

**CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL: A WAY INTO OR OUT OF
CATHOLICISM? ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE SÃO JOSÉ GROUP, IN THE CITY OF
PORTO ALEGRE, BRAZIL**

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Abstract

Based upon an empirical research about Catholic charismatic groups in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, I analyze the transformations that the religious practices of some members of the Catholic Church, specially its leaders, have been going through. The members' appropriation of mystical religious forms, similar to those of the New Age patterns, seem to show to a "way out of Catholicism", for they imply in the abandonment of certain elements that are central to the Catholic tradition. On the other hand, some traditional rituals have been recovered and reinterpreted as "internal locutions", thus remitting to a direct experience with the realm of sacredness, which is closer to possession or mediumistic cults. The hypothesis with which I intend to work is that many Catholic charismatic groups, particularly those that are furthest from central control, have become a transit place between Catholicism and new religious forms. This allows us to think that, while the Catholic Charismatic Renewal holds Catholics within the Church, it also enables the moving of traditional ways of being Catholic towards more individualistic and reflexive forms, thus corroborating the contemporary abandonment of the religion's traditions

Key-words: Catholicism, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, New Age, Religious transit.

The image of a plural religious field, in which people, based on their individual choices, move freely between different experiences and construct personal syntheses, collecting elements from different religious traditions, has become almost common place in the current characterization of religion. This vision of the religious field has as its premise the emergence of the modern individual, autonomous and free, capable of choosing from a gamut of possibilities within its reach in society. A plurality that, many times, can be observed in the great religious traditions, as in the case of Catholicism in Brazil, which is seen by its participants, but also by many who study it, as a composite and multifaceted religion, permitting the identification of internal transit between religious currents, movements and expressions that are identified inside it, reflecting the diversity existing in the most extensive field of religion in the globalized Brazilian society¹.

If on one hand the analyses centered on the autonomy of the individual as a rational subject capable of choosing from multiple possible paths and experiences are legitimate inside the modern vision of religion, on the other they end up reinforcing classic dichotomies between reason and tradition and between individual and institution. The objective of this text is to relativize these dichotomies based on ethnographic work. In this sense, we seek to emphasize not only the porosity of the religious borders, but also the categories that we have used to classify and identify institutional forms and tendencies present in the contemporary religious field.

The transformations of the Brazilian religious field in recent years are not restricted only to the movement of rearrangement of the field, as if each actor repositioned themselves strategically in a new arena of religious disputes and competition, but have produced a change inside their own traditions, those which seek to adapt to the redefinition of the concept of religion and its contemporary meaning. We are proposing, in short, that, instead of thinking of the institutional borders between specific “churches” or religious groups, we place our focus on a certain irruption of different forms of believing that are occurring inside Catholicism. It deals, however, less with a sociology of institutions and more with an anthropology of experience, to the extent that it seeks to apprehend the presence of different systems of beliefs and practices within the dominant Catholic system².

The data that we have found in our fieldwork points to a specific situation, in which the affirmation of Catholic identity occurs through the negotiation between tradition and reflexivity, between individual autonomy and the institution³. This will allow us to relativize the hypothesis that the reflexive and individualized forms of believing necessarily lead to the instauration of a movement of detraditionalization, or even of deinstitutionalization. Instead, we want to investigate the possibility of religious traditions assuming configurations that allow them to coexist, in the periphery of their dogmas, with beliefs and rituals that do not fit into their religious regimes, creating zones to escape the orthodoxy in relation to the meanings inside their own tradition. This leads us to propose that, instead of directing our focus to the end of religion, we seek to perceive how the religious institution reproduces itself in a context where the growing dominion of a new language is at stake, which seems to penetrate it in a capillary way, redefining the very concept of religion⁴.

Instead of looking at the polarities between Catholicism as a religious institution opposed to other institutions, our analysis intends to capture the heterogeneity of the religious field – great religious tendencies and matrixes inside it. In other words, our concern is not focusing on Catholicism as a totality closed in on its dogmas and hierarchical structures, but trying to perceive how the diversity of the Brazilian religious field is reflected inside Catholicism, allowing other religious languages (Spiritism, New Age, Pentecostalism etc.) to emerge within its boundaries. In this sense, we can think of these languages as opposing narratives that spot the totalizing vision of the Catholic tradition in terms of doctrine as much as in rituals, disturbing the ideological strategies through which the representatives of the orthodoxy intend to present Catholicism as a homogenous totality.

Part of this internal heterogeneity is that different meanings can be attached to the same references and signs, referring us to a performatic perspective – of inscription of the alterity in the dominant narrative – more than a historic vision, centered on the dialectic

of different temporalities. Following the performatic perspective, the alterity inside the Catholic system does not present itself as diverse forms of such – pre-modern, modern, and post-modern Catholicism, but is there as an alternative language that constantly seeks insertion into the dominant narrative without allowing itself to be diluted in its totality⁵. It deals, at last, with different religious regimes that exist side-by-side, establishing a form of contradiction that has to be negotiated, rather than integrated into a new dialectic synthesis.

Some premises for the interpretation

Before moving on to the ethnography of this religious group inside Catholicism, it is necessary to explain some beacons that guide our interpretation. The first is with respect to a paradox, which could be formulated as an “escape” from the Catholic orthodoxy or a change in the Catholic *habitus* through the affirmation of the Catholic identity. We observe in the speech and attitudes of our interviewees the reiterated defense of their identity and of their Catholic belonging at the same time as they adhere to a system of beliefs and practices that, in principle, oppose the traditional and historic structure of Catholicism. Because Catholics make seeking out several sources legitimate, they find themselves on a boundary of constant risk between orthodoxy and the traditions that are legitimate in the religious field⁶.

The other beacon is associated with assuming a performatic perspective, which analyzes the presence of these peripheral groups inside Catholicism not as dissidences, but as events situated at its margins, which demand a place in the heart of the dominant narrative of Catholicism. It establishes, in this way, a creative articulation between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, in a game that internalizes the boundaries between the diverse languages that make up the current religious field. This brings us to an environment of religious plurality that, in some form, allows for making incommensurable differences compatible, since it proclaims, even if only in a formal way, the Catholic identity. In this way, under the cloak of a formalized Catholic identity through the explicit adhesion to some of the central elements, such as participation in the sacraments and the devotion to Mary, it becomes possible to transpose the boundaries of Catholic orthodoxy.

This affirmation of explicit belonging to Catholic identity becomes then, essential for the erasing of the structure of internal difference that remains latent in the dominant narrative of official Catholicism. On the other hand, the “difference that does not keep silent” reveals the insurmountable ambivalence of the religious field, traversed contemporarily by disjunctive alterities, which is internalized by the great traditions. In this sense, what we are going to find is not as much religious transit as the reiterated attempt of negotiation between beliefs and rituals of Catholic tradition and those that belong to other religious regimes, but that emerge within its interior. The maintenance of this ambivalence is fundamental in order for the groups situated in this intermediate and preliminary space to be able to remain inside the institution.

