

Aspects of a discipleship pedagogic in the formation of disciples in a postmodern society

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to propose critical disciples that can live faithful, moral and purposeful lives in a postmodern world. Christian education functions today in a postmodern society, characterized by a multicultural and multi-social reality. This reality changes rapidly and requires a pedagogical model that can renew as societal challenges and changes occur. A critical discipling model is adopted according to a pedagogical quintet approach. In relation to contextual challenges this model consists of the following: a critical conscience to analyse any giving situation, to live responsible lives, within familial-koinonial relations, with a holistic person and world view, as permanent learning. The pedagogical value of this model is to inform, guide and empower educators and learners to make meaning out of confusing situations (gang-related, drugs, economic). The church requires critical/compassionate people that can help to discern, build and transform the current socioeconomic, moral-political reality.

1. Introduction

Violence, unemployment, cultural plurality, broken families and changing moral practices characterize society (Prins, 1993:32; Koopman & Vosloo, 2002:16). Christians live in complex multiracial, multicultural and multireligious contexts. The Christian vocation is not to change rules of society, but to foster principles of faith, humanity, fairness and responsibility (Heyns, 1994:159). Public education does not attend to moral, social and economic challenges in the new South Africa. The Ministry of Education has opted for a pedagogical shift from *humaniora* programmes to natural sciences, engineering and technology, with severe implications (Department of Education, 1996:10;12). It resulted in a moral vacuum in society. The church lacks appropriate faith and ethical training (Heyns, 1994:161). Young people act in terms of what is 'nice' and not what is morally appropriate (Prins 2001:109).

2. Future-oriented religious pedagogy as discipleship formation

A religious pedagogical approach is determined by contextuality which requires appropriate responses for challenging postmodern societal issues that the youth are struggling with. The contextual reality of contemporary Christian education is that it functions (in the Netherlands and South Africa) in a post-Christian (Ter Horst, 1997) or postmodern society. The Church's public moral formational role and the motivational impact of the Christian faith have become (Ter Horst, 1997:10-12;63;138). Education in the home, and at church and school greatly differs from what children/young people experience on the streets, television and computers. Educational situations change constantly – impoverishing the role of Christendom (Ter Horst, 1997:11). Children/Young people in postmodernity will become maladjusted if education does not continuously develop in fostering appropriate youth behaviour (Ter Horst, 1997:21). A future perspective metaphor for the Kingdom of God is needed (Ter Horst, 1997:11). The pedagogical quintet approach developed from the theory of Creation: protection, care, transfer, introduction and guidance (Ter Horst, 1997:78). Proactive religious pedagogy in a postmodern society requires a discipleship approach (Ter Horst, 1997:12). Discipleship as an ethical practice may serve as a solution for contemporary socio-moral issues. Discipleship practices are determined by the unique characteristics of Christian discipleship (Patte, 1996:37-38). In the light of a postmodern society and according to Ter Horst (1997) an integrated discipleship religious pedagogical model is proposed.

3. Basic theoretical framework for a discipleship pedagogy

Discipleship offers critical “consciousness” during times of transition and new orientations (Botman, 1993:52). Discipleship guides reciprocal learning actions and correlates with the dialectic-hermeneutical learning model of Dingemans (1986:14). Faith learning develops through imitation and identification (Dingemans, 1986:120). Botman (1993:52-53) identifies “*imitatio Christi*” as discipleship of Jesus as an epistemology for Christology, intending the total transformation of the individual, group and world. The learning person is viewed as a point of departure (Dingemans, 1981:3).

Dingemans (1986) argues for a holistic person approach and defines learning as a relational process. Discipleship also refers to citizenship that tackles life issues through social accountability (Botman, 1993:18 ff; Dulles, 1988:221-222). Discipleship should be the primary practice for the formation of the contemporary youth (Curry, 1993:310), with a public and private orientation (Bethge, 1961:258). The human-spiritual praxeology as framework for faith and moral formation is essential for discipleship. Intersubjective involvement in a context of the need and suffering of the neighbour is an essential dimension for the human-spiritual discipleship approach (compare Ploeger, 1995:220). Discipleship is functional-formatinal in both public and private situations, and functions as a praxis (Patte, 1996:37-38). Reflections in practices are crucial for developing religious pedagogy as discipleship. Moral, values and epistemological principles serve as criteria for a discipleship praxis (Dykstra, 1997:168-173).

