

Homosexuality, gender, and *healing* in evangelical pastoral perspectives*

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the ways of sexuality regulation in evangelical pastoral perspectives from the analysis of normative texts. The author also discusses the notion of cure of homosexuality. The ethnographic material is composed both of books and Brazilian and foreign articles selected from a mapping out of the evangelical editorial universe and of the monitoring of contents at sites offering counseling and treatment to homosexuals from a religious perspective. Data was collected between 2003 and 2004.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; Homosexuality; Spiritual cure; Gender; Religion; Human rights.

[...] I've seen tears on that face. Yes, I've seen, it was a woman's face. Or maybe a man's? I couldn't tell for sure. But she (he?) was crying. I could only be certain of one thing: that person was an entendido¹. Entendido in suffering, in pain, in being hurt, in being humiliated, offended, insulted, even beaten. Entendido in losing... Some have lost their dignity; others, their very will to live. Entendido in prejudice at the workplace, the streets, the family, the church. Entendido in AIDS. Entendido in being laughed at along the streets and in walking with her (his) face down, trying to keep a low profile. Or in walking with an insolent expression, head high, looking defiantly at people, ready to strike before being stricken... Entendido in disguises, in lies. And often, when looking at her (his) own reflection on the mirror, she (he) sees herself (himself) neither as a man nor as a woman. And finds out that she (he) is nothing. Not a man, not a woman.

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In August 2004, a bill in proceduring at the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro caught the attention of the public opinion and developed into a critical controversy on the possibility of change in the sexual orientation of homosexuals.¹ By that time, a research was being conducted on the conceptions of homosexuality among evangelical Protestants in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Following up the action of religious groups such as the Movement for a Healthy Sexuality (Moses - Movimento pela Sexualidade Sadia), the Association of Christian Psychologists and Psychiatrists (CPPC - *Corpo de Psicólogos e Psiquiatras Cristãos*) and the Brazilian Association for Supporting People that Voluntarily Wish to Come Out of Homosexuality (Abraceh - *Associação Brasileira de Apoio a Pessoas que Voluntariamente Desejam Deixar a Homossexualidade*),² interviewed men belonging to Pentecostal communities that had already kept homosexual relationships along their lives, seeking to investigate the nexuses between the religious experience and the processes of self-construction.³

¹ "Entendido": literally, it means "one that understands", "one that is an expert in something". In the homosexual context, however, it stands for "gay", and has also the subtler meaning of "someone that knows about something that the rest of us don't". (Translator's Note)

In the first stage of the investigation, the religious discourse that regarded the notion of the *healing* of homosexuality appeared as a hegemonic perspective,⁴ defended by different denominations, despite the varied cosmological and doctrinaire emphases of those churches.⁵ Ensuring the possibility of "transformation" of the individuals in *ex-homosexuals* – enunciated within the pastoral sphere as a "hope for those that suffer" –, the religious men's discourse penetrated the political arena in a bill that intended to establish the allocation of State resources to religious initiatives focused on the *recovery* of homosexuals. A religious congressman has even granted the bill a favorable sentence in the following terms:

Man and woman were created and born with opposite genders in order to complement each other and procreate. In spite of being accepted by society, homosexuality is a distortion of the normal human being's nature. Thus, the opportunity to wager again on the normal condition of procreation is praiseworthy, and that is the reason why my sentence is favorable (Congressman S. Malafaia - Relater).

The theme has resounded in the big press and counted on the reaction of several sectors of the civil society: social movements, intellectuals, public personalities and NGOs manifested their repudiation to the *fundamentalism* and *homophobia* of the evangelical Protestants. The debate demonstrated the urgent need of investigating the religious perspectives on what concerns to sexuality in Brazil today.

The anthropologic production focused on the spheres of the entwining between religion and sexuality highlights the impact of the religious adhesion on the construction of the gender and of the female sexuality (Machado, 1996; Machado and Mariz, 1996). Although some studies focus on given aspects of the regulation of sexuality by the evangelical Protestant doctrines, there is a scarce specific literature on homosexuality. The present article intends to contribute to such debate, focusing on discourses about homosexual practices in pastoral and doctrinaire and evangelical perspectives.

Fresh researches point out transformations in the Brazilian religious scenario on what concerns to themes that are pertinent to the sexuality sphere – such as, for instance, the demand of fidelity for men and women, indicating a minimization of the asymmetry between genders (Machado, 1996; Fernandes *et al.*, 1998). In the evangelical Protestant context, in issues such as abortion, homosexuality and sexual choice, there seems to be some impermeability to changes (Mafra, 1998). In spite of an emphasis on the discourse of *shelter*, the concept remains that such practices are *sinful*. Thus, although the Universal Church of God's Kingdom (IURD - *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*) stands out in a broader set of religious communities due to the greater acceptance of homosexuals in its list of followers (76% of the interviewees from this church stated that they would never exclude a homosexual from their congregational space), the defense of that position should be construed not so much as an acceptance of the homosexual practice, and more as a "primordial reason for pastoral care" (Fernandes *et al.*, 1998, p. 117).

Such pastoral posture provides a proliferation of discourses that works as a true *discursive explosion* (Foucault, 1997). This article's interest focuses on the perspectives of the management of the sexual practices based on a given discourse on homosexuality. It is about, essentially, discussing the nexuses between the conceptions of body, gender and sexuality that are present in the religious discourse.

The proposition is comprised in an anthropological approach that privileges the social and cultural construction of sexuality. The basic presupposition is the fact that the sexual conduct is a domain that depends on the socialization and distribution of meanings, regulated by social parameters (Heilborn, 1999; Weeks, 1999). I regard religion as one of those instances of control, since it constitutes symbolic systems that are able to provide a sense to the social action, introducing *dispositions* and *motivations*, a certain way of *seeing, apprehending and understanding* the world (Geertz, 1989). In this sense, understanding that values are diffused by the religious discourse contributes to the unveiling of the cultural logics that inform the experience and guide the social action (Fry, 1982).

In the first part, I address the forms in which homosexuality is seen as a problem in Brazilian religious discourses. In the second, the focus shifts to the techniques that constitute the discourse about *healing*

and *liberation* of homosexuality, aiming at understanding what the perspectives of regulation of sexuality are in this context.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the evangelical Protestant discourse, a contextualization of the ethnographic material comes in handy. The texts that I mention in the first part contemplate the Brazilian evangelical discursive production on the theme. Collected as a result of a mapping of the evangelical editorial universe,⁶ they consist of Brazilian books and texts that broach homosexuality directly: approximately ten titles authored by pastors and religious leaders, in their majority active in pastoral works with homosexuals. Articles collected within the sphere of action of the Movement for a Healthy Sexuality (Moses) complete the *corpus* of the material that is examined in the first part. The option to prioritize those texts is due to the position of that religious initiative in the evangelical area: Moses has an "interdenominational" action and, presently, is an important articulator of pastoral works pointing toward homosexuals. Created in 1997, in Rio de Janeiro, it promotes counseling, lectures and "qualification" for the evangelization of homosexuals, in addition to disclosing in its website (www.moses.org.br) addresses and contacts of several religious institutions and initiatives with similar purposes.