This situation allows us to think of a zone of ambiguity that installs itself in the internal boundaries of Catholicism and brings us to the hypothesis proposed by Pierre Sanchis of a “Brazilians` religion”, which, in the case studied, is enclosed by Catholicism itself. This “Brazilians` religion” is defined by Sanchis not as “a common denominator, set of ‘basic elements’ that all the religious currents share” (Sanchis 2001: 18), but as a

totality that “in its manifestations [...], in the modalities of the way it constructs itself – analogies, oppositions and complementarities activated preferably at the margin of the institutions – would end up making this set a religious ‘field’ with particular and mutually determined components” (Sanchis 2001: 19)⁷.

Having in mind this reflection suggested by Sanchis, we can comprehend the mechanisms through which it becomes possible for Catholicism to incorporate elements of a belief system that, in principle, seems to contrast with its internal logic and with its cosmology. At the same time, it permits the situating of the beliefs and practices of the movement that we intend to analyze inside a totality that transcends the Catholic system as a source of meanings and horizon of interpretation for its practices and beliefs. The experience that we are analyzing, therefore, is situated in a frame of references that, although it appears inside Catholicism, possesses a certain autonomy in relation to Catholic orthodoxy, without, however, constructing itself like a religion *stricto sensu*, with defined institutional boundaries. On the contrary, it presents itself as a between-place, which emerges in the context of Catholicism as an alternative source of meanings as much for the practices of Catholic tradition as for new practices that are tolerated in the institutional space of the Catholic Church.

The diversity of the CCR in Porto Alegre

The first studies about the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the country highlighted the ideological profile of this movement, taking it as a homogeneous totality, marked by a conservative bias among the forces that dispute the political and institutional space inside Brazilian Catholicism. In this sense, the comparisons with the Catholic Base Communities are frequent, those which would represent the opposite pole of conservatism (Oliveira 1985; Prandi and Souza 1996). Other works, such as that of Oro (1996), highlight the competition in the religious field, emphasizing the strategic use the Catholic Church would be making of this movement to “retain their faithful and bar the Pentecostal advance” (idem: 108). More recently, we can register some works that, in the line of the pioneer research of Thomas Csordas, in the United States (Csordas 1996), have sought to relate the CCR to the processes of construction of subjectivity and the role of the body in the religious experience (Maués 2002). Following the path of this reflection, we seek, in other texts, to show, based on the scheme proposed by Troeltsch, the approximation of the CCR to the “mystic model” through which Christianity materialized historically (Steil 1999; 2001). The sociological or anthropological literature about the internal divisions and dissidences of the CCR, in turn, has been quite scarce. This work seeks to contribute to the analysis of the processes of differentiation and ruptures, or even of the change in format and organization, which have been occurring inside the movement.

The Catholic Charismatic Movement in Porto Alegre is divided in three great currents. The central nucleus, which has the official recognition of the archdiocese and the *Conselho Nacional da RCC* in Brasília, is organized in sectors such as the *Conselho Estadual* and the *Coordenação Diocesana* and reaches the faithful through an extensive gamma of prayer groups, communities of life and alliance, secretariats, radio broadcasters and projects (Oro 1996: 108-117).

The second nucleus, called São Martinho, organizes itself around the parish of the same name and has the support and structure offered by its parish priest. It has a strict connection with the official movement, but enjoys a certain autonomy, maintaining its own projects and particular orientation. This nucleus also possesses a radio station and a network of prayer groups and independent evangelization communities⁸.

The São José Group, discussed in this article, appears as the third nucleus with visibility and presence inside the local Catholicism. Their identification with the CCR, however, is more in the type of service and in the format that it adopts than in an organic connection with the movement or with the Church, as it is with the two other charismatic currents present in the archdiocese. Their rituals, with Renewal canticles, with glossolalia, with the placing of hands, bring the observer immediately to the charismatic environment. In the same way, one can perceive a common *ethos* shared by those that attend any of these spaces of services. These affinities, however, have not guaranteed the recognition, by the directors of CCR, of the São José Group as part of its organization and structure. In the interpretation of its founder, M.A., as we can see in her autobiographical narrative, the São José Group would have appeared as a result of the demand not answered by the CCR:

I began with the charismatic movement, when I began to hear the voices I sought the movement and I attended many meetings, but their style since the beginning revealed itself different from mine, it did not harmonize, so, I left.

Nevertheless, for the directors of the São José Group, the difference between their practices and their fundamentals is small. As M.A. tells us: “we sing the same canticles and the prayers are very similar, the placing of hands is the same”. The fundamental difference would be in the “ancestral line”, which consists, according to our interviewee, in establishing a line of decisive influence from ancestors over the present life of each human being. In another passage from her testimony, M.A. evokes the recognition and the authority of Father Jonas, one of the central figures of the CCR in Brazil, to express the charismatic inspiration and identity of her movement.

The first time I saw Father Jonas from the charismatic movement, who is extraordinary as a charismatic creature, [...] I said: “This priest gets me!” I came home to have lunch, I grabbed a notebook [of notes of his inspired words] and I took it to him. I arrived before the start and I said: “Father Jonas, read this and tell me what you think” [...]. He read it and came and said to me: “My child, go ahead, this is pure Holy Spirit. Go ahead, and do not worry about anything they say to you.

The archdiocese coordination of the CCR, in turn, at the same time as it evokes a legalist vision, excluding the São José Group, since it is not officially tied to its structure and organization, also recognized the existence of a tension between the CCR and the group. In an interview for the research project, one of the directors of the CCR in the archdiocese said that the “São José Group is a pebble in CCR’s shoe”. The public of one often overlaps with the other, not distinguishing one from the other, especially when dealing with people that participate only in the services that take place in the parish or the lectures offered by M.A., within an annually defined calendar. The difference becomes

evident, however, in the liberation services, held in the headquarters of the group, whose rites are close to those of trance and exorcism.

For the ecclesiastic hierarchy, even though there is recognition of a tie between the São José Group and the CCR, this is perceived more as a convergence of theme and style and less in relation to the methods employed and doctrinal fundamentals. As the priest RP affirms:

Even though the São José Group isn't linked to the official Charismatic Renewal, it doesn't distance itself from the movement in terms of theme. Maybe the methodology is different. [...] It's a group that has its own path that isn't the path of the Renewal, even though there are some convergences with it.

Another point of convergence raised by priest RP would be, in fact, that both give a central place to healing rituals in their services⁹. But he calls attention to another link of the São José Group inside the spectrum of movements and lines of orientation that compose the field of the internal disputes of Catholicism, which is its identification with the millenarian groups. Here appear the figures of Olivo Cesca, ex-clergy, announcer of the contemporary Marian apparitions, and Paulo Roberto Feijó, a layperson that affirms having visions of angels. Father RP still refers to the psychic of Our Lady, whose name is Raimundo, from Belo Horizonte, who maintains a tight relationship with the group of Olivo and Paulo Roberto¹⁰.

