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Article

Trans and Queer Latin American Theologies

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Abstract: This chapter provides an overview of Latin American queer theologies in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. It begins by highlighting Althaus-Reid's significant contributions and his impact on the development of queer theologies in the region. Key ideas from the first generation of queer theologians who collaborated with Althaus-Reid are emphasized. The chapter then explores the second generation of queer liberation theologians in Latin America, drawing on each author's theological work to illustrate the progression of queer theological thought. Finally, it addresses emerging issues within trans-queer theologies, offering insights into their development and significance within the broader context of Latin American queer theology.

Keywords: trans theologies; queer theologies; Latin American liberation theologies; liberation theologies; LGBTIQ+; Latin America

Introduction

Religion has been, continues to be, and will always be a significant issue in all Latin cultures and communities. Therefore, understanding those realities requires an equally deep and thorough understanding of their beliefs, spiritualities, and socio-political contexts. That process requires special care not to identify "religion" only —or primarily— with traditional institutional expressions —such as the Roman Catholic Church— or with orthodoxies and hegemonic canons from different Christian branches. In Latin America, "religion" is an experience that emerges with the families and popular bosom rather than in institutional spheres.¹¹⁰² The phenomenon of religion in Latin American cultures and communities beseeches for an inclusive logic. The cultural intertwining of various peoples — rather than orthodox perspectives— characterizes that logic. Thus, we should listen to and observe people in their daily lives rather than the discourses presented by institutional sermons.

The language and categories of social scientific, philosophical, and theological thought of the Global North tend to be blind to or intentionally marginalize what does not "fit" their self-proclaimed normativity and universal validity (i.e., their culturally constructed "orthodoxies").

Consequently, studying religion in the Latin context needs a methodology *a la manera Latina* [in a Latin way]. That should prevent falling prey to colonial and Eurocentric approaches that force foreign or colonialist analytical categories on Latin American realities. The purpose is not to hinder dialogue but rather to avoid any subtle form of continuing the colonizing project. It is one thing to dialogue with the categories of other continents through engaging with them and another not to see that those categories are *de otros lugares* [from other places]. Thus, universally applying those categories reflects the agenda and perspectives of their creators, their cultures, and situated knowledge. From its beginnings, any theology that has done *a la manera Latina* has been recognized for its theological particularity since it is neither a copy, translation, or adaptation of other intellectual traditions. Latin theologians began their work criticizing the universalizing and colonizing tenor of European and Euro-American theologies. At the same time, they recognize that doing theology *a la manera Latina* in other locations was not a matter of translating or adapting Latin American theologies to the American context. Initially, although they took much from Latin American Liberation Theology, they also engaged the context in which Latinxs began to root.

Measuring the amount of *Latinidad* [latinness] needed to identify a theologian or a theological work as Latin American is impossible. That is not a matter of nationalistic calculations. There is no

“latinometer.” Fundamentally, whoever engages in theological work *de manera Latina* is personally involved with the Latin American communities to such an extent that their theology is genuinely and unquestionably born from *el corazón del pueblo Latinx* [the heart of the Latin people]; in other words, done *desde dentro* [from within]. That is the only way to know what we call “Latin American,” for our theologizing emerges only through daily, personal, committed, and prolonged engagement with the Latin American communities. Latin American theology is born from a heart that suffers and compains the historical situation of the Latin American people.

To overview the paths of Latin American queer theologies in the first two decades of this millennium, this chapter begins with Althaus-Reid’s significant contributions, highlighting her impact on constructing queer theologies in the region. We then emphasize critical ideas from the first generation of queer theologians who collaborated with Althaus-Reid and embraced her postulates. The third section explores the second generation of queer liberation theologians in Latin America. This historical reflection draws on each author’s theological work, illustrating the progression of Latin American queer theological thought. Finally, we address issues pertaining to the emergent trans queer theologies.

Indecent Theologies: Queer Latinoamerican Theologies

A theology that seeks to lead to “liberation” from the oppression suffered by humanity must be understood as a continuous process of re-contextualization. Latin American queer theologies have sought to construct their own inclusive theological narrative *de manera Latina* while taking into account Latin American contextual diversity and questioning Latin American Liberation Theology (“TLL”). The purpose of queer theologies has not been to “demolish” TLL but to “explore in depth” the Latin American project and to question the way theology is done in the traditional liberationist context. The TLL, in effect, is the meeting place of Latin American theologies and queer theologies; thus, it operates as an instrument of theological inflection since it is, at the same time, a point of “arrival” and “departure.” The project of Latin American queer theologies represents a continuation and a disruption of TLL.

Latin American queer theologies challenge us to network with contextual and regional theologies that propose a rapprochement within the paradigm of queer theologies, even if they do not identify as such. Several Latin American scholars have begun to rethink their theology from the intersection of sexuality and Latin American liberation theology. Indecent Theology can properly be considered a Latin American queer liberation theology that seeks to embody the tastes, delights, dilemmas, ecclesial hopes, and change in the social reality of Latin American people.¹¹⁰³ Thus, it is necessary —as Marcella Althaus-Reid did— to queer the divine and human and divine relationships to challenge the cis-heteronormative tone of classical theologies about God.¹¹⁰⁴ Starting from the daily experience, the “every day,” of queer believers, it is necessary to liberate God from the theo(ideo)logical closet of traditional Christian thought.

