



Echoes from Freire for a Critically Engaged Pedagogy

Mayo, Peter
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Book Review

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Whose side are we on when we teach (4)? Theological education and religious studies have sometimes been the type of elitist, domesticating education that Paulo Freire warned against – education that supported colonial powers. Peter Mayo’s book is not written specifically for teachers in seminaries or religious studies, but it offers both challenge and resources for profound reflection on issues of the politics of knowledge relevant to all theological and religious work. Mayo calls educators to move toward social justice and revitalization of the public sphere in ways reminiscent of Freire. Through Mayo, readers find companions in liberating movements for an authentically dialogical approach to education. What’s more, Mayo offers encouragement through his awareness of the movements of “globalization from below,” insisting on integration of theory and practice for substantive democracy.

First, Mayo poses pedagogical and philosophical questions situating Freire’s contribution in the tradition of John Dewey’s “education for democracy” (36). Readers must consider Mayo’s judicious acknowledgement of both the excesses and contributions of socialism, Marxism, and Neo-Marxist thought. Furthermore, readers are challenged to consider ways their pedagogy approaches knowledge as dynamic rather than static (92). Next, Mayo explores common ground for potential partnerships rooted in shared work and theory. Postcolonial, peace activist, anti-racism, neo-Marxist, liberation feminist, and other emancipatory educators will find companions in this call to confront the spread of hegemonic global capitalism. Like an invitation to a remarkable symposium, the gift in Mayo’s book is an introduction to the work of key figures who echo Freire including: Lorenzo Milani, Margaret Ledwith, Julius Nyerere, Paula Allman, Antonia Darder, and Henry Giroux. Each of these thinkers invites study in their own diverse contexts. Mayo points out common threads of shared praxis and analysis in their

work providing directions for further study and unifying a growing movement.

In this way, Mayo's book offers encouragement for those engaged in critical, emancipatory work. Despite evidence of increasing militarism and corporate encroachment on daily life, the reader finds sustaining encouragement in growing global movements for social transformation. We are encouraged by robust manifestations of Freire's influence that extend from Brazil around the world, in places including: Malta, Italy, California, Nottingham, England, Rhode Island, and Tanzania. Mayo illustrates local educators/actors confronting corporate globalization while at the same time weaving together transnational networks of support.

Educators in theology and religious studies will find rich resources for pedagogy that is both critical and emancipatory in this volume. The breadth of voices included and the depth of Mayo's familiarity with Freire's ethos and writing spark new dialogue for transformational teaching. Although this book could be accused of being overly ideological, those making such an accusation could be called to examine their own political commitments for complicity with systems of injustice. If teachers were true to Freire's vision, we would be in conversation with each other across borders and cultural contexts. Mayo both models and invites us to join that work uniting reflection and action.

Problems of xenophobia, racism, and cultural accommodation persist in theological education and religious studies as well as other forms of higher education. Educators interested in political mobilization, community development, and liberating praxis will find Mayo posing key problems in transformative ways.

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