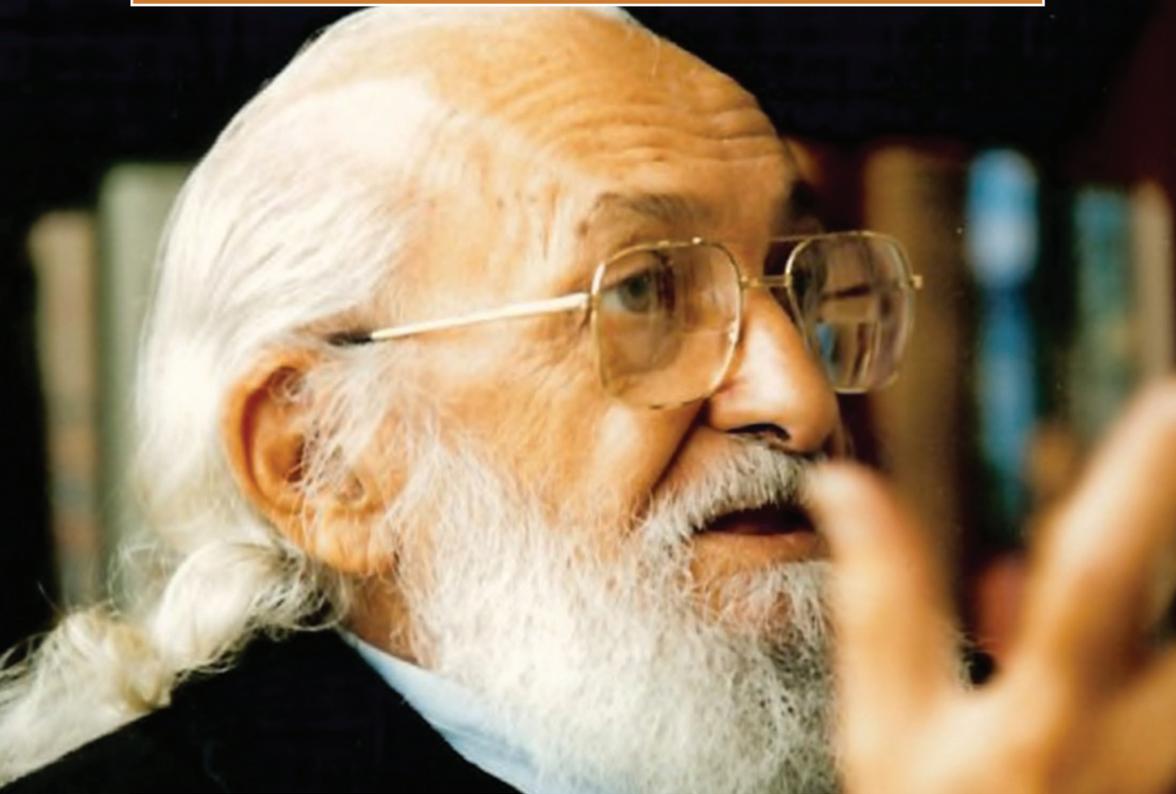


# Paulo Freire

## His Faith, Spirituality, and Theology

James D. Kirylo and Drick Boyd

*Foreword by Ana Maria Araújo Freire*



*SensePublishers*

**Paulo Freire**



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*His Faith, Spirituality, and Theology*

*Foreword by Ana Maria Araújo Freire*

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*University of South Carolina, USA*

and

**Drick Boyd**

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**ADVANCE PRAISE FOR  
PAULO FREIRE: HIS FAITH, SPIRITUALITY,  
AND THEOLOGY**

“James D. Kirylo and Drick Boyd’s powerful essays text on the faith, spirituality, and theology of Paulo Freire provide a unique and much needed contribution to our understanding of one of the most influential educational philosophers of the 20th century. By way of thoughtful engagement with Freire’s lived history, praxis, and political sensibilities, they reintroduce us to the man from Recife, through his radical sense of hope, undaunted faith, and the beauty of his implicit spirituality.”

– **Antonia Darder, Leavey Endowed Chair of Ethics & Moral Leadership at Loyola Marymount University and Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of Johannesburg**

“Freirean orthopraxis has a redemptive as well as protagonistic role. To deny spirituality as part of Freire’s pedagogy of liberation is to enable the abscess of reason to pacify what can only be understood as Freire’s fundamental revelation: to take down from the cross all those who suffer from the crimes of the state. Thus, the generative power of Freire’s pedagogy presents us with a formidable weapon for unmasking the structural sins of the state (i.e., economic inequality, racism, patriarchy) and for emboldening our commitment to justice for those whom democracy has disinherited: the poor and the powerless. Kirylo and Boyd have made an important contribution to our understanding of Freire and his work, and in so doing have taken us further down the long road to justice.”

– **Peter McLaren, Distinguished Professor in Critical Studies, Co-Director, The Paulo Freire Democratic Project and International Ambassador for Global Ethics and Social Justice, College of Education, Chapman University**

“This book is indeed an invaluable read for anyone interested in exploring the often-overlooked spiritual dimension in the work of one of the most influential educators of the 20th century. Freire’s pedagogy was deep-rooted and substantiated by his Christian faith, which provided him the inspiration to work relentlessly to denounce all systems of oppression that dehumanize people and steal their agency and to announce the sacredness of life which implies dignity for all. Drawing from a wide range of religious thinkers and leaders, James Kirylo and Drick Boyd skillfully interweave Freire’s life, work, and spirituality offering us new lenses to see Freire’s praxis as a result of his ethical commitment to the world and the people in their material and spiritual aspects.”

– **Débora B. Agra Junker, Founder and Director of the Cátedra Paulo Freire at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary**



*Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed  
by the renewing of your mind.*

(Romans 12:2)

*The hope of a secure and livable world lies with disciplined  
nonconformists, who are dedicated to justice, peace and  
brotherhood. The trailblazers in human, academic, scientific  
and religious freedom have always been nonconformists.*

*In any cause that concerns the progress of mankind,  
put your faith in the nonconformist!*

(Martin Luther King, Jr.)

*In the final analysis, the Word of God is inviting me to  
re-create the world, not for my brothers' [and sisters'] domination,  
but for their liberation.*

(Paulo Freire)

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ANA MARIA ARAÚJO FREIRE

## FOREWORD

There are moments in my life when a longing for the presence of Paulo and the pain of his loss bring forth, in a seemingly contradictory manner, an outpouring of true joy from me.

Such is happening at this moment: the happiness and the immense longing for Paulo take form in a task, which although difficult, is at the same time pleasurable because it brings him back to me.

What awakens this feeling in me was the invitation from James D. Kirylo and Drick Boyd to provide the foreword for the book that four hands, two souls, and two heads, united as if as a single being, wrote about my husband Paulo Freire.

