crisis and critique becomes clear in their assertion that schools have failed to take seriously their alleged commitment to the demands of capitalist rationality and the imperatives of the market economy. The crisis pointed to in this case resides in the lagging state of the American economy and the diminishing role of the United States in shaping world affairs. Many on the radical left, by contrast, write off schools as simply a reflex of the labor market. As reproductive sites that smoothly provide the knowledge, skills, and social relations necessary for the functioning of the capitalist economy and dominant society, public education no longer provides the tools for critical thinking and transformative action. Like the work place and the realm of mass culture, schools have become a device for economic and cultural reproduction. Within these contrasting positions, the language of crisis and critique has collapsed into either the discourse of domination or the discourse of despair.

Paulo Freire's newest work represents a theoretically refreshing and politically viable alternative to the current impasse in educational theory

and practice worldwide. Freire has appropriated the unclaimed heritage of emancipatory ideas in those versions of secular and religious philosophy located within the corpus of bourgeois thought. He has also critically integrated into his work a heritage of radical thought without assimilating many of the problems that have plagued it historically. In effect, Freire has combined what I call the language of critique with the language of possibility.

Utilizing the language of critique, Freire has fashioned a theory of education that takes seriously the relationship between radical critical theory and the imperatives of radical commitment and struggle. By drawing upon his experiences in Latin America, Africa, and North America, he has generated a discourse that deepens our understanding of the dynamics and complexity of domination. In this instance, Freire has rightly argued that domination cannot be reduced exclusively to a form of class domination. With the notion of difference as a guiding theoretical thread, Freire rejects the idea that there is a universalized form of oppression. Instead, he acknowledges and locates within different social fields forms of suffering that speak to particular modes of domination and, consequently, diverse forms of collective struggle and resistance. By recognizing that certain forms of oppression are not reducible to class oppression, Freire steps outside standard Marxist analyses by arguing that society contains a multiplicity of social relations, which contain contradictions and can serve as a basis from which social groups can struggle and organize themselves. This becomes clear in those social relations in which the ideological and material conditions of gender, racial, and age discrimination are at work.

Equally important is the insight that domination is more than the simple imposition of arbitrary power by one group over another. Instead, for Freire, the logic of domination represents a combination of historical and contemporary ideological and material practices that are never completely successful, always embody contradictions, and are constantly being fought over within asymmetrical relations of power. Underlying Freire's language of critique, in this case, is the insight that history is never foreclosed and that just as the actions of men and women are limited by the specific constraints in which they find themselves, they also make those constraints and the possibilities that may follow from challenging them. It is within this theoretical juncture that Freire introduces a new dimension to radical educational theory and practice. I say it is new because he links the process of struggle to the particularities

of people's lives while simultaneously arguing for a faith in the power of the oppressed to struggle in the interests of their own liberation. This is a notion of education fashioned in more than critique and Orwellian pessimism; it is a discourse that creates a new starting point by trying to make hope realizable and despair unconvincing.

Education in Freire's view becomes both an ideal and a referent for change in the service of a new kind of society. As an ideal, education "speaks" to a form of cultural politics that transcends the theoretical boundaries of any one specific political doctrine, while also linking social theory and practice to the deepest aspects of emancipation. Thus, as an expression of radical social theory, Freire's cultural politics is broader and more fundamental than any one specific political discourse such as classical Marxist theory, a point that often confuses his critics. In fact, his cultural politics represents a theoretical discourse whose underlying interests are fashioned around a struggle against all forms of subjective and objective domination as well as a struggle for forms of knowledge, skills, and social relations that provide the conditions for social and, hence, self-emancipation.

As a referent for change, education represents both a place within and a particular type of engagement with the dominant society. For Freire, education includes and moves beyond the notion of schooling. Schools represent only one important site where education takes place, where men and women both produce and are the product of specific social and pedagogical relations. Education represents in Freire's view both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. Its dynamic is forged in the dialectical relation between individuals and groups who live out their lives within specific historical conditions and structural constraints, on the one hand, and those cultural forms and ideologies that give rise to the contradictions and struggles that define the lived realities of various societies, on the other. Education is that terrain where power and politics are given a fundamental expression, since it is where meaning, desire, language, and values engage and respond to the deeper beliefs about the very nature of what it means to be human, to dream, and to name and struggle for a particular future and way of life. As a referent for change, education represents a form of action that emerges from a joining of the languages of critique and possibility. It represents the need for a passionate commitment by educators to make the political more pedagogical, that is, to make critical reflection and action a fundamental part of a social project that not only

engages forms of oppression but also develops a deep and abiding faith in the struggle to humanize life itself. It is the particular nature of this social project that gives Freire's work its theoretical distinction.

The theoretical distinction of this book can best be understood by examining briefly how Freire's discourse stands between two radical traditions. On the one hand, the language of critique as it is expressed in Freire's work embodies many of the analyses that characterize what has been called the new sociology of education. On the other hand, Freire's philosophy of hope and struggle is rooted in a language of possibility that draws extensively from the tradition of liberation theology. It is from the merging of these two traditions that Freire has produced a discourse that not only gives meaning and theoretical coherence to his work but also provides the basis for a more comprehensive and critical theory of pedagogical struggle.

The New Sociology of Education and the Language of Critique

The new sociology of education emerged in full strength in England and the United States in the early 1970s as a critical response to what can be loosely called the discourse of traditional educational theory and practice. The central question through which it developed its criticism of traditional schooling as well as its own theoretical discourse was typically Freirian: how does one make education meaningful in a way that makes it critical and, hopefully, emancipatory.

Radical critics, for the most part, agreed that educational traditionalists generally ignored the question, and avoided the issue through the paradoxical attempt of depoliticizing the language of schooling while reproducing and legitimating capitalist ideologies. The most obvious expression of this approach could be seen in the positivist discourse used by traditional educational theorists. A positivist discourse, in this case, took as its most important concern the mastery of pedagogical techniques and the transmission of knowledge instrumental to the existing society. In the traditional world view, schools were considered merely instructional sites. That schools were also cultural and political sites was ignored, as was the notion that they represented areas of contention among differently empowered cultural and economic groups.

In the discourse of the new sociology of education, traditional educational theory suppressed important questions about the relations among knowledge, power, and domination. Furthermore, out of this criticism emerged a new theoretical language and mode of criticism that argued that schools did not provide opportunities in the broad Western humanist tradition for self and social empowerment in the society at large. On the contrary, left critics provided theoretical arguments and enormous amounts of empirical evidence to suggest that schools were, in fact, agencies of social, economic, and cultural reproduction. At best, public schooling offered limited individual mobility to members of the working class and other oppressed groups, and in the final analysis they were powerful instruments for the reproduction of capitalist relations of production and the legitimating ideologies of everyday life.

Radical critics within the new sociology of education provided a variety of useful models of analysis to challenge traditional educational ideology. Against the conservative insistence that schools transmitted objective knowledge, radical critics developed theories of the hidden curriculum as well as theories of ideology that identified the interests underlying specific forms of knowledge. Rather than viewing school knowledge as objective, as something to be merely transmitted to students, proponents of the new sociology of education argued that school knowledge was a particular representation of the dominant culture, one that was constructed through a selective process of emphases and exclusions. Against the claim that schools were only instructional sites, radical critics pointed to the transmission and reproduction of a dominant culture in schools, with its selective ordering and privileging of specific forms of language, modes of reasoning, social relations, and cultural forms and experiences. In this view, culture was linked to power and to the imposition of a specific set of ruling class codes and experiences. Moreover, school culture functioned not only to confirm and privilege students from the dominant classes but also through exclusion and insult to discredit the histories, experiences, and dreams of subordinate groups. Finally, against the assertion made by traditional educators that schools were relatively neutral institutions, radical critics illuminated the way in which the state, through its selective grants, certification policies, and legal powers, shaped school practice in the interest of capitalist rationality.

For the new sociology of education, schools were analyzed primarily within the language of critique and domination. Since schools were viewed primarily as reproductive in nature, left critics failed to provide

a programmatic discourse through which contrasting hegemonic practices could be established. The agony of the left in this case was that its language of critique offered no hope for teachers, parents, or students to wage a political struggle within the schools themselves. Consequently, the language of critique was subsumed within the discourse of despair.

While working with Brazilian peasant communities, Freire demonstrated that his work shared a remarkable similarity with some of the major theoretical tenets found in the new sociology of education. By redefining and politicizing the notion of literacy, Freire developed a similar type of critical analysis in which he asserted that traditional forms of education functioned primarily to reify and alienate oppressed groups. Moreover, Freire explored in great depth the reproductive nature of dominant culture and systematically analyzed how it functioned through specific social practices and texts to produce and maintain a "culture of silence" among Brazilian peasants. Though Freire did not use the term *hidden curriculum* as part of his discourse, he demonstrated pedagogical approaches through which groups of learners could decide ideological and material practices, and in the form, content, and selective omissions of these one uncovered the logic of domination and oppression. In addition, Freire linked the selection, discussion, and evaluation of knowledge to the pedagogical processes that provided a context for such activity. In his view, it was impossible to separate one from the other and any viable pedagogical practice had to link radical forms of knowledge with corresponding radical social practices.

