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An Emancipatory Pedagogy of Jesus Christ: Toward a Decolonizing Epistemology of Education and Theology

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

An Emancipatory Pedagogy of Jesus Christ:
Toward a Decolonizing Epistemology of Education and Theology

by

Terrelle Billy Sales

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,
Loyola Marymount University,
in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education

2017

An Emancipatory Pedagogy of Jesus Christ:
Toward a Decolonizing Epistemology of Education and Theology

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by

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This dissertation written by Terrell Sales, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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An Emancipatory Pedagogy of Jesus Christ:
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by

Terrelle Billy Sales

This decolonizing interpretive analysis serves to provide bicultural researchers the opportunity to engage and challenge the dominant literature on pedagogy, curriculum, methodology, and schooling. Bicultural researchers have been forced to navigate the dialectical social terrain of dominant/subordinate tensions and contradictions, as part of their process of survival, as subaltern or subordinate cultural citizens and critical scholars. This study seeks to deconstruct Eurocentric epistemicides that compartmentalize knowledge, particularly within the fields of theology and education. Western Christianity tends to separate God from humanity. This is an epistemological problem. The nature of this study necessitates a process by which critical theory, critical pedagogy, and liberation theology serve to reconstruct traditional Westernized notions of the interrelatedness of theology and education. This study seeks to determine what can be learned from a critical pedagogy of Jesus Christ by examining His integration of theology and pedagogy as presented in His praxis detailed in the New Testament. Jesus is positioned as the

literal embodiment of both theology and pedagogy, where both are procured through praxis for liberation, resulting in an emancipatory pedagogy that reconciles humanity back to God and God to humanity.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.”

Mark 7:9

To what degree is humanity willing to uphold man-made traditions at the behest of fulfilling our duty to defend the rights and privileges of all creation? This is the question that the Lord Jesus poses to the hegemony of His time. In chapter 7 of the book of Mark, Jesus Christ rightfully confronts the Pharisees and Scribes, a Jewish religious sect originally entrusted to uphold the commandments of God in the care of His people. Yet, through the misappropriation of privilege and power, the sect had inadvertently become an oppressive, hegemonic, and legalistic religious faction, devout in teaching and upholding man-made traditions above God’s provisions for man. This particular passage of Scripture continues to speak to the egregious disharmony that exists today between followers of oppressive traditions and those who fight for equality. The words of Jesus Christ, spoken over two thousand years ago, still resonate through the pages of Scripture and emphatically speak to the modern day man-made Eurocentric traditions that continue to supplant humanity’s commitment to God-given rights apportioned to the human race.

I identify as Black. I identify as Christian. This is a conscious decision made in my attempt to develop an identity based off limited knowledge, experience, and truth presented to me through a lens shaped by an education and spiritual formation imbued in colonial Eurocentric tradition. I often wondered why my educational experience did not provide the fulfillment promised by the American Dream dogma still perpetuated at many campuses throughout the

country. The ideals, history, language, pedagogical strategies, education, and ideologies of my education were all filtered through a racializing lens that uplifted and favored the dominant culture, all while relegating the disenfranchised minority. Consequently, as a Black Christian, these two aspects of my identity seem forever pitted against each other in an ethereal struggle to develop an identity in a so-called postcolonial nation, still shaped by Eurocentric epistemologies and deeply substantiated in exclusionary Western principles of humanity.

My profession of faith in Jesus Christ has permanently changed my life. The truths of the Gospel message have permeated every facet of my walk; whether professional or personal, I strive to place the principles taught by Jesus as the lens through which any and all of my life's decisions are made. In chapter three of his letter to the Colossian Church, the Apostle Paul urges its members that in "whatever [they] do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." This is my ultimate goal. Thinking back on my academic career and as a Black male in the United States, I never felt that my educational experience provided me the opportunity to engage both cognitively and intellectually with my Black identity or my Christian faith. Hence, I was never afforded the value of critically analyzing what it meant to be a Black Christian in an academic setting. Entering my college years, I purposefully chose to attend private Christian institutions of higher education with the resolve of having this experience; sadly, it never occurred even within these contexts. As such, clearly absent from the curriculum and teaching practices of the faculty was a critical perspective and focus on Christianity and its influence on the Black experience in America.

As a Black student at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, I was never afforded the opportunity to engage critically with my identity as it related to educational and spiritual

formation. Christian values and morals were assumed to be the norm for all students, and again I found myself only engaging in theological, ethnic, ethical, and Christocentric matters by way of personal conversations, books, articles, and in my participation at my local church. As a student in a teacher education program, I yearned to learn about the pedagogy of Jesus Christ the teacher, as examined through an epistemological and ontological lens that engaged my history and the conditions of my social location within society. I also found myself asking questions like, “How would Jesus the teacher approach this lesson?” and “Why are the teaching methods of Christ not taught or critically analyzed?” Whenever I worked up enough courage to ask teachers and faculty members these questions, instead of engaging in great dialogue, I was often referred from the School of Education to the School of Theology, as if the two were traditionally and inherently epistemologically separate. Yet, for the Black Christian student, matters of identity and knowledge formation are essential to personal, social, and intellectual development. Hence, the separation of theology and education are problematic, for both these entities have contributed profoundly to the identity formation of Blacks in America. Theology and education should then be embraced and utilized in tangent to produce a more holistic educational experience for Black Christian students. This fundamental premise underlies this interpretive study, which seeks to discover an emancipatory pedagogy of Jesus Christ, in an effort to move toward a decolonizing epistemology of education.

The Problem of Epistemology

This study argues that the problem with the American educational system is an epistemological one, which undergirds, reproduces, and perpetuates the racialized oppression of Blacks and other populations of color in this country. Accordingly, education in the United

States compartmentalizes knowledge through a Eurocentric lens that inhibits the progression and attestation of other ways of knowing and learning. James Joseph Scheurich (1994) defined epistemology as “the study of how we know or what the rules for knowing are” (p. 18). Nichole Bourgeois (2011) argued that humanities intend to give meaning and purpose to life, and its processes ultimately drive social scientists to employ a variety of systematized reasoning to produce knowledge in all disciplines—herein, lies the problem. In trying to separate the two ways of knowing—theological and educational—these two disciplines cannot operate to their fullest capacity when functioning in isolation; there must be an integration of the two. Where theology and education intertwine and reconcile to their greatest affect is in Jesus Christ, the sincerest revelation and appropriation of knowledge and truth toward humanity and its relation to God and His creation.

Epistemological Traditions

Operating from a critical epistemological lens, it is important to fully detail the decolonizing interpretative approach that will guide this section of research. According to Antonia Darder (2015), the decolonizing interpretative approach to knowledge construction is a “meta-process of investigation” that allows for “the interrogation and disruption of currently held views, beliefs and assumptions” (p. 66). This interpretive approach is to be used to “challenge mainstream social structures of inequalities that perpetuate racialized, gendered, economic, sexual, [religious] and other forms of social exclusions that persist within education and the larger society” (p. 66). Epistemology and knowledge construction, in regards to social structures (e.g., educational institutions of higher education), actively contributes to the fragmentary

systems of education in America. As such, not even research epistemologies go untainted from the persistent cultural reproduction of endemic systems of oppression (Darder, 2015).

Approaching the study of epistemology through decolonizing interpretative analysis is important for the purposes of challenging and deconstructing prevalent ideologies that are detrimental to the progression in understanding the relationship between pedagogy and Jesus Christ. According to Darder (2015), this form of critical inquiry and research is dedicated to the conceptual rethinking of the perceived norm. To better understand the need for a decolonization of hegemonic epistemology surrounding knowledge, Biermann (2011) suggested peering closer into the immense saturation of colonialism in Western culture as it pertains to Indigenous settlers. I believe his work, although adequate for Indigenous populations, can also be attributed to the decolonization of Western epistemologies in all areas and for all peoples. Mario Barrerra (1979), in his theoretical elaborations on the internal colony thesis, argued that colonialism is a “structured relationship of domination and subordination” (p. 193). Within such structured relationships, Biermann (2011) posited sustainable “racialised hierarchies of power/knowledge that legitimate, serve and naturalize the interests of the dominant group” (p. 388).

The intent here is to retheorize colonialism beyond its hegemonic rendition as a static term frozen in the annals of history, used to describe isolated events, and to see it as a living, systemic presence of oppression that is alive and actively ensures the perpetuation of dominant Western thought. The use of the term from this critical lens applies to it the rightful weight necessary as noted by Biermann (2011), in that the term is generally used with “major qualifications” and, therefore requires sustained “awareness of its genocidal baggage” (p. 388). Biermann argued that colonialism’s nuanced operation demands concentrated consideration in

order to come to grips with the structural, psychological, and discursive elements present within its multifaceted make-up. Moreover, Osterhammel (2005) suggested the history of colonialism is not only rooted in conquest, as it is also devised of gradual accumulation of “state structures and societal forms and their geographical expansion or contraction within nominally claimed regions” (p. 28).

The interconnectivity of colonialism to societal structures provides the necessary factors for Western epistemological ideals to persist and reproduce, seemingly without notice. One of Western societies greatest structures for this perpetuation is the university—colonialism’s historical association with academia is not by happenstance. According to Loomba (1998), in Europeans’ attempts to explain societies vastly different than their own, new fields of study were created such as anthropology, history, and sociology. In alignment with the normative Westernized epistemology, colonialism effectively deflected the production of knowledge and fashioned the appropriate conditions for its dissemination and reception (Biermann, 2011; Loomba, 1998). Loomba reported that the influence of colonialism was not limited to these disciplines, but also helped to reconfigure “existing structures in human knowledge [where] no branch of learning was left untouched by the colonial experience” (p. 57). Disruption of this closed system of Western epistemology is essential to legitimizing knowledge constructs that exist outside of Western culture. A critical epistemological lens can provide insight then on this growing concern among critical research as it pertains to knowledge construction, pedagogy, and curriculum in the field of education.

Epistemology: Knowledge Construction

Epistemology as a term is broad in scope and deserves considerable scrutiny, analysis, and enquiry as its appropriation hinges greatly on its definition. According to Turri (2014), “Epistemology is the philosophical discipline that studies the evaluative dimensions of cognition, their metaphysical bases, and the language used to ascribe cognitive states” (p. i). In his discussion on epistemology, Hetherington (2012) brought into question both the validity and reliability of the use of such an extensive definition for the term and its consistency regarding focus and emphasis throughout the centuries. About this, Hetherington (2006) posed questions: “How good are we at judging epistemological proposals without reflecting entrenched yet narrow or misleading central concepts, standards, methods, questions, and so on? (p. 5)

To contextualize this broad term within a comprehensive analysis, Hetherington (2012) declared that the prevailing topic of epistemology, from its very inception, is knowledge. If knowledge, and the pursuit of its definition, use, and apprehension, exists as the most consistent aspect of this particular field of study, he concedes that scientifically, the epistemological problem will inevitably result in skepticism. According to Laudan (1977), the problem of knowledge is a good problem to have. Scientifically, the problem of skepticism lends itself to furthering researchers’ understanding of knowledge and their abilities to gain its philosophical conceptualization of it. Examining knowledge from a critical lens epistemologically posits the question: Whose understanding of knowledge production and construction needs to be furthered?

Elabor-Idemudia (2011) equated knowledge with power, a power that begins with self and accumulates through meaningful interaction with others. The interpretation and appropriation of that process of knowledge production is, however, dominated by Western

philosophical thought. Hegemonic culture continues to downplay and degrade the experiences and philosophical ideologies of indigenous populations related to knowledge production. Elabor-Idemudia tied these oppressive worldview constraints on knowledge formation, through interaction and knowledge of self, back to colonialism's pervading presence within the educational system,

The result of this practice is the colonial education system that denies peoples' identity and negates their knowledge of self through shifts in focus to only prestigious functions.

The problems with this practice is the asymmetrical power relations between educators and the subjects of education, and in the differing frames of reference adopted in the knowledge production process. (p. 142)

The dominant culture's continual devaluing of indigenous knowledge production actively contributes to promoting the value of hegemonic knowledge approved by the state. Utilizing education as a medium to promote the Western ideology of knowledge, Dei (2004) exhorted scholars to spearhead and advocate for the transformation of education.

The purpose of Elabor-Idemudia's (2011) work was to illustrate how "identity and relations of power shape knowledge production" (p. 143). Within this construct there is either "validation or (de) valuation" of knowledge based on the multifaceted compilation of factors that contribute to identity (e.g., race, religion, class and gender). The continued perpetuation of Western philosophy's knowledge production cannot go without proactive protest; indigenous ways of knowledge must be valued and appropriated with adequate validation of identity as a key lever in knowledge production. In the Western context, knowledge is consistently used to

impose ideals, philosophies, epistemologies and values upon others (Aguilar, 1981; Darder, 2012).

In 1963, Edmund Gettier posited one question that has permeated the minds of all epistemologist, “What is knowledge?” or, more poignantly, “can we truly understand ourselves as knowing fallibly?” This line of thinking allows for conclusions regarding knowledge to enter a vicious cyclical stalwart, truncating the ability of knowledge to ever truly exist and/or thrive.

However, it does present epistemologists with fodder for research, as Hetherington (2012) noted,

Perhaps knowledge is somehow not fully understandable by the likes of us, no matter that it is our knowledge. Maybe our best epistemological thinkers are those who are intelligent and insightful enough to notice philosophical problems within our concepts of knowledge, even when they cannot proceed to solve those problems. (p. 5)

Darder (2015) proposed that all knowledge is understood as both historical and contextual, which corroborates with the idea that “what we know changes over time as we acquire new knowledge,” as postulated by Aristotle (Bolton, 1990; Code 1986). In critical research, the historicity of knowledge is paramount to further cementing the researcher and subject in a continuous and regenerating process of inquiry and analysis. According to Darder (2015), the knowledge tradition is best understood as dynamic and reconstructive. Within this construct, absolute knowledge is not the goal, neither is objective truth. This is considered so, given that all knowledge is produced or constituted within particular cultural, historical, political, and economic contexts that are constantly changing and evolving. Accordingly, all knowledge is considered both historical and partial in nature, being firmly anchored within the specific values

and beliefs of the context that perpetuate (or not) patriarchy, racism, class privilege, homophobia, and other forms of social and material inequalities.

This view of knowledge is also consistent with the critical literature surrounding epistemology, as Rorty (2000) noted, where singular, “truth cannot be our aim” (p. 169). However, this does not mean that knowledge is relative and that anything goes. Instead, within the critical tradition, truth is conceived as an organic and living human phenomenon, in which liberatory truths (as a plural phenomenon) are sought collectively—truths that are consistently in sync with the larger human struggle for our humanity and liberation (Darder 2012; 2015). Moreover, directivity in the critical transmission of such truths does occur; however, what distinguishes this critical epistemological approach from a banking or authoritarian approach (Freire, 1970) is that it occurs within an open field of engagement, where the contestation of knowledge is possible (Darder, 2015). Moreover, according to the literature, “truth can never be understood as a static thing. Truth is a process. It is always that which is in the process of becoming” (Moore, 1988, p. 462).

The Concept of Limit-Situations

In 1970, Paulo Freire provided epistemological insight on what he deemed “limit-situations.” These often-contradictory and difficult learning situations serve as revolutionary impetuses for new possibilities and interactions among humans and the world around them. In 1998, Anthony P. Petrucci conducted a study on the concept of limit-situations in critical literacy and pedagogy. Petrucci noted that Freire’s concept of critical consciousness, which contributed to his understanding of limit-situations, drew upon Karl Jaspers’s (1971) conception of limit-situations. However, Freire’s interpretation of Jasper’s notion of limit-situations was developed

through Martin Heidegger's disclosive theory of truth, which argues that truth is a dialogical "exposition" into the revealed nature of "what is" (Heidegger, 1949, p. 307).

According to Petruzzi (1998), Freire rejected Jasper's view of truth, yet accepted conceptually the notion of limit-situations, while providing revisions to the idea of limit-situations that center around his processual and disclosive concept of truth. What should be noted here is that both Jasper and Freire agreed that there is a withdrawal from authentic experience and being when individuals, including society as a whole, refuse to engage and/or confront limit-situations (Petruzzi, 1998). In "Education as a Practice of Freedom," Freire's (1973) defined two aspects of being in a limit-situation: integration and adaption. Freire described integration as a humanizing process that contributes to the arrival of truth as a projective disclosure. Conversely, he described adaption as a dehumanizing process that actively contributes to the process of truth's withdrawal. Moreover, Freire saw integration as resulting "from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical ability to make choices and to transform that reality" (p. 4).

Linking this train of thought to the ideals surrounding decolonizing epistemologies that skew toward the separation of theological and educational theory, Freire's philosophy, according to Darder (2015), speaks to an epistemology of knowledge construction that champions the exploration and engagement of conflicting elements in order to arrive at an emancipatory space for knowledge to formulate and expand. Freire (1998) also lent credence to the ideals of knowledge reconstruction through his understanding of learning as an ever-changing process by which learners are open to risk taking and to the adventure of the spirit. This presents an opportunity to confront an apparent limit-situation exhibited within the literature on both the

Eurocentric epistemological traditions evidenced in education and theology as well as the concurrence of Jesus Christ and pedagogy.

As stated earlier, the field of epistemology serves to answer the question “What is knowledge?” It also seeks to provide a non-prescriptive course for the discovery of truth. Petruzzi’s (1998) argued that Freirean thought on truth presented itself most fervently within particular limit-situations like the ones in my research topic. He intended to show that Freire’s view of critical consciousness is “grounded in a view of truth as a procedural disclosure of limit-situations of concrete historical and social practices” (p. 309). Within this unique limit-situation, Western epistemological constructs on the traditions of education and theology, religion and humanity, Jesus Christ and pedagogy, knowledge and truth are all essential elements to the work that must be done to decolonize normative ideologies surrounding these social and historical entities. Marxist philosophy deduced that philosophy could only take us so far; interpretation of the world through a narrow Eurocentric epistemology only serves those who benefit from this perspective—hence, the point here is to transform it (Santos, 2012, 2014).

Looking unto Christ: Education and Theology

An important underlying assumption of this study is that Jesus Christ represents the perfect union of God and humanity. Christians look to Jesus in order to better understand the human experience and to gain greater clarity on the nature of God. With an epistemological view that deeply splits theology and education, it remains an uphill battle to provide educators, clergy, Churches, and educational institutions with meaningful enriching opportunities that encompass the spirituality inherent in human existence. Lois E. LeBar (1989) postulated that, in relation, to education, “all of the valid educational concepts that have been discovered through the centuries

should have been discovered by Christians” (p. 64). She went on to explain that the various teaching concepts and educational methodologies and philosophies that have been universally accepted in the field of education have all found their roots within the Bible, evidenced in the life and praxis of Jesus Christ, yet their origins continue to be unacknowledged.

S. P. Ango (2005), supported LeBar’s argument, stating that even within theological education, there are epistemological barriers concerning the praxis of Jesus Christ’s teaching methods and their importance to the field of theology. Ango (2005) argued that, to be of any global relevance, while remaining faithful to the orthodoxy of Christianity, theological education must not only be Christ-centered and follow the examples laid down by Christ’s teaching methods, but also explicitly acknowledge that Christ’s teachings permeate the pedagogy that informs all educational disciplines—not just theological education.

Jesus Christ, the Teacher

The light of Christ has shown bright within academic theories and methodologies throughout the history of both private and public education, respectively (Dillon, 1995). However, since the turn of the 21st century, the brightness of that light has begun to dim within popular notions held in public, private, and higher institutions of education alike. The values, principles, methodologies, techniques, and overall understanding of the human condition that Jesus Christ both taught and exemplified, over two thousand years ago, are still present today within academics, philosophy and social movements, yet go without notice.

According to Lobkowitz (1991), not only has Jesus Christ deeply shaped European and American public and private educational systems, but also His thoughts, principles and values have been deeply embedded into the respective cultures altogether. Lobkowitz (1991) went on to

say that the influence of Christianity has affected Western culture more than any other entity outside of human nature itself. Yet, within the turn of the 21st century, that influence is waning greatly. How can this majestic figure, which by His very nature altered the course of human history, be forgotten among the annals of education, philosophy and social movements? Considering the ever-growing chasm between Christianity and culture, evidenced through the separation of Church and state and public and private institutions, how do we reconcile the religious-historical Jesus and all His implications, with the sociopolitical, educational, theological, and philosophical Jesus, particularly within a critical pedagogical framework, to benefit both society and academia? The literature on Jesus Christ the Teacher can help to dispel narrow Western epistemological formulations of theology and education.

Jesus Christ, the Man

Many have come to know Christ through His teachings, some through, what they would deem personal experiences, his being a disciple of Christ, and others through the volumes of works written about this polarizing complex God-Man. Some call Him Savior, Lord, King—God. As a Christian, I hold dear to the Christology that Jesus Christ is Messiah, the Second Adam, the sinless incarnate Son of God, the propitiation of sin for those who believe: Savior of humanity. Many of the views that are present within the literature, I believe to be true, objectively. However, what cannot be discredited is the authenticity of Jesus Christ the man and His teachings on life and righteousness. When asked what is the greatest commandment by the Pharisees, a hierarchical, oppressive religious sect in ancient Palestine, Jesus's answer was quite telling of His epistemology. Jesus quotes both Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18:

The first is this, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There are no other commandments greater than these.” (Mark 12:29-31)

To summarize our duty to both God and his fellow man, Jesus’s epistemological stance was shaped heavily by these two commands, and all other commandments are merely commentary on these. We will revisit this passage more closely later in Chapter 3.

The sociopolitical context of Jesus’s time on earth is paramount in understanding who He is: a Jew; where He’s from: first-century Palestine; and to whom He is sent: the world, but more specifically, to the socially, politically and religiously oppressed Hebrews occupying the Roman province of first-century Palestine. Many scholars have attempted to accurately capture the Jesus of history and apply who He is in a historical context, to who He is in present day-scholarship and theology. Borg (1991) argued, through a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary typology of religious personality types, that Jesus is a teacher of “world-subverting” wisdom within His cultural and historical context.

Epistemological Pillars of Christ

Within the educational spectrum there is a Christocentric foundation of praxis that shapes academics and, when implemented with intentionality and consistency, further warrants the transformation of morals and ethics through the medium of Christocentric pedagogy. From a *transformationist* perspective, Niebuhr’s (1951) juxtaposition of Christ and culture seems appropriate, as Jesus sought to transform individuals as well as the prevailing culture to a higher level of ethics and morality. The literature paints a picture of Jesus Christ as liberator (Boff,

1978); however, this is rarely mentioned explicitly. What the literature does mention are the ethics of Jesus Christ. Conversely, the definition of ethics is also convoluted and extremely diverse, given interdisciplinary perspectives (Dillon, 1995). Thus, defining ethics presents an arduous task, with so many perspectives and opinions on Jesus Christ, it is difficult to synthesize the works into a cohesive conceptualization of who Jesus is and the ethics and morals that He taught, particularly with regard to education.

A consistency can be found throughout the research regarding two pillars represented regarding the praxis of Christ. The first is the need for a new attitude, a rebirth, from the inside out. According to Stein (1994), the ethics of Christ point to what Jesus refers to as being “pure in heart.” Under this Christocentric praxis, it is the heart that must change, for out of the heart, the issues of morality to God and man are decided. It is because of our understanding of God and His mercy and compassion toward us, that we reciprocate the heart of God toward others. The second pillar represented in the literature is the command to love: an unconditional love of God and man. Pointing back to what Jesus Christ refers to as the greatest commandment, we see emphasis placed on loving God fully, with all of our very being, and the reciprocation of this same love of God toward us to our neighbor. Stein pointed out that this love is not to be relegated to an emotional feeling, yet should be a love understood and demonstrated by actions. Only then is love fully demonstrated toward our fellow human beings.

According to Stein (1994), looking at what he deems the liberal interpretation of the ethics of Jesus, “being” and “doing” go hand in hand, there is no separation of the two. This is the praxis of Jesus Christ, knowing the will of God toward man and doing it should never be separated, for one cannot exist without the other. These are the ethics and morals of Jesus that

shape His epistemology. Stein stated that the ethics of Jesus are not simply intention ethics; they are also ethics of doing. Thwing (1897) provided insight on the importance of the praxis of Jesus Christ by stating, “He spake truth because He was truth; and the truth which he spoke got to itself greater power through coming forth from His essential character” (p 170). For Jesus, the marriage of teaching and doing further substantiated and authenticated the message and provided the necessary means for hearers to adhere and believe. Thwing stated that “[Jesus’s] teachings had life because it came from His own life” (p 171). According to Webb (1997), teaching involves the expression of one's whole personality; this was exemplified in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The praxis of Jesus is essential to His theology and critical to His pedagogy.

