
Artigos

“Poor in Spirit”: Economy in the Gospel of Matthew

Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli¹

*“Só um mundo novo nós queremos:
o que tenha tudo de novo e nada de mundo.”*

*[Only a new world we want:
One that has everything of new and nothing of world].
(Mia Couto)*

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta um importante assunto para a reflexão teológica latino-americana. Seu primeiro movimento é uma incursão na reflexão sobre pobreza. Apresenta brevemente algumas das principais percepções de pobreza sociologicamente, como a modernidade mudou a concepção de pobreza e progressivamente criou uma percepção negativa do pobre. Mostra também como isso nos afeta no Brasil e quais os efeitos da compreensão espiritual e neoliberal de pobreza para as lutas por justiça e libertação. O segundo movimento parte da noção de justiça, apresentado pelo evangelho de Mateus, como o modelo de relação, também

¹ Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli is a Lutheran lay theologian. He has his master's degree in practical theology and his doctorate in systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology in São Leopoldo/Brazil (www.est.edu.br). At the moment, Buttelli is doing his post-doctoral research reflecting on intercultural and decolonial basis for religion and theology and their participation in public life, with scholarship from CAPES. Buttelli is currently lecturer at the University of São José (www.usj.edu.br), at the faculty of religion's sciences. Activist in solidarity with Palestine, being one of the coordinators of Kairós Palestina Brasil (www.kairosbrasil.com). felipebuttelli@yahoo.com.br

econômica, exigido por Cristo para o seu povo e todo o mundo. O artigo apresenta também alguns dos principais aspectos que são exigidos para a relação da justiça no mundo contemporâneo, especialmente no hemisfério Sul, para vermos qual é nossa contribuição para que o “novo” possa emergir: relações econômicas, relações culturais, relações políticas, relações sexuais, relações de gênero e, por último, relações epistemológicas e teológicas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Pobreza. Justiça. Libertação. Evangelho de Mateus.

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with an important subject for the Latin American theological reflection. Its first movement is an incursion on the reflection about poverty. It briefly checks some of the main perceptions of poverty in a sociological way. How modernity changed the understanding of poverty and progressively created a negative perception of the poor. How it affected us in Brazil and what the effects of the neoliberal and spiritual understanding of poverty to the struggles for justice and liberation. The second movement will drink from the notion of justice, strongly presented in the gospel of Matthew, as the model of relation, also economic, demanded by Christ for his people and for the whole world. Some of the main aspects which demand us a plight for justice in the contemporary world, especially experienced in the Southern hemisphere will be presented, in order to see what is the contribution we can make to help the “new” to emerge in: economic relations, cultural relations, political relations, sexual relations, gender relations and lastly epistemological and theological relations.

KEYWORDS

Poverty. Justice. Liberation. The Gospel of Matthew.

The theme suggested for this paper was always very important for the Latin American theological reflection, being poverty and economy at the very basis of the initial reflections of the liberation theology. In this sense, it is challenging to represent a whole theological tradition that

was constructed on the endemic problem of poverty, necessarily related with the economic global relations of the XIXth and XXth centuries and the effects of them for Latin America. My purpose is, for this reason, not to make a presentation of this entire and plural theological reflection², but to construct a little bit further with some contemporary references, analyzing from the actual situation experienced in Latin America, with a Lutheran voice, which constitutes my own type of approach. As the Mozambican writer Mia Couto reflects, describing the answer of João Passarinheiro [something like John, the birds caregiver] to the question of what would be his own race. John says, “My race is myself, each person is an individual humanity, each person is a race, Mr. policemen”³.