The major difference between Freire's work and the new sociology of education is that the latter appeared to start and end with the logic of political, economic, and cultural reproduction, whereas Freire's analysis begins with the process of production, that is, with the various ways in which human beings construct their own voices and validate their contradictory experiences within specific historical settings and constraints. The reproduction of capitalist rationality and other forms of oppression was only one political and theoretical moment in the process of domination, rather than an all-encompassing aspect of human existence. It was something to be decoded, challenged, and transformed, but only within the ongoing discourse, experiences, and histories of the oppressed themselves. In this shift from the discourse of reproduction and critique to the language of possibility and engagement, Freire draws from other traditions and fashions a more comprehensive and radical pedagogy.

Liberation Theology and the Language of Possibility

Central to Freire's politics and pedagogy is a philosophical vision of a liberated humanity. The nature of this vision is rooted in a respect for life and the acknowledgment that the hope and vision of the future that inspire it are not meant to provide consolation for the oppressed as much as to promote ongoing forms of critique and a struggle against objective forces of oppression. By combining the dynamics of critique and collective struggle with a philosophy of hope, Freire has created a language of possibility that is rooted in what he calls a permanent prophetic vision. Underlying this prophetic vision is a faith that, as Dorothee Soelle argues in *Choosing Life*, "makes life present to us and so makes it possible. . . . It is a great 'Yes' to life . . . [one that] presupposes our power to struggle."

Freire's attack against all forms of oppression, his call to link ideology critique with collective action, and the prophetic vision central to his politics are heavily indebted to the spirit and ideological dynamics that have both informed and characterized the theologies of liberation that have emerged primarily from Latin America since the early 1970s. In truly dialectical fashion, Freire has criticized and rescued the radical underside of revolutionary Christianity. As the reader will discover in this book, Freire is a harsh critic of the reactionary church. At the same time, he situates his faith and sense of hope in the God of history and of the oppressed, whose teachings make it impossible, in Freire's words, to "reconcile Christian love with the exploitation of human beings."

Within the discourse of theologies of liberation, Freire fashions a powerful theoretical antidote to the cynicism and despair of many left radical critics. The utopian character of his analysis is concrete in its nature and appeal, and takes as its starting point collective actors in their various historical settings and the particularity of their problems and forms of oppression. It is utopian only in the sense that it refuses to surrender to the risks and dangers that face all challenges to dominant power structures. It is prophetic in that it views the kingdom of God as something to be created on earth but only through a faith in both other human beings and the necessity of permanent struggle. The notion of faith that emerges in Freire's work is informed by the memory of the oppressed, the suffering that must not be allowed to continue, and the

need to never forget that the prophetic vision is an ongoing process, a vital aspect of the very nature of human life. In short, by combining the discourses of critique and possibility Freire joins history and theology in order to provide the theoretical basis for a radical pedagogy that combines hope, critical reflection, and collective struggle.

It is at this juncture that the work of Paulo Freire becomes crucial to the development of a radical pedagogy. For in Freire, we find the dialectician of contradictions and emancipation. In Freire's work a discourse is developing that bridges the relationship between agency and structure, a discourse that situates human action in constraints forged in historical and contemporary practices, while also pointing to the spaces, contradictions, and forms of resistance that raise the possibility for social struggle. I will conclude by turning briefly to those theoretical elements in Freire's work that are vital for developing a new language and theoretical foundation for a radical theory of pedagogy, particularly in a North American context.

Two qualifications must be made before I begin. First, as will be made clear in this book, Freire's mode of analysis can no longer be dismissed as irrelevant to a North American context. Critics have argued that his experiences with Brazilian peasants do not translate adequately for educators in the advanced industrial countries of the West. Freire makes it clear through the force of his examples and the variety of pedagogical experiences he provides in this book that the context for his work is international in scope. Not only does he draw on his experiences in Brazil, he also includes pedagogical discussion based on his work in Chile, Africa, and the United States. Furthermore, he takes as the object of his criticism both adult education and the pedagogical practices of the Catholic Church, social workers, and public education. As he has pointed out repeatedly, the object of his analysis and the language he uses is for the oppressed everywhere; his concept of the Third World is *ideological* and *political* rather than merely geographical.

This leads to the second qualification. In order to be true to the spirit of Freire's most profound pedagogical beliefs, it must be stated that he would never argue that his work is meant to be adapted in gridlike fashion to any site or pedagogical context. What Freire does provide is a metalanguage that generates a set of categories and social practices that have to be critically mediated by those who would use them for the insights they might provide in different historical settings and contexts. Freire's work is not meant to offer radical recipes for instant forms of critical pedagogy; rather, it is a series of theoretical signposts that need

to be decoded and critically appropriated within the specific contexts in which they might be useful.

Freire and the Discourse of Power

Freire provides one of the most dialectical notions of power in contemporary social theory. Power is viewed as both a negative and positive force; its character is dialectical and its mode of operation is always more than simply repressive. For Freire, power works both on and through people. On the one hand, this means that domination is never so complete that power is experienced exclusively as a negative force. On the other hand, it means that power is at the basis of all forms of behavior in which people resist, struggle, and fight for their image of a better world. In a general sense, Freire's theory of power and his demonstration of its dialectical character serve the important function of broadening the terrain on which it operates. Power, in this instance, is not exhausted in those public and private spheres where governments, ruling classes, and other dominant groups operate. It is more ubiquitous and is expressed in a range of oppositional public spaces and spheres that traditionally have been characterized by the *absence* of power and thus any form of resistance.

Freire's view of power suggests not only an alternative perspective to those radical theorists trapped in the straitjacket of despair and cynicism, it also stresses that there are always cracks, tensions, and contradictions in various social spheres such as schools where power is often exercised as a positive force in the name of resistance. Furthermore, Freire understands that power as a form of domination is not simply something imposed by the state through agencies such as the police, the army, and the courts. Domination is also expressed by the way in which power, technology, and ideology come together to produce forms of knowledge, social relations, and other concrete cultural forms that function to actively silence people. But the subtlety of domination is not exhausted by simply referring to those cultural forms that bear down on the oppressed daily; it is also to be found in the way in which the oppressed internalize and thus participate in their own oppression. This is an important point in Freire's work and indicates the ways in which domination is subjectively experienced through its internalization and sedimentation in the very needs of the personality. What is at work here

in Freire's thought is an important attempt to examine the psychically repressive aspects of domination and, hence, the possible internal obstacles to self-knowledge and thus to forms of social and self-emancipation.

Freire's notion of domination and how power works repressively on the psyche broadens the notion of learning to include how the body learns tacitly, how habit translates into sedimented history, and how knowledge itself may block the development of certain subjectivities and ways of experiencing the world. This perception of knowledge is important because it points to a radically different conception of how emancipatory forms of knowledge may be refused by those who could benefit most from them. In this case, the oppressed people's accommodation to the logic of domination may take the form of actively resisting forms of knowledge that pose a challenge to their world view. Rather than being a passive acceptance of domination, this form of knowledge becomes instead an active dynamic of negation, an active refusal to listen, to hear, or to affirm one's possibilities. The pedagogical question that emerges from this view of domination is: how do radical educators assess and address the elements of repression and forgetting at the heart of this type of domination? What accounts for the conditions that sustain an active refusal to know or to learn in the face of knowledge that may challenge the nature of domination itself?

The message that emerges from Freire's pedagogy is relatively clear. If radical educators are to understand the meaning of liberation, they must first be aware of the form that domination takes, the nature of its location, and the problems it poses for those who experience it as both a subjective and objective force. But such a project would be impossible unless one took the historical and cultural particularities, the forms of social life, of subordinate and oppressed groups as a starting point for such analysis. It is to this issue in Freire's work that I will now turn.

Freire's Philosophy of Experience and Cultural Production

One of the most important theoretical elements for a radical pedagogy that Freire provides is his view of experience and cultural production. Freire's notion of culture is at odds with both conservative and progressive positions. In the first instance, he rejects the notion

that culture can simply be divided into its high, popular, and low forms, with high culture representing the most advanced heritage of a nation. Culture, in this view, hides the ideologies that legitimate and distribute specific forms of culture as if they were unrelated to ruling-class interests and existing configurations of power. In the second instance, he rejects the notion that the moment of cultural creation rests solely with dominant groups and that these cultural forms harbor merely the seeds of domination. Related to this position, and also rejected by Freire, is the assumption that oppressed groups possess by their very location in the apparatus of domination a progressive and revolutionary culture that simply has to be released from the fetters of ruling-class domination.

For Freire, culture is the representation of lived experiences, material artifacts, and practices forged within the unequal and dialectical relations that different groups establish within a given society at a particular point in historical time. Culture is a form of production whose processes are intimately connected with the structuring of different social formations, particularly those that are related to gender, age, race, and class. It is also a form of production that helps human agents to transform society through their use of language and other material resources. In this case, culture is intimately related to the dynamics of power and produces asymmetries in the ability of individuals and groups to define and achieve their goals. Furthermore, culture is also a terrain of struggle and contradictions, and there is no one culture in the homogeneous sense. On the contrary, there are dominant and subordinate cultures that express different interests and operate from different and unequal terrains of power.