When Freire (1970) has spoken on praxis, he has often described it as putting theory into action. Taking this into consideration, when looking at Freirean principles on education and theology, a pattern of Christocentric elements is embedded within its very fibers. In fact, T.M. Moore (1988) wrote: “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” (p 453). What Jesus Christ provided through His life, actions, and teachings was a viable framework and contextual epistemological foundation for spiritual, social, and educational reform. Operating from a Christocentric praxis, educational institutions should, as many do, attempt to emulate Jesus Christ by building upon these pillars, proffering both the Church and educational institutions to end all forms of oppression by obtaining a new attitude and enacting upon Christ’s command to love through the eyes of God. The implications of Christocentric praxis, when aptly applied, provide the opportunity for radical change in both education and society.

What can be said regarding liberation theology and Freirean thought on the purpose of education and the Church can, and will continue to be, debated. One thing that cannot be denied is that orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy. H. Richard Niebuhr's (1951) transformationist stance on Christ and culture and Paulo Freire's (1970) contribution to critical pedagogy provides an extension of Jesus Christ's theoretical and philosophical praxis of transforming the culture from within and the true purpose of education. These two conceptual frameworks also operate through a Christocentric praxis, for they are meant to be used to minister to humanity and draw men closer to God and the world that He loves so dearly, evidenced through the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ—liberator of the human capacity. Yet, the Lord Jesus Christ has ascended to His Heavenly Father and is no longer with us—bodily. What, in turn, has He left in order to continue His mission of revealing God to man? The Gospel of Matthew provides the final commission of the Lord Jesus Christ to His faithful disciples upon His ascension,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt 28:18-20, NASB)

His commission was to the Church. The Church is God's governing body, His precious bride that serves as the world's moral compass, in that it reflects in the people of God the beauty, holiness, and righteousness of its Husbandman, the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Church ventures into the realm of education, this commandment should not be diluted, but heightened. I would argue that, along with the Church, He has also left His teachings that serve as a guide for not only Christians, but also educator's worldwide.

Christian Education and The Black Church

For the purposes of this study, a refocusing on the Christian University's purpose for students and their lived experiences is essential to gain a full understanding of the issue. Perry L. Glanzer's and Keith Negley's (2012) research stated that students at Christian institutions of higher education seek to acquire wisdom that is relevant to life; students long for Christian institutions to be a witness of Jesus Christ in every dimension of academic life. As the varying entities that determine the purpose of education in America continue to shape and reshape student's experiences, Dewey (1916) postulated in *Philosophy of Education*, the danger of formalizing instruction as the only focus in schools, completely isolates and omits the subject matter of life-experiences. This, too, can be attributed to the learning experiences of student's in Christian institutions.

Looking at the history of education in America, from its religious inception to its secular manifestation, and the overall lack of clarity surrounding the missions of not only secular institutions, but also Christian institutions of higher education, students are left longing for a greater experience. The purpose of the university is based on noble purposes, ideally to pursue truth through the opening of minds to promote the idea of redefining the possible (Blauner, 1970). However, these institutions neither know, nor care enough, to engage in the missions of their respective universities or the diverse populations they serve. A nation that refuses to define education and grapple with its purpose is a nation that is severely mis-educated.

More so, a Church that has ventured into the realm of higher education, that refuses to provide its students with a Christocentric curriculum that permeates all sectors of their education, is egregiously mis-educating their students. Defining the purpose of education, due to the

increased secularization and colonization of American culture, has become a very difficult task. America continues to propagate the necessity of higher education and generate billions of dollars a year off of this premise, yet continues to fail to substantiate the claim by actively providing a meaningful and purposeful educational experience for its constituents, particularly African American/Black and indigenous populations. The question that I intend to answer through this research is complex; however, its implications are as relevant today as they were over four hundred years ago.

The secularization of higher education has offered American society an avenue to promote academic freedoms that align to the hegemonic culture (Dei, 2004). As a result, Glanzer (2012) has stated that secular universities have transformed into what he deems “multiversities”—institutions with no unifying core of knowledge or identity that can provide students moral wisdom for life. His remedy for this growing concern is the resurgence of Christian thought and practice in higher education, most notably in Christian universities and colleges. With research pointing to the vast purposelessness of the majority of university experiences, should not this practice be soluble for all institutions of higher education, particularly institutions serving African American/Black and indigenous populations?

Examining the role that the Western Church has played in the development of educational practices and knowledge formation contributes to the pantheon of literature surrounding the subject. However, according to Roland Mitchell (2010), a space for Black people to discuss the Black Church and its influence on Black education is rarely, if ever, provided. Mitchell stated that, in the conversation for Black education and the Black experience, is a paucity of research on the role the Black Church has played in the identity development of

Blacks in America. From my personal identity formation and journey through the American university system, I can attest to the dearth of curriculum that engages in such a pivotal aspect of my spiritual and cultural identity development.

Identity: The Role of the Church and Education for Blacks

The *Journal of Negro Education* provides scholastic articles on significant educational and societal issues prevalent within the Black community. Their 2010 study on “The Role of Spirituality, Religion and the African American Church on Educational Outcomes” (Jett, 2010) uncovered the deficiency of recent publications on the relationship between the Black Church and educational outcomes among Blacks. The scarcity of literature surrounding knowledge construction and identity development for Blacks through the Black Church speaks to the vast proliferation of colonialism’s saturation within not only education, but also in the control over educational institutions. Further analysis of the Black Church and its effect on Black culture and education reveals two things: (a) Historically, religion was a key lever for the education and success of Blacks and (b) Blacks in prominent positions have a profound positive influence on other Blacks. Black history reveals how faith and educational self-determination played a pivotal role in the identity formation of Black communities, as Mitchell (2010) pointed to the formation of Sabbath schools as an example of this premise.

According to Span and Benson (2009), Sabbath schools were church-sponsored schools, established and run by emancipated slaves, post–Civil War. Span and Benson believed these schools to be the forebears of Black educational and spiritual self-determination and uplift. The purpose for these schools was to provide basic literacy and religious instruction to those who could not attend schools during the weekday (Span & Benson, 2009). Because of Western

colonialism and the hegemonic control over curriculum development, history has traditionally overlooked Sabbath schools founded by Black religious denominations and, conversely, has promoted the narrative of the White Northerner's establishment of schools for the education of Blacks with institutions such as Hampton and Tuskegee (Mitchell, 2010).

What history fails to illustrate—much to the chagrin of all indigenous populations—is historical narratives depicting Blacks as the contributors to their own academic and spiritual formation. Black religious' denominations are a significant part of the U.S. educational landscape (Mitchell, 2010). Blacks, immediately following emancipation, lacked the economic resources and social capital to create the necessary institutions for their educational progress; however, one African American institution did not, the Black Church (Dancy, 2010; Gaines, 2010; Jett, 2010; Mitchell, 2010; Reyes, 2010).

Spirituality and Religion: Educating Mind, Body and Soul

Jett (2010) attested to the lack of research on the role of spirituality and religion in the educational experiences of African American males. Within his research, Jett sought to illuminate the profound impact of spirituality and religion on the academic success of African American males in the field of mathematics. Herndon (2003) used a grounded theory methodological approach to researching the academic achievement of 13 African American male college students attending predominantly White institutions and found that spirituality accomplished three things for African American male students: bolstered resistance, provided a sense of purpose, used as support for African American students through religious institutions.

Jett (2010) also referred to Riggins and colleagues' (2008) replication of Herndon's study that examined the role of spirituality of among 13 African American males attending a

historically Black college and university (HBCU). Riggins and colleagues found that African American males that fully embraced their spirituality lead to continued retention, academic growth, and achievement. Watson's (2006) study on three private HBCU's found that spirituality was an essential aspect in the lives of the 97 freshman and sophomore male Black students examined in the study. Watson concluded, "The ability to affirm his spirituality is an essential part of the African American man's identity development" (p. 124).

While the findings of Watson's research help the cause for identity formation and decolonizing educational practices for African American males, Jett (2010) also noted the absence of research that highlights religion and spirituality's role in the educational experiences of African American students as a whole. Jett, along with Harris-Lacewell (2004) and Leonard (2009) believed this to be problematic, "given the important role that religion and spirituality have played, historically and currently, in the struggle for equity and justice for African Americans" (p. 327).

As a Black male educated at predominantly White institutions of higher education, I know the importance that my spirituality and religion have played in my identity development. The longing for my academic experience to substantiate and validate my identity and spiritual ideology has, according to the research, been inbred into my biological and ancestral make up. I have sought a spiritual educational experience that supersedes the confines of Western epistemological thinking: one that would understand my ethnic and historical background, by validating my need to bridge educational theory and Christocentric pedagogy. Seeing the dichotomy evident in theology and education on an institutional level shines greater light onto the epistemological issues that have to be unseated in order to create schools and social

institutions in which students can benefit from decolonized approaches to education. There is a dire need for educational institutions that validate other forms of knowledge and identity formation and that offer education meant not just for the mind, but also for the soul.

Education, Theology, and the Black Church

Dealing specifically with education and theology, the Black church has historically positioned itself as a metaphoric window that serves as a microcosm of the positive effect of critically engaging with theology and education and its role in the liberation of humanity. *The Journal of Negro Education*, for more than seven decades, has judiciously covered nearly every major issue concerning Black education. However, for the past 20 years, there has been a paucity of research on education and the Black church (Mitchell, 2010). Mitchell affirmed that the dearth of research exists because, much like education and theology, the Black church and education have always been so closely integrated that their “relationship has... escaped mainstream educational research’s gaze” (p. 203). Mitchell attributed the marriage of the Black Church and education to their enduring struggle for freedom, positioning this issue as both central and timely, as well as an empirical catalyst to address 21st century challenges.

Na'im Madyun and Noelle Witherspoon (2010) also spoke to the role that Black churches and Black faith communities have played in leading and cultivating advancements in Black education:

Despite attempts to leech out this important cultural construct, religion and/or spirituality has been and still is an integral aspect the education of Black students and the professional practice of educators of color. In fact, in the Black American community,

religion and spirituality have always been central to the project of seeking change in schools and communities. (p. 199)

With the Black Church providing emancipatory contributions to the Black community in the form of identity and cultural development, it is an injustice not to critically engage in its history, especially for those who share in the history and cultural make-up of the Black Church.

According to E. Paulette Isaac, Michael L. Rowland, and Lewis E. Blackwell (2007), the Black Church has been a constant and integral part of the lives of Blacks in America. They argued that the Black Church has been unique in its support of social, political, cultural, and religious foci throughout its history. This integration of theology and education in the Church has afforded Blacks the opportunity not only to develop a bicultural identity (Darder 2012) in a Western colonial climate, but also to provide a blueprint for humanity to fight against injustice and oppression (Lucas, 2014).

Jesus Christ's teachings on life and the human experience in relation to freedom from oppression speaks not only to the Black community, but also to the struggles of all oppressed people, who must daily navigate the bicultural tensions inherent in the dominant/subordinate dialectic of asymmetrical relations of power in every aspect of their lives (Darder, 2012).

Through a proper command of theology and education serving in tangent, all of humanity can come to a greater understanding of freedom—freedom from oppression, freedom from sin, freedom from self. Only when we are truly free, emancipated from all forms of oppression, can we fully embrace our fellow brothers and sisters as equal in all things.

Purpose of the Study

As a Black Christian male living in America, to some observers, I am a walking contradiction. The very faith that I hold dear and to which I have devoted my life, could very well have been the same faith used to justify and sustain acts of oppression and injustice toward my ancestors. On the surface, the Black experience in a society heavily influenced by Western colonial thought is one of severe oppression; Christianity, then, would be steeped in dogma justifying the proliferation of institutionalized racism, classism, sexism, inequality, and many other forms of dehumanization. However, when the Scriptures are critically examined, a Gospel of love, acceptance, and compassion is uncovered. You see a Gospel seeking to emancipate the sinful and oppressed, a Gospel that both transcends and encapsulates all colors, ethnicities, cultures and socioeconomic status (Galatians 3:26-28). Conversely, you see a Gospel completely outside of the context presented by the hegemony.

The Black narrative in America is underscored by the egregious acts of slavery, Jim Crow legislation, and racial segregation; however, underneath these heinous acts is found a constant beacon of light that illuminates through even these darkest of moments, the Black Church. This imperfect merge of theology and education provided Blacks the appropriate ideology regarding human rights, bicultural identity development, and political self-determination necessary for emancipatory aspirations. Functioning as a community hub during the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Church also provided the ideological and theological perspective for Blacks in their fight for equality in education and in society (Gadzekpo, 1997; Johnson, 1986; Pinn, 2002).

The Black Church's role in ongoing commitment to end discriminatory acts toward minorities in America is a testament to creative appropriation of theology and education to benefit those who are oppressed. Just as critical analysis of Black History in America has brought about greater discussion and understanding of the Black Church's role in fighting to end oppression (Lucas, 2014), I believe a critical analysis of the pedagogy of Jesus Christ and the foundation of the Black Church can illustrate the necessity of educational leaders to once again critically engage with the emancipatory possibilities inherent in the relationship between theology and education. Also, a decolonizing interpretive analysis (Darder, 2015) of Jesus Christ's life and praxis, in relation to both theology and education, can potentially produce much more than simply another Westernized emancipatory doctrine of the human experience in relation to God and man. Conversely, a critical deconstruction of epistemicides (Paraskeva, 2011; Santos, 2005) embedded within the educational and theological constructs will result in the creation of the Pedagogy of Christ.

There are three major purposes for this decolonizing interpretive research analysis. The primary purpose is to identify critical principles that inform the Pedagogy of Jesus Christ, which are grounded in His praxis. By examining specific passages from the New Testament, I intend to provide evidence and illustrations of Jesus's pedagogical practice to substantiate His praxis as it relates to social justice and the ongoing fight against racialized oppression. I also intend to clarify and interpret what can be learned from Jesus Christ the teacher and the praxis of His pedagogical approach, principally by critically examining the necessarily connected fields of education and theology. The final aim of this study is to consider what a critical praxis of Jesus

Christ the teacher can contribute to an educational leadership paradigm committed to social justice in ways that work toward ending the oppression of marginalized populations.

Research Questions

This research examined the interconnectivity of theology and education, focusing on the contributing efforts of the Black Church and Jesus Christ as exemplars for ending oppression. As such, this study sought to address the following three research questions:

1. Based on New Testament scripture, what are the principles that inform the pedagogy of Christ and His praxis?
2. What can the pedagogy of Jesus Christ and His praxis as a teacher contribute to the field of critical education today?
3. What can we learn from a critical praxis of Jesus Christ the teacher in relation to educational leadership and social justice?

Significance of the Study

Dualism in the Western tradition makes the claim that mind and matter are two ontologically separate categories, which extend to the epistemological domain (Bojabotseha, 2011). The epistemological dualism of Western Christianity then functions to separate God from humanity. This is an epistemological problem related to how we make meaning and how we understand the relationship between Humanity and the Divine (Santos, 2015). Within this Westernized understanding of Christianity, often the focus of Christ is on how values are interpreted by others in terms of Christ's work; seldom is there direct engagement with Christ's words and actions as teacher. By examining Jesus Christ as teacher, I aim to extend our understanding toward a more precise Christ-centered praxis that can inform both Christian

education and other disciplines in education through a critical Christocentric lens. My intention is to formulate a critical Christocentric theoretical framework that will be used to inform educational pedagogy, theory, theology, and leadership practices. Another aspect of this research is to offer a reasonable possibility in bridging the gap between theology and education, primarily looking to the example of the Black Church and its historical contributions in challenging the oppression of racialized communities in America.

The Black Christian perspective that guides this study contends that Jesus Christ represents the perfect union of God and humanity. We look to Christ in order to better understand the human experience and to gain greater clarity on the essence of God. Richard Niebuhr (1951) contended that Jesus Christ disclosed God in the most intricate and intimate of fashions, thus formulating a refined focus of meaning and value around which to orient our lives and most importantly our faith—and, by extension, how we orient our pedagogy, as well. Douglas F. Ottati (2003) synthesized Niebuhr’s understanding of Christocentric practices by stating, “those who believe in Jesus Christ, those who are loyal to His cause, must likewise be involved in this same double movement from the world to God and from God to the world” (p. 122).

With a limited epistemological view of theological and educational philosophy and practice operating as separate and often conflicting disciplines, it remains an uphill battle to provide educators, clergy, Churches, and educational institutions with meaningful, enriching programming targeted toward human emancipation from the ravages of systemic oppression in the United States and around the world. Through a systematic overview of the writings on critical theory and liberation theology, I seek to confront what has been missing in Western

society's conceptualization of Jesus Christ, His praxis, and questions of human liberation and social justice. Toward that end, this study seeks to create an emancipatory pedagogy of Jesus Christ, grounded in a critical epistemological perspective and a decolonizing methodology.

Theoretical Framework

Critical theology, critical pedagogy, and liberation theology all offer emancipatory principles, theories, and ideologies that allow for greater analysis of deconstructing Eurocentric epistemologies embedded within the Western cultural understanding of the purposes for education and theology. According to C. Michael Patton (2009), having a critical view of theology not only provides believers with an opportunity to increase their faith in God, but also lends credence and substance to Christian faith as truth. The critical theologians not only invite but also demand criticism, skepticism, discernment, and questions, as an important process toward emancipatory possibilities. Carl Raschke (2014) stated that for the first time in the development of contemporary learning and letters, critical theology strategically merges the theory of religion with the theological constitution of all transcendental inquiry. As such, this study draws on critical theology to examine the New Testament writings in an attempt to determine critical principles that can inform the pedagogy of Jesus Christ and His praxis.

From a critical theological perspective, Jesus Christ did not come to establish a new religion, but rather came primarily to establish a blueprint for the liberation of humanity—a blueprint that transcends the institutional and ideological boundaries set by traditionalists far removed from the praxis of God toward man (Levine, 1988). Building on Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of critical pedagogy, this entails a profound and on-going struggle to support and sustain an intense faith in humankind—a faith necessary to trust the process of meaningful dialogue.

Jacob Neumann (2011) expounded on this notion by detailing the relationship between faith and critical pedagogy through a Freirean lens. Neumann argued that faith and critical pedagogy produce a complex interdependent relationship where educational critique is a spiritually driven process, quite often viewed as a reflection on Christian beliefs. Hence, a synthesis of Freire's thoughts on critical pedagogy will be utilized in this study as a theoretical framework for the purposes of engaging in a metaphorical dialogue to critique and contextualize the pedagogy of Jesus Christ and its contribution to the field of education.

According to Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff (1984), the first and most foremost goal of liberation theology is that of liberation: "There is only one point of departure—and one goal—the liberation of the oppressed" (p. 24). Michael R. Hillis (2000) presented a second important goal of liberation theology, which is that a Christocentric perspective substantiates any emancipatory movement. Gustavo Gutierrez (1990) offered insight on this idea, stating:

Theology must be asked to show in the presence of relationship to God and the rupture of the relationship with God at the very core of the historical, political and economic situation; this is something that no social analysis can ever bring to light. A sociologist will never come to see that sin—the breaking of the relationship with God and therefore with others as well—is at the very heart of any unjust situation. (p. 58)

According to Lange (1998), the paradigm of liberation in theology rejects conceptions of God that colonize the mind and spirit by utilizing a reverse hermeneutic that begins with context and interpretation of sociohistorical realities not necessarily present in Biblical writings. In Gustavo Gutierrez's (1970) work, *A Theology of Liberation*, this reverse hermeneutic is referred to as *orthopraxis*. According to Lange, the truthfulness of theology is only as genuine as the actions it

produces in the world, which constitutes the sincerest expression of orthopraxis. Liberation theology, in essence, critically analyzes the meaning of Christianity where God shows His love for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed through His Son, Jesus Christ (Lange, 1998). Liberation theology will serve to critically analyze both the Black Church's use of theology and education in its fight against oppression in America, as well as provide a critical barometer to determine what can be learned from the praxis of Jesus Christ in relation to educational leadership.

Methodology

The nature of this study necessitates a process by which critical inquiry serves to deconstruct traditional Westernized notions surrounding theology and education. Accordingly, a decolonizing interpretive analysis serves to provide bicultural researchers the opportunity to engage the dominant literature on pedagogy, curriculum, methodology, and schooling (Darder, 2015). Joao Paraskeva (2011) stated that a decolonizing interpretive approach to research should be understood as an intrinsic call to challenge and disrupt one-dimensional Eurocentric epistemicides that contribute to the prevailing traditional theories on schooling and society. For the purposes of this study, Antonia Darder's (2015) decolonizing interpretive analysis will be used to engage and deconstruct Eurocentric epistemologies on Jesus Christ and education. Researchers who partake in this qualitative process are unique in that they operate within the research from an "authority of lived experience" (hooks, 1994). From this methodological approach, critical analytical principles—such as cultural politics, class, historicity, ideology, hegemony, critique, dialogue, and conscientization—are employed to help uncover emancipatory meanings and possibilities. Therefore, the analysis serves to proffer counterhegemonic theories,

ideologies, and methodologies to interpret social phenomena that would be otherwise overlooked and devalued (Darder, 2015).

In combination with a decolonizing interpretive analysis, content analysis, also referred to as hermeneutics, will be used to analyze the New Testament with specific focus on direct examples of Jesus Christ's pedagogy and praxis. Bleicher (1980) defined hermeneutics as the theory or philosophy of the interpretation of meaning. Coyne (1995) argued that there are four distinct perspectives for hermeneutics: conservative, pragmatic, critical, and radical—all used to interpret varying levels of meaning. For the purpose of this study, a critical hermeneutic will be adopted. According to Coyne, the underlying purpose of this lens is emancipatory, where conventional wisdoms within communities are addressed and challenged in order to analyze and deconstruct asymmetrical relations of power.

To preserve the proper respect for the text being analyzed, I will also conduct the analysis through a Christian perspective that serves to uncover the original meaning and intention of the action-text. With the authors of the literature to be analyzed also being bicultural and members of historically colonized populations, these two perspectives are not contradictory, but complementary, where each perspective serves to reveal a true decolonized interpretive approach in making meaning of the New Testament. In essence, this decolonizing interpretive analysis seeks to rupture the Western dualism of Eurocentric epistemological belief that all knowledge and ways of knowing must be compartmentalized—separate and distinct—in order to be truly known. Instead, a decolonizing interpretive methodology supports the integral and organic construction of knowledge as emancipatory necessity (Darder, 2015).

Limitations and Delimitations

My Positionality

At this juncture, it is necessary to expound upon my personal beliefs and biases, grounded in my Christian formation, with respect to knowledge and truth. I believe that there is truth that is absolute. As a Christian educator, I “recognize the existence of propositions, 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 conditions according to eternal norms of right and wrong” (Moore, 1988, p. 462). I recognize that this statement by Moore is contrapuntal to the notion of truth as a process or truth as evolutionary, generally a bedrock of critical epistemology.

I also believe that truth can be obtained and appropriated, even within fallible human beings. I also believe that once truth is obtained, it is the duty of human beings to promulgate truth for all to benefit. I felt it absolutely necessary to relieve myself of this burden, even while adopting the mindset of a critical researcher. As a critical researcher, I am obligated to be self-aware and cognizant of my beliefs and biases. Knowing that I am among a few critical researchers who still hold to belief in absolute truth, yet still fight for the rights of those who are oppressed and seek emancipatory democratic practices as a secondary means of liberation.

My truth is Jesus Christ, the truest explanation of the love of God, lived and expressed, toward humanity (Niebuhr, 1951). My spiritual, ethical, social, and historical formation, as noted, leads me to write the above. I recognize that there is a conundrum here; yet I find the intellectual and spiritual courage to engage this quandary head on. My internal fight is to approach truth through a critical lens, which allows me to stand firm in my allegiance to Jesus

Christ, yet, still engage in the dialectical tension within the fight for the emancipation of those who are oppressed. Acknowledging the struggle betwixt myself and the work that I am called to do, I find solace in this place, knowing the outcome of this “limit-situation” can lead to a greater work for the emancipation of others.

Another research limitation of the study includes the researcher’s affinity for Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The researcher is currently connected with and serving in the capacity of Youth Pastor at a Black Church where he has served for more than 10 years.

Definition of Terms

Bicultural: of or belonging to two cultures simultaneously, and the accompanying behaviors that result from the lived experience.

Black/African American: these terms are used interchangeably to describe individuals, including myself, that descended from African ancestry.

The Black Church: a social, religious, ethical, and ethnic institution traditionally serving predominately those of African descent for the purposes of spiritual cultivation and identity development.

Hegemony: a systematic or institutional stronghold on society perpetuated by moral and intellectual leadership, in order to propagate and preserve the perceived status quo.

Jesus Christ: the second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God—Jewish Master teacher and historical figure.

Overview of Study

Chapter 1 has served as an introduction to the study, in order to present concerns that point to the necessity of the study. Along with an introductory discussion of the epistemological

problem and ideas that link to Christ the teacher and the Black Church, this chapter has sought to provide the statement of the problem; research question(s); the theoretical lenses for analysis; the methodology; my positionality; the limitations of the study; and definition of keywords.