Between these groups and the São José Group, we can highlight three common elements that bring them together, also cited by priest RP in his interview. The first is in respect to the centrality that it possesses, in their system of beliefs, the “particular revelations”, received by their leaders from Our Lady, from Jesus Christ, from the saints and angels, through the “internal locutions”, in the context of the contemporary Marian apparitions, or of the “inspired words”, in the specific case of the São José Group. The second is related to the pessimistic vision of this world and the imminence of a restoring end, in which only those that are in these communities will be saved. In this apocalyptic perspective, we are living the decisive moment “of the separation of the tares and the wheat”. Their critiques of the Catholic Church itself and of the clergy are forceful, even though they protect the figure of the current pope, last bastion against the enemies of the Church, infiltrated at its bases and its structures of power. After him, however, the antichrist will come¹¹. The last refers to the presence of the devil, as a spiritual entity, in the society and in the Church. It deals with an agnostic situation, in that the leadership of these groups plays the protagonist role in the combat against the devil. The latter would be disputing with Jesus Christ and Our Lady for the souls of the living, easily imprisoned by the “sensations” and pleasure that the world offers¹².

Therefore, if on one hand the São José Group occupies a peripheral and dissident position in the context of the archdiocese of Porto Alegre, on the other hand it is associated with a mystic-millenarian network that disseminates today in the heart of

Brazilian Catholicism, relying as much on the traditional experience of dissident alternative communities as on the Internet. All of these groups and the “particular revelations” that their leaders receive are available to anyone who has access to the Internet. And, to the extent that they are able to break through local geographic borders, connecting themselves in a global network, where the contemporary Marian apparitions and the Catholic charismatic movement appear as privileged mediators in these connections, the São José Group would already be the stimulating focus of the investigation. But, in the case of the São José Group, one must include another connection, which associates it to another network, which Valérie Rocchi call mystic-therapeutic, and which allows us to apprehend the emergence of new religious languages and the intersections of other forms of believing in the very heart of the institution at the margins of Catholicism¹³.

The origin of the São José Group

The São José Group was created by a laywoman, who belongs to the upper-middle class of Porto Alegre, and who we are going to identify in this text by her initials: M.A. Its origin is situated in the end of the 1970s, counting today on an estimated five thousand participants and more than two hundred leaders (“sentients”, intercessors, liberators etc.), who are responsible for the diverse forms of services that the movement offers. The coordination center is in the home of their leader – a comfortable house in an upper-middle class neighborhood of the city – and it is spread out through various parishes of the archdiocese, where the services usually take place, attended by people of the middle class, for the most part women. Currently the São José Group is expanding to the interior of the state, having reached the border with Uruguay and Argentina. If in the first years of existence the group saw themselves somewhat cast off from the structure of the Catholic Church, more recently the tolerance and welcome have grown, such that today they rely on a priest, indicated by the archbishop, to accompany them. This function, although it is more as a control rather than an incentive, does not cease to confer an institutional legitimacy on the group.

The Catholic origin and belonging of their leader are professed as a fundamental piece of legitimating their ecclesial identity. As she herself affirms, in an interview she conceded:

I have always been an Apostolic Roman Catholic, since my mother's womb. I had a very solid education, something rare among Catholics. I have always been practicing and I have never gone off to other religions, therefore I can't say that what happened with me was the result of contact with other religions...

It is necessary to highlight in this speech two references that are central in the discourse of the group leaders. The first is related to her Catholic origin, which goes back to the maternal womb and not to the sacrament of baptism, carried out by the ecclesiastic

liturgy. As we will see in what follows, the uterine phase of human existence, as a moment of choice and determination of the destiny of each person, is one of the central postulates of the sustentation of the doctrine or theory shared by the group members. It deals with an agnostic moment, when the decisive shock occurs between the forces of good and evil, between God and the devil. The existence of an autonomous uterine life, in which it is possible to later intervene through techniques of regression and spiritual liberation, establishes a zone of heterodoxy in relation to the psychic and religious field. The existence of this zone of ambiguity is what allows the clergy to exempt himself from taking a doctrinal position about the ideas and theories put forward by the group. As the priest RP affirms: “about the postulated former life, the uterine life, that is related to the creation of the soul and the possibility of a regression. In this, I do not interfere. In this, the Church also does not have doctrine, it is a question for psychology”¹⁴. In short, in telling her life story, M.A. will identify each element and each postulate that compose her belief system.

The second reference is related to her concern in clarifying the origin of the beliefs and theories that support the action of her group. “I have never gone off to other religions” actually appears to be a response to the frequent criticism and insinuations on the part of the clergy towards the religious eclecticism of the group, identifying, in her beliefs and practices, vestiges of New Age and Spiritism. Her Catholic origin and exclusive fidelity throughout her life to the Church is her safe-conduct for the ecclesiastic recognition from the orthodoxy of her preaching and ritual practices. In another moment of the interview with M.A., just like in the services we observed, the explicit criticism of religious transit appeared frequently. On the other hand, the affirmation that the São José Group can offer to those that are involved that which the religions of mystic character, such as New Age, or of strong individual appeal, such as Spiritism, are offering in the modern context of religious competition, becomes fundamental in guaranteeing the inclusion of the group in the Catholic system.

To the extent that it answers a spiritual demand present in the society, which not even the ministry in the parishes nor the apostolic movements are capable of answering, the group assumes, in the vision of hierarchy, a supplemental function in relation to the action of the Church. As another interviewed priest told us:

We don't have in our parishes specialized people, or a specialized group that are capable of attending to these special cases. So, if some group can do something to help these people full of problems, they should. What the group of Dona M.A. does, does not enter into the scheme of the Apostolado da Oração, of the Congregação Mariana, of the Vicentinos...or other traditional or more modern groups. It does not enter, although all of these should be more open to helping.

Modalities of the service

This demand is answered by a variety of services, which distinguish themselves by their *performance* and by the environments in which they take place. Keeping in mind that healing is the principal reason that people seek out these services, it is necessary,

however, to notice that this occurs in different modalities and intensities, establishing a grade of specific classification. The most widespread is that of the “*amorização* service”, that takes place in some Catholic temples of Porto Alegre, with the consent of the parish priests¹⁵.

This service could attend as much to the demand for mental health, where the faithful look for comfort for their general afflictions, usually associated with ills of the soul, as to the demand for physical healing, concerning diseases of the body. In the fieldwork, we were able to observe these nuances in this specific modality of service, which happen in different spaces. While the service aimed at the ills of the soul take place in the parochial hall of the temple of the middle class neighborhood, the service directed towards the physically sick takes place in the Catholic temple, located in front of the first-aid center of one of the principal hospitals of the city.

