

Affirming Human Rights against Neoliberal Anthropology: Social Aphasia And Words That Create

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Abstract

All social movements justify their actions, even if not explicitly, on the basis of the notion of human rights, just as every church and religious groups that are active in social struggles justify them in the name of a God who legitimizes human rights. In other words, the notion of human rights is at the basis of all groups' struggles for social justice. We may find different understandings of the origin of these rights - God, nature, or the human essence - but it is, or was, a presupposition of the project or utopia of modern civilization. However, with the hegemony of neoliberalism in economic and cultural globalization, the situation has changed profoundly. What was once a fundamental presupposition has become a matter of dispute? The theme of human rights has increasingly become a central issue in our political and social discussions. This means that we need, first, to better understand what is happening in the world and then to rediscuss the foundation of human rights. To this end, I will divide my

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article into three parts: a) the end of the consensus around human rights; b) the neoliberal notion of the non-existence or illusion of human rights; c) the social aphasia of the poor and its relations to the word and the revelation of Yahweh.

Keywords

human rights, neoliberalism, theology, social aphasia, poor, liberation

First of all, I want to explain briefly about the expression “social aphasia” in the title of my essay. The three terms - human rights, neoliberal anthropology, and the struggles of regular folk- are known to all, but the fourth term is somewhat strange. Aphasia is a neurological problem that weakens or impairs the ability to grasp, manipulate and use words to express one's thoughts.

It is usually the result of some brain injury. Some years ago, reading a text on Minjung Theology - which could be translated simplistically as “poor/oppressed” - I became aware of the expression “social aphasia”. In this theology, there is a fundamental concept, han, which reveals the phenomenon of psychological and physical incapacity of those who suffer exclusion and discrimination and are unable to adequately express their grief.

This incapacity to use their language properly because it was taken away by the dominant system, has to do with aphasia, dysmnnesia - a memory disorder manifested by difficulty in recalling memories - and other diseases of the mind and body. These phenomena are not only the fruit of neurological problems, but social ones as well. Hence the notion of “social aphasia” proposed by some Minjung theologians.¹

When I first read about this notion, I found it interesting, but I could not find anything else about it, so I decided to put it aside temporarily. A few months later, I suffered a stroke, which left me with no bodily sequelae, but with the problem of aphasia. Of course, my experience of the stroke and the process of recovery, both of my body and my ability to speak properly and use words, marked me very much and when I re-

1 Jin-ho Kim, “Ochlos and the Phenomenology of Wretchedness,” in Yung Suk Kim, Jin-Ho Kim (eds). *Reading Minjung Theology in the Twenty-First Century: Selected Writings by Ahn Byong-Mu and Modern Critical Responses*. (Eugene (OR): Pickwick Publications, 2013. Kindle edition), 200-214.

turned to professional activities, I first engaged in developing the notion of social aphasia, which resulted in an article I wrote on the dialogue between Minjung Theology and Liberation Theology.²

Through this introduction, I would like to take advantage of an atmosphere of dialogue and friendship to take the risk of presenting a work still under construction on the topic of social aphasia and human rights.

All social movements justify their actions, even if not explicitly, on the basis of the notion of human rights, just as every church and religious groups that are active in social struggles justify them in the name of a God who legitimizes human rights. In other words, the notion of human rights is at the basis of all groups' struggles for social justice.

We may find different understandings of the origin of these rights - God, nature, or the human essence - but it is, or was, a presupposition of the project or utopia of modern civilization. However, with the hegemony of neoliberalism in economic and cultural globalization, the situation has changed profoundly.

What was once a fundamental presupposition has become a matter of dispute or struggle in the political and cultural field. Simply put, we can say that society is dividing into two large groups: those who defend that human rights are or should be the foundations for the path of human civilization, and those who defend that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), especially the so-called social rights, are the enemies of civilization and progress.

In other words, the theme of human rights has increasingly become a central issue in our political and social discussions. When topics such as this, which have been used as a prerequisite for political and social dis-

2 Jung Mo Sung, "Minjung Theology and the Social Aphasia: A Dialogue with Liberation Theology," *Madang. Journal of Contextual Theology*. 31 (jun/2019): 3-34.

cussion, become a hotly debated and conflicting issue, it is a sign that we are living in a time of transition and of dispute over new foundations.

