



CHURCH & COMMUNITY

JUNE, 1974

30¢

Freire speaks on Freire



Keith Rowe

Paulo you are known to all of us here by your writings and by your reputation and I'm reminded that earlier on today you were saying that you haven't come with any recipes, that can be overlaid as it were on any given society. But, it's our task to create the sort of society here and the sort of education system that services the sort of society we want and over this weekend we are going to be having our own conversations about New Zealand education and New Zealand society. We are glad you're here to sit in on our conversation and to comment out of your experience on what we are saying. It's particularly significant for us to welcome you because you bring together the concern of being an educator as well as being a person from part of the world that we are coming to hear more from—Latin America. We are discovering there, some tools to understand our society. You also come as a person who is not only a thinker but, a doer and for many of us there is a dichotomy between the thinking and the doing that worries us (sometimes I hope). What we want to do tonight Paulo is to hear from you and about how you come to be here, some of the adventures you have had and some of the things you learnt on the way. Paulo I'd like to ask you how you come to make the discoveries about education and society that have become familiar to us through your writing?

Paulo

Right, now I will begin to talk to you about some of the aspects of my experience in order to make it easier for your communication this weekend. First of all, I was born in 1921 in Recife. I was born in a middle class family,

Christian, with something, I think, very important for me, for my existential experiences. (Another thing, I always use existential experience instead of life because even though in English life is more than existence, for me, existence is more than life). My mother. My family on my mother's side was, is, Catholic. My father was a spiritualist. But, what is important for my life concerning this point was the enormous capacity which my father had, was to respect the choice of the others. It is very important in my life, my personal history. Of course he did not believe, he did not follow the Catholic church or the protestant churches, but, I remember when I was seven years old, I went to him and I said. "Next Sunday I will go to church to make my first communion." He kissed me and said "O.K., Fantastic. He'll go with me." And he went with me, without believing, but with **absolute respect** for my belief. After the worship he embraced me, kissed me again, and said "congratulations son".

So, you cannot realise how much such an attitude impressed me deeply. That is the ability which he had to respect the choice even of his seven years old child. It has many things to do with my emphasis on dialogue, of course it does not explain everything you know in my life. But, it says something, because if he was really to do it, it was because he was really a dialogical man and not an authoritarian man. He did not need to cry out about his authority of father or power. He simply was. By experiencing his authority vis-a-vis our freedom. So he invited us constantly to talk about everything, but always with a constant respect, a total respect. The same with my mother, she could go to the church without any kind of comment. Even irony because he could make irony.

Another thing which is important, excuse me, I did not come here to write my auto-biography because in the last analysis it is not important really but it is important for me. Precisely because we have to have some two days of conversation I think that by telling you some of these personal aspects I can make easier our understanding.

Another point which is interesting in my personal experience is that even though the great influence on my life comes from my father much more than from my mother whom I love deeply, she's alive today, 82 years old and he died when I was 13 years old, younger than I today. His influence was stronger than my mother's influence. Never-the-less concerning my religious choice I made the choice of my mother and not of my father. It's very interesting considering the influences of him. It should be expected of me to follow him in religious dimension and not my mother. So in that light I think I really made my choice because I was able to overcome his influence.

I was born in a good house, with a backyard with a lot of Mango trees, tropical fruits and space to walk and play. But my family suffered the impact of depression, economical depression of 1929, and we lost the house and we had to go to a small town twenty kilometres from Recife to try to survive. In that town when I was nine years, I began to experience, to feel hunger. I know what it is to be hungry. For example, when we have an operation to remove the tonsils, I was hungry, it was painful, I could not eat, but it's not really to be hungry. When we diet in order to be beautiful and elegant, this is not to be hungry because we know that we can eat. That we have money to buy. We are hungry when we don't know when we can overcome the hunger, at this moment we have known what it is to be hungry. Not when we say tomorrow I don't have breakfast in order to suffer for the poor. No, no, no, it is not to be hungry, and maybe it's beautiful but it's not to be hungry. I was hungry in my childhood because I needed to steal, I needed to kill birds with a sling. I needed to fish not because I love to do it, it was not a sport, I needed to fish, I needed to eat. And I learned a lot at that time in spite of my childhood. I had my brothers and we were connective children, that is, conjunction "but" "and" these links between these centres and the other centres. We were kind of conjunction children, that is, we established relationships. We belonged to a second social class, the middle class, but at the same time we had friends of our same class position and friends of the other social class, the workers, the peasants, we established the connections.

