

The Queer God: The God we must free from the mirror of our own ideologies.

by: Genilma Boehler¹

I was talking to a theologian friend of mind whom I studied with in the 80s. We were talking about the Queer God, and we recalled that many people at the time were scandalized when, within Liberation Theology, we asserted a God of the Poor. At the time, this was considered subversion, which was persecuted precisely for revealing the particularity of God for the poor men and women of Latin America and the Caribbean. Herein lies a key element of our theology: the contexts occupied by subjects, diversity, pluralism, the fleeting nature of life itself, of faith and of God. The God of the poor was and is scandalous, just like the Black God and countless other theologies with which we dialogue, such as ecological theology, feminist theologies, post-colonial theologies, as all of them present the fragmentation that counters hegemonic dogmatism.

Pre-modern and modern Christian theologies claim God to be inflexible, immutable, cast in a mold formed by masculine, hierarchical and patriarchal influences. Authoritarian in form and doctrine, and in the dogmas created to legitimize it. As such, there is a God separated from his/her humanity, and is instead cast as cruel, distant, exclusionary, punishing, while at the same time is characterized by just one possibility of being represented.

To speak of the Queer God is to question the legacy that we as Christians cannot avoid, even recognizing the diversity of pre-modern and modern theologies, with their respective traditions.²

Nonetheless, if Theology is to speak about God, we must ask ourselves: of what God, then, are we speaking?

When Marcella Althaus-Reid was in Brazil in 2004, she was interviewed by journalist Eliane Brum³ for the magazine *Época*. One of the questions she was asked was: What is a Queer God like? She gave the following response:

“It is an unfinished God. We have God coming out of the closet saying “I can’t be God, I have another identity, I need to be a man.” It is not a concession to men, but a need held by God to reveal himself. To say: “I am weak, I am human.” Coming out of that closet was hard. That is a new interpretation of God, arising from a new way of relating with the divine. Metaphors of a perfect God, one of supreme wisdom, a complete God, come from a pre-modern way of thinking. I work with the post-modern. The Queer God is an

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² OtrasOvejas. Las theologies Gay-Queer. Disponible In: <http://www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar/articulos/TheologiesGayQueer.pdf> , Acesso, setembro, 2014.

³Eliane Brum, Revista *Época*, Edição 329, 06-09-2004.

unfinished God. One that is in process, ambiguous, one of multiple identities that we never quite get to know, because when we try they escape, there is more. I do not want a God of the hegemonic center, a king that comes to visit the slums, who extends his hand and says: "I am God, I have a kingdom and I am so good that I come to visit. But now, I must return to the kingdom of heaven." I speak of a God that opens his/her closet and entertains his/her friends saying: "Now I'm Marlene Dietrich".⁴

Based on this response, we are faced with one of the key elements of Queer Theology, or of the Queer God, which is characteristic of postmodernity, the poststructuralist renewal of the pursuit of transcendentalism, including the religious dimensions of deconstructive thought. The unfinished God, as Althaus-Reid claims, passes through that filter and reaches a sublime dimension in that game of revelation and concealment, of what it is and what it could become. Jean François Lyotard affirmed that "post-modernity, at its conception, is not simply a period that follows modernity: it is the disenchantment with the structures established by the traditional narratives, it is the end of generalizations and universalities."⁵ This is key in our era of disenchantment with Western Christianity based on theology, whether it be of the Roman Catholic variety or the Evangelical one.

According to Althaus-Reid, Queer Theology "shares certain elements with liberationist and feminist theologies, but goes further in its hermeneutical suspicion by breaking down theological constructions that serve the interests of power, and especially questions the ideological construction of sexual identities."⁶

Queer Theology, as used by Althaus-Reid and what she calls Indecent Theology or Twisted Theology⁷, breaks with heterosexual ideology, which establishes itself as a universal model for sexuality, and has been the dominant force in the history of Christianity and theology.⁸ To work with this theory, the author explains, we must come out of God's closet and engage in a process of theological *queering*.⁹ Put simply, we must ask ourselves about the heterosexual experience that has molded our understanding of theology, paying close attention to the role of theologians and hermeneutics.¹⁰ According to Althaus-Reid, this method requires courage

⁴ Brum, 2004.

⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, **citado por: Leonardo Marcondes Alves, THE God pós-moderno. Disponível: <http://ensaioesnotas.wordpress.com/2010/12/03/the-God-pos-moderno/>, Acesso, setembro, 2014.**

⁶ Marcella Althaus-Reid, Yo soy la desintegración. In: Re-leituras de Frida Kahlo – por uma ética estética da diversidade machucada. Santa Cruz of the Sul: Edunisc, 2008, p.96.

⁷ Creio que os termos "indecente" e "torcida" foi uma tentativa de Althaus-Reid com the termo "Queer" para uma linguagem próxima ao espanhol e ao português.

⁸ ALTHAUS-REID, 2004, p. 2.

⁹ ALTHAUS-REID, 2004, p. 2.

¹⁰ ALTHAUS-REID, 2004, p. 2.

and honesty, beyond simple critical engagement with *queer* theory, which implies thinking outside the heterosexual box and criticizing heterosexual theology.¹¹ Althaus-Reid states: The challenge is there for everyone. Heterosexual women (and men) must speak of their own identity, as heterosexual ideology has also distorted the reality of relations between men and women. Herein lies the paradox: the heterosexuality of Liberation Theology is also an ideologized, distorted product.¹²

For Althaus-Reid, *queer* theology is an emerging discipline whose radical starting point is the broad subject, still unexplored, of the nature of incarnation. The fact that God came down from heaven and become of the flesh, living on this strange earth, opens up new horizons to writing and understanding theology, whose limits are not set in stone and cannot be held back by canonical laws and statutes. This phenomenon of the divine made incarnate invades diversity and offers countless challenges for our understanding of theology.¹³

In Althaus-Reid's writings, the incarnation, which primarily passes through the body, through the feeling of the body, does not mesh with metaphysical descriptions of the Son of God, because the divine-human was born crying amidst cow manure and fleas, covered with the blood of its birth and held in the insecure arms of a young woman and who, from that moment, assures salvation for all.¹⁴ This is the root of the incarnation in all its radicalness. Of the God incarnate, of the divine-human who became flesh, and the all the ideas linked to this principle are always subject to change.

Althaus-Reid claims: "life can never be normal for those that embrace the flesh as divine, those that are lovers of God through the flesh with all its diversity".¹⁵ This is a relevant discussion that contemplates the body and sexuality. A relevant aspect of Althaus-Reid's theology, found in the political, critical positioning, assuming non-neutrality and a responsible position in the divine mapping of pleasure and desire.¹⁶ Althaus-Reid assures us that: "all theology is a sexual act, due to its vision of the world, its methodology and even as a result of its subject matter."¹⁷ According to Althaus-Reid,

¹¹ ALTHAUS-REID, 2004, p. 2.

¹² ALTHAUS-REID, 2006a, p. 68.

¹³ ALTHAUS-REID, 2004(a), p. 7.

¹⁴ ALTHAUS-REID, 2004(a), p. 7.

¹⁵ ALTHAUS-REID, 2004(a), p. 7.

¹⁶ ALTHAUS-REID, 2004, p. 7.

¹⁷ ALTHAUS-REID, 2006a, p. 67.

The *Bible* is full of sexual metaphors. Christianity comes from a sexual metaphor— a God that has relations with a woman, and from those relations Christ is born. It all stems from a sexual origin that some would have us desexualize. A cloud, a dove, an angel. A woman who was promised to be married, and suddenly becomes pregnant, and no ones from where. “But who is your father?”, people must have said to Jesus in Israel. So, instead of rejecting the sexual metaphor, I play with it. Christianity understands and organizes the world based on a heterosexual ideology: family, subordination and duality. My proposal is to imagine a faith and a theology based on different sexual experiences. Not that of the gays or lesbians, or transvestites, but based on *Queer* Theory, a sort of umbrella that covers all sexual diversity. I want to know, for example, how a transvestite relates to the sacred, what is a transsexual’s God like. My theology isn’t about equality, it’s about difference.¹⁸