This means that we need, first of all, to better understand what is happening in the world and then to rediscuss the foundation of human rights. To this end, I will divide my presentation into three parts: a) the end of the consensus around human rights (HRs); b) the neoliberal notion of the non-existence or illusion of HRs; c) the social aphasia of the poor and its relations to the word.

I. The End of the Consensus on Human Rights

The starting point of the struggles of social movements with a universal perspective is the defence of the fundamental dignity of all people and, therefore, the validity and necessity of human rights. This position presupposes the recognition of what can be called a “human essence” and the possibility that human beings from different cultures are capable of knowing this truth. A fundamental characteristic of modern reason. At the same time, many of us also advocate the importance of cultural and religious pluralism. That means that pluralism also implies recognizing that there are no longer absolute truths accepted by all, and therefore also about the human rights of all people.

The recognition of cultural and religious pluralism as something positive in the evolution of human civilization leads us to the challenge of also recognizing the right of those who do not accept the modern notion of human rights, or the Christian notion that God, in creation, gave all human beings fundamental rights. At the very least, we must recognize that, with the crisis and critique of modern Western reason taken to the ex-

treme by postmodern reason, the pillars of the rational or religious foundations of human rights are broken.

Among those who defend the notion of human rights to all people, it is common to find an essentialist conception of the human being and their rights. As Manfredo Oliveira says, “As a person, a human being is the bearer of inalienable rights, which are essentially linked to the essence of the person and, as such, must be regarded as natural, that is, as a requirement of the concrete essence of the human being in his society.”³ It does not matter whether this notion of natural rights is or was founded on the Christian vision of God the Creator or modern philosophy; the most important thing is that this argument was considered by many to be irrefutable. What was most discussed was that, insofar as the human being is essentially a historical being, there would be a need to create or recognize new rights that would always be effective.

However, with the critique of modern reason, especially the cultural character of the whole notion of “human essence” and, therefore, of its rights and duties, emphasized by postmodern thought, the absolute foundation of human rights could no longer be assumed. It is interesting to note that many of the thinkers and social activists who have taken up the postmodern critique in an anti-systemic perspective - for example, the leftwing postmodernists, feminists, postcolonials and decolonials - against modern reason as being a patriarchal Eurocentric reason had and have as their goal the broadening and deepening of human rights. However, with the loss of the notion of human essence or human nature, the natural character of human rights was also lost. Now, if one cannot rationally justify the foundations of human rights having assumed the his-

³ Manfredo Araújo Oliveira, *Ética, direito e democracia*. 2nd edition (São Paulo: Paulus, 2010), 213.

torical and cultural character of all civilizations, neither can one assume as self-evident the UN Declaration of Human Rights or any declaration along these lines. With that came the need to justify or defend them. Norberto Bobbio clearly perceived, at the end of the 20th century, that:

[...] the fundamental problem in relation to human rights today is not so much that of justifying them, but that of protecting them. This is not a philosophical problem, but a political one.

It is undeniable that there is a crisis of foundations. We must recognize this, but not try to overcome it by seeking another absolute foundation to serve as a substitute for what has been lost. Our task today is much more modest, though also more difficult.⁴

He recognizes a “paradox”: one can no longer rationally provide a foundation for the UDHR, but at the same time, this declaration is necessary to maintain and/or promote free and democratic human civilization. How to maintain and extend human rights for all persons and peoples while recognizing that it is not possible to rationally ground them? The possible solution would be the creation or strengthening of a general consensus.

In other words, the challenge today would be to protect human rights by increasing the broad and general consensus. Hence, the importance of human rights education and the strengthening of human rights culture worldwide.

As we move from the field of philosophical grounding to the political field, we are in the discussion on feasibility and operability. Bobbio says: “It should be remembered that the strongest argument adopted by

⁴ Norberto Bobbio, *A Era dos Direitos*(Rio de Janeiro: Campos, 1992), 24.

reactionaries in all countries against human rights, particularly social rights, is not their lack of foundation, but their unworkability.”⁵

Firstly, Bobbio points out that the “reactionaries of all countries against human rights” had lost the cultural struggle and had no political and/or rational arguments for denying human rights. Therefore, the main argument was the non-feasibility of guaranteeing human rights, especially regarding social rights. This does not mean that they have definitely lost the cultural struggle against human rights. Moreover, recent history shows that they have succeeded or are trying to reverse it.