Freire argues for a notion of cultural power that takes as its starting point the social and historical particularities, the problems, sufferings, visions, and acts of resistance, that constitute the cultural forms of subordinate groups. Freire's notion of cultural power has a dual focus as part of his strategy to make the political more pedagogical. First, he argues that educators have to work with the experiences that students, adults, and other learners bring to schools and other educational sites. This means making these experiences in their public and private forms the object of debate and confirmation; it means legitimating such experiences in order to give those who live and move within them a sense of affirmation and to provide the conditions for students and others to display an active voice and presence. The pedagogical experience here becomes an invitation to make visible the languages, dreams, values, and encounters that constitute the lives of those whose histories are often

actively silenced. But Freire does more than argue for the legitimation of the culture of the oppressed. He also recognizes that such experiences are contradictory in nature and harbor not only radical potentialities but also the sedimentations of domination. Cultural power takes a twist in this instance and refers to the need to *work on* the experiences that make up the lives of the oppressed. This means that such experiences in their varied cultural forms have to be recovered critically in order to reveal both their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, this means that self-critique is complimented in the name of a radical pedagogy designed to unearth and critically appropriate those unclaimed emancipatory moments in bourgeois knowledge and experience that further provide the skills the oppressed will need to exercise leadership in the dominant society.

What is striking in this view is that Freire has fashioned a theory of cultural power and production that begins with the notion of popular education. Instead of beginning with abstract generalities about human nature, he rightly argues for pedagogical principles that arise from the concrete practices that constitute the terrains on which people live out their problems, hopes, and everyday experiences. All of this suggests taking seriously the cultural capital of the oppressed, developing critical and analytical tools to interrogate it, and staying in touch with dominant definitions of knowledge so we can analyze them for their usefulness and for the ways in which they bear the logic of domination.

Resistant Intellectuals and the Theory-Practice Relationship

Radical social theory has been plagued historically by the relationship between intellectuals and the masses, on the one hand, and the relationship between the forms of theory and practice on which it has been modeled on the other. Under the call for the unity of theory and practice, the possibility for emancipatory practice has often been negated through forms of "vanguardism" in which intellectuals virtually removed from the popular forces the ability to define for themselves the limits of their aims and practice. By assuming a virtual monopoly in the exercise of theoretical leadership, intellectuals unknowingly often reproduced the division of mental and manual labor that was at the core of most forms of domination. Instead of developing theories of practice rooted in the concrete experience of listening and learning with the oppressed, Marxist

intellectuals often developed theories for practice, or technical instruments for change, that ignored the necessity for a dialectic reflection on the every day dynamics and problems of the oppressed within the context of radical social transformation.

Freire's work refutes this approach to the theory-practice relationship and redefines the very notion of the intellectual. Like the Italian social theorist Antonio Gramsci, Freire redefines the category of intellectual and argues that all men and women are intellectuals. That is, regardless of one's social and economic function, all human beings perform as intellectuals by constantly interpreting and giving meaning to the world and by participating in a particular conception of the world. Moreover, the oppressed need to develop their own organic and resistant intellectuals who can learn with such groups while simultaneously helping them to foster modes of self-education and struggle against various forms of oppression. In this case, intellectuals are organic in that they are *not* outsiders bringing theory to the masses. On the contrary, they are theorists fused organically with the culture and practical activities of the oppressed. Rather than casually dispense knowledge to the grateful masses, intellectuals fuse with the oppressed in order to make and remake the conditions necessary for a radical social project.

This position is crucially important in highlighting the political function and importance of intellectuals. Equally significant is the way it redefines the notion of political struggle by emphasizing its pedagogical nature and the centrality of the popular and democratic nature of such a struggle. This raises the important question of how Freire defines the relationship between theory and practice.

For Freire, "there is no theoretical context if it is not in a dialectical unity with the concrete context." Rather than call for the collapse of theory into practice, Freire argues for a certain distance between theory and practice. He views theory as anticipatory in its nature and argues that it must take the concepts of understanding and possibility as its central moments. Theory is informed by an oppositional discourse that preserves its critical distance from the "facts" and experiences of the given society. The tension, indeed the conflict with practice, belongs to the essence of theory and is grounded in its very structure. Theory does not dictate practice; rather, it serves to hold practice at arm's length in order to mediate and critically comprehend the type of praxis needed within a specific setting at a particular time in history. There is no appeal to universal laws or historical necessity here; theory emerges from specific contexts and forms of experience in order to examine such contexts critically and then to intervene on the basis of an informed praxis.

But Freire's contribution to the nature of theory and practice and to understanding the role of the intellectual in the process of social transformation contains another important dimension. Freire argues that theory must be seen as the production of forms of discourse that arise from various specific social sites. A discourse may arise from the universities, from peasant communities, from workers' councils, or from various social movements. The issue here is that radical educators recognize that these different sites give rise to various forms of theoretical production and practice. And that each of these sites provides diverse and critical insights into the nature of domination and the possibilities for social and self-emancipation, and they do so from the historical and social particularities that give them meaning. What brings them together is a mutual respect forged in criticism and the need to struggle against all forms of domination.

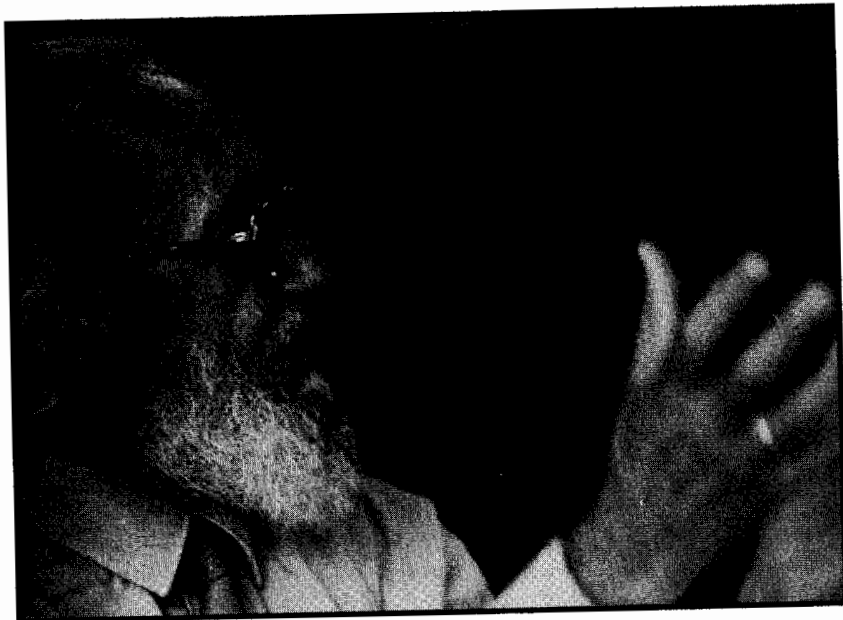
Freire and the Concept of Historical Insertion

Freire believes that a critical sensibility is an extension of an historical sensibility. That is, to understand the present, in both institutional and social terms, educators must place all pedagogical contexts in an historical context in order to see clearly their genesis and development. History is used by Freire in a twofold sense: on the one hand, it reveals in existing institutions and social relations the historical context that informs their meaning and the legacy that both hides and clarifies their political function. On the other hand, Freire points to the sedimented history that constitutes who we are as historical and social beings. In other words, the history that is anchored in the cultural forms that give meaning to the way we talk, think, dress, and act becomes subject to a form of historical analysis. History in this sense becomes dialectical in Freire's work because it is used to distinguish between the present as given and the present as containing emancipatory possibilities. This perspective makes the present as it constitutes our psyche and the wider society visible in terms of its revolutionary possibilities and in doing so points to the need for a critical awakening (what Freire calls the process of denunciation and annunciation) that is grounded in the capacity for social transformation.

In conclusion, Freire provides in this book a view of pedagogy and praxis that is partisan to its core, for in its origins and intentions it is

for "choosing life." Moreover, Freire demonstrates once again that he is not only a man of the present but also a man of the future. His speech, actions, warmth, and vision represent a way of acknowledging and criticizing a world that lives perilously close to destruction. In one sense, Freire's work and presence remind us not simply of what we are but also of the possibilities of what we might become. His newest book could not have come at a more important time.

CHAPTER TEN



Education, Liberation and the Church

We begin with an affirmation; though almost a truism, it clearly sets forth our position on the present subject.¹ We cannot discuss churches, education, or the role of the churches in education other than historically. Churches are not abstract entities; they are institutions involved in history. Therefore to understand their educational role we must take into consideration the concrete situation in which they exist.

The moment these statements are taken seriously, we can no longer speak of the neutrality of the churches or the neutrality of education. Such assertions of neutrality must be judged as coming either from those who have a totally naive view of the church and history or from those who shrewdly mask a realistic understanding behind a claim of neutrality. Objectively, nevertheless, both groups fit into the same ideological perspective. When they insist on the neutrality of the church in relation to

history or to political action, they take political stands that inevitably favor the power elites against the masses. "Washing one's hands" of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.