In the second part, in spite of making reference to the aforementioned literature, I use a different material. I examine the discursive production on the *healing* of homosexuality (four foreign titles) and on *liberation* (two foreign and four domestic titles), including speeches of religious leaders held in Pentecostal services. The incorporation of publications by foreign authors is justified, since they constitute an "indispensable reading" for those that wish to obtain the *healing* of homosexuality in certain religious contexts. *Coming out of homosexuality*, by Bob Davies and Lori Rentzel, for example, is indicated in Moses' website as the most important book about homosexuality. I have been introduced to authors such as the *Christian physician* Rebecca Brown and the Brazilian pastor Neuza Itioka by several informers as being "specialists" in *spiritual battles*, important references within the evangelical environment on what concerns to techniques of *liberation*. Out of a total of ten books, six are authored by pastors or religious leaders that *administer*⁷ *liberation*, and four by authors that perform a pastoral work with homosexuals.⁸ Thus, the present literature is taken as a document, with a programmatic content that is utilized in ritual contexts involving practices of *liberation* and *healing*. The relevance of this analysis is also justified by the fact that those books occupy top positions on the bestsellers rank.⁹ Moreover, my participation as a visitor in the 2005 Apostolical Prophetic Congress granted me access to lectures on *sexual restoration* and to ethnographic observation during rites dedicated to that theme.¹⁰

From the moral constructivism to the gender naturalism

The articles diffused by the Moses' website contemplate different themes such as homosexual movement, civil partnership between homosexuals, sexual abuse, pornography, pedophilia, prostitution, gender, abortion, gay theology and feminist movement. The wording of their approach places a strong emphasis on the problem of the "homosexual lifestyle". Thus, although Moses signalizes the broader purpose of "helping those suffering of sexual deviations of any nature", its specific concern with homosexuality is obvious. In the way in which each of the themes is approached, a moral judgment on the homosexual practices is clearly detectable. The references to the *gay lifestyle* are countless and constant even in texts addressing more general themes, such as, for instance, sexual equality. The crossing between nature and gender indicates that sexuality is deeply contained within a comprehensive moral order, whose determination is divine. The epigraph of this article is illustrative of such aspect: "neither man, nor woman", the *homosexual sin* is the act of defying a world order that was established by God. In this perception, sexual practices between men or between women antagonize a *divine determination* concerning to the genders and the sexuality. The religious message becomes complete with the affirmation that the homosexual desire is liable to a change.

The pastoral proposition presented in the context of the evangelical literature¹¹ possesses a similar content: there is a strong concern with pointing out the *biblical truth* about the *facts* associated to homosexuality. The book *The day of my rebirth* (1993), by the pastor João Carlos Xavier, presents the

testimony of the author himself - an *ex-homosexual* and *ex-transvestite* – with the purpose of "proving what Christ operates in the life of someone that is apparently a lost cause".

The ensemble of articles and books shows a certain homogeneity both in its structure and in its contents: they present discussions on the origin of homosexuality, followed by the explanation of the *truth* of the Bible, in order to prove the possibility of *healing*. They also present a negative characterization of homosexuality, highlighting the aspects of a "previous life" associated to a *deranged, immoral* behavior, which leads to *suffering*. Recurrent "examples" of healing make a contrast between the previous and subsequent moments to the conversion of the "ex-homosexual", indicating the need of an adjustment to the normative model for the genders. In these narratives, the past is associated to a kind of inversion of the gender, in opposition to the "restored" present, in which the male homosexual, for instance, can transform the "sin of homosexuality" into the "blessing of heterosexuality" by means of marriage and constitution of a "family of God".¹²

In the examined material, some statements about homosexuality are recurrent: 1) it is a *learned behavior*; 2) it is a *spiritual problem*; 3) it is *against nature*. Such concepts support a more general position of the evangelical Protestants, that *homosexuality* does not represent a "natural" attribute of the subject. Underlying to the conception that those practices can be *abandoned* by means of *restoration* and *healing*, the idea of a *heterosexual nature* is present. Let's examine each of those statements to see how that rhetoric is constructed.

Homosexuality: a learned behavior?

One of the major themes of these texts is the genesis of homosexuality. A heated discussion on the *origin* of the homosexual behavior is presented based on the confrontation of theories generated by the knowledge of biomedicine – which supports a determinist genetic view – with the theories that assert the "construction" of homosexuality. A great number of authors examine and refute theories that consider the existence of an innate *pre-disposition* or *tendency* to homosexuality, and then asseverate the primacy of the environmental, social and psychological influences in the configuration of the homosexual identities.

Lísias Castilho, a *Christian physician*, author of the book *Homosexuality*, discusses the theme in the chapter "Biological perspective" and supports the position that the scientific knowledge "is transitory". Although men and women are "anatomically, hormonally and functionally" different "since conception", the "differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals of the same gender have never been clearly demonstrated, neither in the mental nor in the physical sphere". For the author, several science-based studies have failed in their efforts to demonstrate "the genetic transmission of homosexual tendencies" (Castilho, 1990). Thus, he presents a selective appropriation of some psychologizing theories and defines "how" an individual *becomes* a homosexual: "sexual abuse in childhood", "difficulty in the relationship between the children and their parents" and "a defective relationship with the parent of the same gender" are some of the factors that would result in the emergence of that *deficiency* or *disease*. His text is illustrative: "We could even state, like so many authorities in the Psychology area, that the homosexual is, above all, a sick person, and, as such, liable to treatment and healing" (*Idem*, p. 65).

The review of the rhetoric constructed by this author indicates a recurrent view on the "origin" of homosexuality. In this literature, the homosexual behavior is learned by means of negative experiences. The concepts defended by Castilho characterize a kind of general highlight of the texts, with small variations, over the "factors" that influence the "configuration" of a homosexual identity. As a matter of fact, the arguments are contrary to an essentialist view of homosexuality. The homosexual is a carrier of symptoms of a *sick* psyche. The homosexuals are *prone to depression* and to suicide, are *unstable, insecure* and *immature*. A "*patologized*" representation of the homosexual practices is emphasized, articulated over the conceptions of *viciousness, compulsion* and *mental disturbances*. In another discursive sphere, such practices are presented as "deep-rooted habits" that, nevertheless, constitute a state that is liable to an alteration: "people are not homosexual by nature,

they are in a homosexual state" (Santolin, 2001, p. 28); "the problem, therefore, is not to have or not a homosexual nature, but to be or not in a homosexualized state" (Souza, 2004). Homosexuality is regarded, fundamentally, as resulting of the socialization in families *with no structure*, in which the absence of strong male and female models produces a kind of identification with the *wrong* gender. In this context, the use of the expressions *disorder* or *crisis* of gender identity is recurrent. Absent fathers and domineering mothers are mandatory characters in the cases evoked as examples of male homosexuality.

Homosexuality: *a spiritual problem*?

