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André S. Musskopf

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# **Cruising (with) Luther – Indecent Lutheran Theologies from the South**

*or*

## **What makes a Lutheran Theology Lutheran**

**André S. Musskopf<sup>1</sup>**

### **Coming out as Lutheran**

**T**he year of 2017 marks the 500 years of the Reformation Movement. As a participant in the heritage of this movement, for my upbringing in a village of German descendants that emigrated to Brazil in the nineteenth century,<sup>2</sup> for my church affiliation in the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (ECLCB), for my educational and current professional practice in a Lutheran theological institution (Faculdades EST), and for many other reasons, this event and the issues related to it have been on my horizon for quite some time. For the last – at least – two years there has been a plethora of seminars, celebrations, exhibitions, books, materials, publications, stamps, playmobile figures, traveling and excursions... in churches and congregations, academic and research institutions, political debates and even government events. A first version of this very article was first presented in 2015 at a meeting in Denmark called “Luther from the subaltern.”<sup>3</sup>

The “Reformation” has been/is being revisited, discussed, evaluated, praised, critiqued, and used as an opportunity to reflect on its legacy, but also on the challenges the world faces currently, expressed both through the overall situation of crises (economic, climate/environment, political, religious/cultural, migration, violence) and the various forms of resistance and actual projects for a new society. As in the sixteenth century, the Reformation is not only a matter of religion and theology, but is immersed and participates in all the processes we face as *oikoumene* – inhabited world. That’s why it has been – and needs to be – a subject discussed across disciplines and with all political actors and actresses, so that it is not turned into a glorious discourse that avoids the intricated and multifaceted experiences that took place in the past, and is used to justify old and new forms of oppression and violence and the maintenance of the *status quo* now, but an opportunity to exercise the best of this tradition in denouncing all forms of violence and oppression and continuing in the search for a another possible world.

I started my theological studies in 1995. In 1997, I came out (not officially) as a gay man. It was a time in which we lived and studied Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, Black Theology in its various forms, even as many claimed it was all old news and dead. In the process of coming out I also discovered Gay and Lesbian Theologies and, later, Queer

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<sup>1</sup> André S. Musskopf is a Professor and Chair of Theology and Gender at Faculdades EST.

<sup>2</sup> For more details on the relationship between the German immigration of the sixteenth century to Brazil and the emerging of the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil see: Martin Dreher, *Igreja e germanidade* (São Leopoldo: Editora Sinodal, 1984); and Hans-Jürgen Prien, *Formação da Igreja Evangélica no Brasil* (São Leopoldo, Petrópolis: Editora Sinodal, Vozes, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> The Conference “Luther from the Subaltern - the Alternative Luther” took place from 29 to 31 October 2015, in Sandbjerg, Denmark, hosted by Aarhus University.

Theologies. In 2001, I graduated as a Bachelor in Theology with a final paper called *A gap in the closet: Proposals for a Gay theology*. In the theological and ecclesiastical contexts, I became a “gay theologian.”

In all those years, I also became an activist in the LGBTIQ Movement. I worked in an HIV and AIDS non-governmental organization, participated in local, regional, national and international meetings and gatherings, led workshops on issues of gender and sexual diversity, organized and went to Pride Parades, helped to write and approve anti-discrimination laws and even took on the government working with public policies for LGBTIQ people. As an academic I studied, participated and lectured in seminars and conferences, wrote and published in the same area. Because of the resistance of both activist groups and social movements and secular academics, my theological and religious background, many times, was not made known. If that was not the case, in many situations, I had to come out as a theologian and a person of faith with religious affiliation, and I became “a gay man who is a theologian.”

Although suddenly I became a representative of something “queer” in itself – a gay theologian or a gay man who is a theologian, and speaks about it – there was little room – precisely for its “queerness” – for such an identity in theological, activist and secular academic debates and practices. I had to learn different languages and codes to navigate those areas. I was a theologian; but a very specific one, not always seen as doing “real” theology. I was an activist; but a very strange one, that included in his agenda “religious citizenship,” when religious was/is many times seen as our main problem. I was a gay/queer scholar; but what’s religion got to do with it?! On this side of the Equator, such a combination is not that common – unfortunately.

On the religious side, my relationship with my own church got estranged precisely because of this odd mix. More than anything, I was mostly tolerated, but not really taken seriously. Most of my religious life and work was lived out in eventual participations in some congregations’ activities (not all Lutheran), or with LGBT religious groups and churches throughout Latin America in visits, meetings and gatherings. Together with friends and colleagues we even created an Ecumenical Inclusive Worship Group in São Leopoldo, Brazil. For some time, I followed the work and participated in activities of Lutherans Concerned North America and, in many ways, the Gay Men’s Issues in Religion Group of the American Academy of Religion became a nurturing space in my faith and theological journey.