The title, *Paulo Freire: His Faith, Spirituality, and Theology*, invokes our curiosity and encourages us to read about a facet of Paulo, which in recent years has been ignored: his faith and his spirituality.

The search for this metaphysical side of Paulo, which was manifested in his acts, gestures, and practices, in his commiseration for and togetherness with the poor and those who suffered injustices, is, I believe, the life history of the authors. James had Catholic upbringings and almost became a priest. Drick describes his early work, some of the difficult challenges he faced as a youth worker, and his search for what his life would become leading to his becoming a Pastor. Today they have gone different ways. Both are teachers in the area of education concerned with religious development and social justice.

In the book, they narrate, analyze, formulate hypotheses, draw parallels, and contrast ideas of other authors with those of Paulo, and discuss the epistemological theory of the educator from Pernambuco with propriety, seriousness, and competence. And they delight and astonish us by their ability to simultaneously form a critical analysis, a deep search for the virtues of Paulo – demonstrated in his faith and spirituality, which forged a new theology, “wet”, as Paulo himself put it, in the experience of his life and praxis – with the enormous capacity of the educator to observe, learn, verify, think, reflect, and create things: absolutely new practices and ideas, putting them on paper as political and loving acts. Fortunately, James and Drick lovingly understood the cognitive path that is guided by intelligence and the ability to tap into Paulo’s thoughts as they demonstrate in their critical-comparative narrative of this excellent work.

The bibliography set down by the authors includes nearly all of Paulo’s work, surely all published in the English language; the attraction that they sensed through

the writings of a man who broke the most hidden, and at times, the most obvious soul and utopian dreams of human beings; the sense of goodness and solidarity of a man who lived for 75 years searching for truth, with tolerance, simplicity, coherence, and generosity, from his love for human beings (of any origin, age, religion, or sexual orientation) that impregnated his theory and his praxis toward the pursuit of this greatest dream: social justice, and as such, authentic democracy. I affirm with no trepidation that this profound work will become a classic in the literature of pedagogy and even in religious literature including the study of the philosophy of religions.

They point to the influences of humanism, personalism, and Marxism in Paulo, but stay true to my husband's originality of thought, to his composition of a theory of knowledge, which is not a junction of different theories, but is, to the contrary, an educational theory: political, ethical, with a philosophical basis, anthropological, and theological.

Paulo worked at the World Council of Churches for 10 years in Geneva at the position created especially for him, as an educator surrounded by the great theologians of Christian churches, not just Catholic, who taught him a great deal. But his faith in God, his "camaraderie" with Christ came from the Catholic upbringings of his mother, who made the choice to raise her four children in this way.

His ethical, scientific, and anthropological development were made possible by my parents, Aluizio and Genove Araújo, who provided him with a scholarship at the school they owned, the *Colégio Oswaldo Cruz*, in Recife in the 1940s where I met him. This school, known for its highest moral, civic, and scientific qualities, has graduated hundreds of young people from the *Nordeste*, the Northeast of Brazil.

Paulo's political development was, in fact, self developed. Born not only from his studies, but also from books of the most varied ideological strains, which, through his own lens, forged a political pedagogy centered on compassion and engagement with the "*esfarrapados*" or "ragged ones" of the world and within his praxis that included the oppressed classes and with those of different genders, religions, races or ethnicities.

Finally, I want to highlight the incisive perception of the authors about Paulo's dialectical understandings, particularly when they address *conscientização*, which arises from Paulo's political understandings and not, as it might seem to many, arising from his spirituality. I also want to emphasize the authors' understanding of the denunciation-announcement concept as a concomitant act and not, as viewed by positivist thinkers, as one that follows from the other. For Paulo, conscientious and critical denunciation brings at its core the announcement of the new. Denunciation of the ugly and that which is evil is an act that also simultaneously announces the dreamed dream, the hope for a better future.

I conclude my words inviting potential readers and actual readers of this work to establish with James and Drick a loving dialogue comparable to how they established their own dialogue with Paulo seeking out the roots of things and the substantivity of phenomena.

FOREWORD

I can without fear assure that much will be learned by the reader from all three: a European-born, James; a North American, Drick; and a Brazilian from the “*terras quentes*” and refreshing breezes of the *Nordeste*, from Recife, the beloved city of my unforgettable husband Paulo who, through his genius and humility, illuminated the making of this book.

Thank you so much, James and Drick, for inviting me to be a part of this book, which brings the presence of the man from Recife who became a man of the world, Paulo Freire.

Nita  
*Jaboatão dos Guararapes*, at the end of the  
afternoon of May 23, 2017



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of writing this book was an enriching experience, enabling us to individually know deeper the spiritual foundation that profoundly framed the philosophy that guided Paulo Freire's activism, ultimately inspiring us even more to continue the work of justice, equity, and the furthering of humanizing humanity.

Engaging in this project could not have been completed without the support and assistance of several people, who, with great gratitude, we would like to pay tribute. Many thanks to Ana Maria (Nita) Araújo Freire, Paulo's widow, who despite her ever-present busy schedule, took the time to write the Foreword to this book. We are honored. Thank you Edwin Dickey for translating Nita's Foreword, nicely capturing her thought from Brazilian Portuguese to English.

A million thanks to our esteemed colleagues Peter McLaren, Antonia Darder, and Débora Junker for taking the time to write respective praises for this work. We are humbled with your words of support for this important project.

Thank you, Jerry Aldridge and Kathy Hastings for their insightful, timely critiques, and much appreciation to Kathleen Duffy whose research informed us about the New Sanctuary Movement, all of which greatly added to the richness of this text.

David Armand your editorial assistance is greatly appreciated. In addition, thanks for our respective graduate assistants, Christopher Khaleel (as in the case of James) and Arlicia Etienne (as in the case of Drick), both of whom were helpful in moving this project along with checking references, finding articles, and other related research assistance.

Thank you, Michel Lokhorst, Publishing Director, at SENSE. Much appreciation for you believing in this project! And many thanks, Jolanda Karada, Production Coordinator at SENSE who once again has been a pleasure to work with to bring this book to final publication!

Finally, I (James) would deeply like to thank the three most important persons in my life. To Anette, my wife, who has always been supportive of my work, for which I am eternally grateful. And for our two boys, Antonio and Alexander. As they grow older, our hope is that they will come to deeply learn the greatness of Paulo Freire, and to be greatly influenced by his thought and spirituality. And I (Drick) thank my wife, Cynthia, for her quiet support. I also am grateful to my colleagues in POWER (Philadelphians Organized to Witness Empower and Rebuild) who everyday witness to their faith through their commitment to social justice.