Although we can say that the solid and deeply rooted work in the production of sexual theologies of the 1980s and 1990s was, at the same time, a continuation and a critique of the contribution of the TLL since the beginning of the twenty-first century, we live a time of new deployments in queer theologies, especially in Latin America. Thus, today’s Latin American queer theologies do not cease to establish networks with contextual and regional theologies that allow a better approach to the reality of queer people in our continent. These emerging local theologies are inscribed within the paradigm of queer theologies, even when they do not identify themselves with that name, as in the case of Althaus-Reid’s theology, which was called “indecent theology.”

Indecent Theology

Marcella Althaus-Reid is one of the most prominent queer theologians worldwide, especially in Latin America. Her book *Indecent Theology* marked a turning point in the evolution of queer theologies within Christianity, especially in our continent. Deeply rooted in Latin American liberation theology, her work fully embraced queer theory to challenge classical theologies and TLL to address issues of

gender and sexuality. For many reasons, Althaus-Reid was a pioneer of Latin American queer theologies, and her book also gives its name to her theology. *Indecent Theology* is genuinely a queer Latin American theology of sexual liberation that seeks to embody the context of the continent and its flavors, pleasures, dilemmas, ecclesial hopes, and changing social reality. She set out to liberate the TLL from the closet of its limiting traditions. It should come as no surprise that the publication of *Indecent Theology* was a revolutionary element in the academic world.

On the one hand, it contributed to the development of a queer theology politically engaged with the work of the TLL. On the other hand, it was a staunch critique of the distinctly cis-heteropatriarchal tone of the early works of liberation theologians. Her emphasis on (re)connecting the dignity of those under oppression — especially when exercised against gender and sexually diverse individuals and communities— was commendable. Althaus-Reid wisely showed in her *Indecent Theology* how queer theologies subvert the cis-heteronormative dictates of societies and religious denominations. Her analysis always kept on the horizon his strong vocation to include in the theological conversation the different sexual realities, mainly through their histories and, above all, their actors.

Althaus-Reid proposes to queerify the divine and the human we have already said, especially concerning their relations to the divine to challenge the cis-heteronormative tone of classical theologies about God. Taking the everyday experience of queer believers, the author also aims to liberate God from the closet of traditional Christian thought. Indecent theology thus becomes a vehicle and spokesperson for a very Latin American way of doing theology, listening to people's experiences as a theological act. Indecent Theology is a theology *de manera Latina*. However, this is not the only way of doing sexual theology in Latin America since our challenge is to sexualize theologies in Latin America or, rather, to recover sexuality in Latin American theological narratives. In other words, our query is to (re)take Althaus-Reid's work and open the range of possibilities to the tangible reality of the multiple queer experiences in the different contexts of the American continent, especially in South America. To accomplish this task, we must work at the intersection of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and racial ideologies, nationality, bodily capacities, social class, and nationality; in these multiple intersections emerges the Latin American queer theologies.

The First Generation of Queer Theologians in Latin America

The first generation of Queer Theologians in Latin America made visible and exposed the new themes and challenges emerging from queer theologians committed to the Gospel in Latin America.¹¹⁰⁵

Mariology

One of the topics that urgently needed to be addressed was Mariology and the queering of the figure of the Virgin Mary. Focusing on the Christian iconography of Mary, authors such as Mario Ribas reflected on the cis-heteronormative view and contrasted it with a queer understanding of Mary.¹¹⁰⁶ In doing so, they highlighted the connections of that icon with sexuality in everyday life experiences. Although the faithful venerate Mary in Latin America as a pristine model of motherhood, the presence of Mary icons, even in brothels or bars, reveals a mixture of the sacred and the profane, whose boundaries are difficult to determine. Therefore, "stripping" Mary of her cis-heteronormative holy garments can bring her humanity closer to the experiences of poor women amid their daily struggles in Latin America. Addressing the theme of Mary implies deconstructing one of the main aspects of Christianity in Latin America.

The careful delimitations of the cis-heterosexual division of labor in Latin American societies reflect the establishment of the cis-heteropatriarchal tone embedded in Christianity, especially in Roman Catholicism. Mary is a symbol that proclaims liberation and resistance. Her description in the Gospels of the Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55) distills that idea. However, she suffered co-optation to become its opposite. Mary has been cis-heteronormatized to reinforce cis-heteropatriarchalism and sociocultural oppression. Thus, the image of the Virgin becomes the most destructive element of

confrontation for women to re-consider their “place” and “role” in Latin American societies and “approve” male privilege.

Especially in popular religiosity, the image of the Virgin has commonly adopted the Christian ideal of femininity and motherhood. Moreover, it has traditionally represented a clear example of what it is to be “decent” as opposed to women labeled as “indecent” and “perverted.” For centuries, a destructive dynamic judged women’s lives in Christian contexts. They were condemned or approved for their conformity —or lack of it— to the image of the Virgin Mary.

What emerges from this dynamic is that religion and sexuality have been two categories that barely came together for centuries. When they intertwine, they do so under the strict supervision of cis-heteropatriarchal power and morality.

It should be noted that Ribas does not refer to the Virgin of Guadalupe in this work but to Nossa Senhora de Aparecida, the national Marian symbol in Brazil.¹¹⁰⁷ It is fair to say that the co-optation of the Virgin of Guadalupe made other representations of Mary in Latin America invisible. We can affirm that each country and even most regions, cities, or towns in Latin America have a particular representation of the Virgin. This is commonly known as “Advocations of the Virgin.” Undoubtedly, the Virgin of Guadalupe is significant for the people of Mexico. However, it is not a central symbol for all the peoples of Latin America, as each nation venerates its local invocation. Connecting with Althaus-Reid’s notion of “theme park” theologies, the Virgin of Guadalupe did not escape that situation.¹¹⁰⁸ It became Mary’s “unique” icon in Latin America, imposed upon everyone regardless of their local veneration and Christian affiliation. It should be noted that not all Christians in Latin America are devotees of Mary.