Secondly, it is important that we distinguish the categories of human rights that are part of the UDHR. Without going into too much detail, we can distinguish three types: civil rights, political rights, and social rights. The first is civil rights, a type of right that is considered negative because it protects people from usurpation and violence by the State, such as their freedom, their life, their property, the right not to be tortured, not to be imprisoned without due legal process, not to be treated as an inferior human being because of their race, sex, and religion, etc. The second is a positive right that guarantees political participation and the processes of formation of political will. Political democracy would be the social-political system that guarantees these rights. The third is social rights, a type of positive right that guarantees each person a share in the distribution of material goods necessary for a dignified life. The social expression of these rights would be social democracy (not to be confused here with the notion of a political party that has social democracy in its name). In general, all modern countries accept civil and political rights, excluding situations of exception - such as wars or dictatorships. As Bobbio stated, the questioning of social rights was not the lack of their foundation, but rather

⁵ Bobbio, *A era dos direitos*, 24.

the lack of economic conditions.

Faced with demands for social rights for all persons, including poor and “developing” countries, a counterargument arises, asserting that such rights are either impractical or non-existent. Of course, there were some groups that radically denied the existence of these rights, but politically they were not significant.

“In response to calls for universal social rights, encompassing individuals in both impoverished and 'developing' nations, a counterargument arises, asserting that such rights are either impractical or non-existent. Detractors contend that the feasibility of implementing these rights is questionable, casting doubt on their existence altogether.”

This argument of the non-feasibility of the realization of these rights for all was countered by the advocates of universal social rights as proposed by the myth of economic development. That is, the economic development produced by world capitalism, or by communism, would lead to the realization of these rights for all peoples.

In fact, both sides were right and wrong. Both agreed with the idea that the myth of economic development would lead to a constant increase in the level of consumption and social welfare. The “pessimists” realized that there would not be the material resources and the possible budgets to allow all people this constant increase in consumption. Therefore, they theoretically recognized the social rights of all, but denied to some sectors of society these rights in the name of non-feasibility.

On the other hand, the advocates of the universal right to social rights split into two parts. The dominant part continued the path of the myth of capitalist economic development and technological advancement. The

other group continued the path of universal rights, but criticized the identification of quantitative economic development with an increase in the quality of life. In the name of social rights for all people, they advocated the reduction of material consumption in rich countries. With this, the issue of ecology became part of the political-social and human rights struggle around the world.

This struggle for a new consensus on human rights - the struggle between the defenders of the myth of development and those of the myth of Mother Earth, or Gaia - did not have a final result. A new social actor emerges on the world stage with a radical discourse: neoliberalism.

II. Neoliberalism and the Non-Existence of Social Rights

At the same time that Bobbio and others were warning of the importance of the cultural struggle on behalf of human rights, Margaret Thatcher emerged on the global scene as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1979, and as one of the new stars to shine on the new economic-political-cultural scene after the end of the dollar-gold parity (1971) and the oil crisis. In an interview given to a Sunday newspaper in 1981, she said:

What has annoyed me about the direction of politics in the last 30 years is that it has always been towards collectivist society. People have forgotten the society of individuals. [...] It's not that I've set economic policies, it's that I've actually set a change in approach, and the change in economy is a means of changing that approach. If you change the approach, you are ac-

tually wanting to change the heart and soul of the nation. Economics is the method; the goal is to change the heart and soul.⁶

As far as our topic is concerned, Thatcher makes it clear that her aim is not simply to participate in the struggle over the feasibility or otherwise of social rights, but to completely change the direction of the discussion or change the rules of the game. As she clearly states, what she wishes to change is the direction of society, from the collective to the “society of individuals,” that is, from a society founded on social rights to a society founded only on individual rights. She is clear that to do this it is not enough to change the rationality and method of an economy, it is necessary to “change the heart and soul of the nation,” and of the world.

In other words, Thatcher, and the defenders of the neoliberal project of a new civilization want to completely change the situation, as we have analyzed in the previous section on the foundations and the defenses in favor of the consensus on human rights, especially social rights. They want a new rationality, a new social sensibility (or social insensitivity) and a new conception of the human being.