The contribution I want to bring is meant in a different world in relation to that which was the contextual reference for the first liberation theologians. It is a “world”, mainly being offered or imposed on us as a global totalitarianism, which constitutes most of the contexts we will refer here as our own. Recalling the mentioned epigraph of Mia Couto, if someone asks me what I want, or if someone asks the thousands of protestors and demonstrators who are taking the streets and marching for a different world in the Occupy Movements, the outraged in Spain and Europe, the Arab Spring or in the Brazilian Autumn, what world do we want? We will say: “Only a new world we want: One that has everything of new and nothing of world”. This *new*, which is not this world being imposed on us, is qualitatively different from the “world”. It is almost an antithesis of the *world*. New is not the world, the world is not the new. As Rudolf Bultmann once said, *it is already, but not yet*. It is a sign of the kingdom of God. It is justice.

² In order to point to some important references on this debate it is possible to refer to: GUTIERREZ, Gustavo. *Teologia da Libertação*. Perspectivas. 4^a ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1983 (1970) [A Theology of Liberation]; in the 80's and 90's SUNG, Jung Mo. *Teologia e Economia*. Repensando a Teologia da Libertação e Utopias. São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2008 [Theology and Economics, Rethinking Liberation Theology and the Utopias]; and from a Lutheran perspective, ALTMANN, Walter. *Lutero e Libertação*. Releitura de Lutero em perspectiva latino-americana. São Leopoldo/São Paulo: Sinodal/Ática, 1994.

³ “– A minha raça sou eu mesmo. A pessoa é uma humanidade individual. Cada homem é uma raça, senhor polícia”. COUTO, Mia. *Cada Homem é uma raça*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2013.

This presentation will have then two main movements. The first of them is an incursion on the reflection about poverty: How is it seen in the Bible in a general glance and how is it perceived by Matthew. Mostly, what is this concept of spiritual poverty. Is it necessarily related with the economy? What is the problem and the promises of this assimilation? Afterwards, we will briefly check some of the main perceptions of poverty in a sociological way. How modernity – one of the historic realities constituted also by the Protestant Reformation – changed the understanding of poverty and progressively created a negative perception of the poor. How it affected us in Brazil and what the effects of the neoliberal and spiritual understanding of poverty to the struggles for justice and liberation.

The second movement will drink from the notion of justice, strongly presented in the gospel of Matthew, as the model of relation, also economic, demanded by Christ for his people and for the whole world. Some of the main aspects which demand us a plight for justice in the contemporary world, especially experienced in the Southern hemisphere will be presented, in order to see what is the contribution we can make to help the “new” to emerge in: economic relations, cultural relations, political relations, sexual relations, gender relations and lastly epistemological and theological relations.

Poor in the Bible

Francisco Orofino, a liberation theologian who works with popular reading of the Bible suggests that the Bible is like a “storeroom”⁴, in which we can find all type of different things. If we do not consider the plurality of perceptions of narratives, the different contexts, the political views that compete with each other in the canonical construction of the text we will possibly sort out of this room the perceptions which are more suitable for us. The Lutheran biblical scholar Mercedes García

⁴ OROFINO, Francisco. A Categoria *Pobre* na Bíblia: permanência e mudanças. In: OLIVEIRA, Pedro A Ribeiro de. *Opção pelos Pobres no Século XXI*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2011, p. 123-138.

Bachmann, however, points to the fact that the plurality of voices and interpretation is exactly what constitutes the identity of our plural Lutheran communion, which still confesses the *One Faith*, but differently:

One faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, yes, but that faith is certainly mediated by our human reality and therefore, is colored by different experiences. And if we deny this variety we only try to impose them, as the style of the builders of Babel, a fortress that will not allow us to express the variety of what we are⁵.

In this “Storeroom”, as Orofino says, we can find in the Old Testament mainly two notions of poverty. A notion constructed before the Babylonian Exile and a notion constructed after it. The pre-Exilic notion was constructed by the prophets and is, on the words of Gustavo Gutierrez a “scandal state”⁶. Many words are used to refer to *the poor* and they are mainly not neutral, as the less used Hebrew concept of “*Rash*”, but contain a critical meaning. It is used in a critical approach to who is sitting in power and allow it to happen to part of the people of God, as the concepts of “*ébyôn*”, “*dal*”, “*anaw*”. This last one, “*anaw*” can also be used to refer to our condition before God. So that we can say that we are “*anaw*” in front of God, it means humble, we do not have anything to offer, we can only receive. The concept “*anaw*” can, then be used in two ways, as a poor that does not have the minimal conditions of life and the humble person that is before God. The concept of “*anaw*” is translated to the Greek version of the Bible, *The Septuaginta*, as “*ptochós*”.