Many times, throughout this journey, my Lutheran heritage seemed to have been lost. Although I have never been too far from Lutheran institutions, people and communities, that part of my history – and identity? – became less and less relevant both in the way I presented myself and in the way, I thought, people saw me. But, then, the conversations about the 500 years of Reformation started, and suddenly I caught myself having to think about what it means to be a Lutheran theologian and in which ways my work is or can be seen as part of this tradition.

### **What makes a Lutheran Theology/ian Lutheran/ish?**

In light of the events and debates around the 500 years of Reformation, and the requests I started to receive to talk and write about it, I started wondering if my work and my writing, which had been adjectivized in so many other ways, kept any resemblance of what might be considered Lutheran/ish. I must confess that it was and is not for me a matter

of ultimate definition and affiliation,<sup>4</sup> as I am less concerned with finding the right label (if that is actually a possibility) than I am concerned with the impact that it might have in actually changing people's lives and contributing to just forms of relationship. But, on the other hand, entertaining that question seemed interesting even if only for the sake of destabilizing traditional discourses and practices and opening other possibilities of thinking and acting – in this case Lutheran theology and ecclesiastical practice – something queer scholars, theologians and activists like to do.

However, I must also admit a certain level of pleasure I have experienced when being identified as a Lutheran theologian or simply a Lutheran person in some situations and spaces. This might be explained in a simple way by calling it an act of defiance to a Church and a Tradition that blocked me out through silence, pretending I didn't exist, and, when unavoidable, rather labeled me as something else. In many ways, this is also part of a particular epistemology, an epistemology from the South,<sup>5</sup> some might say, or a pedagogy of presence, or simply a queer political and theoretical strategy. I am here, I am Lutheran, get used to it!

The intent of the question in the heading above is not to prove that I am "authentically" Lutheran (whatever that is) or actually "a theologian," but raise the question for what is or might be called a Lutheran Theology at all (if someone wishes to). In order to reflect on the same question and looking at it from my own theological journey as a Lutheran theologian, I went back to three of my writings, produced and published in different periods of my personal and academic life. Although it is honestly not my concern if they do qualify as "Lutheran" or any other label that might validate them in the standards of some kind of authority, I do hope that in some way this contributes to the ongoing discussions about Reformation, Lutheranism and Protestantism.

As mentioned above, in 2001, I graduated in Theology and presented a paper on Gay Theology. It was soon after published in a book format as the first (and only) publication of a series called "Theological Essays" by the Escola Superior de Teologia in partnership with Editora Sinodal. In 2005 a new edition was produced and printed by Centro de Estudos Bíblicos (CEBI), and in 2015 a third edition was released in a partnership between CEBI and Fonte Editorial.<sup>6</sup> "A gap in the closet" was an attempt to raise the question about the absence of "homosexuality" among the emerging theological themes and subjects in Latin American Liberation Theology together with Feminist Theology and Black Theology. I interviewed and presented the life histories of three gay men, and, based on those histories, proposed a reflection on theological themes articulating what a Gay Theology might look like.

It was in between the presentation of the paper and the publication of the first edition of the book that the relationship with my church got complicated – I was denied access to

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<sup>4</sup> Marcela Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (London: Routledge, 2013), 43-45, advocates for a need of disaffiliation from any form of theology constructed on colonial parameters. According to her, disaffiliation is the "ultimate hermeneutical perversion" as it breaks away from the theology of the Lord (or the Fathers). It is about "taking the familiar into unfamiliar contexts."

<sup>5</sup> See Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meses, *Epistemologias do Sul* (São Paulo: Cortez, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> André S. Musskopf, *Uma brecha no armário* (São Leopoldo, São Paulo: CEBI, Fonte Editorial). A summary of the book was published in English in André S. Musskopf, "A Gap in the Closet: Gay Theology in Latin American Context," in *Men and masculinities in Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Björn Krondorfer (London: SCM Press, 2009), 460-471; and in German in André S. Musskopf, "Ein Spalt in der Tür - Persönliche Erfahrungen als Schwuler Theologe im Kontext Lateinamerikas," *Werkstatt Schwule Theologie* 12, no. 3 &4 (December 2005), 112-127.

the ordained ministry – and, to my utter surprise, one of my professors approached me *en passant*, to tell me that he had read my paper and how excited he was that a Gay Theology could be *fundamentally* Lutheran. The main reason, for him, was that at the center of my theological argument I put “justification by grace through faith.” In fact, the third chapter of the paper was constructed in three parts, where the first one (The search for new forms – or their absence) sought to deconstruct elements of traditional theology around homosexuality (silence, embodiment, Bible, guilt and sin), and the third one (The construction of something new) sought to articulate a theological discourse grounded in gay men’s experience (mostly in terms of theological ethics). The second part (Coming out of the closet as a rupture between the absence of models and the construction of new ones), presented justification by grace through faith in relation to the concept of the human being as image of God (*imago Dei*) as the turning point that allowed for a propositional construction of a gay theological reflection expressed through the experience of “coming out,” common among gay men. As stated in the book:

