

## CONSCIENTIZATION AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: THE PROCESS PEDAGOGY OF PAULO FREIRE

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There are a number of perspectives from which it would be possible to examine the educational work of Paulo Freire. As a practitioner he could be analyzed on the basis of his work as a university professor, a vocation he has discharged in Brazil, Chile and the United States. As a methodologist he could be examined from the point of view of one concerned to establish the efficacy of a particular approach to the training of illiterates. As a sociologist he could be considered from the perspective of the effectiveness of his work as a means of introducing political change in emerging nations.

As a matter of fact, Freire has been analyzed from each of these perspectives. In each case his work has been received with approval and with much expectation as holding promise for improving the lot of the masses in third-world nations.<sup>1</sup>

Yet there is one perspective on Paulo Freire that has yet to be considered from a genuinely critical approach, and that is from the point of view of his being a representative Christian educator, one who espouses a consistently Christian educational philosophy. Certainly Freire perceives himself to be functioning in this capacity.<sup>2</sup> Moreover he has been generally well received by members of the modernist Christian camp as an educational philosopher of much hope for their endeavors in Christian education.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore programs of literacy training based on Freire's model—such as have been introduced in Cuba and Nicaragua—have received financial support from both the World and National Councils of Churches.

Yet to my knowledge there does not exist a thorough analysis of Freire's educational philosophy and work that would enable us to determine to what

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. G. J. Conti, "Rebels With a Cause: Myles Horton and Paulo Freire," *Community College Review* 5/1 (Summer 1977) 36-43; J. L. Elias, *Conscientization and Deschooling* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976); H. Kekkonen, "An Experiment in Outreach and the Pedagogy of Freire," *Convergence* 10/1 (1977) 53-56; C. Wright, "Education for Community and Liberation," *Study Encounter* 11/1 (1975) 1-12.

<sup>2</sup>P. Freire, "Education for Liberation," *One World* (July 1975) 19; "Pilgrims of the Obvious," *Risk* 11/1 (1975) 18.

<sup>3</sup>J. L. Elias, "Paulo Freire: Religious Educator," *Religious Education* 71 (January-February 1976) 40-56; T. Hokenson, "A Process Pedagogy for Christian Education," *Religious Education* 68 (September-October 1973) 600-602; *Foundations for Christian Education in an Era of Change* (ed. M. J. Taylor; Nashville: Abingdon, 1976).

extent that work can be regarded as a reliable expression of a distinctively Christian educational philosophy. In this paper I hope to take some steps toward providing just such an analysis.

After an examination of the philosophy and methodology that lie at the heart of Freire's work in the training of illiterates, the paper will present some conclusions with respect to points of convergence with and divergence from a Biblical approach to Christian educational philosophy in his work. My general conclusion, as will become apparent, is that the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire is more informed by the social theories of Karl Marx than the theological perspectives of Jesus Christ.

For Freire, education is primarily a political endeavor.<sup>4</sup> The educator's task is to create a context and learning tools in which people can work to change their world through coming to understand it better and thereby gaining the insight that they can play a significant role in making it a new and better place. He observes:

Democracy and democratic education are founded on faith in men, on the belief that they not only can but should discuss the problems of their country, of their continent, their world, their work, the problems of democracy itself.<sup>5</sup>

Learners are encouraged to see "the 'possible dream' that is to be accomplished" through their efforts.<sup>6</sup> According to Freire "social radical transformation, revolution itself, is an educational task."<sup>7</sup> It is for this reason that he prefers to use the term "cultural action for freedom" rather than simply "education" to describe his work:

Education for liberation, as a true praxis, is simultaneously an act of knowing and a method of transforming action, which men have to exercise on the reality they seek to know. So, education or cultural action for liberation is a social praxis, as a method of this praxis is to make and re-make itself in the very process of its being.<sup>8</sup>

In this culture-transforming work of education there can be no pretense to neutrality<sup>9</sup> for, according to Freire, education that does not consciously work to help the learner develop his critical apparatus and to initiate social change is nothing more than a subtle form of oppression. Through education learners become involved with the reality around them and, beginning with basic literacy training, initiate the process of introducing the changes that will enable them to describe and remake their world according to their own developing perceptions. Ideally the type of social development that an emerging nation should undergo takes place on two levels,

<sup>4</sup>Cf. P. Freire, *The Politics of Education* (South Hadley: Bergin and Garvey, 1985).

<sup>5</sup>P. Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury, 1974) 38.

