

CHRISTIANS AND YORUBÁ PEOPLE EATING TOGETHER

Eucharist and Food Offerings¹

Cláudio Carvalhaes

We only live by doing. Without doing, we are just existing.

Padre Vieira

I am only interested in what is not mine.

Oswald de Andrade

Religions and religious differences are an active and inseparable element of the cultural and political dynamics that are transforming the meaning of social and political connections in our time, when expressed from below, as emancipatory.

Joanildo Burity

I would say that there can't be dialogue between Christians and Muslims if there isn't a common practice. Any other dialogue outside of a common practice is just discussion. Byzantine nonsense.

Frei Betto

This chapter presents the possibility of a broader form of Eucharistic hospitality which builds on early church practices and is consonant with the ongoing work of our spiritual/faithful *reformata semper reformanda* “reformed and always reforming.” By exploring a possible relation between two religions in Brazil, Christianity (the Reformed branch) and Candomblé (an African Brazilian religion), I am trying to expand the inter-religious, racial, and global vocabulary, practices and notions of Eucharistic hospitable prayers. The issues at stake in Brazil’s reality and the format of praxis proposed here can perhaps illustrate the growing

need for churches everywhere to engage with strangers through new forms of theological dialogue and liturgical practices that can in some ways provide dialogue, justice, peace, and hospitality. Moreover, our globalized world continues to spread many forms of religions everywhere and Christians need to learn how to relate, dialogue, and live together with different forms of people's beliefs, practices, and worldviews.

Candomblé is such a religion that is apt to live in a globalized world with a strong and malleable capacity to adapt and adjust to new places and situations. Candomblé's gods travel with its people and welcome local gods where Candomblé people are received. Traveling from Africa, Candomblé changed and took on a new configuration in Brazil. Rachel E. Harding defines Candomblé this way:

Candomblé is a rich and complex portico of ritual actions, cosmology, and meaning with deep and obvious roots in several religious traditions of West and West Central Africa—especially Yoruba, Aja-Fon, and Bantu. It is a (re)creation of these traditions, and others, from within the matrix of slavery, colonialism, and mercantilism which characterized Brazil and other new societies of the western hemisphere from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries.²

I am choosing Candomblé for what I am calling an inter-religious dialogical praxis for three reasons: (1) Candomblé is not the type of religion, like Hinduism or Islam, which other scholars normally pick for considering inter-religious dialogue or praxis and thus may offer new insights into the inter-religious work we need to do; (2) it is a religion, somewhat like Christianity, in which food and eating together play a central role in worship and thus provides an excellent inter-faith case study for reflecting upon boundaries in Eucharistic practice; (3) Candomblé has been a religion of which Christians have long been highly suspicious and have attacked throughout Brazil's history. It has become a radical other, especially for Protestant Christians, and my own faith has been deeply defined by the negation and condemnation of Candomblé people and their religious activities. Let me explain:

Candomblé is not found in the textbooks on the so-called world religions. It has no founder, no sacred texts, no normative traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam to which most Christians interested in inter-religious dialogue normally turn. Like Christianity and the

aforementioned world religions, it is also a religion firstly grounded in oral history and practices formed in local communities that reads the universe from their own social structure. However, Candomblé did not take the next step of forming sacred texts. Instead, it continued its movement and continuous formation through the passing of its own secret (*awó*) by oral history to those who belong to the group. As for its various traditions, they are not defined primarily by dogmas, religious, or theological ideas but rather by their practices defined by social groups (tribes in Africa) that move, transform, and give structure to their world. That is why it only makes sense for us, Christians, to establish a dialogical–practical relation with Candomblé people. In addition, Candomblé happens to be a religion, somewhat like Christianity, in which food and eating together play a central role in worship and thus provides an excellent inter-faith case study for reflecting upon boundaries in Eucharistic practice.

In Brazilian history, both Roman and Protestant Christianity fought fiercely against African religions. In general, Christians considered them to be lesser forms of civilization and their believers less human, engaged in superstitious and magical religious practices that belong to the Devil. Thus, Candomblé and other African religions seen as a threat to the Christian culture and well-being of the “free” religious life of Brazil. Moreover, since most of the members of these religions were black, one cannot disassociate this low view of African religiosities from a heavily marked system of racism underlying Christian views, concepts, and perceptions.

The widespread fear, anger, and suspicion of African religions in Brazilian culture have made African religions a mission field for Christians to conquer. Lately, this fear, anger, and suspicion have even taken more violent forms. To cite just one example, Yalorixá Dulce left the Assembly of God to become a mother of saint (a spiritual leader, a kind of pastor) in Candomblé. She told me that Christians came to her house, where her *terreiro* (worship space) is located, sang Christian songs loudly and even threw stones to interrupt and destroy the Candomblé worship celebration. This attack, I might add, was not out of step with Brazil’s history of racism and Christian theological reasoning.³

Finally, Candomblé has become a radical religious other hovering around the Christian faith in Brazil. Once Prof. John Makransky asked the following question to a group of scholars who were doing inter-religious

dialogue: “What is your (personal) fundamental motivation for doing this work and how does that influence your theology? Is it related to your predilections or is it something else deeper in you?”⁴ My faith can only be understood when I look back and see that most of what I affirmed was grounded in a negation and denial of other people and other beliefs, including African religions. At school, church, and on the streets of São Paulo, I learned that Candomblé was a religion dominated by demons and controlled by the Devil. I could not cross the front door of a terreiro, a Candomblé worship place lest taken captive by those demons. Very early in life I became a fervent evangelist and my mission was to convert these demonized people who were made captives by the Devil and were going to hell.

It was much later that I started to learn that Candomblé people were not people of the Devil but my brothers and sisters. The movement away from fear and into a space of trust and admiration was neither quick nor easy. I had to meet them, I had to visit their own worship spaces, I had to invest myself, I had to see their rituals, I had to eat their food, and I had to invite them to be part of my own life. Thus, engaging new forms of relation here, I want to find and foster a somewhat safe space where Christians can connect with Candomblé people and, through practical movements, create a process of restitution for Candomblé people and a space of shared joy, care, respect, and hospitality.

This chapter holds the belief that by searching for sacramental possibilities through inter-religious dialogue/praxis and by exploring the relationship between Christianity and Candomblé, we can find a space for dialogue, reconciliation, connection, dismantling of racism, healing peace, and hospitality. Thus, my initial questions are as follows: Given the Brazilian history of slavery and racism, can we provide a space of reconciliation and hospitality through common rituals of eating, praying, and dancing? Can we offer sacred food to each other and can we eat together? Can the Eucharistic table carry food offered to Orixás (gods of the Candomblé)? Can the Orixás allow Christians to eat their food? How can do such things while respecting our own limits and expanding our possibilities?