The other modality is the “liberation service”, which takes place at the house of M.A., in a space specifically prepared and separate from the intimate family space. It deals with a type of exorcism that seeks to liberate the faithful from the evils caused by generational demons. A brief citation from the interview with one of the priests that we interviewed offers insight into what occurs in this modality of service.

She puts one person in the middle. Then she is the sentient, and proceeds to analyze the problem of the person in the past, of the person's ancestors. Of course, this is possible... Because we can have a spiritual subconscious. All of this education of our ancestors is in our subconscious and she can access this. For this she must have special charismas. They can certainly be either natural or supernatural, I don't interpret this. But it's that sometimes this reading of the ancestors that she does, of the person that is being liberated, was interpreted many times as a mediumistic question.

We are not going to extend here our interpretation of this quote, since we intend to return to the question later, when we deal specifically with liberation. It is useful, however, to call attention to the resemblance that this modality of service has with Spiritism, to the extent that it seeks to attribute the cause of the psychic and physical ills to the ancestors, although it does not evoke the belief in reincarnation. Actually, what we have here is a sophisticated theory about the family and generational ties between the living and the dead, that establishes itself based on a psychic-mystic referential, which has as its basic premise the belief that we inherit from our ancestors, by genetic transmission, the patterns of physical and psychic diseases that afflict us. Associated to this belief, is the promise that these ties can be undone and this inheritance dissolved by means of the ritual process.

Still in the category of service, we could include the lectures of M.A., which, although they are directed especially to teaching, are permeated by rites, symbolisms, canticles, prayers, and testimonies. These lectures, while they can take place at different times and places, present a monthly regularity, being held in a day-care center, sustained by a congregation of nuns, in one of the noblest areas of the city. On these occasions, two genres of language are specially employed, which Csordas (1996) recognizes as central to the Catholic Charismatism: prophesy and teaching. While prophecy consists of a pronouncement in the first person, in which the “I” is a divine entity (Jesus Christ, Our

Lady, a saint or angel), the teaching appears covered in a didactic and informative tone, distinguishing itself from the rhetorical and technical resources of its *performance*¹⁶. Its practice, however, demands spiritual maturity and its exercise is associated to a gift that is given by God to some chosen people. In the specific case that we have been studying, we could observe this modality of service as a privileged occasion for the recruitment of new participants and collaborators directly from M.A.

Finally, we could refer to the services restricted to the leaders of the rituals, which take place in the house of M.A. or in the house of the leaders themselves. They are services aimed at the adept, especially for the “sentients”, on whom the responsibility lies for the rituals directed at the general public.

Between mystic and therapy

M.A. sees herself in the Church, and is seen by some other representatives of the hierarchy, as having a special mission. But, while those that are part of the São José Group interpret her mission as a divine calling, the clergy assign a human and pragmatic meaning, to the extent that she answers a demand that comes from the transformations that are occurring in contemporary society.

Her account of this calling, although it appears to be formatted within a biblical style, also incorporates various elements of a psychic-mystic context. A brief citation of the interview that she provided already allows us to notice this mixture of discursive genres between religious and psychic.

But it's been 25 years since I started hearing voices that said... "I need you", "I need your hands, because my children are suffering". [...] I was upset, but I always heard and saw the flashes and was shocked because no one else saw them. Well, then I thought that I was schizophrenic... Then I sought help, a psychologist friend, Renate Jost de Moraes, who has an office in Belo Horizonte. She submitted me to therapy, because I think that therapy is another step on the scale of the evolution of psychology. Then I ended up doing a TIP, a direct approach of the subconscious, a series of techniques for you to relax, and that go directly to the subconscious, without hypnosis. You can say it is a sort of regression. Therapy is to treat everything bad that has happened.

We can verify here a psychic-mystic vision that appears much more complex than a simple alternative “religion or therapy” (Rocchi 2003: 179). If on one hand, one can notice a predominance of the psychic-mystic vision over the religious vision, leading M.A. to search for a therapeutic solution for the disturbance that assailed her, on the other, there is the evidence that her ill transcends the scope of the therapies. And what is more, as evidenced in the sequence of her statement, the production of this ambivalence is fundamental as a narrative strategy so that the archaic signs and symbols of the Catholic tradition – the devil, Lucifer, Michael angel – can emerge in the web of a new religious language that, as we will see, resemble an experience that we could situate in the scope of the New Age practices.

In this porous boundary of the religious and psychic heterodoxies, the disintegrating experience of “I” appears as a beneficent proof that is going to allow the person to overcome their problems and reach a state of superior being, of spiritual character. It deals with, in short, having access to this “part of oneself” that, in a “New Ageist” language, is identified as the “*self*”, “the essential being”, but that, in the context of Catholicism in which M.A. works, can be substituted for God, Jesus Christ, Our Lady¹⁷. In the sequence of previously transcribed statements, we will see that M.A. submits herself to the therapeutic process to arrive at the conclusion that the origin of her emotional disturbance is of a spiritual order. As she herself states:

I did therapy to see my psychosomatic state. After the therapy, Renate told me that my problem was not mental, nor physical, but in light of my life experience it could only be spiritual, so she recommended that I did what the voice asked of me. I even sought a priest, but there was no comprehension. He asked me who I thought I was to be hearing the voice of God?

Under the cloak of a Catholicism fundamentally centered on the practices of the sacraments and the affirmation of an objective Catholic identity – we can see another religious system acting as the principal structure of beliefs, where the Catholic references, signs and symbols are reinterpreted following a psychic-mystic logic. Actually, we do not have here an elimination of the religious dimension of the experience, but another type of articulation between the beliefs and the therapeutic practices. As Leila Amaral affirms, based on New Age, but what could be transposed to the interpretation of the reality that we are analyzing, in these experiences there is an implicit desire of “radical transformation”, which turns “healing” and “salvation” into synonyms (Amaral 2003). In another passage from the interview with M.A., we can see the radicalism with which she assumes the mission of liberating the individual through healing, going down to the depths of the human being.

We search for the root of the illness, and we see it perfectly. [...] The Lord allows us to go to the world of spiritual purification and see the hoards of slaves tied with chains, ropes and umbilical cords, or rather, generations. We go to where the disorder began. Then there are physical, mental and spiritual diseases, and you have to see these various patterns. [...] I had to go through everything that I did in order to be able to do what I do here, because we are a group of liberators. So it is the characteristic of the São José Group, because of this we are liberators, we are going to free ourselves from the conditioning that comes from back in time...

There is, therefore, a purification process that was reached by M.A. in the personal experience of an atrocious suffering, experienced as an afflictive trance, which led her to the finding of herself¹⁸. This experience, in turn, acquires, in her autobiographical narrative, the meaning of a “final rescue”, that allows her to go down to the depths of the evil and the disease, from where she proposes to liberate the human being, through therapeutic techniques, but also through religious rituals. As in the New Age spirituality,

here also, the idea of “healing” constitutes a sense of self-encounter and supposes, for its effectiveness, the experience of “suffering” and of “pain” (Amaral 2003). It is not the “suffering” that one seeks to suppress, but the “disease”, that which functions as an opposing metaphor of this finding, the situation in which the person loses him or herself. Finding oneself in the pain and suffering is the condition to guarantee the very expansion of existence or, in the religious language of the São José Group, “liberation”.