Coming out of the closet might be compared theologically to the discovery that God justifies us and loves us as we are, despite our sins and failures. In the experience of many gay men, this event takes place after a long journey trying to fit in a society in which there is no space for their way of living their sexuality. ... In this sense, the doctrine of justification, in the context of a Gay Theology, can help gay men to rediscover God, strengthen the faith and rebuild their identity ...<sup>7</sup>

To support my argument I, indeed, used Martin Luther’s works and respected Lutheran theologians as a reference. But, since “justification by grace through faith” and “*imago Dei*” are not exclusive and/or property of Luther’s and Lutheran theology (and Martin Luther certainly didn’t think so as his main argument was that it was central to the biblical message in relation to salvation), and since, as time went on and people’s reaction to the book was more on its “gay character” than in its “Lutheran identity” – and some resistance on Lutheran theologians and churches to engage with it – I guess the “Lutheran touch” became less relevant.

In 2002, after my frustrated attempt to become an ordained minister in the Lutheran Church, I started a new journey in my academic studies and theological activism. In many ways, I wanted to contribute to the debate around the ordination of homosexual people and question the Lutheran standings that prevent them/us to exercise their/our gifts in this capacity. So, for next two years I researched and worked on the issue of ordination and presented, in February 2004, a Master’s Thesis titled “Pink Robe: a didactic-historical-systematic study on the Ordination to the Ecclesiastical Ministry and the exercise of the Ordained Ministry by homosexuals.” It was evaluated (and praised) by Luther and Lutheran scholars as “a careful work of research, that is able to systematize a beautiful set of information to subsidize an updated discussion about the ministerial ordination of homosexual people.”<sup>8</sup> This quote was part of the formal evaluation of one of the professors and printed on the back cover of the book, published in 2005 under the title “Pink Robe:

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<sup>7</sup> Musskopf, *Uma brecha no armário*, 118.

<sup>8</sup> Ricardo Rieth, back cover quote in André S. Musskopf, *Talar Rosa* (São Leopoldo: Oikos, 2005).

Homosexuals and the Ministry in the Church” through the financial support of First United Lutheran Church of San Francisco.

For this work, I interviewed seven gay men who studied theology at the Lutheran school and that, at some point, intended to become, were or were on the way to become ordained ministers in the Lutheran Church. Their life histories and their reflections on ordained ministry are presented in the first chapter as a starting point for the conversation. The reflection, then, goes on to revisit the origins of ordained ministry in the Christian Church and its process of (hetero) patriarchalization in the first three centuries of the Christian Era. Using mostly the work already done by feminist scholars, the study discusses the concept of ministry in the New Testament (and its roots in the Old Testament) to show the existence of several different ministries that were the expression of people’s different gifts in the early communities. It also shows how, already in the New Testament, it is possible to notice a process of institutionalization and patriarchalization, mostly as a result of a strategy of survival in a context of persecution and, later, for public recognition, that resulted (in the third century) in the establishment of the Sacrament of Order, which separates clergy from lay people, excludes women and other people considered unfit. This process contradicts the experience of the early communities so beautifully put by Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza:

They were tax collectors, sinners, women, children, fishermen, housewives, those who had been cured from their illnesses or freed from servitude to bad spirits. What they offered was not an alternative way of life, but an alternative ethos: they were the ones without future, but now had hope again; they were people rejected and marginalized, but now had a community again; were despised and trampled, but now had dignity and self-confidence as children of the God-Sofia and loved by her; they were, because of the circumstances of life and the social injustices, sinners without any hope to share the holiness and presence of God, but now were the inheritors of the *basileia*, experiencing the gracious goodness of God who had made them equal to the holy and righteous of Israel. As such, they gathered together in the discipleship of equals and shared their scarce bread with those who came to listen to the gospel.<sup>9</sup>

In many ways, it is argued in the third chapter of the book, Luther’s work and action in the sixteenth century sought to recover this sense of ministry through the concept of “priesthood of all believers.” Using mostly Luther’s work as reference, this part of the reflection presents a Theology of the Ordained Ministry in Martin Luther, starting with his critique to the “papists” of his time, who, in his opinion “invented a holiness higher than the holiness of Christians or of that which the holy Christian people have.”<sup>10</sup> It is followed by his articulation of the “priesthood of all believers” grounded in Baptism, and getting to the ordained ministry as a calling instituted by God for the service to the community through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments.

It is true, however, that Martin Luther kept a (hetero) patriarchal view of the Church and of the Ministry in the same way the apologists of the three first centuries of the Christian

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<sup>9</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *As origens cristãs a partir da mulher* (São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1992), 170. The original title, in English, is *In memory of her*.

