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THE IMPORTANCE OF LGBTQIA+ INCLUSIVE LIBERATING THEOLOGIES

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Abstract: Nowadays, a significant number of Catholic LGBT people struggle so that, without denying their sexuality, they can continue participating in the Catholic faith, and then with the families they are forming, be included and integrated in the religious communities in which they live. This way, following the guidance of Pope Francis, in the Exhortation AMORIS LAETITIA, 2016, n. 297, where he says that “Everyone must be helped to find his or her own way of participating in the ecclesial community [...]. I am not only referring to divorced people living in a new union, but to everyone, whatever situation they find themselves in. “Within the debate “religion, secularism and democracy”, we want to reflect on the importance of knowing LGBTQIA+ inclusive liberating theologies. And based on the all powerful God in love, on scientific knowledge about this group, and on contextualized biblical reflections, communities can through the ethics of inclusion, experience empathy as an element of unconditional love, so that LGBTQIA+ people are welcomed, respected as they are, and integrated, as people loved by God. With this goal, this article, initially published in the Proceedings of the 330th Congress of Soter, in Brazil, in 2021, brings reflections: - on the demands of this group; - what LGBTQIA+ inclusive liberating theologies are; - and the need for the Church to be open to the new times, to welcome and integrate all people.

Keywords: Respect; Empathy, Ethics of inclusion; Integration; Unconditional love.

INTRODUCTION

I am Catholic and since I was a little girl I have had a very active life in the Catholic Church. I was a student at a religious school, then actively participated in family ministry, music ministry, and in different social actions. In general, the people I worked with had a lot of good will, but they only knew

the dogmas, the sacraments, and what they learned as children in a catechesis focused on the commandments, but with little depth in the unconditional love of God, which for me, jeopardized the reception of people who differed in some way from the majority.

Over time I felt the lack of a greater religious base that would help me in evangelization, and I decided to study theology. It was through this study, and situations in which I realized the need to carry out research in the area of gender and sexual diversity, that I decided to carry out my psycho/theological research focused on the theme of “gender violence”. Along with this, I dedicated myself to working with women who suffer violence, and with LGBTQIA+ groups, always asking myself how theology could effectively help these people.

In search of answers, in 2006, Fr. Luís Correa Lima founded, with the participation of other colleagues, the research group Sexual Diversity, Citizenship and Religion, at PUC-Rio. I then did a master’s and doctorate, at PUC-Rio, within the theme of “gender violence”, and a sandwich doctorate on ‘gender violence from Girard’, at the University of Roehampton, London. Finally, in 2017, I presented my doctoral thesis at PUC-Rio, and based on it, I decided to continue researching, writing, and thinking about liberating theologies that could enable people to feel strongly the love of God and spread it around the world, welcoming all of them without distinction. And through the ethics of otherness (Lévinas) and of Christ (JM Castillo), I arrived at the ethics of inclusion and the LGBTQIA+ inclusive liberating theologies,

Many LGBTQIA+ people are in the Catholic Church. In Brazil, today, there are twenty-three LGBT Catholic groups, located in different cities, belonging to the national network of LGBT Catholics, which has contacts and exchanges with groups from other countries. This means that there are

countless LGBTQIA+ people who struggle to continue living their faith, wanting to be heard, welcomed, loved, integrated, and to have a spiritual accompaniment in the religious community in which they grew up or chose to live. But, unfortunately, the advice given by the clergy and pastoral agents, many times, is not empathetic, and does not help them because they start from the generalization of norms, and do not see them individually.

I participate in three Catholic LGBT groups, and only one works in a church. It is very good to see the concern of the parish priest, and of the nun who works with the group, in the search for the integration of people in the community. However, many other groups meet outside the church, and although the existence of these groups alone is important, since, in my view, LGBT Catholic groups represent LGBT Catholic resistance, I still perceive that the inclusion of these people in the church is small. religious community. Integration takes place between the groups themselves, which helps their members to experience the Catholic faith, but I feel that this work is still in the “catacombs”.

This needs to change. It is necessary to listen, welcome, include and integrate the countless LGBTQIA+ people who, despite the hostilities they suffer, continue to fight to be part of the Church. But I believe that, only when priests, women and theologians, seminarians, and pastoral agents can carry out: - A scientific study on gender and sexual diversity. – Theological reflections that depart from the liberating and creator God, who loves each human person unconditionally. – And reflections that lead each person to break free from the fear of love, to look inside themselves, to see that the other person is not a reflection of themselves, but someone with equal and different demands; LGBTQIA+ people will be truly welcomed, included and integrated into Catholic communities.

LIBERATION THEOLOGIES OR LIBERATION THEOLOGIES

They are theologies that bring the spirituality of the liberating and creator God. A God with maternal entrails who sees the concrete life of each person. A God who, by having become incarnate and assuming humanity, is able to put himself in the place of each person, because he knows the pain of those who are discriminated against, marginalized, such as the landless, homeless, indigenous, of the woman who suffers violence, the marginalized woman and man, the black person, the person with special difficulties, with chemical dependency, and LGBTQIA+ people loving them, exactly, as they are.