It is not possible at this point to deepen the theme of the transition from the myth of economic development of the 1950s to the 1980s - of the Keynesian paradigm - to the theological myth of the “free market” - of the Hayekian paradigm⁷(SUNG, 2018a). However, it is worth pointing out that the awarding, in 1974, of the Nobel Prize in economics to Frederick von Hayek, considered the “pope” of neoliberalism, gives neoliberal eco-

⁶ Margaret Thatcher, “Interview for Sunday,” *Times*, May 1st, 1981, <http://www.margaret-thatcher.org/document/104475>

⁷ Sung, *A idolatria do A idolatria do dinheiro e os direitos humanos dinheiro e os direitos humanos*, chapter 2.

nomics the important scientific character in political-economic struggles and in cultural struggles for a new social consensus. It is worth remembering that the fundamental anthropological-theological assumptions of the neoliberal discourse against human rights are present in the thought of Ludwig von Mises, who was Hayek's mentor and teacher.

For Mises, all those who defend social rights share an illusion: "The worst of all these illusions (delusion) is the idea that 'nature' has conferred on each individual certain rights [...] just because they were born."⁸ In other words, for neoliberals, the concept of human rights, especially social rights, does not exist. It is an illusion. All notions of human rights linked to the concept of "human essence" would simply be meaningless inventions. In simplified language much used in today's social media networks, it would just be an "invention of cultural Marxism".

All the argumentations made by defenders of human rights are based on a conception of human nature, or of a human essence, which would have within itself these fundamental rights. It presupposes the possibility of knowing, through the path of reason or through spiritual enlightenment or revelation, the characteristics of human nature and deducing these rights. For example, everyone's right to have food exists because it is the necessary condition for the realization of one's right to be alive. Within the paradigm of modern reason, no one debated the human possibility of rationally knowing one's nature. The debate was around what kind of rational theory would be able to explain it, develop its potentials and indicate what would be the most efficient and correct way to realize the "human vocation".

Mises moves the discussion from the field of reason to the field of

⁸ Ludwig von Mises, *The Anti-Capitalist Mentality* (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2008), 80.

“illusion”. He makes this reference to Freud’s classic text, *The Future of an Illusion* :

What is characteristic of illusions is that they are derived from human desires. (...) We may (...) call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfilment constitutes a prominent factor in its motivation, and in so doing we disregard its relations to reality, just as illusion itself does not value verification.⁹

For Mises, and all neoliberals, the notion of human rights would be the fruit of an illusion, a utopia, without any scientific or rational basis. The problem with their argument is that this assumption that there are no human rights in human nature is not scientific either. That is, it is also not possible to prove the non-existence of human rights in the evolution of human nature. This is because the notion of science in the modern and also in the postmodern world is reduced to the field of instrumental reason that studies the relationship between an end and the means. Even in the perspective of Karl Popper's philosophy of science, author embraced by Hayek, a theory can be considered scientific if it allows for refutation and, when refuted, can be discarded.

What Mises does is to use a pseudo-scientific argument for his cultural-political struggle against the defenders of human rights, especially social rights. I am repeating the expression, “human rights, in particular social rights,” to point out that for neoliberals, at least theoretically, they have no problem against so-called civil and political rights. For these do not necessarily lead to state intervention in the “free market”. The problem is the so-called rights of the poor. The civil rights of women, blacks, and LBGQTQ+ consumers are defended by the neoliberal state. Not be-

9 Sigmund Freud, “O futuro de uma ilusão,” in *Freud* (São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1978), 108.

cause they believe in their human rights, after all they do not believe in the notion of fundamental rights from their human nature, but because they are bearers of consumer rights, rights born of contracts in the market.

It is the conservative and authoritarian sectors of society, which are allying themselves with the neoliberal sector, that stand against human rights, especially civil rights linked to sexuality, gender relations, and the family. This neoliberal-conservative alliance between the defenders of the free market, that is, free from the interventions of the State and civil society in the face of the neoliberal market, and the defenders of the traditional patriarchal family, is against the so-called “communists,” all those who defend social rights and the Welfare State, and the victims of oppressive social relations.

