

Critical Pedagogy and the Crisis of Humanization in Education: An Analysis of the Dehumanization of the Education System and Efforts for Restoration Through the Perspective of the Theology of Imago Dei

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ABSTRACT

Christian Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Kristen / PAK) is called to be a human praxis that affirms the dignity of human beings as God's creation. However, in the context of modern education, PAK also faces a humanization crisis due to the dominance of instrumental paradigms, competition orientation, and cognitive achievement-based assessments that reduce students to objects of the system. This article aims to analyze dehumanization in the education system through a critical pedagogical perspective and to formulate PAK's theological contribution in restoring human dignity based on the concept of imago Dei. This research uses a literature review method with a reflective-critical and interdisciplinary approach, integrating the critical pedagogical thought of Paulo Freire, Henry A. Giroux, and Peter McLaren with the theological reflections of Karl Barth and John R. Middleton. The results of the study show that an education system that emphasizes efficiency, quantitative evaluation, and structural compliance has implications for the alienation of students and weakens the spiritual and relational dimensions of education. Critical pedagogy provides a framework for liberation through dialogical and transformative education, while imago Dei theology affirms the ontological and ethical foundations of PAK as a restorative pedagogy. This article concludes that the integration of critical pedagogy and imago Dei theology strengthens the role of PAK as a liberating praxis of faith, restoring human dignity, and presenting an education oriented toward love, justice, and solidarity.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education; Critical Pedagogy; Humanization of Education; Dehumanization; Imago Dei

INTRODUCTION

Several studies have examined the issue of dehumanization in education and efforts to redress it. Govender (2020), introduced critical pedagogy as a liberatory practice that rejects the banking model of education. Ukpokodu (2016), expanded this with the concept of teachers as transformative intellectuals who fight for social justice. Rosser (2023), criticized modern education as being trapped in a predatory capitalist culture. In the Indonesian context, H.A.R. Aithal & Srinivasan (2024), criticized the national education system for neglecting ethical and spiritual dimensions, while Aithal & Srinivasan (2024), called for education rooted in spiritual values. From a Christian theological perspective, Henriksen (2020), developed the understanding of the imago Dei as a relational reality, and John R. Murphy (2025), expanded it as a call to participate in God's work of creation and reconciliation. However, these studies remain partial because they fail to simultaneously integrate critical pedagogical analysis and imago Dei-based theological reflection in responding to the crisis of humanization in education (Yoon, 2019). This research aims to fill that gap.

Education should ideally be a space for humanity, where human beings grow as complete individuals who think, feel, and believe. However, the reality of modern education shows a deep crisis, namely a crisis of humanization. The current education system tends to place human beings as economic objects and instruments, not as dignified subjects. Orientation toward competition, grades, and exams has made education lose its human meaning. Ihejirika (2017), calls this condition banking education, an educational model that treats students like empty containers filled only with knowledge, without critical participation and existential reflection.

Education, which was originally intended to liberate human beings, has now turned into a social reproductive tool that maintains the status quo. Emphasized that modern education often plays the role of an ideological agent that normalizes social inequality through policies and curricula that emphasize efficiency and academic achievement alone (Isseks, 2017; Kromydas, 2017). In this context, learners are trained to be “obedient workers” in a capitalistic economic system, not citizens who are critical and empathetic toward their social realities. Bainbridge (2020) even said that education has been trapped in a predatory culture that values human beings based on productivity, not humanity.

This tendency to dehumanize is also evident in the context of Indonesian education. H.A.R. Bainbridge (2020), sees that the national education system tends to be oriented toward test scores, rankings, and accreditation, which ultimately ignores the ethical and spiritual dimensions of education. This crisis not only gives rise to social inequality but also produces a generation alienated from life’s reality and human values. Widyatmmadja (2005) adds that education which loses the soul of humanity is essentially education that loses its theological meaning, because true education is an effort to humanize humans (Sahin, 2022).