Chapter 2 will provide a historical overview of the literature surrounding the “historical” Jesus Christ by seeking to answer the question “Who is Jesus Christ?” By critically analyzing the varying traditions presented within the literature, this critical examination of the literature will determine what is missing or still needed in our understanding of the history, culture, and identity Jesus Christ and the implications on His theology. As a bicultural researcher utilizing a decolonizing interpretive analysis of the literature, I hope to build upon, expand, and transform current Eurocentric perspectives on the theology of Jesus, addressing that which is still missing from theory and practice.

Chapter 3 will serve as a systematic overview of literature on liberation theology as an effort to contend with what has been missing in Eurocentric conceptualizations of Jesus Christ and questions of human liberation and social justice. Also, within Chapter 3, I conduct a systematic overview of the literature that seeks to both critique the limitations of Western notions of the world that undergird traditional perspectives of Christianity and Christ and engage decolonizing and indigenous epistemologies that call for opening the field of philosophical, pedagogical, and theological engagement to create a place for non-Western voices to bring our cultural wisdom and knowledge, linked to struggle, to our understanding of the world and how we make meaning of it.

In Chapter 4, the discussion will focus on the history of critical pedagogy, as a significant pedagogical foundation that can be linked to a genuinely decolonizing and socially just

understanding of Christianity as an emancipatory human relationship and experience with self, others, the world, and Christ. The discussion will also be used to critically glean, analyze, and formulate methods and teaching principles consistent with an understanding of Jesus Christ as teacher.

Finally, Chapter 5 will bring together elements from the previous chapters to articulate an Emancipatory Pedagogy of Christ that is fundamentally anchored in Christ's teachings of love, faith, and hope found in New Testament writings. The discussion will culminate with the manner in which these critical principles can guide pedagogical transformative labor in the classroom and in the world.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORICAL JESUS

“But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

Galatians 4:4-5

Who is Jesus Christ? This question has plagued the hearts and minds of all men since His earthly dissention to the shepherding hills of Bethlehem over two thousand years ago. The study of this enigmatic man continues to fill volumes of literary sources at an exponential rate. Many have sought to categorize, analyze, and interpret the teachings, methods, and beliefs of the incomprehensible carpenter from Nazareth. History has proven that belief in the person of Jesus will shape and or reshape worldviews, politics, matters of social justice, morality, and, ultimately, eternity. With this, the Jesus of History and the Jesus of Faith must not operate in seclusion from one another, for as the research indicates, they never have. Moreover, it is imperative to recognize the power of faith to inform history just as it is equally important to acknowledge how history informs faith. For the purpose of this study, I am morally obligated to articulate what I believe about Jesus Christ. I do not believe this to be a limitation to the validity of the power of this work; contrariwise, I know that my conviction to find the truth will contribute to a greater critical analysis of who I know Him to be throughout my research. This is just as much a journey of the human spirit as it is a critical examination of otherworldly scholarship. More than anything, I have a commitment to truth and, conversely, a moral obligation to diligently pursue it. My truth just so happens to be the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

It is ethically irresponsible and morally impossible to divorce my affinity for Jesus Christ as my personal Savior from the work that I am attempting to accomplish. I would be committing an egregious act of betrayal to myself as well as to all who read this work. Through all of the oppression that I have experienced in my life as a Black man, to now abandon my commitment to Him, the only constant in my hope and despair, would be to abandon a part of who I am in my inner most; for that is where He resides. With this, my task and objective is not to proselytize. I felt it absolutely necessary to represent my authentic self and other bicultural researchers like me, who both hold to these beliefs and endeavor to approach this critical work authentically in order to present the historical, theological, and pedagogical implications of Jesus Christ as Teacher. This work serves to illustrate the identity, culture, ethnicity, and ethical make up of Jesus Christ as depicted in Scripture and literature regarding His person. Biblical excerpts and scholarship on the life of Jesus will be used to paint a culturally responsible portrait of the Jesus that I have grown to love, adore, and pattern my life's work after.

“His” Story or Theirs: The Historical Jesus

In 1909, *The Biblical World* released an editorial calling for the examination of the historicity of Jesus Christ through the method of scientific research known as historical inquiry. This historical method of investigation allowed for the analysis of history to be approached as a science—veering from the more subjective analysis and interpretations of history, into a more codified method leading to both viable and valid conclusions within the discipline. The journal demanded that scholars stop projecting internal beliefs and subjective ideals onto who they believed Jesus was in order to find out who history actually proclaims Him to be (*The Biblical World*, 1909). The editorial posits that due to the various interpretations and roles of Jesus Christ

presented within the literature “[the] need of an [indiscriminant], objective historical research cannot fail to be [more] apparent” (p. 76). History, as noted in the editorial, must be used to play the role of arbitrator in order to “[free us] from erroneous ideas and so restrains the activity of subjectivism,” thus forcing scholarship to “broaden [its] outlook upon the movements of Jesus’ time and so [give] a more intelligent and sympathetic appreciation of Him and His work” (p. 77).

In order for the work of Jesus Christ to be critically examined with fidelity, positioned and appointed in its proper context, I believe it necessary to answer the question, Did Jesus ever live? The power of His message and the essence of His person are essential and eternally linked to His historicity (Case, 1911; Macintosh, 1911). Although critically important to the validity of the Christian faith, the historicity of Jesus should not be limited to this proof alone. Coming to grasp with the Jesus Christ of Scripture as the Jesus Christ of history has ultimately placed many men in a virtuous conflict of interests. My job is not to convince, but to present a historically accurate portrayal of Jesus that is both evident and consistent with the culture, ethnicity, geography, and ethics of His time on earth as depicted in the literature and historical documents. As a bicultural figure, these developmental aspects of His character and person are essential in constructing a truthful multifaceted portrait of the man, Jesus Christ.

William Bradley (1963) brought to light one of the greatest barriers with history: time. The issue of time forces humanity to forever be present while simultaneously existing and revisiting the past. The cyclical aspect of time was evident to the followers of Christ as well. According to Bradley, because Jesus never wrote of Himself to preserve in time that piece of history, the disciples were tasked to create an accurate historical figure so that those in time would come to know Him as they knew Him then. The centrality of Jesus Christ to history is not

merely pertinent to apologetics, it is crucial for the critical analysis of the misappropriation of Christocentric epistemological constructs found within Westernized notions of who Jesus Christ is.

As mentioned before, identity formation is a visceral amalgamation of every aspect of the human experience that contributes to the essence of an individual. The culture, ethics, ethnicity, biology, and physiological make up of an individual cannot be isolated from the work of great men and women throughout history. Without a clear understanding of these key elements what can be taken away from the work is the power and majesty of the context behind what makes the work profound. When seeking to recreate history utilizing all cultures and ethnicities involved is, at its core, an ethical practice that must actively fight against contributing to the current hegemonic narrative that essentially washes away the heritage and overall identity of all contributing factors. My objective is to find the historical Jesus within the New Testament texts.

The Historical Jesus sans Christ

New Testament scholarship surrounding Jesus has continued to be shaped and reshaped by three agreed-upon quests for the historical Jesus proven to accept. As a bicultural researcher embarking on the journey to research how history has painted Jesus Christ, one has to ask the ethical question of who has been holding the metaphorical paintbrush? In the Spring of 2012, F. David Farnell wrote an engaging two-part piece on the three searches for the historical Jesus. Farnell believed that, in the search to make Jesus more relevant to our time and age, historians, critics, theologians, and scholars alike have ultimately destroyed the true portrait of the Jesus illustrated within the Gospel narratives. According to Farnell the various “quests” for the historical Jesus *a priori* were to show the deficiency, inadequacy, and ultimate fallacy of the

canonical Gospels for the expressed purposes of revealing that their presentation of Jesus was, in fact, not the Jesus of History.

In searching for the “historical” Jesus, many scholars have completely missed the truth of who Jesus is. Instead of a true search for who the Jesus of antiquity is, what has been created are a myriad of faux-Christ’s taking on not the ethics, beliefs, and theology of the Jesus depicted within the historical narrative accounts by the disenfranchised New Testament authors. Conversely, what we are offered are the characteristics and ideologies of the researchers (Hagner, 2001; Robinson, 1959). The irony here is appalling; what was once thought to bring clarity and authenticity to a religious misinterpretation has ended up revealing that, through the search for the “historical” Jesus, there is no consensus of who He is among its seekers.

What is imperative to this work is the ethical call to deconstruct any power seeking to relegate the intellect, culture, and knowledge of indigenous peoples. In these “quests” to find the “historical” Jesus, a systematic intellectual persecution of the synoptic Gospels authors and the validity of their belief in who Jesus is, reveals an agenda—an attack against the Church, with the casualty from the crossfire being its progenitor Jesus Christ. This nebulous artificial reconstruction of the Jesus of history devalues who He is to His disciples and diminishes the power of the narratives presented by the authors and their original intent to illustrate His truest essence. Farnell (2012) concluded, “whatever the ‘Historical Jesus’ Is, It Must NOT be the Christ of the Gospels” (p. 8). If the result of the quests were not to find the Jesus of the Gospels or the “historical” Jesus for that matter, then what were the purposes?

Deconstructing the “Historical” Jesus

This section will serve to outline the various quests to find the “historical” Jesus and expose and deconstruct Eurocentric influences on the outcome of the study’s findings. The search for the historical Jesus has been broken into three “quests” with the first two being heavily influenced by German theologians and the last being a culmination of both North American and European ideologies surrounding the Jesus of history (Farnell, 2012; Meier, 1999; Neill & Wright, 1988). Each “quest” is examined and analyzed, ultimately leading up to the critique and analysis of the (in)famous Jesus Seminar of the late twentieth century. Much work has already gone into researching the historical Jesus. I am reviewing the literature only to show what is missing from its narrative.

Many authors have traced the inception of the Jesus Seminar to the Enlightenment period (Brehm, 1996; Farnell, 2012; Harrisville & Sundberg, 1995; Loewe, 2000; Robinson, 1959). It was during this time that scholars sought to escape what they perceived to be the limitations surrounding the person of Jesus Christ brought upon by “fundamentalist” Christian doctrine. What has been portrayed in theological scholarship dating as far back as the seventeenth century to as recent as the first half of the twentieth century was the expressed purpose of uncovering the real Jesus through a historical context. Travis L. Frampton (2006) traced the beginning of this search to what he deems the historical critical ideology back to the Jewish apostate Benedict Spinoza. With the lens of theological study now focused through the ideology of historical criticism, David Dungan (1999) posited that the purpose of the research was altered from the *referent* of the biblical text to the *history* of the text. This redirected and colluded the image, depiction, and person of Jesus within His historical context. In essence, the divide in the

scholarship between Jesus as He was in history and the Christ of faith grew ever wider in context and scope.

The First and Second Quest: Looking for Jesus Through Tainted Eyes

According to Farnell (2012), the first quest to find the “historical” Jesus is heavily influenced by the work of Spinoza, but is primarily led by the research and studies of Deist Reimarus (Brehm, 1996; Brown, 2008). The first literary work for the search of the historical Jesus, originally published in 1906, was acknowledged in Albert Schweitzer’s (1968) *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. These theologians operated from an incessant ideology of rationalism, which permeated the findings of their work, thus leading to the conclusion of this quest stating that: “[Jesus] is a figure designated by rationalism, endowed with the life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb” (cited in Farnell, 2012, p. 398). The reality of the situation is that, because of the Churches’ relentless pursuit to impress their dogmatic Christology on to the public and their alliance with the government, theologians like Schweitzer and Reimarus sought to remove Christianity from its position as a governing force within society. The motives for the research led to its ultimate and timely conclusion.

This does not mean the conclusions of these works were steeped in historical accuracy regarding the truth of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, the results on the historical Jesus merely mimicked the researcher’s presuppositions and perceived outcomes. The analysis of the historicity of the life of Jesus took root in a personal agenda against the perceived oppressor and was not purely of historical interest (Schweitzer, 1968). As a bicultural researcher, I too must protect my heart and motives from repeating the same mistake; however, it does bring to light the power of oppression and the active fight to free from its burdensome yoke. Hence, I am

reminded of Matthew 11:29-30: “*Take My yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*”

The second quest, led mostly by the work of Rudolf Bultmann (1934), continued the fight against established religion and the oppression of the Church, carrying with it a negative connotation on what studying the history of Jesus could bring about. Bultmann’s studies concluded that, through historical criticism, nothing could be concluded about the historical Jesus and that there is minimal-to-no continuity between the teachings of Jesus and the preaching of the Church (Farnell, 2012; Meier, 1999). Ernst Käsemann (1964), a student of Bultmann, did not completely concede to his predecessor’s thoughts, yet proposed that there are “pieces of the Synoptic tradition which the historian [must] acknowledge as authentic... [in order to] remain an historian at all” (p. 46). He felt that, in order for the work to continue, there had to be a call for fidelity to the material and a commitment to do the work, not from a place of hurt and anger, but from a place of compassion, truth, and genuineness. This period provides continued contributions from other writers, theologians, and historical researchers utilizing historical criticism as a method to systematically fight against the Church. James M. Robinson (1959), another contemporary of this second quest, built on Schweitzer’s and Bultmann’s work by offering *A New Quest for the Historical Jesus*, yet contributed nothing new to the discussion. The new quest sought to evaluate the teachings of Jesus in an attempt to authenticate the validity of His ministry as depicted within the Gospels (Meier, 1999). The outcome of the “New Quest” again failed to construct an adequate justification for the use of historical research as it pertains to the Christian faith and its professed leader, Jesus Christ.

Before entering into the third and most hopeful “quest” for the “historical” Jesus, I must disclose that, as a member of the body of Christ (the Church), it pains me to see that these men were so hurt by the varying circumstances surrounding the ecclesiastical influence over the governing power, that what was meant to be used for good became corrupted. For these men to embark on a search for their Savior with hearts pierced by the dogmatic oppression of the church is a human emotion that is both true and visceral. Their pain is felt through their literature, and I find myself fighting back tears, hoping that, in their waning years, they had the pleasure to experience the love and compassion of Jesus on this side of eternity.

The Third Quest: Jesus, Close in Sight

The first two quests to find the “historical” Jesus sought to provide a reconstructed view of Jesus that differed greatly from the Christology of the Church. These two quests attempted to find Jesus using a research-based analytical method that used history as a barometer to determine the authenticity and validity to a Jesus they felt was far removed from His original identity. What set out to be an historical endeavor to find the “true” Jesus, ultimately became a theological quest steeped in a social agenda to discredit and fight against the governing power of oppression of the time, the Church. Conversely, each quest attempted to create its own version of Jesus. Whoever the oppressor of the age, or whatever the agenda of the researcher, the historical Jesus was found to be the counter to the identified oppressive agent, or an extension of the researchers’ bias, agenda, or beliefs (Newell, 2009; Wright, 1992).

This uncertainty surrounding the carpenter from Nazareth brought about what has been determined to be the *Third Quest* for the historical Jesus and is what is often referred to as the “Jesus Seminar” of the late twentieth century. The commencement of the third quest has brought

about many questions and criticisms of who the real Jesus of history is as well. It is the consensus of both history and the literature surrounding the first two quests that there was a huge German influence within the offerings to the field of Christology surrounding Jesus. However, the Third Quest, although drawing from elements of the first and second quests, have been largely the contributions of North American and English theologians and historians (Farnell, 2012; Meier, 1999; Riddle, 1940; Wright, 1988). Although the geographical headquarters for the search for the historical Jesus had shifted, the results have been the same: more identifiers and terminology to construct a Jesus of history far removed from the ideals and identity of Jesus found within the Gospel narratives.

Out of all the literature published on “historical” Jesus research, none has been more prominent than the Jesus Seminar (1985) founded by Dr. Robert Funk and Dr. John Dominic Crossan in Sonoma California (Loewe, 2000). This is regarded by recent scholarship as the most vastly publicized research on the historical Jesus (Brehm, 1996). According to Funk (1993), the intention of the Seminar mirrors that of the first and second quests, which was to liberate Jesus from the bondage of fundamentalist dogma that believe in the literal translation of the Gospels (Borg, 1994). One of the major contributions of the Seminar has been the task to include other extra-biblical texts like the *Gospel of Thomas*, the “*Q*” source, the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, and the *Gospel of Peter* in to biblical canon (Funk, 1993). The Seminar has brought about further analytics outside of historical criticism to research the times and society in once Jesus once lived. Thomas Scott Caulley’s (1998) work *What’s Right with the Jesus Seminar?* proposed that although there is significant criticism around the findings of the Seminar, some things can still be learned from the work.

As a result of the Jesus Seminar, the use of anthropological evidence, textual critique, the Q source of Jesus's sayings, contextual analysis, among other devices, have added a depth to New Testament scholarship that was once absent (Loewe, 2000). According to Caulley (1998), the Jesus Seminar and its critique of the canonical Gospel "has at least had the positive effect of forcing a fresh debate over the problems related to New Testament studies and the correlative academic disciplines" (p. 240). The Seminar's conclusions regarding the historical Jesus have also fallen victim to alignment with particular agenda-driven conclusions, thus painting a picture of a Jesus much different from the synoptic illustration present in the Gospel accounts. These portraits painted by the members of the Seminar, and previous quests before, have applied a filter that aligns with the lens of the theological body of researchers within the Seminar and those from previous quests. Even within the "Third Quest," the same issue arises—no agreement surrounding who the Jesus of History truly is, yet providing "a range of competing hypothesis...no final agreement on method; [and] certainly no common set of results (Farnell 2012, p. 19 quoting from Wright, "Jesus, Quest for the Historical"). The question, then, must be asked, was finding the Jesus of History the motive for conducting the research?

The Jesus Seminar has faced much criticism over its conclusions regarding who Jesus is. It is not the discovery of the historical Jesus that is driving the research, but more the reconstruction of a figure that is suitable and acceptable to the researcher who is in stark contrast to the "historical" Jesus presented within the Gospels (Farnell, 2012). In H. Alan Brehm's (1996) article, "Will the Real Jesus Please Stand: Evaluating the 'Third Quest of the 'Historical Jesus,'" he offered this insight regarding the Jesus Seminar methods of research: "While all this

has the appearance of historical research from a rigorously objective perspective, in fact it represents and elaborative justification for their own idiosyncratic views of Jesus” (p. 7).

Others have offered a different view regarding the mass appeal for the Jesus Seminar and its far-reaching attractiveness to not only scholars but also the public at large, some citing access to media as the main culprit (Loewe, 2000). Bringing the issue of finding the “historical” Jesus to the forefront of American thought by utilizing media outlets such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*, the Jesus Seminar, in the Spring of 1996, had its findings on the cover of each of these magazines, chronicling its latest research findings. I mention this particular aspect simply because of the power and accessibility of popular media as an instrument of influencing the culture.

The fidelity to which one attempts to discover such an iconic and important figure as Jesus Christ through an historical critique must be called into question. For true and authentic research to be conducted, one must be upfront and honest regarding neutrality and transparency. To operate under the guise of unbiased research practices, attempting to color a canvas of history that is essential to the very being and spiritual make up of millions of people, is misleading and a travesty in justice. Meier (1999) stated it best, “despite the Seminar’s protestations to the contrary, it has not avoided the temptation of projecting a modern American agenda onto a first-century Palestinian Jew” (p. 460). With the “Third Quest” ultimately likening itself to the “First and Second Quests,” I must reexamine the statement from Schweitzer’s (1968) *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* which states, “each individual created [Jesus] in accordance with his own character. There is no historical task which reveals a man’s true self as the writing of the life of Jesus” (p. 4).

With this, the “Third Quest” has also sought to produce works that seek not to reconstruct Jesus, but to find Him within His rightful place in history, as He was found by those who knew Him best. E. P. Sanders (1985) brought critical consciousness back to (re)discover the Jewishness of Jesus by regarding Judaism as a key factor in understanding Jesus within not only a historical context, but through a cultural context as well (Charlesworth, 1991; Farnell, 2012; Garber, 2015; Sanders, 1985). This aspect of the research was missing within the previous quests, and it must be duly noted how key this research to deconstructing Eurocentric epistemological and theological constructs within the literature. The new quest, even with its flaws, is ambitious and refreshingly aware of the necessity to highlight Jesus’s Jewish roots (Head, 2004).

In man’s attempt to free Jesus from the perceived dogmatic confines of the Church, the Jesus Seminar achieved the complete opposite. It has created an intellectual free-for-all, where the ideals of man can now reconstruct a sacred figure into their own image, not the image depicted by the original authors of the synoptic Gospels. In an attempt to modernize Jesus, they have devalued Him and those that believe(d) in Him, His life, and His message. For the European descendant, nothing, not even the most sacred of beings, is off limits to the need to be assimilated and conformed into his image. At its core, this is a form of theological manifest destiny. It is essentially the greatest illustration of man’s ability to justify the forced invasion, colonization, and enslavement of not only the material realm, but also the spiritual realm. The false notion that the historicity of an individual must be separate from the theology of an individual is a presumptuous and very Western ideology; in that, it was the theology of Jesus that

placed Him on a path toward reconciling man with God. The culminating event in the life of Jesus has affected the courses of both historical and theological studies since the first century.

With this, the “historical” Jesus should not be a creation of our efforts, but instead an attestation of His disciples’ view and understanding of His character, essence, and being. The notion that Jesus is both theological and historical fits perfectly within the realm of reality in which His disciples operated. According to William Bradley (1963), Jesus Christ is unique in His appropriation, in that His person is “distinguished from other great men in history,” because His identity is enveloped within a theological construct held in tact, in history, through the efforts of those closest to him, His disciples (p. 35). The Gospel accounts of Jesus’s life and teachings contribute to and validate the history of Jesus within His context, culture, heritage, and theology. It will be from these accounts that I will draw my references to detail both the theology and pedagogy of Jesus.

The Theology of Jesus

The greatness of Jesus did not exist within His writings, for He did not write of Himself. Consequently, the greatness of Jesus was evidenced within His teachings. For in the teachings of Jesus, we find the life of Jesus, as the two are never separate, yet are reflective of each other in the most intricate and intimate of fashions. To study the teachings of Jesus is to study the life of Jesus and to study the life of Jesus, in its most authentic context, would be to examine the life of Jesus as depicted in the Gospel accounts (Dillon, 1995; Evans, 2004; 2006). It is not my task to develop an argument for the legitimacy of the Gospel accounts, there are many studies that have taken on that endeavor to much avail (Archer, 1982; Craig & Craig, 1994; Dunn, 1988; Strobel, 1998). However, I do believe that the truest account of the life of Jesus can be found within the

Gospel narratives. For it is here that we encounter Jesus within His cultural, theological, and historical context.

According to Bradley (1963), the task of the disciples of Jesus, and other great teachers of history, was to commit as much of their master's teaching to memory for the purpose of preserving the teachings in time. Bradley elaborated on this claim in reference to Jesus and His disciples, stating: "Thus is set the task to create by an act of the historical imagination a figure so clearly like Him that those in time to come will know him as he was known to his disciples" (p. 38). With this in mind, to truly understand the theology of Jesus, one has to critically examine the life of Jesus: His actions, His motives, His beliefs, His culture, His heritage. These components make up how Jesus viewed both the world and His understanding of His purpose within it. His theology is rooted in His relationship and duty to God and humanity. However, the greatest contributor to the theology of Jesus, much like all, is deeply influenced by His identity development within a culture marred from centuries of oppression and an unyielding faith in God, their Father and Deliverer.

Jesus, Son of Israel

According to the biblical accounts recorded in the *Gospel of Matthew* and the *Gospel of Luke*, Jesus has a rich and robust genealogy replete with both the patriarchs and kings of His people, which traces back to the nation's very inception in the Abrahamic Covenant (Luke 3:23-38, Matt 1:1-17). Much research has taken place regarding the genealogy of Jesus as depicted in the two gospel accounts, none more recognized than the first purported Christian historian, Sextus Julius Africanus completed before 240 A.D. (Nettelhorst, 1988; Sanders, 1913). Born in Jerusalem, Julius Africanus's most famous work, the *Chronographiai* (221A.D.) first contributed

to the idea of Christianity being placed within a historical context. The foundation of his work and the context for his study on chronology was ultimately rooted in studying the genealogy of Jesus. Who Jesus is must be understood as inextricably linked to His cultural heritage.

The very first words found in the *Gospel of Matthew* seek to solidify for the reader who Jesus is and, most importantly, the nation to which He belongs. In the *Gospel of Matthew*, the account begins with, “the record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1, NASB). It cannot go without notice that both David and Abraham are mentioned as part of the lineage of Jesus. These two figures, outside of Moses, are paramount in the construction of the faith and history for the Jewish people, for in each, all of Israel finds its identity. To fight against perceived cultural norms and paradigms that align to Western ideologies, I am choosing to highlight Jesus’s nationality, bringing His cultural heritage to the forefront by illuminating the spirit of His humanity, “Jesus was a Jew by birth, and a Hebrew by religion,” these two aspects of His identity are forever intertwined and actively contributed to His life experiences and critical understanding of the world around Him (Curtis, 1945, p. 22).