Never-the-less, if our hunger made possible for us to communicate with the workers, the children, the peasants, on the other hand our position of class was defended by the family which was afraid to lose its position of class. It explains for example that in spite of all the difficulties my family continued to preserve the German piano which we had and my father did not lose his tie. The tie of my father on the neck and the piano inside the house expressed our position of class. At that time I could not understand very well what I was experiencing, never-the-less, during or since that time I never thought that I was hungry because God wanted it. Fortunately, since I was a child I never had such a bad theological thought. So, I never could believe that God could do it. Fortunately.

Of course in such a situation I had problems to learn, you cannot realise the difficulties I had to understand the primary lessons of history, of geography, of language. The times I spent repeating—France—capital—Paris. England—capital—London and I would close my eyes and repeat and repeat, France—capital—Paris. England—capital—London. But the only geography I could understand at that time was the geography of my hunger and not London and Paris, it did not make sense. So, it was tremendously difficult and at that time I thought I was stupid because I was not able to understand what I was reading. It was very interesting, it was fantastic, because years later when I was twenty-five years old and was Director of the Department of Education in my state and I went to visit the schools in the popular areas, I did not need to read any texts by scientists demonstrating the relationship between bad nutrition and learning difficulties. I did not need to read scientific books about that because I had my knowledge first hand. So I could understand the children of the workers whom many many of the intellectual bourgeois say, they are incapable, they are not able to follow our levels of thinking of knowledge, they need a different school because they are not like us. Maybe like some scientists in the United States say they are genetically inferior (concerning the blacks)—beautiful white

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FREIRE ON FATALISM

Question: How can we have faith in a religion which often serves to keep people oppressed?

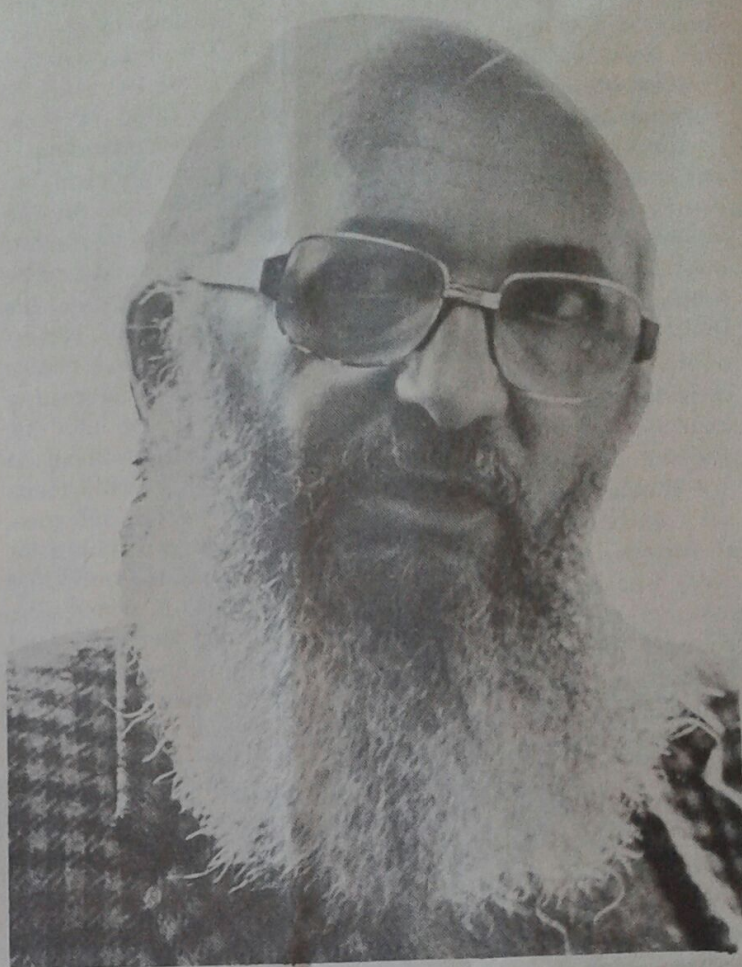
Answer: I always say that being a Christian does not mean for me, that it is necessary for me to be a reactionary. On the contrary, my point of view of being a Christian implies becoming the oppressed not the oppressor.