This Hebrew concept of “*anaw*”, translated to Greek as “*ptochós*” is the Old Testament version to describe “poor in spirit”, which is not a good translation to English, once it leads to an understanding of spiritual poverty, while it actually refers to a positive condition of our situation before God. We have to identify ourselves as “Poor in Spirit” in order to receive the spiritual “richness” that God can offer us through “the

⁵ BACHMANN, Mercedes García. Elements for a Biblical Hermeneutics in Dialogue with our Lutheran Identity. In: LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION. *Memoria – Conferencia de Liderazgo – Iglesias Membro de la FLM in Latino America y el Caribe*. Florianópolis, 2012, p. 140-141.

⁶ GUTIEREZ, 1983, p. 238.

wonderful change”, as Luther defines the work of Jesus Christ for us. As Hans Joachim Iwand described⁷, Luther points to our need to recognize ourselves as poor, as sinners, as destitute of any credit before God, so that Christ can take our sinner condition to the cross and give us, by His grace, the condition of justified before God. So we are only justified once we recognize ourselves as “*anaw*” or “*ptochós*”, which is not necessarily a material or economic condition.

According to this first biblical, prophetic and mainly pre-exilic notion, poverty is a scandal that reflects the broken relations in our societies, a broken solidarity among people which represent also the broken relation between we and God. In this sense, the material and economic poverty is a sign, an indication of our sinner condition, once the reality of poverty denounced by prophets is incompatible with the kingdom of God, the kingdom of justice. In this sense, to live out as justified people, recognizing our spiritual poverty and humbly embracing the grace of God, means necessarily also to struggle against the economic and material poverty, as it threatens the reality of the kingdom of God. To become spiritually poor before God will necessarily mean to struggle against any type of injustice.

The second notion of poverty, constructed after the Babylonian exile, as Orofino describes, understands poverty as a retribution. It means, if someone is poor, he/she is it because of his/her sins, failures. Richness, health, descent and land were blessings for that people that keep on living according to the law, who practice the pure and perfect worship to God. Poverty was a retribution to people who were not accomplishing what God wants for us. From a social and collective perception of poverty denounced by the prophets as a social responsibility, after the Exile poverty was an individual condition disconnected from the whole society. For this reason, until the time of Jesus, the poor were considered impure, marginalized and excluded from the society, and they could not return to the social and communal life until they became pure again and started to live according to the law.

In the gospel of Matthew, which is the object of our consultation, the notion of “spiritual poverty” appears in the Sermon of The Mount,

⁷ IWAND, Hans Joachim. *A Justiça da Fé*. Exposição conforme a doutrina de Lutero. São Leopoldo: Editora Sinodal, 1981, p. 97-98.

in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mathew 5.3)⁸. The Greek concept used by Matthew is “*ptochós*”. As many hermeneuts and biblical scholars emphasized, the Gospel of Matthew was written to a mostly Jewish-Christian community in Syria after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (70 CE), on the 80’s or 90’s⁹. It is clear that the writer of the gospel, which is unknown according to the contemporary stand of research, had a profound knowledge about the Jewish law and faith, assuming that also the readers of the Palestinian community would deal properly with the Jewish concepts and religious obligations. In this sense, Matthew knew both perceptions of poverty: the pre-exilic, the notion of the prophets that poverty is a scandal to the communion among the people of God and with God; and also the second perception, post-exilic, according to which poverty is a retribution to sinners who do not follow the law and are impure.