## INTRODUCTION

*Paulo was a man of authentic faith that believed in God. And while he was Catholic, he was not caught up in the “religiosity” of the faith. He believed in Jesus Christ, and in His kindness, wisdom, and goodness.*

(Freire, 2011, p. 278)

The Hispanic-Latinx Center at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Illinois honored Paulo Freire with the naming of *Cátedra* Paulo Freire in April, 2016.<sup>1</sup> A Spanish-Portuguese term, *Cátedra* comes from the Latin word *cathedra* (chair), which originates from the Greek word for seat, possessing two broad meanings.

On one hand, in Roman Catholicism, for example, one who literally sits in the *cathedra* (or throne) is the bishop at a cathedral setting. On the other hand, in an academic setting, the person who “sits” on the *cathedra* is one who is honored for his/her outstanding contributions to a particular discipline, worthy to be remembered in the life-long preservation, studying, and investigation of that body of work.

Freire’s recognition is, of course, related to the latter. In fact, the *Cátedra* Paulo Freire was the first *Cátedra* of its kind dedicated to Freire in the United States, particularly underscoring his contribution to theological and religious studies (<http://catedra.garrett.edu/>).<sup>2,3</sup>

This high honor that the Hispanic-Latinx Center at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary bestowed on Paulo Freire is no small matter. It is indeed a public recognition that Freire possessed a certain spirituality that guided his thinking and work, so much so that this spirituality had an impact on theological and religious circles.

Freire, however, is more popularly recognized for his work in education, and is often referred to as the “father” of critical pedagogy and popular education, and is known worldwide as one of the most significant educational thinkers of the 20th century. Particularly illuminated with his seminal masterpiece, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and later with other popular and highly influential works,<sup>4</sup> concepts related to banking/problem-posing education, dialogue, conscientização (conscientization), and justice are Freirean themes laced throughout his entire body of work. Moreover, those who have studied Freire’s life and work speak of the radical social, educational, and political nature of his thought, and his lifelong commitment to education as a means to human liberation.

What is less known about Freire, but equally important, is the influence of his Christian faith on his overall educational philosophy and vision. Obviously, as resoundingly affirmed by the *Cátedra* Paulo Freire, Freire was a man who reflectively filtered his thought through a spiritual lens so much so that his work was also influential outside the circle of education, as it were.

## INTRODUCTION

Students of Freire familiar with theological terminology can sense a resemblance in his writing to the language and spirit of theological thinking. Throughout his work he uses words like love, hope, faith, Easter, conversion, and other related concepts, all of which carry religious or spiritual connotations. While there are only a few works in which Freire explicitly writes and speaks about his religious beliefs, those writings, nevertheless, are enough in making clear that there was a spiritual dimension to his thinking that had a profound influence on him.

There are, of course, a handful of scholars who have noted the spiritual dimension in Freire's thought. For example, Goodwin's *Reflections on Education* (1978) contrasts the educational strategies of Martin Luther King Jr., Paulo Freire and Jesus of Nazareth. While not minimizing the divinity of Christ, Goodwin's objective was to compare these three towering figures as "social educators," by connecting Freire with both King and Jesus, implying that Freire's thinking also has spiritual and theological significance.

John Elias, author of the influential book, *Paulo Freire: Pedagogue of Liberation* (1994) is one of the first to write extensively on the religious dimension of Freire's work, and also believes that since its publication in English, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, has been used by religious and theological thinkers more than any other discipline.<sup>5</sup> Fenwick and English (2004) go so far as to claim that Freire "saw his work as spiritual" (p. 51). Fraser (1997) interestingly puts it this way, "In other times and traditions, Paulo Freire would be seen as not only a great teacher but also a spiritual guide" (p. 175).

In addition to the above, several scholars have noted the connections between the writings of Freire and liberation theology (Aronowitz, 1998; Giroux, 1985; McLaren, 2000; Kirylo, 2011) and moreover many religious thinkers have drawn insights from his work (Goodwin, 1978; Gutiérrez, 1971; Schipani, 1984). Welton (1993) has even explored the parallels between Freire's concept of conscientization and the Christian concept of conversion.

## PURPOSE OF BOOK

And while noted above, Freire wrote a handful of theological essays, often spoke to groups of religious educators and carried on meaningful dialogues with theological thinkers, the spiritual orientation guiding his thought and action is still relatively unexplored, and deserving of further examination.<sup>6</sup> In large part with respect to the latter, this is due to the fact that Freire infrequently referred to his "faith" (his word for his spirituality). Moreover, he admitted he was hesitant to speak about his faith, and so only did sparingly (Freire, 1992).

Until recently many scholars outside the theological disciplines were hesitant to speak of spirituality out of what Keating (2008) calls a "spirit phobia." In recent years, however, conversations on spirituality have expanded its traditional borders, and have become broader and more eclectic; that is, the concept of spirituality is becoming largely separated from simply a synonym for religious convictions. As

Ngunjiri (2011) has pointed out, spirituality is now openly discussed in disciplines as diverse as leadership, social work, education and nursing. In short, while religion and spirituality have an obvious connection to each other, in recent times it has come to be seen that the former does not contain or define the latter.<sup>7</sup>

To that end, the purpose of this volume aims to explore the connection between Freire's faith (as earlier mentioned, Freire's preferred term, rather than spirituality) and its impact on his thought, practice, and his overall work of fostering the humanization of humanity. While the sources of this book will be primarily drawn from Freire's work, secondary sources will be pulled from those who knew Freire, have written about him, and have been meaningfully impacted by him.

### OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In Chapter 1, *Spirituality and Paulo Freire*, the concepts of spirituality, religion, theology, and faith will be explored. While there is certain interrelatedness with these four concepts, they each possess distinct features about them that necessitates a conversation in order to establish working assumptions that framework this text. In Chapter 2, *The Easter Experience: Conversion to the People*, Freire's notion of faith and his concept of "conversion to the people" will be examined and its impact on the change of self and working toward making a more just and right world for all. *Personalism, Humanism, and a Freirean Spirituality Toward Humanizing Humanity*, the title of Chapter 3 clarifies the meaning of the philosophies of personalism and humanism and its influence on Freire's thinking and ultimately his spirituality. In Chapter 4, *Hope, History, and Utopia*, as the wording of the title indicates, are critical central themes in Freire's philosophy in the effort of being participatory subjects in the world. A common thread that weaved throughout Freire's life's work was the concept of love, which will be explored in Chapter 5, *Grounded in the Well of Love*, which makes a good transition to Chapter 6, *A Man who Humbly Lived in Authenticity*. There is no question that Freire was a humble man, and to live in humility requires one to appreciate what it means to live authentically.

Freire's concept of conscientization is one that is certainly critical to his thought, a dynamic that moves one from awareness to action, that is ongoing in the dialectical interweaving of thought and action, all of which is the theme for Chapter 7, *Conscientization: Inner and Outer Transformation for Liberation*. Chapter 8, *A Freirean Imprint on Liberation Theology*, as the title suggests, discusses Freire's critical influence on what is known as liberation theology. Finally, the *Epilogue, A Call to Reinvent*, brings all the chapters together, reflecting on the common threads that had been woven throughout all the chapters and the implications for the present day critical pedagogue.