From conversion to liberation

If the category of conversion serves as a characterization of the process of change that occurs in the life of the individual upon entering the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, as Maués shows (2002), in the context of the São José Group the category used will be liberation. In other words, while conversion means the adhesion to the objective revelation of a moral and biblical-theological truth, made concrete in a specific religious institution, which demands faith, liberation relies upon the experience of the radicalism of suffering and pain as a means of access of truth. The encounter with the divine becomes an encounter with the “real I”, in that the discovery of self becomes the way to the encounter with a subjective truth, which transfigures in the reality of being.

It is this displacement of conversion by liberation that produces the disjunctive game between the institutional vision of official Catholicism and the mystic perspective. In short, it is not a question of converting to a new mode of being Catholic, in the sense of a new identity that structures itself around the subjective adhesion to the institution, but of conserving an objective Catholic identity, of sacramental character. This objective identity, in turn, authorizes the members of the São José Group to use the resources of the Catholic tradition in the search for liberation of the ego – external personality, contaminated by the shackles of the past that affect us through a chain of generational influences. But, they also insert themselves in a network of other groups of mystic character that are present in the context of contemporary Catholicism.

This liberation is expressed in the context of the São José Group as an experience of confrontation with the devil. This confrontation, however, takes place on two levels: as a personal process, of a mystic-spiritual character, and as a magical act, through which the devil is expelled from the body of the individual. This distinction appears in the native discourse as two different types of devil: the devil as a spiritual entity, with its own personality, and the generational demons, which are conceived as disaggregating forces that initiate the disorder and disease in the life of each individual. Between them, however, a zone of ambivalences and a field of misunderstanding are found, which end up being strategic when considering the insertion of the São José Group into the mystic tradition of Catholics as well as in its identification with a frame of psychic-mystic references, based on which it becomes possible to respond to the spiritual demand of individualistic character, to which the institutional forms of religion appear not to have an adequate response.

The personal process of confronting the demon appears in the following passage, from the autobiographical narrative of M.A., as a decisive shock that brings her closer to the experience of other mystics of the Catholic tradition.

I had the knowledge of the devil as a being. It's obvious that there are the demons that we create, but there is also Lucifer and the fight for the soul. I experienced the strength of the king of deceit and it is because of this that I believe. It was because I went through this that I believe in people and can speak with this certainty, if I hadn't know the art of the other I wouldn't believe. There I had the experience of the devil [...]. But I have knowledge through experience, the Lord said: "I test you to prove the improbable. So that then, the fundamentals are strong, of solid bases". I have knowledge through experience, not intellectually, hence my security and authority in respect to what I do.

By invoking experience as a source of knowledge, M.A. is employing an element that belongs to Catholic tradition itself. In this sense, she joins a line of mystics, men and women, who throughout the history of Christianity have described their confrontations with the devil as part of their sanctification. So much that, in another passage from the same interview, she cites explicitly Saint Catherine of Siena, Doctor of the Church, who, according to her, "saw the demons still in purgatory, haunting the souls". This tension between the mystic knowledge, which comes from experience, and the theological knowledge, which originates from the rationality of the faith (*fides quaerit intellectu*), is determinative of the historical trajectory of Catholicism. This same opposition can appear in the theological discourse and in that of the ecclesiastic magisterium, expressed as a dichotomy between religion and spirituality. The citation that we transcribe below, from a contemporary theologian, can provide insight into this opposition, to the extent that it approaches, in terms of its symbolic content and narrative style, the language that M.A. uses in her autobiographical testimony.

Religion is for those who are afraid of death and of hell. Spirituality is for those who are there. A division that arose in western culture. We confuse religion with spirituality, the content with the process. Religion is that external form, the content, specifically the liturgy and all the acts of the worship service, the teaching, preaching and worshipping God. Spirituality is the internal activity of growth and maturity that happens in each one of us. (Artress 1995: 15.)

It is in reclaiming the legitimacy of the knowledge that comes from experience that M.A. defends her authority and independence opposite the hierarchy, whose authority legitimates itself based on the other pole: the institution ("religion") and theological knowledge. As she herself explains, "I received teachings and instructions from God, it is an inspiration inside myself, not a psychograph, it is inside of me that the word of God originates, the emotion that comes from the spirit, it is very sacred"¹⁹. A differentiation that she insisted on making clear in relation to Spiritism, since the "inspired word" could be associated with psychography, which, if it was assumed explicitly, would put her in a position outside of the Catholic identity. For the outside observer, however, this differentiation is not clear, precisely because the presence of Spiritists in the services held

by the São José Group is frequent, known as much by the hierarchy as the group members.

The second ideal-type to think about the process of liberation in the context of the São José Group corresponds to a magical vision of religion, which will attribute the cause of the diagnosed disease to “super-empirical entities” (Lambert 1995). In the discourse of M.A., she deals with another species of demons – the generational demons –, which would be causing all ills of the people.

There are incredible things in the area of spirituality, incredible things that happen, because you never liberate only the person, you liberate the ancestors. Because when we see the ancestral line from which the evil comes [...]. I began to see that behind there was more. So today you bring light to the origin of the evil. I have been praying for twenty-five years, and the Lord was preparing me little by little. And many times that which causes the disorder is held prisoner in horrible places. Horrible! It is the symbol that he gives us: the darkness. For you to arrive there, you have to have a lot of courage. Someone who is not prepared spiritually cannot go there to that place. [...] We walk through caves and descend into dark places. The slippery ground and the hands, these purgatories of life, beggars, large hands that what to grab you and beg for help. Horrible, horrible, horrible...And the Lord allows us to see the people that usually cause some very large family disorder, imprisoned in places like caves, and there we have to say a prayer of liberation. And, in the spiritual part we see what we call generational demons, and as if passing through the egg or the spermatozoid, we see them black, there we notice that we are going through a spiritual problem, there in that way the liberation is done to resolve the ill.

They believe, in this way, in an internal world, of a psychic-mystic character, in which the person lives tormented by generational demons. These, in turn, do not conform to the Catholic mystic-theological imagery, or to the belief system of traditional popular Catholicism, highlighting, therefore, a “between-place”, which maintains its autonomy in front of the Catholic tradition. The following phrase, spoken by one of the interviewees from the clergy, defines well this non-place that the São José Group occupies in the context of Catholicism: “they are beyond the traditional popular Catholicism and before the official Catholicism”. Such that, if the generational demons can not be situated in the pantheon of the Catholic entities, since they do not fit into the imaginary of theology and of Catholic tradition about angels and demons, they can however be sent, as Lambert shows, to “a system of psychic-mystic references of meanings and believing” (1991: 81). This, as we have seen, becomes a place of escape inside Catholicism, allowing Catholics to incorporate another religious system without ceasing, formally, to be Catholic.