<sup>10</sup> Martinho Lutero, “Dos Concílios e da Igreja,” in *Obras selecionadas* – Vol. 3 (São Leopoldo/Porto Alegre: Sinodal Concórdia, 1992), 406.

era did. In *On the Councils and the Church* he states that the cornerstone of the Church is the house, where one must “obey the fathers and the lords of the house,” and goes on to establish the relation between the government of the house, the city and the Church.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, he states: “It is true, however, that in this article the Holy Spirit excepted women, children and inept people and chose for that only apt men (except in case of need), as one can read in several passages of S. Paul’s epistles.”<sup>12</sup> Even so, there was some ambivalence on his part, especially regarding women, as he stated elsewhere that “even women, are priests without tonsure or episcopal mark ... and therefore also women exercise the legitimate ministry when they baptize” and “a woman may baptize and minister the word of life, through which the sin is taken away, eternal death is kept away, and the prince of the world is expelled.”<sup>13</sup> This issue, however, remained a task for Lutheran Churches everywhere to solve, most of which have already approved women’s ordained ministry and some of which have approved the ordination of gays and lesbians. The last part of this chapter of the *Pink Robe* is, thus, devoted to analyzing the “Statement of the Church Council [of the ECLCB] referring to the Ecclesiastical Ministry and homosexuality,” showing its incongruences with Martin Luther’s own teachings and writings, and current understandings of sexuality in general and homosexuality specifically.

The last chapter goes on, then, to reflect on the concept of Ecclesiastical Ministry from the perspective of the experience of homosexual people. Building on a queer hermeneutics and notion of embodiment, it discusses issues of body and sexuality, sexual ethics in relation to celibacy and marriage, the importance of communication and dialogue in the life of the community, ecclesiology and the threats of conflict and division in the church, indignation/anger against heteropatriarchy as a source for the work of love<sup>14</sup> and gifts and skills that homosexual people may bring to the Ordained Ministry as a result of their particular experience of exclusion and marginalization. At the end:

The concept of Ordained Ministry constructed through [the image of] the *Pink Robe* does not represent necessarily anything new in relation to the theological principles of the New Testament or Luther’s writings. The newness resides in questioning the heterocentric structure that sets obstacles to non-heterosexual people’s faith and vocation. ... The same way that many movements considered heretic in the history of early Christianity ... and the same way Luther felt the need to question the ecclesiastical structure of his time ... the goal of the *Pink Robe* is to question the heterocentric structure of the church reclaiming principles such as Baptism, priesthood of all believers, justification by grace through faith, the understandings of sexuality and ecclesiastical organization from the experience of homosexual people.<sup>15</sup>

It is obvious that this paper depends strongly on Luther’s works and is discussing a situation of a particular Lutheran Church. Even so, it has been read and can be read to discuss the issue of ordained ministry in any Church, using the Lutheran tradition as just a case study

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<sup>11</sup> Martinho Lutero, *Dos Concílios e da Igreja*, 431.

<sup>12</sup> Martinho Lutero, *Dos Concílios e da Igreja*, 413.

<sup>13</sup> Martinho Lutero, “Como instituir ministros na Igreja,” in *Obras selecionadas – Vol. 7* (São Leopoldo/Porto Alegre: Sinodal Concórdia, 1992), 96, 97-98.

<sup>14</sup> See Beverly Harrison, “The power of anger in the work of love,” in *Making the connections*, ed. Carol S. Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

<sup>15</sup> André S. Musskopf, *Talar Rosa* (São Leopoldo: Oikos, 2005), 235.

of the matter. In the Lutheran Church herself it has not gotten much attention as a copy of the book was sent to every bishop in the Church and there was only one short response to it, and the whole issue of ordination of gays and lesbians remains untouched.<sup>16</sup>

As in the case of “A gap in the closet,” all my (conscious or unconscious) intentions to be faithful to my Lutheran heritage seemed to have gotten lost as it did not make its way into the “Lutheran debates” on the issues I was pointing to. But going back to the question of this article: What makes a Lutheran theology Lutheran? Is it its connection to and repetition of Luther’s works or the Reformation’s founding documents and highly recognized and respected theologians? If that is the case, one might say that, for what is worth, the works described up to now might actually qualify, even if questioned and failing to achieve some kind of standards that even the academic evaluation processes it went through were not able to detect. Or might the work in question be just too “indecent” to figure in the respectable and honorable lists of approved and canonical readings of what is allowed to be called “Lutheran” at all?