Accordingly, feminists and queer activists contested the cis-heteropatriarchal tone assigned to Mary. Queer theologians responded to that challenge through the queerification of her image, which involved the distortion of supposed cis-heteronormativities of “decency” that denied a deep spirit of faith to the powerful expressions of gender and sexuality in the history of Christianity. Thus, queer theologies in Latin America constantly deconstruct and liberate this Christian figure.

Pastoral Work

Another aspect that was pivotal for that first generation of Latin American queer theologians was pastoral work, especially in light of the military dictatorships that descended upon Latin American societies, violating human rights, persecuting, killing, and disappearing people. One of those ministers was Roberto González and his partner Norberto D’Amico.¹¹⁰⁹ They made visible and detailed the struggles of doing queer ministry and theologies. They recounted their struggles amid one of the bloodiest military regimes of the 1970s and 1980s in Argentina, marked by a cis-heteronormative presence in society and religious organizations. Everyday life, religion, politics, faith, and personal and community struggles are interrelated with liberation theologians. They enriched and illuminated each other. Gonzalez does theology by living it through his life and community ministry.

It is fair to remember that many lost their lives to military regimes in Latin America from the late 1960s to the late 1990s. For example, Mauricio Amilcar Lopez —a professor at ISEDET and a member of the Free Brethren Church in Mendoza, Argentina— was abducted and killed by the military dictatorship. The contribution of these authors, in particular, constitutes a unique piece, as there are not many articles, chapters, or biographical books on those who were forerunners of gender and sexual diversity amid religious organizations in Latin America. Their memories and experiences join the invisibilization of almost 400 queer people kidnapped and murdered by the military regime. Their names are often absent in the tributes to those killed by the armed forces during the civil-military dictatorship in Argentina. There were many people who, because of their faith and sexuality and because of their political commitment, became military targets and were viciously murdered. However, political commitment was visible at the cost of invisibilizing their faith or sexual orientation.

Local theologies

As in Asia or Africa, Latin America is a diverse region of languages, cultures, spiritualities, and ethnicities. That is visible in situations in which queer folks have multiple religious affiliations. That entails for queer theologies to dialogue with the numerous religious experiences of believers.¹¹¹⁰ In a predominantly —but not exclusively— Roman Catholic context, the numerous religious affiliations —some of which are not cis-heteropatriarchal— suggest that the closet of religious experiences may have gaps that allow the existence of third spaces of negotiation and spiritual creativity. Such a proposal is innovative. One of the central tenets of it resides in the need to recover vital information to understand better queer movements and their connection to queer theory in Latin America. It is noteworthy that many authors choose the term *queer* to articulate their theology in their context. Terminology in Spanish and Portuguese is crucial in working with queer theory and queer theologies. The problem of how to define activism or sexual and gender diversity often becomes a central issue that blocks any possibility of dialogue.

Thus, regionality is also an essential aspect. For example, although every country in Latin America was under colonial rule, their histories diverge from each other due to the colonial power —Spanish, Portuguese, British—, language —Spanish, Portuguese, English, French— or the relation to the first-nations present in every territory, which bear their own distinctive cultural, linguistic, political, and religious characteristics. In this line, André S. Musskopf has contributed significantly to the grounding of queer theologies in Brazil by considering in his analysis the elements present in Brazilian society, returning to the Portuguese colonial period,¹¹¹¹ marked the cis-heterosexual division of labor and the gender role expectations of cis- heteropatriarchy with the help of Christianity. Thus, it speaks of ambiguities in both religiosity and sexuality. While on the surface, they affirm one thing, deep down, they (re)produce another situation in intimacy. Amidst that dynamic, the life stories of queer individuals who keep their spirituality alive along with their sexuality constitute a fundamental source for queer theological reflection.

Popular Religiosity

Likewise, popular culture is a feature in the Latin American landscape that connects to the emergence of popular religiosity. In his sense, the representation of God in Brazilian or Argentinean popular culture is an example of this concern.¹¹¹² The connection between theology and popular culture is not new, as it is a crucial feature of the TLL. However, it marks a continuation of that line in queer theologies by addressing aspects that relate God to gender, especially notions of masculinity. For example, Musskopf relates God to the images of the *Gaúcho* [cowboy] from the Rio Grande do Sul region —in southern Brazil— and the *Malandro* [slacker] from Rio de Janeiro —in western Brazil— as two iconic metaphors for hegemonic masculinity. Thus, the connection of the divine with local and autochthonous representations of masculinity allows us to (re)construct an invisibilized archaeology of gender fluidity through the analysis.

Therefore, in connection with the previous, the first generation of Latin American queer theologians exposed the hidden sexual undertones in all theologies produced on the continent. While queer theologians appear to “sexualize” theology, the truth is that all theologies— explicitly or implicitly—are sexual theologies.¹¹¹³ Some theologies hide, camouflage, or silence their sexual dimensions to comply with the normative “decency” of theological and ecclesial spheres. Recognizing this issue demystifies the assumption that only queer theologies engage with sexuality. Since Christianity’s origins, sexuality has been present in theological discourse, even if often manifesting as rejection or condemnation. Latin American queer liberation theologians critique the omission of sexual issues in classical theologies, theological faculties, churches, and liberationist movements. By addressing this omission, they challenge and destabilize the seemingly cis-heterosexual foundations of traditional theologies, advocating for a more inclusive and honest approach to theological reflection and practice.