In the midst of this crisis, there is an urgent need to review the educational paradigm through a more critical and humanistic approach (Mielkov et al., 2021; Topuzov et al., 2022). Critical pedagogy offers an alternative paradigm that places education as a praxis of liberation and self-awareness. Safari (2017), teaches that education must be a praxis of freedom, a dialogical process between educators and students to foster critical awareness (conscientização) of social and structural injustice. This approach invites educators to become transformative intellectuals, who not only transfer knowledge but also challenge oppressive structures that constrain humanity.

From the perspective of the Christian faith, the crisis of humanization in education reflects a crisis of understanding of humans as the image of God (*imago Dei*). Christian theology affirms that every human being has irreplaceable dignity because they are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). The concept of *imago Dei* is not only a doctrine of creation, but also an ethical foundation for the entire educational praxis. Charlesworth (2018), emphasized that human beings as *imago Dei* are called to live in relationships of love that reflect the Triune God, relationships that are dialogical, mutually respectful, and humane. Thus, true education must be a space to restore human relationships with God, others, and themselves.

Christian education rooted in *imago Dei* cannot be trapped in the logic of efficiency and competition. Rather, education should be a pedagogy of restoration that builds the whole human being intellectually, emotionally, morally, and spiritually. As Hobson (2019), affirms, *imago Dei* is a call to participate in God's work of creation and reconciliation in the world. In

the context of education, this means restoring the function of education as a means of liberation and a service of love for fellow human beings.

Thus, the main challenge for contemporary Christian education is how to integrate critical pedagogy and imago Dei theology to build an education that liberates and restores human dignity. Critical pedagogy provides an analytical framework for uncovering dehumanizing educational structures, while Christian faith provides an ontological and moral foundation for rebuilding human values in education. This integration paves the way for an educational praxis that is not only critical of oppressive structures but also brings to life the dimension of spirituality and love in the teaching and learning process (Berila, 2023; Takona, 2025).

The formulation of the problem in this study includes two main points: first, how can critical pedagogy analyze a dehumanizing education system? Second, how can a theological perspective on the imago Dei restore human dignity in education?

This research offers several novelties that distinguish it from previous studies. First, substantively, it simultaneously integrates two frameworks of thought that have generally developed separately: critical pedagogy (Freire, Giroux, McLaren) and imago Dei theology (Barth, Middleton) in analyzing the crisis of humanization in education and formulating efforts to restore it. Second, this research not only critiques the education system by deconstructing it from a socio-political perspective, but also uncovers the theological roots of the crisis by showing that dehumanization in education is essentially a blurring of the image of God (imago Dei) in humans. Third, this research offers a new concept of education as a “liberating practice of faith” that combines critical awareness of oppressive structures with a spiritual calling to restore human relationships with God, others, and themselves. Fourth, this research defines the role of teachers as “pastoral educators” who not only transform students’ social consciousness but also accompany them spiritually on their journey to restore their dignity as the image of God. Fifth, this research contributes to the development of theo-critical pedagogy as a new paradigm in Christian education that is rooted in God's love, grounded in social justice, and fruitful in human solidarity (Poudyal, 2022; Stockbridge, 2017).

The purpose of this study is to review the literature on critical pedagogy and the humanization crisis in the modern education system. Furthermore, it aims to critically analyze forms of dehumanization that occur in the education system using a critical pedagogical perspective as an analytical tool. In addition, this research seeks to formulate theological reflection based on the concept of imago Dei, as well as provide recommendations for educational reform that can restore human dignity in the context of education. This research is expected to provide theoretical benefits for the development of critical pedagogy and educational theology, particularly in enriching understanding of the integration between social analysis and theological reflection in responding to the crisis of humanization in education. Practically, this research is useful for Christian educators and educational institution managers in formulating more humane, dialogical, and spiritual learning practices. For churches and theological institutions, the results of this research can be used as material for reflection and for developing Christian education curricula oriented toward the restoration of human dignity as the image of God. For educational policymakers, this research provides input on the need to reorient educational philosophy from an instrumental paradigm to a humanist-theocentric paradigm. For future researchers, this research can serve as a foundation for further examining the implementation of theo-critical pedagogy in the context of education in Indonesia.