<sup>6</sup>P. Freire, "Literacy and the Possible Dream," *Prospects* 6/1 (1976) 70.

<sup>7</sup>P. Freire, "To Know and to Be," *Youth Affairs* (June 1979) 2.

<sup>8</sup>P. Freire, "The Political Literacy Process: An Introduction" (unpublished paper, October 1970) 8.

<sup>9</sup>Freire, "Pilgrims" 16.

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.<sup>10</sup>

Fundamental to these overall objectives is the work of literacy training among the masses of developing nations. In Freire's approach, small bands of educators become incorporated into the lifestyles of rural villages and communities. There they learn the ways of the peasants and begin to formulate means of creating an educational vehicle with which to begin the instructional process. Once they have become adequately prepared and the basic educational materials are in readiness, the members of the training team next need to "mobilize the population and, in a general way, explain the project to them."<sup>11</sup> The learning that ensues evolves in two stages:

In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all men in the process of permanent liberation. In both stages, it is always through action in depth that the culture of domination is culturally confronted. In the first stage this confrontation occurs through the change in the way the oppressed perceive the world of oppression; in the second stage, through the expulsion of the myths created and developed in the old order, which like specters haunt the new structure emerging from the revolutionary transformation.<sup>12</sup>

The literacy process is the most elemental aspect of cultural action for freedom. It is in the "culture circles" of peasants and educators that the basic mindset of transforming action through the acquisition of knowledge of their world is inculcated:

When adults learn to read and write, they begin to take the initiative in shaping history in the same way that they begin to remake themselves. Shaping history means being present and not merely represented. Pity the people who passively accept, without the least sign of agitation, the news that in their own best interest "It has been decreed that on Tuesdays all people must use the greeting 'good evening' from two P. M. on." That would be a situation in which people are represented, but not present, in history.<sup>13</sup>

Both in its initial and subsequent stages adult literacy training is concerned with "informing the people about even the most minor problems relating to the nation's destiny."<sup>14</sup> Freire elaborates on this ideal for the literacy process:

As a creative act, learning how to read and write necessarily implies, in this approach, a critical understanding of reality. Illiterates are called to seize existing knowledge for themselves, based on their concrete practice in the world.

<sup>10</sup>P. Freire, "Education, Liberation and the Church," *Study Encounter* 9/1 (1973) 11.

<sup>11</sup>P. Freire, *Pedagogy in Process* (New York: Seabury, 1978) 134-136.

<sup>12</sup>P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1970) 40.

<sup>13</sup>P. Freire, "The People Speak Their Word: Learning to Read and Write in Sao Tome and Principe," *Harvard Educational Review* 51/1 (1981) 29.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

Thus, these new avenues to knowledge surpass the old limitations and, by demystifying false interpretations, reveal the causes of facts. When the separation between thought and language and reality no longer exists, then being able to read a text requires a "reading" of the social context from which it stems.<sup>15</sup>

This process of teaching peasants to read and write Freire has been able to accomplish in six to eight weeks.<sup>16</sup> The learning normally takes place in a group setting in which the learners are stimulated, through graphic depictions of their surroundings and discussion with one another, to develop a level of critical awareness concerning their lives in the world. For Freire it is of critical importance that people perceive the significance of their unique life contexts:

Only as men grasp the themes can they intervene in reality instead of remaining mere onlookers. And only by developing a permanently critical attitude can men overcome a posture of adjustment in order to become integrated with the spirit of the time.<sup>17</sup>

Without this ability critically to perceive the themes that are operational in their circumstances, people "are carried along in the wake of change"<sup>18</sup> rather than themselves being integral parts of the transforming process.

The discussion groups—or culture circles—serve as the basic educational context for Freire's method. They provide a setting for problem-posing, debate, discussion, and the creation of "generative words" (words and word roots having cultural significance that become the focal points for literacy training):

The culture circle functions as a context, which I would like to call "theoretical," in which cultivating the attitude of being a curious and critical subject becomes the point of departure for learning to read and write. In the initial stage, the exercise of thinking critically about society prepares the learners for the subsequent phase where they deepen their analysis of social practice and of the transformation of reality. At the same time, critical thinking enables the learners to approach their everyday reality with awakened curiosity, relating their own practice to the meaning of the situations in which they are involved.<sup>19</sup>

In the culture circles the educator functions as a stimulator and guide to discussion and debate through the presentation of carefully-prepared graphics that portray realities with which the peasants are familiar. Presentations based on these graphics are then made in the form of problems intended to stimulate interaction among the learners concerning their everyday lives.<sup>20</sup> Out of such discussions arise generative words. These become core concepts in the process of the peasants' learning to read and write. The entire process

<sup>15</sup>Freire, "Literacy and the Possible Dream" 71.