A New Generation Flourishes

The work of the first generation of Latin American queer theologians bore fruit in forming a new generation of queer theologians on the continent. The emergence of radical narratives has

characterized this new flowering of Latin American queer theologians in the last decade in favor of equality and justice for sexual dissidence, both in societies and ecclesial communities. Twice—in 2015 and 2019—this generation also elaborated statements on the relevance of queer theologies in the Latin American context.

A small group of Latin American queer theologians tried to advance in their liberating and dissident theological work. However, beginning in the second decade of this century, there was a more significant debate on issues related to sex-gender diversity in the religious sphere in several Christian denominations and ecumenical organizations. Much of this discussion took place under the umbrella of the term “gender,” one of the reasons that certainly enhanced the propaganda and effects of the campaign against what is known as “gender ideology.” The term “gender,” as used in feminist movements and women’s studies, took on a broader and broader meaning outside the cis-heteronormative standard. The primary example of questioning this category can be found in Judith Butler’s works.¹¹¹⁴

In line with those discussions, queer theologians offer contributions to a theologizing of gender. For example, queer theologian Darío García Garzón utilized philosophy and hermeneutics to examine not only the emergence of queer theologies but also their critique and destabilization of heteronormative theologies in Latin America.¹¹¹⁵ Drawing on Martin Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein* [being there], the author points to the process of being/becoming as a hermeneutical tool for understanding not only the fluidity of sexual diversity but also how it impacts, shapes, and enriches the knowledge of the divine and the situation of human beings concerning that divinity. Furthermore, García Garzón insisted on the need to delve into the sociology of sexuality to unearth Latin American sexual history.¹¹¹⁶

Defying Anti-religious LGBTIQ+ Sentiment

At the same time, queer theologians’ analysis focuses on how that impacts, shapes, and enriches the understanding of the divine. Significantly, they examine the situation of humanity concerning the Divine. On the other hand, it is worth noting that Latin American queer theologians and ministers denounce the deep-rooted resistance to religion in LGBTIQ+ activism across the continent. Many activists flatly reject any connection to religious or theological aspects. This situation is the result of often unreflective conceptions of secularism, anti-clericalism, and anti-Roman Catholicism. García Garzón’s work is dense and affluent because it delves into little-trodden paths of Latin American thought to relate philosophy, theology, and queer theory. However, therein lies his singular contribution to Latin American queer theologies. It is vital to mention the connection that highlights the place of faith and the often invisible experiences of queer believers.

In the same vein, this new generation of queer theologians highlights the place of faith in everyday societal niches. For example, Yacurmana de la Puente dares to think about how Althaus-Reid’s legacy can find its root in a particular context.¹¹¹⁷ De la Puente finds that, at present, the militancy of the queer movement in the province of La Rioja in Argentina is distanced from the Roman Catholic Church and any other religious institution. This is a painful situation faced by LGBTIQ+ activists across the Latin American continent who profess a particular faith. The violence—symbolic, verbal, psychological—that they endure often holds back their engagement and activism. The criticism is evident: it is well extended in different sectors of Argentine society. Therefore, this author’s analysis focuses on the possibility that Althaus-Reid’s indecent theology can ally with sexual and gender diversity militancy. De la Puente offers three proposals that we should consider for this. First, to recognize “(...) the diversity of inclusive churches that exist in the country, which positively value gender and sexually diverse people. (...) [I]nclusive churches become places of liberation and resistance”.¹¹¹⁸ Second, to bring to the discussion the “(...) different ‘Catholicisms’”¹¹¹⁹ as a way to destabilize the hegemony that the Roman Catholic Church has over Christianity, the ecclesial realm, and the Catholic tradition. Finally, to deconstruct and “(...) demystify the fals(ifi)e(d) binary of religion vs. sexual diversity”¹¹²⁰ through which society tries to maintain both aspects—religion and sexuality—as two trenches in constant struggle.

The contribution of De la Puente —a member of the Pilgrim Church, a continent-wide ecumenical and interfaith church— is vital. It shifts the focus from the hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church to a queer theology that recognizes the spirituality and theologizing of individuals and communities that are gender and sexually diverse in the footsteps of any Christian tradition. Taking into account this aspect, namely, the flip side of the liberation sought by religious organizations from sex-gender diversity, is vital in order not to repeat past mistakes that produced the exodus and sexile of queer believers who left or were kicked out of traditional churches.

Queer ecclesiology

In addition to documents, meetings, and events in different churches and ecumenical organizations, the 2010s also saw the emergence of new confessional groups and initiatives favored by the development of communication technologies and the popularization of digital social networks. There are a large number of groups of all denominations on various digital platforms that identify with a particular religious tradition. New inclusive churches have also emerged in different contexts and with diverse perspectives —such as Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Neo-Pentecostal— revealing a diversity of approaches to the relationship between religion—particularly Christianity— and gender diversity issues. Also, in academia, there has been a renewed interest in the debate on queer theologies and the relationship between queer studies and religion. This is evident in conferences and seminars focusing on sex-gender diversity studies and in which the question of religion has gained space. This also reflects an increased interest in social movements and even governmental areas in a positive way. It is increasingly understood that religion, its multiple perspectives, and its relationship with gender and sexuality issues must be articulated in the construction of political agendas and strategies, as it is present in the daily lives of people and their communities.