While each chapter is, of course, unique unto itself, there is, however, from time to time, some natural intersectionality among chapters. For example, a detailed discussion on hope and utopia, as in Chapter 4 cannot be discussed without a nod to its link to love, and a more detailed discussion on love, as in Chapter 5, cannot

## INTRODUCTION

be examined devoid of its association to the concept of hope. But such is the work of Paulo Freire, particularly highlighted in the interpretation of his notion of praxis in which intersects such concepts as love, faith, hope, conscientization, utopia, humility, unfinishedness, authenticity, and humanization. In other words, while each of the chapter themes and the associated concepts are unique unto themselves, and as we attempted to deconstruct them in the context of spirituality in seven separate chapters, it is only natural—because of the close association among the themes—that from time to time there may be some intersection or a critical reiteration from chapter to chapter.

### IN BRIEF: OUR STORY

Whether one is doing curriculum work, writing a book, teaching, or conducting some kind of artistic creation, one's story is always intertwined in the work. Our lives are in a perpetual state of contextualization, in an ever-constant process of becoming, intersected with what we read, observe, the experiences we undergo, and the people we meet. In that light, therefore, in order to fully appreciate the motivation, purpose, and implications of this book, we think it would be helpful to provide a brief autobiographical account of our story.

The genesis of this book took place in 2014 when the both of us first met at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference in Philadelphia, PA, USA. Along with other contributors, we both were participating in a Paulo Freire Special Interest Group round table event, which naturally tapped into various Freirean themes. And one theme that particularly resonated with the both of us was concepts related to spirituality, theology, and faith. Indeed, Freire is widely recognized as one who has significantly contributed to the thinking of liberation theology. Subsequent to that 2014 conference, our conversation continued over the next few years with our shared admiration of Paulo Freire, his work, his thought and our mutual interest in social justice, the common good, and its intimate link to spirituality.

While we certainly have shared common interests and a certain shared spirituality, we are quite different from each other. I (James) have spent virtually my entire adult working life in education, 18 years teaching elementary school and the last near 20 years in higher education. The focus of my research has been related to critical pedagogy, spirituality (more specifically liberation theology), literacy, and teacher leadership.

I was born and raised in Europe, and grew up in the Roman Catholic tradition, at one time with one foot nearly entering into the seminary to study to become a Catholic priest. My spirituality—deeply linked to social justice and educational equality—is greatly influenced by a cross-section of people such as Jonathan Kozol, Henri Nouwen, Richard Rohr, Hélder Câmara, Therese of Lisieux (“The Little Flower”), Thomas Merton, James Cone, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Oscar Romero, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and, of course, Paulo Freire, to name a few.

To that end, therefore, it is only natural that over the years the trajectory of my work has been filtered through a decidedly Christian spirituality, which is framed in the dialectical interweaving of reflective educational practice in the light of faith, with a core focus on the “least of these,” or what the liberation theologian would characterize as making a preferential option for the poor. The aim of my faith, however, is not so much to proclaim what I believe, but rather to hopefully demonstrate in my life a sense of love and hope in which the Gospel message is illuminated. To put another way, it is attributed to Francis of Assisi for saying, “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words.”

Indeed, when one carefully examines a critical cornerstone that filtered Paulo Freire’s work, it was clearly influenced by the Gospel story—with an ecumenical spirit—in which love, faith, and hope was the foundation. My aim, our aim, in this text is to simply examine that cornerstone and its impact on Freire’s thought and the implications for those of us who seek to make the world more loving, more kind, more human.

I (Drick) often tell people I have not had *a* career but rather a *series* of careers. Following graduation from college, I worked as youth worker in Boston, MA during the period when the city schools were being desegregated through a citywide busing effort ordered by Judge Arthur Garrity. Though the neighborhood I worked in (Jamaica Plain) was equally divided by Puerto Rican, African American and Irish Catholic families, with a small contingent of Cubans and Dominicans, the kids of various racial groups were bused across town to achieve racial balance in the schools. This decision was not well received by most communities, so when I arrived in the spring of 1975, violent outbreaks were occurring in neighborhoods across the city. In fact one weekend when the violence had risen to a fever pitch, my neighborhood was walled off by police barricades.

While still living and working in that neighborhood, I attended seminary where I first read Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I had become deeply enamored by liberation theology and the writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez, and so had the sense that Freire’s insights could and should have an influence on my work as an aspiring Baptist pastor. However, there were few people who shared my interest in Freire’s writings, and fewer still who could help me translate his words into action. So my interest in Freire remained strong but dormant during my sixteen years as a pastor in urban, small town and suburban churches.

In 1997 I left the pastorate and began teaching adult students returning to college to complete their undergraduate degrees. I eventually enrolled in a doctoral program focusing on adult education, where I again encountered Freire, along with Myles Horton, and the popular education movement. I employed Freire’s dialogical approach to teaching and learning in my classes. I began to interact with other like-minded educators and was introduced to critical pedagogy, another area greatly influenced by Freire’s writings. In 2007 I transferred from the adult education program to the Urban Studies program where I now teach courses in urban theology, racism, leadership and social justice.

## INTRODUCTION

During a sabbatical in 2011, I proceeded to read every writing by Freire in English I could get my hands on. For some time I had been curious about the theological concepts Freire often referred to in his work, and wrote an article on “The Critical Spirituality of Paulo Freire” (2012), which was positively received. I also wrote a white paper on popular education describing the ways in which popular education was being practiced by community educators in the U.S. and Canada. When James and I met at that AERA Conference in 2014, I saw an opportunity to explore more deeply my interest in Freire’s spirituality, which led to our collaborative effort of this book.