<sup>16</sup>P. Freire, "By Learning They Can Teach," *Convergence* 6/1 (1973) 82.

<sup>17</sup>Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* 5-6.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. 7.

<sup>19</sup>Freire, "People Speak" 30.

<sup>20</sup>P. Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge: Center for the Study of Development and Social Change, 1970) 17.

constitutes one of analyzing familiar situations for the sake of challenging old assumptions and beginning to think about and act in the world according to an altogether new set of assumptions:

In the process of decodifying the representations of their existential situations and perceiving former perceptions, the learners gradually, hesitatingly, and timorously place in doubt the opinion they held of reality and replace it with a more and more critical knowledge thereof.<sup>21</sup>

The general goal for the culture circles is to encourage critical analysis of one's life in the world and to stimulate the learners to courageous and transforming action on their circumstances in order to bring about a new set of conditions.<sup>22</sup> Mere reflection and interaction themselves are not the heart of the educational process, as Freire explains:

The education our situation demanded would enable men to discuss courageously the problems of their context—and to intervene in that context; it would warn men of the dangers of the time and offer them the confidence and the strength to confront those dangers instead of surrendering their sense of self through submission to the decisions of others. By predisposing men to reevaluate constantly, to analyze “findings”, to adopt scientific methods and processes, and to perceive themselves in dialectical relationship with their social reality, that education could help men to assume an increasingly critical attitude toward the world and so to transform it.<sup>23</sup>

At the heart of Freire's pedagogy is the concept of “conscientization,” the word he uses to describe the process whereby learners come to perceive themselves and the realities of their world in a new light. As a matter of fact, says Freire, it is of the very essence of being human to be involved in conscientization:

As conscious beings, in a dialectical relationship with the objective reality upon which they act, human beings are involved in a permanent process of conscientization. That which changes, in time and space, is the contents and the objectives of conscientization.<sup>24</sup>

Thus the culture circles, as arenas for conscientization, provide a most human context in which the process of a learner's realizing his or her true destiny can be effectively worked out.

Yet conscientization is not merely reflection on one's life situation. It is not complete until it has issued in reality-transforming action in which new perceptions are actualized and solidified for further reflection:

Conscientization cannot stop at the stage of the revelation of reality. It is authentic when the practice of revealing reality constitutes a dynamic and dialectical unity with the practice of transforming reality.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. 16.

<sup>22</sup>Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 31–32.

<sup>23</sup>Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* 33–34.

<sup>24</sup>Freire, “Pilgrims” 18.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid. 15.

Thus conscientization serves as the means whereby people emerge from oppression into a new life of freedom and cultural renewal:

Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which men discover each other to be "in a situation." Only as the situation ceases to present itself as a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and men can come to perceive it as an objective-problematic situation—only then can commitment exist. Men emerge from their submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled. Intervention in reality—historical awareness itself—thus represents a step forward from emergence, and results from the conscientização of the situation. Conscientização is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence.<sup>26</sup>

The ongoing educational task, then, becomes one of effecting ever-deepening levels of conscientization, of the fundamental combining of critical reflection and effective transforming action on the conditions of a learner's circumstances, thus allowing the learner to denounce his former estate and to announce a new social agenda for himself and his neighbors.

This general philosophy has been worked out by Paulo Freire over a period of thirty-five years and in cultural situations in Latin America and Africa. It has been adapted for use in the training of illiterates in political contexts as diverse as Chile, Brazil, Guinea-Bissau, Cuba and Nicaragua. Thus it would be safe to say that Freire's is no merely abstract pedagogical theory. On the contrary, it has been proven in the hands of skilled and determined practitioners as an effective tool for raising the level of literacy in a nation and for expediting the implementation of that nation's revolutionary social agenda.

Without attempting fully to elaborate a distinctively Christian philosophy of education, I wish now to point out some areas of convergence with and divergence from such a philosophy on the part of the process pedagogy of Paulo Freire.

There are at least four areas in which the educational philosophy of Freire and that of a distinctively Christian educator tend to intersect. The first of these has to do with the notion that education cannot be treated as a completely neutral enterprise. The Christian educator would maintain that all educational endeavors are informed and motivated by a view of the world and life that serves to organize the material to be learned and the goals to be achieved, so that the learners are progressing toward a preconceived ideal of what it means to be educated.<sup>27</sup> To assume a posture of neutrality in the work of education is therefore, in effect, to deceive or to mislead the learners and to subject them to practices that can be manipulative and destructive of personal freedom and responsibility.