### Getting indecently Lutheran

Up to now I have used the words “queer” and “indecent” indistinctively and without any concern for conceptual and theoretical precision or clarity. This is mostly due to the fact that “queer theory” or “queer studies” were mostly absent in the works presented. Both *A gap in the closet* and *Pink Robe* are not necessarily “queer” in the sense that they do not rely on the theoretical ideas developed in the field of queer theory. The two pieces put together mostly show a move from a “homosexual theology” centered in the justification by grace through faith – although trying to avoid being apologetic and using the experience of gay men as a starting point for the theological reflection, to a “gay theology” reflecting on the ordained ministry in the context of the priesthood of all believers – although trying to avoid an essentialist identitarian and assimilationist approach and exercising the use of a queer hermeneutics through the notion of queer embodiment. In this sense, “queer” is taken in its original terminology as “strange, eccentric,” but also in its relation to sexual and gender non-conforming identities and expressions and as a theoretical approach that: “interrogate aspects of social life – the family, intimate relationships – but also look at places not typically thought of as sexualized – the economy, for example.”<sup>17</sup> “Because society is organized on a heterosexual model, challenging the presumptive claims of heteronormativity forces the questioning of the logic of government, religion, medicine, law, and every discipline that structures people’s lives.”<sup>18</sup>

Even though the works described above cannot be – *stricto sensu* – qualified as “queer,” as Marcella Althaus-Reid has pointed out in relation to Latin American Liberation Theology, touching soft spots of a heteropatriarchal theology, church and society structure might, in itself, be identified as “indecent” or “queer,” especially when dealing with issues of gender and sexuality. She says:

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<sup>16</sup> Before being published by an independent publishing company, the book proposal was presented to a Lutheran publisher who affirmed that its publication might cause much debate and trouble.

<sup>17</sup> Arlene Stein and Ken Plummer, “I Can’t Even Think Straight,” in *Queer Theory/Sociology*, ed. Steven Seidman (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers), 135.

<sup>18</sup> Rachel E. Poulsen, “Queer Studies,” in *Reader’s Guide to Lesbian and Gay Studies*, ed. Timothy F. Murphy, (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), 489.

Liberation Theology was promissory, and spoke in terms of dissemination and the possibility of the unknown breaking into the old narrative of being the church in Christian Latin America ... Therefore, some traces of indecency were present in the genesis of Liberation Theology.<sup>19</sup>

The same might be said about Martin Luther and his questioning of the church structures and theology of his time, and maybe even for his known impolite manners and language. Imagine that: an indecent Luther. But as Marcella also points out, those traces of indecency might get lost when assimilated by mainstream theology and, especially, become a profitable product in the northern theological market.<sup>20</sup> So let's go queer and see if a Lutheran theology from the South might be able to be indecent or lose its lutherishness altogether in the process.

In 2005, after another frustrated attempt to engage the Lutheran Church and Lutheran Theology regarding the Ordained Ministry, I started the Doctorate Program with an ambitious research project: to show how "queer" Martin Luther and his theology was/is and reread most (if not all) theological *loci* from that perspective. Something not too queer at a first glance, one might say. To "prove" Martin Luther's and his theology's "queerness" I studied biographical materials about his life, his language, and resorted to the category of ambiguity to analyze concepts and ideas such as "*simul justus et peccator*," Christ's double and simultaneous nature (*homoousious* – from the Nicene Creed), the consubstantiation of Christ's body in the Eucharist, the relationship between the visible and the invisible Church... and I still think this is all very queer. Cruising (with) Luther can be a very indecent thing to do.

As time, the research and my paths went on, the traditional (dogmatic) theological *loci* also got lost on the way as I decided that another approach was more suitable to what I wanted and what I felt was needed. In 2008, I presented my Doctorate Dissertation *Theological faggoting*<sup>21</sup>: *itineraries for a queer theology in Brazil*, focusing on the epistemological question in theology. The three chapters were organized and presented as a result of my own personal, academic and activist journey (described in the introduction as a "Traveling/Faggoting guide") and in the very traditional methodological perspective of Liberation Theology: see – judge – act.

Using the concept of ambiguity, I revisited Brazilian landscapes on religiosity and sexuality. Several studies have shown, separately, how Brazilian religiosity and sexuality have been historically constructed in ways that can be described as ambiguous, mixed, and syncretic. But very few, if any, have deepened the ambiguous relationship between religiosity and sexuality and how this ambiguous relationship, in many ways, produces the ambiguity of each of this dimension of human experience in Brazilian culture. These experiences range from – the conquest of Brazilian lands and peoples, and the invention of a

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<sup>19</sup> Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* (London: Routledge, 2001), 24.

<sup>20</sup> See Marcella Althaus-Reid, "Gustavo Gutiérrez goes to Disneyland," in *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, ed. Marcella Althaus-Reid (London: SCM Press, 2004), 124-142.