One might ask why we must bring the history of colonization and slavery to the Eucharistic table? As we have also seen, the Eucharistic table establishes not only theological, liturgical, and ecclesiastical

boundaries but also social/economic /political borders which delimit the ways in which a community defines itself, engages issues of power, and determines the norms and standards of its own identity and worth. In one word, the Eucharistic table offers a certain understanding of humanness. By taping into the ways in which Christianity in Brazil dealt with black people and their religion, the question of what it means to be human is open again. We, who are at the table, are also responsible not only for ourselves but also for those who are not there and for what is going on in our society.

Slavery and Candomblé in Brazil

The history of Brazil is the history of Indians, Europeans, Africans, and their religions. It is around these encounters that Brazilian cultures and identities were formed. The African people have been fundamental to this cultural, religious, and identity polydoxy. Africans enriched Brazil's ways of thinking, literature, music, food, religions, and ways of relating. Nonetheless, Brazil's history is deeply tainted by almost 400 years of slavery perpetrated by Portugal. The Portuguese, unhappy with the work of the native people, imported African people from their colonies in Africa. In 1590, there were as many as 36,000 slaves in Brazil; by 1817, there were 1.9 million, and by 1850, there were 3.5 million slaves. "In total," says Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, a Brazilian historian,

more than 4 million Africans were deported to Brazil between 1550 and 1850, making Brazil the American country that received the largest amount of slaves arriving in the New World. If compared to United States in the same period mentioned above, Brazil received 43% of Africans, while the United States, from 1650 to 1808 received 5.5% of Africans brought to the Americas.⁵

In 1888, Brazil became the last major country in the world to enact a law ending slavery. However, slavery continued in many different ways, deeply affecting the people and religions of African descent. The impact of 400 years of slavery is still very much alive in Brazil today, but is made nicer by the Brazilian cultural apparatus. Brazil's racism is not an "in your face" movement with public signposts saying "blacks are not welcome here"; it is subtle and "nice," making people think that they live "in harmony" while it keeps black people at the bottom of society. This

so called “cordial racism” shows the ideological myth of racial democracy in Brazil. Its niceness is so pervasive that it makes fighting against it way more difficult.⁶

This does not mean that there was no African resistance to it. One of the most significant was Quilombo dos Palmares⁷ in the 17th century. Slaves fled from their owners and created these free cities in remote areas and were joined by the disfranchised. More than 20,000 former slaves and other socially rejected people, including Europeans and indigenous people, lived in freedom in their own sovereign place.

Brazil is slowly starting to delve more deeply into these differences and into the acculturation of Afro-descent peoples. As Africans arrived in Brazil, they brought their religions with them. However, slaves were forbidden to practice their religion and were forced to learn the Christian faith. Especially during the nineteenth century, the Portuguese made clear attempts to destroy the religious practices of Africans and Criolos (blacks born in Brazil). Candomblé beliefs and practices considered to be a sign of an uncivilized culture, featuring magic and pre-modern elements of religion that were not part of the modern civilized European Christian project for Brazil. Forceful attacks on Yorubá and other African religions continued in different forms until the end of the twentieth century.

Nonetheless, Candomblé and its people were able to survive in spite of continuous persecution by the Brazilian government and systematic repression by the police force until 1975 when a federal law was finally issued to protect *terreiros de candomblés* (worship places) from invasion, abuse, and destruction. From that time until now, it has been a continuous struggle for the Candomblé people, called “people of the saint,” to survive and live freely in this nice and cordial racist South American country called Brazil.

Candomblé⁸

Candomblé is grounded in the mystery of *awô*, the secret that is transmitted orally to new generations of believers over time. Candomblé is passed on by the initiated as they live its religious precepts together. It has a non-structured orality at its core and only recently have efforts to write about African religions been made. In Candomblé, the tradition is sung

and danced. The synthesis of the whole process, says Alessandra Osuna, would be

the search for an energetic equilibrium between the inhabitants of the material world and the energy of those beings who inhabit the orum, a space dimension that could be called heaven, the interior of the earth or a place beyond anything that is known, according to different understandings of tribes, peoples and traditions. Each human being has an Orixá who protects him/her and that person will only know if s/he gets in touch with the Orixá through a ritual. By fulfilling the obligations ascribed by the Orixá, the person receives a reserve of energy and will gain more equilibrium.⁹

The same way that we cannot talk about Christianity but Christianities, we also need to talk about Candomblés, in the plural. Candomblé varies according to its various traditions: congo, jeje, nagô, queto, ijexá, angola. Roger Bastide says that “It is possible to distinguish each of these ‘nations’ from the way each nation plays the drums (with sticks or hands), their music, the idiom spoken, songs, liturgical vests, names of divinities and for certain aspects of the ritual.”¹⁰ Moreover, “each house of Candomblé is a sentence”, that is, each house of worship finds notions of right or wrong, its theologies and religious understandings of their histories and antecessors.”¹¹

Gisele Omindarewá Cossard, a very well-respected Yalorixás, engages three essential African traditions in the Yoruba line: “the Yoruba aspect of the houses of Ketu tradition, the Fon aspect in the houses of Jeje tradition and the Bantu aspect of the houses of tradition Congo/Angola. . . . The world of Candomblé is multifaceted.”¹² However, the differences in the African traditions do not mean that the Africans are polytheists. Olorum, Olodumarê, and Zaniapombo are names for the same God creator of all. According to Vilson Junior, “Candomble is grounded on three pillars: (1) Secret—Religion or orality; (2) Respect—hierarchy; (3) Precept—liturgy.”¹³

Pierre Verger, a French scholar who went to Brazil to study Candomblé and became a father of saint, a Babalorixá, defines Candomblé this way:

Candomblé is for me very interesting because it is a religion of the exaltation to the personality of people. Where one can be what one

is and not what society makes you be. For people who have things to express through the unconscious, transe is a possibility for the unconscious to show itself.¹⁴

Candomblé carries a powerful view of the world, known and unknown, including myths of creation and offering ways that people can realize the potentiality and the fullness of their lives. Candomblé is a way of balancing the energy of the individual, the community, and the world. The movement between the visible and the invisible worlds, the connections with gods and entities (thus with oneself, communities, past, present, and future), the ways one can find healing and protection, the ways one is charged to live a just life are all part of the private sessions/rituals and public festivities. Everything happens ritually and the connection and responses to the Orixás conveyed through the rituals. The composition and demands of this very difficult and committed religion is a fascinating way to understand humanity in all its complexities.

Let us consider some of the main known elements in Candomblé:

Hierarchy and structure

The respect of hierarchy is based on the religious structure that has Olo-dumarê as the main God creator, Orumilá who holds all the wisdom, and the Orixás, voduns, and inquices who live in between the natural and the supernatural world. Within the social organization of Candomblé, there is a strong hierarchical structure where the Babalaôs and Yalawôs are the main leaders of the Candomblés, something like pastors/priests in Christian churches, and the iawôs, the initiated people, and then those who participate in one way or another way but are not necessarily members. The hierarchy is grounded in the line of ancestors of the African people and is the result of the ways in which the ethnic, socio-cultural system with kings and queens of different nations on the one hand, and the religious system with Iorubás and Nagôs on the other were established in Africa. Kings and Queens were responsible for the well-being of peoples and communities and controlled the powers of nature. They were treated like gods. When they died, their reign was spiritualized and they became part of the history, memory, and strength of a community who made them sacred. They then become their guides and Orixás.