On the horizon of this system, the confrontation with the demon is interpreted not only as a religious *performance*, but also as a psychic process. The objective is to reconstruct a generational sequence, constitutive of the historical and family biography of the participants, in order to offer them the opportunity to untie the knots that bind them physically and psychically to those that came before them and that impede them from

reaching their full human and spiritual potential. In this interpretative system, pain and suffering, lived through the mystic and ritual experience, become necessary conditions not only to move up to a more elevated level in the spiritual order, but also to attain physical and psychic health. It deals with, finally, offering a ritual opportunity for the participants to assume the control over the past in function of the present.

Liberation, in the context of the São José Group, is founded on a conception of the human being that comprehends it as structured on three levels: psychic, emotional and spiritual. According to this conception, liberation occurs basically through healing, seen as a process of gradual internal improvement, which would be reached through the incessant search for equilibrium between these dimensions that compose the human being. A “transformation of self” that should occur beyond the limits of any particular culture, political or religion system. As M.A. herself affirms, “healing is a gradual thing: body, mind and spirit. It isn’t supernatural at all. This is not a miracle tent here. Everything happens based on a conscientization in which each one does his or her part.” There is, therefore, a search for the metaphysical and ontological unity that denies the dualism and modern separation between body and soul. This unity, in turn, will be able to be reached through individual therapy, especially by those that are in a position of leadership, but also through the ritual of liberation.

so I have to bring here a person whose ancestor is imprisoned and needs sacerdotal pardon, I cannot give this, you will pray for her through me. Because the blessing is for the soul. The body is not of interest, the body dies, the body becomes a cadaver... the person continues the same... so the Lord will give his sacerdotal blessing. And he did. The soul was liberated. And, by liberating the soul, she has symbols that the Lord gives me in her hand, the fish of the descendent... you see.. it passes the conditionings and leads the people to the most absurd things...

Effectively, the therapeutic demand is the principal motivation that mobilizes the people in search of the services of the São José Group or the consultations with M.A. and her closest circle. The people that regularly go to these spaces are usually assailed by some problem of health of the body, but, above all, of the soul. The disease finds there a psychic-mystic context that grants it meaning within a coherent symbolic system, where the central idea is that the disease is the external happening that needs to be fought. But, unlike the secularized therapeutic contexts, the principal cause of the psychic and physical diseases has to be sought in a misalignment of spiritual order. Such that the healing process only ends when the patient passes the physical and psychic stages and reaches spiritual liberation.

The internalization of the boundaries or the revolving door

The data that we took from the fieldwork and the categories with which we worked in the attempt to interpret the role the studied group played in the religious context in question did not allow us to assume the affirmation that the movement constituted way into and out of Catholicism. The way out of the problem came to us from the metaphor of the revolving door, used by one of our interviewees, the priest assigned by the archbishop of Porto Alegre to follow the São José Group. The passage that we will transcribe below was his response to our attempt to test the hypothesis that the CCR could be not only way into the Catholic Church, as appears frequently in the analyses of the Brazilian religious field, which have emphasized the issue of religious competition, but also a way out, to the extent that it would liberate its faithful from assuming practices and beliefs that, in principle, are outside the Catholic system. In the words of the priest:

So, I believe that [the São José Group] is on the boundary. But it is important to have boundaries too [laughs]. We cannot stay all incarcerated in the middle, or in the nucleus. And this is true: it is a way out, but also a way in. I would say, it is a revolving door [laughs]. Some go out and others come in.

The first element to highlight is the recognition that the internalization of the boundaries is legitimate, from an institutional perspective, through the conglomeration of alterity in the Catholic space. This is reinforced in another passage of the same interview in which the priest explains that the participants of the São José Group “have a facility of language and are conducting rituals for people that are in New Age and in Spiritism”, offering them “that which the Catholic Church does not have to offer”. And he concludes, “if the Church does not offer it and the group does, until the Church offers something better, we cannot prohibit it. It is wise to let it continue”.

The second is with respect to the metaphor of the “revolving door”, proposed by our interlocutor, in order to think about the religious diversity inside the Catholic space, leading us to relativize our initial hypothesis, centered on the question of religious transit. As we saw previously, if it is possible to speak here of a space crossed by multiple religious languages, it is because there is a precedence of the objectified Catholic identity regarding the option or individual responsibility of salvation. As Sanchis affirms, in the case of Catholicism “the totality is primordially given, since the Sacrament is mediated from the substantial communion. Father Rahner is right in emphasizing that, for the Catholic intuition (the Catholic genius), the globality of the Church is given first, affirmed by the antecedence of the whole over its parts” (Sanchis 1986:10). Following the path proposed by the same author, it deals with an analysis that is made from a Durkheimian perspective, in which the society precedes the individual, unlike a Weberian sociology, in which the society is composed of the articulation of the individuals²⁰.

Another passage from the interview referenced above will make explicit the importance and prevalence of the sacramental practice in the Catholic Church regarding the meanings and experiences that circulate in the group in question. Speaking of the leader of the São José Group, the priest states:

The fact is that she gains credibility with the person: the person really believes in what she is doing, all the people that go there. And she, and this is what interests us, forwards the people to the sacramental practices of the Church. In other words, she sends the people to mass and confession. So, if you ask me about the effectiveness, this group took many people away from Spiritism, it took them away...

The affirmation of symbolic effectiveness of the sacrament beyond the rational choice of its faithful is a central part of the complex strategies of identification and discursive interpellation, which work inside a hierarchical register of the agglomeration of the opposites (Dumont 1992:372). The divisions and borders of the ritual and doctrinal character are equivocated, therefore, by the Catholic insistence about the objective action (*ex opera operatum*) of the sacrament and the visibility of the Church, although an “imagined community”, unified around a hard nucleus of the Catholic identity, which finds in the symbolic effectiveness its angular stone²¹.

Another question to take on in this item is regarding the proposition that consists of opposing on one side religion, as an objective and institutionalized system of beliefs, rituals and moral principles to which adhesion is requested, and on the other spirituality, experienced as a personal guidance that possesses autonomy in relation to dogmas and institutionalized commitments. This division, which has become recurring in the current studies on religion, has served to identify two irreconcilable tendencies in western culture, as shown in the analysis of Collins Campbell, which calls them *transcendence* and *imminence* (Campbell 1997). The singularity of the group that we are studying is in reconciling these two forms of religious experience, remaining inside the institutional mark, at the same time as it gives privilege to experience as the source and space of their spirituality. Such that an ethnography about the group, although brief, inside the limits of an article, can be revealing of religious processes that break with the dichotomies that we commonly use to think about the Brazilian religious field.