According to the literature, the main objective of the gospel of Matthew is not only to address to the condition of Jewish-Christian communities, reaffirming the Jewish values present on the basis of Christian faith, but also indicating that Christ accomplished the law in perfection and surpasses, overcomes the law in itself¹⁰. Matthew points to the transition of the message of Christ and His work in itself from Israel to the whole world, as Schnelle affirms¹¹. The framework of the gospel, starting with an inclusive and plural introduction (genealogy includes other peoples, three kings come from the pagan world) and finishing with the Great Commission (Mathew 28 18-20), shows that Matthew wanted to emphasize that Jesus Christ came not only to accomplish the law, but also to overcome the Jewish law.

In this sense, we can say that for Matthew the notion of spiritual poverty (*anaw* in Hebrew and *Ptochós* in Greek) includes both realities

⁸ I am using here the New International Version of the Bible.

⁹ LOHSE, Eduard. *Introdução ao Novo Testamento*. 4ª ed. São Leopoldo: Editora Sinodal, 1984, p. 145-154; GOPPELT, Leonhard. *Teologia do Novo Testamento*. 2º Vol. São Leopoldo/Petrópolis: Editora Sinodal/Vozes, 1988, p. 472-493; SCHNELLE, Udo. *Teologia do Novo Testamento*. Santo André: Academia Cristã/Paulus, 2010, p. 555-596.

¹⁰ LOHSE, 1984, p. 153.

¹¹ SCHNELLE, 2010, p. 565.

identified by Orofino: The prophetic dimension of denouncing the scandal of the poverty as something that separates us from God and also overcoming the legalistic approach which became stronger after the Exile, according to which the poor is a sinner and deserves to be excluded. For this reason, Jesus Christ came to preach and to live among the people considered sinners and were marginalized (Mathew 9.10-13). And the solidarity with the poor was even more important than the law as we see Jesus picking heads of grains with the disciples on the saturday, what was forbidden by the law (Mathew 12.1-2). It becomes even clearer when we look to the Old Testament and search for the usage of *Anaw* or *ptochós* in this perception of spiritual poverty, evocated only in Matthew 5.3. As Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the founders of liberation theology, identified there is a clear relation between “poor in spirit”, or *anaw*, or *ptochós* in Matthew and in the prophet Zephaniah 2.3: “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord’s anger”. Gutierrez sees the two notions of poverty getting together in this formulation of Zephaniah, which probably inspired Matthew. For this reason, I want to emphasize that I opt, with Gustavo Gutierrez¹², for understanding the “poor in spirit” in both senses: As someone which is humble before God and dependent on God’s grace to be justified, as Luther understands our human condition, but also as the poor of the land which struggle for justice and against the scandal of the poverty, as Matthew recognizes on the same Beatitudes pericope: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Mathew 5.6).

Poverty in Latin American context

The so called category of the poor has changed significantly during the history in the social sciences and also in the theological reflection. It was always a pertinent issue in Latin America, as we notice that the colonial history is the history of the construction of poverty, so that others could live in the wealth. It is always the history of the expansion of the

¹² GUTTIERREZ, 1983, p. 245.

meaning of poverty, once the poor in the colonial history are not only the economically impoverished, but also the black slaves, destituted of humanity, rights and living conditions, as much as the indigenous people, who were deprived from their land, from their symbols, religions, and social arrangements. Poor were also the women, who were progressively locked in the private spaces and suffered all kind of violence; poor are the homosexuals (the LGBT community) who were condemned by a patriarchal and homophobic society. This history of a colonial, Western, modern and capitalistic society is the history of the poverty in Latin America, with which we are still struggling.

The Brazilian sociologist Sarah Silva Telles helps us to understand briefly the different perceptions of poverty which were used in different periods of our colonial history¹³. The first meaning that is related to the modern history was already present in the XIVth century, while the poor were that people living without the minimal standard of life and maintenance. They depended on the rich people, who could practice the Christian piety. There was a symbolic relation between both extremities of society, having the poor people an important role on keeping the religious and symbolic balance on the late middle age European society.