Jesus, Student of Israel

According to the gospel accounts, Jesus and His parents were keepers of the Jewish Law and participated in the cultural and spiritual customs of Judaism. Luke’s account records that Jesus and His parents attended the Feast of the Passover every year (Luke 2:41). It is here at the temple that Jesus the Jews of His time learned their history and faith, they have always been interrelated, one being a direct reflection of the other. The concept of theology and history being separate was a foreign concept to Palestinian Jews. Edwin Knox Mitchell (1900) understood the importance of the temple and synagogue and their significance in building both the national and

spiritual identity of Israel, stating “Israel was proud of her history and she believed that [God] had spoken to her in times past” (p.10). Where does Jesus fit into this equation? Where does He lie in regards to the learning of His heritage?

To deconstruct the prevailing image of Jesus throughout the centuries, as mentioned above, the “Third Quest” for the historical Jesus has brought much-needed conversation around the heritage of Jesus, particularly what Hyam Maccoby (1995) called “The Jewishness of Jesus.” Maccoby called for us as theologians and historians; educators and practitioners; Christians and Jews, to never devalue the fact that Jesus was, in fact, a Jew and to acknowledge that His Jewishness was an integral part of His life. In making explicitly clear his stance on the heritage of Jesus, Maccoby stated,

Traditionally, the Jewishness of Jesus was very little emphasised. While it was acknowledged that he had a Jewish upbringing, and had undergone Jewish rites of passage such as circumcision, this was not considered a matter of great moment in assessing his personality, since his originality of thought enabled him to transcend his upbringing in a radical way. (p. 54)

This text highlights the Hebrew roots of Jesus and His connection to Judaism and how His worldview was influenced by His Jewish upbringing (Ash, 1996; Maccoby, 1995; Wright, 1992). Although the governing power was Greco-Roman, conversely His knowledge of life, spirituality, education, theology, and humanity were constructed through a Jewish lens, steeped in the history and culture of His ancestors before Him. The theology of Jesus cannot be separated from His history; for one informs the other.

Although Maccoby (1995) sought to reconcile the Jewishness of Jesus, at a macro level, he was also seeking to mitigate the differences between Judaism and Christianity, ranging from their distinct views of Jesus as Messiah to Jesus's dealings with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and rabbis of His time. This is not my argument or why I have chosen to highlight his work. This work was chosen because of its mission to convey a clear and authentic message that Jesus, regardless of whether He is viewed as human or divine, was a product of Jewish origin, educated through Jewish tradition, and cultivated in Jewish theology. It is safe to say that I do not hold to all the views presented within Maccoby's claims about Jesus; however, that does not negate the deconstructive power of refocusing research and theology on the historical fact that Jesus was a Jew. He studied the teachings of Jewish contemporaries, He expounded upon the Law and its implications from man to his neighbor and from man to back to his God (Charlesworth, 1991; Jeremias, 1969; Maccoby, 1995; Sanders 1977).

The authors of the Gospel accounts were Jewish as well and it is that very Jewishness that permeates the pages of each historical narrative involving their Master. When asked by His contemporaries about the greatest commandment, Jesus quotes from the Torah to answer, revealing His intimate comprehension of not only the appropriation of scope, but also the simplicity of application.

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:36-40, NASB)

What can be learned of Jesus and His theology is that they are intricately interwoven into the identity of who He is. Therefore, the identity of Jesus and His theology cannot be separated, in that one directly and indirectly informs the other. It is essential, then, to understand that to separate Jesus from history, or to study Jesus as history apart from His theology, is not to study Jesus in His truest sense. His knowledge was vast and His message was clear: reconciliation of man back to His creator. Jesus's understanding of the world was heavily influenced by His culture, His heritage, His Jewishness. Just as I, and every bicultural individual, have come to understand: our heritage consistently informs our being and worldview. In order to see history as the authors intended it to be seen; peering into the history of Jesus, we clearly discover that there is a veil of Eurocentrism that has to be lifted.

Conclusion

The Jesus Christ of history is the same Jesus Christ of theology; we must do our due diligence not to recreate Jesus in our own image. To do justice to the text and to the original author's intent, it is imperative that our goal not be to find the historical Jesus, but rather to focus our attention on unveiling and validating the authentic Jesus whom His followers wrote of. I am afraid that in an attempt to "find" Jesus grounded in "reality," an egregious decision was made to first find Him historically, completely placing Him outside of His culture, His people, His context, and His mission. With the focus being squarely centered on finding the "historical" Jesus, we have negated and relegated the value of Jesus within the historical contextualized record from which He was first found. Where we find Jesus most vividly is in the minds and hearts of His disciples, those closest to His life, struggles, pains, triumphs, and failures (Bradley, 1963).

Sadly enough, these critical aspects of the historical Jesus did not find prominence until the commencement of the Third Quest of Jesus research (Newell, 2009). The purpose here then has been to highlight the importance that the culture and heritage of Jesus played in His identity development. Knowing who He was immensely shaped His theology. He too was bicultural; earthly and divine. The culture from which His ancestors descended ultimately influenced His worldview, pedagogy, and spiritual development (Evans 2004, 2006; Newell, 2009; Wright, 1992). Having an immense knowledge of His history—both cultural and spiritual—contributes significantly to His identity formation and adds immeasurable nuance to the values and ethics that made up His teachings and practice. How can we learn from the values that cultivated His theology? His identity? Where have we seen these values present in modern-day struggles to end oppression? Jesus’s radical construction of both knowledge and self pushed His theology past philosophical rhetoric and theory toward a radical appropriation of theological principles culminating in action. Reclaiming the guiding light of Jesus’s theological construct within this radical tradition is truly at the heart of this study.

The foundation of something being dialectical relates to the discussion of logic and opinions. They are in relation to each other, always co-informing one another. These two entities are tense—relating to the variables of good literature that creates an intrigue that holds one captive in the story. In this case, I am speaking with regard to the story of Jesus. A dialectical tension is always informing and reforming itself. What is the origin of faith? This automatically constitutes a historiography. History is faith and faith is history. There must be a belief in what is actual, which leads to a particular moment in time constructed and solidified in faith. However, there must be an acknowledgment of those who oppose this belief. Others might think, believe,

and have varied faiths that differ from mine, this is beautiful and creates learning opportunities to help inform reality. This argument is rooted in a pedagogical orientation that is empowering and transformative.

CHAPTER 3

LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Christ and Culture: A Guiding Light

As we saw in the previous chapter, the culture of Christ played a pivotal role in shaping His values, ethics, and morals. Because His identity formation and knowledge construction was greatly influenced by His heritage and culture, Jesus operated from an epistemological lens filled with deep empathy, compassion, and understanding of humanity. His theology helped change the world around Him by liberating those who were marginalized and oppressed to seek God through an unfiltered scope that challenged them to not only know the Law, but also fulfill it. Knowledge was not enough to Jesus; the appropriation of that knowledge, not for self-gain, but to assist others, was His message. During His ministry on earth, there was an incessant critique of the culture, an insatiable appetite to deconstruct misconceptions surrounding the true intent of God's law, and to share His will for mankind. This is what drove Jesus to consistently break down cultural and religious barriers. My task here is to determine: how does this apply to the culture of today?

The necessity to consistently critique culture, education, and society through the lens of Jesus Christ is essential in creating moral and ethical frameworks for analyzing social constructs within a hegemonic society. The positional scope presented in H. Richard Niebuhr's (1951) classic book *Christ and Culture* challenges humanity to judiciously examine the mind of Jesus Christ in order to adequately analyze His effect not only on humanity, but also the prevailing culture within society. Niebuhr created both a dialectical harmony and tension between Christ and culture by proffering definitions on both the duty of Christ toward humanity and the duty of

culture operating within humanity. Utilizing this work as a conceptual framework, Ottati (2003) built upon Niebuhr's definitions of Christ and Culture and posited that the purpose of Christ in the world is to direct believers toward God and then back again toward the world God loves. With this, culture, comprised of material and immaterial goods such as technology, education, science, and government, should then direct humanity toward a variety of socially defined goods, causes, and values that are used to advance humanity's well-being. Therefore, culture, just like Jesus Christ, should be overwhelmingly concerned with the overall good of humankind.

This chapter seeks to critically engage two conceptual frameworks: H. Richard Niebuhr's (1951) transformative position on faith presented in his most famous work, *Christ and Culture*; and Paulo Freire's (1970) humanizing pedagogy. These two frameworks will be used to critically discuss Liberation Theology in both Latin America as well as in the Black Church and African American communities. The significance of the analysis is linked to its attempt to generate greater understanding of the foundational principles embedded within these two social movements and their implications for both education and theology.

Toward this end, Niebuhr's (1951) work distinguishes five positions on Christ and culture that Christians, theologians, and educators throughout history have attempted to wrestle with that still ring true today. These include Christ-against-culture, Christ-of-culture, Christ-above-culture, Christ-and-culture, and finally Christ-the-transformer-of culture (Niebuhr, 1951). To access a more substantive understanding of all five positions, Ottati's (2003) article, *Christ and Culture: Still Worth Reading after all these Years*, and Glen H. Stassen's (2003) *It is Time to Take Jesus Back: In Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary H. Rich Niebuhr's "Christ and*

Culture” are two excellent resources. However, for the purpose of this discussion, I will focus on only one of the five positions: Jesus as Christ-the-Transformer-of-Culture.

Christ-the-Transformer-of-Culture

Niebuhr’s (1951) notion of Jesus as Christ-the-transformer-of culture emphasizes the sovereign reign of Creator who is God of all grace. All things are made and ordained through a coherent, sustained redemptive principle. Sin is seen as radical and universal, touching every aspect of the human condition, and as a corruption of what is good. Just as humanity was, in its inception, inherently good until the advent of sin, so it is with culture. In all other iterations of Jesus Christ’s interactions with “tainted” culture, something new was offered as a replacement by humanity. However, in this theoretical rendering, the conversion of culture is so radical that instead of replacement, we are offered rebirth. Where faith in God and humanity comes into play, our capacity for practical reasoning is innately corrupted, but through faith’s conversion, our lines of reasoning are reordered and put in line with the object that our faith has been placed in, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, redeemer of humanity, culture, and the world. Through what has been coined by Niebuhr as *transformative faith*, believer’s faith in Christ should not conform to the culture, but transform and sanctify the culture with the ultimate goal of liberating humanity by pointing them to God and the world that He loves.

The five positions present in Niebuhr’s work are to be evaluated with a three-dimensional standard to decipher faith that transforms the culture. In *The Kingdom of God in America*, Niebuhr (1937) argued that three dimensions are crucial for what he deems as "transformative faith": (a) the sovereignty of God over all; (b) the independence of the living God from captivity to human ideologies or institutions; and (c) a revolutionary strategy with particular normative

content from God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. According to Stassen (2003), without the historically particular content of the way of Jesus Christ, Christian faith has a vacuum only too eagerly filled by alien ideologies that do not coincide with the Jesus of Scripture and do not aid in understanding Christian ethics in relation to transforming the culture.

Niebuhr's five positions on Christ and culture cannot go untested in their practical applications within the daily lives of Christians, laymen, disciples, teachers, administrators, members of society, and liberation movements. This brings into question if we can fully articulate fruitful movements with the use of his systematic approach for critique and analysis of culture. According to Ottati (1982), the answer would undoubtedly be a resounding yes! Out of the five positions presented in Niebuhr's work, choosing to juxtapose, critique, and appropriate the Christ-the-transformer-of-culture framework, with respect to historical and contemporary works such as Gustavo Gutierrez's (1970) classic offering, *A Theology of Liberation*, and Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, can be useful. In these works, for example, we can see evidences of Niebuhr's theoretical stance vividly illustrated through the conceptualization and implementation of Liberation Theology. One could argue that transformative faith is essential and evidenced in both these works. Thus, Niebuhr's transformationist stance, coupled with critical pedagogy, can be used as a theoretical framework to evaluate religious socio-political movements such as liberation theology, both in Latin America and within the Black Church. This in an attempt to aid in discovering the core values and foundational principles evidenced within each—values and principles that I firmly believe find their roots in an epistemology grounded in the theology, pedagogy, and praxis of Jesus Christ.

According to Pishghadam and Meidani (2012), critical pedagogy mainly concerns itself with “the social embeddedness of education and its political character” (p. 468). Shelton (2007) stated that, within this Freirean construct, learning should always engage and incorporate the learner’s personal background and the environmental conditions that shape his or her life, particularly with respect to questions of cultural and social practices. Freire (1998b) also affirmed the open and loving relationship that must exist between students and teachers—if they are to consistently challenge and engage the dialectic of teaching and learning with epistemological curiosity. This curiosity both necessitates and validates students’ and teachers’ epistemological rights as human beings to experience a liberatory education, despite living in an oppressive society. By teachers and students engaging together critically in personal issues unique to their situations, transformation of the culture is not only possible, but also inevitable. Simon (1987) offered this insight on Freire’s praxis of critical pedagogy:

The goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience, and to envisage versions of a world which is ‘not yet’...is the ongoing praxis of critical pedagogy. (p. 375)

In order to utilize Freire’s construct of critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework that is appropriate for discussing liberation theology, a synthesis of Freire’s thoughts on critical pedagogy will be provided. But before this can happen, another question must be both proposed and analyzed to further cement the framework’s authenticity: what is the foundation for Freire’s conceptual construct of pedagogy? Knowing that Freire was deeply affected and involved in Latin America’s liberation theology movement, one could argue that critical pedagogy’s

epistemological construct, from the standpoint of Freire's contribution, is deeply rooted in Christocentric ideals. Although I have mainly focused on the contributions of Freire, it is important to note that contributions to critical social theory emerged from the Frankfurt school. This critical work was anchored in the work of Marx, Gramsci, Fromm, Marcuse, and others, who contributed to what we now call critical pedagogy. This is a crucial recognition, in that it would be false to attribute all of critical pedagogy to Paulo Freire (Foley, Morris, Gounari, & Agostinone-Wilson, 2015; Shor, 1992; Steele, 2003; Welton, 1982).

According to Elias (1976), Freire's pedagogical philosophy is best summarized in these words:

Our pedagogy cannot do without a vision of man and of this world. It formulates a scientific humanist conception which finds its expression in a dialogical praxis in which teachers and learner, together, in the act of analyzing and a dehumanizing reality, denounce it while announcing its transformation in the name of the liberation of man. (Freire, 1970 p. 20).

Elias (1976) asserted that the roots of Freire's humanism are religious, more specifically Christian and Catholic, and his belief of the relationship that man should have with others stems from man's relationship with his Creator. These views heavily shape and reshape the notions of praxis that Freire brings to critical pedagogy. Much like Niebuhr's (1951) transformationist stance, Christ-to-transform-culture, Freire viewed pedagogy as a means for transforming society, in that it provides the necessary epistemological tool for emancipatory social criticism. A comparison of Niebuhr and Freirean views (see Table 1.1) juxtaposes these two frameworks and

their tenants for social, educational and ecclesiological critique—all for the purposes of transforming each to their most humanizing possibility.

Table 1.1

Comparison of Niebuhr's and Freire's Views

Tenants	Transformationist (Faith)	Freirean Pedagogy
Epistemological Construct	Our way of knowing is inherently shaped by knowing God and His will for humanity (Niebuhr, 1951; Ottati, 2000).	Man is to be reflective and free because he is created by God to extend continually the potentialities of his personal being by living out relationships with God and other man (Elias, 1976).
Human Responsibility	Believer's faith in Christ should not conform to the culture, but transform and sanctify the culture with the ultimate goal of liberating humanity by pointing them to God and the world that He loves (Niebuhr, 1951).	Domination and oppression should not exist among men because this would not be true to what man is because of his relationship to his Creator, therefore man should fight to end all oppressive acts and liberate humanity (Elias, 1976; Freire, 1970).
Cultural Outcome	The conversion of culture is so radical that instead of replacement by another system of oppression, we are offered rebirth through Jesus Christ. Where a renewed faith in God and humanity comes into play, our lines of reasoning are reordered and put in line with the object that our faith has been placed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, redeemer of humanity, culture, and the world. Our actions will now lead to end oppressive acts and liberate humanity (Niebuhr, 1951; Ottati, 2000).	A democratic free society, free from oppression, and in which man is liberated through dialogue, nourished by love, humility, hope, and trust in God and his fellow man—utopia. (Freire, 1970).
Foundation of Praxis	Christocentric Practice: Jesus Christ points all to the One who created the world, but also points us back to the world that God loves. If we place our faith in Jesus Christ, this is the mission of all mankind (Niebuhr, 1951; Ottati, 2000).	Christocentric Practice: One's view of God is influential in social criticism. Jesus is presented as a person who worked for radical change. A democratic society is clearly to be founded on Christian principles of freedom, justice, equality and charity (Elias, 1976; Freire, 1968).

The striking commonalities between these two frameworks—both focusing on the purpose for religion and education in a cultural and societal context—provide us with a significant and useful tool not only for analyzing Liberation theology but also, more importantly, for engaging the on-going struggles of marginalized and oppressed populations. These two radical frameworks proffer a critical transformation of society through the praxis of key Christian principles that culminate with the end of oppression and the liberation of humanity.

Critique of Christ and Culture

In 2003, Darryl M. Trimiew offered a riveting and thought-provoking critique of H. Richard Niebuhr's (1951) *Christ and Culture*. In his work, he called into question the impact of Niebuhr's work, not only in present-day struggles, but more so in relation to the struggles and triumphs of oppressed African Americans within a Christian context. Trimiew asserted that Niebuhr's timeless classic "remains a useful heuristic device for discerning and interpreting the process of struggle and change produced by the attempts of the church to minister to the world" (p. 157). The work seeks to highlight Niebuhr's Christ-transforming-culture typology as a liberating methodology, which actively contributes to the eradication of socially oppressive paradigms affecting oppressed African American communities.

Although he agreed that the five typologies presented in the work were useful, they were not without error. Niebuhr's insight on Christ and culture can be useful in helping the church and society understand where social, political, and ecclesiastical liberation might be headed. Consequently, Niebuhr himself, lacked the critical awareness to recognize the influential transformationists of his era like Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, W. E. B. DuBois, Frannie Lou Hamer, Sojourner Truth, and Booker T. Washington, whose contributions in transforming

culture were not documented within his work (Anderson, 1998). Moreover, an understanding of Niebuhr's Christ-transforming-culture typology with respect to the oppressed is made evident by a critical examination of the Black Church.

The Black Church: Christ and Culture

When looking at the Black Church in relation to the emancipation of Blacks and African Americans in America, the Civil Rights Movement serves as an exemplary representation of oppressed peoples fighting alongside their God to end repression. During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the Black Church responded to the social ills of American society by utilizing theology as the ideological basis and foundation for an organized institutional change that aided in the eradication of racial oppression in North America (Swain, 2008). As a self-identified Black Christian seeking to offer something transformative to the culture that will emancipate future educators, leaders, and students alike, I find it exceedingly refreshing to see that my work can align with other Christians who share in my identity and culture. Finding in the literature, for example, ideas that confirm Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was himself a transformative moral agent who aligned his life's work with the transformative Christ, brings me unparalleled optimism as I seek to lay down the foundational ground for this study.

Along with a much-needed critique, Trimiew (2003) analyzed how Niebuhr's typologies can serve as evaluative principles to remedy egregious social conflicts. Aptly, his critiques are usually followed with a deep and critical empathy for Black Christians and their profound potential for service in fighting against oppression, both now and ultimately in the future. He grounded his beliefs in the future work of African American liberationists in the Black Church's

historical alignment with the fight against oppression in America, namely during post–Civil War emancipation and, most vividly, within the Civil Rights movement. About this, Trimiew wrote:

It is unlikely that the leadership of ongoing struggles for transformation against racism, sexism, homophobia, or class difference, will come from a Christian leader who is not theologically inclined to see as his or her role, and as a duty for the Church to engage as part and parcel of its mission, the struggle to transform the world. Thus the Christologies and practices that engage in public discourse, public policy formation and public disputes, are the ones most likely to transform our lives together and this fact was observed long ago by Niebuhr. (p. 163)

Liberation through theology is not a new notion, it has the ability to both transform and emancipate humanity from many facets of oppression. Jesus has been the catalyst and foundation for social movements in the past. Why should He not continue to contribute to the social movements of the future? As a member of an oppressed and marginalized community Himself, it is only fitting that those who follow in His footsteps would come from a similar struggle. The potential for transformative impact on subaltern cultures, particularly those within decimated and segregated social contexts—such as those found within the culture of education in America—seems like the perfect place to start. The liberation of historically oppressed populations can be forever effected by a pedagogical shift in educational practices. The conditions, moreover, are primed for another wave of liberation through theology. Knowing that my belief in Jesus has prompted me to set off on this emancipatory journey of liberation through theology and education has further connected me to my ancestor’s ideologies and praxis. The Black Church, hence, has played a pivotal role in securing some of the freedoms that I enjoy today. The

physical yoke of slavery has been lifted through its collective cries to God as deliverer and His Dear Son as Savior. Its unyielding belief as beloved members of God's creation, being themselves created in His image, fueled their desire to obtain civil rights and fight for equality (Cone, 1973; Gaines, 2010; Kirylo & Cone 2011).

I have often wondered where my desire to see Jesus in my life's work has come from. My mother's personal faith has become my personal faith; so naturally I attribute this insatiable appetite to find faith in my practice to her. She, as well as many other Black women in history who continue to be looked over, deserves much mention in the both the formation and development of many Black men's identities and ideologies surrounding faith and Jesus Christ. Women like Jarena Lee, Maria Stewart, Harriet Tubman, Nannie H. Burroughs, and Wells-Barnett have contributed to the Black Church's call for the Gospel to be a driving force in issues surrounding social justice (Pinn, 2007). Before I segue into liberation through theology, I think it important to take a cursory overview of another of liberation theology's offsprings, Black Theology and the Black Church. One is a theology, the other an institution, and neither should be mistaken for the other. Yet, both have had major implications on Black lives and faith in America and both have found their work rooted in liberation of Jesus Christ.

Black Theology

The intentions of Black Theology and the Black Church have both found their mission, whether overtly or incrementally, to persevere in the constant fight to liberate the oppressed in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. The need to briefly examine the literature on Black Theology in this study stems from its significant alignment with the theology of liberation. Moreover, these two bodies of literature share a prevailing perspective of God as a God of

action, moving on behalf of the oppressed as a result of His righteousness. Through this lens, God is not distant, removed from the world that He's created, as the deists believe. But rather He is a personal God who is concerned and deeply involved with His creation, especially those who are oppressed. This perspective is central to the formation of a Black Liberation Theology.

In 1969, James H. Cone's classic work *Black Theology and Black Power* contributed to the cultural and critical formation of what we now know to be "Black Theology." With this work, Cone both identified and defined Black Theology and Black Power as viable cultural constructs unique to oppressed individuals fighting for the liberation from physical, mental, emotional, and psychological oppression of Blacks living in North America. Cone illustrated the relationship between Black Theology and Black Power by detailing how both constructs serve as extensions of the other (Rhodes, 2009). Black Theology and Black Power are heavily influenced and shaped by the "black experience." Theology is therefore defined as God's revelation of Himself to the oppressed of the world through the appropriation of the gospels evidenced in the life, ministry, and ethnic make-up of Jesus Christ (Cone, 1969; Rhodes, 2009).

Within this theological spectrum, Cone identified *blackness* as an essential contributing factor that aligns and interconnects Black Theology and Black Power at both a physiological and ontological level (Cone, 1969, 1973; Rhodes, 2009). *Blackness*, according to Cone (1970), was more than surface-level skin pigmentation, although being dark skinned was a qualifier for "blackness"; conversely, being Black or White was not a reflection of one's skin color, rather an articulation of one's attitude toward fighting to liberate oppressed Black people from the effects of White racism (Pityana, 1973). For Cone (1970), *blackness* was an "ontological symbol for all people who participate in the liberation of man from oppression" (p. 32).

In 1982, H. Wayne House wrote an article titled “An Investigation of Black Liberation Theology.” This article served a clear purpose: to analyze and interact with the beliefs and ideologies of Black Theology for the purposes of discovering how evangelical theology can learn and benefit from its teachings. House concluded through his analysis that, “as an ideology, [Black] theology [at its core] concerns itself with the liberation of oppressed people” (p. 159). House actively struggled with the precepts and ideological implications of the doctrine, forcing himself to see the conflicting beauty presented in theology as a socially influenced theological construct. His understanding of theology was aimed at ending the subordination of African and African American peoples who had been oppressed by damaging Eurocentric beliefs and practices that negatively impacted the lives of marginalized populations.