<sup>26</sup>Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 100–101.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. N. DeJong, *Education in the Truth* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969) 32–36; R. J. Rushdoony, *Intellectual Schizophrenia* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973) 1–11; C. Van Til, *Essays on Christian Education* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 45 ff.; J. Waterink, *Basic Concepts in Christian Pedagogy* (Ontario: Paideia, 1954) 34 ff.; N. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Responsible Action* (Grand Rapids: CSI/Eerdmans, 1980) 14–15.

Freire is adamant on this concept. Neither the individual nor any educational institution—such as the Church—can presume to educate people on the basis of a purely neutral starting point. Preconceived notions about the nature of reality and the role of individuals in that reality are inescapable.<sup>28</sup> Thus it is the responsibility of the educator to bring all such presuppositions to the surface for analysis and discussion rather than blindly to assume that the theoretical basis that undergirds the educational and social context is altogether proper and valid.

For Freire the shape such presuppositions must take in any particular learning context is related to the degree of oppression that exists in that context. Such oppression takes both a national and a communal or personal shape. Oppression is national in that certain formerly helpless national entities have, in the past, been subjected to the imperialistic and colonial designs of larger, more powerful governments. Freire begins with the assumption that all such oppressive yokes must be thrown off. On the microcosmic level the basic assumption is that individuals in a community are oppressed by dominant classes of individuals who keep them from having a part in determining their own destinies. Such oppressors are generally portrayed by Freire as capitalists, landowners and media experts. Their dominance must be resisted and thrown off if true freedom is to eventuate for the masses.

Thus Freire is open and honest about his basic operating assumptions, and this presuppositional straightforwardness is consistent with a Christian approach to education, if only on the procedural level.

A second area of convergence between Freire's approach and that of a distinctively Christian educator may be found in the former's insistence that there must be a close tie between learning and life in the educational program. True learning is to result in changed lives and, ultimately, changed cultures, societies and histories. The task of the educator is to create a context for modeling that reality, for promoting its acceptance, and for facilitating its outworking among the masses:

I was convinced that the Brazilian people could learn social and political responsibility only by experiencing that responsibility, through intervention in the destiny of their children's schools, in the destinies of their trade unions and places of employment, through associations, clubs, and councils, and in the life of their neighborhoods, churches, and rural communities by actively participating in associations, clubs, and charitable societies.<sup>29</sup>

This attitude is further revealed in Freire's description of the types of subject matter that frequently come up for discussion in the culture circles:

In the culture circles, we attempted through group debate either to clarify situations or to seek action arising from that clarification. The topics for these debates were offered us by the groups themselves. Nationalism, profit remittances abroad, the political evolution of Brazil, development, illiteracy, the vote for illiterates, democracy were some of the themes which were repeated from group to group.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Freire, "Education, Liberation and the Church" 8.

<sup>29</sup>Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* 36.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid. 42.

Thus there is always to be a "dialectical relationship between the concrete context in which the practice takes place and the theoretical context in which critical reflection is done."<sup>31</sup>

With this notion the Christian educator would find much with which to agree. As Arthur Holmes has observed: "Learning should touch the real issues we experience rather than detach itself like a remote game of chess."<sup>32</sup> It is a shortcoming of much of Christian education, especially much of what occurs in local churches, that it fails to specify the implications of Christian instructional content for the everyday matters of the whole of an individual's life. Similarly, church education often fails to encourage any authentic or effective accountability with respect to these same matters. When church education does attempt to stress the peculiarly moral, social and cultural implications of its doctrine, it all too often falls into a pit of moralism or legalism, as Rushdoony has pointed out.<sup>33</sup>

A third area of convergence can be found in the insistence of both Freire and Christian education in general that each individual learner is a person of consequence, a significant being who has the potential for making a significant impact on his or her world. Freire notes:

For me education for liberation implies the political organization of the oppressed to achieve power. Only then will there be the possibility of having a new kind of education which takes reality and the potential of each member of society seriously.<sup>34</sup>

It is this process of taking the learner seriously, together with the learner's coming to take himself or herself seriously, that creates a climate in which the ideas of remaking one's circumstances and of shaping history do not seem like far-fetched notions at all.<sup>35</sup>

Although his conclusions as to man's essence and purpose will differ markedly from those of Freire, the Christian educator can agree with him that of all creatures certainly man is the most significant.<sup>36</sup> Created in the image of God, he has become the object of God's covenant love, the goal of his redemptive plan, and the steward over his created order. Thus his education must be taken seriously, with a view to enabling him to become all that he can as a responsible and creative being in the world—indeed, as, the very vicegerent of God.