Of course I understand that historically Christians have many things to pay for historically, for their compromise with the establishment, but I repeat that being a Christian is not necessarily to be a reactionary. And now in Latin America (I don't know your situation) even though we don't still have a majority, we have at least a minority of Christians, a few bishops, some many priests and sisters and pastors, both sides protestant and catholic and a big quantity of lay people engaged in the real process of transformation in Latin America. The Theology of Liberation in Latin America is the most important intellectual expression of this movement. Of course, many people say the books on theological liberation in Latin America are not theological essays, but anthropological, economical, sociological but, not theological. Of course I don't agree with this analysis.

scientists. So, I know today because of my experience of yesterday, I experienced this difficulty to understand. With the hunger, my friends, it's difficult to understand.

It was necessary for me to spend a lot of time. But, above all, to start eating in order to discover that I was not as stupid as I thought I was. For example, I began to start a grammar school, secondary school when I was only sixteen years old, before it was impossible. I did not have any kind of possibility. When I was sixteen years old, I was more-or-less the same size I am today. (Editor, say, five foot six inches tall, solid build). But, today I'm a bourgeois fat. Then I think I was very thin. But when I was nineteen my older brothers and sister too began to work and it was possible for me to begin to eat something more. And it was a beautiful moment of my life, for I discovered I really could understand the books. I was reading and I read a lot. At this time I discovered also that I loved the syntax of my language and I studied it very deeply and I began to teach the syntax of Portuguese language and I began to get some money to help the family to buy books to continue to study. At twenty years of age I began to teach in secondary schools, at the moment when I was finished my secondary school I taught Portuguese in the other secondary schools. First, second, third and fourth degree.

The experience of teaching my language very young was very good for me, it was a kind of awakening for education. I remember by myself I began to study linguistics but the only grammar book did not satisfy. So I began to read something more. When I found one I discovered for example, in the linguistics it starts to consider communication and all the problems of signs, linguistic signs. I felt challenged and when I was twenty three I made maybe the most important decision in my life. Which was to get married to Else. I always that was much more important than writing the **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**. I think that without Else it would have been a very difficult task for me to have written the book. She does not like me to say it because she says I am making a lot of propaganda. (Laughter). It's true. But she exercises a strong influence on me. She studied with me and was a teacher of Portuguese and finally because of that we ended up bringing children to Europe. She was a primary teacher and loved education. Else was another very important dimension in my life experiences. And the children were our great teachers and the people our greatest teachers. When I was twenty five, I began to work in Recife in an institution which worked in education with workers, with poor workers in some areas with fishermen and from that I myself had a fantastic time working with the workers. So it meant that I re-found, I re-met the workers as I met them while I was a child, through the children of them and now as a young man I re-met them as an adult. I had a beautiful time—very beautiful—maybe six or seven years working in adult education. Since, for example, the relationship between the schools and families until the literary process and the post literary process and during this period by having a permanent contact with the workers in Recife and in other areas of my state, my country, I learned a lot of things. With them I discovered the obvious things that in order for us to be educators of the people, that is students of the people, I cannot teach the people if I