Today, I am an active member of an urban Mennonite congregation actively involved in interfaith social justice efforts in our neighborhood, as well as across Philadelphia. I also have worked with community groups helping to develop grassroots leadership, and to address problems and challenges in their local communities. In my work as a professor, I introduce all my students to the writings of Freire, and many have found *Pedagogy of Oppressed* as life-transforming as I did years ago. Like James, my spirituality is not so much evidenced in what I believe or say, but rather in how I seek to live and work in relationship to the poor, the marginalized and disenfranchised of our society. As Jon Sobrino (1988) describes so clearly, my spirituality and my social justice efforts are integrally related to each other. My spirituality is in an ongoing process of what Freire calls “the Easter experience” as daily I seek to live into God’s preferential option for the poor.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Through the leadership of Freirean scholar, Dr. Débora Junker and others at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and with the blessings of Dr. Ana Maria (Nita) Araújo Freire, Paulo’s widow, the reality of this event is indeed a dream especially realized by Dr. Junker.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://catedra.garrett.edu/>
- <sup>3</sup> At this particular event, Dr. Ana Maria (Nita) Araújo Freire gave two keynote addresses, one titled *Critical Pedagogy as an Act of Faith, Love and Courage*, and *The Legacy of Freire: Dreams and Challenges*. In addition, along with other esteemed presenters, long-time Freirean scholar, Daniel Schipani, lectured on *Freire’s Contribution to Understanding and Fostering Healthy Spirituality*.
- <sup>4</sup> To name only a few of those works, see *Pedagogy of The Heart*, *Letters to Cristina: Reflections on my Life And Work*, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, *Pedagogy of the City*, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*.
- <sup>5</sup> This assertion by Elias regarding the influential effect *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* on religious and theological thinkers was shared in a personal conversation with D. Boyd in 2011.
- <sup>6</sup> It is worth pointing out that about the same time of the publication of this book, Irwin Leopando’s text, *A Pedagogy of Faith: The Theological Vision of Paulo Freire* (Bloomsbury, 2017), was also released.
- <sup>7</sup> While the concept of spirituality will be explored in Chapter 1, in brief, as a point of distinction between spirituality and religion, spirituality comes from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning “breath of life.” It is a way of being and experiencing. Spirituality develops, as May (1953), Buber (1958), and others point out, through an awareness of a transcendent dimension and is distinguished by certain recognizable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one views to be the supreme

or the ultimate. In contrast, religion can be defined as the social or organized means by which persons express spirituality (Grim, 1994). And while religion and spirituality can be interrelated, spirituality does not depend on religion. Spirituality exists without the structure of religion, but authentic religion cannot be without spirituality (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992).

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## CHAPTER 1

# SPIRITUALITY AND PAULO FREIRE

### INTRODUCTION

Paulo Freire is considered one of the most influential educational thinkers in the twentieth century, the founder of popular education, and the inspiration for the field of critical pedagogy. Yet as Sternberg asserts “those of us who espouse critical pedagogy and embrace Paulo Freire’s visions of praxis and conscientization work out of a tradition, often unknowingly, with deep ties to religious faith” (quoted in Neumann, 2011, pp. 609–610). While many have acknowledged his ties to liberation theology, his deep underlying faith out of which that theology arose is often overlooked. In fact for Freire his political radicalism was an expression of and an outgrowth of his deep spiritual connection to God (Neumann, 2011). The purpose of this chapter is to explore the various ways contemporary writers understand the concept of spirituality, and then to explore the manner in which Freire’s spirituality aligns with these understandings, and then to explore the concrete ways he sought to live out his spiritual commitments.

### WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

When speaking about his religiosity, Paulo Freire almost always referred to his “faith in Christ” or just “faith.” In his era, the terms, faith, religion and spirituality were generally considered inter-related if not synonymous. In more recent years the term “spirituality” has taken on a more eclectic and all-encompassing meaning, where as “religion” refers to a formal set of beliefs and practices in and through which individuals live out their spirituality. However, spirituality has also come to refer to experiences and practices not necessarily tied to formal religious beliefs. Often one can hear people say they are “spiritual but not religious.”

Beginning in the late 19th century, sociologists and psychologists such as Freud, Jung, Weber and Allport found the study of religion and spirituality (often referred to as religious experience) to be a rich area of research (Hill et al., 2000). These early thinkers largely concluded that religion and spirituality are significant dimensions of human experience that can either contribute to or detract from fruitful and healthy living. Historically, religion has helped individuals come to terms with the meaning of their lives, address questions of ultimate significance and connect individuals to their understanding of the Divine. However, as the assumed connection between religion and spirituality has increasingly been severed, religion has taken on an institutional flavor focused on the adherence to certain beliefs, liturgical practices,

and codes of behavior, whereas spirituality has taken on a more individualized and personal focus having to do with one's beliefs and experiences with God, a higher power, or a transcendent sense of purpose. In this sense persons can consider themselves deeply spiritual even though they are not related to a particular religious institution or set of beliefs (Tisdell, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006; Zwissler, 2007; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985).

Moreover, spirituality does not simply pertain to one's private beliefs, but can also reflect one's engagement in the public sphere; that is, spirituality can be private and public, individual and political. For many people spirituality is related to a belief in God, but for others it encompasses a commitment to the betterment of the human condition, preservation of the natural world, or the pursuit of values such as love, truth and peace. In this sense spirituality involves an awareness of the transcendent or sacred, and an outlook that makes one feel connected to something larger than themselves that informs their morals and actions. As such, spirituality nurtures one's commitment to issues of social justice and desire for social change. This type of spirituality is akin to liberation theology, which both influenced and was influenced by Paulo Freire, and goes so far as to assert that one's spirituality, by design, leads one to act for liberation of oneself and others (Gutiérrez, 2003; Bean, 2000; English & Gillen, 2000; Tisdell, 2000).

Fowler (1981) makes a distinction between religion, belief and faith that can be helpful here. Referring to the work of his mentor and colleague William Cantwell Smith, Fowler says that religion is "a cumulative tradition of various expressions of the faith of people in the past" (p. 9). Religion includes symbols, oral tradition, music, sacred texts, creeds, and other elements usually associated with religion. By contrast faith "is the person or group's way of responding to transcendent value and power" (p. 8). Whereas traditionally faith is practiced within a religious tradition, often people express faith without reference to a particular tradition or with reference to several traditions. Quoting Smith, he writes faith "is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbor, to the universe; a total response, a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever one handles....to see, to feel, to act in terms of a transcendent dimension (Smith, quoted in Fowler, p. 11). Faith is distinguished from belief in that belief is "the holding of certain ideas" and "arises out of the effort to translate experiences of and relation to transcendence into concepts or propositions" (p. 11). By contrast "Faith is the relation of trust and loyalty to the transcendent about which concepts or propositions – beliefs – are fashioned" (p. 11). What Fowler refers to as "faith" in this book we are using the term used in more contemporary settings: spirituality. When he referred to his ultimate trust in God, Freire used the word "faith;" we refer to it as his spirituality.<sup>1</sup>

In its most basic sense spirituality causes people to be more aware of their inner life, the persons around them and the general state of the world. When viewed this way, the ultimate goal of spirituality is to help people find personal meaning and become more fully human, while serving the purpose of improving the lives of those suffering in the world. One's sense of meaning may be found in God, through

significant relationships, or in personal and social actions. At the same time, it must be recognized that one's spirituality always develops in a specific social and cultural context. Thus, it is important that we consider Freire's family life, his cultural context, his religious background and the socioeconomic forces that shaped his life (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006; Keating, 2008; Gotz, 1997; Stanczak, 2006).

