

Forum 5

De-colonizing Religious Praxis: Expansive Education for Engaging the Public Square

The current reality marked by injustice and individualism has affected not only the socioeconomic contexts of our societies but also has induced religious people to accept as normal a fundamentalist discourse that justifies crimes and wars in the name of God. Although these fundamentalist discourses are present in different dimensions of culture, economy, and politics, it is through the religious narrative that fundamentalism becomes more explicit and threatening.

Inspired by Freire's thoughts, I maintain that in contemporary societies there is religious illiteracy that needs to be challenged by the process of *conscientização* proposed by Freire. As Freire argues in several of his books (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1968, *Education as a Practice of Freedom*, 1974; *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, 87), the literacy process in a Freirean perspective begins with the realities of students and their life experiences and should simultaneously incorporate a critical analysis of reality by those engaged in the literacy process. From this perspective, it is possible to avoid a fatalistic interpretation of reality. For Freire, this approach to adult literacy goes beyond the analysis of language codes. According to him, it is not enough to know how to read and write but to make social and political use of this knowledge in daily life. This political, liberating and conscious character is what differentiates the Freirean approach from other methods of literacy, and what has notably been lacking in the contexts in which fundamentalism has proliferated. Therefore, I argue that religious people should engage simultaneously in reading the sacred book and in reading their reality.

Freire says: "Reading the world always precedes the reading of the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world ... we can go further and say that the reading of the word is not preceded only by the reading of the world, but by a certain form of writing it, or to rewrite it, that is, to transform it using a conscious and practical work "(Freire, 1987, p.35). His thoughtful idea sheds light on contemporary contexts where inflammatory expressions of hatred, prejudice, and violence have become "normalized" and where "the other" have become demonized. If, on the one hand, colonialism, under the guise of fundamentalism, functions as an impediment to the democratic project, liberating education, on the other hand, should awaken the conscience of religious people to understand their reality and act upon it to transform it. Only then does education become a practice of freedom within a democratic society.

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