In this struggle, the main enemies of humanity are the poor. As Z. Bauman (1998, p. 52):

Every type of social order produces certain fantasies of the dangers that threaten its identity. Each society, however, generates fantasies elaborated according to its own measure - according to the measure of the type of social order it strives to be. (...) The society insecure of the survival of its order develops the mentality of a besieged fortress. But the enemies besieging its walls are its own ‘inner demons’.¹⁰

And these “inner demons” of the consumer society and its members are the fears of being excluded from the game, of becoming the failed consumers. Therefore:

10 Zygmunt Bauman, *O mal-estar da pós-modernidade*(Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Ed., 1998), 52.

Increasingly, being poor is seen as a crime; impoverishment, as the product of criminal predispositions or intentions - alcohol abuse, gambling, drugs, loitering and vagrancy. The poor, far from deserving care and assistance, deserve hatred and condemnation - as the very embodiment of sin,¹¹

These questions show us that we are in a very different world from what we have seen in recent times. Before the victory of neoliberalism at the end of the 20th century and the neoliberal conversion of the heart and soul of the world, most people and social groups believed that because everyone was created by God, or by their nature, they had fundamental rights to life, liberty, and happiness. Today, no more. We live in times of an inversion of ethical and social values.

Among various social and ethical consequences of denying the fundamental human rights of all persons and peoples, I want to draw attention to the inversion of the concept of “social justice” into injustice towards the rich. Insofar as there is no notion of the laws of nature, ethical imperative or divine justice that grants all people the right of access to the material goods necessary for a dignified life, there are no criteria for the just distribution of material goods in society, and therefore no criteria for social policies in defense of the poor. With this, all social programs - from those of the Welfare State to those of the Social Assistance State - would be nothing but robbery against the rich.

In short, social, and political programs of income retribution are nothing but theft or injustice to the rich. Moreover, Hayek summarizes the inversion of the notion of social justice, or the injustice of the moral values of the Christian tradition:

11 Bauman, *O mal-estar da pós-modernidade*, 59.

the gospel of 'social justice' targets much more sordid feelings: the aversion to those who are better off, or simply envy, that most antisocial and harmful of all passions. This animosity towards great fortune, which considers it a 'scandal' that some enjoy wealth while others have basic unmet needs, and hides under the name of justice what has nothing to do with it.¹²

This inversion of the notion of justice is also accompanied by an inversion of the notion of spirituality or mysticism. As Thatcher said, the conversion of the economy is not enough, it is necessary to change the "soul". Among many quotations on this conversion advocated by neo-liberal thinkers, I want to quote an economist who was fundamental at the time of the military dictatorship in Brazil. The minister of economy Roberto Campos wrote: "Modernization presupposes a cruel mystique of performance and the cult of efficiency."¹³

They recognize that neoliberal policies are cruel, but they believe, they have faith, that the market demands the maximization of economic efficiency calculated in terms of profit. However, since the human species has a natural instinct against cruelty to its fellow human beings, they advocate a new mystique, the "good news" of the cruel mystique of the free market.

In short, as Thatcher says with honesty, "Economics is the method; the goal is to change the heart and soul." In addition, by changing the heart and soul of society, neoliberalism wants to consolidate a new anthropology that denies the existence and therefore the recognition of human rights and the human dignity of all people.

12 Friedrich A. von Hayek, *Direito, Legislação e Liberdade: uma nova formulação dos princípios liberais de justiça e economia política*. Vol. II (São Paulo: Visão, 1985), 120.

13 Roberto Campos, *Além do cotidiano*. 2nd edition (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1985), 54.

III. The Social Aphasia of the Poor and the Word

As we said above, we are in a political and cultural struggle for the public recognition of human rights, rather than in the field of the philosophical struggle about the theoretical foundation of the human essence. But, at the same time, we must be clear that we cannot win this struggle without rational or reasonable arguments. For, the powerful already have the “argument” of political and economic force, while it is the poor and weak who need rational arguments, the weapon of “truth,” to overcome the power of military force and wealth. And, as we said before, modern reason, with its notion of the “essence of the human being” as the foundation of human rights is no longer acceptable. So too are critical thoughts that have broken with modern reason but kept the presupposition of human rights as given - for example postcolonial or decolonial theory. We need to re-found the notion of human dignity, human rights and, from this, the importance of policies to defend social rights and the environment.

This is a huge challenge for all of us who are committed to defending the lives of vulnerable and oppressed people. In this final part of my presentation, I want to propose some provisional ideas that are still in the process of construction.