#### PAULO FREIRE'S FAMILY AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND<sup>2</sup>

Paulo Freire grew up in a time of personal and social struggle. Late in life he recalled the Brazil of his childhood as a place of great beauty but also a place of backwardness, misery, poverty, [and] hunger" (Freire, 1996, p. 15). While Brazil had freed itself from colonial rule, the mindset and structures of Brazil's colonial legacy persisted in the social structures. Brazilian society consisted of a small, but powerful wealthy elite, while masses suffered pervasive poverty. Born in 1921, as the youngest of four children, Freire's childhood years were shaped by the suffering caused by the global economic collapse following the 1929 stock market crash.

Freire grew up in a loving, middle class family with a father who worked as a military police officer and a stay-at-home mother. His earliest years were spent in a small house in the northeastern city of Recife. Freire particularly enjoyed the backyard of his home in which there was a lush mango tree under which he spent many joyful hours. However, when Paulo was three years old, his father had to retire from the police force due to debilitating arteriosclerosis. This began an extended period of downward mobility. His father tried to supplement his meager retirement pension by working at various jobs: carpentry, importing, and buying and selling fruit from the interior of the country.

When the Depression of the 1930s began to impact the family, they were forced to sell various items for cash as well as seek support from family members in order to make ends meet. As the effect of the Depression deepened, Freire experienced hunger, which he described as "a real and concrete hunger that had no specific date of departure [and which] arrives unannounced and unauthorized, making itself at home without an end in sight" (Freire, 1996, p. 15). Eventually, Freire's family lost the house because they could not pay the mortgage, forcing them to leave Recife. They moved to nearby Jaboatão, to a home that was smaller and more affordable, but enabled them to continue the appearance of a middle class existence. However, when he was 13 years old his father died, leaving Paulo and his family in a state of destitution. Paulo had to drop out of school for two years and experienced the stress of living a survival level of existence. The stress, hunger, and impoverishment of those years caused Freire to fall behind in school and to be diagnosed by some of his teachers as "mentally retarded." Consequently, he barely qualified for secondary school. He particularly struggled with spelling (which may have been an influence on his eventual interest in literacy work). Even so, through the support of his older siblings who were able to work and the ingenuity of his mother who got a job at a local private school, Paulo was eventually able to continue his education despite the

increased hardship caused by his father's untimely death (Horton & Freire, 1990, pp. 23–27; Elias, 1994, p. 3; Jeria, 1986, pp. 9–11).

While deeply committed to each other and the welfare of their children, Freire's parents had distinctly different religious views. His father was a spiritualist. He believed in God but chose to not affiliate with any specific religious body or denomination. Instead he drew from a wide range of sources in nature, science, philosophy and theology to shape his religious beliefs. By contrast, Paulo's mother was a devout Roman Catholic, who in turn raised him in the faith and traditions of the Catholic Church (Kirylo, 2011). Later in life, Freire recalled being enamored with the rituals and sense of awe invoked by those rituals, even though he resisted the rigidity of the local priest's teaching (Freire, 1984). From his parents he learned two overriding values: consistency in treating all people equally regardless of their station in life, and respect for people of different viewpoints (Horton & Freire, 1990). Through those values he saw the importance of linking one's religious beliefs to positive action on behalf of others.

During adolescence, he abandoned his Roman Catholic faith, claiming he was “formed and deformed” by the Church (Freire, 1984). He related one incident where the priest tried to frighten his catechism students (of which Paulo was one) by talking about the eternal damnation and hell. Years later Freire wrote that he was deeply offended by that statement. However, in the next sentence he goes on to say he was struck by “the goodness, the strength to love without limits to which Christ witnessed” (Freire, 1984, p. 547). This same paradox of resistance to the formal rigidity of the Church but acceptance of Christ was reflected in a scene from a documentary made late in Freire's life. In one scene Freire leads the interviewer to the Catholic Church of his youth, and admits that he and the church did not always see eye to eye, but then says “me and Jesus, we are friends” (Stoney, 1996).

While in college, Freire was introduced to the Catholic personalist philosophies of Maritain, Bernanos and Mounier (Elias, 1994).<sup>3</sup> He also became involved with Catholic Action, a religious group that sought to live out its faith through actions of service toward others, especially the poor. Catholic Action was commissioned by the Church leaders to encourage “religiously approved behavior” among the laity (Horton & Freire, 1990; de Kadt, 1970).

#### FREIRE'S ADULT SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The chapter of Catholic Action in which Freire was involved was particularly concerned about the poverty conditions among the rural *campesinos*, who in essence were tenant farmers on lands owned by large and powerful landowners. Because the treatment of workers was largely unregulated by the Brazilian government, these workers were often exploited and oppressed by the landowners. In exchange for land and protection peasants were expected to remain loyal to the political views of their landowners, even as they were forced to live in subsistence conditions. Catholic Action organized peasants into *sindicatos*, or farmer's unions, that demanded better

treatment and working conditions from their landowners. At the same time Catholic Action protested the incursion of United States corporations seeking to control land and resources in exchange for small returns to the Brazilian economy. They called for the nationalization of Brazilian industries and land reform as well. Because of these overtly political actions, Freire's chapter of Catholic Action was eventually shut down by the Roman Catholic hierarchy (Jeria, 1986). Thus began Freire's ongoing tension with the leadership of the Church, even as he embraced its essential teachings related to social justice.

These early experiences in Catholic Action led Freire to pursue his literacy work among the rural poor, and eventually led to his exile from Brazil. At the same time, during this period he developed lifelong friendships with individuals such as Dom Hélder Câmara and Camilo Torres, who became influential leaders in the liberation theology movement. Moreover, these experiences caused his spiritual sensitivities to become intricately and intimately related to a commitment to social change and a fight against oppression (Jeria, 1984).<sup>4</sup>

#### POPULAR EDUCATION AND EXILE

Freire's development as a popular educator occurred amidst tensions between conservative and progressive forces within the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand, and a rising interest across Brazil in literacy training throughout the country as a political strategy on the other. In 1947 upon graduating from law school, Freire went to work for the Servico Social da Industria (SESI) as the director of Education and Culture in his home state of Pernambuco helping families who were having difficulties implementing educational programs in their communities. In 1956 he was appointed to the head of Council on Education in Recife, the capital city of Pernambuco, and he became well known as an expert and advocate on literacy training across Brazil. He further developed his ideas about literacy training after helping found the Popular Culture Movement (MCP). By 1962 he was the extension services director at the University of Recife, and involved many college students in literacy programs around Recife and eventually throughout the states of northeast Brazil. His approach gained great praise for enabling illiterate peasants to learn how to read in 40 days well enough to pass the literacy test required of all registered voters (Kirkendall, 2004).