<sup>21</sup> In Portuguese, there is play with the words traveling (*viagem*) and faggoting (*viadagem*), presented in the title as "*via(da)gem*."

colony<sup>22</sup> that relies on a founding myth<sup>23</sup> that praises the paradisiacal natural beauties and richness of the land and, at the same time, is horrified with the diabolic and uncivilized manners of its peoples who walk around naked and have strange sexual and alimentary practices; through the colonial period marked by the exploitation and extractivism of the natural resources and of the peoples labor (including indigenous and African slavery), under the auspices of an unholy relationship between State and Religion, always ready to close an eye to the subversion of moral, sexual and religious codes in the name of profit, or just because they were unable to control the diversity of peoples and practices spread in a continental territory; to modern times with the formal opening to the presence of other denominations and religions and the visibility of a religious pluralism and the emergence of simultaneous pieties,<sup>24</sup> aside with the development of a scientific/hygienist discourse and control on sexuality together with the organization of feminist and women's movements and homosexual and LGBT movements contesting those same discourses and practices and setting a landscape of sexual and gender diversity. This ambiguity, present in Brazilian culture, in the construction of people's religiosity and sexuality, is, then, the starting point for a queer/indecent theology in Brazil. In terms of religiosity, Adilson Schultz states that:

Ambiguity or mixture is not synthesis, but a system that underlies the theological structures of religions. ... People who attend a certain cult did not chose an *ambiguous* cult, but made of ambiguity the theological system of belief itself. Ambiguity is not confusion, but an integrative system of different significations that, in theory, should be separated, but that make sense to a certain groups or person. It never ends in one religion, but agencies in the interaction of the faithful with significations of other religions. ... As ambiguous the religious agencies are always open, are dynamic, move, touch each other.<sup>25</sup>

Although Lutheranism, and Protestantism in general, are present in this landscape, several studies have shown the difficulties of articulating its theology and religious practice with the Brazilian religious imaginary. According to Vitor Westhelle, the failure of Latin American Protestantism resides in its alliance with liberal forces and the bourgeoisie classes that allowed its emergence, but not to reach the poor masses.<sup>26</sup> Something different happened with what Adilson Schultz calls "Neoprotestantism," including Pentecostalism by denying the colonial religious imaginary through an out-worldly ascetics and being averse to the intellectualism of classic Protestantism, and Neopentecostalism which articulated in a more complete way this imaginary. Neoprotestantism "represents a theological movement

<sup>22</sup> See Vitor Westhelle, *Voces de protesta en América Latina* (Mexico: CETPJDR/Lutheran School of Theology, 2000), 7-32.

<sup>23</sup> See Marilena Chauí, *Brasil: Mito fundador e sociedade autoritária* (São Paulo: Perseu Abramo, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> According to Ivone Gebara, *Teologia ecofeminista* (São Paulo: Olho D'Água, 1997), 100: "One can belong to the candomblé or to the Catholic brotherhood of the Senhor do Bonfim, get affiliated to the third Franciscan order and to the charismatic movement, be Catholic, study theology with Lutheran and consult with Spiritualist or Buddhist guru. This is us before the complexity of the current religious phenomenon and of our incapacity to hold closed approaches."

<sup>25</sup> Adilson Schultz, *Deus está presente - o diabo está no meio* (São Leopoldo: EST, 2015), 160. [Doctoral Dissertation]

<sup>26</sup> Vitor Westhelle, *Voces de protesta en América Latina*, 99. According to Westhelle: "The crises of Latin American Protestantism is precisely this: it oscillates between adapting to the instituted situation, converting into a supplementary institution without charisma, and being a charismatic extreme without formative power."

of contact of worldviews never before touched: the one of the reformed European Protestantism and the one of the Catholic Brazil anchored in the African and indigenous tradition.”<sup>27</sup> Together, this is what he calls the “nebulous” of the Brazilian religious imaginary.

Forged in an intricated and slow historical process, this nebulous looms over the country and does not cease to repeat itself, update and resignify its values and principles. The catholic signification is the main component of this *nebulous*, a big center around which the other ones revolve. The divine providence, the figure of Jesus Christ as the representation of the divine, the strength of the ritual and of the holiness and the moral/ethical appeal, among others, are some of the *catholic* marks that compose this *nebulous*. The spiritualist significations become important precisely because they constituted themselves after the catholic categories already established, such as charity and holiness, and collaborate with significations such as belief in spirits and the communication with them. Although the catholic significations also collaborate or have collaborated for the establishment of the candomblé and, later, the umbanda, those *African* significations will be decisive in the composition of the nebulous by inserting elements such as the belief in orixás and ancestral divinities and the ritualistic of the offering and sacrifice. On the other hand, umbanda and candomblé used the indigenous significations and their emphasis on the communication with ancestors. The indigenous and African signification, on its turn, collaborated decisively in the construction of the spiritualist and umbandist significations.<sup>28</sup>

Several other attempts in the history of the Lutheran Church and theology in Brazil have pointed to the need to engage more deeply the county’s religious, cultural, political and social context and struggles.<sup>29</sup> This small detour from presenting my own work and making way for some reflections that have helped me on my journey allows to better understand the challenges of a Lutheran Theology in Brazil, but also from the perspective of the South, where the contexts and landscapes require other tools and epistemologies. On the other hand, it helps to better set the stage for what I tried to accomplish in *Theological Faggoting*.