Conclusion

In the guise of conclusion, we could take up again here the metaphor of the revolving door, suggested by one of our interviewees, in order to think about the relationship between the different religious regimes that appears articulated in the specific context of Catholicism through the service and ideas disseminated by the São José Group. This metaphor allows us to imagine a juxtaposed continuity of the religious regimes, separated as compartments of this *revolving door*, so that they do not necessarily tend towards a synthesis or a syncretism, although they are continuously interacting and rubbing together. At the axis of this revolving door lies a group, which puts these diverse religious regimes into motion, legitimating itself as a distributor of resources, based on the differentiated individual demands of beliefs, rituals and cosmologies present in society. In other words, what attracts the people to the services of the São José Group is not the desire to adhere to a doctrine or community of faith, but the possibility of accessing, without needing to change their particular religious identity, fragments of the religious traditions and systems that make up the Brazilian religious field. It is in this

sense that, from the point of view of those who simply attend these ritual spaces, it is not fitting to speak of a process of conversion or religious transit, because what we have there is the possibility of accessing diverse modalities or matrices that make up this determined and recognizable religious field without needing to convert or move their specific institutions.

This reflection leads us to the other image, from the same interlocutor, already cited, according to which the São José Group would be “before the official Catholicism and beyond the popular Catholicism”. This brings us to conclude that this role played by the group is only possible because it lies in a between-place, in a certain institutional vacuum, from where it is possible to articulate the religious plurality accepted in Brazilian society. In the Catholic Church, maintaining within it these zones of ambiguity ends up playing a functional role, since it allows for extending its hegemony over the Brazilian religious field, where it considers itself a national religion. This “*pastoral of boundaries*”, as one of the interviewed priests called it, makes it possible to widen the offering of the religious goods of Catholicism, responding to the diversity of demands present in the society.

It is this Durkheimian vision of the Catholic Church, as an inclusive “moral community”, which allows for maintaining in it structure movements such as the São José Group. For the latter, in turn, it is fitting to affirm an “objective and sacramental Catholic identity” in order to remain in the Catholic Church and use its resources and social recognition, while at that same time becoming a distributor of religious goods and meanings that are not part of the repertoire of Catholic tradition. Or, still, retaining elements of a traditional popular Catholicism, which a rational and modern vision cannot integrate into its contemporary, post-Vatican II theology.

The analysis that we have made of the São José Group indicates a form of Catholic reaction to the diversification of the Brazilian religious field that does not fit into a Weberian referential of the religious competition between “businesses of soul saving”, which consider themselves autonomous subjects in a context of religious liberty, where all are equal. Although this modern and liberal vision has penetrated into some expressive sectors of the hierarchy, and has been implementing changes in the ecclesiastic structure in the sense of making it competitive in this field of disputes, the traditional mentality of Catholicism continues effective, reacting to this diversification through the logic of inclusion, where the other should not be fought, but incorporated.

The study of the São José Group, in turn, is covered by a great ethnographic density to the degree that it moves in its *revolving door* a wide variety of the spectrum of modalities that religion assumes in Brazilian society. In this way, from traditional popular Catholicism, it rescues and makes available beliefs related to millenarism, Marian apparitions, worship services to the saints and angels, exorcism and personalized vision of the devil, which were marginalized in modern theology. From Pentecostalism, especially in its Catholic version (CCR), it absorbs the elements that give form to the liturgy, such as the canticles, the placing of hands, glossolalia. From Neopentecostalism, it recuperates for the Catholic field exorcism and the belief in miracles. From Kardecist Spiritism, it reinterprets, in the key of the regression, the belief in reincarnation, seeking in the communication with the dead the solution to the present suffering and diseases of the soul. Under the influence of Spiritism, we can still identify ritual aspects that make the services of the São José Group resemble the sessions of *passe*. From the Afro-Brazilian

religions, it brings the belief in magic and witchery, resuscitating the human being in the field of disputes that are beyond their rational or emotional control. From New Age, it recuperates the value of experience as a source of knowledge, mysticism and therapies as ways of access to the self and to the sacred. And, moreover, it inserts into the Catholic narrative a new conception of religion, which presents itself in today's context as a "spirit of time".

Finally, this entire repertoire is placed at the disposition of all, Catholics and non-Catholics, without demanding from those who participate a conversion or subjective adhesion to a religious institution.

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Notes

- ¹ One of the recurrent categories in the current studies of religion in Brazil is that of religious transit. For many researchers of the field this would be the principal characteristic of religion today. Identified as a revealing element of the institutional crisis of religion in modernity, the religious transit would be associated with “a new type of porosity of borders and of multiple and/or composite identities,” which Pierre Sanchis has included under a new denomination of “syncretism” (Sanchis 2001, p. 9).
- ² We could include here the proposal of Lambert to privilege what he calls a “sociology of believing”, to interpret the transformations of the religious field in the sense of the incorporation of practices of mystic characteristics, as opposed to a “sociology of religion”, centered on the religious institution (Lambert 1991, p. 79).
- ³ The field research had the valuable participation of the students and fellows of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul Juceli da Silva, Bruno Marques and Nair Negrão Caldoro. I am thankful for the immeasurable collaboration of these dedicated students. I also appreciate the contribution of the theologian Paulo Fernando Carneiro de Andrade, with whom I discussed many of the issues presented in this article.
- ⁴ Among the authors that have emphasized the crisis of Catholicism in the contemporary Brazilian religious context we can cite Pierre Sanchis (Sanchis 1994), who shows the reflux of the Catholic culture in Brazil; Oro (1996), for whom the advance of Pentecostalism would be provoking a Catholic reaction to the loss of faithful; Prandi and Souza (1996), who associate the growth of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal inside the Catholic church to a process of Protestantization of Catholicism.
- ⁵ As an instrument of analysis to think about what we see happening inside Catholicism, we can use the same scheme proposed by Sanchis for the Brazilian religious field, of “pre-modern, modern and post-modern” as heuristic categories that refer to “logics, or as we would say, temporalities simultaneously present in varied combinations in the same situations “ (Sanchis 1997, p. 104-105).