On the reformation, Luther had an understanding that God chooses the poor, the marginalized and the humble to reveal Godself. As Altmann points out, this perception is clear on the Lutheran concept of *absonditas sub contrario*, which means that God, also in Jesus Christ, chooses the weak, the marginalized, the crazy, and the poor to show the power of God's love¹⁴. However, the main inheritance of the Reformation for the constitution of the Modern society was the Calvinist theology of predestination. As widely known, Max Weber identified on the Calvinist piety the ethical behavior which was able to develop the spirit of capitalism¹⁵. According to this fundamental perception, wealth and economic improvement in life were results of an ascetic social behaviour, which has

¹³ TELLES, Sarah Silva. A Categoria *pobre*: o que tem a dizer a sociologia? In: OLIVEIRA, Pedro A Ribeiro de. *Opção pelos Pobres no Século XXI*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2011, p. 29-57.

¹⁴ ALTMANN, 1994, p. 50.

¹⁵ WEBER, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London/New York: Routledge, 1992.

as center of the life an ethic of work. To be poor, on this new Modern society, was a result of ones own failure in becoming more prosperous. Like in the post-exilic perception of poverty, wealth and material success were blessings of God which could demonstrate only the elected people, the predestinated.

During the industrial revolution, the poverty was seeing as an individual course, resulting from a sinner condition of someone who did not behaved according to the ethic of work. Poverty was disconnected from the whole social fabric and the relations implicated by this triumphant capitalism. Only in the XIXth century, when a social crisis erupted in Europe was that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels interpreted the social misery of a huge part of European (and also other pre-industrialized countries) population as part of the socioeconomic relations that sustained the Capital.

In the social sciences on the XIXth century, two main thesis were constructed to explain the reasons for poverty and inequality in the Modern West: The first can be identified in the words of Alexis de Tocqueville, on his work on “Democracy in America”, to whom, in the Modern liberal civilization, all the people are born equal, with the same chances and conditions. In this perception the world, once it becomes modern, will overcome the inequality. For him, poverty was a result of human activity, but was also a relative concept, as people can perceive it differently according to every countries patterns. On the same tradition, more recently, we identify the influence of Georg Simmel, that identified the social assistance to the poor as a way to keep the social *status quo* as it is, without any significant structural change. Social assistance is a way for the society not to see the ugliness of the poverty, says Simmel.

The other main current follows the influence of Karl Marx, identifying the social conflict on the basis of society between the social classes, including the workers classes and the owners of the capital and of the means of production. Poverty is the condition for the accumulation of capital. More recently, Karl Polanyi made an important contribution, observing the relationship between economy, culture and society. Poverty is not a natural fact, but its significant increase was related with the establishment of the self-regulated market. For Polanyi, it was fundamental what he called the “discovery of the society” and its necessary intervention on regulating the “self-regulating market”.

These two main lines and ways to understand poverty and its reasons are related with the two faces of the same modern coin: The liberalism/capitalism and the socialist/communist alternatives of the Cold War. As both social theories pressured Western societies, the most reasonable solution found, and mainly applied on European countries, was the so called Welfare State. The Welfare State was established in order not to affect the increasing logic of the Capital and its demand for self-regulation and the strong role of the state on guaranteeing the minimal conditions of life for the most vulnerable in society. But after the fall of the Berliner Wall, during the establishment of the global neoliberal economic market, the Welfare state became progressively an expensive concept, hindering national economies to grow and subsist in the global economic market. As the Welfare State was slowly dismantling and neoliberal capitalism was prevailing, the social and economic inequality increased considerably, becoming the rich even richer and the poor even poorer, without assistance from the State.

After this long incursion, one might ask how is it related with Brazil and Latin America? Latin American social scientists identify the history of the modern West with the colonial history, with the history of the expansion and universalization of Europe, Modernity and Capitalism¹⁶. In Brazil, the history of poverty was from the beginning identified with the clash of civilizations, races, languages, and peoples, in a framework of political and military domination. So, the poor in Brazil – and also in Latin America – had always a color and a different culture. So for the first sociologists, as Joaquim Nabuco, Gilberto Freyre, among others, the establishment of Brazilian society was intimately related with racism (slavery), patriarchy (sexual abuse, miscigenation), and an agrarian economy with landlordism and agricultural monoculture for exportation.