Alongside the neutral attitude, there are more subtle and more attractive means of serving the interests of the powerful while appearing to favor the oppressed. Here again we find the naive and the shrewd walking hand in hand. I refer again to what we might call anaesthetic or aspirin practices, expressions of a subjectivist idealism that can only lead to the preservation of the status quo. In the last analysis the basic presupposition of such action is the illusion that the hearts of men and women can be transformed while the social structures that make those hearts "sick" are left intact and unchanged.

The illusion that suggests it is possible, by means of sermons, humanitarian works, and the encouragement of otherworldly values, to change men's consciousness and thereby transform the world exists only in those we term naive (or moralistic as Niebuhr would have said).² The shrewd are well aware that such action can slow down the basic process of radical change in social structures. This radical change is a precondition for the awakening of consciousness, and the process is neither automatic nor mechanical.

Although, objectively, both groups are equally ineffectual in producing liberation or the real humanization of human beings, there is still a basic difference between them, which should be underlined. Both are caught up in the ideology of the ruling social class, but the shrewd consciously accept this ideology as their own. The naive, in the first instance unconscious of their true position, can through their action come to take the ideology of domination for their own and, in the process, move from naiveté to shrewdness. They can also come to renounce their idealistic illusions altogether, forsaking their uncritical adherence to the ruling class. In committing themselves to the oppressed, they begin a new period of apprenticeship. This is not, however, to say that their commitment to the oppressed is thereby finally sealed. It will be severely tested during the course of this new apprenticeship when confronted, in a more serious and profound way than ever before, with the hazardous nature of existence. To pass such a test is not easy.

This new apprenticeship will violently break down the elitist concept of existence they had absorbed while being ideologized. The *sine qua non* the apprenticeship demands is that, first of all, they really experience their own Easter, that they die as elitists so as to be res-

urrected on the side of the oppressed, that they be born again with the beings who were not allowed to be. Such a process implies a renunciation of myths that are dear to them: the myth of their superiority, of their purity of soul, of their virtues, their wisdom, the myth that they save the poor, the myth of the neutrality of the church, of theology, education, science, technology, the myth of their own impartiality. From these grow the other myths: of the inferiority of other people, of their spiritual and physical impurity, and of the absolute ignorance of the oppressed.

This Easter, which results in the changing of consciousness, must be existentially experienced. The real Easter is not commemorative rhetoric. It is praxis; it is historical involvement. The old Easter of rhetoric is dead—with no hope of resurrection. It is only in the authenticity of historical praxis that Easter becomes the death that makes life possible. But the bourgeois world view, basically necrophiliac (death-loving) and therefore static, is unable to accept this supremely biophiliac (life-loving) experience of Easter. The bourgeois mentality—which is far more than just a convenient abstraction—kills the profound historical dynamism of Easter and turns it into no more than a date on the calendar.

The lust to possess, a sign of the necrophiliac world view, rejects the deeper meaning of resurrection.³ Why should I be interested in rebirth if I hold in my hands, as objects to be possessed, the torn body and soul of the oppressed? I can only experience rebirth at the side of the oppressed by being born again, with them, in the process of liberation. I cannot turn such a rebirth into a means of *owning* the world, since it is essentially a means of *transforming* the world.

If those who were once naive continue their new apprenticeship, they will come to understand that consciousness is not changed by lessons, lectures, and eloquent sermons but by the action of human beings on the world. Consciousness does not arbitrarily create reality, as they thought in their old naive days of subjectivist idealism.

Conscientization

They will also discover to what extent their idealism had confused any number of concepts—for example, "conscientization," which is so badly understood—when they tried to offer magic remedies for healing the hearts of mankind without changing the social structures, or, equally idealistic, when they claimed that conscientization was a similarly magic means of reconciling the irreconcilable.

Conscientization appeared to them then as a sort of third way that would allow them to escape miraculously from the problems of class conflict, creating through mutual understanding a world of peace and harmony between oppressor and oppressed. When both were conscientized there would be neither oppressor nor oppressed, for all would love each other as brothers, and differences would be resolved through round-table discussions—or over a good whiskey.

Basically, this idealistic vision, which works only for the oppressors, is exactly the position that Niebuhr vehemently condemned as moralistic, whether it be found in the religious or the secular domain.⁴

Such mythologizing of conscientization, be it in Latin America or elsewhere, be it at the hands of the shrewd or the naive, constitutes an obstacle rather than an aid to the liberation process. It becomes, on the one hand, an obstacle because in emptying conscientization of its dialectical content and thus making it into a panacea, it puts it, as we have seen, at the service of the oppressors. On the other hand, it creates an obstacle because such idealistic disfiguration leads many Latin American groups, especially among youth, to fall into the opposite error of mechanical objectivism. In reacting against the alienating subjectivism that causes this distortion, they end up by denying the role of consciousness in the transformation of reality and therefore also denying the dialectical union between consciousness and the world. They no longer see the difference between such things as class consciousness and the consciousness of class needs.⁵ Between the two there is a sort of dialectical gap that must be bridged. Neither subjectivism nor mechanical objectivism is able to do this.

These groups are right in affirming, as do we, that one cannot change consciousness outside of praxis. But it must be emphasized that the praxis by which consciousness is changed is not only action but action *and* reflection. Thus there is a unity between practice and theory in which both are constructed, shaped, and reshaped in constant movement from practice to theory, then back to a new practice.

Theoretical praxis is what occurs when we step back from accomplished praxis (or from praxis that is being accomplished) in order to see it more clearly. Thus, theoretical praxis is only authentic when it maintains the dialectical movement between itself and that praxis which will be carried out in a particular context. These two forms of praxis are two inseparable moments of the process by which we reach critical understanding. In other words, reflection is only real when it sends us back, as Sartre insists, to the given situation in which we act.

Hence conscientization, whether or not associated with literacy training, must be a critical attempt to reveal reality, not just alienating small talk. It must, that is, be related to political involvement. There is no conscientization if the result is not the conscious action of the oppressed as an exploited social class, struggling for liberation.⁶ What is more, no one conscientizes anyone else. The educator and the people together conscientize themselves, thanks to the dialectical movement that relates critical reflection on past action to the continuing struggle.

Education for Liberation

Another dimension of the mythologizing of conscientization—whether by the shrewd or the naive—is their attempt to convert the well-known education for liberation into a purely methodological problem, considering methods as something purely neutral. This removes—or pretends to remove—all political content from education, so that the expression *education for liberation* no longer means anything.

Actually, insofar as this type of education is reduced to methods and techniques by which students and educators look at social reality—when they do look at it—only to describe it, this education becomes as domesticating as any other. Education for liberation does not merely free students from blackboards just to offer them projectors.⁷ On the contrary, it is concerned, as a social praxis, with helping to free human beings from the oppression that strangles them in their objective reality. It is therefore political education, just as political as the education that claims to be neutral, although actually serving the power elite. It is thus a form of education that can only be put into practice systematically when society is radically transformed.⁸ Only the “innocent” could possibly think that the power elite would encourage a type of education that denounces them even more clearly than do all the contradictions of their power structures.⁹ Such naiveté also reveals a dangerous underestimation of the capacity and audacity of the elite. Truly liberating education can only be put into practice outside the ordinary system, and even then with great cautiousness, by those who overcome their naiveté and commit themselves to authentic liberation.

A growing number of Christians in Latin America are discovering these things and finding themselves forced to take sides: either to change their naiveté into shrewdness and consciously align themselves with the ideology of domination or to join forces with the oppressed and in full

identification with them seek true liberation. We have already stated that if they renounce their uncritical adherence to the dominant classes, their new apprenticeship with the people presents a challenge; in meeting this challenge they encounter risks formerly unknown.

During what we are calling their new apprenticeship, many Christians soon realize that previously when they had engaged in purely palliative action—whether social or religious (for example, fervent support of maxims such as “The family that prays together stays together”)—they were praised for their Christian virtues. They now begin to realize, however, that the family that prays together also needs a house, employment, bread, clothing, health, and education for their children, that they need to express themselves and their world by creating and re-creating it, that their bodies, souls, and dignity must be respected if they are to stay together in more than suffering and misery.¹⁰ When they begin to see all this, they find their very faith being called into question by those who wish to have even more political, economic, and ecclesiastical power for the reshaping of the consciousness of others.

As their new apprenticeship begins to show more clearly the dramatic situation in which they live and which leads them to undertake action that is less paternalistic, they come to be seen as diabolic.¹¹ They are denounced as serving an international demonic force that threatens Western Christian civilization, a civilization that in reality has very little that is Christian about it.

Thus they discover through praxis that their innocent period was not in the least impartial. But at this point many are afraid; they lose the courage to face the existential risk of historical commitment. They return to their idealistic illusions, but now as members of the shrewd camp.

They need to be able to justify their return. Hence they claim that the masses, who are “uneducated and incapable,” must be protected from losing their faith in God, which is “so beautiful, so sweet, and so edifying”; they must be protected from the “subversive evil of the false Christians who praise the Chinese Cultural Revolution and admire the Cuban Revolution.” They sign up for the defense of the faith when what they are really defending is their own class interests, to which that faith is subordinated.