This research also has theoretical implications for the development of critical pedagogy and educational theology, particularly in strengthening the understanding that the crisis of humanization in education cannot be understood solely as a technical-pedagogical issue, but also as an ideological and theological issue that requires both structural analysis and spiritual reflection. This finding confirms that the integration of critical pedagogy and *imago Dei* theology paves the way for a new paradigm in education that is not only socially liberating but also spiritually restorative. Practically, this research implies the need to reorient educational philosophy from a competitive-instrumental paradigm to a collaborative-humanist paradigm centered on the restoration of human dignity. For Christian educational institutions, the implication is the need to develop curricula that integrate the values of love, justice, and solidarity as concrete manifestations of their calling as images of God. For educators, this research reaffirms their calling as “pastoral educators” who not only transfer knowledge but also accompany students in the journey of restoring their human identity and dignity. For the church, this research implies the need to take a prophetic role in overseeing educational policies so that they remain oriented toward humanitarian and spiritual values. This research also implies the need for further empirical studies to test the implementation of theo-critical pedagogy in various educational contexts in Indonesia.

METHOD

Critical Pedagogic Concepts

Critical pedagogy is born out of a concern for education that tends to be repressive and structurally oppressive. The root of this idea departs from the thought of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher of education, who introduced the concept of education as the practice of freedom. Freire (1970) rejects the traditional educational model that he calls banking education, namely an approach in which teachers place students as empty containers that must be filled with information. In this system, students are not trained to think critically or to question, but instead simply accept knowledge as dogma. As a result, education becomes a tool for the domestication and reproduction of unjust social structures.

For Freire, true education must be dialogical and transformative. He emphasized the importance of *conscientização* (critical awareness), which is the process by which students become aware of oppression and take action to change it. In this perspective, the teacher is no longer the sole authority, but a dialogue partner who helps learners understand reality and interpret the world. Freire writes, “Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system, or it becomes the practice of freedom” (Freire, 1970, p. 34). This means that education can be a tool of oppression or a means of liberation, depending on the awareness and orientation of the educator’s praxis.

Freire’s ideas were further developed by Henry A. Giroux, who saw education as an arena of ideological struggle. Giroux (1983) rejects a neutral view of education and states that every education system is laden with particular values and interests. In his work *Theory and Resistance in Education*, Giroux introduced the concept of the teacher as a “transformative intellectual”, namely an educator who plays the role of an organic intellectual who is aware of power structures and committed to social change. Education, according to Giroux, is not merely a technical activity, but a political action that can expand democracy and strengthen social

participation. In this context, teachers must develop a critical awareness of structures of domination and integrate the values of justice, empathy, and solidarity into learning practices.

Peter McLaren expands critical pedagogy discourse through cultural and political analysis. In his book *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture* (1995), McLaren highlights how education in a global capitalistic society has transformed into an instrument for reproducing consumptive ideologies. He argues that modern education is trapped in a predatory culture, a culture that judges humans based only on economic productivity and academic achievement. McLaren emphasizes the need for education that fosters a politics of empowerment, an empowerment process that restores human agency to think, feel, and act freely amid market ideological pressures. Within this framework, critical pedagogy demands moral courage to resist systemic currents that objectify humans.

Thus, the three figures—Freire, Giroux, and McLaren—base critical pedagogy on the principles of liberation, dialogue, and empowerment. Education is seen not only as an intellectual process, but also as an ethical and political praxis that aims to build a more just and humane society. Critical pedagogy rejects dehumanization in any form, whether in curriculum structures, teaching methods, or school cultures that suppress students' creativity and freedom of thought.