There was no need for education, for state investment on these black, indigenous, and “mestizo” farmworkers, living under slave conditions. For a long time, the main understanding was that these people were culturally inferior and for this reason their social and cultural inhabits were responsible for their poor condition. This perception just changed in the

¹⁶ MIGNOLO, Walter; ARTURO, Escobar. *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

1950's, when Florestan Fernandes and Antônio Candido denounced the class domination and the impossibility for this people to ascend socially. The social prejudice was interwoven with cultural racism.

Since the 1960's, United States of America and the International Organizations propagated the theory of modernization and development. The way to overcome poverty was to develop and the industrialization was the necessary step to improve progressively life conditions for the poor. The urbanization of the big economic centers became the solution, bringing masses of people from the land to work around the factories in urban areas. This free world of competition offered the dream of social mobility. If someone does not get out of his/her poor condition, it is due to his/her cultural behaviour, psychological and cultural aspects that hinder his/her ability to improve the life. In this specific part of the history of poverty in Brazil, became stronger the idea of a "culture of poverty". This culture includes different attitudes, apathy, fatalism, lack of social participation, non-integration on the increasing entrepreneur culture. In one word, it was summarized as "poor in spirit".

And this is a very important part of our reflection, because again religion and especially the Christian spirituality was used to victimize the poor. The notion of Matthew 5.3 that the "poor in spirit" will be redeemed in the kingdom of heaven was a promise for the future, once these people in the social life are condemned to live in poverty. They can trust in this expectation that even if they live a miserable life, suffering under any exploiting condition, they must resist in this life, because God is preparing a kingdom for that people living in poverty. The poor people were poor in spirit, it means, they do not have the cultural, the psychological, the social conditions to prevail in the society. It is a divine or a natural aspect, there is nothing we can do for them. But in the other side, a prosperity theology became the counter-face of this reality. If some were born to be poor, and this is their fault for not having the "spirit" that would enable them to prosper, some other people are elected by God to prevail in this world, economically, politically, military, culturally, etc. Poverty and wealth were again not related with economics and social machinery, but naturalized and blessed by Gods decision. It is on the roots of the Manifest Destiny, a strong belief in United States, that was exported to other elites in the world. Some are born to dominate and some are born to be dominated.

Huge parts of societies and societies in itself were collectively marginalized. Progressively, the individual notion of poverty was projected to poor masses. Internally in Brazil we can identify the dehumanization of the poor, of the masses living in slums and in suburbs. These masses are rapidly identified as the reason for the violence in the urban areas (criminalization of social movements as Landless Movements, etc.). The poor worker who migrated from the land to work as cheap labor on the factories became the criminals who threaten the security of the wealthy areas of the cities, in which they are supposed to work. Poor people are now dangerous people, and for that reason, the State must be equipped with security tools. This is mainly the reason for the institutional violence against poor, black, mestizo young population and also against the social movements which struggle collectively for their right. State repression is in the order of the day. If I give the Brazilian reality as an example, I am not suggesting this is only our way to deal with poverty. This pattern of relation, the criminalization of poor masses is also projected in the relation between North and South Hemisphere, with progressive measures to prevent migrations and a whole bureaucracy and State control of the movement of people. As the international economic relations became every time more free of state regulations, the global movement of people is prevented with walls, fences, and weapons.

It is crucial for us, as we go deeper in the comprehension of the gospel of Matthew that the notion of “Poor in Spirit” does not support the victimization of the poor. Returning to the epigraph of this presentation, this is not the “new” that we want. We do not want this “world”. After recognizing many faces of the poverty and their social reasons, we bring back the concept of “poor in spirit” of Matthew and its double meaning, as described by Gustavo Gutierrez:

The poverty is a scandalous stand. The spiritual poverty is an attitude of openness to God, of infant spirituality. The elucidation of these two meanings of the term poverty disentangles us the way and allows us to follow towards a best comprehension of the Christian witness of poverty, due to a third meaning: poverty as commitment of solidarity and protest¹⁷.