In chapter three of her book, *Indecent Theology*, the very title explains the duality of the sexual and of the erotic: “Sing obscenity to theology. Theology as a sexual act”.¹⁹ In her arguments, she points out the sexual aspects of theology confirming them as ideology, orthodoxy, orthopraxis and sexual activity.²⁰ By affirming the legitimacy of indecent theology, the authors calls into question and criticizes “the normative and interpellative forces of patriarchal theology,”²¹ reclaiming the right to assume a divine and human identity²² with no restrictions, as well as to assume the right to rename God, as indecent theologians: “God the Faggot; God, the Drag Queen; God the Lesbian; God the heterosexual Woman God that does not accept the constructions of ideal heterosexuality; God, the ambivalent, not easily classified sexuality.”²³

When asked about her affirmation of the Bisexual Christ, Althaus-Reid reveals that this is not a simplification of theology or of the naming of Christ or a definition of Christ as a sexual category:

What do we know about Jesus’ sexuality. Nothing. What the Gospels tell us? They tell us he was circumcised. That he spoke in the synagogues and knew scripture. Those are the few details we are given about Jesus. I know that Jesus was a man, but I like to say that he was a man for one or two reasons. Of Jesus’ sexuality we know nothing. Being a man doesn’t mean being a man. So why not assume that Jesus could have had another sexuality? What could it have been? I seek to develop a Bi-Christ. Not to look for sexual experiences. It is the way of thinking that interests me here. Bisexuality is taboo. Gays don’t like it. Lesbians don’t like it. They say: “Make up your mind.” Then I thought to raise this flag, to be critical, it is very interesting. The Bi-Christ is a God who is in the

¹⁸ Brum, 2004.

¹⁹ ALTHAUS-REID, 2005, p. 127.

²⁰ ALTHAUS-REID, 2005, p. 127.

²¹ ALTHAUS-REID, 2005, p. 138.

²² ALTHAUS-REID, 2005, p. 138.

²³ ALTHAUS-REID, 2005, p. 138,

middle, who can understand the differences and love them. A God who cannot fit into just one identity because he never completely defines himself. He is a broad Messiah.²⁴

I believe these arguments necessarily lead us to think of a Queer God as one who challenges univocal representations, to disrupt the hegemonic models of representation of God.²⁵ In the words of Althaus-Reid,

Bisexuality is one of those epistemological categories that defy the binarism characteristic of Christianity. Theology, accustomed to the heterosexual thought by which it is dominated, can only see the world through opposites and hierarchies. Isn't it time to recognize that if Christ can only be understood in terms of binary opposition, his sacrifice was worth very little? Jesus' praxis subverted ideologies and gave way to what in Latin America is called "the path": the theological journey when God's people continue growing in faith and understanding.

This is about deconstructing the hegemonic, recovering the possibility of the particular, of the fragment, that gives meaning to a community of faith. According to the author, "The heterosexual, gay, lesbian, transsexual or other Christ do not need to be exclusive, but to be placed in the space-time of the experience of a community."²⁶ For theologies accustomed to universalities and absolutisms, what indecent theology offers are serious questions to the *status quo* of traditional theologies.²⁷ As such, it is important to break with the codes of pre-modern and modern theologies. In that case, indecent theology questions, criticizes and offers a different epistemological modality for theological and Christological thought.²⁸ According to Althaus-Reid: "it is an exercise in hermeneutics and interpretation, one which draws signs by developing varying levels of overlapping meanings, [...] and always leads us to another notion we haven't seen before."²⁹

²⁴ Brum, 2004.

²⁵ Althaus-Reid, 2008, p. 98.

²⁶ ALTHAUS-REID, 2005, p. 167.

²⁷ ALTHAUS-REID, 2008, p. 98.

²⁸ ALTHAUS-REID, 2005, p. 167.

²⁹ ALTHAUS-REID, 2005, p. 170.

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