They must then insist on the “neutrality” of the church, whose fundamental task, they say, is to reconcile the irreconcilable through maximum social stability. Thus they castrate the prophetic dimension of the church, whose witness becomes one of fear—fear of change, fear

that an unjust world will be radically transformed, fear of getting lost in an uncertain future. But a church that refuses historical involvement is nevertheless involved in history. In fact, those who preach that the church is outside history contradict themselves in practice, because they automatically place themselves at the side of those who refuse to allow the oppressed classes to be. Afraid of this uncertainty, and anxious to avoid the risk of a future that must always be constructed and not just received, the church badly loses its way. It can no longer test itself, either through the denunciation of the unjust world, or the annunciation of a more just world to be built by the historical-social praxis of the oppressed. In this situation, the church can be no more utopian, prophetic, or filled with hope than are the ruling classes to which it is allied.¹² Deprived of its prophetic vision, it takes the road of formalism in bureaucratic rites where hope, detached from the future, becomes only an alienated and alienating abstraction. Instead of stimulating the pilgrim, it invites him to stand still. Basically, it is a church that forbids itself the Easter it preaches. It is a church that is freezing to death, unable to respond to the aspirations of a troubled, utopian and biophile youth to whom one can no longer speak a medieval language, and who are not interested in discussing the sex of angels, for these youths are challenged by the drama of their own history. Most of these young people are well aware that the basic problem of Latin America is not the laziness of the people, or their inferiority, or their lack of education. The problem is imperialism. And they know that this imperialism is neither abstraction nor slogan but tangible reality, an invading, destroying presence. Until this basic contradiction is overcome, Latin America and the rest of the Third World cannot develop. It can only modernize.¹³ For without liberation, there can be no real development of dependent societies.

A Theology of Liberation

Many theologians who are today becoming more and more historically involved with the oppressed rightly speak of a political theology of liberation rather than one of modernizing development. These theologians can begin to speak to the troubling questions of a generation that chooses revolutionary change rather than the reconciliation of irreconcilables. They know very well that only the oppressed, as the social class that has been forbidden to speak, can become the utopians, the prophets, and the messengers of hope, provided that their future is not

simply a reformed repetition of the present. Their future is the realization of their liberation—without which they cannot be.¹⁴ Only they can denounce the order that crushes them, transforming that order in praxis; only they can announce a new world, one that is constantly being re-created and renewed.

That is why their hope rests not in an invitation to halt the pilgrimage, an invitation offered not only by the traditionalists but also by the alienating modernizers. Their hope lies in the call “Forward, march!”, not the senseless wandering of those who give up and run, but the “Forward, march” of those who hold history in their hands, who create it and re-create themselves in it. It is the “Forward, march” they will eventually have to embark upon if they are to experience death as an oppressed class and be born again to liberation.

We must stress yet again that this journey cannot be made within their consciousness. It must be made in history. No one can make such a journey simply in the inside of his being.

But there are a growing number of people who, whether or not they still claim to be Christians, commit themselves to the liberation of the dominated classes. Their experience teaches them that being Christian doesn't necessarily imply being reactionary, just as being revolutionary doesn't always imply being demonic. Being revolutionary implies struggling against oppression and exploitation, for the liberation and freedom of the oppressed, concretely and not idealistically.¹⁵ In their new apprenticeship they finally realize that it is not sufficient to give lip service to the idea that men and women are human beings if nothing is done objectively to help them experience what it means to be *persons*. They learn that it is not through good works (Niebuhr's phrase here was “humanitarian”) that the oppressed become incarnate as persons. They have, then, managed to overcome the first obstacles that were too much for some of their traveling companions; but that is no guarantee that they will survive the harder trials that lie ahead.

At some point in the process the oppressor's violence will be directed exclusively against the working class, usually sparing committed intellectuals, since in the last analysis they belong to the same group as the ruling class; at other times, however, their violence will be indiscriminate. When this happens, many will retreat, keep quiet, or adjust to the situation; others will react by undertaking new commitments. A basic difference between those who leave and those who stay is that the latter accept, as an integral part of existence, the dramatic tension between past and future, death and life, staying and going, creating and

not creating, between saying the word and mutilating silence, between hope and despair, being and nonbeing. It is an illusion to think that human beings can escape this dramatic tension. We have no right so to submerge ourselves in the drama of our own life that we lose ourselves in daily triviality.¹⁶ In fact, if I lose myself in the details of daily life, I lose, at the same time, a vision of the dramatic meaning of my existence. I become either fatalistic or cynical. In the same way, if I try to escape from the daily demands and details to take up my life's dramatic character—but without at the same time becoming historically involved—I can have no other destiny than to fall into an empty intellectualism, equally alienating. I shall then see existence as something impossible and hopeless. I have no other chance of conquering the alienating trivialities of daily life than by way of historical praxis, which is social and not individual. It is only insofar as I accept to the full my responsibility within the play of this dramatic tension that I make myself a conscious presence in the world.

I cannot permit myself to be a mere spectator. On the contrary, I must demand my place in the process of change. So the dramatic tension between the past and the future, death and life, being and nonbeing, is no longer a kind of dead end for me; I can see it for what it really is: a permanent challenge to which I must respond. And my response can be none other than my historical praxis—in other words, revolutionary praxis.

The revolution does not do away with the dramatic tension of our existence. It resolves the antagonistic contradictions that make that tension even more dramatic, but precisely because it participates in that tension it is as permanent as the tension itself.

A reign of undisturbed peace is unthinkable in history. History is *becoming*; it is a human event. But rather than feeling disappointed and frightened by critical discovery of the tension in which my humanity places me, I discover in that tension the joy of being.

At the same time, dramatic tension cannot be reduced to my own existential experience. I cannot of course deny the singularity and uniqueness of my existence but that does not make my existence, in itself, isolated from other existences, a model of absolute meaning. On the contrary, it is in the intersubjectivity, mediated by objectivity, that my existence makes sense. “I exist” does not come before “we exist,” but is fulfilled in it. The individualistic, bourgeois concept of existence cannot grasp the true social and historical basis of human existence. It is of the essence of humanity that men and women create their own

existence, in a creative act that is always social and historical even while having its specific, personal dimensions.

Existence is not despair, but risk. If I don't exist dangerously, I cannot be. But if my existence is historical, the existential risk is not a simple abstract category; it is also historical. That means that to exist is first and foremost to risk oneself, though the form and effectiveness of the risk will vary from person to person and from place to place. I do not assume risk in Brazil as a Swiss assumes it in Geneva, even if we are both of one political mind. Our sociohistorical reality will condition the form our risk will take. To seek to universalize the form and content of existential risk is an idealistic illusion, unacceptable to anyone who thinks dialectically.

Dialectical thinking constitutes one of the major challenges to those who follow the option we are talking about here. It is not always easy, even for those who identify with the people, to overcome a petit-bourgeois education that is individualistic and intellectual, dichotomizing theory and practice, the transcendent and the mundane, intellectual work and manual work.¹⁷ This trademark shows constantly in attitudes and behavior patterns in which the dominated classes become mere objects of their "impatient revolutionism."

The Role of the Church

In trying, now, to analyze more deeply the role of the church, especially its educational role, we must return to some of the points made above, first of all, to the fact that it cannot be politically neutral. It cannot avoid making a choice, and therefore we in turn cannot discuss the church's role abstractly or metaphysically. Its choice will condition its whole approach to education—its concept, objectives, methods, processes, and all its auxiliary effects. This conditioning affects the theological training of the leadership of the militant church, as well as the education dispensed by the church. Even theological education and reflection are touched.

In a class society, the power elite necessarily determines what education will be, and therefore its objectives. The objectives will certainly not be opposed to the elite's interests. As we have already said, it would be supremely naive to imagine that the elite would in any way promote or accept an education that stimulated the oppressed to discover the *raison d'être* of the social structure. The most that could be expected

is that the elite might permit talk of such education, and occasional experiments that could be immediately suppressed should the status quo be threatened.

Thus the Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM) can talk about liberating education in nearly all its official documents; as long as it is not put into practice, nothing serious will happen to it. At any rate, we should not be surprised (though this is not based on any hard evidence) if one day CELAM is severely restricted by the power elite, through the antiprophetic church of which we spoke. This church, which is freezing to death in the warm bosom of the bourgeoisie, can certainly not tolerate any ideas, even if only verbal, that the elite considers diabolic.

Our task in considering the role of the church in education would be simplified if we could count on coherence between church and gospel. In that case, it would be sufficient to look at the dependent condition of Latin American society (with the exception of Cuba and up to a point Nicaragua) and set up a strategy of action for the church. The reality, however, is different. We cannot think in a vacuum.

It is not possible to speak objectively of the educational role of the various denominations as being unified and coherent. On the contrary, their roles differ, sometimes opposing each other, according to the political line, whether evident, hidden, or disguised, which the different churches are living out in history. The traditionalist church, first of all, is still intensely colonialist. It is a missionary church, in the worst sense of the word—a necrophiliac winner of souls; hence its taste for masochistic emphasis on sin, hellfire, and eternal damnation. The mundane, dichotomized from the transcendental, is the "filth" in which humans have to pay for their sins. The more they suffer, the more they purify themselves, finally reaching heaven and eternal rest. Work is not, for them, the action of men and women on the world, transforming and re-creating, but rather the price that must be paid for being human.