The notion of *spiritual problem* raises a characterization of homosexuality that is similar to the previous idea, in defense of the possibility of "reversion", since both concepts impute to homosexuality a certain externality to the individual, that is, they do not regard it as innate.

J. Cabral, in his book *Love the wrong way out: homosexuality*, discusses the *spiritual* aspects that may lead to homosexuality. Above all, the adhesion to non-evangelical rituals and beliefs "may be a stimulator for the homosexual behavior", leading to *promiscuity* and *perversion*: "the cases of demonic possession may be directly associated to the homosexual activity. Moreover, there is a belief in the existence of demons whose specific function is to provoke this kind of distortion in human beings, deviating them from the teachings of God" (Cabral, 1995, p. 22). João Carlos Xavier, with his *testimony* as an *ex-homosexual*, presently a pastor of the Assembly of God – married to a *servant of God* and father to a son – presents a similar view in his book *The day of my rebirth*. His *homosexuality* had allegedly been developed in the *umbanda*², when *legions of demons* "operated in his life" and, "taking possession of his body", *aroused* him for the homosexual desires. Xavier's narrative is punctuated by considerations about the *malign* character of the homosexual impulses. This *sexual sin* is regarded as perpetrated by individuals *whose body is possessed by the Devil* or that are under the influence of *pombas-gira*³ and other *exus*⁴. These arguments, of a cosmologic nature, configure a physical-moral perception of homosexuality, in which the sin opens *breaches* in the corporality - through which the Devil instills sensations, movements, involuntary contractions. We will resume this aspect later; for now, it is important to emphasize that the struggle against homosexuality encompasses a ritual participation and processes of purification in the solution of a *spiritual problem*.

Those two books illustrate the highlight of the concepts presented in the ensemble of the examined material. Homosexual practices are apprehended in negative experiences of *abuse*, *trauma*, *violence*, and *rejection* (psychological version); or are associated to a complex chain of cosmologic meanings that resorts to the theology of the spiritual battle¹³ when considering the action of *demons* over the sphere of the individuals' sexuality. I had access to this kind of discourse in the literature, but several informers, as well, stated that this is a conception quite diffused in their churches.¹⁴ In the religious environment, "the demons" are regarded as "sexually transmissible". In this sense, the sin of homosexuality should be avoided because it allows an infestation by malign beings (Natividade, 2005, 2003a and b). Under the view of that perspective, the social and psychological disorders that help in the development of *homosexuality* may be caused by a spiritual influence. Be that as it may, in both cases homosexuality is external to the individual: *homosexual feelings* or *desires* do not constitute attributes that are innate to the subject, but are configured based on a constellation of "social" or "spiritual" factors.

Expanding the view focus to the religious universe, this discourse is in contrast, above all, with that of the Catholic Church, which does not deny the homosexual practice as being a *tendency*. The Catholics consider the possibility that homosexuality constitutes an expression of some individuals' *nature*,

² Umbanda: a religion formed within the Brazilian religious culture, which syncretizes several elements, including those from other religions such as Catholicism, Spiritism and the Afro-Brazilian Religions. (Translator's Note)

³ Pomba-gira: in the Afro-Brazilian religions, a kind of she-devil, represented by a very beautiful woman, who influences both women and men, making them behave as lascivious and impudent *females*. (Translator's Note)

⁴ Exu: in the Afro-Brazilian religions, the messenger between the gods (*orixás*) and the human beings. Due to the syncretism with the Catholic religion, however, he was associated to the Devil. The *pomba-gira* is a kind of female exu.

despite the affirmation – on an ideal plane – of the need of restraint by means of celibacy and the cultivation of the *love of God* (Natividade and Oliveira, 2004). As a matter of fact, the evangelical *homosexual state* acquires a more precise outline when put in contrast with the relatively more tolerant position of the Catholics.¹⁵

The adoption of a *constructivist* position by the evangelical Protestants admits the possibility of a management of the body in the production of a sexuality that complies with the limits established by the doctrine. Stating that the homosexual drive is originated by environmental or spiritual factors is precisely what allows the control of the sexual conducts by the promise of reversion of homosexuality. The evangelical conception, therefore, is configured as a *moral constructivism*, which, on another discursive plane, resorts to naturalistic arguments in its definition of gender.

Homosexuality: *against nature*?

The examined material places a stronger emphasis on the discourse that regards homosexuality as a practice that is opposed to nature, and this fact points to two distinct ways of formulation. The first one discusses the natural use of the body; the second focuses especially on the sphere of the gender. "Naturalistic" arguments are utilized both in the characterization of a *healthy* and suitable use of the body, and in the proposition of maintenance of the traditional and complementary roles played by the genders. We could state that a kind of essentialism is re-introduced into the evangelical discourse when characterizing the models of man and woman that were bestowed by God. I suggest a discussion on this matter based on a passage of the aforementioned book, *Homosexuality*, by the *Christian physician* Lisias Castilho, and on a fragment of the article "Aberration", diffused in the Moses' website. Respectively:

"The human homosexuality lacks a biological sense, antagonizes the anatomical finality of the genitals and hinders the procreation." (Castilho, 1990, p. 64)

"How is food introduced into the body: is it through the nose or through the mouth? How are images introduced into the body: is it through the mouth or through the eyes? How is a perfume introduced into the body: is it through the ears or through the nose? How is semen introduced into the body so that an act of love is executed and humankind is perpetuated: is it through the mouth (oral sex)? Is it through the anus (anal sex)? Is it through the vagina (natural sex)? [...] Homosexuality is the abandonment of the natural way in favor of another one, which is against nature." (*Revista Ultimato*, 1986)

Those passages express the concern with a "natural" finality that would restrict the ways in which the body can be used. The motif focuses on the definition of the limitations for the human pleasure. What is licit and illicit for the sex is defined based on an equation in which a *normal* and *healthy* behavior is the one guided by the determinations of God, which are allegedly expressed in the biblical text. The non-heterosexual sexualities are, therefore, opposite to the Word of God and, in this sense, constitute an "abnormality", an "aberration", and a behavior that "aggravates God". A hierarchic structural principle is presented, pointing out that there is "a place for each item": the penis, which produces semen, was not created by God for the individual pleasure (out of the Christian marriage), but for the reproduction of humankind, and should be deposited into a natural vessel (the vagina), created by God as well. Transgressing that order means abandoning a natural way of life. The homosexual practices, as Castilho states, "lack a biological sense" and "antagonize the anatomical finality" of the genitals. The family is regarded as the utmost expression of God on Earth, and the reproduction with the purpose of constituting the *family of God* is the advocated principle. Underlying to the concept that sexuality should be guided by the biblical rules, we can detect the more or less concealed supposition that the good sex is only the sex that occurs within the Christian marriage.

Thus, the association between reproduction and sexual practices is a recurrent resource in the definition of what is a natural and healthy way of exercising the sexuality. After all, "the civil union between a man and a woman *usually* results in babies, while the sexual union between two individuals of the same gender *usually* results in diseases" (Severo, 2003, p. 3). That is the outline of the

construction of the homosexuality image as a practice that is *hazardous* and *threatening* to society due to the potential transmission of diseases.