At this particular juncture in the analysis, I highlight this work particularly due to House’s keen and astute recognition of Black Theology as a legitimate form of liberation theology. Drawing from the work of Gutiérrez (1970) to define the theology of liberation, House (1982) substantiated the Black movement for liberation and fortified its message by promoting its move from a theology that is theoretical to a theology that is concrete in its application. While Gutiérrez’s context was that of oppressed populations from Latin America, Black Theology’s context speaks to Blacks in North America. The prevailing question proposed through this ideology, and ones of similar constructs, is: how can theology directly affect or bring to life, the social implications of the gospel message that Westernized nations continue to perpetually ignore (McCall, 1976)?

“Black” Jesus: Savior of the Oppressed

The authority for Black Theology derives from a shared experience of oppression (Cone, 1969; Cone, 1973; McCall, 1976). According to House (1982) this authority of experience comes from an anthropocentric base that is created by a deep emotional bond that ties all Blacks together in a common struggle against the evils of oppression (Cone, 1973). The theology operates from an ideology that links all principles and beliefs to oppression even to the extent that Jesus is seen as a fellow sufferer and co-laborer in the fight to end oppression. As such, Jesus is seen as Savior, yet alive and working for their behalf (McCall, 1976). Jesus, within the Black theological paradigm, is the one who delivers socially and politically.

Accordingly, salvation is something experienced here on earth, not in the afterlife. An existence free from oppression and bigotry is the “heaven” that should and can be experienced on this side of eternity. Jesus is thus seen as the perfect revelation of God’s will toward man, and in this Black theological construct is Himself “Black,” for He, too, became a member of an oppressed society (Cone, 1969). Jesus is Savior; however, His salvific work does not culminate on the cross, dying on behalf of sinners, but is seen here, in the now, solely in emancipatory political terms (Cone, 1997; House, 1982; McCall, 1976). Learning of Christ, is, in essence, learning of oppression, for He is the expression of God in history “whereby one can know God’s concern for the rejected of society” (House, 1982, p. 165).

This raises the question: is education a social construct or a God-given right? If a social construct, then this study seeks to write a new chapter in the book of the theology of liberation, for the foundational principle of research here is that of a theological interpretation, as it pertains to pedagogical practices in education. If a God-given right, this study seeks to create a new and

yet familiar chapter in theological studies, where this critical examination considers how humanity responds when inalienable rights are withheld from marginalized and oppressed members of society. There is also a third option not yet considered, until now: an option that seeks to actively fight against Eurocentric epistemologies that endeavor to compartmentalize cultural ways of knowing and belittle the interdisciplinary process of Black historical life.

Through offering a pedagogy of Christ that is derived from assumptions forged outside the four walls of the hegemonic Western classroom of theology and education, educators can find the courage to liberate themselves from the dominant “religion” of practice. Ultimately, through a pedagogy of Christ, subaltern educators can seek liberation from the hegemonic ritual of formulaic lesson plans, oppressive curricula, and instructional paradigms, which continue to oppress and perpetuate sinful Westernized ideologies in both marginalized and nonmarginalized communities. Particular aspects of Black Theology challenge us to answer these and other questions affecting subaltern communities. For example, an analysis of the Black Church reveals specific moments in American History where the theology of liberation saw God’s people work as agents of eliciting change for the freedom of oppressed peoples (Gaines, 2010; Jett, 2010; McCray, Grant, & Beachum, 2010; Mitchell, 2010; Riggins et al., 2008).

Comparing the Jesus of Black Theology to the Jesus of evangelical theology does no good here. Tying in the essence of the Jesus of Black Theology and the Jesus of evangelical theology is what is necessary to formulate a working framework from which to build a viable pedagogy of Christ. There is beauty, nevertheless, in the conflicting Christologies. In one instance, Christ solely came to free humankind from their sins: which I believe to be true. In another instance, Christ came to free subaltern humankind from oppression. One Christ is the

revelation of God to man for emancipatory purposes dealing strictly with forms of oppression in social aspects. One Christ is the revelation of God to man for emancipatory purposes, dealing with matters of spiritual bondage to sin. Something can be learned from both views, which culminates in freedom from sin that leads to spiritual and physical oppression (Cone, 1969; Gutiérrez, 1988).

The two understandings of Christ do not have to operate in conflict with one another. Rather, this study seeks to combine key principles of both. Seeing Jesus's pedagogy as a perfect union of both allows humanity to learn from His praxis and see the "wholistic" nature of salvation (Boff, 1978). A humanizing and critically grounded understanding of doctrine can lead to right practice of doctrine. Until theology is released from the realm of the mind and is embodied with hands and feet, it will remain merely theory. I contend here that the life of Jesus as teacher reveals to us theology in practical application. Elements of Black Theology have contributed to liberation theology and elements of Liberation Theology have laid the foundations for Black Theology (Cone, 1970; House, 1982; Pinn, 2007; Rhodes, 2009). Both point to what we do with theology and Jesus; but the life of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospel accounts points to why what we do with theology matters to God and humanity (Boff, 1978; Boff & Boff, 1984; Cone, 1969; Gutiérrez, 1970).

Moreover, the parallels of Liberation theology and Black theology, which rise up on two different continents are too similar to ignore. What, then, is the essential element that joins these theologies of liberation? Is it a shared skin color? I don't think something as profound as the struggle for human liberation would be solely predetermined by skin color. The common factor, then, that aligns Blacks in America and subaltern populations in Latin America, is the committed

fight against oppression. More to the point, the common denominator that supports each social movement is power of Jesus Christ. Our understanding of freedom stems from our understanding of God's truest revelation to humankind. His life and His practice are one and the same. It is a life actively entrenched with compassion for humanity, a deep love for God, and an unyielding fight for the amelioration of oppression and freedom from the evils of sin and all of its manifestations. It is now time to review liberation theology and its implications for Latin America, and how the teachings of Christ's moved Latin America toward a greater emancipation from oppression.

Liberation Through Theology

The intent of liberation theology is to present an accurate understanding and appropriation of the gospel message of Jesus's teachings toward the oppressed of society (Escobar, 1987). It is a theological reflection concerned with the life experiences of the oppressed in society, where faith actively challenges injustices perpetrated upon the poor (Boff & Boff, 1987; Gutiérrez, 1972). As stated in Eddy Muskus's 2015 work, *Liberation Theology: Its Origins and Early Development*, Samuel Escobar defined the Theology of Liberation as "a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the Word" (p. 30). Gustavo Gutiérrez's transformative theological work in Latin America helped establish the theology of liberation within a Latin context. Gutierrez espoused the notion of liberation through theology as a critical reflection of the Gospel enacted upon by men and women committed to the liberation of the oppressed and marginalized subaltern populations of Latin America.

According to Levine (1988), within Latin America, the Catholic Church, in the eyes of the poor, allied itself with the social elite and perpetuated the hegemonic established order,

furthering the oppression of the impoverished members of the culture. The religious institution's representation of Jesus Christ completely missed the mark. The term *liberation theology*, during the time frame when first introduced, was considered an oxymoron within Latin American societies. For the oppressed living in Latin America, the prevailing religion, Catholicism, was not a "religious institution committed to the transformation of the social order by direct involvement in the struggle for liberation," but rather a fortification for stark conservatism (Muskus, 2015). Theology as a social construct, through the redefining of praxis, moved from traditional religious piety, toward a renewed socialized methodology ripe for the oppressed to enact upon (Escobar, 1987; Gutiérrez, 1983).

Smith (1991) noted that, within Latin America, the church incongruously aligned itself with the government and, as a result, was allowed to control much of public education, politics, and the economy, limiting access to impoverished members of Latin American society. As a result, the church became an avenue of systemic oppression. Conversely, according to Levine (1988), Jesus did not come to establish a new religion, but rather to play a primary role in the liberation of humanity that transcends the institutional and ideological boundaries set by traditionalist far removed from the praxis of God toward man. Gutiérrez's (1972) discussion on liberation through theology has set the foundation for these and other works that champion the pillars enumerated in this theological reflection. Gutiérrez (1983) chose to refocus and align both Christianity and the Church with their most foundational pillar: love. The center of all Christian life should formulate through a praxis of love toward God and His creation.

A historically accurate contextualization of liberation theology is important in establishing continuity of thought. What exactly were the religious, cultural, economic, and

societal conditions in Latin America that led to liberation theology? According to Hennelly (1990) in 1962, the Second Vatican Council met to discuss the current status of the Catholic Church and initiate changes to its hegemonic practices in Latin America. This council had a profound influence on the actions and practices of the Catholic Church in Latin America. In 1968, 130 Catholic bishops convened in Medellin, Columbia, with the intention to apply the documents cemented in Vatican II to Latin America clergy. According to Hillis (2000), within this council, the bishops broke established Catholic tradition and circulated a document that examined the sociological realities of Latin America. This break in tradition, according to Hillis, made way for the development of liberating movements.

One conclusion made from the Medellin Council, presents a reimagined view of justice for the Catholic Church that stated:

The efforts that have been made have not been capable of assuring that justice be honored and realized in every sector of the respective national communities... We cannot ignore the phenomenon of this almost universal frustration of legitimate aspirations, which creates the climate of collective anguish in which we are already living. (p. 98)

Smith (1991) stated, as bishops' demands for liberation and justice grew due to this council, many were called to elaborate on the further development of this idea. As a result, Medellin not only became the springboard for liberation theology, but also systematized the term and provided a viable platform for liberation theology to blossom. As liberation theology began to develop from theory into praxis, many interpretations and analyses have come into play to create a practicable framework for this movement's replication and sustainability. In order for this to occur, a valid definition had to be put into place to classify and separate liberation theology from

other religious-political movements of the time. Three criteria are presented in the literature that constitutes an accurate understanding of this movements purpose and implications.

Drawing on Boff and Boff's (1984) understandings of liberation theology, the primary effort should be to liberate the oppressed. This keenly reflected a Freirean understanding that any social movement, particularly one administered by the church, should function within the same priority.

The liberation of the oppressed is critical to the critique and analysis of liberation theology; for, at the very core of its principles is the contextual nature of justice, as evidenced in the Medellin Council. Beyond critique and analysis, Hillis (2000) asserted that liberation theology must be both done by and with the poor. Gustavo Gutiérrez (1983) a key proponent of liberation theology in the region, asserted that how to correctly appropriate and achieve liberation theology ultimately fall within these two guidelines: "In order for this liberation to be authentic and complete, it has to be undertaken by the oppressed people themselves and so must stem from the values proper to these people. Only in this context can a true Cultural Revolution come about" (p. 91). One could argue that this is a limitation of liberation theology being that only the oppressed could partake in authentic appropriation of liberation theology. However, Gutiérrez's perspective is in line with Freire's belief that the oppressed have the historical task to liberate themselves (Darder, 2015; Freire 1970).

There is a unique parallel between the first advent of liberation theology in Latin American society and the current cultural conditions present within North America today. According to Levine (1988), social change, ecclesiological debate, and political upheaval are three key components that helped usher in liberation theology in Latin America. With the current

religious, political, economic, and social landscape of North America, taking a look at this movement seems to be more than just appropriate, but necessary. Its implementation in outside oppressed communities, not only in America, but also abroad, could spark a resurgence of liberation perspectives and social actions in other contexts as well.

The notion of liberation theology being Christocentric reflects Ottati's (2003) understanding of Christ and His praxis and influence on culture developed through Niebuhr's (1951) transformationist faith paradigm. Through this lens, Christ is to direct humanity toward God and then back toward the world that God loves. Hillis (2000) concurred with this conclusion, and stated that the problem of oppression and injustice stems from the breaking of the relationship with God and man. This segues into the third critical aspect of liberation theology, which Banks (1993) referred to as *knowledge construction*, the process by which others come to fully understand the authentic perspective and realities of others, without which, it is impossible to create true and authentic relationships with oppressed people.

This final pillar of liberation theology coincides with Freirean thought, with respect to conscientization and its liberating role for oppressed communities seeking to transform the hegemonic society. In accordance with transformationist faith (Niebuhr, 1951), Liberation Theology focuses not on replacing the current culture with another system, but rather on the liberation of man through theology (Boff & Boff, 1984; Gutiérrez, 1970). The focus here is placed on the end of oppression and the rebirth of humanity through Christocentric emancipatory elements. Liberation theology, in this context, is rooted in Christocentric values and ethics implemented through the praxis of theology proper.

Critical Christ: The Forerunner of Liberation Theology

Horsley and Hanson (1988) stated that Jesus's engagement with His social world is central to understanding who He is. Horsley and Hanson described first-century Palestine as "a colonial situation of class struggle and conflict between economically oppressive urban, ruling elites and economically oppressed rural peasants," of which Jesus was a member. Applying Levine's (1988) criterion for liberation theology to emerge, Christ in this context is placed within the perfect conditions for human liberation through theology. Horsley and Hanson believed that what emerged was a social revolutionist that liberated the poor and indicted the ruling elites. Rather than political reform that often results from a "top-down" system of power, Jesus believed in spiritual reform, which does not focus on a change in leadership, but instead a change within the heart of the individual operating from the "inside out" (Mark 7:14-16).

The social, political, and religious parallels in Latin America and first-century Palestine are undoubtedly similar. The spiritual and social revolution ushered in by Jesus Christ pioneered what would later be termed by Gustavo Gutierrez (1970) and the Medellin Council *liberation theology*. Hence, within liberation theology, there is a Christocentric foundation of praxis that shapes the movement and ensures the proper implementation of Christocentric morals and ethics (Escobar, 1987; Gutiérrez, 1972, 1983). With the construction, critique, and analysis of the three elements presented by Levine (1988), I would argue that Latin America is not the Mecca of liberation theology, yet a contemporary continuation of theological liberation and Christocentric principles revisited. If these three elements are, indeed, what constitute satisfactory implementation of liberation theology, one could argue that the inauguration commenced with the original proprietor of these three elements, Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

A Narrative Text from the Gospel of Mark

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him,

“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.’” “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but Him. To love Him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions. (Mark 12: 28-34)

With Christ at the center of this pedagogical and theological investigation, the next two chapters will focus on critical pedagogy and the teachings of Jesus. What can be gleaned from the Scripture, to position Him as a critical educator? The work is a critical work of inquiry; with this, the first question one must ask is What did the text mean to the biblical audience? The next question that must be asked is What are the differences between the biblical audience and us? The next question pertaining to the theology of Jesus and its implications for this work is essential, What is the theological principle in this text? The final question that must be asked of the text is paramount, as I will use this most frequently in the subsequent chapters to define and articulate the pedagogy of Christ is How should individuals, Christian and secular alike, apply

the theological principle in life practice? These four questions will serve as a compass to guide me on this journey in Chapter 5.

As I seek to interpret Jesus's theology in practice, my hope is never to negate the influence of His culture and heritage along the way. My contention is that the Gospel accounts illustrate the pedagogy of Jesus informed by the theology of Jesus. On this decolonizing interpretive journey, it is imperative that I proactively fight against reproducing Western-influenced thinking and ideologies. I must also honor the original author's culture, mindset, and intended audience when approaching their work. Duvall and Hays's (2008) simple approach fits best in accomplishing this interpretive journey, rooted in contextual analysis. However, for the sake of this study, I have chosen Mark 12:28-34 as a focal point. I believe this text in particular clearly articulates the theology of Jesus both in word and deed.

The passages from the gospel of Mark serve as a sample text to convey the theology of Jesus, grounded in His culture. I have chosen this particular text because it offers an excellent example of the practicality of theology when properly interpreted and implemented. The framework provided by Duvall and Hays (2008) will be used in Chapter 5 to interpret the biblical texts in an attempt to analyze and uncover what principles connote and effectively convey both the theology of Jesus and His pedagogy. His theology, I predict, will ultimately inform and influence the development and articulation of a critical pedagogy of Christ in the concluding chapter. His pedagogy, when illuminated and practically applied, will serve to emancipate both teachers and students from the oppressive educational paradigms and constraints heavily influenced by Western epistemological constructs.

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND CHRISTOCENTRIC CONNECTIONS

Thinking back on my educational journey, it is safe to say that Eurocentric epistemologies have permeated the pedagogical practices and ideologies of many of my educators. Navigating life as an African American male from an impoverished background has provided its fair share of challenges; however, to experience racialized epistemologies reproduced and reinforced in educational institutions from kindergarten through high school also created a unique set of circumstances. As a student, I rarely felt affirmed throughout my academic career. To provide some context for clarity, affirmation pertaining to aspects of race, culture, gender, personhood, religion, and so forth. The teaching styles, instructional techniques, and pedagogical practices all seemed to paint a picture of an academic student who was supposed to be me, yet differed greatly from what I felt was essential to life, learning, and being. When the image on the canvas was finished, the portrait thought to be me looked very unfamiliar. The image was not steeped in my culture, my background, or my race; it was quite the opposite. It was as if I were being colonized and forced to assimilate into an academic society that only accepted certain ways of thinking, speaking and doing. The final portrait resembled many other likenesses produced by the educational system, none of which differed significantly greatly from the others.

The deep yearning for my educational experience to not only affirm my identity, but also to cultivate my intellectual curiosity and spiritual formation continues to be the driving force behind my insatiable appetite to learn. The absence of this kind of education for marginalized, culturally and intellectually oppressed populations has been the catalyst for educational reform in

the United States. To say that my education has not afforded me favorable conditions for social and economic mobility would be a lie. The question is, however: at what cost? It is an injustice for the educational system to function as an institution for the social reproduction of oppressive curricula and pedagogical practices (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

For the pendulum in education to swing toward a more liberating direction, teaching strategies, philosophies, and theory have to undergo a rigorous process of critique. Freire (1970), a founding proponent of critical pedagogy, proposed that education should serve as a humanizing force to end oppression. Freire argued that students should learn within conditions that empower them to critically reflect on their social and historical realities, within their respective communities, in order to adequately engage and counter oppression in all its forms. For Freire, students and teacher should constantly be engaging in a dialectically grounded manner in the interest of an evolving process of conscientization, which can critically engage with the social, political, and economic contradictions that affect their lives daily. Giroux (2010) built upon Freire's definition and views critical pedagogy as a praxis-oriented educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop a consciousness of freedom with which they can recognize authoritarian tendencies, connect knowledge to power, and build the skills to take constructive action. When implemented, critical pedagogy should serve as a vehicle to transform not just the individual, but the collective society as well.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is rooted in the struggle to emancipate students and teachers from oppressive systems that permeate the hegemonic paradigm of education (Freire, 1970, 1998a). Critical pedagogues concur that this method of educational theory and practice provides teachers

and researchers with more accurate and culturally sensitive methods in understanding the roles schools play in shaping society (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Darder & Torres, 2004; hooks, 1994; Freire, 1970). One of the major charges of critical pedagogy is to “disclose and challenge the reproductive role schools play in political and cultural life” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008 p. 2). With this in mind, this chapter seeks not to (re)define critical pedagogy, but rather to affirm its fundamental tenets, contributors, and ultimately direct attention toward the foundational elements of its inception, which I believe to be rooted in a spiritual Christocentric framework.

Critical Theoretical Foundation

It is impossible to build on the tenets of critical pedagogy without first properly unearthing the foundational principles upon which it is built: critical theory. Within critical theory is a dialectical relationship that persistently intertwines the individual and society (Wardekker & Miedema, 1997). The result of this relationship manifests in the lived experiences and practices of the individual influenced by a capitalistic paradigm. What emerges from this inner conflict is the struggle of self-conscious critique. This critique provides the necessary questioning of the established political, economic, social, and psychological norms or hegemonic ideology within society, in order to push the individual toward a process of emancipation from ideologies perpetuated within capitalism (Giroux, 1983; Schiro, 2008). The notion of critical theory was the result of a group of philosophers, educators, and sociologists within what has been loosely defined as the “Frankfurt School” (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2009; Kirylo, 2011). The resulting work from the Frankfurt School was to essentially lay the foundations for critical thinkers to fight against domination of all forms. Being brought forth from critical

thinkers fighting against capitalism and its reproduction of social, political, and educational systems of oppression, critical theory firmly established itself not as a method, but as a way of thinking, *being*, knowing, and understanding the world (Darder et al. 2009; Giroux, 1983; Gutek, 2004; Kirylo, 2011).

The critical pedagogue is then informed by principles (as discussed in chapter 1) rooted in critical theory. From this perspective, education is obstinately concerned with answering one question: What is the purpose of education within an oppressive society? The optimal concern of the critical pedagogue peering through the lens of critical theory is the sociopolitical forces that continue to shape and reshape injustice and inequality (Darder et al., 2009). There must be an intentional and consistent pursuit to engage the individual and society in a persistent dialogue with democracy and freedom (McLaren, 1989). Critical thought is considered essential then to building meaningful connections among and across members of society, in order to properly influence society (Gramsci, 1971). Moreover, critical theory's ultimate aim is to oppose and critique the hegemonic social paradigm predicated on capitalism, which seeks to both normalize and quantify the human experience in an effort to control it. According to Foley et al. (2015), "what traditional theory lacks is a clear connection to the subjectivity of individuals and society, and is predicated on the notion of positivism in the sciences" (p. 133).

Critical theory, in contrast, focuses consistently on creating the necessary environment for more profound questioning of the values and structures that sustain gross inequalities in the world. Questioning society; questioning democracy; questioning self within society and democracy; questioning of education; questioning of politics; questioning of the individual: questioning of the individual within politics and education—these are considered essential

questions that must be consistently engaged, if emancipatory change is our goal. “In short, critical theory/pedagogy questions the value-laden curriculum of everyday life...the power structures that manipulate rationality and truth...and how subjectivity becomes a political ontology” (Foley et al., 2015, pp. 113–114).

Critical theory is not solely meant to remain abstract notions; it is a way of thinking that provides educators, theorists, psychologists, and social workers a framework to both react and respond to the traditional hegemonic epistemology and address its problems head on, through developing critical praxis (Breunig, 2005; Gibbs, 1997). Critical theory moves society into a place of reflection that sees the beauty in human differences, yet recognizes that these differences should not go without proper critique, specifically with in the lives of those who have been historically marginalized and oppressed.

In Gibbs’s (1997) juxtaposition of Christian Education and critical theory, he acknowledged the emancipatory and moral elements of critical theory noting its desire to free the oppressed and to reduce suffering through hope. Gibbs stated:

[incorporating] a moral vision of human justice and decency...[it] also calls upon educators to have a prophetic commitment in humility to pit “decisions against despair... against oppression, barrenness, and exile from freedom...” to become a guiding light...Justice and compassion are the goals of critical theory in education, [where its] purveyors see it as a moral enterprise. (p. 60)

With this, hope, justice, love, and compassion are synonymous with the values of critical theorist, where one does not exist without the other in the pursuit of liberation. There is a visceral interconnectedness of these three elements that motivates the critical theorist to seek measures of

emancipation for those who are oppressed. Critical theory functions, then, as a framework that consistently informs the philosophical direction and actions of critical educators (Kirylo, 2011). If this is true, if we search deep enough, then, at the root of critical theory are found the elements of an emancipatory philosophy that informs the critical theorist. The notion of peering into the foundational principles of critical theory and practice will play a more pivotal role as this discussion moves forward. The aim here is to illustrate the various building blocks that have contributed to the foundational principles of an emancipatory pedagogy.

Emancipatory Pedagogy: Teaching as Liberation

Education is an essential dimension of democratic life and significant to the development of conscientious citizens who are committed to culturally democratic outcomes. Despite democratic rhetoric in education, the hegemonic culture of schooling has traditionally been marred with oppressive curricula, fraught of “ideologies shaped by power, history, politics, culture and economics that do not align with and/or support the empowerment of culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students” (Darder et al., 2003, p. 11).

Concerning the role of asymmetrical power relations and its oppressive impact on the lives of the disenfranchised, Gramsci (1971) proffered a deeper understanding of this system of social control and power through what he deems *cultural hegemony*. According to Gramsci, these hegemonic forces serve the interest of the dominant sociocultural class and utilize power as a form of oppression, wielded in demonstrative efforts to actively silence subjugated populations (Giroux, 1985). Critical and emancipatory pedagogy “incorporates this notion of hegemony in order to demystify the asymmetrical power relations and social arrangements that sustain the interests of the ruling class” (Darder et al., 2003 p. 13). This ongoing process of critique assists

in the development of educators who are able to identify, challenge, and overcome oppression through social action, particularly within the classroom.