So, in the second chapter of this paper I revisited another landscape: the one of homosexual, gay and queer theologies. Using mostly North-American references published in English, I reflected on the emergence of what Foucault called “a new species”<sup>30</sup> in the nineteenth century with the creation of the word and concept “homosexual” in the context of medical sciences. The theological reflection that followed was mostly apologetic, trying to explain through science, tradition, biblical and pastoral care approaches the need to embrace homosexual people. Secondly, I presented the work done by many theologians in the field of Gay Theology that was based on new understandings of homosexuality arising from the organization of social movements and the development of Gay and Lesbian Studies. As in the movement and in the academic studies, this theology relied on a mostly closed and

<sup>27</sup> Adilson Schultz, *Deus está presente - o diabo está no meio*, 303.

<sup>28</sup> Adilson Schultz, *Deus está presente - o diabo está no meio*, 139-140. Although the author does not mention in this passage the “protestant significations,” he speaks of the “indelible protestant presence in Brazil” (168-170) and of forms of “protestant success” in the agency of the Brazilian religious imaginary” (170-180).

<sup>29</sup> For example, Rolf Schünemann, *Do gueto á participação* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal, EST, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *História da sexualidade – Vol. 1* (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1988), 43-44.

homogenized gay identity, creating a new binary (heterosexual – homosexual) and using liberationist and assimilationist strategies. Lastly, I presented new developments in the field of feminist, gender, gay and lesbian studies articulated in what became known as queer theory, and raised the question, presenting some examples, of what a queer theology might look like.

The intention was to summarize and present to a Brazilian audience some of the work that remains mostly invisible and virtually unknown in Latin America, especially in the field of theology, as there is a lively and growing field of Queer Studies in these latitudes. Nonetheless, I devoted the second part of the chapter to present homosexual-gay-queer theologies in Brazil and Latin America. I started, again, with the question about the absence of this kind of reflection in the context of Latin American Liberation Theologies, and went on to present the history of some LGBT Christian groups and churches collected through interviews, documents and scarce publications, and the writings of some theologians doing this kind of work in our context. The goal was to show that, even if not acknowledged, made invisible and mostly absent of academic formal settings, there is important work done in relation to religion and theology from the perspective of sexual and gender diversity, even when not using those categories and labels specifically.<sup>31</sup>

To finish this chapter, I introduced the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid, also virtually unknown in Latin America. Her theological reflections became central to my proposal as she brought together Latin American Liberation and Feminist Theologies with Queer and Post-Colonial studies and theologies. This is when it really started to get indecent, as Marcella argued for an “indecent theology.” In her own words: “An Indecent Theology will question the traditional field of Latin-American decency and order as they permeate and support the multiple (ecclesial, theological, political and loving) structures of life in my country, Argentina, and in my continent.”<sup>32</sup> “Indecency” is used, then, as a category to dialogue with “queer” (which she used interchangeably), but from a Latin American perspective. In this sense, “indecent” is:

a counter-discourse for the unmasking and unclothing of the sexual presuppositions built into Liberation Theology during the past decades but also today when confronting issues of globalisation and the new neo-liberal world order. Indecency as social gesture is extremely political and erotic, and relates to the construction of the identity of the subject through the subversion of economic, religious and political identities.<sup>33</sup>

Considering the Brazilian context in relation to religiosity and sexuality described in the first chapter and the tools provided by homosexual, gay and queer theologies in the second chapter, the third chapter elaborates a theological epistemology that allowed for a queer theological thinking in Brazil. The Lutheran perspective, if it is still there, is something we will have to discuss later. The idea of the chapter, and the epistemological theory behind it, is to put in conversation different voices and experiences around the concept of ambiguity

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<sup>31</sup> It is important to notice that a lot more has been produced in this field since then by individual theologians, in theological and religious gatherings, and in a new wave of LGBT Christian churches and groups.

<sup>32</sup> Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 168.

and seek to present a theological reflection that takes seriously the context and wishes to respond to issues emerging from it.

The chapter starts with a conceptual discussion and formulation on the category of ambiguity to establish the relationship between what is called the “Brazilian ambiguity” – cultural, religious and sexual – and the propositions of queer theologies. It presents the “sexual histories”<sup>34</sup> of three trans persons – Maria Florzinha, Júlia Guerra and Lolita Boom-Boom – as living testimonies of the ambiguity and queerness of embodied experiences, and a starting point and a way, in itself, to do queer theology. Following, “occupy, resist, produce,” a slogan of the Brazilian Landless Movement, are presented as methodological steps for this reflection. “Occupy” is articulated in terms of reclaiming authority over one’s own body as territory, in relation to the body of others, the body of the world and the body of God. “Resist” is articulated in terms of creating our own languages that contradict, question and destabilize traditional and oppressive discourses and practices in general and in terms of gender and sexuality – after all, all theology is a sexual act<sup>35</sup> – opening way for new and unpredictable forms of theological knowledge. “Produce” is, then, an exercise in articulating a theological discourse that does not intend to have the ultimate authority or truth, but that is itself marked by multiple ambiguities and provisionality.