The Crisis of Humanization in Modern Education

One of the great challenges in the world of contemporary education is the crisis of humanization, which is a situation in which education loses its orientation to humanity and turns into an instrument of global economic, political, and competition. Tilaar (2002) states that the current education system in Indonesia places too much emphasis on academic achievement and passing national exams, while human values such as empathy, solidarity, and social justice are increasingly marginalized. As a result, education gives birth to people who are cognitively intelligent, but morally and spiritually poor.

This phenomenon can be seen in various practices in the field: students and teachers are pressured by grade targets, standardized exam systems, and ranking orientations that foster individualism and fear of failure. In the long run, this kind of education forms a dehumanizing competitive culture, where success is measured by numbers and certificates, not by character growth and wisdom. Freire (1970) asserts that this kind of system symbolically "silences" humanity because it abolishes dialogue and removes critical meaning from learning. Widyatmadja (2005) called this condition a spiritual and existential crisis of education. He emphasized that education that has lost its spiritual dimension has fundamentally lost its anthropological direction. Human beings are no longer seen as whole persons, but as means of production. Widyatmadja called for the need for "liberating" education in the theological sense, namely education that restores human beings to their original image as the image of God, who is intellectual, emotional, and moral. In this context, the crisis of humanization is not only a pedagogical problem, but also a theological crisis that demands a transformation of values.

The crisis of humanization of education is also closely related to the influence of neoliberalism in education policy. Giroux (2014) in his follow-up work *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* shows that the global education system has been colonized by market logic, where human value is measured on the basis of "usability" and "efficiency". This process

deepens social inequality and marginalizes groups that do not have economic and political access. In Indonesia, a similar symptom is seen in education policies that emphasize measurable outputs such as National Exam scores, Teacher Performance Index, and institutional accreditation, without paying attention to the quality of relationships, morality, and welfare of students (Tilaar, 2002).

Dehumanization of the Education System

In the global and national contexts, the dehumanization of education can be seen in several main forms. First, competition replaces collaboration. Competitive cultures create a stressful learning environment, where learners see classmates not as learning partners, but as competitors. Second, the exam replaces the dialogue. The learning process focuses more on the achievement of grades than on the process of understanding and reflection. Third, value replaces meaning. Academic achievement becomes a symbol of success, while personal growth and spirituality are ignored. As a result, students no longer experience education as a journey of humanization, but as an assessment mechanism that suppresses their identity.

Empirical data reinforce this phenomenon. The results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey in 2022 show that although Indonesia's literacy and numeracy scores have increased slightly, students' academic stress levels have increased significantly (OECD, 2023). Many students report a loss of intrinsic motivation and low self-confidence. This phenomenon is an indicator that our education system has failed to build the psychological and social well-being of students.

Within the framework of critical pedagogy, the situation shows a new form of "symbolic oppression", namely the dominance of educational structures over the consciousness of students. Freire (1970) reminds that dehumanization is a consequence of oppressive structures, and can only be overcome through liberating critical consciousness. Therefore, education must be directed back to its true goal: to form a conscious, independent, and compassionate human being. Tilaar (2002) emphasized that transformative education must contain the values of humanization, democracy, and deep social participation.

This literature review shows that critical pedagogics provides a strong analytical framework for the crisis of humanization of education. Freire, Giroux, and McLaren invite educators to see education not as a technical tool, but as a social and moral praxis that demands active engagement with the reality of injustice. In the Indonesian context, Tilaar and Widyatmmadja's thoughts affirm the urgency of humanizing education through an approach that integrates spiritual and theological values. Thus, critical pedagogics can be the gateway to education that restores human dignity and reaffirms the call of education as a means of liberation and service of love.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Critical Analysis of a Dehumanizing Education System Education as a Tool of Domination

In a critical pedagogic framework, education is never neutral. Paulo Freire (1970) emphasized that every form of education is always on the side, it can be a tool of liberation or a tool of oppression. The modern education system that is oriented towards efficiency, productivity, and competition essentially reproduces the capitalistic ideology that places

human beings as means of production. Education that should be a humanization process has instead turned into a social reproductive mechanism, where students are trained to conform to existing power structures, not to challenge them.