Emancipatory theory develops from the “hermeneutic demands of classroom praxis” (Gordon, 1986 p. 62). It is within this crucible of conflict and care, creativity and purposefulness, that emancipatory educational practices can thrive as educators view themselves as lifelong learners, fully integrated as participants in the learning process (Gordon, 1986). What provides credence to this aspect of the theory are not mere words and philosophy, but the power of action that emerges from critical reflection and dialogue; for example, the work of proponents of emancipatory education, like Cynthia Brown, Paulo Freire, and Sylvia Ashton Warner, whose writings emerged from their literacy work alongside poor, marginalized and oppressed peoples (Gordon, 1986). Similarly, urban critical educators see the potential of the classroom experience as an important catalyst for critical consciousness and social change to further develop and redefine emancipatory life in schools and beyond.

Freire (1998) posited that teaching must function as an act of liberation. However, in order to truly unveil and challenge all systems of oppression, students and teachers must come to understand the question of power as an agent of oppression. The critical educator utilizes the classroom as a vehicle of social transformation by creating the conditions for students to think critically about politics and society in their own lives and the world, creating a space that reflects their respective roles within the classroom as agents of change. Power structures that are set up to persistently oppress marginalized and poverty-stricken communities must be radically reoriented to form new structures of freedom that allow for the *reinventing of power*, in order to alter the status-quo (Darder, 2002; Freire, 1998).

Emancipatory pedagogy concerns itself with freeing teachers and students from the traditional Eurocentric method of education, in which teachers and students are means of social reproduction, complicit in perpetuating the hegemonic ideologies of the times (Shor, 1992). To fully negate the normalized structure of the teacher-student paradigm, there must be a clear understanding of how asymmetrical relations of power perpetuate domination and enact structures of oppression. The process of emancipation depends heavily on the recognition of the humanity of learner and student, where teachers and students fully embrace their humanness.

Within this process of liberation, there must be a clear recognition between student and teacher that, despite the critical authority of the teacher (Freire, 1998) and the students' authority of experience (hooks, 2000), there are no lesser or greater roles, in that both teachers and students are essential to the communal process of learning. This horizontal relationship is also rooted in an emancipatory purpose committed to the interests of democratic live—a purpose that defies the domestication, colonization, racialization, and appropriation of the humanity of subaltern populations. As such, “horizontal relationships of self-determination, serve as the impetus for this reflection on the need for a decolonizing community practice—one that cultivates political grace among those who aspire to create both social and material change” (Darder & Yiamouyiannis, 2009, p. 10).

Three Central Themes

I have chosen three central themes from the literature to triangulate in relation to critical pedagogy and best tie to the underlying purpose of this study. One theme surrounds critical education as human encounter, or “human moment” (De Lissovoy, 2010). Within these human moments, or encounters, humans engage in a dialectic focused on the transformative liberation of

humanity and the world. This dialogue is ongoing, and steeped in hope and faith, where the oppressed problematize their existential situations, through engaging in critical praxis (Berthoff, 1990; Freire, 1970; Gibbs, 1997).

The second critical pedagogical theme in the literature is that of conscientization (Freire, 1970). This outcome is directly linked to the process of critical reflection and dialogue within both critical pedagogy and liberation theology (Kirylo & Cone, 2011; Oldenski, 2002). Critical dialogue is essential to liberatory pedagogical practices, in that it supports a transformative problem-posing approach, equipped to critically examine the conditions of students' lives in relation to the larger society.

The final and most important theme to this study, which encapsulates all the others, is the principle of love (Darder, 2011, 2002; Freire, 1973, 1993, 1998b; Oldenski, 2002). Teaching, for the critical educator, is understood fundamentally as "an act of love" (Darder, 1998), rooted in the ontological understanding that humans are agents of change. The literature reveals that these themes are central to critical pedagogical practices. I argue that these themes are also central to the pedagogy of Jesus Christ, who introduced the world to a fuller understanding of the human being and God, through forms of critical emancipatory practice (Boff, 1978).

Rethinking Education: Searching for Human Moments

In his work, Noah De Lissovoy (2010) called for educators to rethink education and, in essence, its purpose. According to De Lissovoy, essential to all critical and emancipatory pedagogues is the notion that students, although considered human in every facet, are traditionally perceived as conditional entities, in need of further development by means of conscientization. De Lissovoy engaged Freire's contention that students are human agents of

change, essential to the struggle against all forms of oppression and that a humanizing approach to education must be key, particularly in the relationship between student and teacher. From here, De Lissovoy posited a challenge to traditional critical conditions where dialogue is used to assist in the development of student's critical awareness and their capacity to engage in reflection and action. His argument does not negate the foundational work of emancipatory pedagogy, but rather notes the need for a more rigorous conceptualization of shared humanness, which is not constructed, but already verified as fact due to the shared suffering of both the oppressed teacher and the oppressed student, given that both are already part of a hegemonic system of education.

The social and political conditions that reinforce asymmetrical power dynamics persistently permeate the educational system, thus, making schools, as currently constructed, a viable mechanism for social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). If education has always been the avenue of introducing and conforming students and educators to the principles of domination, it must also continue to be a formidable site in the struggle against the establishment of critical principles. To buck the trend of domination at the forefront of the educational paradigm, De Lissovoy (2010) argued,

in countering the project of domination that lives at the heart of education, emancipation is less a project of humanization than an insistence on the necessity of constructing education – *to begin with* – as a human encounter. That is, in the context of a society organized by the process of domination, the truly transformative act is to constitute a human moment *outside* of that logic. (p. 205)

What now truly constitutes an emancipatory educational experience are “human moments” that function “outside” of the dominant constraints of education (Dussel, 2003).

“Teaching, then, is *a work on being* and the invention of the possibility of an authentic encounter between [students and teachers] outside of domination” (p. 208). These “human moments” liberate the collective toward glimpses of an alternate world where the veil of oppression is lifted to reveal truth and justice. Hope and faith are established within these glimpses of truth and justice and rooted in our collective pursuit and on-going struggle for social justice as an attainable possibility, where our humanity and political grace—that collective force generated through our collective struggles for freedom (Darder & Yiamouyiannis, 2009)—is effectively leveraged through a *pedagogy of love*.

Pedagogy of Love: Political and Spiritual

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”

John 13:35

For Freire (1970), true engagement with critical pedagogy is essentially an act of love, whereby the oppressed, in solidarity, participate in critical praxis that supports them in the process of reflection, dialogue, and action toward an outcome of transformation. Throughout his writings, Freire expanded upon his theory with a focus on education as a liberatory context in which individuals could come to more fully understand both themselves and others in relation to the world (Freire, 1995, 1998a; Oldenski, 2002;). Thus, education can serve to usher in political and social change, utilizing the power of critical awareness through dialogue. Freire (1990) defined this process of conscientization as a fluid dialogue where human beings are made critically aware of the world and to their responsibility in transforming it into a new reality. This advances the notion that humans are constantly creating and recreating, not only their reality but also themselves in relation to the world.

According to Berthoff (1990), Freire's impetus for engaging in a true pedagogy of liberation places emphasis on his definition of dialogue as a uniquely human encounter. Within this encounter, dialogue is not to be mistaken for a conversation; "it is dialectic and reflective," intricately constructed on the basis of culture, society and politics (Berthoff, 2009 p. 363). Moreover, within this liberatory pedagogical ideology, teaching "becomes an act of love and courage" (Olendski, 2002 p. 136). Therefore, teachers within this construction of education are considered ambassadors of liberation (Freire, 1993). The pedagogical objective within the classroom, or what Freire (1970) referred to as "culture circles," is tied to a dialogical context that seeks to implement teaching and construct knowledge through the power of shared love.

In Antonia Darder's (1986, 2002, 2011, 2015) writings on the implications of Freire's articulation of love as a pedagogical and political construct, she notes that love in the critical teacher is "a love that [can] be lively, forceful and inspiring, while at the same time, critical, challenging, and insisting" (p. 179). Therefore, within this concept, love does not function as an emotion or a feeling, but rather as a deep sensibility, a conviction and commitment to our being human, insisting that "for Freire, a liberatory education could never be conceived without a profound commitment to our humanity" (Darder, 2011 p. 180). Moreover, teachers must themselves be in love with the very act of teaching; seeing the vocation as a transformative social and political phenomenon (Darder, 2011). However, it is not the duty of the teacher to liberate the students, but rather to love and lead students to liberate themselves, through creating the conditions that support their individual and collective process of conscientization (Darder, 2015; Freire, 1970).

Darder (2015) developed Freire's view on the significance of love, stating, "Freire believed deeply—from the personal to the pedagogical to the political—in the transformative and emancipatory power of love" (p. 47). The underlying current of Freire's progressive thinking surfaces in his unwavering belief in moving from social constructs that lead to the dehumanization of the oppressed, to liberatory values that ground our existence as human beings (Darder, 2015). The individual and collective humanization of the oppressed and marginalized cannot be actualized without love; for it is love that becomes the motivating factor for all acts of true liberation. Moreover, Darder and Yiamouyiannis (2009) argued, "love as a vital revolutionary force infuses political grace into our community struggles, guiding us toward new possibilities for a more just world" (p. 18).

There is no question that how we come to understand education and the world around us greatly shapes our worldview. How we come to understand our worldview is greatly shaped by the dehumanizing forces evident in hegemonic schooling, given our particular social location (Darder, 2015). It has already been established that schools, as currently constructed, continue to promote Eurocentric epistemological ideologies that are oppressive to indigenous and marginalized populations (Darder 2011, 2015; Paraskeva, 201; Santos, 2015). This provides the proper condition to position "love as a political force" (Darder, 2015, p. 49) in opposition to the current system of oppression evidenced within traditional schooling. For Freire (1997), deepening our understanding of democracy and freedom beckons the critical educator to cultivate moments of "greater intimacy between self, others, and the world" (Darder, 2015, p. 50) to allow for a true emancipatory educational experience.

According to Darder (2015), Freire's view on love simultaneously serves as both a political and dialectical force that assists in the nurturing of a collective consciousness aimed at counterhegemonic practices. When love serves as a political force, it offsets and fights structures aimed at keeping marginalized populations subjugated and oppressed. Evident in Darder's conceptualization of love as a political force is an underlying pedagogy of love that fosters conditions for developing lasting emancipatory relationships embedded in our mission as educators. About this inseparability between love and pedagogical labor, Darder posited,

Directly and indirectly, Freire touched on the essence of love as inseparable to our labor as educators and democratic citizens of the world. Again, true to Fromm's (1964) adage, Freire embraced the idea that "[o]ne loves that for which one labors, and one labors for that which one loves. (p. 26)

In addition, the task of the critical pedagogue who seeks to enact a pedagogy of love is also the need to labor to create emancipatory educational conditions within an oppressive system where students can actively express their anger and frustration. By receiving "the experience of assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons; dreamers of possible utopias...because of a capacity to love," students are empowered to impart radical change (Freire, 1998a, p.45).

This understanding of education can seem daunting at first glance; however, Freire labored to bring us back to the very foundation of the purpose and practice of education: teaching. Although teaching is also a political act (Freire, 1970), some fail to see it as such. Within this paradox one can find oneself lost in the social and political aspects of the context and forget to commit to the initial calling of the educator, which is to teach. Freire contextualizes this

calling by channeling his pedagogy of love in relation to his love for teaching and his students. As such, Freire understood his love for students inside the framework and process of teaching (Darder, 2015; Freire, 1995). Moreover, the relationship between teaching and loving is considered foundational and imperative to the pedagogical and political potential of critical educators who lives out their convictions within the classroom and out in the world.

Another aspect that cannot be overlooked in our endeavor to understand teaching as an act of love—and therefore worth repeating—is that education must inherently function as a humanizing endeavor (Darder 2015; Freire, 1970). According to Darder, a pedagogy of love must be acknowledged as a deeply purposeful educational practice, driven by a political vision substantiated in what Freire believed to be our “true vocation: to be human” (Freire, 1970). As schools are currently positioned within society to reproduce hegemonic ideologies, within Freire’s estimation, they must undergo structural transformation, so that they can function as political forces for the emancipatory humanization of the oppressed. Educators, within this new social construct of teaching, must see students not as bodies in seats, but as human beings with the potential for not only academic achievement, but also as to serve as social change agents capable of radically transforming the systems that currently oppress and constrain their freedom (Darder, 2015).

Therefore, an education cannot be rooted in love if it does not first allow for students to be seen in relation to their social, political and economic existence. Darder (2015) linked this again to Freire’s pedagogy of love:

The same rich humanizing quality that Freire brought to his writings was also profoundly apparent in his love for life, freedom, and learning; as well as the ways he sought to share

the transformative power of this love in his praxis...Freire's commitment was consistently expressed as both a personal struggle to be free and a collective struggle for the emancipation of our collective humanity. Similarly, he urges educators to embrace our labor in schools and communities with love and respect for our students, as creators of their own lives and co-creators of the new world to come. (p. 64)

Love within the context of education does in fact function as a political force, for it creates an emancipatory avenue for the humanization of students who are or have been oppressed (Darder, 2015). Consequently, a pedagogy authenticated by love formulates a humanizing, educational praxis for critical consciousness, producing liberating evidences of social agency within students themselves. Love is a political force, radical in its conception and essential in its implementation. However, when enacted as a foundation for critical pedagogy, anchored in dialogue, teachers and students are given the opportunity to critically examine themselves and the world in which they must survive. Love here is, thus, a humanizing force, an effectual call, which echoes as a command of the will of God to see our fellow brother as we see ourselves.

Conscientization: Freirean-Inspired Education

Paulo Freire and his contemporaries understood the powerful relationship between liberation and education, noting the keen influence this relationship has on creating a world that is free of ideological structures designed to oppress, rather than to liberate (Glass, 2001). This speaks to an important dimension of this study—to unearth and develop the powerful connection evident between liberation, theology, and education (Boff, 1978; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1989; Oldenski, 2002). Not to stray, however, too far from the central purpose of this

research, it serves us to revisit some one of Freire’s most pertinent offerings to the field of critical pedagogy—namely the question of *conscientização* or conscientization.

Freire’s (1970) defining work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, influenced the North American educational landscape to move more deliberately toward the incorporation of more culturally sensitive pedagogical ideas and practices aimed at building just, democratic societies. His work continues to provide educators, students, community organizers, and activists around the world with the foundational means to engage in socially just praxis. As defined by Freire, praxis constitutes deliberate and meaningful reflection on the world, dialogue with one another, and actions within the world for the purposes of transforming it through a process of conscientization (Freire, 1970). Moreover, Freirean theory is concerned with the creation of conditions that critically examine life through education based on ontological reasoning, which posits praxis as a defining element of what it means to be human. According to Freire (1970), this understanding of praxis is an essential condition of freedom (Glass, 2001). Freire (1998a) further developed this concept by acknowledging the central problem of oppressive societies is their failure to achieve structures and practices of humanization, which is well evidenced in by the persistence of asymmetrical relations of power that perpetuate the dehumanization of oppressed populations.

Darder’s (2015) book *Freire and Education* highlighted Paulo Freire’s contributions to the field of critical pedagogy with the expressed purpose of expanding upon, and in some cases reinventing, Paulo Freire’s contributions to the field of education. Choosing to highlight Freire’s efforts toward the transformation of consciousness and leadership, Darder contextualized his work in alignment with her own personal history as an “impoverished and colonized subject” (p.

xii). Often the focus of research on Freire's contributions to critical education emphasizes his "articulation of dialogue and its relationship to a problem-posing pedagogy, the dynamics of the oppressor-oppressed dialectic, [and] issues of banking education" (p. xi). Although these elements are critically important in building socially just pedagogical practices, Darder (2015) set out to clearly articulate the vital significance of conscientization as an evolving "spirit of consciousness" that works in tangent to humanize and promote the "transformation of material life" (p. xii).

How can we effectively transform the world through the power of education, if we are unaware of the hegemonic forces constructed to oppress us? Remaining ever vigilant in the pursuit of freedom and democracy, it is the duty of the critical educators to both know and understand the oppressive nature of our circumstances (Freire, 1998a). Until there is a "critical awakening" in our awareness of the oppressive conditions surrounding the social, political, and educational ideologies that shape our lives and the world, we cannot critically engage in building new ways of knowing and being in the world (Darder, 2015). It is essential to the critical theorist and educator to cultivate the notion of conscientization in one's life and teaching practice; for through this critical liberatory process, we generate opportunities to deepen our awareness of the world, and most importantly, those who suffer within it (Darder, 2015; Freire, 1998a). Moreover, the critical educator must labor to enact "critical awareness and the formation of social consciousness as both a historical phenomenon and a human social process connected to our communal capacities to become authors and social actors of our destinies" (Darder, 2015 p. 82).

The evolution of conscientization arises from a consistent move toward greater consciousness. As such, Freire (1983) persistently developed the notion of critical consciousness

by distinguishing the levels of consciousness the oppressed undergo in the process of critical awakening: semi-intransitive, transitive and critical transitive (Freire, 1983). Within the process of conscientization, according to Darder (2015), as the level of awareness of the world increases, consciousness can move from one form of consciousness to the other. This is not to be mistaken as a hierarchy of objectified consciousness; conversely, this process of awareness is predicated and produced through on-going dialogical “human engagement, which requires critical pedagogical interactions that nurture the dialectical relationship of human beings with the world” (Darder, 2015 pp. 83–84).

Understanding this critical conceptualization of critical consciousness is essential to engaging in true praxis and the evolution of a humanizing process of education. For without appropriate awareness of the human conditions that impact subaltern populations, reflection on the human condition can be self-serving, surface level, and ultimately superficial at best. It is in these moments of dialogue that we can come to better understand the causality of our lived circumstances (Darder, 2015). When the conditions of our lives are paramount, we can now position ourselves in growing intolerance to the unjust realities of our present and labor with hope toward a more just future. It is, therefore, imperative to note that Freire’s understanding of conscientization creates the necessary organic conditions for the intimate paring of consciousness and human action (Freire, 1983). This formation allows for the oppressed to evolve, transform, and reinvent the world, not through individual effort, which would be the antithesis of Freire’s pedagogy, but through the efforts of communal life (Freire, 1983; Davis, 1981; Darder, 2015). Hence, emancipatory consciousness must be understood as an inextricable

social phenomenon that can only evolve through the relationships of human beings who labor against their domestication and colonization *together* (Horton & Freire 1990).

Christocentric Links to Critical Themes

The following discussion makes some important links between the critical themes of human moments, pedagogy of love, and conscientization and Christocentric views. It is worth noting that, rather than to address “human moments” separately, this discussion is embedded throughout the two discussions about scriptures and love and the church and conscientization, given its importance to the liberatory processes as work in the life of God’s children.

The Scriptures and Love

Within the New Testament’s account of love, in tangent with holiness, it is the definitive attribute of God, and thus should be the defining factor of the children of God: “let us love one another, for love is from God...for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). Colin Grant (2009, 1996) conducted a study surveying the influence of Anders Nygren (1953), an early 20th-century Swedish Lutheran theologian and professor of systematic theology, whose seminal book, *Agape and Eros*, contributed to a Christian understanding of love by distinguishing the uniqueness of *agape* from other forms of love. In *Altruism and Christian Ethics*, Grant (2009) contended that Nygren makes the mistake of focusing on the uniqueness of *agape*, while negating other important forms of love represented in the literature. At the conclusion of his critique, however, Grant comes to agree that the significance of *agape* is distinct from all other variants of love due to its theological implications.

The three most prevalent definitions of love are *agape*, *philia*, and *eros*, two of which are found within the New Testament and the other is not; however, it is prevalent in and throughout

Greek thought. Eros, not found within the New Testament perspective of love, focuses on sexual desire, aspirations, thirst for the divine, intimacy, and the physical reality of love. In contrast to agape which focuses on the love of God unilaterally, eros focuses on the human physical expression of love amongst friends, sexual partners, and so forth (Heyward, 1989).

The New Testament, however, does provide two readings of love: *agape* and *philia*. According to *Young's Analytical Concordance* (Young, 2008), the word *agape* appears 150 times in the New Testament. And, although *philia* only occurs 18 times, quantitatively and qualitatively, it nevertheless has significant representation as well (Grant, 1996). Agape love represents a selfless love, an overflowing generosity, from God to human beings and a call for the reciprocation of those who experience the generosity of God toward other human beings (D'Arcy, 1945; Grant, 1996). In short, *agape* is of God and humanity's response to God is faith, "through faith, the believer may participate in agape toward [their] neighbor" (Grant, 1996 p. 6). *Philia* represents the mutuality of love from one person to another that presents the necessity of reciprocation, which addresses the need of both sides of the loving relationship (Pope, 1991). Hence, this expression of *philia* requires vulnerability between self and others as essential to its true functionality and implementation (Grant, 1996). However, for true vulnerability to exist, it would seem that the initiation and sustainability of mutuality would have to be substantiated in the vulnerability of *agape* (Grant, 1996). The New Testament positions agape love as paramount to the life of the believer, as it is a direct reflection of the love shown to them by God. This love, through faith in God, is to now be imparted from one believer to their neighbor (Matt 22:36-40).

It serves the epistemological purpose of this study to pause and call out the deeply disturbing element of Eurocentrism evident within the definitions of love represented in the New

Testament and in scholarship (Grant, 1996, 2009). Consequently, there has been an attempt to further categorize and separate the three definitions of love positioning them against each other as nuanced, distinct, and varied in their application and appropriation (D'Arcy, 1945, Grant, 1996, 2009; Nygren, 1953; Outka, 1992;). The literature further compartmentalizes the essence of love represented in the New Testament by separating the theological implications and the moral/ethical implications of love (Hallett, 1989; Outka, 1992). The focus of the literature mainly contributes to the displacement of one definition over the other; as a result, the scope, application, and definition of each has become increasingly secularized (Grant, 1996, 2009; Hampson, 1990). Each displacement, accordingly, moves further and further away from the purpose and original intent of the original usage and meaning of love within the New Testament. Moreover, introductions of secular ideologies of love, like Eros, not represented in the New Testament, have been introduced in the "knowledge" construction surrounding our understanding of love as represented in the New Testament.

As currently defined in the New Testament, *agape* and *philia* both provide an avenue of praxis for not only believers, but for all to actively engage and transform self and society through a love that seeks not to gain for self, but rather actively seeks to serve others. The literature as currently constructed seeks to portray the definition of love within the New Testament as idealistic, in need of concrete implications that move from the realm religious to a state of morality (Green, 1978; Kegley, 1967). This is meant to dilute the potency of the love that we are called to exemplify from one evidenced and perfected in God and reciprocated by humans, to one determined by human beings, thus controlled by them as well (Grant, 1996). In essence,

“morality may be demanding, but it does not challenge us at a level of religion” (Green, 1988, p. 16), which calls for not only tolerance, but also forgiveness.

To alter the definition of love as presented in the New Testament would be to alter the very Gospel itself, as noted by Grant (1996), who argues, “from the perspective of the Gospel, *agape* is a reality before it is an ideal. It reflects the basic reality of God. It is because God is *agape* that we are challenged to pursue that way” (pp. 186–187). In seeking to displace one form of love for another, one is essentially seeking to silence others, which is not an attribute of emancipatory pedagogy. I want to acknowledge the necessity of this ongoing dialectic between religion and morality; the sacred and secular; Eros, *Agape*, and *Philia*. These conversations should take place; however, the construction of knowledge must not seek to displace current understandings of love that are not meant to oppress, but to liberate.

To take from an original construct of knowledge, misplace the context of the original intent, is unethical and misleading. Love as expressed within the Christian faith is a love cemented in God, without this, there is no ground to stand on and love, particularly in relation to our duty to others, becomes a flippant choice, not a method of change in our humanization. It does not flow from a state of mutualism, for if love flows through mutuality my motivational factor is predetermined on the worthiness of the foundation. I love, because I have been shown the greatest love ever known to man.

Therefore, it cannot be based on mutuality, but causality. With a Christian understanding, my love is not contingent upon an act of man, but rather an act of God, who caused me to love by bestowing His love upon me (1 John 4:10). Because of this, the actions and practice of that love might seem irrational and even nonsensical to someone who receives or observes it in

action. However, as Darder (2015) asserted, love is not emotional or based on feelings, love is our imperative and constitutes, as such, a force generated from our communion with God and one another. I would add that love is not only our duty, but our calling. God demonstrated His love toward us in the most intimate, radical and nonsensical of fashions, by sending His Son Jesus Christ as a manifestation of Himself to the world (Rom 5:8, NASB). Grant (1996) offered a summation of agape love:

Agape is not, however, a rational, anthropocentric concept. It represents the divine extravagance of giving that does not take the self into account. Clearly this is impractical. Common sense demands that the needs of the self be taken into account. If they are not, how can there be a self to be concerned with others? The answer of the gospel is: “through agape!” (p. 19)

Within Scripture we are provided the definition of love as well as the fruit or example of love fully detailed. Whether it is your contention that Jesus’s sacrificial death was for nothing or you believe that His death served as the propitiation for the sins of the world, one cannot deny the motivating factor for His sacrifice was *agape*; love for God and love for His fellow brethren. For Williams (1968), *agape* is living the gospel. Accordingly, the appropriation of agape is the understanding of our humanity in relation to being image bearers and definitive hope for the possibility of transformation, by the grace of serving our neighbor through love (Williams, 1968). We have the ability, even in an imperfect way, to reflect the love of God toward our brothers, including our enemies as well.