Therefore, queer theologians examine the situation of inclusive churches in Latin America, uncovering findings that raise concerns. For instance, Talita Tavares, in her study of Brazil, asserts that by not considering homosexuality a sin, inclusive churches seem to serve as places of redemption for queer people.¹¹²¹ However, she also points out that queer theologies have developed discussions about power relations in which genders and sexualities were—and are—continuously produced. Consequently, she emphasizes the need to analyze to what extent the dialogue between Brazilian inclusive churches and queer theology can bring critical reflections on the different practices within these institutions. One of Tavares' findings is that, in some cases, there is a cis-homonormativization operating within these churches.¹¹²² For Latin American queer theologians, it is challenging to acknowledge that even religious institutions that honor and respect gender and sexual diversity can adopt cis-hetero/homonormative positions in censoring and controlling their faithful.

Nevertheless, this is a tangible reality. The solution lies in the decolonization and deconstruction of these hegemonic positions.¹¹²³ By doing so, inclusive churches can better align with the principles of queer theology and foster truly inclusive and liberating spiritual communities.

Finally, Brazilian queer theologian Ana Ester Pádua Freire takes us down a different path. Her work narrates the first queer worship service at the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC BH) in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.¹¹²⁴ The event marked a shift in how worship services were conceived and organized in Latin America. The layout of the sanctuary, designed as a bar, invited parishioners from the outset to break down the division between “the sacred” and “the profane,” intertwining a religious ceremony with the familiar scene of gay bars. The whole event deeply embraced Althaus-Reid's proposal of an indecent theology that is not afraid to be controversial, counter-cultural, and avant-garde. In short, to be genuinely indecent!

The issue of ecclesiology undoubtedly highlights a tension that underlies all versions of queer theologies in Latin America: the connection between theological reflection and the pastoral, liturgical, and ecclesiological praxis of queer believers. It challenges inclusive churches and queer believers to follow the necessary steps to unlearn and question traditionally learned truths. At the same time, it invites to denaturalize and critique essentialized truths, thus initiating the search for answers. The proposals of queer theologies and theologians in Latin America push believers and communities towards an *eclesiología revolucionaria, indecente y escandalosa* [a revolutionary, indecent and scandalous

ecclesiology]. This queer and revolutionary ecclesiology is rooted in daily life, in *lo cotidiano* [every day] of the individuals who make up the community of faith. Unlike cis-heteronormatized environments, in these communities, any difference is not a threat but a collective strength, a sign of “unity in diversity.”¹¹²⁵ Queer and decolonizing ecclesiology implies that different individuals begin to have a place at the table. Regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or sexual desire, every believer is an equal member of the body of Christ. Such a work requires a continuation, as ecclesiology is fundamental in moving from reflection to praxis.

Recovering mysticism

The recovery of mysticism has been another trend brought by this new generation of Latin American queer theologians. Throughout history, both mystical and non-cis-heterosexual people have been suspects, outsiders, and subjects of discrimination in institutional religions due to their presence in the cultural and religious realm. Following this line, theologians such as Anderson Santos Meza present a relational dialogue between mysticism, gender diversity, and politics. Santos Meza and other queer theologians consider the influence of mysticism on politics and its overlaps with queer theory, thus, examining the emergence of queer theologies and the eschatological consideration of God becoming queer as a possibility of liberation for minorities. Such a prospect leads to the emergence of queer resistance. In Latin American societies, all that is “different” and “strange” has been historically displaced to peripheries where many human beings suffer the systematic silencing of their voices and a sort of existential cornering on the threshold of the unnamable because all of us who are part of a minority today have felt how they constantly want to move us to the few places where we can authentically live our “difference” and onto small communities where our “strangeness” is not a reason for exclusion or shame, but, on the contrary, is a richness without comparison.

It is essential to state that in this emancipatory aspect converge both mystical people and minorities who fight for a world free of narrow labels that minimize “the human” within the cis-heteropatriarchal logic, according to which diversity and “queer” have no voice.¹¹²⁶ This is why mysticism and the wide range of “queer” walk in the same direction, in search of unloading from the shoulders of humanity that cancerous yoke of cis-heteropatriarchy: re-membering with love the bodies and territories dis-membered by global violence is an expression of messianic times. The bodies that matter, the exploited and invisible bodies of LGBTIQ+ people, migrants, the disappeared, the differently abled, are today the living members of the queer body of Christ; thus, their multiple resistances, their struggles for dignity, life, and hope, represent an invaluable dimension of the eschatological process of redemption.¹¹²⁷

Fostering academic production

It is worth mentioning some academic events and publications of this new wave in the field of queer theologies so that we can complete our journey through the path that queer theologies have taken in Latin America. It is no longer possible to ignore the production of queer theologies and their contribution, fundamentally, to the creation of more just and egalitarian relations everywhere: in religion, in the economy, in politics, and culture. We have the training, publications, and, well, the space at the tables of debate and in the decision-making spaces, but we still have to conquer it.

In 2018, with the first publication of *Conexión Queer: Latin American and Caribbean Journal of Queer Theologies*, the need within the Latin American theological-pastoral field to formulate and disseminate new theological discourses and queer pastoral practices in the Global South was manifested. Undoubtedly, the desire to produce theologies from the Global South marked the beginning of a significant renewal of the academic and epistemological project. The journal *Conexión Queer* aimed to shift the research focus from North America to the Global South. While queer theoretical formulations from Anglo-Saxon contexts have sought emancipation and dissidence, they are often seen as geopolitical impositions from the “North,” invalidating popular movements and knowledge from the “South.” Since that time, Latin American queer theologies began to be presented as “queer theologies,” “bolleras theologies,” “cuir theologies,” and theologies from/about sex-gender dissidence in the Global South. From 2018 to 2023, the magazine published six issues featuring

scandalous writings with a vital identity aspect. The editorial of volume 6, published in late 2023, highlights the “scandal” theme in Latin American and Caribbean queer theologies. These theologies challenge neoliberal, cis- heteropatriarchal, and Eurocentric narratives, seeking to dismantle oppressive power structures and advocate for inclusion and dignity for all.¹¹²⁸