Worship

Candomblé is worship; it is service. Only those who are initiated know the secret and continue to grow into the knowledge of this secret. Candomblé is a religion that connects the material and imaterial world, giving space for the unconscious to reveal itself as part of the totality of the sacred. A religion that balances out the energies of these worlds and struggles with the imbalance of our attitudes and the balance of the world provided by Olodumarê, the main God creator, Orumilá. Candomblé is a service to the Orixás, gods that come from all forces of nature: earth, fire, water, and air. Babalorixá Aragão describes Candomblé as a monastery where people are in the world and the function of Candomblé and its priests/ess (Yalorixás /Babalorixá) is to take care of the initiated and the entities. Service is an exchange in Candomblé. The omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent God (Olorum) does not need worship. The Orixás need worship! Most of the festivities are centered around singing, dancing, and eating.

Worship spaces: terreiros

Candomblé is an extension of the house, of the family. That is why the terreiros are always at the back or around of the house of the Yalorixás / Babalorixá. Terreiros/worship places are often located at the house of the mother or father of the saint. The terreiro has to be close to trees and gardens and plants since Candomblé is fundamentally related to nature where its sources come from. At each terreiro, often one main Orixá is the head of the worship place but all of the Orixás are welcomed and worshiped. It is their choice to appear or not. During festivities and specific works, the terreiros are the place where people stay, sleep, dance, eat, and live. The terreiros are the sacred places where “Orixás, voduns and iniquices dance; the font where the iawôs (initiated) bathe, the sacred trees where Iroco and Tempo live; the little houses for Exú and eguns.”¹⁵ Grounded in African societies, Candomblé has complex social, cultural, religious structures, and its practices and beliefs are multiple, varying according to each terreiro. Terreiros became spaces for resistance and wrestling with old and new worldviews. At these spaces, thin and thick movements of memory, resistance, engagement, and solidarity were at work against oppression and death. As Harding puts it, these spaces refer

“to socio-political, cultural, psychic, and ritual-religious locations within Afro-Brazilian experience... locations contain the implication of both boundary and movement.”¹⁶ These religious spaces kept by the African people were places that would contrast and offer alternatives to the streets (where poor, “worthless,” abandoned people lived), and the *senzalas* (plantation slave quarters), destitute of dignity, value or pride, social locations imposed by a racist and slavocratic society. Terreiros, also called *axé*, the vital energy, were locations that helped Africans and African Brazilians to reposition themselves in relation to the new world of slavery, destruction and death. Harding establishes the relation of Candomblé to the African and African descent people.

for these people and their descendants, Candomblé was an important means for the engagement of trauma. It represented an integrative process—pulling together and (re) organizing that which had been rendered asunder: family, identity and psyche.... Candomblé provided a means of re-membering and re-creating an identity of value and connectedness—to Spirit, to a pre-slavery past, to ancestors, to community. It also provided, cultivating African material and cultural elements in its rituals, an alternate meaning of Africanness, an alternate identity of blackness. And where the myriad of ignominies of life in Brazil created crises in psychic integrity, Candomblé offered transformative music and dance, community, and magico-pharmacopoeic healing. In the mutual embrace of humanity and spirit in Candomblé emerged intimations of wholeness—representations of the reciprocity of devotion and responsibility, the sharing of burdens and joys.¹⁷

Candomblé's terreiros were places where people participated fully, and this way of participating gave them a certain assurance of identity and self-worth, conditions to resist, restoring their strength, and living their lives under the crushing power of slavery.

Priest/ess

Father of saint, Babalorixá, is connected to Knowledge while the Mother of saint, Yalorixás, is connected to Wisdom. Long before, Babalorixás and Yalorixás were called servants. They are the ones who took care of the Orixás. The priest/ess (Babalorixás and Yalorixás) organize the worship

event and make sure everything is done appropriately. They are the ones who hold the secrets of the religion and to whom the initiated owe respect and obedience. Also, they are the ones who receive and give the messages to the Orixás (entities/gods) and they decide what the worship acts, offerings, and work are to be made for the enjoyment of the Orixás and for the safety, blessing, and protection of the initiated. Rituals are corporeal and the priest/ess' (Babalorixá/Yalorixás) speaking generates energy.

Orixás

Orixás are bodiless, energetic forces that feel and think and experience things like us humans. The African understanding of the world divides neither the sacred and secular nor the human and godly behaviors of the Orixás. Orixás manifest themselves to human beings by possessing their bodies during worship at terreiros. A person chosen by the Orixá is an *elegum*, who has the privilege to be mounted by the Orixá. Anyone can ask and know and engage their Orixás without having to do the ritual of initiation. However, if a person is chosen by the Orixás, he/she will be asked to do the *Orí*, the making of the head, which is the ritual of initiation. Those who invoke the Orixás have to offer greetings, do liturgies, perform gestures and movements, sing, dance, and drum, cook, dress up with their proper colors, and follow the demands ordained by the Orixás. They have to offer food desired and spread it around the city but mostly within forests, as ways of fulfilling the Orixás desires. In everything, the believer has to obey the Orixá who in turn will offer miracles, healing, and a balanced life to the person. Orixás cannot be irritated. If they demand a work and it is not done, the believer will suffer the consequences.

Feasts, sacrifice, food, and offering

Festivities in Candomblé are powerful events with many people participating. However, as Roger Bastide said, "the public festivity constitutes only a small portion of the life of the Candomblé. The private rituals are more important than the public ceremonial. African religions will color and control every part of the life of its members, and (by ways of living its religion) the black person feels more African and end up belonging to a different mental word. . ."¹⁸

Kitchens are fundamental parts of the worship inside of the terreiros. As Edson Carneiro puts it:

The kitchen ritual, filled with clay pans and stones to trite, with its novices and iabassês (kitchen chefs) is a fundamental point of any terreiro of any Candomblé nation... where the cook prepares the obligations, the food offerings and the drinks to the black gods. Everything is spotless. These kitchens used to be different from people's daily kitchen but now they look alike. But then and now, these kitchens hold secrets only those inside know. The way of preparation and to serve must follow some precepts.¹⁵

Kitchens have all the proper tools and ingredients for the cooking and preparation of the food. There is a high office, so to speak, in the work of the kitchen and a person, called iabassê or Adagam, designated by the Orixá of the house, prepares the special food. Babalorixá Luis de Logun Edé says that "Nobody is asked if one is formally educated or not. The gift is perceived by the Babalorixá/Yalorixás and chosen by the Orixá to occupy the office. Often the person is born with this gift. Then she/he is trained so she learns how to do the many offerings for each Orixá."¹⁹