The moral weight present in the arguments developed with regard to the “against nature” enunciate postulates that homosexuality is an "impurity", a behavior that contaminates and infects, in such a way that *treating homosexuality* – that is, providing conversion to that population – is to produce *social health*. This is the perspective from which Júlio Severo, author of the book *The homosexual movement*, views the homosexual contacts:

“The typical sexual practices of the homosexuals are horror stories: they exchange saliva, feces, semen and blood with dozens of men each year. They drink urine, swallow feces and experience rectal traumas on a regular basis. During those encounters, the participants are often drunk, stoned or in orgy environments.” (1998, pp. 67-68)

The utilization of the body during sexual homoerotic contacts is regarded as a man’s mistaken desire of making an *immoral* (and unnatural) use of himself, an action that presents "serious social consequences". For Severo, the "sexual practices of the homosexual men, involving an oral copulation following the rectal sodomy, as well as the contamination of the fingers and hands during the homosexual acts, are causing the spread of a variety of parasites, bacteria and viruses across society" (*Idem*, p. 69). The most recurrent image of the homosexuality – impurity - infection articulation concerns to the propagation of Aids, although this is not the only sexually transmissible disease that the homosexuals "spread all the time". Thus, the homosexual practices culminate in a *punishment by God*.

The “nature” *versus* “against nature” dichotomy is, therefore, strongly marked; based on it, other oppositions are structured: salvation - hell, purity - impurity, life - death, marriage - loneliness, protection - vulnerability, happiness - destruction, sanctification - sin. Homosexuality, as an *unnatural* practice, is always placed on the negative pole, a fact that confirms the formation of a negative image around it.

Based on this logic, Júlio Severo analyzes homosexuality in several texts. In *The illusions of the gay movement* and *The homosexual movement*, the author points out the "serious social consequences of *homosexuality*". For him, the homosexuals are *pedophiles* and *abusers*, *tend to crime* and to *sexual excess*, are prone to *promiscuity* and, above all, *spread diseases*. It is important to emphasize that it is about the male homosexuality, which is *promiscuous* and *irresponsible*, which *threatens* the family and *spreads diseases*. Summing up, it is the expression of a *deranged* and *excessive* sexuality, which ultimately results in *death*. The female homosexuality is mentioned with a lesser frequency. Claudionor Corrêa de Andrade, gospel pastor of the Assembly of God, resorts to similar arguments in his book *There is hope for the homosexuals!*. Although this author also regards the female homosexuality as a *sin*, his problematization focuses mainly on the male relationships. Based on the exemplary cases of two famous homosexuals (the North-American actor Rock Hudson and the English writer Oscar Wilde), Andrade discusses the *tragic end* that is reserved to every homosexual: Aids, solitude, death and suicide. Rock Hudson, who died as a victim of Aids in 1986 and was an "assumed homosexual, accustomed to the wildest orgies, has become a victim of his own depravation". Oscar Wilde, in his turn, is for the author an example of how the sin "accelerates the degeneration of a human being"; "his pathetic story is the inexorable reduction of a man to a human zero", is the proof that "everything that a man sows he will harvest." (Andrade, 1987)

It is important to highlight that, although the texts make reference to the male and female homosexuality on an ideal plane, there is an irregularity in the emphasis placed on these practices.¹⁶ Severo states that "it is much easier for men to become homosexuals, and in great numbers, than for women to become lesbians" (2004, p. 29). The conversion is, above all, focused on the *recovery* of male homosexuals from a prior life of excesses, leading the individual back to the values of family, marriage and religion.

To the “against nature” enunciate a counterpart should be presented. If the homosexuals make sex in an unnatural way, then it is true that (homosexual) men and women *are born as heterosexuals*, by the determination of their biological gender:

“When you were generated, your gender was also established. [...] You were born with your gender already defined: you possess defined, normal and healthy sexual organs. The hairs that cover your body and the tone of your voice. Also your physical structure, your pelvis, your testicles, your broad shoulders and your musculature. All this is a confirmation that superimposes to your [homosexual] situation.” (Feitosa, 1979, pp. 10-11)

The religious (naturalistic) message points to heterosexuality as the "natural norm" that is defied by the homosexuals. The Christian psychologist Rozangela Alves Justino reveals her naturalistic perspective in the text *From homosexuality to heterosexuality*.¹⁷ For the author, there is a *natural propensity* to heterosexuality that can be rediscovered by means of therapies:

“The clients of the Group of Friends (GA - *Grupo de Amigos*)¹⁸ come with a homosexual “mask”; they come to the GA to get help to take that mask off, and ask to be confirmed as heterosexuals. At heart they know that their propensity is to heterosexuality, but for whatever reasons they had been playing the role of homosexuals.” (1997, p. 30)

Homosexuality is, thus, a mask, under which lies a *heterosexual nature* that can and should be revealed, a propensity that is in harmony with the biological gender. If, on a certain plane "God has created men with a potential to homosexuality or heterosexuality", on another plane God "has determined heterosexuality". The naturalistic arguments expressed here quite reinforce the hierarchy of the genders, by strongly linking the biological gender to the masculine and feminine. It is a naturalism that acquires its own features, that is, an essentialism that is culturally molded by religion, subsumed to the cosmological and doctrinaire conceptions. The nature that is mentioned is the "divine nature".

The healing of homosexuality under discussion

So far I have been seeking to characterize some general principles that guide the pastoral practices on what concerns to homosexuality. From the "constructivist" posture to the naturalism that comprises the definitions of gender, conceptions on homosexuality are presented that allow affirming the possibility of changing the sexual orientation. My intent, in this second part of the article, is to reflect on the notion of the *healing* of homosexuality. I analyze the phenomenon to the light of a theoretical referential, dialoguing with contemporaneous authors in the area of the social sciences. Next, I focus on the pastoral techniques that propound the healing through a religious experience and examine notions employed as *sexual restoration*, *healing of memories* and *liberation*.

The work of Delma Pessanha Neves (1984), about communities of the Assembly of God, points to a relevant analytical perspective. According to the author, phenomena of *miraculous healing*, in a generic sense, report to the need of putting the devious or faithless individuals in good order, of subjecting them to the rules that are in force among the believers. The ideal of healing emphasizes the need of adjusting the individual to the religious norms and precepts, since disease and misfortunes, in a general way, allude to an estrangement from God and a subjection to the carnal pleasures. Phenomena of spiritual healing can be better understood if inserted in the context of "ritualized actions, which express the relationship of men with the world that has been made supernatural by them or with the powers that they attribute to the deities" (Neves, 1984, p. 5). As a matter of fact, the notion of miraculous healing presupposes classifications concerning to disease and health (misfortune and happiness), inserted into a cosmologic and doctrinaire referential picture.