- ⁶ Sanchis discusses this issue in the introduction of the collection *Fiéis & Cidadãos*, calling on the structural analysis of the Brazilian religious field of “ a *habitus* (history made structure) of porosity of the identities and ambivalence of the values, of a tendency, always frustrated but permanently retaken, in direction of bringing together diverse parts in a unit never reached”(Sanchis 2001, p. 45).
- ⁷ Sanchis identifies the following modalities as composing this open totality: Christianity (in its Catholic and Protestant expressions), the Afro-Brazilian religions, Spiritism and, most recently, New Age. These elements can be evidenced in the experience of the group we have been studying, presenting itself, however, in a tensional form, but sharing a common belief. From Catholicism we can highlight the affirmation of an objective identity, updated in the practice of the sacraments and in the recuperation of the tradition of worship services for the saints and the millenarianism. From Protestantism we have the resemblance to Pentecostalism, in its Catholic form of CCR, which occurs especially in the *amorização* services, where the elements of charismatic origin are abundant, such as canticles, glossolalia, the placing of hands. One can, still, make reference to the rites of liberation that assume an aesthetic very near to the exorcisms that are practiced in the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD). With the Afro-Brazilian religions, they share the same belief in the power of magic and witchcraft, as appears in the testimonies of M.A. of liberation cures that are reached through the attribution of the origin of the disease to the “work done and *despachos*, an offering made in hopes of a favor, made for the *orixás*, *exus* and other entities of Umbanda”. Finally, the presence of New Age, which offers a new mystic-psychic frame for the interpretation of its spiritual and therapeutic practices.
- ⁸ In our field research, we still have not explored this current. However, we have already come across their presence in the research about the Marian apparition of Taquari, where they are owners of the local radio station and maintain direct connection with the community, which was constructed based on the apparition (Steil 2001).
- ⁹ In another passage from the interview, priest RP clarifies what he is calling methodology. It actually deals with the liberation rituals of the São José Group, which performatize the shock with the demon, that which should culminate in the “spiritual healing” of the person, providing psychic and corporal well-being.
- ¹⁰ The millenarian groups, linked to the Marian apparitions and to the Charismatics, are the focus of our research and should be further studied in later works. Among these groups, one that has stood out in our research is the community of Portão, a city of the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre, where around the “confidant” Laerte de Vargas, who has “interior locutions”, received from the Virgin Mary, from Jesus Christ, from São José and from angels, a millenarian community was constructed, which waits for the second coming of Jesus Christ and the restoration of the world, giving origin to the thousand years of happiness (Delumeau, 1997). Although local, this community has a page on the Internet, where the messages received from the psychic are announced (available at: www.portalanjo.com)
- ¹¹ For every one of these groups, the Catholic Church would be today the target of a conspiracy of the great majority of the clergy with the forces of evil, identified with their traditional enemies: Freemasonry and Zionism.

- ¹²For a deeper look into the presence of the devil in the specific context of the Marian apparitions, I refer the reader to the text *A santa e o demônio. Relato e interpretação de um momento crucial da aparição de Nossa Senhora em Taquari, RS* (Steil; Alves 2003).
- ¹³Rocchi explains the meaning of the concept of mystic-therapeutic affirming that “the term psychic can mean the predominance of the therapeutic activities over the religious activities, while mystic indicates the references made by those adept with the mystical aspects of the traditional religions as much as a return to the ideal-type concept of Weber, of the search for salvation through personal improvement” (Rocchi, 2003, p. 177)
- ¹⁴The doctrinal limit, however, is manifested by the ecclesiastic assistant of the group in relation to the practice of baptism of aborted children, which, according to the assistant, does not only break with the Catholic orthodoxy, but also brings the group closer to Spiritism.
- ¹⁵A brief passage from the fieldwork journal, kept by Carolina Gruim, research assistant in the *Aparições Marianas e Carismatismo Católico* project, under my coordination, can provide the reader with an idea of how this ritual takes place: “The prayers began, accompanied by the sound of an electronic keyboard. The first was ‘Louvemos o Espírito Santo’, from a booklet that is distributed during the service. And the canticles follow, sometimes interrupted by series of ‘Hail Marys’. The most interesting were the women that “prayed” [for] the people present in a circle. In pairs (there were five pairs), the women passed, from chair to chair, doing something similar to a ‘*passe*’. First, they asked the person what had brought them there, what problem they were facing, what they wanted to ask or give thanks for. Then, with one hand on their chest and the other extended over the head of the devout (in a gesture of placing of hands), they prayed for around two to three minutes mumbling unintelligible words in a clear allusion to glossolalia. I could notice that these ‘prayers’ (designated in the group as ‘sentients’) entered into a state of trance during this activity. After prayer for the person, one of the women of the pair received a message (‘inspired word’) and whispered it in the ear of the devout.”
- ¹⁶According to Csordas “the principal generic criteria of teaching is that it clarifies some spiritual truth and so makes the listeners capable of living better their Christian lives. The teachings are usually detailed elaborations of the key terms and concepts that occur in a less elaborated form in other ritual genres” (1996, p. 171)
- ¹⁷Following Rocchi’s suggestion, maybe we should call these practices of different religious contexts that we have identified as a mystic-psychic network, not as part of the New Age movement *stricto sensu*, but as another moment, that the author calls the Post-New Age. (2003, p. 177). In this same sense, Françoise Champion identifies a process of disorganization of the constitutive elements of the system of beliefs of New Age – in the sense of loss of its contesting, countercultural, and desubstantializing character of its alternative communities – and of the assimilation of more pragmatic elements, that can no longer be identified as New Age, phenomenon such as those that are being analyzed here. Facing this, Champion suggests the use of the category Post-New Age (Champion 1989).

- 18 The meaning of conversion that is being questioned here is that defined by Max Weber and that is associated to the idea of a restructuring to which the individual undergoes upon changing from one religious group or denomination to another. From this perspective, conversion means assuming a process of ethical rationalization of behavior, to guarantee the permanent possession of the charismatic state, producing a full relation of meaning with the world and corresponding qualitatively to the valorizations of an eternal order or of an ethical God (Weber 1991, p. 357-361). It is necessary to refer the reader to Maués' article about conversion in Catholic Pentecostalism, which brings an important contribution considering the objectives of this work, since, upon transposing this concept to the context of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the latter shows itself limited to apprehend a reality that reaches dimensions that are not apprehended by it (Maués 2002, p. 38).
- 19 These teachings to which M.A. refers are denominated by the São José Group as "inspired words", which are received by the directors of the service, especially by M.A., in the ritual context or outside of it. The "inspired words" can be from Jesus Christ, from Our Lady, or from the Catholic saints or angels, especially from Saint Michael. During the interview that we conducted with M.A., in her house, in the space reserved for the rituals of liberation, she received an inspired word from Our Lady, which was pronounced through her mouth and recorded by her "secretary", to be later transcribed and distributed to the other members of the group, as a reflection and mediation aid.
- 20 As Sanchis reports, "F. Isambert, furthermore, recognized recently: the implicit model of the Durkheimian Church is that of the Catholic Church; not in relation, it is clear, to the experience of a Jewish religiosity. [...] In contrast, the religious sociology – and the *tout court* sociology – of Weber would be analogous to the Protestant intuition of a society that is made up of the articulation of the individuals. Catholic 'substantivist' - and traditional – vision; Protestant 'nominalist' - and modern – vision. (Sanchis, 1986, p. 10).
- 21 Sanchis will affirm that it is exactly the concept of sacrament – "the symbol, the symbolized and the link that joins them, and that precisely makes the simple sign a sacrament, the symbolic effectiveness that makes the symbolized present through the symbol" (Sanchis, 1986, p. 6) – that is at the base of "being Catholic".

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