In this traditionalist line, whether it be Protestant or Catholic, we find what the Swiss sociologist Christian Lalive calls the haven of the masses.¹⁸ This view of the world, of life, satisfies the fatalistic and frightened consciousness of the oppressed at a certain moment of their historical experience. They find in it a kind of healing for their existential fatigue. So it is that the more the masses are drowned in their culture of silence, with all the violence that this implies on the part of the oppressors, the more the masses tend to take refuge in churches that offer that sort of ministry.¹⁹ Submerged in this culture of silence, where

the only voice to be heard is that of the ruling classes, they see this church as a sort of womb in which they can hide from an aggressive society. In despising this world as a world of sin, vice, and impurity, they are in one sense taking their revenge on their oppressors, its owners. It is as if they were saying to the bosses, "You are powerful—but the world over which your power holds sway is an evil one and we reject it." Forbidden as a subordinate social class to have their say, they fool themselves that the prayers for salvation they voice in their haven are a genuine form of speaking out.

None of this resolves the real problems of the oppressed. Their catharsis actually alienates them further, for it directs their anger against the world and not against the social system that is ruining the world. Thus, seeing the world itself as the antagonist, they attempt the impossible: to renounce the world's mediation in their pilgrimage. By doing so, they hope to reach transcendence without passing by way of the mundane; they want metahistory without experiencing history; they want salvation without knowing liberation. The pain of domination leads them to accept this historical anaesthesia in the hope that it will strengthen them to fight sin and the devil—leaving untouched all the while the real causes of their oppression. They cannot see, beyond their present situation, the untested feasibility, the future as a liberation project that they must create for themselves.

This traditional type of church is usually found in backward, closed societies, mostly agricultural, which depend upon the export of raw materials and have only a minimal internal market; here the culture of silence is fundamental. Like the archaic social structures, the traditionalist church remains unchanged throughout the modernization of these societies. The force of such traditionalist religion is seen even in the urban centers being transformed under the impact of industrialization.²⁰ Only a qualitative change in the consciousness of the people can overcome the need to see the church as the haven of the masses. And as we have seen, this qualitative change does not happen automatically, mechanically, or merely within consciousness.

Furthermore, technological modernization does not necessarily make people more capable of critical analysis, because it too is not neutral. It is dependent on the ideology that commands it.

For all these reasons and for many more that would take too long to analyze, the traditionalist line is unquestionably allied to the ruling classes, whether or not it is aware of this. The role that these churches can (and do) play in the field of education is conditioned then by their

view of the world, of religion, and of human beings and their destiny. Their idea of education and its application cannot help being paralyzing, alienating, and alienated. Only those who hold this perspective critically—rather than naively—will be able to escape from their trap through praxis, by entering into a totally different commitment to the dominated classes and so becoming truly prophetic.

The Modernizing Church

Some churches abandon the traditionalist perspective for a new attitude. History shows that the new position begins to emerge when modernizing elements replace the traditional structures of society. The masses of the people, previously almost completely submerged in the historical process, now begin to emerge in response to industrialization.²¹ Society also changes. New challenges are presented to the dominating classes, demanding different answers.

The imperialist interests that condition this transition become more and more aggressive. They use various means of penetration into and control over the dependent society. At a given moment the emphasis on industrialization gives rise to a nationalist ideology of development that makes a case for, among other things, a pact between the national bourgeoisie and the emerging proletariat.

Economists have been the first to analyze this process, followed closely by sociologists and some educators. Together they plan and put into practice the concept of social planning. At this point, the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) begins to play a decisive role, both through technical missions and through its adherence to development politics. Later comes the contribution of the Latin American Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES), an organ of the United Nations whose job is to educate economists for the entire South American continent.

Obviously, none of this happens by chance or in isolation. The process is an intrinsic part of the history that Latin American societies are living, in varying degrees of intensity. This complex movement, like the different perspectives produced in response to the so-called backwardness of Latin America, is neither accidental nor the result of some caprice.

As we have seen, imperialistic economic interests, such as the need for wider markets, force the national elite (which is almost always a

purely local expression of a foreign elite) to find ways to reform the archaic structures without, at the same time, frustrating their interests. For imperialism and its national allies, the important thing is that this reformist process—publicly called development—should not affect the basic relationship between the master society and its dependent societies. Development is acceptable, but it must not alter the state of dependence! With the exception of a few minor points that will not alter the state of the subordinate society, the political, economic, and cultural decisions concerning the transformation of the dependent society will be made in the master society.

So it is that the Latin American societies, with the exception of Cuba since its revolution, and up to a point Nicaragua, are modernizing rather than developing in the real sense of the word. Latin America can only truly develop when the fundamental contradiction of dependence is resolved. This demands that decision-making on change must rest in the hands of the masses of oppressed people in the society concerned; it must be independent from a superimposed bourgeois elite.

Thus development is liberation on two levels: the whole dependent society liberating itself from imperialism, and the oppressed social classes liberating themselves from the oppressive elite. This is because real development is impossible in a class society.

The process of imperialist expansion produces new political and social situations. The process of transition in the dependent society implies the contradictory presences of both a proletariat that is being modernized and a traditional proletariat, a technico-professional petite bourgeoisie and a traditional middle class, a traditional church and a modernizing church, a highly baroque academic education and the technico-professional education demanded by industrialization.²²

So it is that in spite of what the mechanists think, the movement from one stage to another is not automatic. There are no rigid geographical frontiers between the stages; both dimensions coexist in transition.

The proletariat of the modernization phase lives in a new historical experience, that of transition, giving birth to a new political action style: populism. Its directors play the game of mediator between the emerging common people and the ruling classes.²³ Populism is unthinkable in a situation where the common people have not yet made their emergence. It is found in urban centers rather than in the latifundia or estates where the peasant masses are still submerged.

At the same time, in the historical framework that gives birth to it, populism tends toward do-goodism; hence its possibilities of manip-

ulation. The emerging masses of common people are intensely conditioned by their experience in the culture of silence.²⁴

During the process of emergence they obviously have no class consciousness, since their former state of immersion gave them no chance to develop it. They are, then, as ambiguous as the populism that attempts to respond to them. On the one hand they make demands. On the other, they accept the formulas of do-goodism and manipulation. That is why the traditionalist churches also survive during the period of transition, even in the modernized urban centers. These churches often choose to enhance their own prestige, since after the stage of populism there may well be a new phase characterized by violent military regimes. Repression, reactivating the old life styles of the masses (the culture of silence), forces them to take refuge in the church. As we have seen, these churches, existing side by side with those that have modernized, modernize too in certain respects, thereby becoming more efficient in their traditionalism.

We have seen that the modernization process of the dependent society never gets translated into fundamental changes in the relationship between the dependent society and the master society, and that the emergence of the masses does not by itself constitute their critical consciousness. In the same way, it is interesting to note, the churches' pilgrimage toward modernization never gets translated into historic involvement with the oppressed people in any real sense that leads toward that people's liberation.

Challenged by the increased efficiency of a society that is modernizing its archaic structures, the modernizing church improves its bureaucracy so that it can be more efficient in its social activities (its do-goodism) and in its pastoral activities. It replaces empirical means by technical processes. Its former charity centers directed by lay persons (in the Catholic church by the Daughters of Mary) become known as community centers directed by social workers. And the men and women who were previously known by their own names are today numbers in a card index.

Mass media (which are actually media for issuing communiqués to the masses) become an irresistible attraction to the churches. But the modern and modernizing church can hardly be condemned for attempting to perfect its working tools; what is more serious is the political option that clearly conditions the process of modernization. Like the traditionalist churches, of which they are a new version, they are not committed to the oppressed but to the power elite. That is why they defend structural

reform over the radical transformation of structures; they speak of the humanization of capitalism rather than its total suppression.

The traditionalist churches alienate the oppressed social classes by encouraging them to view the world as evil. The modernizing churches alienate them in a different way: by defending the reforms that maintain the status quo. By reducing such expressions as *humanism* and *humanization* to abstract categories, the modern churches empty them of any real meaning. Such phrases become mere slogans whose only contribution is to serve the reactionary forces. In truth, there is no humanization without liberation, just as there is no liberation without a revolutionary transformation of the class society, for in the class society all humanization is impossible. Liberation becomes concrete only when society is changed, not when its structures are simply modernized.

Insofar as the modernizing churches busy themselves with no more than peripheral changes and plead the case of neocapitalistic measures, they will have their audience only among the naive or the shrewd. The young people who are neither naive nor shrewd but are challenged by the drama of Latin America or other parts of the Third World cannot accept the invitation of the modernizing churches that support conservative and reformist positions. Not only do they refuse the invitation, it provokes them into assuming attitudes that are not always valid, such as the objectivist position discussed elsewhere in this article.

The churches' conservative position, rejected by these young people, does not contradict their modernism, for the modernization of which we are talking is eminently conservative, since it reforms in order to preserve the status quo. Hence the churches give the impression of moving while actually they are standing still. They create the illusion of marching on while really stabilizing themselves. They die because they refuse to die.