Based on this view, what is liable to healing is situated within a very ample set of phenomena, which comprises from organic issues to family disagreements, unemployment, addictions of all sorts, as well as the possible *deviations* in the sphere of sexuality (*adultery*, *homosexuality*, etc.). In this sense, the

healing of a disease, the obtainment of a job and the organization of the family life – everything concerning to the idealized order in the doctrinaire perspective – are signs of the condition of an individual that was chosen by God and is protected by the Holy Ghost (Neves, 1984). Sin is associated to punishment, to human degeneration, in opposition to the omnipotence of God, to the grace, merit and mediatory power of the Holy Ghost, which, "obviously", the converts succeed in obtaining. Thus, perceptions of disease and health articulating the physical and moral aspects are configured.

The analysis by the sociologist Cecília Mariz (1994) on the recovery from alcoholism among the Pentecostals of lower social strata in Rio de Janeiro brings new elements for reflection. For the author, the process of religious conversion includes certain ways of interiorization, that is, from the moment of the religious adhesion the individual becomes reflective and able to obtain *liberation* from "problems" such as the alcoholism. Mariz points out that, in the context of *pentecostalized* evangelical beliefs, it is in the tension between freedom and determination that a liberated person is produced:¹⁹ "Thus, the concept of Pentecostal freedom reports to a subjection to God, that is, to His Rules and His plan" (1994, p. 207). In the Pentecostal sense, being free does not mean following the individual impulses and desires, but, on the contrary, it means living the Word of God, in accordance with His ethics and His determinations. It is a cognitive perspective that articulates magic – since it is enchanted – and ethics, characterizing a form of self-construction that is, at the same time, paradoxically individualistic and holistic: it values the individual transformation and encourages the dependence on God and on the religious community. In this sense, healing, liberation and personal regeneration appear as closely linked categories.

Clara Mafra (2002) also analyzes the evangelical liberation, especially by describing the ritual system of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, highlighting the performative sense of this religious form that encourages a change of the ontological sense. The constant reference to the Devil and the re-discovery of a personalized evil reinforce the dualism between good and evil and focus on the *performances* that are executed during the religious service: the manifestation of the Devil – and his confession of the evil he causes to the believers – provides the participants with a guide and a sense for their suffering. However, it is also in the ritual context that the believer learns how to defeat the *malign*. The powerful prayers, the human chain and the action of the pastor, who exerts his authority in the expulsion of the demons, make of the cult a kind of lesson of how to confront evil. Unemployment, distresses and afflictions are the work of the one that spends his whole time pestering the human beings and contending with God for inhabiting the believers' body. In contrast, by *living in Christ* and becoming a *temple* of the Holy Ghost, the believer becomes guarded from the *deceiver's* attacks and able to face the everyday tribulations and temptations. For Mafra, healing and liberation are achieved by means of the agonistic quest of ritual purification, which involves the "burning or tying" of the malign, but never his total defeat. Thus, in the "Neopentecostal ritual liberation, the Devil is never defeated once and for all, but suffers transitory defeats, one after the other, in the case of successful battles" (*Idem*, p. 219). It is a religious system that aims, by means of ritual processes of purification, at transforming the individual into a field, a surface fit to be inhabited by the deity (the Holy Ghost). Mafra, like other authors, points out the existence of given forms of construction of subjectivity and self-construction within this religious context, in which the notions of healing, liberation and personal regeneration are necessarily present in the learning of the theory of the person of that cosmology.

Based on this theoretical discussion, it is possible to discern three categories in the evangelical discourse we are analyzing: *healing*, *liberation* and *sexual restoration*. The first one is achieved in a process known as *healing of memories*, which indicates the influence of a psychologizing discourse on the religious practice. The *liberation*, in its turn, takes as its starting point the notion of *possession* and requires a ritual practice in which the believer and the pastor stage *performances* of expulsion of evil. The *sexual restoration* category circumscribes an ideal to be achieved: the adjustment to a model of gender that is in harmony with the ideal of man and woman of God. I start from this more general classification to proceed to the analysis of the discourses on the *healing* of homosexuality.

Sexual restoration: the return to the natural gender

In the first place, it is important to contextualize the ideal on which the conception of restoration of sexuality is founded. The pastoral discourses that favor the use of that notion present a strong

normative perspective, by conceiving a single model for the exercise of sexuality: the sexual practices executed within the *Christian marriage* are the only permitted ones. What is not in compliance with the pattern is a sin, therefore a sexuality disorder – a behavior that requires a *restoration*, a divine "repair". A *natural* (heterosexual) sexual drive, which was perverted in its origin by traumatic experiences and the practice of certain *sins*, is liable to be *restored* by a communion with the Holy Ghost, in a process involving the *healing of memories*, the search for sanctification, discipline and liberations. The extinction (or at least the attenuation) of the homosexual desires, as well as the emergence of a natural heterosexual drive, is aimed at as a possibility of compliance with the destiny conceived by God.

The evangelical rhetoric resorts to a naturalism with certain specificities: it favors the conception of a divinely conceived and ordered nature. Every effort aiming at the *healing* (in its ideal sense) will necessarily involve a return to *God's determinations*, on what concerns to the human sexuality. The concept of *sexual restoration* also presupposes an ideal of gender to be pursued by means of the religious experience.

In their definition on the *healing* of homosexuality, some of the examined books grant a privileged situation to the gender. Leanne Payne, author of *The healing of the homosexual* and *The broken image*, presents cases of healing involving the discovery of a *repressed masculinity*. *Being healed* is to release a *restrained* masculine energy, *deviated* from its *natural* course and destination. Restoring sexuality is to receive a *healing in masculinity* and cause the natural energy of the *male of God* to emerge. For other authors, the homosexual drive is attenuated (or even extinguished) with time, and is replaced by the heterosexual impulse (Davies and Rentzel, 1997).

The homosexuality addressed by Payne as a *crisis of identity* by the identification with the *opposite gender* implies an *immature* sexual development, which can be healed by means of prayers. The author suggests the "prayer for the liberation of the normal heterosexual drive", with the invocation of the Holy Ghost's presence, in order to awaken the *dormant sexual energy*. The use of the *cannibalistic compulsion* metaphor defines the origin of a homosexual identity, in a psychological perspective: homosexual desires are indicative of a need to "seek in the other" what one cannot recognize in oneself. In such perspective, in the sexuality restoration the recovery of the natural attributes of masculinity occurs by the election of certain models as ideals to be achieved. The pastoral discourse seeks the adjustment of the body and sexuality to a hierarchic gender model:

[...] I anointed his forehead with oil and prayed to the Lord to enter, heal and put in the normal course the normal desires and sexual impulses of 17-year old José. [...] After that prayer, I guided him to, consciously and deliberately, change his womanlike gestures, suggesting him to choose as his model the most virile man that he could imagine – someone he admired as a Christian, a leader, a husband and father – and he promised to do it." (Payne, 2001, p. 80)

The ideal of gender regards *initiative*, *confidence*, *aggressiveness* and *virility* as naturally masculine attributes, reinforcing an asymmetrical conception of the gender roles, which can be illustrated by the narrative of João Carlos Xavier (1993). *Changing his womanlike gestures, fixing his voice*, modifying his clothing, changing his mode of speech,²⁰ abandoning everything that was characteristic of his homosexual life, those were the attitudes that he took in order to restore his sexuality:

"I tried to adjust myself to the clothing of the consecrated spiritual brethren. I prayed and prayed to God to take away from me all the womanlike gestures and effeminate corporal stances. I also asked the Lord to change my voice, since I talked funny due to having lived among homosexuals. [...] At home, I got rid of everything that reminded me of the past: pictures of me dressed like a woman, and personal items; rock'n'roll posters and records were burned; the alcoholic beverages, which were many, I flushed down the toilet while singing hymns with a great joy." (Xavier, 1993, pp. 132-133)

His change to an identity of *ex-homosexual* was preceded by the prayers, by the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, by the experience of adjustment of his will to the will of God, and by the liberations. From the point of view of the pastoral perspectives presented here, those are the fundamental steps toward the "transformation", which I present below.