After it is prepared by people specially trained for it, the food/offering is (1) offered at specific sites in a procession at the sound of songs; (2) then brought to the forests or nature where the Orixá live; and (3) offered during the festivity of the whole terreiro and ate by the participants. Moreover, the offering of food to the Orixás is usually done in the evening since Orixás do not eat when the sun is up. Often Candomblé feasts end very late and with food. Gisele Cossard describes the end of a ceremony:

It is usually too late for people to go back home... some of the yawôs (the initiated ones) go help serve the meal that is offered to the people present. This food is a generous offering of the terreiro to the whole community who came to the feast. However, according to the ancient people of the Candomblé, there is another meaning for this offering: the Orixás like plenty and they desire that all present leave with their belly full.²⁰

However, there is way more to the meaning of food to the African religions. In fact, it was the women of the Candomblé who preserved and made known the African religions by ways of their ability with the

preparation of the food and the making of their artcrafts: necklaces, wristbands, sewing, embedded cloth work, etc.²¹ Rituals in Candomblé involve offerings of mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, healing, dancing, and percussion. The sacrifice of animals is a very important part of the religion. Only those who are part of the *terreiro*/axé can see it. Mostly, the fear is that non-believers will see it as uncivilized or barbaric. Each animal relates to a different Orixá. In each festivity, if the *terreiro* has the means, one two-legged animal should be sacrificed for Exú and a four-legged animal to the appointed Orixá of the house. The sex of the animal has to follow the sex of the Orixá. The Oxogum is the one who makes the sacrifice. Then, the sacrificed animal goes to the person in charge of the kitchen who prepares the food and makes it ready to be offered. After the food is offered to the Orixá in a separate room by the Babalorixá/Yalorixás, the food will be consumed by the faithful and also given to guests.²² Every food offered to the Orixá has the power to change people's lives. Everyone can receive a blessing from the food. The food not eaten is kept for three days and after that thrown away. It was the African kitchen preserved in the African rituals that ended up going to the table of every person.

Vilson Caetano de Souza Junior says that “during the festivity, food is shared among people and means commensality. People share, live and memorize it. Food is memory and provokes emotions. Food in Candomblé has to do with the rescue of the memory of the people. The food during the service is to energize the Orixá, people and the place.”²³

The Babalorixá Luis de Logun Edé says that “Orixás eat the food that humans eat. However every offering has its own wisdom and ways of being prepared that include: enchanted words (*fó*), prayers (*àdùrà*), evocations (*oriki*) e songs (*orin*) connected to sacred stories (*itan*), essential elements that are vital to the transmission of the axé. Life, power and creativity is what we use to do good.”¹⁸

The structure of the food ritual is described by Bastide as follows: “In the morning, the sacrifice is done; the culinary preparation and the offering to the divinities happen in the afternoon; the public ceremony properly done is done when sun goes down and enter deep into the evening.”²⁴ The eating together is a fundamental part of the festivity. Below Roger Bastide describes an experience of eating together at the end of the ceremonies. He says

... and before we all break up, a fellowship meal will allow the gathering of deities, members of the fraternity and the spectators who still remain in the worship room. The daughters of saint bring in dishes from the color of their Orixás, a little food, some of which had been placed in peji: white for Oxalá, blue for Yemanjá, violet for Nanã... They sit around a towel placed on the same ground on which they deposited the sacred food. Each person takes a bit of the food from their god's plate, with both hands cupped, then the person scoops the food in his/her hand and raise it to their mouth. After that, it is offered a bit of each dish to the sons of other Orixás in order to cement the solidarity of the group through the sharing of the food. The leftovers are placed on banana leaves, are offered to the spectators who are standing near the daughters of saint who are seated- the various food offering from the multiple Orixás fraternally mixed in a kind of fraternal mixed vegetable tray; it is mandatory to eat with your hand. One should not confuse this repast, which is a communion, with the collation sometimes served to important guests between a calling dance and the dance to the gods. This is something very different, a kind of triple solidarity to happen before returning to the mundane world: first, between the divine and human, then the fellowship among the members who belong to different deities, and sometimes even rivals; and finally among the fellowship of the uninitiated so that a little bit of Africa that was lost can be found again and penetrate into their lives. The group of the faithful go beyond the fellowship of the sons and daughters of the saint. Entering a Candomblé is done gradually and there are many degrees of inclusion ...²⁵

The food/offering is an essential part of the life of the religion and the community, a way of re-enacting a relation with nature, commensality, memory, resistance, offering, joy, and celebration between the deities, inner, and outer community. Once we have gained a brief knowledge of Candomblé, how do we frame this dialogical praxis? What is at stake here?

Inter-religious dialogical praxis

In Latin America, there has been a great movement of theologians working on "Intercontinental Plural Liberation Theologies."²⁶ These

theologians are aware of the need to expand the dialogue and create opportunities for theological conversation and sharing life together. As a result, they are trying to expand the discourse of liberation theology into the field of religious pluralism and engage indigenous and Afro-descent religions, spiritualities, and worldviews. This new way of engaging theology has been called “new and positive look,” “pluralism as principle,” “new compassion,” and “macro-ecumenism, a new word to replicate a new reality and a new consciousness.”²⁷ This liberation inter-religious dialogue is challenging us to engage ecology issues affecting the life and beliefs of the poor and to include women.²⁸ At the core of this Christian work, says Teixeira, “there is a convocation to hospitality, to courtesy and acceptance to alterity.”²⁹ As we all engage into this project, Marcelo Barros calls our attention to an important aspect of its methodology.

“Why, all of sudden theologians and anthropologists start to see positively what was called syncretism that historically, authorities and intellectuals always saw as negative what once was so negative? The only explanation we have is that such an opening happens when we are able to look at this question not with confessional eyes or from the perspective of the institution, but rather, with an eye of love towards the people, worrying about their life and liberation.”³⁰

This call is very important since intellectual thinking without emotions and feelings and the body being involved, as obvious as it might be, cannot entail a full inter-religious dialogue. Love is a fundamental presupposition for Christians, and worrying about people’s life conditions and possibilities of liberation is more important than any methodological tool we choose to work with.

This present project hopes to contribute to this field by expanding what liberation theologians have been thinking about inter-religious dialogue in Latin America by bringing into the heart of this dialogue the need of radical hospitality described in previous chapters. In so doing, the relation between Christians and Candomblé people becomes grounded in practical ways to welcome each other. Starting from the gospel’s love commandment as requiring radical hospitality to one another, this way of understanding inter-religious relationships hopes to move beyond detached dialogues to provide down-to-earth tools that can

possibly, give practical shapes and forms to the notions of multiplicity, plurality, and infinite love as envisioned by Gebara, Barros, and many other inter-religious thinkers.