Finally, agreement can be found between Freire and the Christian educator in the matter of the larger goals of the educational endeavor. Both will agree that education cannot be satisfied with the simple transference of data or the making of merely nonthinking, functional beings for a mechanistic society. Education must concern itself with the development of a world and life view

<sup>31</sup>Freire, *Pedagogy in Process* 100.

<sup>32</sup>A. F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 72.

<sup>33</sup>Rushdoony, *Intellectual Schizophrenia* 119–122.

<sup>34</sup>Freire, "Education for Liberation" 16.

<sup>35</sup>Freire, *Pedagogy in Process* 23.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. DeJong, *Education* 71 ff.



that becomes for the individual a source of motivation and a touchstone for finding his or her niche in the world and for beginning to remake the world according to that developing worldview. Freire articulates this conviction as follows:

When people are able to see and analyze their own way of being in the world of their immediate daily life, including the life of their villages, and when they can perceive the rationale for the factors on which their daily life is based, they are enabled to go far beyond the narrow horizons of their own village and of the geographical area in which it is located, to gain a global perspective on reality.<sup>37</sup>

With such a remark the Christian educator can certainly find much to agree. As Holmes observes:

The Christian faith enables us to see all things in relationship to God as their Creator, Redeemer and Lord, and from this central focus an integrating worldview emerges.<sup>38</sup>

Again, it is regrettable that, with respect to this area of responsibility, much of Christian education has presented a fragmented rather than a unified and complete approach to understanding the various facets of human life and our discipleship in the world.

There are three primary areas in which it is virtually impossible to reconcile the process pedagogy of Paulo Freire with a distinctively Christian approach to education. In fact so significant are these areas that they disqualify Freire's educational philosophy as being representative of a consistently Christian approach. Moreover it is in the last of these areas that Freire can be seen ultimately to be more dependent for his educational and social theories on the thinking of Karl Marx than that of Jesus Christ.

The first of these areas of divergence involves the question of ultimate standards, those foundational beliefs that constitute the touchstone for the overall pedagogical process.

For Freire this foundation can be nothing other than the developing understanding of the world and their role in it that is emerging within the learners under the guidance of a trained teacher. As he notes: "The existential experience of the population as a whole would constitute the basic source from which the total educational undertaking would be drawn."<sup>39</sup> The source of learning—that is, the object of transformation as well as the guidepost for progress—is nothing more than the immediate cultural context of the learners as this is perceived and even defined by the learners themselves.

The Christian educator, on the other hand, would point beyond the mere experience of the learners to the revelation that God has given in his Word and to the person and work of Christ.<sup>40</sup> The Scriptures, as interpreted by themselves and finding their ultimate focal point in Christ, are for the Christian the propositional standard against which all our endeavors must be measured. Progress in learning and in transforming both our individual lives

<sup>37</sup>Freire, *Pedagogy in Process* 57.

<sup>38</sup>Holmes, *Idea* 57.

<sup>39</sup>Freire, *Pedagogy in Process* 133.

<sup>40</sup>DeJong, *Education* 37 ff.

and the cultural context of which we are a part can only effectively be measured according to the criteria and guidelines set forth in the Word of God. Without these norms to give guidance to his efforts the Christian educator runs the risk of creating a context and an enterprise where ultimate relativism will reign supreme. Such a situation not only frustrates the search for reliable knowledge but also jeopardizes the interests of the less vocal or less intellectually facile as skilled teachers subtly interject their personal biases into the learning process and as the outspoken and more mentally agile learners concretize and propagandize their own distinct views. For the Christian educator the Scriptures provide a reliable objective touchstone, thus serving as an absolute backdrop against which all pedagogical decisions and all learning must be measured.