At this juncture, I am reminded of the Apostle Paul’s epistle to the Corinthian church where he outlines that love should be the motivational substance of all good things (1 Cor. 13:1-

13). Within this epistle, Paul urged the members of the church in Corinth to pursue love above all spiritual gifts within the body of Christ (the church). Paul admonishes each member seeking to do the work of God to seek to put on the attribute of love foremost. I can surmise to say that like Paul, Freire too understood the need for love, not as an emotional state of being, but rather as a visceral human act of the will, in being paramount toward the work necessary to impart true transformative change. In the Christian faith, love is the motivational factor for God sending His Son Jesus Christ into the world (John 3:16). The necessity of love in this work is inescapable, for without it we are nothing as the Apostle Paul reminds us here:

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. (1 Cor 13:1-3, NASB)

The Church and Conscientization

Thinking back on my educational experience I find it very difficult not relating to the concept of conscientization and its importance in my social and political development. However, this reflection is limited in its scope and sequence, as the medium of my critical awareness was not through the lens of the educational system, but through the lens of my local church. As mentioned before, my experience as a student did not mirror a critical educational approach, beyond my reading and studying in college. Hence, the education that validates my existence, personhood and individualization did not occur within the classroom; albeit one cannot deny that critical awareness and social consciousness were occurring on the school yard in various forms,

including dialogue amongst pupils. Yet, very rarely did this form of education take place within the four walls of the classroom, Conversely, these conversations and human interactions did take place within the Church. With each sermon preached and every Sunday school lesson taught, I and other members of the congregation were met with the teachings of Jesus Christ, which inspired us to look beyond our current reality toward a blessed hope of a world to come. I was affirmed in my identity and commanded to take action in transforming our material reality through persistent interaction with God, His dear Son, His Church, and His creation. These teachings pushed me and others like me outside of the four walls of the Church and into the community to serve our fellow brethren, seeing their struggles as our struggles; their pain as our pain. Critical awareness was met with spiritual awareness, as the Gospel represented for us the perfect conduit of transformative change.

To provide a concrete discussion on the effectiveness of conscientization in the Church, let's focus for a brief moment on Thomas Oldenski's (2002) work that examined liberation theology and critical pedagogy as two ideologies that have and continue to contribute to the liberation of the oppressed. Oldenski noted within his work that conscientization is the indispensable link that connects liberation theology and critical pedagogy. He posits that, within each ideology, social consciousness serves to illuminate the issues of oppression evident in the lives of either students and teachers or clergy and members of the church. The heartbeat within each of the social movements cannot be sustained if not for consistent reflection and critical awareness to embrace the struggle for social transformation (Darder, 2015). Hence, Freire's contributions to liberation theology should not go unnoticed (Kirylo & Cone, 2011; Oldenski, 2002). It's not by accident that both liberation theology and critical pedagogy offer a discernable

language of hope, faith, possibility and transformation (Oldenski, 2002). These similarities are not by coincidence and have found root in the theory and teachings of Paulo Freire and other proponents of critical pedagogy and liberation theology (Boff & Boff, 1984; Gutierrez, 1973; McLaren, 2015;). Immersed within the language, actions, and teaching of both liberation theology and critical pedagogy is an ongoing discourse of Christocentric commonalities that cannot be overlooked.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus's use of parable to describe the kingdom of heaven and those who belong to it deserves a brief examination, particularly in regards to the notion of social consciousness. Within this passage of Scripture, Jesus is calling the disciples to understand the importance of social service, not to the wealthy, but to all members of the social structure. He informs His listeners that when serving others, specifically those who are in need, whether in providing food, shelter, drink, visitation of the sick and the imprisoned, one is actually performing those deeds unto Him (Matt 25:35-40, NASB). He is reinforcing the notion that all humanity bears the image of God and reflects His glory; to perform service to one's neighbor regardless of social stature, culture, religion, and socio-economic status is to validate their personhood and to see them through the eyes of their Creator. Thus, upholding the greatest commandment: to love God and to love one's neighbor as to love one's self. In sync with this idea, Boff (1978) offered this estimation of Jesus's teaching as liberator:

The Gospels and our exposition of Jesus' extraordinary good sense, creative imagination, and originality have demonstrated that the existence of Jesus was an existence totally oriented and lived for others and for the great Other (God). He was absolutely open to all, he did not discriminate against anyone, and he embraced all with his unlimited love,

especially those socially and religiously marginalized (Mark 2:15-17). Her personally lived the love he preached for enemies (Matt 5:43). If he was liberal when confronted with the law, he was rigorous when imposing the demands of love that bind human beings with more liberating ties than those of the law. (p. 195)

To engage as Jesus is commanding; it is to be critically aware of our humanness and the need to critically engage, not only in words, but also in action and deeds, for the purpose of transforming not only the reality, but also the individual and community through love.

Throughout the literature on critical theory, liberation pedagogy, liberation theology and critical pedagogy there is made evident an interaction between the individual and society, where the two are never separate, but are intricately interwoven, where one drastically informs the other. Within the classroom, these elements must be brought to life, and it is the job of the educator to examine all aspects of the student's life in order to do so. This paradigm brings to light a central element of critical pedagogy that aligns with an understanding of teaching as a spiritual act (Boyd, 2012). There must then be not only an interaction between individual and society, but also a persistent interaction between body (individual) and Spirit (God).

Numerous contributors to critical pedagogy (Darder, 2002; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 1998; hooks, 1994; McLaren, 2015, 1988) delve into the importance of political and democratic aspects of education and critical pedagogy, with recognition that a central component of social consciousness also entails a spiritual awakening that is foundational to the emancipation of the oppressed. If we are oppressed spiritually then we will find it impossible to fully engage with the suffering of the oppressed, an important task in our work as a critical pedagogue. This work is as much spiritual as it is political and democratic. Freedom of spirit must occur for humanity to

connect at a deeper level. About this, hooks (1994), Darder, and Duncan-Andrade and Morrell stated plainly in their writings that critical pedagogues must be committed to the process of self-actualization, fully engaged with their spiritual, emotional and physical well-being to provide students with the educational experience necessary for liberation and empowerment. Moreover, Freire (1998a), hooks, and Darder argued that in order for teachers to have their greatest impact, they must be living embodiments of their beliefs and, thus, critical pedagogy an integral praxis of heart, mind, body, *and spirit*.

The task of the critical teacher is to engage students in the dialectical interweaving of self and society (McLaren, 2015). In proposing Jesus as a critical teacher, He calls for us not only to engage with self and society, but in alignment with hooks (1994), calls for a critical engagement of self within self to critically examine the spirit or “inner human” in relation to God, as it manifests itself in our commitment to humanity. The dialectic between theory and practice reveals the duty of the critical teachers’ engagement in the execution and appropriation of a loving pedagogy.

Making a Link between Christ and Critical Pedagogy

In the worldview of Christians, there can be no denying that Jesus is a masterful teacher. New Testament accounts of this assertion are abundant. Within Gospel narratives, Jesus is referred to as such more than fifty times (Dillon, 1981). Moreover, James T. Dillon (1995) provided a comprehensive multidisciplinary study that well corroborates this claim. Within Dillon’s book *Jesus as a Teacher: A Multidisciplinary Case Study*, he took on the task of compiling over eighty-four books, articles, studies and theses that provide content and *context* on Jesus as teacher (Dillon, 1995; Newell, 2009). The motivation of the study is to develop a clear

understanding of the effectiveness of Jesus as a teacher. On the effectiveness of Jesus as a teacher, Dillon (1995) concluded that “Jesus cannot be shown to be a successful and effective teacher, [However] He was nonetheless a demonstrably good one” (p. 185).

Dillon’s summation of Jesus as a teacher, however, does not align with the writings of other scholars in the field (Bennion, 1981; Horne, 1920; Richardson, 1931), who in most cases conclude Jesus to be a Master Teacher of both man and subject. The reason for utilizing Dillon’s work here, however, is not to critique his findings, but rather to engage his effort to juxtapose the teaching methods of Jesus with the outcomes of the audience reactions (Newell, 2009). Dillon’s purpose was not, in fact, to analyze the teaching performance of Jesus, which he deems was the central focus of other studies, but rather to concentrate on the effects of Christ’s teachings on the hearers, which in his estimation ranged from little reaction to no reaction at all (Dillon, 1981).

However, the context surrounding Dillon’s findings deserve further analysis, most notably the omission of theology and contextual analysis within his methodology as noted by Newell (2009). As with the research and findings in each “quest” for the “historical” Jesus, Dillon asserted the same epistemological issue occurs in the research to uncover Jesus the educator: there exist the assimilation of the biases and beliefs of the researchers and the dominant ideologies surrounding the field of education (Dillon, 1981, 1995). Another issue with Dillon’s methodology is his use of modern conceptions of teaching and learning as evaluative tools to determine Jesus effectiveness as an educator (Smith, 1995). Although Dillon is correct in his assessment of the epistemological problems with research surrounding Jesus as educator, he too falls victim to the mistake of non-critical researchers—the displacement of Jesus from His

cultural context and the implications this has on his analysis of Jesus's effectiveness as an educator in Jewish Palestine.

In 2009, Ted Newell conducted a powerful study positioning Jesus as critical educator. Aligning the work originally started in the Third Quest to uncover Jesus within His cultural context, Newell also proffers the culture and identity of Jesus as essential to His pedagogical development as the critical educator of His time. Newell incorporated N. T. Wright's concept of worldview as a critical framework in understanding the cultural and historical make up of Jesus within His proper context (Newell, 2009; Wright, 1992). According to Wright, worldview and praxis are evident to Jesus through His culture and identity as displayed through an implicit "Story" characterized and shaped by history, culture, and theology.

Wright's (1992) worldview model has three main elements: (a) Story, which represents the mythos; (b) Symbol, the lived social reality shaped by the worldview; and (c) Praxis, the lived actions and experiences relational to the Story of Christ and Israel (Newell, 2009; Wright, 1992). For Jesus, His Story was fashioned by God through Israel's redemptive history, as outlined within the Scriptures. From this we see how all other elements of Jesus's worldview are comprised, as they shape and formulate the basis for His praxis. Furthermore, a deep understanding of His culture and social awareness deepened His effectiveness as a critical educator. Newell (2009) developed his notion of Jesus as critical educator by building off Wright's three elements of worldview in the context of Israel's Story, Symbol's and Praxis as understood by Jesus.

Newell (2009) showed that it is essential to build appropriate context as detailed in the literature, for only by so doing can we determine Jesus's overall effectiveness as teacher. The

application of modern concepts of education cannot apply here, as they are limited and are often tainted with ideologies steeped in alignment to the dominant culture. To take Jesus out of context is to take the Gospel out of context, misappropriate it, in effect, and misalign it. Drawing on Newell's study, Evans (2006) affirmed the implications of utilizing contextual analysis in the case, given the importance of worldview in shaping Christ as critical educator. According to Newell (2009) "in worldview perspective, Jesus's main mission is to teach an interpretation of the Scriptures by precept and example toward a fuller picture of God" (p. 144). To Jesus, the worldview established and promoted by the religious leaders was a corruption of the Story, Symbols and Praxis detailed in Scripture.

Contextual analysis, therefore, cements Jesus's teaching and pedagogy throughout all generations, allowing for adequate appropriation within different settings and within similar contexts. We have seen these similar contexts before in religiously and socially oppressed Latin America, in racially and socially oppressed North America, also within the oppressive educational system in North America as well. Unlike within the search for historical Jesus and the Jesus of education, Jesus in this paradigm is no longer bound by human interpretation throughout the centuries, His pedagogy is alive and available to contribute to all contexts, which in essence speaks to a Christian form of cultural reinvention—which echoes Freire's (1998a) belief in the need for critical reinvention—for the glory and power of God on earth and across communities of difference.

What, then, is the context of Jesus's pedagogy? Newell (2009) suggested it is in the collision of opposing worldviews; one that oppresses and one that seeks to liberate. According to Newell, it is Jesus's enactment as a critical educator, where His worldview is positioned to

“collide” with the hegemony of His time, challenging the Symbol and Praxis of perverse religious leaders, in order to move from self, back to God. It is this sense, in particular, that His pedagogy can be found most effective. Newell, moreover, substantiated his claim and develops his argument by applying Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) definition of hegemony to the religious rulers of Israel during the time of Jesus’s earthly ministry. According to Newell, by targeting Jesus’s confrontational accounts with the dominant worldview administered by the religious leaders of Israel, we are witnessing worldviews collide and Christ’s functioning as a critical educator.

Examples of these collisions of worldviews can also be found in Jesus’s encounters with the Pharisees, Scribes, and religious leaders throughout the New Testament accounts. In the book of Mark, Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees and Scribes for dining with sinners. As a noted rabbi according to their traditions, it was not socially acceptable for someone of Jesus’s stature to mingle with sinners, however we see worldviews collide when Jesus states in the company of all “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

We also see Jesus actively confronting the hegemony of His time even through His miracles, which serve as praxis. In the book of Matthew, Jesus interacts with a leper, those who were according to customs and traditions both ceremoniously, socially, and physically unclean, by touching Him, “Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him...” (Matt 8:3). This gesture was performed in the presence of what the text describes as a “large crowd” where undoubtedly Pharisees and other religious leaders were present. By touching the leper Jesus would be considered ceremonially unclean; however, what we see is the miraculous healing of the leper

becoming “clean” through the world-subverting power of love expressed by Jesus. Social constructs were consistently broken down through His teaching ministry. By Jesus taking the Story, Symbol’s and Praxis of Israel to clarify and interpret their true meaning, He challenges the established oppressive system to function as God originally intended. According to Newell (2009), to challenge the social reality of His time, Jesus is in fact engaging as the catalyst of not only a social awakening, but the theological and spiritual awakening of Israel.

Israel was to live differently from the nations on its borders, to offer a distinct Story, a different account of reality, a counterhegemony. Jesus adopts exactly this counterhegemonist strategy; [H]e is always at the task of challenging and reconstructing the dominant worldview—except now the alternate hegemony has moved within Israel itself. (p. 148)

Although Newell’s study is essential to my work, the implications of his findings are limited as they target Christian educators in private and public school settings. As a Christian educator in a public school setting, I nevertheless appreciate this study and look to incorporate his research into my practice as a critical educator. However, I do not believe that his findings should be limited to only those of the faith; instead his work should be present for all educators committed to critical praxis of social justice. Newell also focused on Jesus as critical educator through the lens of opposing hegemonic power structures, specifically within the public and private school dynamic. Again, this is a crucial element for all critical educators to understand, in that the study’s findings have the potential to reach far past only those who claim Christ to be Lord and Savior. With this, I intend to build off Newell’s foundation and position Jesus not only as a critical educator who opposes hegemonic structures, but also to develop the emancipatory

elements in His pedagogy that are also essential to critical pedagogy. The hegemonic error of their time is similar to that present in ours. Essentially a narrow view of God that results in the dehumanization and oppression of human beings on earth. As such, this understanding opens up the possibility of Jesus as a critical educator, in order to be further explored in concert with critical pedagogy.

Jesus Christ also understood teaching as an act of love; a love not merely built on emotion and feelings, but a love devoted to truth, conviction and a commitment to humanity and God. The love that Jesus requires is unconditional (Aquinas, trans. 1975). It is a love that is self-sacrificing and rooted in a profound understanding of God's love toward humanity (Aquinas, trans. 1975; Augustine, trans. 1989). This love is exemplified in agape and extends to all humanity, where barriers of gender, race, culture, socio-economic status, and ethnicity are nonexistent. This love does not negate or dismiss these elements of the human identity, but testifies to these components, as essential factors in the anthropological make up of human beings. Therefore, unconditional love acknowledges all and utilizes each unique qualification of humanity to critically engage in the restorative practices distinctive to the human condition. The Scriptures detail the love of God, which is thoroughly expressed in the praxis of Jesus toward the world.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:9-12)

If this holds true, then in the mind of Christ to teach is not only an act of love; but an act of God. For the educator who positions his/herself to teach embracing love in its fullest measure, they ultimately position themselves to do the work of God. The love that we as educators exhibit within the teacher-student dynamic, in all our humanity, sets the spiritual conditions for the cultivation of unconditional love to flourish. Relative to His world, Jesus also calls for His learners to engage and develop social consciousness through an appropriation of unconditional love, often utilizing social constructs to help illuminate His followers understanding of their lives in relation to God and the world around them. Within His teaching, we also see unique human moments shared at a level of intensity unparalleled in scope and impact. These elements of the critical educator are evidenced in the praxis of Jesus Christ and will serve to illustrate the significance of these elements not only for the critical educator, but also for educational leaders at the forefront of social justice.

In an attempt to arrive to critical principles for a pedagogy of Christ in the final chapter of this study, the notion of critical pedagogy as an act of faith, love, compassion, and deep knowledge of self and others will be examined through three texts from the New Testament, which illustrate Jesus's ability to engage as a critical teacher. Moreover, I intend to propose Jesus as an originator of critical pedagogical practices at work within contemporary critical pedagogue's research and practices today.

CHAPTER 5

JESUS CHRIST THE CRITICAL PEDAGOGUE

In an attempt to further develop the notion of critical pedagogy as an act of faith, love, forgiveness, compassion, restoration and deep knowledge of self and others, I will examine three texts from the New Testament that illustrate Jesus's ability to engage as a critical teacher: John 4:1-26, Mark 10:17-22, and Mark 14:66-72, John 21:15-17. Jesus Christ understood teaching as an act of love; a love not merely built on emotion and feelings, but a love devoted to truth, conviction and a commitment to humanity and God. Relative to His world and contexts mirroring the social, political, economic, educational and spiritual conditions of His time, Jesus also calls for His learners to engage and develop social consciousness.

Within His teachings, we also see unique human moments shared at a level of intensity unparalleled in scope and impact, developed through the means of dialogue. The defining factor of Jesus's pedagogy, the element that sets His teaching apart from all others is the component of unconditional love; expressed both in His life and praxis, through forgiveness and restoration. Conscientization, dialogue, human moments, and teaching as an act of love, these crucial elements of the critical educator are unmistakably evidenced in the pedagogy of Jesus Christ. This chapter moves to illustrate these elements and offer implications not only for the critical educator, but also for educational leaders at the forefront of social justice.

The Woman at the Well

In the Gospel of John, we peer into the classroom of the Great Teacher and encounter a picture of unconditional love expressed through a human moment shared between Jesus and a woman at a well. The implications detailed here are earth shattering as Jewish and Samaritan

worldviews collide. Hegemonic societal constructs are set aside by the carpenter from Nazareth for a moment to help illustrate an eternal lesson on love that permeates the soul, creating the spiritual conditions essential for transformational change to occur. In this blessed passage of Scripture, we see the pedagogy of Christ on full display, realized in context and application, enacted upon by Jesus in Samaria.

Each of these aspects are paramount in their own right and add unequivocal depth to the narrative account. In order to unearth the profundity of love evidenced by the Teacher in the lesson at hand, this passage of Scripture calls for a critical examination and analysis of each context presented: historical and geographical, social and spiritual. It must be noted here that this section does not serve to bring this and the other two illustrations into modern times, in that it would be a disservice to the pedagogy of Christ. Conversely, it serves both the context and application of this work to preserve the historical Jesus within His culture, identity, religion, and worldview (Story). Only when Jesus is presented in His proper context can we drink from His everlasting fountain, and be aptly guided by His instructional framework for emancipatory practices.

Historical and Geographical Context: Love Knows No Bounds

“And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph...”

John 4:4-5

Utilizing the corresponding text and applying contextual analysis to understand the historical and geographical elements of Jesus and the woman, this narrative beckons for a closer examination. Samaria was the capital city in the northern kingdom, called Israel, which was separate from the southern kingdom of Judah. In Israel’s history, after king Solomon’s reign, the

kingdom of Israel separated in two: a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom (1 Kings 12:16). After the separation, King Omri named the capital of the northern kingdom Samaria and the name became synonymous with the entire region (1 Kings 16:24). What is critical to note here is that the northern kingdom was separated not only geographically from the southern kingdom but spiritually as well, as the Samaritans went into Assyrian captivity circa 722 B.C. and intermarried with nations deemed immoral, pagan, and idolatrous (MacArthur, 2006).

It is noted in Jewish history that even before the northern kingdoms captivity, their hearts drifted further and further from their God (Knoppers, 2013). As a result, The Jews deemed Samaritans a mixed race of people, unclean and God-forsaken. They were both socially and religiously outcast from the southern kingdom of Judah. Samaritans were essentially seen as a corrupted form of the Jewish race (Knoppers, 2013; MacArthur, 2006). The journey to the northern territories, specifically to Galilee where Jesus was headed, passed through Samaria and was geographically the shortest route. The hatred and disdain of the Jews toward the Samaritans was so prevalent, religious leaders would take alternate and often much longer routes, just to bypass Samaria altogether (MacArthur, 2006). However, we see Jesus, a Jewish rabbi in every sense of the title, undeterred by social norms entering this marginalized area with divine purpose and love unconditional, willing to do the work of God in meeting this woman right where she is, in Samaria.

Social and Spiritual Context: Love Reaches Pass the Past

“There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink.’”

John 4:7

What cannot go unnoticed are the social and spiritual implications of Jesus’s encounter with the woman at the well. Within the social structure of Jewish life and society, men were not permitted to speak to women in public, especially men of high report like rabbis and religious leaders. Moreover, Jews customarily were to have nothing to do with Samaritans as noted within the text, “For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9). Jesus’s simple request for a drink of water broke down gender, social, and cultural barriers and was by all accounts a monumental step toward the validation of this and all other women as individuals, equal in opportunity and position in the kingdom of God. This move is bold and daring, free from the fear of social constructs that debilitate and inhibit true human encounters that authenticate and dignify equal positioning of men and women as human beings. This is the commencement of a true human moment, where dialogue of the soul, mind, and heart can lead to true emancipation from dehumanizing constructs aimed to oppress even the most marginalized of society, which in this case is an adulterous woman.

How can we be sure that this encounter is free from fear and rooted in love? According to the book of 1 John 4:18, “there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out all fear.” It is Jesus’s unconditional love for this woman that causes Him to overlook all oppressive social ideological constructs aimed to dehumanize the marginalized of society and pass through Samaria for the divine purpose of engaging in an ordained dialogue. Jesus’s critical consciousness informs His praxis, evidenced in the use of social awareness to draw the woman into the dialectic of life,

altering proportions. So, He prompts and asks, “Give me a drink.” What humanity is shown here! A Jewish rabbi asks a woman of Samaria for a drink. What a collision of worldviews!

The ensuing dialogue; elemental in humanity, yet foundational in spirituality, reveals much about the two individuals engaging in the dialogue. For Jesus, it is revealed that He is a prophet, but not only that; He is the promised Messiah, Savior of the world (John 4:19, 26). For the woman, it is revealed that she is immoral, adulterous, and in need of living water (John 4:15, 17). It is of note to illuminate that within this Gospel account, Jesus has yet to reveal His identity to anyone, not even His disciples. What we see here is a unique human moment, so great in contrast of character, so extreme in relational proportions, so radical in conflicting socio-political and cultural implications; yet it is within this dialogue with this woman that Jesus, first in the Gospel of John, declares His true identity (John 4:26).

This is a powerful collision of worldviews that results in transformative dialogue that both changes society from the outside in and quickens spiritually from the inside out. What began with Jesus asking for physical water to quench His thirst brought about by a human condition, evolved into a woman finding the source of everlasting water to wash her clean, providing her an equal position within the kingdom of God and society. She, too, was now free from social restrictions and oppressive constructs evidenced in her actions as she leaves the well to proclaim to men, “...come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?” As a result of her emancipation “from that city many of the Samaritans believed in [Jesus] because of the woman who testified ‘He told me all the things that I have done’” (John 4:39). She was now not a woman known for having five husbands, which according to Jewish Law was cause for social ostracizing, but a woman emancipated through

forgiveness and reconciled back to society through the unconditional love and compassion of the Teacher.

Jesus, in His pedagogy, not only operates from a position of humanity to liberate from the darkness of oppression, but more so through unconditional love, He posits the offering of forgiveness, calling for all to consider the raw humanness, frailty, and brokenness that is evident in and shared by all humanity. In the praxis of Jesus, He presents a path of restoration, which serves to bring closure toward the spiritual ethics of liberation. Emancipatory education should not only liberate, but should also restore the human and spiritual nature of all individuals that were once broken to their rightful places in society, or in Jesus's worldview, the kingdom of God. Love of others is a reciprocal experience. If the educator can know unconditional love, what ensues is a mutual experience between student and teacher, where education becomes mutually liberating. Through the transformative power of love, Jesus breaks the woman out of her social exclusion, through the pedagogical intervention of spiritual reconciliation back to God and humanity. "And they were saying to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world'" (John 4:42).