Theologies of religious pluralism and comparative theologies are based on reflection and practice. From a Latin American perspective, we must return to Antonio Gramsci's notion of the "organic intellectual."³¹ Liberation theologians in Latin America have viewed the notion of the "organic intellectual" as a facilitator, one who gathers information hidden by ideologies, connecting it with the formal knowledge that can serve as critical tools, and engaging the pulsing reality and wisdom of the poor in order to create a different praxis that will transform the social situation and bring about liberation.³²

The organic theologian assumes the need to change Brazil's social threads, especially those of Christian hatred that endanger the living and the religious reliefs of Yorubá people. Thus, starting from our "religious–inter-religious" perspective, we must assume that the organic theologian must take a step ahead and enter other's religious communities in order help facilitate the dialogue and the sharing of life together. In addition to the organic theologian, the organic liturgical theologian in particular must take steps as he/she is the one who considers rituals and performances, gestures, body postures, prayers, voice, hearing, vision, touch, taste, dancing, and songs as key "texts" for inter-religious dialogue.

Since Yorubá religions do not have a sacred text but is grounded in non-structured orality, the organic liturgical theologian must learn how to best engage this dialogue through religious and non-religious practices. Thus, ritual theories, liturgical reasoning, performance studies, everyday life theories, affect theories, constructive inter-religious theologies, and so on can and must engage dance, songs, bodily movements in order to help frame this inter-religious dialogue. In Christianity, the law of prayer/*lex orandi* is what helps the law of belief/theology-*lex credendi*. In this dialogue, the law of dancing, drumming, dancing, and eating in the Axé along with the law of prayer and singing and eating in the Christian services is the *lex-agendi*, that is, the laws of respectful ethical living. As a result, a *lex-vivendi* is constantly reformed, a life where spaces of generosity, commitment, love, and care are fully lived.

It is the doing of religion that is at stake here. As J. Edgar Bruns puts it theologically, "God is the doing of something."³³ How can we

understand each other from our religious practices, or, our very doing of God? What methodology, what journey, path, or road, is the organic liturgical theologian to take here?³⁴

Gebara suggests what the articulating point might be: “the recognition of the pluralistic founding principles of our existence and life itself, invite us not only to understand ourselves, again, as human beings, but also, to create politics of dialogue that will help us get once again, to that which we call common good.”³⁵ Moreover, according to Diego Irarrázaval, this process includes the ability to be open to and to appreciate the symbols of salvation that are present in other’s religious search. From a Christian point of view, this process involves a recognition of the sacramentality of somebody else’s religion and how the sense of the sacred is fluid and permeable in our living together.

Sacramentality (according to the Catholic perspective) runs through the veins of the Latin American population. However, it does not limit itself to this or that church. So much of Latin American ritualism shows the importance of symbols that configures the spirituality and praxis of the daily life of people. God is loved in the everyday life and concrete realities that always carry symbolic value.³⁶

Ararrázaval sees the notion of symbiosis as a perspective to approach the systems of symbols of black people, which engage “different elements that conjugated, make space for a bigger life.”³⁷ It is through a symbiotic process of dealing with opposing forces without dichotomy or contradictions that Africans and their beliefs and practices have engaged the new land, Brazil. Christians could learn from this symbiotic movement.³⁸ We don’t start with orthodoxy but with orthopraxis. Everyday life is the criterion of religious truth, and in that regard every religion might carry the possibility of holding a sacrament, that which is vital, important, and necessary for the living of one’s life. Thus, while Candomblé has its own set of beliefs and sacraments, it does not need to undo some other faith structure, or sacrament, in order to relate or engage in dialogue; it respects and engages somebody else’s sacrament for everything belongs to everybody.

Irarrázaval ends his work by offering four main points of dialogue in the Christian-African religions:³⁹ (1) to celebrate and to think, meaning

that the celebratory way of the African religions are ways of thinking, of constructing their lives, and recreating the world; (2) to identify ourselves and our continent as African American, calling ourselves Africans so as to help us embrace the life, history and the religious elements of the African religion as common to us all; (3) to celebrate the mystery of the African way, which is the celebration of the sacred in our bodies, and to realize that the body is a privileged foci for the revelation of the sacred; and (4) wrestle with syncretism and belongings. While Irarrázaval does not explicate what belonging means, he quotes Maria Cristian Ventura to say that Afro religiosity has the power to recreate their worlds from the available religions that they have at hand. Thus, a disposition to this form of syncretism, of recreating our worlds from each other religious wisdom and tools, is a way of relating with the African religions in Latin America.

One point not mentioned by Irarrázaval but fundamental in this process is the connection with the earth. Ecology is a central aspect of this dialogue since the African religious practices are markedly steeped in elements of the earth. Every Orixá has a connection to some aspect of the mineral, vegetal, and animal world, and every terreiro is always around earth, trees, and plants. Without the eco-system, Africans would not be able to live their religions. (Neither would Christians for that matter.) For a pluralistic theology of liberation to happen in Latin America between Christians and Yorubá religions, the commitment to peace and justice must accompany the commitment to the defense of the environment. "This is the ground from which we try to build a true communion between different religious communities with their own doctrinal, ethnic, linguistic and ideological elements."⁴⁰

She was a Methodist pastor, a faithful one to her church. However, for some reasons unknown to her, her heart was very much attuned to the drumbeats of the terreiros. So much so that she decided to study Quilombo Zeferina and the presence of powerful women in that community. A great solid academic work. However, this work got her body closer to her heart and she started to participate in the Candomblé festivities. So much so that she was called to do the initiation process. She then said no because she was faithful to her Methodist tradition. Then one morning, While she was preaching about the Holy Spirit, She was taken by her Orixá and started to move the way she did at the terreiro one night. The people of her congregation thought it was very strange but she said it

was the Holy Spirit and whole people had their concerns, they believed God had manifested Godself in her. She was fine to move in between these two religions but at that day she said: “ I can’t do that.” I must honor my Orixá and must leave the church. I will always love the church and Jesus Christ but my work is at the terreiro now.

Christianity-candomblé: movements and challenges

The opening to another in Christianity is neither a new thing nor a choice. Rather, it is a demand built into the core of the gospels and grounded in love. As Sharon V. Betcher says, using Jean Luc Nancy, Christianity has “an obligation ‘the great open.’”⁴¹ As part of this obligation to the “great open,” which is an unknown, unforeseen space, Christians must always learn again the ability to offer a radical hospitality, and eating together with strangers and expanding the table of Jesus Christ must be a common practice. Again, this “great open” does not mean doing away with Christian beliefs, for the Eucharist must always carry the powerful message of the revolutionary memory/anamnesis of Jesus Christ given, broken, and shed for all, food for the world. For Candomblé people in Brazil, these theological claims are not foreign. They have been listening to it throughout their history in Brazil, and will not taken offense at them. On the other hand, Christians could learn the claims Candomblé people make and honor their faith. At this crossroads, Christians will have the opportunity to live the gospel as a culture of hospitality, embrace, and healing. How we deal with each other’s theological claims will be decided along the way. The only demand is that we must be near each other, preferentially at the Eucharist/food offering table(s). What then should we consider for a possible dialogical praxis?

Holy spirit

Every beginning depends upon the Spirit, both for Candomblé and for Protestants. For Christian Reformed people, we cannot start anything if not first deeply moved by the Holy Spirit. Our acts of praise and work to God are always a response to God’s love, generosity, and demand. For Candomblé, the Orixás and entities move the energies and make us respond to their calls and demands.