Closely related to this is the second area of disagreement, that being the question of the nature of truth and knowledge. For Freire, truth can never be understood as a static thing. Truth is a process. It is always that which is in the process of becoming:

It is, therefore, important that in the conscientization process the uncovering of social reality be grasped not as something which is, but as something which is becoming, something which is in the making.<sup>41</sup>

The kernel of truth that this statement contains is completely overshadowed by Freire's intention to absolutize it for the teaching-learning context. As this translates into the social process of learning,

to know, which is always a process, implies a dialogical situation. There is not, strictly speaking, "I think", but "we think". It is not "I think" which constitutes "we think", but, on the contrary, it is "we think" that makes it possible for me to think.<sup>42</sup>

The possibilities for new forms of oppression arising out of such convictions will be disturbing for any educator who holds to a more objective view of truth and knowledge.

The Christian educator will recognize the existence of propositional truths such as are revealed in the Bible—changeless, timeless truths that are unaffected by altered circumstances but that must be constantly understood and applied to the modification and correction of the human condition according to eternal norms of right and wrong. When, as Freire insists, knowledge must be viewed only as a process, then we can never truly say that we have come to learn or know anything in a final sort of way—not even such things as the reliability of our pedagogical technique or of the goals toward which we are laboring.<sup>43</sup> Instead we can only ever be in pursuit of the truth, utterly bereft of any but the most existential and pragmatic standards for assessing the validity of our efforts or the reliability of our objectives.

Finally, the Christian educator would take issue with Freire's dialectical approach to the matter of social change. Having rejected his process episte-

<sup>41</sup>Freire, "Pilgrims" 14.

<sup>42</sup>Freire, "Political Literacy Process" 1.

<sup>43</sup>P. Freire, "Education for Awareness," *Risk* 6/4 (1970) 15.

mology, the Christian will not be able to bring himself or herself to accept the model of social change that Freire sets forth as being a reliable representative of Christian educational or sociological philosophy. In fact the Christian will be quick to point out that it is clear from the writings of Freire that he has allowed himself to be more dependent on the teachings of Marx than on those of Christ in this most important area of pedagogical theory:

The educator not only does not possess the knowledge, he knows that he does not know in a complete and total way. And so, precisely because of this, he knows that knowledge is not a fact but a process. And what is more, it is a process which determines the praxis of men and women in their reality. Because of this, knowing implies transforming. We know when we transform. It is a fact in the history of consciousness that in the process of evolution theory never precedes praxis. Marx was and is absolutely right.<sup>44</sup>

Freire's dependence upon the teachings of Marx is apparent in other areas as well. For example, Freire's commitment to the dialectical nature of social change appears to come primarily from Marx:

Mechanical objectivism is a gross distortion of the Marxist position with regards to the fundamental question of the subject-object relationship. For Marx, these relationships are contradictory and dynamic. Subject and object are not found to be dichotomized nor constituting one identity, but one dialectical unity. The same dialectical unity in which we find theory and practice.<sup>45</sup>

In discussing the revolutionary nature of his work in education and its tendency to substitute one form of power (rule by the enlightened) for another (rule by oppressors), Freire observes in characteristically Marxist rhetoric:

Because the revolution undeniably has an educational nature, in the sense that unless it liberates it is not revolution, the taking of power is only one moment—no matter how decisive—in the revolutionary process.<sup>46</sup>

As a matter of fact, Freire at times takes existing Marxist governments to task for having diluted the pure Marxist doctrine by prolonging the use of power and not continuing the dialectical transformation of society in the direction of the Communist ideal. In so doing he charges that they are in danger of simply creating a new form of bourgeoisie rather than the truly revolutionary society populated with new people.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Freire, "By Learning They Can Teach" 79. Cf. K. Marx, "The Materialist Conception of History," excerpted in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (ed. T. B. Bottomore; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) 51: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness."

<sup>45</sup>P. Freire, "Conscientisation and Liberation," *IDAC*, Document 1, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup>Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 131-132. Compare the remarks of Lenin: "By educating a workers' party, Marxism educates also the advance-guard of the proletariat, capable of assuming power and leading the whole community to Socialism, fit to direct and organize the new order, to be the teacher, guide, leader of all the toiling and exploited in the task of building up their common life without capitalists and against capitalists." V. I. Lenin, "The State and Revolution," in *The Essential Left* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961) 170.

<sup>47</sup>Freire, "Political Literacy Process" 9-10. Cf. K. Marx and F. Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," in *Essential Left* 28.

Thus it seems that, in spite of there being clear areas of convergence between the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire and a distinctively Christian approach to education, we must reject the idea of Freire's process pedagogy as false in its self-representation as a distinctively Christian philosophy of education. Although there is much that is similar between conscientization and Christian education, in the last analysis their differences are too vast and too significant to permit a parity of identity between them.