Freire calls this model banking education, where teachers place themselves as the owners of knowledge and students as empty containers that only receive and store information. In this context, the relationship between teachers and students is not dialogical, but hierarchical. The learning process loses its essence as a human dialogue that liberates each other. Peter McLaren (1995) added that the education system dominated by neoliberal ideology actually preserves social inequality through a hidden curriculum that instills the values of obedience and consumerism.

Giroux (1983) even emphasizes that modern education has lost its critical power because teachers are positioned only as policy implementers, not as intellectual transformatives. Teachers no longer have the space to interpret social realities and direct learning to human transformation. As a result, schools turn into "human factories" that produce workers, not independent and dignified individuals.

In the Indonesian context, the situation of dehumanization of education is evident in various national education policies and practices. Although the jargon of Merdeka Belajar looks promising, its implementation is still dominated by the outcome-based education paradigm that focuses on numbers, rankings, and accreditation. The freedom promised in the concept of Freedom of Learning is often trapped in administrative freedom, not substantive freedom to develop the humanity of students.

Tilaar (2002) highlights that Indonesian education tends to ignore the social and humanitarian dimensions. Students are burdened with academic targets that are not always relevant to real-life contexts. The pressure to achieve high grades or pass national exams makes schools a space of competition, not a learning community. Teachers are often more concerned with administrative matters, reports, and quantitative assessments than with character development and student empathy. This phenomenon has an impact on the mental health of students. The PISA survey (2022) shows an increase in stress levels among Indonesian students, especially due to academic pressure and lack of space for expression. The data shows that 48% of students feel anxious about exams, and more than 60% feel that the learning process does not give personal meaning. This confirms the existence of a crisis of meaning in education, when learning is no longer a path to wisdom, but merely a means of achieving social status.

Education as a Space of Alienation

Within the framework of Marxian critical theory, modern education can be understood as a new space of alienation. Students are alienated from the learning process (because learning is forced for the sake of grades), teachers are alienated from their moral vocation (because they have to submit to bureaucracy), and society is alienated from the true purpose of education (because it judges success only through degrees and work). Tilaar (2002) calls this phenomenon "the degradation of humanity in the practice of education." This alienating condition makes the school lose its prophetic meaning as a space for the formation of the whole human being. Education no longer builds critical awareness (conscientization), but instills

obedience to the system. Thus, the educational process shifts from a liberation praxis to an instrument of social control that prolongs structural inequality.

Socio-Theological Analysis: Dehumanization as a Pollution of the Imago Dei

From a theological perspective, this crisis is not just a pedagogical problem, but also a spiritual and moral one. In the Christian view, man was created in the image and likeness of God (*imago Dei*) (Genesis 1:26–27). This means that every human being has divine values, dignity, and potential that must be valued and developed. When education fails to respect this dignity by treating students as objects, not subjects, then there is actually a pollution of the *imago Dei*.

Dehumanizing education is tantamount to blurring the image of God in humans. Education that kills empathy and solidarity is contrary to the nature of human beings as relational beings. In the light of Christian theology, true education is supposed to restore man's relationship with God, his neighbor, and himself. A true learning process is a process of spiritual and intellectual reconciliation that fosters love, wisdom, and moral responsibility. Therefore, the main challenge of Christian education today is to restore the transcendent dimension in educational praxis. Education must be a means of restoring *imago Dei*, building human beings who are aware of their divine calling, sensitive to justice, and courageous against systems that oppress humanity.