For Reformed people, the emphasis on the Eucharist is not the table or the elements but rather the Christian assembly called by the Holy

Spirit. At the table, there is common food/common good and under the power of the Holy Spirit, we gather as strangers and become a family. At table, we engage God's sources of power and healing that invite mutual conversation and transformation. Reformed people are able to say boldly that "Through 'eating Christ' in the meal, this community is strengthened and preserved in its task to be the body of Christ in and for the world. With these meanings foregrounded, the meal becomes a central symbol for this new community."⁴²

A radical trust in the work of the Holy Spirit is issued so that the table of Jesus Christ becomes open, breaking down walls of self-enclosed religious membership and sameness. The presence of the Spirit at the table calls us to live radically in an egalitarian manner, sharing food, wisdom, resources, love, and care for the world. The table of Jesus Christ empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit, offers forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation, even if continuously interrupted by fear, hatred, anxiety, injustice, death, and the perils and conflicts of the world.

Since God is the one who manifests Godself where God wants, and makes a covenant with whomever God wants, we are the ones, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to create channels for God's grace to be experienced in ways that we may not yet have been able to experience. Here we are trying to find ways in which the covenant of God can be expanded and offer hospitality to people of other faiths. We are the ones who become channels of God's incarnation.

Around the table, Christians have their Bibles, their food, their songs and their prayers praying "Come Spirit Come." However, in this dangerous prayer, the coming of the Spirit can become the coming of a stranger, a guest, one whom we were not expecting or even desiring. Once we pray "Come Spirit Come," the move of the Spirit cannot be controlled any longer. Perhaps, after our prayer we might have to welcome Candomblé people dressed in their white dresses, dancing and singing, asking for the Orixás to come and move energies through the primal energy Axé.⁴³ Once the Holy Spirit takes over, we must follow. At the table, we share food and struggle together to find balance in the life of individuals, of our communities, and of the world.

The Holy Spirit and the Axé are the moving forces that establish, shift, and balance the world and all of our respective universes. The Holy Spirit and Axé can transform whatever they want and are the very source

of life. Christians and Yourubá people are totally dependent on their movement, and they are the sources we tap into so that we can engage each other around the table and become able to expand our religious horizons.

The engagement with Axé and Holy Spirit can become a vital theological response to the globalized world we live in. The increasing sense of dislocation marked by the growing flow of people around the globe, the hybridity of immigration, the accumulation of capital in the hands of less than 500 people around the world, the trafficking of people, the brutality against women, the shifting markets of labor and the growing new diverse local neighborhoods are just some of the signs that demand our theologies and communities to deal with the constant flow of identities and “mobile personalities.”⁴⁴ The force, potency and agency of the Holy Spirit/Axé can help us engage challenges and dismantle deadly world realities.

The Holy Spirit/Axé can also help us find plural identities not in the de-ritualizing of our religious rituals but rather, in the renewing processes of the ritualization (the expansion of our rituals) of our beliefs as we encounter others along the way. In a lecture given at Union Theological Seminary after the beginning of the Iraq war, Professor Janet R. Walton asked us: “Would your service be the same if a person from Iraq enters our churches?” For some people, this question must be answered immediately with a “no,” since what we do is who we are and we cannot change who we are. Nonetheless, if we could entertain the possibility of a “yes,” we would need to change our worship. We can become better with the presence of another who talks about his/her own experiences and we can start attending to the words and gestures we use in our communities. If a person from Iraq is with us, we can learn about ourselves and wrestle with ways to live out our faith in more expansive, powerful, and welcoming ways. This attention to someone else does not mean to silence ourselves to shy away from who we are or what we believe, but rather the presence of another can be an opportunity to expand who we are. The Scottish Council of Churches said: “We become human through our relationships—with ourselves, others, creation, and God. Reformed spirituality is first and foremost about being grounded in what holds us in common with one another and grounded in what it means to be human.” While concerned with Christian unity, this message can be help us to

broad our own liturgies and theologies as well as help us embrace those who differ from us in large or small ways.

The Spirit of God shows itself through movements of unfolding openness and alterity, movements marked by dis/placements of generosity. The Spirit of God must be seen in my responsibility to myself, but always in relation to somebody else, even if this somebody else throws me at an abyss of inescapable inner and outer workings and challenges. The presence of somebody else at the table of Jesus Christ connects me to unexpected obligations toward this other and that person's people, a people that I might not have paid attention to until that moment. Thus, the movement of the Spirit in us can be a call to us to pay attention to somebody else.

From this place of unexpected openness given by the Spirit, Christians can find a common ground to welcome Candomblé people. There are common elements for a theology of the Spirit in Christianity and Candomblé. Some of them are (1) the Holy Spirit/Axé have a deep connection with the body and without our bodies there is no community. In both religions the Spirit/Orixás can possess bodies. (2) The Holy Spirit and the Axé/Orixás help us not only deal with our daily life, our struggles, our wounds, but also give us strength, wisdom, and vision to go through life. (3) The Holy Spirit/Axé always make us engage with a guest or visitor; (4) the Holy Spirit/Axé are deeply connected with creation; (5) it is the Holy Spirit/Axé who create and sustain the gathered communities; and (6) the manifestation of the presence of the Spirit/Axé is both worship and work.

In Candomblé, the relation between the Spirit and human bodies is seen in the possessions that occur during the public and private festivities, when the Orixás choose some of the initiated people in order to "ride" on their bodies as if the Orixás were mounting on horses. Believers become horses of the entities. In Christian communities, prayer for the Holy Spirit to come and take our bodies, and control our minds, mouth, and gestures are common. The surrendering to the Holy Spirit is something that Christians search for while worshiping God. In Pentecostal churches, bodies are literally taken and they shake, dance, move, and are at the mercy of the leading of the Holy Spirit. The possession of the bodies seen in both Pentecostal Christian and Yorubá gatherings have almost the same body postures, gesturing, and general movements.

Christianity spiritualizes the body in order to get to a place of acceptance with God. Based on guilt, the body needs to be sanctified, and for that it has to engage in sacrifices, like fasting, sexual abstinence, and penance, so the body can mortify the flesh and become finally spiritual, through an asceticism toward God.

Within Afro-religions, including Candomblé, black, and womanist traditions, there is an opposite movement, toward the embodiment of the Spirit. Without dichotomy or guilt, the body is desired by the Spirits, the Orixas, who come to the body freely without sanctification, to communicate with his/her own people. The body is thus the place of interlocution, of connection, of communion. Possessed by the marvelous, the body dwells in transcendence!

Candomblé and Christian believers pray for the Holy Spirit and entities for guidance and wisdom in their daily lives. They bless the Spirit, and they walk in their daily life in ways pleasing to the Holy Spirit/Entities. Both religions have a deep commitment to the transformation of society through their beliefs and practices. For both religions, God is always doing something through us. Or, using J. Edgar Bruns words, “God is the doing of something”⁴⁵ in our religions.