¹⁷ GUTIERREZ, 1983, p. 245. “A pobreza é um estado escandaloso. A pobreza espiritual é uma atitude de abertura a Deus, de infância espiritual. O esclarecimento destas

Justice in Latin America

Besides the whole discussion of the social sciences on poverty, the Latin American liberation theologies – so, in plural, to emphasize the diversity of discourses that emerged since de 1960's – have been reflecting and widening the notion of poverty¹⁸. Basically, from its beginnings, poor were recognized mostly as the economic impoverished masses, normally in dialogue with the Marxist concepts. However, from the 1980s onwards, liberation theologies started to recognize that the poor have a skin color, have an ethnic difference as the case of indigenous and black people, have other culture. A strong reflection emerged from the feminist tradition, so that the poor had a gender and latter also a sexual orientation.

The struggle of the liberation theologies became inclusive and the construction of a notion of another possible world includes many different struggles for justice in different aspects of reality. Theologically, the concept of justice is always more suitable to describe what is the promise of God and what describes its kingdom. Justice is being adopted widely in the theological field as a concept that reveals properly what God wants for Gods creation, as recently recognized by the Gender Justice Policy of Lutheran World Federation:

duas acepções do termo pobreza desembaraça-nos o caminho e permite-nos prosseguir rumo a melhor compreensão do testemunho cristão de pobreza, graças a uma terceira acepção: a pobreza como compromisso de solidariedade e protesto.” (own translation)

¹⁸ DUSSEL, E. *Teologia da Libertação – Um panorama do seu desenvolvimento*. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1999; REGIDOR, José Ramos. Libertação e alteridade: 25 anos de história da Teologia da Libertação. *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira*. Vol./No. 225, 1997; VIGIL, José Maria. Mudança de paradigma na Teologia da Libertação. *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira*. no. 230, 1998; RIBEIRO, Cláudio de Oliveira. *A teologia da libertação morreu?* Petrópolis: Vozes, 2003; RICHARD, Pablo. A Teologia da Libertação na nova conjuntura: temas e novos desafios para a década de noventa. *Estudos Teológicos*. Vol. 31/3, 1991, p. 206-220; MARASCHIN, Jaci C. A teologia da libertação torna-se adulta. *Estudos da Religião*. Vol./No. 6, 1989. BOFF, Leonardo (org.). *A teologia da libertação: balanço e perspectivas*. São Paulo: Ática, 1996; TEIXEIRA, Faustino Luiz Couto. *Teologia da libertação: novos desafios*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 1991.

Among faith-based organizations (FBOs) and churches the concept of justice interfaces with biblical and theological understandings. Justice is spelled out in biblical, prophetic and theological language. This understanding provides a critical approach to the context and intends to analyze reality with tools that are in dialogue with human rights perspectives and theological concepts¹⁹.

The theme of justice is, finally, a fundamental issue for the Lutheran theology, once the great discovery of Luther was related to a deep comprehension of what does the justice of God mean. As Iwand presents, from the Lutheran understanding of Gods Justice:

The justice of God revealed in Jesus Christ includes the human being; it is not a judging justice, but creating. Seeing from Christ, no one can say: “God is just and I am not, God is holy and I am not.” The divine justice, revealed in Jesus Christ before the world, does not exclude the sinner, but includes him/her. [...] This is, therefore, the new justice, different from the one that God revealed in the law²⁰.

As we see, if justice emerges again as a fundamental concept on the search for the creation of the “new” and the overcoming of the “world”, it was always on the center of the reformation and, we could say, of the Christian faith. In our struggle to experience the “new” justice, identified in Brazil as socioeconomic justice for the marginalized people, racial justice, cultural justice – especially on the relation with the indigenous people, but even in a wider way, considering also the cultural relations between the Western modern life and other ways to experience reality; gender and sexual justice and, I would add, an epistemological justice, allowing the Southern narratives to emerge in front of the global totalitarianism.