4. Religious pedagogical discipleship model

A critical discipleship approach for religious pedagogy becomes crucial. The critical discipleship model deals with contemporary socioeconomic, moral-political challenges, as well as the uncritical choices and actions the youth have to deal with. This model consists of the following:

1. formation of critical (technical and unbiased) disciples
2. living responsibly (with life skills)
3. in familial-koinonial relations (protection)
4. with a holistic human and world view (the pedagogical quintet)
5. lifelong learning (care) as objective

4.1 Formation of Critical Disciples

4.1.1 With full consciousness

Focusing on the technical and unbiased and self-consciousness (Ter Horst, 1997: 114), self-consciousness or a reality consciousness that fosters responsibility through an 'openness' or transparency about reality (nature and culture) is proposed (Ter Horst, 1997:23-26). Learner guidance should help young people to discern which human actions are required within a broken/vulnerable contemporary reality. Discernment

about openness/transparency, touchiness, sensitiveness and critical suspicion is only possible if learners possess a full self-consciousness (Ter Horst, 1997:23). Self-consciousness is formed through two modes: the technical and unbiased. The technical mode refers to *control, comprehension, and grasping of reality*. Knowledge gained is **knowledge about something** with a specific meaning. Learners have to deal technically with reality to get a grasp on confusing happenstances; otherwise they may get lost in meaningless chaos; their ability to develop may be inhibited. Emphasis on only this mode in education may be catastrophic; it is dangerous, isolating and egocentric (Ter Horst, 1997:23-26). The **unbiased mode** of the self-consciousness centres in the heart; and it does not focus on the control of, but on *the living experience of reality*; it is not about knowledge about something, but **knowledge of, from reality**. It focuses on closeness/proximity, intimacy, submission, commitment, amazement and a holy regard. The unbiased mode is 'holistic' and not about the analysis of elements, but works with the whole/total. It is about lived experience and dialogue with the Creator, the creation and the neighbour. Meaning formation occurs through symbols. The 'I' can only become fully conscious if the heart is opened for the reality. The human heart is the place of the deepest responsibility, the centre of faith, hope and love. It is the anchor for the unbiased mode of self-consciousness. Discipleship can only succeed with a balance between both the technical and unbiased modes in becoming fully self-conscious (Ter Horst, 1997:26-30).

4.1.2. Through a Critical Transformative approach ...

A transformative approach with a critical Christian hermeneutical principle is essential for postmodern pedagogy. The technical and unbiased modes of Ter Horst correlate with Freire's (1973:29ff; 1994) pedagogy as liberation of the oppressed and oppressor (oppressed and oppressor referring to victims and offenders of unacceptable socioeconomic and moral-political practices). Freire's (1973:23-24) pedagogy includes the following points:

- Pedagogy focuses on both the liberation of the praxis and theory.
- A hermeneutic of suspicion and a critical action-reflection approach provide a tool for contemporary moral dilemmas.

- Pedagogy refers to action for understanding, exercise of freedom and a critical approach of the reality (Freire, 1973:65-71).
- Consciousness is the 'vehicle' of a hermeneutic-dialogical process through which people may overcome moral obstacles and estrangement in their socioeconomic environment.

Freire defines consciousness with the term "conscientization", compounded by the following points:

- The critical method of "conscientization" refers to theory and practice on orientation-knowledge aimed at human development and upliftment (Freire, 1973:57-66).
- Conscientization has, as a theory of praxis orientational knowledge, a developmental dimension which fosters human development (Freire, 1973:57-66).
- Conscientization cannot be changed on the outside of the praxis – praxis through which 'conscientization' can be changed refers not only to action, but also to both action and reflection. Theory and praxis change continuously and may lead to a new praxis (Freire, 1973:171-172).
- Radical learning through vision formation/paradigmatic transformation and critical consciousness radicalizes conventional morality (Freire, 1973:29-44).

"Conscientization" ultimately aims for the wellbeing of the oppressed and suffering person and the total liberation of all people (compare Botman, 1993:52-53). A critical consciousness in learning activities focuses on social and existential situations (Schipani, 1988:53-54). Pedagogy focuses on transformative action and a political or moral-ethical praxis (Freire, 1973:23-24; 137ff.).