In 1961, Socialist Joao Goulart was elected president of Brazil. The United States government, still shaken by the Cuban Revolution and rise of Fidel Castro, took a cautious approach to Goulart. The US officials expressed concern about Goulart's leftist orientation and sought to moderate his views, as well as the views of many governors and mayors elected throughout Brazil, particularly in the northeast, by providing foreign aid with expectations of moderation tied to it. Freire's literary programs were one recipient of that aid. With President Goulart's enthusiastic support, Freire's literacy approach was being replicated in states and communities throughout Brazil, but particularly in the Northeast states. Goulart and his political allies saw Freire's methods, which included the raising of political consciousness, as

beneficial to their progressive political causes. One Northeastern mayor referred to the program as “Revolution Through Education” (Kirkendall, 2004).

Meanwhile, progressive elements within the Roman Catholic Church had been challenging the church’s longstanding alliance with political, economic and social elites, and had begun calling for the church to exercise a particular concern for the millions of urban and rural poor in the country, and to work for substantive social change. While many local priests working in poor parishes pushed these changes, the bishop of Recife, Dom Hélder Câmara, organized the National Council of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) as an institutional voice working for these ends. Out of CNBB grew the Base Community movement, groups of peasants who came together to talk about how the practical implications of the liberating message of the Christian gospel could be applied in their communities. The base community movement drew much of its approach from Freire’s literary work and its emphasis on “reading the world” and conscientization (de Kadt, 1970; Neuhouser, 1989).

However, reactionary and conservative forces within the Roman Catholic Church, the Brazilian political elite and the United States government became increasingly concerned that Brazil would go the way of Cuba, and seek to become politically and economically independent of the United States. In early 1964 the US Agency for International Development (AID) withdrew support for Freire’s literacy program, and in March 1964 President Goulart, and a number of socialist governors and mayors were deposed by a military coup. At first the military leaders hesitated to arrest Freire in the regime change, but eventually he was relieved of his duties, and held in prison for 70 days. Meanwhile the Roman Catholic Church officials, some of whom were Freire’s close associates, failed to come to his defense. Freire later said those 70 days transformed and radicalized his thinking on political matters. He eventually sought exile in Bolivia, and then settled in Chile, where he continued his work and began writing (deKadt, 1970; Kirkendall, 2004).

#### THE NATURE OF FREIRE’S SPIRITUALITY

In adulthood Freire clearly identified himself as a Christian, a “friend of Christ” and “a man of faith” (Elias, 1994; Freire, 2007; Horton & Freire, 1990). While he had an ongoing struggle with the Roman Catholic Church as an institution, some of his closest colleagues were clergy affiliated with Latin American liberation theology movement such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Frei Betto, and Dom Hélder Câmara (Jeria, 1986).

Freire rarely talked of God apart from God’s relationship to persons in the context of history. He considered God a “presence in history,” but believed it was human beings, not God, who made changes in the conditions of society (Freire, 1970). He believed that people needed to work to change their circumstances and could not simply wait on God to change people or their circumstances. God’s role consisted of providing the vision of what human completeness and social justice looked like. Freire wrote, “[God’s] transcendence over us is based on the fact of our knowledge

of this finitude. For man [sic] is an incomplete being and the completion of his incompleteness is encountered in his relationship with his creator, a relationship which by its very nature ... is always a relationship of liberation" (quoted in Elias, 1976b, p. 41). For Freire the purpose of both education and social justice work were to move toward this vision of completeness (Elias, 1976b).<sup>5</sup>

In perhaps his most succinct yet clear statement of faith, Freire wrote late in his life: "This is how I have always understood God – a presence in history that does not preclude me from making history, but rather pushes me toward world transformation, which makes it possible to restore the humanity of those who exploit and of the weak" (Freire, 1997, pp. 103–104.) Expanding on that perspective a bit more, he continued, "... the fundamental importance of my faith [is] in my struggle for overcoming oppressive reality and for building a less ugly society, one that is less evil and more humane" (Freire, 1997, p. 104). In these words, we see reflected the linkage between a concern for social justice with a spiritually inspired motivation, or what Keating (2008) refers to as "spirit activism."

When Freire began his literacy work, he did so motivated by his Christian faith (Elias, 1994). Yet, early in his career he explored how Marxist thought could inform his educational philosophy. This foray into Marxism impacted his view of faith. He described the impact this way:

When I was a young man, I went to the people, to the workers, the peasants, motivated really, by my Christian faith ... When I arrived with the people – the misery, the concreteness, you know! ... The obstacles of this reality sent me – to Marx. I started reading and studying. It was beautiful because I found in Marx a lot of the things the people had told me – without being literate. Marx was a genius. But when I met Marx, I continued to meet Christ on the corners of the street – by meeting the people. (Elias, 1994, p. 42)

While many of his Roman Catholic contemporaries considered this link between Marx and Christ to be heretical, for Freire it was like fitting a hand into a glove. Marx provided him a view of history and the world through which he acted out the dictates of his Christian faith. Marx provided him a new way in which to encounter Christ – in the lives of the people with whom he was working. As Elias (1976a) contends, "As [Freire became] more Marxist, the religious inspiration of his social philosophy [became] more explicit" (p. 65).

This link between spirituality and social justice is further highlighted in Freire's comments about reading and responding to the Word of God. What Freire meant when he referred to the Word of God is not entirely clear, but at its heart the Word of God for him seemed to be the words of Christ recorded in the gospels (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the New Testament). Speaking of the gospels, he wrote,

I cannot know the Gospels if I take them simply as words that come to rest in me ... On the contrary, I understand the Gospels, well or badly, to the degree I live them, well or badly. I experience them and in them experience

myself through my own social practice, in history with other human beings.  
(Freire, 1984, p. 548)

Just as all learning for Freire comes through the interplay of reflection and experience, so too he believed one could understand the directives of the Word of God only as one sought to live them out. Freire wrote: “I think that my attitude cannot be the attitude of an empty being waiting to be filled by the Word of God. I think also that in order to listen to it, it is necessary to be engaged in the process of the liberation of man [sic]” (quoted in Elias, 1976a, p. 64). For Freire this living out was not simply for one’s personal edification and benefit, but to impact the world at large. He wrote, “In the final analysis, the Word of God is inviting me to re-create the world, not for my brothers’ domination, but for their liberation” (Freire, 1972, p. 11).