This is the kind of church that would still say to Christ today, "Why leave, Master, if everything here is so beautiful, so good?" Their language conceals rather than reveals. It speaks of the poor or of the underprivileged rather than the oppressed. While it sees the alienations of the ruling class and dominated class on the same level, it ignores the antagonism between them, the result of the system that created them. But if the system alienates both groups, it alienates each in a different way. The rulers are alienated to the degree that, sacrificing their *being* for a false "*having*," they are drugged with power and so stop *being*; the dominated, prevented to a certain degree from "*having*," finish with so little power that *being* is impossible. Turning work into merchandise,

the system creates those who buy it and those who sell it. The error of the naive and the shrewdness of the shrewd is seen in their affirmation that such a contradiction is a purely moral question.

The ruling classes, as is the logic of the class system, prohibit the dominated class from *being*. In this process the ruling class itself ceases to *be*. The system itself keeps them from rising above the contradiction, from any movement that would end their alienation as well as that of those they dominate. The dominated alone are called to fulfill this task in history. The ruling class, as such, cannot carry it out. What they can do—within their historical limits—is to reform and to modernize the system according to the new demands the system allows them to perceive, thus in effect maintaining that which results in the alienation of all.

Under the conditions in which the modernizing churches act, their concepts of education, its objectives, its application, all must form a coherent unity within their general political position. That is why, even though they speak of liberating education, they are conditioned by their vision of liberation as an individual activity that should take place through a change of consciousness and not through the social and historical praxis of human beings. So they end up by putting the accent on methods that can be considered neutral. Liberating education for the modernizing church is finally reduced to liberating the students from blackboards, static classes, and textbook curricula, and offering them projectors and other audio-visual accessories, more dynamic classes, and a new technico-professional teaching.

The Prophetic Church

Finally, another kind of church has been taking shape in the Third World though it is not often visible as a coherent totality. It is a church as old as Christianity itself, without being traditional; as new as Christianity, without being modernizing. It is the prophetic church. Opposed and attacked by both traditionalist and modernizing churches, as well as by the elite of the power structures, this utopian, prophetic, and hope-filled movement rejects do-goodism and palliative reforms in order to commit itself to the dominated social classes and to radical social change.

In contrast with the churches considered above, it rejects all static forms of thought. It accepts becoming, in order to *be*. Because it thinks critically this prophetic church cannot think of itself as neutral. Nor does it try to hide its choice. Therefore it does not separate worldliness

from transcendence or salvation from liberation. It knows that what finally counts is not the "I am" or the "I know," the "I free myself" or the "I save myself;" nor even the "I teach you," "I free you," or "I save you," but the "we are," "we know," "we save ourselves."

This prophetic line can only be understood as an expression of the dramatic and challenging situation of the Third World. It emerges when the contradictions in society become apparent. It is at this moment, too, that revolution is seen as the means of liberation for the oppressed people, and the military coup as the reactionary countermove.

The world's prophetic Christians may disagree among themselves, especially at the point of action, but they are the ones who have renounced their innocence in order to join the oppressed classes, and who remain faithful to their commitment. Protestant or Catholic—from the point of view of this prophetic position the division is of no importance—clergy or lay, they have all had to travel a hard route of experience from their idealistic visions toward a dialectical vision of reality. They have learned, not only as a result of their praxis with the people, but also from the courageous example of many young people. They now see that reality, a process and not a static fact, is full of contradictions, and that social conflicts are not metaphysical categories but rather historical expressions of the confrontation of these contradictions. Any attempt, therefore, to solve conflict without touching the contradictions that have generated it only stifles the conflict and at the same time strengthens the ruling class.

The prophetic position demands a critical analysis of the social structures in which the conflict takes place. This means that it demands of its followers a knowledge of sociopolitical science, since this science cannot be neutral; this demands an ideological choice.

Such prophetic perspective does not represent an escape into a world of unattainable dreams. It demands a scientific knowledge of the world as it really is. For to denounce the present reality and announce its radical transformation into another reality capable of giving birth to new men and women implies gaining through praxis a new knowledge of reality. The dominated classes must take part in this denunciation and annunciation. It cannot be done if they are left out of the picture. The prophetic position is not petit-bourgeois. It is well aware that authentic action demands a permanent process that only reaches its maximal point when the dominated class, through praxis, also becomes prophetic, utopian and full of hope—in other words, revolutionary. A society in a state of permanent revolution cannot manage without a

permanent prophetic vision. Without it, society stagnates and is no longer revolutionary.²⁵

In the same way, no church can be really prophetic if it remains the haven of the masses or the agent of modernization and conservation. The prophetic church is no home for the oppressed, alienating them further by empty denunciations. On the contrary, it invites them to a new Exodus. Nor is the prophetic church one that chooses modernization and thereby does no more than stagnate. Christ was no conservative. The prophetic church, like him, must move forward constantly, forever dying and forever being reborn. In order to be, it must always be in a state of *becoming*. The prophetic church must also accept an existence that is in dramatic tension between past and future, staying and going, speaking the word and keeping silence, being and not being. There is no prophecy without risk.

This prophetic attitude, which emerges in the praxis of numerous Christians in the challenging historical situation of Latin America, is accompanied by a rich and very necessary theological reflection. The theology of so-called development gives way to the theology of liberation—a prophetic, utopian theology, full of hope. Little does it matter that this theology is not yet well systematized. Its content arises from the hopeless situation of dependent, exploited, invaded societies. It is stimulated by the need to rise above the contradictions that explain and produce that dependence. Since it is prophetic, this theology of liberation cannot attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable.

At this moment in history, theology cannot spend its time discussing secularization (which in the end is the modern form of sacralization)²⁶ or try to entertain us with the death of God discussion, which in many ways reveals an acritical tendency of complete adaptation by the "un-dimensionalized and depoliticized man of the affluent societies," as Hugo Assmann has aptly phrased it.²⁷

To digress a moment from our specific subject, we should add here that this prophetic attitude toward the world and history is by no means exclusive to Latin America or other areas of the Third World. It is not an exotic attitude peculiar to underdevelopment—first because the original Christian position is itself prophetic, at whatever point in time and place. Only the particular content of its witness will vary, according to the precise historical circumstances. Moreover, the concept of the Third World is ideological and political, not geographic. The so-called First World has within it and against it its own Third World. And the Third World has its First World, represented by the ideology of domi-

nation and the power of the ruling classes. The Third World is in the last analysis the world of silence, of oppression, of dependence, of exploitation, of the violence exercised by the ruling classes on the oppressed.

Europeans and North Americans, with their technological societies, have no need to go to the Third World countries in order to become prophetic. They need only go to the outskirts of their big cities, without naiveté or shrewdness, and there they will find sufficient stimulus to do some fresh thinking for themselves. They will find themselves confronted with various expressions of the Third World. They can begin to understand the concern that gives rise to the prophetic position in Latin America.

Thus it is clear that the educational role of the prophetic church must be totally different from that of the other churches we have discussed. Education must be an instrument of transforming action, a political praxis at the service of permanent human liberation. This, let us repeat, does not happen only in the consciousness of people, but presupposes a radical change of structures, in which process consciousness will itself be transformed.

From the prophetic point of view, it makes little difference in what specific area education happens; it will always be an effort to clarify the concrete context in which the teacher-students and student-teachers are educated and are united by their presence in action. It will always be a demythologizing praxis.

This brings us back to our opening statement: the church, education, and the role of the churches in education can only be discussed historically. It is in history that mankind is called to respond to the prophetic movement in the Third World.

NOTES

1. *This chapter first appeared in *Study Encounter*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1973). It was translated by William Bloom with the help of Esther Meyer, Helen Mackintosh, and Helen Franco.

2. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960).

3. A phrase I owe to Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965).

4. Referring to the moralists, Niebuhr says: "They do not recognize that when collective power, whether in the form of imperialism or class domination, exploits weakness, it can never be dislodged unless power is raised against it. . . . Modern religious idealists usually follow in the wake of social scientists in advocating compromise and accommodation as the way to social justice." Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, pp. xii and xix.

5. "For the purposes of the historian, i.e. the student of micro-history, or of history 'as it happened' (and of the present 'as it happens') as distinct from the general and rather abstract models of the historical transformation of societies, class and the problem of class consciousness are inseparable. Class in the full sense only comes into existence at the historical moment when classes begin to acquire consciousness of themselves as such." E.J. Hobsbawm "Class Consciousness in History," in Istvan Mesaros, (ed.), *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 19--), p. 6.

6. On this, see Georg Lukács, *Histoire et Conscience de Classe* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1960).

7. Paulo Freire, "Cultural Action: An Introduction," in *Conscientization for Liberation* (Washington, D.C.: CICOP, 1971).

8. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).

9. A representative of a Latin American elite, answering a journalist's question during an interview, said, "I could never permit an educational process which would awaken the potential of the masses and put me in the difficult situation of having to listen to them. It would be like asking for a rope to hang myself by."