As there is no “metaphysical” truth about human rights to be discovered, we need to debate this issue starting with the arguments of those who defend the non-existence of these rights. Let us resume Mises' statement: “The worst of all these illusions is the idea that 'nature' has conferred on each individual certain rights [...] just because they were born.”¹⁴ He may be right that nature has not conferred on each individual certain fundamental rights just because they were born, but this does not mean

¹⁴ Mises, *The Anti-Capitalist Mentality*, 80.

that there are no fundamental human rights. The fact that science does not detect and prove these rights within the workings of nature does not mean that these rights do not or cannot exist, for we are dealing with two different levels of “reality”. The discussion on nature revolves around understanding its structure and functioning as a system. Whereas when we talk about rights, we are dealing with a second order reality - in the realm of ethics and law - which is the result of human and social interaction. If we do not differentiate this, we would still not have overcome Aristotle's argument that nature created two types of human beings: free and slaves.

In other words, we cannot prove that nature has given each human being some fundamental rights; but, at the same time, this negative argument also does not prove that there are no such rights. Because we are in a discussion outside the scope of the natural sciences or the modern economic sciences, which reduce their discussions only on the relationship between the means and the given economic ends. For the modern economic sciences, the question about the existence or non-existence of human rights is meaningless. It is like the question about the existence or non-existence of God: one cannot definitively prove existence or non-existence.

The neoliberal argument is that there are no fundamental human rights given by nature because there are no rights without contract, and, crucially, there is no valid contract outside market relations. Which means that there would be nothing valid apart from the social-economic system that recognizes individual rights. In other words, it is the absolutization of the neoliberal “free” market, the negation of human transcendence in the face of the laws of the market.

The notion of fundamental human rights of all human beings presupposes a transcendence, a beyond, in front of the dominant social-eco-

conomic system. Without this transcendence that relativizes the free market system, there would be no foundation for human rights. If there is no notion of a human subject beyond the human being understood as a subject within a social system - a social actor or agent, with its social functions, role and place, and social identity - there is no way to justify human rights that are above the rights and duties established by the dominant system. Thus, there would only be the rights and duties of citizens (civil law) and of consumers and owners (market laws), but not human rights.

The central question, then, is: how, within the dominant social system that denies the rights of the poor and of non-citizens, is the transcendence of the human being discovered? To contribute to this discussion, I want to present some ideas starting from the text of the book of Exodus, 3:6-9, the calling of Moses, which is one of the fundamental myths of Western civilization that presents us with a key to grounding human rights.

At the beginning of the dialogue between God and Moses, God introduces himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and says: "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters" (v. 7). Now, who are these people that God is referring to? Actually, it is a group of slaves who cry out and suffer, but they do not constitute themselves as a people. After all, slaves are only slaves, objects of property of their masters, instruments of production. Moreover, slaves do not cry out to a god, for in the ancient world there is no god dedicated to hearing the cries or screams of slaves. Slaves scream and cry out, because of their sufferings, but no one hears them. Of course, their foremen and masters hear their cries, just as they hear the barking of wolves or dogs, but they do not hear them to establish dialogue or for the recognition of their humanity. In this system, these slaves are not part of the "human world," they are not. And the slaves themselves

know their place in the world organized by the gods and ruled by pharaohs, kings, or lords.

In this context, a different God appears who calls the slaves “my people”. This is fundamental. Slaves do not “naturally” constitute a people, not in clans or tribes. It is this strange God who calls them “my people,” who creates them as a people. Just as God created out of chaos a good and habitable order (Gen 1), the God of Moses created the people of Israel out of the afflictions and cries of slaves. This passage from the social condition of slaves - a social function and place - to that of a people, takes place in the recognition of their sufferings by a transcendent God, that is, a God who is beyond the dominant worldview. But this recognition is not a description of what exists, of what is, but rather as a possibility, as a human vocation, that is, as a call from God to freedom, that is, to liberation from slavery in Egypt (v.8). In other words, the call to be a people arises at the same time as the vocation to freedom, to liberation from a situation of slavery and oppression. It is in this context and experience that this human being called Moses discovers or is revealed to him the difference between (a) the human being as social actor-subject situated in his social place, acting as an actor who has his role and function (master or slave, man, or woman, rich or poor etc.) - and (b) the human being as transcendent subject, beyond all social roles and functions.

In order not to create misunderstanding, I want to make it clear that I am using this concept of “subject” not in the modern sense that describes the subject that exists, acts, and knows, but rather as a subject that is absent, as a transcendence within real life,¹⁵ which reveals the “vocation,”

15 Franz Hinkelammert, *El retorno del sujeto reprimido*(Bogotá: Ed. Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2002), chapter 11, Jung Mo Sung, *The Subject, Capitalism and Religion: Horizons of Hope in Complex Society*(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Chapter 3.

the ultimate meaning of human life: freedom and mutual recognition in the community. (This is a difficult theme that is beyond the limits of this article, so let us return to the theme of the Exodus).