When it came to prayer, Freire rejected the “magical thinking” that often characterized much religious practice among the poor. This kind of prayer only bound persons to their poverty to passively await for divine intervention, and played into the hands of the dominant elite that oppressed them (Freire, 1970). Instead, Freire believed that prayer should not excuse or ignore oppressive practices, and should ask God for strength and courage to overcome injustice. Speaking of his own attitude toward prayer, Freire (1997) said, “I have always prayed, asking that God give me increased disposition to fight against the abuses of the powerful against the oppressed.” Speaking of his prayers for the oppressed, he wrote, “I have always prayed in order that the weakness of the offended would transform itself into the strength with which they would finally defeat the power of the great” (p. 65). By the same token, Freire was not one to ask God to bring about societal liberation, but rather saw that as the task of humanity to achieve. In other words, for Freire (1997), God projects the vision of how society should be, but it is the role of human beings to “make history” and bring about needed changes.<sup>6</sup>

Late in his life, Freire spoke openly about his spirituality in an interview with George Stoney (1996). Freire said “I think I am more a man of faith than a religious man... I strongly believe I would never not think of the existence of God for one second. Nevertheless, I don’t feel too much a need for church ... Because above all for me the true temple of God is your body, is my body, our bodies. Reflecting on his work Freire said, “I start from the world. Our great task is to make the heaven here and now, it is to build happiness here and not just wait before arriving there.” Echoing his ongoing critique of the church, Freire said, “The church thinks just of heaven, but the goal is to make the heaven here and now.” By contrast he embraced liberation theology which he said “does not dichotomize worldliness from transcendent reality.”

Throughout the interview he referred to his friendship with Christ. At one point he said the following:

I am sure of the things we should ask ourselves every day is: Why am I here?  
Who am I? With whom do I fight? What is my dream? The more I ask questions  
like this, the more I conceive the need I have to be consistent with my friendship

with Christ. Not fear of Christ, friendship with Christ. To be afraid of Christ is a way of offending and denying him, a contradiction. I cannot have Christ as a liberator of me and of us, if at the same time I am afraid of him. Maybe [I'm] afraid of offending him, but not afraid of him.

From these simple words in halting English, Freire clearly described a spirituality at the heart of his person and of his work, and a friendship with Christ that was central to his sense of being.

Freire adopted a form of what Michael Dantley (2003) calls a “critical spirituality.” Dantley’s critical spirituality brings together the insights of African American spirituality and critical theory, and is rooted in the Black church prophetic tradition. This prophetic tradition combines a deep sense of right and wrong with an outspoken resistance to oppression and a realistic pragmatism with what can be accomplished in the face of that oppression. Based in the Biblical story of the exodus of the Hebrew people from bondage under their Egyptian oppressors, critical spirituality reflects a perspective similar to that of liberation theologians. Like the liberation theologians, critical spirituality looks to Jesus as the friend of the oppressed and as one whose ministry and life point to the ultimate victory of justice over oppression (Boyd, 2012). Dantley sums up his critical spiritual perspective by saying one’s spirituality “comes from one’s internal belief that the *as is* of any given situation can be overcome for the better *not yet*” (Dantley, 2005a, p. 656, italics original).<sup>7</sup>

From his Latin American liberation theology perspective, Freire saw his faith as a source of motivation and hope in his work to overcome oppression and illiteracy. As we will see in the following chapters, he believed God provided a vision of a utopia, a preferred future of what could and should be, even as he felt called to become converted to the cause of the oppressed. His faith enabled him to resist and call out oppression through what he called denunciation, even as it also emboldened him to work for the vision of the future God called them to work toward.

## CONCLUSION

Cornel West describes the great African American philosopher and sociologist W.E.B. Dubois as exhibiting “a self-styled spirituality that was not wedded to cognitive commitments to God talk.” He goes on to say that Dubois was “religiously sensitive without being religious” (West & Buschendorf, 2016, p. 59). We believe much the same can be said of Paulo Freire. While he was shaped by religious and spiritual influences early in his life, and he was close friends with many religious thinkers, he did not think of himself as a religious or spiritual thinker. Yet, his commitment to combatting oppression and illiteracy, as well as his pedagogical philosophy, reflects an unmistakable spiritual foundation. Influenced by the eclectic spirituality of his father and the Roman Catholicism of his mother, Freire lived out worldly spirituality that recognized a transcendent cause and power beyond himself, even as he immersed himself fully in the world. He exhibited what Thomas Berry

calls a “public spirituality” characterized by “the functional values and their means of attainment in an identifiable human community” (Berry, 1990, p. 110).

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> While we are using the words “faith” and “spirituality” with a particular reference to God or a transcendent force beyond normal human experience, it can be noted for many people the word “faith” and increasingly “spirituality” are used without specific reference to a deity or transcendent being, but rather refer to a fundamental faith in the human family, which is revealed in how we related to each other. Purpel (1989) drawing from H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* stresses that the value of faith is seen in the context of how people care, trust and relate to one another. Reinhold Niebuhr (1927) states succinctly “Men [and women] cannot create a society if they do not believe in each other” (p. 62). While stating this in an explicitly Christian theological framework, many non-theists would affirm the same sentiment.
- <sup>2</sup> For the background of Freire’s early life, we looked to Kirylo’s work, *Paulo Freire: The Man from Recife* (2011).
- <sup>3</sup> See Chapter 3 for a fuller explanation of Personalist philosophy.
- <sup>4</sup> Sobrino, (1988) contends that spirituality and one’s sense of the “holy” is directly related to one’s commitment to and involvement with the poor. He writes, “I regard it as established that the practice of liberation prepares the ground for a basic spirituality” (p. 35). He goes on, “[The] de-centration of oneself, this transfer of one’s ultimate concern from oneself to the life of the poor, ... is the subjective experience of the holy” (p. 110). It is clear that for Freire his engagement with the poor in his literacy work enhanced his sense of God and motivated him even more fully.
- <sup>5</sup> See Chapter 5 and the discussion of Freire’s concept of unfinishedness.
- <sup>6</sup> Freire differs somewhat from many liberation theologians when it comes to God’s involvement in human history. Gutiérrez writes: “Human history, then is the location of our encounter with God” (1971, p. 189). When speaking of history, he meant that God encounters us in concrete historical events and places; the encounter with God must always be understood in context. Likewise, Sobrino (1988) insisted that all theology be “theological” (pp. 71–73) meaning that persons and communities encounter God in concrete historical circumstances while at the same time recognizing God as transcendent and beyond history. This understanding of history led both Gutiérrez and Sobrino, along with most Latin American liberation theologians to believe that God was most profoundly and consistently encountered in one’s relationship with and action on behalf of the poor.
- <sup>7</sup> Jon Sobrino in *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (1988) echoes a similar sentiment when he writes “Spirituality is simply the spirit of a subject – an individual or a group – in its relationship to the whole of reality” (p. 13). Sobrino goes on to identify three perquisites of “genuine spirituality:” (1) an honest acknowledgement and engagement with reality, that is the way the world is, not as one wants it to be; (2) fidelity to the real, that is a commitment to remain honest about reality despite suffering or persecution that might come; and (3) a willingness to entertain the possibility of something more, a divine force at work in history. Paulo Freire seemed to embrace the first two dimensions of Sobrino’s view of spirituality, but tended to believe the Divine being less involved in the movement of history.

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