Queer theologians are deeply concerned with the main critiques defended by queer theory to analyze how “the sexual subject” makes queer theologies.¹¹²⁹ For example, Beatriz Febus states that the sexual subject of queer theory makes queer theologies by revising and deconstructing aspects of the Christian faith that have been considered part of the “hetero- normatively sacred.”¹¹³⁰ It can use the resources of the hermeneutic circle of sexual suspicion to rescue the sexual and erotic elements denied by traditional theologies.¹¹³¹ In this way, queer theologians destabilize and subvert the foundations of cis-heteropatriarchy. They assume how cis-heteropatriarchy has affected and hindered religious experiences and theological reflections.

Undoubtedly, and as was perceived throughout this historical and genealogical text, the panorama in the continent is so diverse that it remains dispersed in pockets of activism and pastoral work that only sometimes translate into the creation of networks. Because of this, in Latin American queer theologies, we find and build a common ground to continue with the design of theological networks, revolutionary and dissident, that allow us to continue sharing our experiences but, above all, that will enable us to continue celebrating life and diversity, in this long existential walk in which we march building liberation.

Since theologies emerge in a cultural and social framework anchored in time and space, they do not escape the multiple maneuvers of the cis-heteropatriarchal system. Therefore, the construction of Latin American queer theologies at different moments in the last two decades bears the marks of that reality. Queer theologians and communities in Latin America should consider that doing queer theologies and analyzing situations in which religion intersects with gender, sexuality, and other socio-cultural aspects always involve risks. Therefore, doing Latin American queer theologies is, in effect, a prophetic task that never ceases to seek a different face of God, a queer God who challenges the oppressive powers of heterosexual orthodoxy, white supremacy, and global capitalism. It is a task that is not only scandalous but also profoundly challenging.

Beyond the Addenda: Queer Trans Theologies Among Latin American Scholars

Within queer theologies, transgender theologies have often been forgotten or placed on a secondary plane. That reveals that, despite the shared situation of oppression, the so-called “LGBTIQ+ community” is not univocal or homogenous. Concerns concerning power struggles, intergroup competition, and differences are crucial in determining which sectors or topics to make visible. Due to this situation, only in the last few years has there been an increase in the production of trans-theologies from people immersed in the different realities that transgender entails in the continent.

However, when we speak of queer theologies, we need to acknowledge the diversity contained in them. As theologian Ángel F. Méndez-Montoya asserts: “Before positioning itself in the academic sphere, a queer theory emerged from the streets, amidst a sea of sex-gender diverse bodies, shouting in unison: We are here, and we are queer.¹¹³² Get used to it!” LGBTIQ+ bodies marching in the streets to resist the assignment and iteration of a humiliating and dehumanizing term that has been translated into socio-political and religious practices that have extirpated the rights and human dignity of “this” queer [*cuir*] body, which “now,” raising its voice, declares to be “here.” This term is a Hispanicized hybridization of the word queer in English. Here, it is Hispanicized as *cuir*, following its phonetics and, although “re-twisting,” its etymological roots.¹¹³³ *Cuir* also designates subordinated subjectivities that live precariously due to race or ethnicity, poverty or migratory status, or disability. When used as a verb or action, *cuirizar* means resisting, twisting, resignifying, and subverting expressions and acts of hatred, abuse, exploitation, discrimination, and violence towards the “others” invented by hegemonic societies.¹¹³⁴

Trans-hermeneutics

A vital topic is the development of trans-hermeneutics, which entails a hybrid reflection between hermeneutics and epistemology to understand the existential issue of the trans, with its multiple transits, transgressions, and irruptions in society.¹¹³⁵ Thus, transgender theology aims to deconstruct gay identity, addressing theological and existential transitions as revelations in late modernity, and seeks salvific strategies to challenge and emancipate from prevailing male domination beyond queer theology's playful and hedonistic utopias.¹¹³⁶

With his assertion of the transgender as a point of deconstruction of the preeminence of "gay," García Garzón proposes a new theological horizon. That entails a change of gaze that seeks to move towards a genuinely inclusive theology, that is, towards a trans-theology. He characterizes trans-theology as based on a fluid and abject notion of trans-generality: "This is what transgender consists of, a movement of tension between polarity in the search to polarize or get out of polarity".¹¹³⁷ Ultimately, the term "transgender" proposes the definitive disruption of sexual and gender diversity based on binary oppositions to bring discussion and praxis to a real plane of diversification. It is noteworthy that queer theology, from its beginnings, differs from gay theology as it seeks to transcend it.¹¹³⁸

On the other hand, Althaus-Reid's Indecent Theology emphasizes that the use of metaphor must be frequent since the object in question is also composed of numerous metaphors. This idea highlights the relationship between queer and trans-Latin American theologies.¹¹³⁹ The characterization of Althaus-Reid's indecent theology as a transgressive hermeneutic arouses controversy and fascination because it speaks to issues concealed behind the scenes in the Christian Church, Christian economics, and politics. Thus, queer and indecent theologians must masterfully present God in a new fashion.¹¹⁴⁰

Accordingly, trans-hermeneutics reveals that the liberation project of TLL felt short regarding sexual liberation, as it required confronting dominant institutions to seize their most important possession in the architecture of oppression and socio-cultural control: the sex- gendered body! It is crucial to remember that Latin American liberationist projects excluded gay men and trans people. This pattern of exclusion underscores the need to reflect on the discrimination within liberation movements in recent Latin American history and to offer new interpretative insights to understand and interpret their history and experiences.¹¹⁴¹

Trans Bodies Matter

The issue of trans bodies is fundamental to queer and trans theologies in Latin America.