The fact of discovering oneself as a subject, beyond all possibilities of social functions and roles, does not mean that human beings can free themselves from the condition embodied in a systemic social context. Human individuals only survive insofar as they are situated within a social system acting as a social actor, capable of understanding their roles, acting according to their functions and places. The notion of subject arises when the individual or group rebels against the reduction of their human condition to an oppressive social role, for example that of a slave or a marginalized and exploited woman. It is here, in the cry, in the outcry, that the human being experiences the taste of being a subject. However, it is still an unripe taste.

The emergence of a new experience, that of the affirmation of being a subject, demands a language capable of expressing this way of being for oneself and for others. The problem is that the language learned within the cultural system is not appropriate for that individual to express his or her innovative and liberating experience. The language of the poor and dominated is appropriate to their subjection to the dominant system, but not to their longing and hope for liberation. Thus, without the emergence or creation of a new language this experience of shouting-rebellion will be interpreted as something evil, as a diabolical, heretical, or sinful temptation, or as a criminal or chaos-creating rebellion.

In this moment of tension between (a) the outcry, which breaks the reduction of the human being to their subaltern and oppressive social place and function, and (b) the language apprehended in the construction of their identity as subaltern, as oppressed, it is that (c) the possibility of a

rupture and the recognition of their condition as subject, as a human being with fundamental dignity and human rights emerges.

To better understand the importance of this rupture, in the first place it is necessary to recall here Wittgenstein's thesis: the limits of our language denote the limits of our world. The struggle to transcend the absolutized, naturalized world presupposes breaking with the rules of the language game and going through the phase of "social aphasia," realizing that there is confusion between what one wants to say, and the words used to speak. This confusion may occur in the person who wants to say something, but is not able to explain correctly what they want to express, and realizes by themselves that they are having this difficulty.

On the other hand, individuals who have undergone the experience of becoming subjects (experience of "subjectivity," quality of being a subject, different from the modern notion of subjectivity, and the role of being an actor or agent in social and political movements¹⁶) and are already able to communicate within their community their new understanding of themselves, are not understood correctly by the majority of people. Usually, the people interpret them with the dominant grammar and culture (including here progressive intellectuals). I think that this is what happens, for example, with the popular communities of the Pentecostal churches in their origin with new languages and experiences of "speaking in tongues".

Secondly, for this new language and new understanding of the world, the present one and the one to be, to be recognized as correct it is necessary that other people also recognize them. The construction of a new identity presupposes recognition by other people, that is, mutual recognition. For the slave to see himself or herself as a human being, an-

16 Sung, *The Subject, Capitalism and Religion*, chapter 3.

other human being must recognize them as such.

Thirdly, for this rupture of the worldview to occur, it is necessary that these people break with the dominant system and go beyond, transcending the existing world, towards the future that is not yet clear. This implies the dimension of betting/faith and an active hope. In this movement, it must be clear that this struggle implies participating in a social system, within which people must assume their functions and social roles. This means that the process of subjecthood, of becoming a subject, only happens in dialectical tension with the social role.

Fourth, the movement towards a new social order in which all people are recognized as bearers of human dignity and therefore of fundamental human rights, is based in a last instance on the discovery of a God (the ultimate criterion) who creates the new world where the life of the human being is the ultimate criterion. In the theology/myth of the New Testament, this appears clearly with the statement that God became incarnate as a slave so that God might become as human (Phil 2:6); to reveal that before God, all of us humans are equal, different in social functions, but all in the same dignity.

III. Final remarks

Neoliberalism is more than an economic ideology; it is more than a new rationality of the world; it is a proposal of a new civilization that wants to change the heart and soul of humanity (M. Thatcher). Therefore, neoliberalism changes the juridical discourse, the notion of the human being, creates a new theology of the economy and expands the spirituality of the market.

Faced with this situation, we need to enter into the struggle between the Words that create new worlds. The neoliberals have created a discourse that denies the existence of human rights in order to deny the conditions necessary for the poor and excluded of the world to live with dignity. Against this world that is erasing the modern foundations of human rights, we must recover the “Word of God,” a creative word, that makes exist what it enunciates: human rights.

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