It is in, under, through and around the Spirit/entities in our diverse bodies and rituals that we can recreate our daily and common life within and among ourselves. In both religions, God/Orixás are doing something in and through us and we are also doing something in and through our liturgies/worship recreating the world, recreating life. As Maraschin says, “It is in the body that we are spirit especially when our bodies are ready to recreate life. Let us, then, make of our bodies our main instrument of worship.”⁴⁶ Open to the unknown movements of the Spirit and the Axé, we move along together.

Being at the table

The gathering of Candomblé and Christian people around the Eucharistic table can issue a powerful call to that part of Brazilian culture which hates and fears Candomblé, which continues to demonize them as a “Godly” way to destroy them. Gathering together and sharing each other’s food is a way of offering a version of the Christian gospel that is committed to keeping each other alive, in love and care, with the right to live and share faith fully. This is a gospel that continues to require us

to love, day, and night, God and our neighbors, no matter what faith these neighbors profess and live.

Each community will be open to the Spirit and to the calls both going around the table and inside their minds and hearts. Baptism will always be a call to the Candomblé people to engage more fully in the Christian faith. And the Orixás will also invite Christians to “make their head,” which is the initiation ritual to become a Candomblé believer. These calls should never be understood as threats but as loving offerings of our best to our friends, as circular movements of the Spirit/Orixás to each other to expand our hearts and minds. And each one of us will decide what to do. Then, the words of institution or Christian prayers and songs will be carefully and powerfully said/sung as well as the sacred words and songs of Candomblé spoken by the Babalorixás and Yalorixás.

For the Candomblé people, the ability to make their own theological claims freely at such a central Christian event can represent a Christian request for forgiveness, a historical restitution of the Candomblé’s own worthiness, as well as the undoing of the historical stereotype of Candomblé people as the Devil’s presence in Brazil. For Christians, the Devil has no place at the table of God, and it is always undone there by claims of truth, life, justice, and hope. By being at Jesus’ table offering gifts to the Orixás, Candomblé people and Candomblé theological beliefs gain a new and privileged place, both religiously and culturally, expelling a complex misunderstanding and demonization of their faith within the Christian circles and the larger culture, because at the Jesus table, they are deeply honored by those who worship the God of Christianity.

Eucharist and food offerings

Part of this mutual knowledge has to do with our respective understandings of food and of how we should engage each other through our sacred food. Most religious discourses around food have to do with the delimitations of others and ourselves. Food establishes the distinctiveness of our faith and creates boundaries that can present mixture and impurity or, in other words, to impede some relationships from occurring. Notions of foreignness and otherness are very explicit in the inner definitions of sacred food and we must pay attention to it.⁴⁷ In 1 Corinthians 8:1–13, the apostle Paul discussed eating food sacrificed to idols. He argued that the freedom we receive from God does not prevent us from eating that

kind of food. As we grow into knowledge of God's freedom, we slowly lose our fear to face the difficulties involved in accepting food that is marked as beyond our customs or religious regulations. Thus, we must be careful with those in both Christian and other communities, who cannot understand this freedom and prefer the freedom of sticking to their norms. Each community should discuss these regulations and delve into the reasons of their own and other's belief system's regarding food and identity. As Paul said, "food will not bring us close to God,"⁴⁸ but certainly, it can bring us closer to each other. God's call to us comes before our gathering, laying down the very ground for our gathering and demanding that we figure out how this love should be lived, out of practice. Once we have welcomed each other to our common tables/ground, we can start to lose the fear that the other represents to us.

As the apostle Peter received God's command to eat everything he saw, we are also commanded to be open to attend to our neighbor's food through and beyond our regulations: "The voice said to Peter again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.'⁴⁹ If Paul tells us to be open, Peter's dreams show God demanding him to eat. How can we move around Paul to Peter as we ponder about the precious food of Candomblé? An honest conversation between these two communities will help us dispel the notion that Candomblé people eat food prepared for the devil. To be religious-inter-religious is not only to deal with intellectual religious differences but also, to eat one another's food. The aphorism "we are what we eat" is especially true with regard to religion and to be religious-inter-religious life. Moreover, we become what we eat and it is precisely because of that possibility of becoming that people of saint and Christians need to eat together to establish connections of love and care, to dispel hatred, to recreate Brazil into a more welcoming religiously diverse country. At the end, as Paul again said, "love builds up."⁵⁰

Eating together has to do with creating love, building community, sharing memories, and acceptance of the other's as God's gift to me. As we gather together we start to see the theological as well as the social, political, and cultural possibilities that this gathering, this eating together, can create among our people. I believe that a whole new chapter in Brazil's history would be inaugurated. Forgiveness and reconciliation would be worked out not by state authority as in South Africa, but by two religious groups showing themselves to each other, finding ways

of mutual reconciliation, asking for ongoing forgiveness, engaging our cordial racism, and learning to honor each other's faith.

Since the central questions of this book asks how the borders of the eucharist might be negotiated so that other people who are not used to being part of it can participate, we believe that occasions of generosity are possible for these different peoples of faith. When we start the conversation, Babalorixá Aragão tells me that we need to return to the original Eucharist which was a meal, a whole meal. As a former Roman Catholic seminarian he knows well what he is talking about. Christian meals at the beginning were not about the blood and flesh of Christ but about memory. He says: "God makes Godself food, food for the community. It is not the mythic element that counts at the beginning of the meal, but the way that Christ chooses to be remembered. From all of the possible ways that the disciples can use to remember Jesus, they choose the sharing of the bread. The most divine part of Jesus, the most powerful moment that Jesus manifested as a Messiah, as a divine being was his sharing and his sharing of a meal. Later on, it was around a meal that they remembered Jesus stories. The most original Christianity, the most charismatic, the most Pentecostal is exactly it: the sharing of bread and life."

In Candomblé however, there is not the same type of remembrance of that Christians have of Jesus Christ, since the entity is there, present at the service. For Candomblé, the presence of the entities does not point back to a primal event, as Christians do with the Last Supper in the Upper Room. However, the possibility of the presence of the entities and the presence of Christ in a worship service where there is sharing of food is a common theological aspect for both religions.

The blood and sacrifice in Candomblé, the slaughter of the animals has to do with the scapegoat, can be compared to the Jewish Day of Atonement, when a goat was offered to cover people's sins. In Candomblé, the animal is offered for the sake of the community and in this process, the animal has to want to offer itself to the community. If the animal doesn't eat the leaves it is given, it is not ready to offer itself and the celebration can only happen when the animal offers itself to bless the community. This ritual is important because it keeps the energy flowing and moving, and it continues the encircling of the relations humans and animals and entities have. Animals are messengers to the entities, and they serve as connections.