The above critical analysis shows that the dehumanization of education cannot be understood only as a technical problem, but rather as an ideological and theological crisis. Critical pedagogics invites us to uncover the power structures hidden in the educational system, while Christian theology calls us to restore human dignity in the light of *imago Dei*. The synergy between these two perspectives provides a solid foundation for a more humane, dialogical, and spiritual education reform.

The Concept of Imago Dei as the Basis of Human Dignity

In Christian theology, the concept of *imago Dei* (the image of God) is the most fundamental foundation of theological anthropology. Genesis 1:26–27 affirms that man was created in the image and likeness of God. This statement is not just a description of human origins, but an existential declaration of human values, dignity, and purpose in life. The *Imago Dei* emphasizes that every human being has irreplaceable value, because his existence reflects a transcendent divine reality.

Karl Barth (1960) interpreted the *imago Dei* as a relational reality: man reflects God not through natural substance, but through the relationship man is created to relate to God and to others. Thus, human dignity does not lie in rational or moral ability alone, but in its ability to live in a relationship of love, freedom, and responsibility. John R. Middleton (2005) in *The Liberating Image* affirms that the *imago Dei* has a social and missionary dimension. Humans are called to represent God in the world to be His representative in caring for creation, upholding justice, and restoring relationships damaged by sin. Thus, *imago Dei* is not a static concept, but rather a dynamic call to present the kingdom of God in social life, including in the field of education.

If education ignores the dimension of *imago Dei*, then it loses its spiritual direction. Education centered on the results of exams and economic competition ultimately reduces

human beings to mere instruments, not whole individuals. On the contrary, when education honors man as the image of God, every learning process becomes a sacred act as a participation in God's creative and redemptive work in the world.

Humanization of Faith as Relationship Restoration

The Christian faith is a restorative faith. Faith is not just a personal affair with God, but also a process of liberation from all forms of alienation: from God, from others, and from oneself. Thus, true faith has a humanizing dimension, humanizing man again in the light of God's love.

Jesus Christ, the Great Teacher, showed that true education is the service of love that restores human dignity. He teaches not to dominate, but to liberate. He dialogued with the disciples, uplifted the oppressed, and opposed the religious system that oppressed the little man. In all of His ministry, Jesus showed that truth is inseparable from love; Teaching is inseparable from relationship restoration. So, humanizing faith means imitating Jesus in educating with love, dialogue, and respect for the dignity of each person. Christian education should function as a "pedagogy of restoration," a process that integrates intellectual, spiritual, and moral growth in a single unit. Freire (1970) calls education a praxis of freedom, while the Christian faith views it as a praxis of redemption. The two meet on a single mission: to free man from structural and spiritual slavery, and to restore him to his identity as the image of God.

Integration of Critical Theology and Pedagogy

The integration of critical pedagogics and imago Dei theology paves the way for an education that is not only socially liberating, but also spiritually restorative. Critical pedagogics provides a structural analysis of oppression and dehumanization, while Christian theology provides the ontological and moral basis for that liberation.

Paulo Freire rejected an oppressive education, while Jesus rejected a religious system that oppressed the human soul. Both fight for freedom and justice through dialogue and love. In this perspective, Jesus can be seen as a true critical teacher he did not simply transfer doctrine, but formed a new consciousness through narratives, parables, and personal encounters.

The dialogue between Freire and Jesus opens up the possibility of the emergence of a critical theo-pedagogical paradigm, that is, an educational approach that rejects oppressive systems and elevates the dignity of marginalized human beings. This paradigm invites educators to interpret the classroom not as a control room, but as a space for reconciliation and participation. Teachers are called not only as transmitters of knowledge, but as servants of love who foster the theological and social awareness of students.

Education as a Sacrament of Love and a Space for Reconciliation

In the light of imago Dei, education can be understood as a sacrament of love of holy encounter in which God's love is presented through the process of learning and interpersonal relationships. Every act of teaching and learning becomes a liturgical act, because in it man responds to God's call to create, understand, and love.