For example, Marcelo Alejandro Hidalgo Ríos¹¹⁴² offers a clear example of the religious experience of sexual dissidence in the American continent and, above all, in the South. Through the biographical account of Magdalena, a trans woman, Hidalgo Ríos guides us into the world of trans-queer-Pascual corporeality. Such a theological exercise manifests the struggle to recognize Magdalena's dignity as a daughter of God and our sister. From the perspective of queer and trans theologies, this analysis explores how God continues to reveal himself amid the lives of trans women in prostitution. Excluded by cis-heteronormative social and ecclesial systems, Magdalena fought for equality and the freedom to believe and belong.

The bodies of trans folks point towards the multiple crucifixions occurring daily in Latin America. As we reflect on the Cross of Christ, we are reminded of Latin America's ongoing suffering since the late twentieth century. We move towards the biblical Golgotha, passing through modern-day equivalents. Alongside the Virgin Mary, we stand with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the Mothers of the False Positives in Colombia, and Trans Mothers everywhere mourning their daughters lost to trans-femicides. This suffering mirrors the journey of each person of sexual and gender diversity, promising that a loving, resilient figure will eventually provide support. Many who their families rejected found new homes with trans women who adopted them. During military persecution, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and economic crises, these queer families offered refuge and maternal care, forming supportive, non-traditional family structures.¹¹⁴³

A central aspect of the trans-theological task is the body's recovery as a theological locus.

Traditionally, Christian theology denied bodies a place, even at the expense of betraying Jesus. The process was subtle. From that moment on, bodies were obsessively policed, controlled, corrected,

and normalized to achieve heavenly salvation. Bodies went into the prisons of Christianity, all in the name of salvation and morality. If the Gospel of John is clear that the body of Christ is an act of freedom for the creation that Christ embodied, facing the issue of the incarnation is, consequently, a political action towards the dismantling of politics that have imprisoned bodies. In Christianity, the derisive ground was the abject bodies. Christianity outcasted abject bodies in the name of a homogenous cis-heteropatriarchal narrow vision of corporeality. Therefore, it is, by all means, a crucial standpoint on which trans theologians need to focus so they can overcome this heritage. As presented in this last section, that is precisely where their contribution thrives and enriches broader queer theologies.

Conclusion

The queer —because of its permanent state of fluidity and de/(re)construction— resists being pigeonholed in the closets of the essentialist definitions of modern theories. Therefore, queer theologies are constantly evolving and tested by their postmodern imprint. Ultimately, they are the fruit of a long journey that has taken the faithful and Christian thinkers almost two thousand years to (un)walk.

Queer theologies invite us to give birth to new queer beliefs that help to highlight queer persons as recipients of God's love. That is, to bring to the center of our theological task all persons along with their sexual histories, hopes, dreams, and different kinds of loving or erotic relationships. These experiences allow their discourses to pass through our bodies, senses, and daily experiences and accompany us from the bed to the temple. At the same time, queer theologies must increasingly consider everyday experiences without preconceptions. Such experiences are vital to remember that each person is the product of the intersection of their culture, ethnicity, and diverse backgrounds of the Divine. At these intersections, we can find the richness and complexity of all humanity and its relationship with the Divine.

The experiences and reflections of the theologians we have analyzed in this chapter — while celebrating them— are not paradigmatic but a tapestry of the work that still needs to be done on the continent. We must keep this in mind when doing queer theologies and analyzing situations where religion intersects with other socio-cultural aspects. Therefore, this chapter does not seek to constitute a finished, ordered, and definitive compendium of everything happening in the fascinating world of queer theologies on the American continent. On the contrary, it seeks to break with the possible illusion of readers that —by the end of their reading— they would have exhausted all aspects of queer theologies. That would be impossible and also ineffective.

Because of this, the chapter invites us to continue deepening, investigating, and embracing the march of a movement that flows and unfolds itself in different, complex, and fascinating ways in every place where believers follow the Christian faith from a queer perspective and a Latin American cultural background.

Notes

¹⁰⁶⁸ Wirth, "'Our Bodies'," 475.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Rohrer, "Trans Theology."

¹⁰⁷⁰ Wolff, "Diptych," 107.

¹⁰⁷¹ Wolff, "Diptych," 99. Wolff critiques the use of *imago dei* language as ineffective for trans theological purposes (100).

¹⁰⁷² Burbach, "Everything," 312-313.

¹⁰⁷³ Burbach, "Following," 10-11.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Jordan, "In Search," 305.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Han, "LGBTQ+ Politics."

¹⁰⁷⁶ Hadebe, "LGBTIQ Theological Agency," 102. See also Robertson, "Queer Sexuality."

¹⁰⁷⁷ Goh, "Malaysian."