don't learn with the people. And I learned this with them, not at University. On the contrary, at University we learnt precisely the opposite—that we have knowledge to extend to those who don't have knowledge. It is one of the myths of many of us. A false misunderstanding of knowledge. What means knowledge. I always say that knowledge cannot be extended. Knowledge has to be made, it has to be created and re-created, not extended. So that I learned above all with them. But I also learned during this period with Else in the Parish in the popular areas of Recife and we also worked with Catholic Action among Married Couples. I also worked with University Catholic Action and it was a good experience. During those ten years I was trying to find, by practical experiences some ways of approaching the educational problem among the people, above all at the level of the adults. And I made a lot of experiments and research and of course I was trying to do something at the level of the adults literacy process but not only the adult literary process. But above all, I was pre-occupied with doing something in education in which process the education was not the exclusive education of the educatees, while the educatees should not be the exclusive educates of the education. But, on the contrary, that both became in the process simultaneously educator, and educatee, mutual. It meant that I was trying to overcome the dichotomy of teaching in the language as different things. Another thing that I was trying to develop in the literary process, was not to teach mechanically, the illiterates how to read and write but to chal-

FREIRE ON CHRISTIANITY

We have a strong fatalism among the peasants in rural areas in Latin America, but we also have fatalism in New York, of course the difference of the fatalism is in the expression of it. The dress which fatalism uses. The peasants, for example, say, our grand-grand-father was a peasant, our grand-father was a peasant, my father was a peasant, I am a peasant, my children are peasants. And I ask him, "What means it to be a peasant?" He describes the misery of being a peasant and finally maybe he says: "We are like this because God wants, and if God wants this, why how can we think to change what God wants?"

In New York, it's not God, it's technology. And we have in the United States a lot of expressions of fatalism. Another point, we have in Latin America a very strong incidence of illiteracy, linguistically speaking, in technological societies we have political illiteracy, you understand people know how to read but, the people do not how to make history.

It means in conclusion, that it should be impossible to work in a complex society like this in the same way we worked in the complexity of the simplicity of the rural areas of Latin America. It would be completely crazy. We have to discover in complex societies like this the different game to play. But, I am convinced it is possible, but, if you ask me how to do it, I don't know.

challenge them to understand their reality, that is to become aware, hence the concept of conscientisation.

In the last analysis I was convinced that education never was and never is a neutral thing. It is impossible to have a process of education which is neutral. It does not exist unless in our heads. I was really interested in working with the people and not above the people and not for the people and it means to become committed to the people, not in a paternalistic way. Of course such an approach is as political as the other approach which is also political, but which the educators say they are neutral. I always say that the only difference between me and the reactionary system is that I am not neutral and I say that I am not, that he is not neutral and he says that he is! (Laughter). It is the only difference. Our approach because of this has to be antagonistic it cannot be equal.

In 1961 I finally discovered I'd found some concrete things, it was possible to start a national activity. It was in (1962-63) after national discussion about what I was doing in Recife (at that time I was Professor of the History and Philosophy of Education). I was invited by the Ministry of Education in Brazilia to co-ordinate a national plan for an adult literacy campaign (in my first book I discuss all this experience) this book is now published in English (smile) I am not making propaganda. But precisely because

of this approach in education after coup d'etat in 1964 in April, of course I was arrested and all the campaign was finished (stopped) so I had a small experience of gaol which also was important, not because I am a masochist. I spent seventy-five days in gaol and I was expelled from the University as an enemy of the junta and an enemy of the people of Brazil and as an 'absolute ignorant'. In the October of 1964 I was more-or-less tried again to be put in gaol so I went to Rio-de-Janiero to continue talks with the army and while there took the advantage of being in Rio-de-Janiero and left Brazil. Then I went to Bolivia, but after only fifteen days there was a coup d'etat also, I had to leave Bolivia and I went to Chile.