Healing of memories

The religious literature conceives the *healing of memories* as a fundamental stage in the *restoration* of sexuality, based on the presupposition that homosexuality, as well as other *sexual deviations*, is deeply "ingrained" in the individual's mind, under the form of *sick emotions, traumas* and *addictions*. In order to achieve the healing of memories, it is necessary to seek the *root of the problem*, identifying the memories and, thus, situating *when* and *where* the *deviation* from the *normal* course of sexuality occurred. From the cosmological point of view, it is affirmed that the practice of certain sins²¹ opens *breaches* on the individuals' body, through which the demons operate by *enslaving* their minds and inducing them to new sins, such as homosexuality. On the other hand, the pastoral discourse offers the individual's pacification by the *Holy Ghost*, as a "way out" from the *domination of Satan*. The Holy Ghost is the deity that *consoles, treats, heals* and erases the *memories*. The pastoral advices are: "get rid of negative mental patterns", "reprogram your mind", "seek a mental renovation" and "replace the mistaken information" (Emerich, 2004). The religious message is completed by the following proposition: one should "saturate one's thoughts with the things of God", with constant prayers, bibliotherapy (learning biblical verses by heart), participation in religious activities, and cultivation of love to one's neighbor. The discourse of the healing of memories emphasizes the need of *emptying* one's mind of the *images* that do not come from God, since the mind is Satan's favorite spot for attacking a human being. The pastor Alcione Emerich states "that the major goal of the Devil is to take hold of a man's mind, for, by doing so, he will have him completely under his control; by commanding his mind, he will control his body, his tongue, his will, his forms of social relationship – in a word, everything." (Emerich, 2004, p. 139) The control of the mind is an instrument of the true spiritual war.

This discourse presents an ideal of subject, endowed with autonomy, self-control and will. The individual is invited to *repent, confess his sins* and *divest himself of his faults*. It is in the context of the *liberations* or *ministrations of healing* that the believer is led to self-examination:

"A well done confession, with the assistance of the ministrant, can enable the elimination of the whole emotional garbage that has been kept for years. As I have said, that emotional garbage is what sickens the soul and the body. It has to be purged. In addition to this, however, the exposed wound has to be healed." (*Idem*, p. 170)

Confession is the major method for healing; without it, it is not possible to get free of anything. It is a *technique of spiritual guidance*, which aims at revealing the sin (Foucault, 2002) and in which the individuals are encouraged to relive their past, searching exhaustively for their *mistakes*. Rites of confession are producers of "truth", procedures that aim at the individual's adjustment to the institution's norms (Lima, 1986).²² It is important to highlight, however, the creative character of the Pentecostal confession: the act of uttering one's sins *breaks maledictions*, interrupts the *malign action*, *expels demons* and allows the Holy Ghost's intervention in the pacification of the mind and in the healing of the emotions. The pacification is presented as structured under the form of the received forgiveness (from God) and of the forgiveness that is granted to "others". Leanne Payne, who *ministers* the homosexuality healing, states:

"The major need, of course, is to heal the traumatic memory itself. In this prayer, the victim forgives the individual that has horribly sinned against him / her. The effects of that sin are thrown away, so that the person ceases to be their captive, to be marked or wounded by them. Then, in accordance with the Holy Ghost's guidance, we invite the Lord to enter into that memory, purifying and healing." (2001, p. 83).

For the author, the liberation of the mind and the healing of *homosexuality* are obtained by the identification of the *root of the problem* (the original trauma, which has established the behavior). From then on, *forgiveness* is granted and the *healing* of the *heartaches* is performed by the Holy Ghost. Purified of the emotions that contaminated him / her, the individual can develop new behaviors on what concerns to sexuality.

The pastor Neuza Itioka (2005), when ministering the healing of the *sexual sins* (which include the practice of homosexuality, as well as every form of sex outside the Christian marriage: "pornography", "masturbation", "adultery"), also highlights the relevance of the confession of sins for the *sexual restoration*. Her technique combines self-examination, confession and renunciation to the sin. The mandatory exhaustiveness is expressed in the observation that forgetting any sins during confession prevents the healing. Thus, the whole biography of the subject must pass through the screen of the memory: the past should be searched, analyzed, examined, scrutinized, confessed and renounced. The facts and events that constitute the previous life of that person are repeatedly re-qualified as *sins* and *mistakes*. However, not only the individual's past should be object of confession; also the family relations and the sins of members of the family (of the same generation or of other) should be revealed and subjected to God's forgiveness. We have here a certain conception of *shared sins*, which emphasizes the need of liberation not only of the individual, but also of the family, so that it comes to be constituted as a *family of God*. The subject's biography is presented as inserted within a *circuit of evil* that, through liberation, can be discontinued. Such discontinuance requires the individual's "quebrantamento": the submission to God is that liberates. Itioka emphasizes the importance of "*breaking oneself*", of *humiliating oneself* in the face of God in order to obtain healing and liberation.²³

The discourse on the healing of memories indicates procedures and methods of production of the subject, with the purpose of developing sexual ethics and self-cultivation by means of self-examination and the exercise of discipline. The focus is on the search of the exercise of will:

"For a long time, the individual has developed a pattern of submission in which his / her mind and his / her will were diminished and nullified. [...] The image of God, which consists in developing the human will and freedom, should be rediscovered as a gift from God, and the person should realize the importance and sublimity of the human will to the eyes of God and to the eyes of the other human beings." (Itioka, 1993, p. 225)

This set of values is similar to the one investigated by Tânia Salém (1992) in the self-help literature. Individuality, will and self-possession constitute the core of concerns based on which certain techniques and advices are propounded. It is important to emphasize that, within the researched universe, the term "liberation" has a quite particular meaning: to liberate oneself is to recover the self-control, is to get rid of the constraints imposed by the powers of evil. As a matter of fact, there are similarities between the religious discourse and the self-help literature in this sense - "Free of any constraints and external determinations, the natural individual is immersed in the realm of free will, of choice, of will, and of awareness." (Salém, 1992, p. 11) –, but the pastoral proposition differs by the specificity of its techniques, comprised in the religious perspective. Therefore, it is not about the production of the modern autonomous individual, but of an autonomy that has been conquered by submission to God, who is the One that protects, separates, detaches the individual from evil (Mariz, 1994). Nevertheless, the self-control can also be obtained by the transformation of the subject into a *temple of the Holy Ghost* – that is, to be *filled by*, *full of* the deity.