- ¹⁰⁷⁸ Smith, "Liberation as Risky Business," 214.
- ¹⁰⁷⁹ Smith, "Liberation," 228.
- ¹⁰⁸⁰ Smith, "Liberation," 231.
- ¹⁰⁸¹ Loughlin, "Introduction," 7.
- ¹⁰⁸² Thornton is a theologian with dual belonging to Jewish and Christian traditions.
- ¹⁰⁸³ Thornton, "Trans/Criptions," 365.
- ¹⁰⁸⁴ Powell, "Resurrection," 275-288.
- ¹⁰⁸⁵ Creamer, "Embracing," 126.
- ¹⁰⁸⁶ Aye, "Queer(y)ing Naga," 38.
- ¹⁰⁸⁷ Jordan, *Queer Callings*, 196.
- ¹⁰⁸⁸ Jordan, "In Search," 303.
- ¹⁰⁸⁹ Armstrong, "Thinking Practice," 13.
- ¹⁰⁹⁰ Gordon, *Glorious*, 16.
- ¹⁰⁹¹ Gordon, *Glorious*, 22.
- ¹⁰⁹² Gordon, *Glorious*, 171.
- ¹⁰⁹³ Gordon, *Glorious*, 171.
- ¹⁰⁹⁴ Stobie, "Indecent."
- ¹⁰⁹⁵ Glück, *Margery Kempe*, 57.
- ¹⁰⁹⁶ Crawley, *Lonely*, 164.
- ¹⁰⁹⁷ Larrimore, "Introduction," 1, quoting Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian*, 105.
- ¹⁰⁹⁸ Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian*, 65-77.
- ¹⁰⁹⁹ Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian*, 105-106.
- ¹¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of trans materialisms, subjectless critique, and the relative uselessness of queer theory for trans studies now, see Aizura et. al., "Thinking With." Sam Sanchinel also raises this concern in "The Godly 'I Am'," 84n.12.
- ¹¹⁰¹ Several recent dissertations treat trans or gender-crossing saints in late antiquity. See Wiegel, "Reading Matrona," and Phillips, "You are Correctly."

Notes to Ch. 4.6

- ¹¹⁰² Espín, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*.
- ¹¹⁰³ See: Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*.
- ¹¹⁰⁴ See: Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*.
- ¹¹⁰⁵ See: Althaus-Reid (Ed.), *Liberation Theology and Sexuality*.
- ¹¹⁰⁶ See: Ribas, "Liberating Mary, Liberating the Poor".
- ¹¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.
- ¹¹⁰⁸ See: Althaus-Reid, "Gustavo Gutiérrez Goes to Disneyland," 124-142.
- ¹¹⁰⁹ See: González and D'Amico, "Love in Times of Dictatorships."
- ¹¹¹⁰ See: Musskopf, *Uma brecha no armário*.
- ¹¹¹¹ See: Musskopf, *Via(da)gens teológicas*.
- ¹¹¹² See: Musskopf, "Ungraceful God", 5-29.
- ¹¹¹³ See: Musskopf, "Cruising (with) Marcella," 228-239.
- ¹¹¹⁴ See: Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Butler, *Undoing Gender*.
- ¹¹¹⁵ See: García Garzón, *Mundo de las princesas*.
- ¹¹¹⁶ See: García Garzón, *Cruzando los umbrales del secreto*.
- ¹¹¹⁷ See: De la Puente, "Taking Marcella Althaus-Reid Into the Alleys," 92-115.
- ¹¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.
- ¹¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.
- ¹¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ¹¹²¹ See: Tavares, "¿Las Iglesias Inclusivas prescinden de teologías que tratan la sexualidad?".
- ¹¹²² *Ibid.*, 102.
- ¹¹²³ *Ibid.*, 104.

- ¹¹²⁴ See: Pádua Freire, "Dirty Martini," 7-22.
- ¹¹²⁵ See: Córdova Quero, *Sin tabú*.
- ¹¹²⁶ See: Santos Meza, "Resistencia queer," 83-106; Santos Meza, "Queering John of the Cross," 366; Santos Meza, "Desviaciones teológicas para retornar al Edén," 369-422.
- ¹¹²⁷ See: Knauss and Mendoza-Álvarez, "Teorías y teologías queer," 647-650.
- ¹¹²⁸ See: Córdova Quero et al., "Escándalo, es un escándalo."
- ¹¹²⁹ See: Isherwood and Córdova Quero, *The Indecent Theologies of Marcella Althaus-Reid*.
- ¹¹³⁰ See: Febuz Pérez, "The Sexual Subject in Queer Theologies," 128-147.
- ¹¹³¹ Ibid., 138.
- ¹¹³² Méndez-Montoya, "El amor en los últimos tiempos," 737-746.
- ¹¹³³ See: Santos Meza, "Tránsitos, desvíos y dislocaciones," 143-148.
- ¹¹³⁴ Ibid., 738.
- ¹¹³⁵ See: García Garzón, *Camino del ángel*.
- ¹¹³⁶ Ibid., 55.
- ¹¹³⁷ Ibid., 53.
- ¹¹³⁸ See: Zanotto, "Metáforas e interdiscursividades no armário humano, demasiadamente humano, de Marcella Althaus-Reid".
- ¹¹³⁹ Ibid., 23.
- ¹¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 27.
- ¹¹⁴¹ See: Córdova Quero et al., "Escándalo, es un escándalo," 30; Drucker, "In the Tropics There Is No Sin," 75-101.
- ¹¹⁴² Hidalgo Ríos, "Hermana nuestra".
- ¹¹⁴³ Córdova Quero et al., "Via Cruising," 204-205.

Notes to Ch. 4.7

- ¹¹⁴⁴ As an anthropologist, I capitalize words like Pagan and Witch when referencing self-chosen religious identity and do not capitalize when these same words represent derogatory labels by outsiders, in this case usually Christian polemicists.
- ¹¹⁴⁵ For an overview of both the folk etymologies and their critiques, see Hutton *Triumph of the Moon* 4 and Clifton *Her Hidden Children* 75-79.

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