4.1.2. Through a Critical Transformative approach

Ter Horst's self-consciousness of reality and Freire's "conscientization" are transformative approaches which could engender a new pedagogical theory and practice formation. "Conscientization" occurs within the praxis through critical action and reflection. The result is a praxis of freedom through which reciprocal teaching-learning processes can develop (Freire, 1973:54-55,72ff). The objective is a pedagogy that guides the praxis towards transformation and a pedagogy for all people in the process

of permanent liberation (Freire, 1973:29-44). The pedagogical character and orientation of postmodern pedagogy and liberation theology foster a praxis-centred methodological approach of critical reflection which is crucial for moral, socioeconomic and political orientation (Freire, 1973:29ff; Ter Horst, 1997). The concrete lifestyle and conflict of people, their needs, problems, wishes and dreams/values constitute the pedagogical content. The question to be answered, then, is *Which position and role should the contemporary disciple of Jesus have in the light of the social, moral and economic powers of a postmodern society?* (LeMasters, 1997:2).

4.3. In Familial-Koinonial Relations

Children/Young people are need physical and psychological security to feel safe to confront and live life. Especially within new and unfamiliar situations (youth gangs) experienced as threats. Only from and towards a safe environment (house, school, church) can children/young people enter a tough world to learn about themselves and protect others (Ter Horst, 1997:79-82). First lived experiences of safety/security, of perspective and of gaining meaning happen in the family (Ter Horst, 1997:35-36). Alternative families are needed to support single parents, fragmented or parentless families who cannot carry the responsibility for Christian education, in actually doing it (Ter Horst, 1997:63). Responsible and balanced critical disciples should be supported through healthy human relations, like the family and faith community. The socialising power of a secularised society cause limits or disregard the formative influence of the church in the life worlds of young people (Prins, 1991:256-257). However, the familial metaphor could assist in valuing and understanding the communal nature of the Christian faith in the light of limited community and genuine life sharing (Burger, 1995:10,28; Burger, 1997:7; Prins, 1990:79; Saris, 1984). Familial and reciprocal religious pedagogy draws children/young people to faith-moral formational processes, and tackles the problem of the changing family with the growing isolation of its members (White, 1988; Foster, 1984:279, Lanser, 1996:433-438). Faith communities/families are ideal for building intergenerational relationships (Foster, 1984:279). Parents would be incapable of educating their children based on challenging postmodern faith and moral issues. Educational practices to develop healthy relationships and an ethical

consciousness for children to be sound moral human beings are not part of or supported by a faith community (Burger, 1995:1,10). A practical and relevant “family life curriculum” focusing on familial needs, developments and crisis orientations informs content and is formational for a postmodern pedagogy (Slaughter, 1993:266; Ter Horst, 1997; Saris, 1984:41).

4.4. With a Holistic Human and World view

Ter Horst (1997:22,26) develops his Christian pedagogy from a holistic perspective in which the Creator, the creation and the neighbour function as a totality. The focus is caring in a totalising manner for the self, each other, with others, animals, plants and things (Ter Horst, 1997:77-78). A critical discipleship model requires a holistic human- and world view (Richards, 1975:60-70). A holistic approach fosters human freedom and wholeness (Siejk, 1994:271-291). A holistic-pedagogical praxis is essential for knowledge collection, a social life, personal formation and experience and critical reflection on completed actions (Ploeger, 1995:208-212). Holistic religious pedagogy is a corrective for a formal cognitive school approach that develops an isolated, instead of functional, (discipleship) faith/morality (Ter Horst, 1997). Cognitive, social and moral development generates through forming processes (shared partnership, participation, modelling, teaching-as-interpretation-of-life and choice exercises) (Richards, 1983:109-162;169-174). These formational processes are applied to the life world (house, school, church and society) of the learner. Discipleship is the ultimate objective and guidance of the child/young person's faith-moral development (and personality and character formation).

Discipleship within the perspective of a non-hierarchical and holistic transformational process has as objective the transformation of social structures (sexism, racism, materialism, immorality, etc) (Siejk, 1994:290-291).

4.5. As Lifelong Learning

Lifelong care and learning focus on provisions for living needs regarding security to ‘feel at home’ at school, home, in the church and society. Security is crucial in a confusing postmodern society for developing healthy children/young people (Ter Horst, 1997:92).