10. Concerning free employment as a necessary condition for human liberty, see *Fifteen Bishops Speak for the Third World* (Mexico: CIDOC, 1967). pp.1-11.

11. Dom Heider Câmara, the prophetic archbishop of Olinda and Recife (Brazil), is today considered one of these terrible demons. It's always the same. The necrophiles can never stand the presence of a biophile.

12. From the beginning of modern times, hopes for something new from God have emigrated from the Church and have been invested in revolution and rapid social change. It was most often reaction and conservatism that remained in the Church. Thus the Christian Church became "religious". "That is, she cultivated and apotheosized tradition. Her authority was sanctioned by what had been in force always and everywhere from the earliest times." Jürgen Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution and the Future* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969). pp. 5-6.

13. This theme is more fully developed in my *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

14. In reality, only the oppressed can conceive a future that is radically different from their present insofar as they gain a dominated class consciousness. The oppressors, as the ruling class, can only imagine the future as the preservation of their present—their role of oppressors. So while the future of the first rests in the revolutionary transformation of society—a condition for

their own liberation—the future of the second presupposes mere social modernization in which they can maintain their position as rulers.

15. At this point, of course, no revolutionary, Christian or non-Christian, can accept a church that innocently or shrewdly aligns itself with the ruling class, loses its utopian dimension, and empties itself of prophetic mission. There is no need to denounce such a church. It denounces itself through its defense, surreptitious or not, of the ruling class.

16. Karel Kosik, *Dialéctica de lo concreto* (Mexico: Grijalbo, 1967).

17. The term *mundane* here refers to the condition of incarnation in the world.

18. See his *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentacostal Movement in Chile* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969).

19. A sociological analysis of this fact in Latin America is essential, but it is important that the starting point of such research be social class structures and not the religious phenomenon itself.

20. See Beatriz Muniz de Souza, *A Experiência da salvação: pentecostais em São Paulo* (São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1969).

21. Paulo Freire, *La Educación como práctica de la libertad* (Montevideo: Tierra Nueva, 19--). Also in French: *La Pratique de la liberté* (Paris: Eds. du Cerf, 19--).

22. See Fernando Henrique Cardoso, *Politique et développement dans les sociétés dépendantes* (Paris, Editions Anthropos, 1971).

23. See Francisco Weffort, *Classes populares e política (Contribuição ao estudo do populismo)* (Universidade São Paulo, 1968).

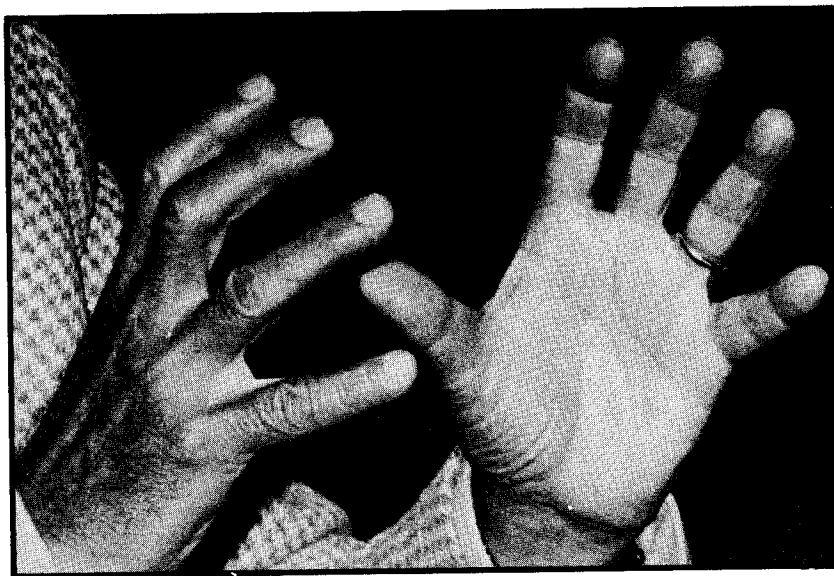
24. Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (London: Penguin, 1972).

25. A prophetic vision need not be the result of a religious position.

26. There are no societies more “sacral” than those that are bourgeois. They react viciously to the slightest attempt to disrupt patterns they consider universal, eternal, and perfect.

27. *Opresión-Liberación: Desafío a los Cristianos* (Montevideo: Tierra Nueva, 1971).

CHAPTER ELEVEN



In Praise of *A Black Theology of Liberation* by James Cone

There is a category of book that so challenges and fascinates us that we can't put it down until, along with the author, we reach the very last word. *A Black Theology of Liberation* is one of those books.

In 1970 when *A Black Theology of Liberation* had just been published in the United States, I received a copy while in Geneva from a young friend in New York, one of Cone's students who had regularly taken part in a seminar I had coordinated in 1969 at Harvard University. Cone was not unknown to me. I had read his first book and even though it lacked the formal qualities he later developed in his second book, it clearly distinguished him. That was the feeling I had in 1969 when I finished reading *Black Theology and Black Power* in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

This book, I said to myself, promises something more rigorous to come.

I received *A Black Theology of Liberation*, then, with ready expectations. Cone's clarity, his seriousness of analysis, and his commitment to the oppressed have not surprised me. All of this is actually confirmation of what I've already stated.

I remember perfectly that I received my copy the day before a trip to Rome, where I was to coordinate a week-long seminar on education for liberation. At home that night after dinner, I accepted the book's invitation and I began my intimate relationship with it. I gave it a careful reading and I was spellbound page after page, not putting it down until the early morning and finishing it for the first time some hours later, en route from Geneva to Rome. When I returned to Geneva, I read it for a second time and then wrote to Cone, expressing my impressions and the importance of its immediate publication in Latin America, since black theology (for which Cone is the foremost proponent in the United States) is unquestionably linked with the theology of liberation flourishing in Latin America.

The prophetic nature of both these theologies lies not in their merely speaking for those who are forbidden to speak, but, most important, in their side-by-side struggle with those silenced so that they can effectively speak the word by revolutionarily transforming the society that reduces them to silence. "To say the word," then, is not just to utter "good morning" or to follow the prescriptions of the powerful who command and exploit. "To say the word" is to make history that can be made and remade. The dominated and silenced classes can only say the word when they take history into their own hands and dismantle the oppressive system that crushes them. Through revolutionary praxis, along with a critical and vigilant leadership, the dominated classes learn to "proclaim" their world, thus discovering the real reasons for their past silence. Hence, the eminently political nature of black theology in the United States and the theology of liberation in Latin America.

Both these theologies tend increasingly to sanction political action, but this doesn't mean that they are aberrations from a theological "purity" or a hypothetical neutral theology.

To use our expression, which Cone admires, a white theology is just as political as a black theology or a theology for liberation in Latin America. Although it's easily seen through, politics hides the orientation of a white theology toward defending dominant class interests. This is why, though simulating neutrality, white theology is preoccupied with

the conciliation of things that cannot be conciliated, why it negates so insistently the differences among social classes and their struggle, and why in its incursions for social good it doesn't go beyond the kind of modernizing reformisms that preserve the structures of domination.

Thinking from the viewpoint of the dominant classes, theologians of this impossible neutrality employ mystifying language. They consistently attempt to soften the harsh, oppressive real world and exhort the dominated classes (invariably labeled as poor or less fortunate) to face their sacrifice with resignation. The pain and degrading discrimination they suffer—their very existence as a form of death in life—should be taken by the dominated classes as a means of purification for their sins. In short, the oppressed should thank "the rich" for the opportunities they offer them to save themselves.

The dominated classes need to transform the suffering arising from their imposed struggle, not merely submit to it. Whereas submission to suffering amounts to a form of annihilation, transformation of suffering becomes a faith that moves it. Only that faith which is born today, and in the "today" of the struggle, can give meaning to the future, not as an alienating vagueness or as a predetermined entity, but as a task of construction, a "deed of liberty."

Those who promote a white theology propose an even greater passivity for the oppressed classes by disregarding the unity between reconciliation and liberation. For them, reconciliation is nothing more than the dominated acceding to the will of the dominant. All this supposes it were possible to reduce reconciliation to a kind of pact between dominant and dominated, "rich" and "poor": a pact that accepts the continuation of the oppressed reality in which the dominated, in return, receive efficient and modernized social assistance.

Such an elitist concept of reconciliation will find no acceptance in the theology of liberation in Latin America or in the black theology of liberation for which, again, James Cone is one of the most eloquent representatives. In truth, any reconciliation between oppressors and oppressed, as social classes, presupposes the liberation of the oppressed, forged by themselves through their own revolutionary praxis.

The important point right now, though, is that the reader begin a convivial relationship with the thinking of James Cone. So to conclude this brief introduction I'll only add that in emerging from an incredible reality, a "diabolic" real world of racism in the United States, his thinking gains a singular force. In his theological reflections on this reality, he doesn't present black people as though from another world, typecast as

curious foreigners. James Cone is a committed man, "saturated" in this real world, which he analyzes with the authority of one who has experienced it.

A Black Theology of Liberation is for this reason a passionate book, passionately written. In reading it, some will be chilled from anger, others will tremble with fear. Many readers, though, will find a stimulus here for their own struggles. James Cone does not attempt any more than this.