In Chile I lived with my wife and our children, they arrived in January, 1965. In Chile I worked for four and one-half years for the Government. Above all, with the former Minister of Agriculture of the Allende Government, Professor Jacque. . . , who is today in the Embassy of Venezuela. Since September the military will not permit him to leave the country. He is one of the greatest men of Latin America in the field of agricultural reform. A fantastic person, he's Catholic also. (Laughter). It's a mere coincidence, but a good co-incidence, I'm deeply ecumenical.

But, in 1969, we left Chile, we went to the United States, to Cambridge, Massachusetts, for almost one year. From the United States came to Geneva in 1970 and since that time until now I am working for World Council of Churches. I'm very happy because I feel free to work.

I think that many of you have noted that by talking to you, how I did not make any concrete reference to anything. That I did not talk about how I worked in Recife. I did this purposely, that is my intention in this first contact, simply to tell you something of the movements, of my moments, of my experience, which is not an individual one because we cannot deny the individual dimension of our existence. It is not enough to explain our existence. That is, we experience ourselves socially and not individually. Many people commit mistakes when they try to understand me, when they try to write about my activities because they try to state what I did. As if I had a direct line (vertical) from Heaven. No! I am a human being, an historical being, submitted to the historical influence of my country, of my book, in order to understand what I did it is necessary to understand the atmosphere of Brazil at that time. How we were becoming in Brazil at that time.

Finally, I'm happy to be here, very happy, because I have the feeling you are receiving me as a normal human being. I am feeling here not as an object, not a strange thing. I feel very bad when I perceive that I'm the object of curiosity. I never was, am not and I reject to become a guru. I am a man, a human being.

I did not come to New Zealand to teach you anything or nothing. I have nothing to teach you, nothing if I'm not able to learn with you and precisely because we don't have too much time together, what we have to do here, from my side, is to explain to you what and how I think on some things. But not to say to you—you have to do the same things, because that would be an invasion from my part and a lack of respect for you as people and as a culture●

Listening to Ourselves

Recently in Auckland a seminar was held under the guidance of Professor Paulo Freire of the World Council of Churches Office of Education.

Over three days representatives of thirty organisations in the fields of education, community service, and employers met to discuss some of the following ideas:

- from secondary school pupils saying their schooling doesn't fit them for life as it is, or for the changes ahead;
- from teachers' organisations saying the teacher/pupil ratio will not allow for meeting the needs of individual pupils;
- from employers saying applicants for jobs haven't the basic skills one expects after a certain number of years of schooling.
- from women saying the educational moulds into which they have been cast reinforce the female stereotypes;
- from Polynesians saying the schooling opportunities don't suit people from different cultures, experience and expectations.

Church and Community attended the seminar and has attempted to catch some of the spirit by means of quoting almost verbatim large sections from the two main discussions or fishbowls as they were called.

The seminar proved to be an occasion where we (i.e. New Zealanders) could listen to ourselves, and an opportunity to increase one's awareness of social situations and contemplate (even plan) action that would transform the situation or society in which we are living.

Paulo Freire, after an introduction to his thought, his history and educational experience insisted for most of the conference on "listening and learning" saying when pressed to comment or "show us the way". "The problems you are discussing are your problems. You will solve them, not I. I am not and refuse to become a Guru."

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CHAPLAIN GREENLANE HOSPITAL AUCKLAND

Applications are invited from ordained ministers of the Christian Churches for the position of Chaplain at Greenlane Hospital, Auckland. The vacancy is due to the retirement of the present Chaplain, and it offers an attractive and developing service opportunity to a man with the requisite qualifications. Applications will close on 30 June, 1974.

For further information and conditions of appointment enquiries should be directed to:

The Revd A. D. Robertson,
Secretary,
Inter-Church Chaplaincy Committee,
P.O. Box 8637,
Auckland 3.

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