Educators and parents and not only children undergo continuous psycho-social/moral developmental changes (Ter Horst, 1997:34). Discipleship is about permanent learning in terms of living relations (De Lange, 1989:53). Dramatic changes in personal and communal living contexts/situations require lifelong learning. Growing search for sense and meaning exist in the light of secular and dominant technical-rational life view. People have a growing need to make sense/meaning of the changes and 'empty feelings' in themselves and their surrounding environments (Dirkx, 1997:79; Foltz, 1986:10; McKenzie, 1986:10). The life world, needs and struggles of learners are thus acknowledged and tackled in learning activities (Foltz, 1986:30). Learning in the concrete here-and-now-reality does not only prepare for life, but is life itself, the experience of life itself (Dirkx, 1997:83). It is experiential learning, change or growth in and through an integrated process that starts with the here-and-now experience, followed by the accumulation of facts and observation of experiences. These facts/actions are critically analysed and lead towards the adoption of moral behavioural patterns and the choice of new (moral) experiences (Kolb, 1984:3-4, 200-202). Critical discipleship, in the sense of *learner-being*, is thus a lifelong process (Browning, 1989:43-47;70-73).

4.2. In and Through Responsible Lives

Focusing on the transfer of skills and knowledge in fostering good behaviour (Ter Horst, 1997:104-105), Ter Horst's (1997:22) basic premise for postmodern pedagogy is a responsible attitude towards the Creator, creation and the neighbour. A particular sense of responsibility is required for things, plants, animals, God and human beings in a time overwhelmed by technology and a consumer mentality. A critical disciple has particular personal, moral, socioeconomic and political-pedagogical responsibilities. Responses, rather re-sponse-ible actions, are crucial and above all the essential requirements for habit formation (Ter Horst, 1997:21). Learner-being should function within social issues and the Christian identity – in the formation of responsible lives (Wolterstorff, 1976:7; Wolterstorff, 1983:vii). Injustice, illusions and moral decay in a postmodern society can thus be transformed (Wolterstorff, 1983:23,43; Stivers, 1984:164). A scientific technological/general world view narrows contemporary Christian and moral principles

increasingly. Uncontrolled actions of young people and adults in a changing society increase and established social relations are overpowered (Westerhoff III, 1983:22-23). Contemporary culture is viewed as authoritative interpreter of the Gospel's norms – which holds a specific danger for Christians (Warren, 1989:viii). Transformation of the social order is a case for discipleship to which Jesus calls believers. The demand for the concrete situation and context is just as important as the ethical norms according to which morally appropriate choices are made.

Bonhoeffer (1964:224-254) refers to “free responsibility” to meet extraordinary situations with responsibility. Tendency learning is a learning process through which this ability or skill to act responsibly is fostered (Wolterstorff, 1980:3-15; 1983:7; Ter Horst, 1997). Stewardship as discipleship is ideal for engendering a responsible Christian way of life with a holistic and balanced human and world view (Westerhoff III, 1983; Stivers, 1984:143,146).

5. Conclusion

Contemporary religious pedagogy should apply a future perspective to dealing with a postmodern society with a multicultural background and moral challenges. Skills (technical and unbiased) are crucial for children/young people in a confusing society for helping them to discover themselves and facing potentially threatening situations (youth gangs, economic oppression) with critical discernment. Young people/children with a critical consciousness are required to accept, for instance, moral and economic responsibilities for themselves, others and their immediate reality. Fostering freedom, love and security/safety (through protection and care of families/alternative families) are a few aspects from a broken reality which can have a healing effect on relationships, people and communities. Critical disciples can make crucial technical and unbiased contributions in sense and meaning formation within a confusing society. Religious pedagogy functions continuously with a future perspective on transforming people, society and the realities of creation, in accord with, current changes, without becoming dysfunctional. A critical disciple can only function from a holistic praxis-oriented context and relations. A critical “conscientization” discipleship-pedagogical approach offers the best answer for contemporary religious pedagogical issues. The *Confession of Belhar*

(Botha & Naudé 1998:4) calls on people to follow God (as disciples) in identifying with the suffering, poor, vulnerable and oppressed in a special way. The church needs, more than ever before, critical disciples to tackle the current moral, socioeconomic and pedagogical issues in the country.

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