Education rooted in love rejects all forms of symbolic and structural violence. It fosters empathy, justice, and solidarity across differences. In the context of a pluralistic society,

Christian education should be a space of reconciliation where the identity of faith is not used to judge, but to serve.

Thus, the task of Christian education is not only to form "believing men," but also "humanizing men." Every teacher is called to present the face of God through love that educates, rebukes, and builds up. This is the highest form of the humanization of faith when the love of God is the central principle of all educational praxis.

Reflektif Synthesis

Theological reflection on *imago Dei* and critical pedagogy leads educators to a new understanding that true education is an act of faith. It not only grows knowledge, but also renews the heart. Education that restores the *imago Dei* makes man an active subject in God's redemptive work in the world.

Thus, the primary task of Christian education is to integrate faith, knowledge, and love into the practice of learning. The humanization of faith does not stop at spiritual discourse, but is manifested in concrete actions in dialogue, service, and solidarity with others. This is where education becomes part of God's mission (*missio Dei*): to restore creation and uphold the lost dignity of man.

Reorientation of Educational Philosophy

The crisis of humanization in the world of education demands a radical paradigm shift. Education should no longer be understood as a system of production of human resources alone, but as a process of forming the whole human person, who is intellectual, faithful, and compassionate. Freire (1970) reminds that liberating education must begin with a change of consciousness: from a competitive and mechanistic mindset to a dialogical and collaborative consciousness. Therefore, the philosophy of education needs to be reoriented from:

1. Competition to collaboration. Education should not foster competition that undermines solidarity, but rather develop cooperation as a form of love and social responsibility (Giroux, 1983).
2. Evaluate to reflection. Assessment should not only measure numbers, but must foster self-awareness, critical reflection, and character growth (Tilaar, 2002).
3. Products to human processes. The focus of education is not an instant result, but a journey of complete human formation cognitively, affectively, and spiritually (Widyatmmadja, 2005).

Thus, true education becomes a journey of faith and humanity that integrates intellect, heart, and spirituality. This philosophical shift demands structural and moral courage from education stakeholders, including churches, theological institutions, and policymakers.

Humanitarianism and Justice-Based Curriculum

Curriculum can no longer be structured solely based on market needs or global economic demands. It must be rooted in human values and social justice as a manifestation of God's love for the world. Freire (1970) calls this a curriculum of conscience that fosters the moral and social awareness of students to be responsible for the world around them.

In the context of Christian education, the curriculum should integrate the values of love, empathy, solidarity, and social justice into every subject. Every discipline, whether science,

art, or theology, needs to be directed to foster awareness that learning is part of a vocation to serve and restore the world. Tilaar (2002) proposes a transformative contextual education approach, in which the curriculum is built on local social realities. This approach is in line with the idea of community-based learning, learning that is rooted in people's life experiences. Through direct involvement in the community, students learn to live love, justice, and social responsibility as a tangible manifestation of their faith. Thus, a curriculum based on humanity and justice not only changes the content of learning, but also the direction and purpose of education itself: from mastery of material to life transformation.

Teachers as Agents of Transformation

In the paradigm of education that restores human dignity, teachers are no longer seen as absolute authority, but rather as agents of transformation and spiritual companions. Giroux (1988) referred to this role as transformative intellectual, i.e. educators who combine intellectual competence with moral and social responsibility. In the context of Christian education, this role can be understood as a pastoral educator, an educator who practices pastoral love in the teaching and learning process. Teachers are witnesses to God's love that is present through empathy, hope, and liberation. It not only teaches knowledge, but also shapes the awareness and spirituality of students.

Peter McLaren (1995) asserts that critical teachers are those who "teach for freedom", freeing the mind from dogmatism and the heart from fear. In the light of Christian theology, such a teacher lives up to Christ's calling as a shepherd who cares for His flock. Education also becomes a service of love that touches the deepest dimension of humanity. Thus, Christian educators must develop a teaching spirituality rooted in love, justice, and critical awareness. He is called to be a bridge between faith and the world, between theological reflection and social praxis.