From the flesh-body to the temple-body

The analysis performed so far points to the dimension of corporality, making use of the notions of *flesh-body* and *temple-body*, concepts that are present with a greater emphasis in the literature on spiritual battle, but, as well, in books (and ritual contexts) that focus on the healing of homosexuality. The image of the *flesh-body* indicates the need of a *rebirth*, which constitutes every process of conversion. The pastoral discourse, founded on cosmological principles, emphasizes the need of the death of the (former) self, for the subsequent rise of a *new creature*. The metaphors *to be full of*, *filled by the Holy Ghost*, *to fill oneself of God* express a cosmological discourse that conceives a sacred self, with a *healed* and *liberated* body, mind and spirit. The weak-willed subject, who indulged in the dictates of the flesh by the practice of sin, can become the individual that renounces, resists and is the master of his / her impulses, the bearer of an ethics constructed by the search of sexual restoration. In accordance with Foucault (2004), we are in face of *technologies of the self* that aim at establishing the self-control, in a similar way to the celibatarian ideal of the Christianity's initial phase. The discussion on the homosexual desire and drive presents the exercise of will as the axial problem: to seek for the

healing of homosexuality. Sexual liberation or restoration means to exercise a sexual ethics based on the principles of renunciation and restraint, on the ability of pondering in face of the desires.

According to Carrara (2000), there are two trends in the Christian thinking that construct formulations on the sexual desire based on different conceptions of person. The first one is characterized by the emphasis on sexual abstinence and the ideal of celibacy, seeking sanctification through conversion, baptism, and the fervor of faith. It is an "autonomic" ideal, which values the self-control and self-domination on what concerns to the impulses of the *flesh*. This conception characterized Christianity in its initial stages (Foucault, 2004; Duarte and Giumbelli, 1995; Brown, 1990), and was appropriated and reinvented in its puritan version with the emergence of Protestantism and its ascetical ideal (Weber, 2001). Another formulation can be found in Saint Augustine, resuming the theme of the original sin. The Augustinian thinking presents a theology that regards sexuality as negative, highlighting the *human carnality*, which has resulted of the *fall* and of the practice of the original sin. Thus, each believer bears the indelible mark of sin, since the *desires of the flesh* possess an *uncontrollable* and *demonic* base.

Within the evangelical pentecostalized universe, both conceptions coexist: the idea of the transformation of the flesh-body (previous to conversion, healing and liberation) into the temple-body (cultivated by the exercise of the doctrinaire ethics) indicates the existence of an ideal of transmutation of the person's essence. It is by means of this *propensity to sin* that unnatural practices are performed, opening *breaches* for the *Malign* (Rebecca Brown, 2000; Itioka, 1993). It is a body dominated by the *malign powers*, infested by *legions of demons*, contaminated, a *habitat-body*, receptacle of the *devils*, bearer of mistaken desires on what concerns to the *truth* and the divine nature.

The *healing of memories* and the *liberation* are comprised in the process of ritual cleansing and pursuit of sanctification. Adjusting the believer's will to the will of God is the principle that ensures the filling, the inhabitation by the *Spirit of God*. To be full is to become merged to the deity or to become the deity itself. Therefore, from the discourse on *healing* and *liberation*, a "self" rises that was conceived in the duality: when *full*, an autonomous individual; when empty, an individual deprived of will. In the beginning, we have the conception of the body as *flesh* that was corrupted by sin, possessed by demons; and which, afterwards, is transfigured by the filling, becoming a *temple* of the Holy Ghost. The discourse about liberation and healing emphasizes the transmutation of the *flesh* into a *divine nature*, which returns the autonomy and will to the subject. It is in this sense that indulging in the desires of the flesh and sin is to remain captive under the domination of Satan. On the other hand, the processes of ritual cleansing that fall upon the body – making of it a temple of the deity – give back the will and autonomy to the subject.

Final considerations

The analysis has demonstrated how the evangelical Protestants deliver a discourse that affirms the exteriority of homosexuality, rejecting deterministic conceptions and asserting the possibility of reversion by means of conversion. The moral accusations underlying to the discourse on the *healing* reveal a moral panic that is insufflated by the cultivation of a negative image. The homosexuals are regarded as "promiscuous", "pedophiles" and subjects that "spread diseases"; therefore, individuals that are dangerous to society. It was also possible to detect an appropriation of notions originated by other institutionalized knowledge acquirements, based on the diffusion of images of homosexuality as a "disease", "addiction", "perversion" or "degeneration". Carrara and Vianna (2004) draw the attention to the fact that such images are the representations of homosexuality that were comprised by the biomedical knowledge in the beginning of the last century. The problematization about the "genesis" of homosexuality – associated to practices that aimed at restructuring the sexual behaviors – has displayed an exhaustive concern with the *peripheral sexualities*. However it may be, homosexuality is not fundamentally located in the organic aspect, but in the *memories* and past experiences, which suggests the interpenetration between psychology and religion (Semán, 2000). The notion of healing and the ideal of *sexual restoration* seek to construct a reflective subject and to establish a sexual ethics. The homosexual drive can emerge under the form of temptations and tribulations, but a true *spiritual war* is required so that one can gain one's self-control and self-possession. The ideal of

transformation of the subject into a temple of the Holy Ghost seeks to reinforce that ethical dimension. After all, a temple is sacred and must be preserved.

The considerations presented here do not intend to offer a homogeneous view on this religious area. The examined material points to the perspective of action of certain religious groups, especially those associated to pastoral works that pursue the management of sexuality.

In the more comprehensive investigation that I have been executing, when collecting interviews with evangelical homosexuals I found out that some individuals search for *assistance* by the church for sexuality issues, which indicates the resort to religious initiatives that offer *healing*. Under the form of individual liberations (in which the pastor, the *Christian psychologist* and the believer can participate) or of pastoral counseling, a religious perspective is presented that dialogues with *psychological* concepts and practices. Such articulation between religion and psychology will be object of reflection in other articles. For now, I limit myself to suggest that, from the discourse on the healing of homosexuality – which emphasizes the importance of the healing of memories, procedures of inner investigation and appreciation of the “self” – a pastoral practice emerges that articulates elements of the religious tradition and certain modern ways of subjectivation. Thus, the dialogue between religious views of the world and individualized views is reinforced (Semán, 2000, p. 219). It is important to emphasize the ingress, into this area, of certain social actors, such as psychologists, psychoanalysts or even *Christian* physicians, who conjugate religious and professional identities and cause an impact on the religious environment.

From the perspective of the subjects’ experience, the approach to the issue is quite sensitive and involves the analysis of the passages and social mediations in the biographic trajectories, since the religious experience comprises three distinctive dimensions: identity or attainment; adhesion, experience or belief; and, on a third plane, the religious *ethos*, as ethical or behavioral disposition (Duarte, 2005). I emphasize the fact that the examined conceptions point to the tension between modernity and tradition in religious contexts, in which principles of change and permanence are associated to cosmology and doctrine. The paradox is useful for a reflection on how those tensions are updated in religious contexts by means of the opposition between exercise of sexuality and religious life. In the discourse on healing and liberation, technologies that aim at the cultivation of the self and the rationalization of the corporal controls live together with the maintenance of the asymmetry between genders.