¹⁹ THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION. *Gender Justice Police*. Geneva: LWF, 2013, p. 8.

²⁰ IWAND, 1981, p. 94. “A justiça de Deus revelada em Cristo inclui o homem [sic]; não é uma justiça julgadora, mas criadora. Visto a partir de Cristo, ninguém pode dizer: “Deus é justo e eu não sou, Deus é santo e eu não sou.” A justiça divina, revelada em Jesus Cristo diante do mundo, não exclui o pecador, mas o inclui. [...] Essa é, portanto, a nova justiça, diferente daquela que Deus revelou na lei.”

Justice in the gospel of Matthew

Concluding this reflection, we might ask ourselves why the theme of the spiritual poverty should be read through the lens of justice in the Gospel of Matthew. As argued previously, If poverty does have the sense of a humble position before God, it also carries the denounce of the prophets, that poverty is an unacceptable reality, which hurts the relationship among the humanity and of the humanity with God. Besides that, the theme of spiritual poverty must be read in the entire framework of the Sermon of the Mount and also of the whole gospel of Matthew. Some elements indicate strongly that the “economic” reality envisaged by Matthew, expected from God and expressed in Jesus Christ is the reality of justice, as Matthew emphasizes: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mathew 6.33). Kingdom of God and righteousness or justice are profoundly imbricate. We found this relation on the Beatitudes clearly, as expressed on the verses 6 and 10: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Mathew 5.6); “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mathew 5.10); Or yet on the verse 20: “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mathew 5.20).

Besides that, the theme of justice which overcomes the simple compliance with the law appears in Matthew 19.16-22 (Jesus and the rich young man); Mathew 20.1-16 (The parable of the workers of the vineyard); Mathew 18. 23-35 (Unmerciful servant) and in many other passages. Udo Schnelle and Wolfgang Schrage²¹ consider the theme of “better justice” the center of the ethical message of the Gospel of Matthew, being the expression *dikaiosiné* referred seven times, more than all the other gospels (just once in the gospel of Luke)²². If *dikaiosiné* is what Jesus accomplished, overcoming the justice of the law, it is also demanded

²¹ SCHRAGE, Wolfgang. *Ética do Novo Testamento*. São Leopoldo: Sinodal/IEPG, 1994, p. 147-156.

²² GOPPELT, 1988, p. 485.

from human being. If the justice of God comes first in Jesus Christ, the practical action of human being come afterwards, as the structure of the Gospel shows. Firstly comes the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon of the Mount (Mathew 5-7) and then Jesus acts healing and accepting marginalized people (Mathew 8-9). The justice God demands from us is not the justice of the law, but, exceeding that, to live as justified by God's grace and according to God's justice. As Luther emphasized, it is a new justice, not redistributive justice (according to our actions) but a creating and inclusive justice of God. For Matthew, while we wait for the eschatological kingdom, God invites us to live out according to Christ's justice now.

For this reason, the practice of Justice is not something that we have to do to show other people, as Mathew 6.1 reminds us: "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." Exactly because this is not any condition to be saved or justified, but as a way to live as justified the commitment with the kingdom of God. This is emphasized by the question of the righteous on the great judgment: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" As the King replies: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Mathew 25.37-40).

In this sense, concluding my contribution, it seems that the gospel of Matthew gives a sounding contribution to our current reflection on justice. Justice, in all its dimensions, is on the agenda of the social movements, of the protesting youth and of the demonstrators all around the world. People do not want to have the same world as we always had. This world that is promoting poverty, in all its senses, repeatedly from generation to generation is not the new justice that God invites us to experience. But as Matthew shows us, the kingdom will just be accessible for us when we become "poor in spirit" humble before God, giving up from the illusion of power, arrogance, and self sufficiency. We have to be poor and receive the justification of God and learning from the justice that Jesus showed us. This is a sign of hope to move out from this world to what João Passarinheiro called "the new".

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