A Theocentric and Humanistic Education Ecosystem

Educational transformation cannot happen only in the classroom. It needs an educational ecosystem that is theocentric (God-centered) and humanistic (human-centered as God's image). This ecosystem involves synergy between churches, schools, families, and communities.

The Church has a prophetic role to remind the educational world of her true vocation not to produce workers, but to form compassionate human beings. Christian schools should be learning communities that blend faith and knowledge in an atmosphere of love and freedom. Meanwhile, the family is the first space for character and spirituality education, where the values of love, responsibility, and respect for human dignity are instilled from an early age.

Tilaar (2004) mentioned the need for a new learning culture that builds a whole Indonesian human being, a human being who has faith, critical thinking, and compassion. In the context of the Christian faith, the culture of learning is a learning fellowship: a community that educates one another in the light of Christ's love. Thus, transformative Christian education must give birth to a spiritual ecology, a network of relationships between faith, education, and social life that support each other. This is where education functions not only as an institution, but as a spiritual movement to restore the dignity of man and the created world.

Ultimately, education that restores human dignity is an education that is rooted in God's love and rooted in human critical awareness. He rejects dehumanization in all its forms, both

structural, intellectual, and spiritual and restores education to its essence as a liberating service of love.

In the light of *imago Dei*, every learning process is a spiritual act to re-present the image of God that has been corrupted by an oppressive system. Thus, Christian education is called to be a pedagogy of love: a place where knowledge, faith, and humanity meet in a harmony that restores the world.

CONCLUSION

The crisis of humanization in the modern world of education shows that the current education system is often trapped in an instrumental paradigm, judging success only by numbers, rankings, and economic productivity. This orientation reduces human beings to mere objects of the system, not subjects with dignity and freedom. Through a critical pedagogical perspective, it becomes clear that such education is a form of symbolic and structural oppression that hinders the growth of human consciousness. Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and Peter McLaren emphasized that education should be a praxis of freedom, not a taming of consciousness. In this context, critical pedagogy opens up a new awareness of the need to transform education from a power-oriented system to dialogical relationships, from competition to solidarity, and from obedience to critical awareness. Education is not only about transferring knowledge, but also about forming a humanitarian consciousness that is able to resist injustice and social inequality. Thus, critical pedagogy makes a major contribution to the humanization of education by placing humans as the center and ultimate goal of the learning process.

Meanwhile, the Christian faith offers a spiritual and theological dimension to this humanization process. The concept of *imago Dei* (the image of God) affirms that every human being is created with irreplaceable divine dignity. When education forgets this dignity, it loses its true identity. Conversely, when education is based on the realization that every learner is the image of God, the learning process becomes a restorative spiritual act. The theology of *imago Dei* affirms that humanization means not only social liberation, but also spiritual reconciliation between humans, others, and God. The integration between critical pedagogy and Christian theology produces a new paradigm: education as a praxis of faith that liberates and restores human dignity. In this paradigm, teachers play the role of pastoral educators—not merely instructors, but spiritual guides who foster awareness, love, and social responsibility. Education becomes a space of encounter in love, where knowledge and faith meet in the harmony of humanity.

Thus, it can be concluded that true education is a humanizing act of faith. It is rooted in the liberating love of God, stands on social justice, and bears fruit in human solidarity. Education that restores human dignity is not just a pedagogical alternative, but a spiritual calling for the church and Christian educational institutions to present the kingdom of God in the midst of a world wounded by dehumanization. Such education not only produces intelligent human beings, but also human beings who are loving, just, and aware of their calling as the image of God in the world. In this way, critical pedagogy and *imago Dei* theology meet in one great mission: to make education a praxis of love that liberates, restores, and glorifies God through the wholeness of humanity.

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