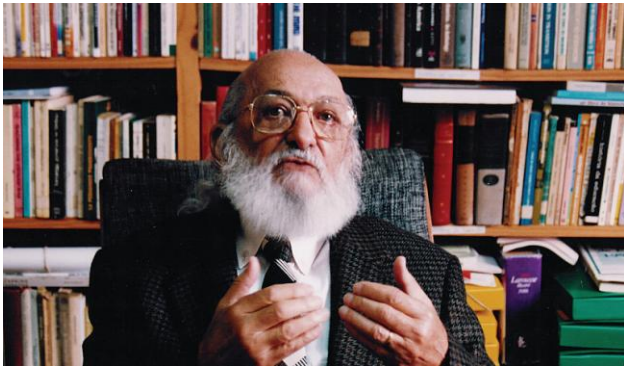


COURSE ON PEDAGOGY OF PAULO FREIRE

Among the courses I am teaching this semester at the Lutheran Seminary and Theological Community is a course on the pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1921-1997), a Brazilian who was one of the most important figures of the twentieth century in the area of education. After I proposed teaching a course on Freire's thought this semester, I also realized that it is the centenary of his birth.

What led me to propose a course on the thought of Freire is the profound impact he has had on my own teaching since I began to study his work in the 1990's. Freire is in large part responsible for the methodology adopted and developed by Latin American liberation theologians in the 1960's and 1970's, which focused on taking an analysis of the social, political, and economic contexts and realities in which we find ourselves as a starting point for reading Scripture and doing theological reflection. This methodology also stressed the importance of bringing together theory and practice or "praxis."



Freire's most important work was "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," first published in English in 1970. There Freire criticized what he called the "banking" model of education, which sees the educator's task in terms of merely "depositing" the superior knowledge he or she possesses into the students. As empty vessels, they are simply to absorb and memorize what the educator tells them without questioning or criticizing it. Freire regarded such a method as highly oppressive in that it assumes that the students are ignorant and does not teach them to think critically for themselves or to research and explore questions of their own.

In contrast, Freire proposed what he called a "problematizing" pedagogy. This pedagogy involves bringing the knowledge and critical thinking skills of the educator and the students together through dialogue in a process in which both educator and students learn from one another and teach one another. All together "problematize" in that they ask questions, react critically to the viewpoints of others, and explore the things that interest them and arouse their curiosity. Such a methodology is both liberating and stimulating for all involved. It also ties together theory and practice in that the subjects and questions raised and researched arise out of the students' own experiences and thus are relevant and applicable for the reality they encounter in their daily lives.



Naturally, this emphasis on dialogue, listening, problem-solving, critical thinking, curiosity, and bringing together the knowledge that people already have in an effort to expand that knowledge further is extremely important not only for the task of teaching but for every aspect of life and ministry. In addition to reflecting on the relevance of Freire's thought for the work of the church, we will also be exploring how to apply the principles proposed by Freire to the use of some of the newer technologies developed in recent years. Among these, of course, is Zoom, which I am using to teach the class to over 25 students in six different countries and seven different states of Mexico. Working with a group of that size is quite a challenge, given the emphasis on dialogue, sharing, and listening, but it also affords a great opportunity to do the type of problem-solving Freire proposes!

FEBRUARY 5, MEXICAN CONSTITUTION DAY

One of the national holidays in Mexico is Constitution Day, which commemorates the signing of the most recent Mexican Constitution on Feb. 5, 1917.

The 1917 Constitution was passed at the conclusion of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917). Among the things it sought to change was the distribution of the country's land and resources, the enormous power of the Roman Catholic Church, and the establishment of dictatorships. The Revolution began after Porfirio Díaz had spent 35 years in the presidency by getting himself reelected repeatedly. The Mexican Constitution therefore prohibits reelection of the president, though the presidential period lasts for six years instead of four, as in the U.S.



While the Mexican Constitution is in most ways similar to the U.S. Constitution, there are also significant differences. It bans the death penalty, for example, and states that all natural resources belong to the nation. This includes all petroleum and mineral deposits.

Originally, the Constitution included many anti-church laws to curb the enormous power of the Roman Catholic Church. All clergy had to be Mexican by birth (since most of the priests were from Spain), church buildings became property of the state, religious education was prohibited in both public and private schools, and only civil marriage is officially recognized. While some of these laws have since changed, clergy are still prohibited from occupying any public office, and churches are not allowed to support political parties publicly or financially, nor to attempt to influence legislation in any way.

PERSONAL NEWS

Alicia and I are happy to report that we and all of our immediate family are in good health and have avoided becoming ill with the Covid-19 virus. Unfortunately, however, the virus has taken the lives of many people here, including family members of some of my students and a good number of people in our neighborhood, among whom have been at least half a dozen people on our same block. Several of the vendors we knew at the market near our house have also passed away. The government has started vaccinating people of our age group here in Mexico City, but it will probably be at least a couple of months before we can get vaccinated, and the vaccine offered us may be one of the versions made in Russia or China.

We were blessed to have our daughter Monica here for several weeks in December and January and really enjoyed her visit. A couple of weeks ago Alicia and I were finally able to take a little day trip to Texcoco outside of Mexico City. It had been over a year since we had been able to do anything like this.



Other than that, things continue to go on normally for us, except for the fact that all of David's teaching is done from home. We thank you for your continued prayers and support!

MORE NEWS AND INFORMATION AT:

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Invitations to preach or give presentations at your congregation online are always welcome!