The Rich, Young Ruler

The challenge of love and its sociopolitical and spiritual implications are not limited to educators; its effects reaches far past the classroom and should permeate even the actions of educational leaders. To limit the power of love is to limit the human experience. The next source that illustrates the pedagogy of Christ is found in three Gospel accounts: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. I have chosen to utilize the historical narrative found in the book of Mark 10:17-22. This

particular text speaks to the unnerving authority of love and its power to reveal truth, even when the results do not yield the desired outcome. It also brings to life common misconceptions that are critical to understanding the purpose of the educational leader. Let us now sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from Him how the power of love, without condition, limitation, or scope can affect the lives of the educator and educational leader alike.

What we have here, just like in the account of the woman at the well, is not a parable or a story, but an actual human encounter between a wealthy, influential young man and Jesus (Matt 19:16, Luke 18:18, Mark 10:17). This human encounter evolves through dialogue between Jesus and the young man, oft referred to as, the Rich Young Ruler. The Story of Israel is evidenced here and plays a critical role in Jesus's and the young rulers encounter. Cemented in the very fiber of all Jewish understandings surrounding social and spiritual life are the Story and Symbols of Jewish life (Wright, 1992). This human encounter reflects deeply another human moment, where two worldviews collide, resulting in emancipatory implications lasting through generations. Teaching is truly an act of love, for only in love can we be challenged without judgment and pretense, for our intellectual and spiritual development.

The Challenge of Love

"...a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone...'"

Mark 10:17-18

Jesus here assumes His role again as the challenger of Israel and confronts head on the man's misconception of the word good (Newell, 2009). The initial ask of the ruler is how to obtain eternal life; however, Jesus bypasses this request to deal with the heart of the matter, a deep-seated mis-appropriation of the concept of good and where it's definition, meaning, and

value derives from. Jesus pushes the thinking of this young man, who much like myself, has achieved a lot in his young lifetime. Matthew describes him as a “young man” (19:20, 22), while Luke identifies him as “a certain ruler” (18:18). Consequently, his descriptors all add intricate components to his character that makes up a man that is wealthy and influential in Jewish life and society. Jesus does not recoil at the sight of the young man’s wealth and influence, He challenges Him in a way that no other has before. The challenge of love knows no respect of person and must call out any falsities surrounding ideologies that contradict and stifle the liberation of others, even to those seemingly seeking salvation.

Jesus possesses a sense of urgency in confronting the young man at the onset of the dialogue to help him address his own misconceptions of what it means to be good. Jesus challenges the rulers superficial, faulty, and inadequate understanding of the word *good* and all its implications in the young man’s life. The purpose of the challenge is to redirect and redefine the use of *good* in relation to God (Hiebert, 1994). According to Jesus, God alone is the ultimate standard of good, He is the absolute good and all human goodness, moral and spiritual, is therefore derived and defined by God (Hiebert, 1994). Jesus understood that the true underlying issue was not the man’s search for salvation, but rather the man’s misunderstanding of the word good, perceiving it to be something that he could obtain through deeds and personal moral attainment. This rich youthful ruler’s perception of life, in relation to God, is contrary to what the Scriptures teach (Rom 3:10-12, Psalm 14:2-3, Psalm 53:1-3). Before Jesus could address the initial question of obtaining salvation, He had to correct his, and possibly other onlookers, conception of good. For Jesus, this young man “needed to recognize that God alone is beneficially good, the true source of the salvation which he mistakenly sought to attain by his

own heroic effort” (Hiebert, 1994, p. 23). It is the duty of the critical educator to call out any and all injustices present and persistent in the lives, ideologies, and social and knowledge constructs of our students, as well as those who consider themselves educational leaders (Freire, 1970).

The essential purpose of education is to liberate; when we stray away from this purpose, it is the effectual calling of the educator to bring attention to it and provide avenues that construct new bridges and pathways in providing students safe passage back to the original course. As critical educators and educational leaders committed to social justice we are commanded to challenge the epistemological meanings of words that we hold sacred to the field of education: education, liberation, dialogue, knowledge, power, emancipation, social consciousness. It is our understanding of these words that build and (de)construct the language for counterhegemonic practices, theories, knowledge and praxis. Like Jesus, our work initially begins with the deconstruction of knowledge epistemicides that continue to oppress and marginalize the poor and misrepresented of society (Darder, 2015; Santos, 2015).

The Path of Reconciliation

“You know the commandments, ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, honor your father and mother...”

Mark 10:19

As the dialogue develops, Jesus can address the original question and in doing so, does not forget to offer restoration, grounded in love. By using the commandments to further illustrate the prevailing issue, Jesus presents the restorative Story of both He and the young man’s cultural and spiritual heritage. In leading the ruler toward the path of reconciliation to God and humanity, the focus of the dialogue shifts to the second tablet of the commandments, which identifies man’s duty to his neighbor. In Jesus’s estimation, the Law of God is perfect; however, His

people have forgotten its true intention and purpose. Many times in Scripture, we see Jesus addressing, redirecting, deconstructing and reconstructing man's understanding of God's Law. Jesus masterfully illustrates the beautifully crafted and divinely purposed dialectical relationship between love and truth; one does not exist without the other.

Addressing the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes mis-appropriation of the Law in the book of Matthew Jesus states, "you are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God" (22:29). In the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus presents the fullest explanation of the Gospel, He began many phrases with "you have heard..." in reference to the Law and the Scriptures, and offered His interpretation with, "but I say..." (Matt 5-7). Again, in the book of Mark, Jesus sharply rebukes the religious leaders misunderstanding of Gods Law and reconstructs their knowledge of the Scriptures in order to help them ascertain the depths of the spiritual nature in the Law (Mark 7:9). What also adds to Jesus sense of urgency are His fellow brothers and sisters being led astray and burdened by the religious leader's oppressive systems.

In each of the cases presented, the precious lives of His people—both oppressed and free—hang in the balance. For the critical educator and educational leader, it is the lives of our students, parents, teachers, educational leaders, politicians that are hanging in the balance, if we are not carefully and meticulously listening to deconstruct oppressive language, ideologies, and constructs within education. Jesus's intention here is to offer Israel the truest interpretation of the Law of God, their road to redemption and reconciliation, by pointing them not to external application of the Law, but inner spiritual transformation through Him. So, it is with the critical educator and the educational leader for social justice. We are to point back to the truest interpretation of education whenever it is misinterpreted and used for the purpose of oppression

and not liberation (Darder, 2002; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1985; McLaren, 1989). Furthermore, love cannot be seen as a unidirectional entity, but must be considered as central in creating the emancipatory conditions to uphold both a dialectical and analectic community of believers focused on the transformative power of love through service to God and humanity.

Just like many educators and educational leaders, this man lived an outwardly exemplary life, but his quest to gain reputation through merit and personal accomplishment was not in alignment with the ultimate mission of his Story, reconciliation with God. Educators like myself, must live in caution of committing the same sin as the rich young ruler. We must never forget to reflect on the true intention of education, just as he failed to reflect on the true essence of the Law. The Law of God was not meant to lead us to perfection, it was meant to lead us to Christ (Gal 3:24). We are to see through the Law our need of God and our need to reflect the love of God toward humanity.

Consequently, the power of education flows from the inward parts, from the head to the heart, which then shapes and reshapes our actions through praxis. Education was not meant to lead us to greater perfection, it was meant to lead us to greater humanization (Freire, 1970). This text cautions educational leaders to not trust in their riches of knowledge, but to utilize all that they have gained in service to the poor and less fortunate. We do not amass our knowledge to serve ourselves and our educational desires, needs, and wants, but rather to pour out our offerings to God, through service toward humanity. Therefore, the notion that truth emerges from the divine is present within the pedagogical, spiritual and divine intervention of Christ.

The motive behind the challenge must stay consistent no matter the outcome. The intention fueling the confrontation must derive from the same place as the act of teaching. Jesus

did not confront to confound, to belittle, or to condescend. Jesus's challenge was and always will be rooted in *agape*, expressed through unconditional love within His pedagogy. In providing the ruler the remedy for his condition, Jesus still operates from a position of love. We see in the text, that the ruler, still blinded by his misconception of God and the Law answers, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." Still relying on personal accomplishments to determine his success, focusing on the outward manifestation of the Law and not the spiritual nature of the Law, he completely misses the opportunity. Yet, Jesus full of compassion and hope sees the humanity in the ruler, with all his shortcomings, and loves him enough to extend a path toward restoration again. We know that the motivating factor is love, as the text testifies: "Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him..." (Mark 10:21). Hiebert (1994) stated that this love "denotes not mere emotional affection but that high spiritual love which, regardless of the worthiness or unworthiness of the one loved, desires his highest welfare" (p. 25). What is described here is love unconditional, a love that seeks to deconstruct and to restore.

In this love dynamic portrayed within the dialogue, Jesus offers the ruler the remedy for his issue, which ultimately reveals the impetus for his spiritual dilemma. "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (10:22). One statement, two commands. Jesus is not asking the man to sell all his possessions as an external act of piety, for that would contradict His initial rebuke (Hiebert, 1994). Conversely, Jesus is calling for the young ruler to give up everything for the glory of God and to live the greatest commandment to its fullest extension: to love God with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind, and to love his neighbor as he love's himself (Deut 6:4-5). Jesus is calling for the ruler to live out the commandments that he has claimed to have kept "from his youth up."

Once the true intention of the Law is fully explained, it creates the necessary conditions for an informed decision to be made. It is the duty of the critical educator to make the calling of *teacher* as clear as possible.

True education calls for much sacrifice at the expense of the educator when love is expressed unconditionally. This young man was asked to unseat himself from the throne of his heart and place God at the helm. Only then could he achieve true liberation. Instead we see the contrary: “but at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property” (10:22). The ruler did not refute or argue with Jesus at the unveiling of this truth. In seeing his life and accomplishments juxtaposed to true essence of the Law of God, he makes the conscious decision to walk away. He was grieved, all that he thought to be true was confirmed; yet, he was not up for the task, and that’s ok.

When critical educators operate in truth, motivated by love, and challenge those who misconstrue the true intentions and purpose of education, we are able to present an accurate portrayal of education in its fullest measure. This will cause some to walk away, some to be saddened, some even to grieve. However, the urgency of students’ and teachers’ liberation from oppressive dehumanizing constructs and ideologies will grant us the resolve and fortitude to continue our journey toward restorative practices, rooted in love. What can we learn from Jesus in this human encounter? The ontological lesson first seeks to reconcile humanity to God and refocus our efforts toward greater service to each other. The epistemological lesson seeks to reconcile the divine relationship between love and truth, that truth emerges from love – the divine – and love (God) procures and illuminates the finite capacity to see and experience truth. As critical educators and educational leaders for social justice we must devote ourselves to

understanding the true meaning of the word *education*. We must not shy away from presenting the clearest understanding of education and all its implications for current and future educators and educational leaders. We must be fine with allowing educators to make informed decisions based on the knowledge and information given them. Ultimately, we must also be fine with some walking away, if so they choose.

Peter's Denial: A Human Moment

In this final illustration, we see Peter, the leader of the 12 disciples of Jesus, deny Jesus at one of their most vulnerable moments recorded in Scripture. On one side, you have the illegal trial of Jesus and on the other the vehement denial of Jesus. There is an internal dialogue playing out between the Master and His disciple; one of immense importance with eternal repercussions. The focus here is not solely on the fact that Peter denies Jesus, but more so on the response of the Teacher to the denial. This is less an illustration of the denial of Peter and more an attestation of the power of forgiveness and restoration on the part of Jesus.

Within Mark's account, Jesus is now on trial by the religious leaders facing charges of blasphemy against God, where the sentencing, if convicted is death. The historical narrative of Mark paints a vivid picture as Jesus faces His accusers stating that "the Chief priest and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death and they were not finding any" (14:55). Here at the trial, we have Peter, observing what is taking place, markedly at a distance, and is seen by a slave girl of the High Priest. Peter then proceeds to deny Jesus, not once, but three times, with each denial increasing in severity and scope ranging from denying his association with Jesus to a slave girl, to making the denial of Christ to an entire crowd of bystanders. The one who has declared to Jesus, "even if all fall away from you, I will

never fall away...even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you!” at this moment is currently doing just that (14:29, 31).

The denial continues to a crescendo, ultimately resulting in a final disavowal, where Peter brings curses on himself as stated, “but [Peter] began to bring curses and swear, ‘I do not know this man you are talking about!’” (14:71). Just as the denial and trial reach their apex, as Jesus is currently being beaten, mocked, spit on, slapped in the face and sentenced to death, “The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, ‘Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.’ And [Peter] went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61-62).

The dialogue that occurs does not materialize in a verbal exchange, but is played out in actions and deeds. The denial of Peter and the trial of Jesus sets the stage for a lesson in forgiveness and restoration, essential to the praxis of critical educators and educational leaders alike. The initial dialogue centers around a denial or human moment of failure and human brokenness, the latter centers on restoration and forgiveness, a human moment of redemption through love.

The Love Motivation

“So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My lambs.’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Shepherd My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’”

John 21:15-17

This wonderful passage of Scripture offers to the critical educator and educational leader a lesson in the power of dialogue that seeks to restore through forgiveness and unconditional

love. The last time we saw Jesus in this narrative, He was being beaten and sentenced to death by crucifixion. During this sentencing, one of the lowest times in Jesus's earthly ministry, He also witnesses one of His beloved disciples repudiating his association with Jesus, his Master. At the height of the denial Jesus and Peter make eye contact, not a word is shared between the two; however, much was communicated in this brief exchange. Jesus now sets off to be crucified and Peter fades into the background weeping bitterly. We pick back up here in John's account of the historical narrative where the resurrected Christ meets Peter on a beach and a dialogue ensues to both restore and challenge Peter to exhibit the love necessary to carry on the message and praxis of his Lord.

Although there is a request at the end of each question within Jesus's exchange with Peter, we must not overlook that the topic of the conversation is undoubtedly love. The entire premise of the dialogue focuses on Peter's love for his Master. What is truly essential is that Jesus in His dialectical approach is not at all concerned with love as a quantifiable attribute. He again is concerned with the correct understanding and meaning of the terminology. The quality of love that is required to partake in Peter's ultimate mission of the pastorate is essential and without a comprehensive knowledge of love as defined by Jesus, it would be impossible for Peter to emulate his Master. What we see in the text is the juxtaposition of the two definitions of love *agape* and *philia* (McKay, 1985; Ramelli, 2008; Shepherd, 2010).

When Jesus asks Peter "do you *love* me more than these?" he is asking Peter to adopt the same unconditional love that is required to serve in the capacity that He has served in His earthly ministry and subsequent death, burial and resurrection. Here, Jesus must challenge Peter's understanding of love to prepare him for the journey ahead. What is evidenced in Peter's

response, “Yes, Lord; You know that I *love* you” is a mis-appropriation of the love required to fulfill his calling. Peter’s response to Jesus’s charge was inadequate as he uses *philia*, to describe love not *agape*.

According to McKay (1985) “Jesus’ pastoral charge is thus revealed as a further challenge to Peter to remember that the true fulfillment of the pastoral role to which Jesus is calling him requires an embracing of the [*agape*], that lays down its life” (p. 790). So crucial is the comprehension of the depths of love that Jesus requires, He could not allow Peter’s misunderstanding to go unchallenged, so He asks Peter a second time, and then a third. With each question, Jesus is reiterating His challenge to Peter. The threefold pattern of questioning and response is a conscious evocation of Peter’s three denials (McKay, 1985). As Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus seeks to restore Peter threefold. However, Peter’s restoration process begins and ends with an adequate apprehension of love. This is what will ultimately prepare him to work the works that he has been preordained to accomplish.

Critical Principles for a Pedagogy of Christ

The pedagogy of Christ is not a methodology or theory; it seeks to provide critical educators with a framework to identify principles of practice that seek to liberate and deconstruct oppressive theological and educational constructs. It is a pedagogy deeply informed by cultural context and analysis that seeks to validate, liberate and uplift humanity. Jesus in His praxis of love provides educators with a framework to approach emancipatory pedagogical practices that support a more just world, through the reconstruction of theology and educational practices.

Jesus’s model of restorative dialogue serves to teach the critical educator an important lesson in what it means to teach as an act of love. Just as Jesus pushed Peter to transition from

student to teacher, our students are to understand that the mission of the teacher must pass on to the lives of the student. If our objective is to teach lessons and not life, we have sorely missed the mark. Jesus challenges Peter to be like the Master, to live like the Master, and most importantly to love like the Master. It is a very difficult task to “teach” someone to love unconditionally. However, to show unconditional love through our praxis, both within and outside of the classroom, should be required, for our lives are the greatest lesson we could ever present to our students. Jesus’s life exemplified His message, the Gospel; and His ministry, the salvation and reconciliation of man back to God. As a critical educator, Paulo Freire understood this notion and lived his life through praxis. Jesus embodied this praxis and fulfilled His mission as a living testimony of the power of unconditional love.

In the preceding verses of the book of John 21, Jesus predicts Peter’s reluctance to embrace the kind of love necessary to carry out the transition from student to teacher, from pupil to change agent (John 21:18-22). Some who read this paper will also feel the same hesitancy to embrace unconditional love as a distinguishing element of the critical educator. However, Jesus offers in His pedagogy emancipation from traditional educational paradigms that restrict the human capacity and spirit. Through engaging in His praxis of forgiveness, restoration, agape, meaningful dialogue informed through conscientization, and fighting to establish true human moments, it is possible. Jesus’s praxis is a pedagogy of action. Just as Jesus challenged Peter, the Woman at the Well, and the Rich Young Ruler to a new understanding of love, the Law of God, socio-political, religious and cultural constructs, I, too, challenge you to a new understanding of the role of the critical educator.

The critical educator must be concerned with the decolonization of educational practices that seek to oppress subaltern populations. The critical educator must be committed to developing and substantiating pedagogical practices that not only offset, but also to challenging perceived norms. The critical educator must continue to explore the true meaning of education to provide bi-cultural students like myself strategies and learning opportunities that are essential to our academic, social, and spiritual growth.

The pedagogy of Christ that I have presented to all learners offers unique spiritual and culturally responsive teaching practices that focus on reaching students both intellectually and spiritually. This pedagogy, though, starts first with the educator, for it is the educator that must make the conscious decision to love unconditionally. It is the educator that must first understand the true meaning of education and fight to uphold and preserve its place within society. It is the educator that must seek to explore, engage, and empathize with the student population in order to effectively develop true conscientization, dialogue, and human moments within the classroom of life. It is the educator that must undergo scrutinizing self-evaluation in order to determine if they are fit for the profession. Jesus calls for a love that requires the sacrificing of self: will you accept the call, come, and follow Him!

Conclusion

The position of teacher is difficult to codify. As critical educators, we have a duty to ask the correct questions and challenge our students to the core of their understandings and beliefs. The kind of love that we are called to possess as we design our pedagogical practice places us not in the seat of Christ the Teacher, but in the seat of the Woman at the Well, the Rich Young Ruler, and Peter the student. Jesus is calling us, as critical educators, to understand the kind of

love necessary to truly teach and reach our students. The love that we are to express in this work is a love that is unconditional, not relational; sacrificial, not self-serving. Agape love is what Christ called for to equip others for service. I believe He is calling for us to do the same. When Paulo Freire and Antonia Darder describe teaching as an act of love, the truest definition and fulfillment of what that love is, can be found in the pedagogy of Christ. Conscientization, human moments, restoration, forgiveness, dialogue, and love are critical components to the praxis of the critical educator.

What we learn from the pedagogy of Christ is that these elements live in isolation of each other if not substantiated and fortified in unconditional concern for community and the other person—the person that joins us in the educational journey. For teachers and educational leaders, this is a pedagogy that shapes and reshapes practice to focus on the human and spiritual development of the individual. It is also a pedagogy that looks to establish love as a definitive factor of the educator with practical implications that inform teaching and learning outcomes. Ultimately, this serves as a framework for guiding teachers toward decolonized educational strategies, teacher development opportunities, and instructional practices that are humanizing and emancipatory.

Christ is portrayed as a critical educator who challenged the hegemony of His time to correctly appropriate the Scriptures, who challenged the understanding of love, who deconstructed the hegemonic ideologies of His time, and who called for greater devotion to God through sacrificial and unconditional love. Does this not give us pause to consider embracing this concept in our own pedagogy? These should be the hallmarks of all critical educators teaching in

similar contexts to His. Jesus substantiates His call for teachers to agape, by His own life and praxis.

Ultimately, through this decolonizing interpretive analysis educators are challenged to call out and alter epistemological understandings of bi-cultural educators. What this study seeks to provide is a framework, grounded in emancipatory pedagogy, that serves to deconstruct traditional Eurocentric epistemologies that force us to continue to separate theology and education. Jesus is a critical educator and His praxis serves to liberate the oppressed. What cannot go unnoticed is the impact that His theology had on His praxis and pedagogy. This research validates my bi-cultural identity and offers a pathway to liberate others like me, who must be emancipated from traditional oppressive ideologies that continue to separate theology and education. In the person of Jesus, we have hope that this can be a reality and that these oppressive constructs will not always remain true.

Inherently demonstrated in the critical pedagogy of Jesus Christ is a call to challenge Eurocentric institutions of higher education that persistently separate Christocentric praxis within education and theology. For a Christocentric institute of education such as Loyola Marymount University, to engage with the theory of a Critical Pedagogy of Jesus Christ will evaluate the meaning and application of Ignatius pedagogy not only within the Center for Ignatian Spirituality, which seeks to develop experientially the process of individual discernment toward a more dialectical process—one that does not focus solely on the individual, but also so on the power of the collective. Deconstructing traditional epistemological definitions and knowledge constructs surrounding discernment to include bicultural articulation of discernment would welcome dialogue that sees the individual within humanity, not in isolation of the mind, will, and

spirit; but rather through living in community, in concert with the individual, reconciled in Christ and humanity, and liberated in love and truth. The theory of a Critical Pedagogy of Jesus Christ would also benefit the fundamental purpose of the School of Education's focus on social justice and service leadership; in moving toward a more grounded praxis, aligned and developed through the power of love and truth, as evidenced in the life of Jesus Christ.

EPILOGUE

“If I told you my story, you would hear Hope that wouldn't let go, And if I told you my story you would hear Love that never gave up, And if I told you my story, you would hear Life, but it wasn't mine. If I should speak then let it be, Of the grace that is greater than all my sin, Of when justice was served and where mercy wins, Of the kindness of Jesus that draws me in, Oh to tell you my story is to tell of Him”

— Weaver & Ingram, 2015

My educational journey within both public and higher education has been fraught by disappointment. The reality is that, as an African American male, I have found that identity development is not championed within the current educational system. As currently constructed, there is nowhere for someone like myself to gain positive affirmation of beliefs, self-efficacy, self-esteem, or positive self-image. These critical aspects of the human experience within the educational spectrum are void and nebulous to say the least. My truest educational experience has taken place in the local church. It is there that I not only engage with the Scriptures, but with my heritage and my culture. It is there that my identity is affirmed and reaffirmed on a consistent basis. It is there that I was originally encouraged to pursue higher education with purpose.

As a Christian, much like Jesus Christ, I have had the Scriptures heavily shape my worldview. As an African American male, my identity is heavily shaped by my culture, immediate family; more specifically my mother and my experiences. This work has challenged me to effectively articulate the dialogue that has taken place in my mind for the past fifteen years. I have seen measures of growth in my own transformation as a result of this work. It is an arduous task to take on a dissertation of this magnitude. This work is so personally connected to

who I am culturally, spiritually, intellectually, and politically. I've come to understand Christ at a deeper level. I see the hope that His message continues to provide not only as a source of spiritual strength, but now as an invaluable resource as educator, I am excited to drink from His cup again.

Many times in my life I have wondered what it would be like to finally engage in my faith and my profession. Now I see, ever more clearly, that my faith informs my practice. My faith is evident within my practice in such an intricate way that the two shall never separate again. Education is elemental to the functioning of society; its very origins in the America's are rooted in Christianity. As a critical educator, I am pleased to offer another chapter in the book of critical pedagogy that rightly posits Jesus, not only as a Teacher, but an essential, if not foundational, contributor to the field of critical education. I believe Jesus to be the Son of God and my worship is predicated on this truth. He is my personal savior and has contributed to my life in ways that are inexpressible with words. For this reason, it fills my heart with great joy to finally express how He has contributed to my professional work as an educator. In the field of education what I have produced is a dissertation, but to me this is a love letter to my incomprehensible Christ, the Teacher of humanity, the lover of my soul. My educational journey, in all of its disappointments, has brought me to this point of reflection and I thank God, that through His Son, my restoration process has finally begun.

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