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Notes

1 I make reference to the Bill 717/2003, by the religious congressman Édino Fonseca, submitted to the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro (ALERJ) in August 27, 2003. In spite of having received two positive sentences during its examination, it was rejected by ALERJ in 12/8/2004 by thirty votes against six favorable ones.

2 Those groups congregate members of different evangelical denominations, representing a relatively consensual position about the *sin* of homosexuality and the forms of pastoral care that such behavior requires. For this reason, they act together not only in counseling, but also in the qualification of religious persons to deal with the "problem" in their churches.

3 The reflection performed here is comprised in a more comprehensive investigation that I am developing, as a candidate for a doctor's degree in the Program of Post-Graduation in Sociology and Anthropology of the Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro). Such research is about the discourses on homosexuality and the processes of self-construction among evangelical Protestants living in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

4 Religious initiatives by communities of the Assembly of God, Methodist Church, Baptist Church, Presbyterian Church, and *Sara Nossa Terra* Church can be seen in Moses' website, offering counseling and "help" to homosexuals.

5 In this scenario, a minority perspective takes position with the emergence of Protestant denominations reported by the media as churches that accept *gays*. In Rio de Janeiro, this discourse is adopted by the United Presbyterian Church of Bethesda (Copacabana) and the Metropolitan Community Church (Downtown). That recent trend can be regarded as constituting an embryonic Christian gay movement, whose influences would be in the existence of a North-American tendency that was formed as of the seventies. About this aspect, see Dallas (1998). The evangelical author seeks to analyze – from a biblical point of view – the transformations occurring in the church as a result of the political achievements of the homosexuals and of the constitution of that Protestant tendency, whose major representative is the Metropolitan Community Church.

6 The initial investigation has focused on consulting the online catalogues of 37 evangelical publishers and of specialized bookstores (in Rio de Janeiro, about fifteen addresses), in addition to the collection of the Betel Theological Seminary (Tijuca, Rio de Janeiro city). A comprehensive bibliography was mapped about themes concerning to sexuality, gender, youth and homosexuality. That exploratory stage has also involved the monitoring of the content of the websites of the Council of Christian Psychologists and Psychiatrists, the Movement for a Healthy Sexuality, the Universal Church of God's Kingdom (*Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*) and other pertinent religious initiatives.

7 Native term that indicates ritual events whose major function is to *expel demons* and provide *spiritual healing*.

8 I make reference to the North-Americans Leanne Payne, Mário Bergner, Bob Davies, and Lori Rentzel.

9 *The healing of the homosexual*, by Leanne Payne, was published for the first time in 1993, with a second edition in 1994. Focusing on the more general theme of liberation, *Stepping out of captivity*, whose author is the Pentecostal pastor Alcione Emerich, is already in its third edition two years after its first publication in 2002. Another example of the consumption of such books is the title *Becoming a vessel of honor for the Master's service*, by the North-American evangelical Protestant writer Rebecca Brown, initially published in 1998 and having already its third edition in 2001.

10 The meeting occurred in January 19 – 22, 2005, and gathered approximately six thousand people, counting on religious leaders and churchgoers from different evangelical Protestant churches. It focused on the theme of the *spiritual battle*. The ethnographic observation of the event allowed me to have access to a privileged material, since it counted on the participation of the *pastor of liberation* and writer Neuza Itioka, who conducted ritual activities dedicated to the *sexual restoration* of the followers. One of the purposes of the rite was to *liberate* them from homosexuality, as well as from other *sexual sins* such as "masturbation", "infidelity", and "pre-marital sex". The pastor reasoned the need of expanding the work of liberation in sexuality to other regions. She commented that she was performing an itinerant work, visiting churches in several States and regions of the country and providing ritual activities like those. Such task was of an urgent nature, since the majority of the Brazilians "had problems in the sexuality area". Brazil was a "sex-worshipping" nation, which idolized sex and needed "liberation" in that area. My thanks to Paulo Victor Leite Lopes, Ana Paula B. Soeiro and Camila Sampaio, students of the bachelor's degree in Social Sciences of UERJ (University of Rio de Janeiro), for their participation in this event as well as for their assistance in the localization of bibliographic materials and systematization of the database.

11 The texts date from 1975 to 2003. The authors are religious pastors or leaders that offer counseling to homosexuals. The religious affiliations are not explicit in the texts; however, there are references to some denominations (Assembly of God, Sara Nossa Terra, Presbyterian and others).

12 See testimonies published in Moses' website (www.moses.org.br).

13 Theology diffused among the evangelical Protestants, emphasizing the need to "fight the devil, who is present in any evil that we do, in any evil that we suffer, and, also, in the practice of non-Christian religions" (Mariz, 1999, p. 34).

14 I make reference to a set of interviews collected between the years 2002 and 2005, with male homosexuals from Pentecostal denominations of Baixada Fluminense, in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.

15 The Catholic discourse conceives homosexuality as a behavior that breaks the circuit of reciprocity of the divine love, as a practice that expresses a "self-centered love", in opposition to the principle of reproduction (utmost expression of God's love) and should be object of restraint.

16 Among the foreign authors there is a greater symmetry in defining the problem of the male and female homosexual practices. However, I intend to mention the *healing* of homosexuality based also on the foreign literature, limiting the theme to the male homosexuality.

17 Rozangela Justino has a confident performance in methods of reversion of homosexuality in the articulation between psychology and religion. In this sense, she appears in connection with the Association of Christian Psychologists and Psychiatrists (CPPC - *Corpo de Psicólogos e Psiquiatras Cristãos*), advocating to her category of professionals the right to *treat* homosexuals in therapies of a religious nature.

18 Reference to a self-help group intended to re-order the sexual conduct of homosexuals, which counted on the professional assistance of evangelical Protestant psychologists.

19 The expressions *healing*, *liberation* and *recovery* appear with a relative recurrence in the religious universe, with correlate meanings. In the present article, however, I outline only a number of specific aspects, seeking to achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon of the homosexuality healing.

20 The author makes reference to the abandonment of the use of slang expressions generally adopted within the homosexual environment.

21 On this theme, see Rebecca Brown (1998) and Neuza Itioka (1993).

22 When analyzing the historical origins of the Catholic confession, Foucault (2002) considers that it establishes the *mandatory revelation of the sexuality*. The notion is appropriated by the evangelical Protestants and recreated in a Pentecostal context. In this sense, spiritual healing and liberation may be achieved by confessing one's sins and renouncing them by means of specific rites.

23 *Quebrantamento* ("enfeeblement", "breaking") is a native category that makes reference to the need to submit to God the individual emotions and desires of the former (non-converted) self. The prostrate, humiliate, "break" oneself metaphors are associated to that wish of submission to God.

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