If we look at Jesus in the New Testament, we will see that his actions are liberating. Rather, he is on the side of the poor and those in need of help, acting to restore their lives. In Matthew, Jesus healed “the hemorrhagic woman”, a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, and as such was considered unclean. However, Jesus did not order her to purify herself, did not ask who had sinned. An energy came out of him, and we know that the woman was cured (BIBLE, 2006, Mt 9, 20-22). The same in “the servant of the centurion” (BÍBLIA, 2006, LC 7,1-10), he did not ask questions, he did not question who that servant would be, he was not interested in knowing what kind of relationship existed between the centurion and his servant. Jesus made no demands, simply healed, and commended the centurion’s faith.

Jesus’ actions are always focused on the uniqueness and specificity of the person, in the quest to restore freedom and peace. He restores the integrity and dignity of those who seek him and want to experience the kingdom of God. He doesn’t judge, recommends that we don’t judge, and doesn’t exclude. Simply welcome and love.

INCLUSIVE LIBERATING THEOLOGIES

In addition to the cited passages, many others show the love of Jesus to people considered, by the lords of the law, sinners. With them he celebrates life, love, including them and integrating them into the group of followers. Jesus does not try to standardize people so that they are equal, because even with the apostles we perceive, among them, great differences. What unites them is Jesus himself, who respects them for what they are equal and different, and seeks to form a great "We".

Over time, Christianity became Christianity, with universal rules that must be extended to all people, and those who were outside the desired pattern were excluded. Even after the Second Vatican Council, and the Catholic Church, preferentially, having placed itself on the side of the poor and needy, we still see the rejection of this position, by certain movements, within the church. We find defenders of morals and good customs blaming the possible failures of the traditional family on trans/transvestite, lesbian, gay, bisexual, non-binary men and women, etc. With many of these people being made into scapegoats in order to "hiding random violence and its persecuting function, finding an explanation that justifies mob violence [...] (BEATTIE, 2002, p. 104). A logic, which contradicts the gospels, because, as René Girard observed, "the gospels break the sacrificial logic of heroic narratives, and tell what happened from the perspective of the victim, not from the perspective of the sacrificer" (SUZIN, 24 set. 2012).

For Girard, contrary to hatred and violence, the gospels reveal that to escape violence it is necessary to love one's brother completely, to abandon violent mimesis. It is regrettable that many Christians continue to insist on uniting violence and the sacred. Second Maria Clara

Bingemer, "violence has become a massive fact in contemporary societies to the point of constituting a real challenge for the moral conscience of our time"¹⁷ (BINGEMER, 2002, p.11).

According to the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, we have a lot of difficulty accepting what is different because our subjectivity is focused on ourselves, and this leads us to only accept in the other person what is in accordance with our own standards. It is a way of thinking that leads to mimicry, from Girard, through the repetition of unreflective behaviors, provoking prejudice, discrimination, and in many cases, leading to physical violence.

For this not to happen, it is necessary to awaken the subjectivity to the Infinite, and to the other person. According to Lévinas, the existing solution is to experience the ethics of alterity, where it is necessary to go beyond one's own being, looking at the face of the different person, in order to see him as he really is. Confronting the suffering and the difference we see, and discovering in it the 'other', the marginalized, like the biblical quadruple: "the poor, the orphan, the widow and the foreigner". People so different that they cannot be made 'into an equal'. This way, despite the desire to eliminate diversity, looking at that different face can reveal God to us, leading us to the opening of our subjectivity, since we were already marked by Him, before becoming a being. "The Infinite (God) presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyzes my powers, and rises hard and absolute from the depths of the eyes, defenseless in its nakedness and misery" (LÉVINAS, 2008, p. 194).

THE ETHICS OF INCLUSION

Lévinas' ethics of alterity makes us refer, as José M. Castillo reminds us, to the ethics of Christ, in which love is in the first place. It shows that Jesus always prioritized the dignity and happiness of the human person, even

leaving aside religious obligations, as shown in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7).

I believe it is important to think about an “ethic of inclusion” because I think this is the ethic that God wants us to live. “Hehe is with us, when we are alone or in a crowd, crying, smiling and fighting for justice, leading us to live an ethics that actively includes all people, with the same rights, duties, living, more than equality, the equity” (FURTADO, 2020, p.44-45). A God who suffers with each person when they are mistreated, excluded. As it is in Matthew, “[...] Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (BIBLE 2006, Mt, 25,40).

Living the ‘ethics of inclusion’ means having empathy, feeling the other person’s joys and sorrows, knowing how to put yourself in their shoes, understanding what is going on in their life and heart, suffering and rejoicing as if they were the person themselves.