In this work, theological production is accomplished by engaging with Frida Kahlo’s painting “the little dear.” In order to do that another methodological tool is put in motion and this is when we start “cruising,” as if we haven’t been doing that all along. “Cruising” is here taken from a common practice among gay men to identify one another in public spaces, which sometimes results in sexual encounters, when it is necessary to deal with unspoken messages and interpret them adequately. In many ways, it represents an embodied sensibility developed in a heteropatriarchal world where one has to learn how to read the smallest signals in order understand a given situation and establish connections. In more specific terms, it refers to what Timothy Koch, discussing biblical interpretation, proposes as a “homoerotic approach to Scripture.” He constructs his idea using Audre Lorde’s reflection on the “power of the erotic” and establishes *cruising* as a hermeneutical strategy to read the Bible. For him, *cruising* means:

using our own ways of knowing, our own desire for connecting, our own understanding and instinct, our own response to what attracts us and compels us ... Since, as in our social lives, choosing to *cruise* here means to take on our own authority and responsibility in following whatever it is that comes in our way, since that is what speaks to our own desires.<sup>36</sup>

In relation to Frida Kahlo’s painting the “cruising” takes place in many ways and is centered around the connection established between the “deer” (animal) and its identification, in Brazilian culture, with “faggot.” It reflects on the meanings of the deer in Frida’s life (her pet, her birthdate in the indigenous calendar, her gender and sexual ambiguity, her accident, her many surgeries, her right foot, Saint Sebastian) and how she

<sup>34</sup> In Chapter 4, Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 125-164, talks about a “Theology of sexual stories.”

<sup>35</sup> In Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 87, the author states that: “theology is a sexual act. Theology is a sexual ideology performed in a sacralising pattern: it is a sexual divinized orthodoxy (right sexual dogma) and orthopraxy (right sexual behavior).”

<sup>36</sup> Timothy Koch, “A Homoerotic Approach to Scripture,” in *Theology & Sexuality* 14 (2001): 16.

paints/becomes herself a deer in a landscape that mixes indigenous, popular Catholic and eastern beliefs. In conclusion:

Frida Kahlo, in her work, reflects about the human being, the world and the sacred, and the relations between those dimensions of reality. In her intimacy she exposes the world with its pains and its pleasures, and constructs her faith without seeking purity, objectivity or ultimacy ... Frida Kahlo's art makes impossible any analytical schematizations or systematizations ... The themes, the concepts and the realities get mixed up, confused and entangled. The narratives of Florzinha, Júlia and Lolita also do not let themselves get domesticated by coherence and ordering schemes. Before them theology becomes strange (*queer*) and is done as faggoting. ... Frida Kahlo offers an image (*literally*) of what a Brazilian and Latin American theology might be, in case it set aside its systems, its orthodoxies and its moralisms and payed more attention to the ambiguity of religiosity and sexuality of its people.<sup>37</sup>

Can the same be said about Lutheran Theology? And, more specifically, about a Lutheran Theology from the South? The question remains.

### In-conclusion

The last part of the previous heading (Getting Indecently Lutheran) did not entertain specifically the question regarding a Lutheran background or perspective precisely because it lacks any reference to Luther's work or any specific Lutheran doctrine. In many ways, one might say that the theological reflection developed in this work gave up all intentions to present itself as or reflect any kind of Lutheran connection. Surprisingly enough, though, the response it got from at least one reader, and Anglican (is he really?) Brazilian theologian stated the opposite. In his opinion, *Theological Faggoting* stands "in the best Lutheran tradition, without guilt ... absolutely without guilt, a truly overflow of grace."<sup>38</sup>

So, relying on this one witness, I want to claim that Lutheran Liberation, Feminist, Queer theologians are producing new forms of Lutheran Theology. We do not do theology for the sake of fitting some external authority criteria, but from our own experiences and the experiences of our people, engaging with tradition whenever it seems appropriate and helps us to move forward in our work and struggle. Using Timothy Koch's proposal, we cruise (with) Luther and the Lutheran tradition as an erotic and embodied journey in the search for justice.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, just like Martin Luther and as in Queer Theology or in the "best Christian tradition," we risk not being the same and becoming something else – whatever that may be.

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<sup>37</sup> André S. Musskopf, *Via(da)gens teológicas* (São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2012), 457-458.

<sup>38</sup> Carlos Eduardo Calvani, Back cover in André S. Musskopf, *Via(da)gens teológicas*.

<sup>39</sup> In André S. Musskopf, "Cruising (with) Marcella," in *Dancing theology in fetish boots*, eds. Lisa Isherwood and Mark D. Jordan (London: SCM Press, 2010), 228-239, I use the same hermeneutical strategy as I rework her theological proposal presented in *Via(da)gens teológicas*.