It is a way of seeing and feeling the world, in a way that there is room for all people, who understand and respect each other through dialogue, empathy, and love. It is knowing that all people are children of the same God and have the right to be wherever they wish, as long as each person is respected, in their individuality, and as a social being. (FURTADO, 2022, p.314.)

It’s helping those who need to be part of the community, so that they can participate without fear and find support and strength there for whatever they need and be happy. It’s knowing that each person is special because they were created by God, and everything He created is good! God unconditionally loves all people, regardless of sex, gender, race, religion, etc. It privileges life, celebrates love, and each person as they are.

LGBTQIA+ INCLUSIVE LIBERATING THEOLOGIES

The ethics of inclusion leads us to think about theologies liberating inclusive

that encompass all people as one big we, and individually, with care, each person. Today, when talking about gender and sexual diversity, we have a great acronym that seeks to include, and increasingly, to make visible people who ask for respect and attention for them. The large acronym seeks to make visible not only the group, but the uniqueness of each person found in each letter of the acronym LGBTQIA+. This way, we need to think of theologies that do not start from the abstract, from the whole, as has been done with the natural law, and with sexuality, when it is admitted only for procreation. On the contrary, we need to look for the look of the God who loves each person in their peculiarity, in their difference, realizing that nature has different paths, not equal, and recognizing the presence of his immense love, in the most different families.

LGBTQIA+ inclusive liberation theologies can serve as a basis for conscious reflection on and for LGBT people.

We can start with non-LGBT-specific theologies, but which are linked to people who also suffer discrimination. For example, ‘black liberation theology’. A theology that, due to its reflexive consistency, anti-racist hermeneutics and the appreciation of the black person, is very important, helping us to reflect on prejudice, the value existing in each human person, the importance of what is equal and different, of respect for rights humans and all people.

The same is true of feminist and ecofeminist theologies. They are essential because they lead us to reflect on the patriarchal standards that govern society and churches, in addition to showing us the responsibility of taking care of Mother Earth, our common home, and of respecting and valuing the women of this planet. These theologies help us to reflect on the equality of rights and duties, fostering collaboration rather than domination, respect

for all forms of life and the freedom every person needs to love and be loved.

More specifically, then, we enter LGBTQIA+ theologies, where we have Queer theology, which through the theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid's thinking, helps us to reflect on the fluidity of gender, and the non-mandatory nature of binarism. It brings the image of the Queer God, who is always in process, with multiple faces, and we never finish getting to know each other. Equally important, knowing Mary Hunt's theology, through her reflection on marginalized, excluded women, and lesbian women, uniting theology and ethics, giving attention to questions of social justice.

They are plural and important LGBTQIA-inclusive liberating theologies, and need to be known and reflected. Theologies that, together with biblical reflections, such as those mentioned above, and the parables told by Fr. James Martin, in his book *Building a Bridge* (2018), can help to achieve a new perspective on life and God's love, enabling the carrying out a pastoral work of reception, inclusion and integration of all people, especially LGBTQIA+ people. As stated by Fr. Luis Correa Lima, "Our words can save lives or they can destroy them. May they save them" (LIMA, 2021, p. 12).

CONCLUSION

In this article we address: - The countless people who struggle to be heard, welcomed, and to occupy the place they are entitled to by baptism, in their religious communities. - The importance of liberating theologies, capable of making us feel the presence of the "almighty God in love and mercy", as theologians, Fr. Alfonso Garcia Rubio and Fr. Luis Correa Lima. Theologies that, in addition to being liberating, are inclusive, and bring reflections capable of rescuing self-esteem, developing empathy, recognizing the importance of welcoming and integrating people considered

'different' or 'non-standard' into religious communities.

LGBTQIA+ inclusive liberating theologies help to end limiting beliefs, leading people to love themselves as they are, and to respect the other person as they are. And without a doubt, they can help us in preparing people who want to hear, and see in the faces desiring love, the presence of the God who loves, unconditionally, all people, especially LGBTQIA+ people and their families.

I conclude by recalling that Pope Francis has drawn attention to the importance of: - the discernment of conscience, and the experience of God by the faithful and the need for all people to find mercy and pastoral support.

In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* he said: "Everyone must be helped to find their own way of participating in the ecclesial community [...]. I am not referring only to the divorced who live in a new union, but to everyone, whatever the situation in which they find themselves" (AL, n.297).

Regarding the logic of pastoral mercy, Pope Francis vehemently states: "Sometimes it is very difficult for us to make room, in pastoral care, for the unconditional love of God. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of concrete sense and real meaning, and this is the worst way to keep the Gospel" (AL, n. 311). Further: "I invite pastors to listen, with affection and serenity, with a sincere desire to enter into the heart of people's drama and understand their point of view, to help them live better and recognize their place in the Church (AL, number 312).

Pope Francis wants us to be bridges, not walls. To this end, knowing and reflecting on LGBTQIA+ inclusive liberating theologies are important actions to help us walk the path of inclusion and integration of all people in Catholic communities.

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