Babalorixá Aragão reminds me that Africans do not have problems with blood. It is not dirty or impure as some of us believe. Everything is sacred in the African worldview. Blood is food and a precious food, the best offering we have. When the animal dies, he transfers the energy of the blood to the stones and reinforces the connection between the entities. Blood is a channel for deep communion, energy that gives life to the relation between animal-entities-community. In this process, the interconnectedness of life is assumed, the inter-related participation deeply connected with honor and respect. Each sacrifice is done with care, devotion, libations, ritual objects properly consecrated, and follows a ritual order.

Each entity has some kind of food prohibition. There are two types of food: dry (grains) and wet (blood) food. Food offerings are offered to the Orixás and are eaten by the initiated. The food that is offered and is not eaten is given to nature: to the river, sea, or earth, where the entities live, encircling the movement of life. We can offer our simple food and the Orixá will receive it. The places prepared for Orixás at terreros called *assentamentos* and these places have a heightened sense of the sacred. We could say that these *assentamentos* do not symbolize the Orixás but instead, they are the Orixás. In the same way, the bread and blood in the Eucharist for Catholics do not symbolize the Eucharist but are the Eucharist. The Christian God is present in the bread and the wine, and in the Candomblé, the stone, the house, the place prepared for the Orixás are *assentamento*, are the Orixás. For instance, the bowl and the food that are offered to the Orixá are not containers of the Orixá but are the Orixás themselves.

Expanding each other's faith, practices, and theologies through commensality

Food and drink are precious liturgical-theological elements in the life of these two communities. Both celebrate God's creation and providence. The entire cosmogony of Candomblé is grounded on the meaning and importance of earth. God's and Orixás are deeply related to the earth and herbs, plants, food, drink, etc, all things from the earth, do the connections between this and the outer world. Moreover, the elements that mark the liturgical objects and worship in Candomblé all come from nature. Both rituals need food and they have deep connections with creation, ecology and can only be sustainable if understood as part of a larger eco-

system where life is lived at the table and on the floor, in gatherings and in rivers and forests, in the air and in every part of God's creation. Together, we can fight for our common good, the ecosystems, and the biodiversity which is a powerful way of working for peace.

The sacredness of these worshiping events is a common mark in both religions. Through this food, God is manifested through Jesus/Holy Spirit, and Olodumarê through the many Orixás and other entities. The doing of the sacrament of Eucharist is a way of worshiping God by obeying God's command to do this in memory of Jesus Christ. As for Candomblé, food offerings are carrying out promises and works of praise to please the Orixás so they will continue to bless the lives of the community.

It is interesting to see how women are at the center of the preparation of these sacred foods. The worship can happen only if the food is properly prepared. I remember my mother preparing herself in order to prepare the food for the Eucharistic table. Jan Rudolph, a student of mine at Louisville Seminary once mentioned in class how her African American grandmother used to literally iron all of the breads the day before Communion Sunday. In Bahia, I participated in a ceremony to the Orixá Ogum and the women carefully prepared the food many days before. Good and well prepared food and drinks are key to make the festivities efficacious.

Both the Eucharist and the Candomblé worship are rites of passage and political acts. Historically, while in Brazil we can say that the Eucharist, since it was attached to the powers that be, it was more attuned to a rite of imperial reinforcement, in Candomblé, the food offerings were liturgical acts of resistance and resilience. In any circumstance, both rituals enact ongoing passages in the life of the individual, larger community, and the country.

Christian Eucharist is grounded in the ecclesial understanding of a cloud of witness that surrounds this community of faith. The presence of the ancestors can also be related to the presence of Christ in history. As for Candomblé, the belief in the ancestry offers the assurance that this community of believers is continuously empowered by the presence of the ancestors who have prepared the way for them. Both religions can share these commonalities of their cloud of witness and ancestry.

Eucharist is celebrated around the table, and food offerings are done around a table or on the floor. For Christians from Reformed traditions,

the table reminds them of the place that Jesus had the last supper with his disciples. For Candomblé people food on the ground emphasizes the deep relation of the food with the earth, and to those places of nature that are related to each Orixá. The sharing of each one's food around the table and on the floor can be a powerful way to engage each other rituals and experience the differences and commonalities between their rituals.

At the common table/floor Christians will have their sacred book, the Bible, and the Yoruba people will have their oral culture. Each group can share their stories of faith and transformation in different ways.

Candomblé has way more theological connections with the Eucharist where the Eucharist is understood as a sacrifice, as the Roman Catholic Church. The shedding of blood and the expiatory event of Jesus can be related to the animals sacrificed in Candomblé. If the Christian sacrifice brings forgiveness, the Candomblé sacrifice brings protection. Some Protestant understandings of Jesus death as a ransom can also relate to the animal slaughter and food offerings that honor/pay/negotiate with the Orixás.

Perhaps, Candomblé people can teach Christians how to engage more deeply with the cooking and the relation between food, preparation and the sources of its food. For Reformed people, the Eucharist is not often thought of as an open table with enough real food for all. Instead, it is a reminder of a full meal, a memory of a feast and not necessarily a joyful celebration. People don't actually eat the food from the Eucharistic table but join in sharing a meager piece of bread and a tiny sip of wine/grape juice. Candomblé people can also help Christians to have a sense of commensality around sacred foods. The food offerings are always plentiful in worship services and are offered not only to the Orixás but also to the community. For Reformed people, the Eucharist is not often thought of as an open table with enough real food for all. Instead, it is a reminder of a full meal, a memory of a feast and not necessarily a joyful celebration. People don't actually eat the food from the Eucharistic table but join in sharing a meager piece of bread and a tiny sip of wine/grape juice. Perhaps Candomblé people could learn with Reformed people about the Protestant principle that confronts power, hierarchical unbalanced religious structures and works for social change.

At the end of our conversation, I blatantly asked Babalorixá Aragão if it is possible to place food for the Orixá at the Eucharistic table/altar?

And he answered with a loud “yes!” and continued: “We gather the food of our extended family and everything belong to God. Or better said, is it not everything God?” Aragão’s answer affirms the conditions of the possibilities for this dialogue, connections, and relationships.

Learning with Christian ancestors—Holy kiss as a liturgical practice to be engaged in inter-religious praxis

In this rehearsal for a possible future for our societies and religions, I call upon the early Christians and their liturgical gesture of Holy kissing to help us engage into this relationship-dialogical praxis. Kissing is a common practice in many religions and I am not claiming that Christians invented the Holy kiss. Instead, the idea here is to learn about the liturgical kissing from the early Christian practices and how it can enhance our own religious communal living. The Holy kiss from the early Christian churches is one that combined the liturgical gesture of getting close to each other, the sharing of the breath/presence of the Spirit and the eating together and the negotiation of social structures. The Holy kiss was a practice that wove together several layers of life. Paul and Peter will write to different communities to kiss with a Holy kiss and a kiss of love. (Romans 16:16 and I Peter 5:14).

Early Christian scholar Michael Penn says that in this gesturing, “Family, spirit, reconciliation—seemingly abstract concepts—the kiss transformed these into embodied actions.” For the Greco-Roman world, any gesture in public space was an “exercise of power... the exchange of the ritual kiss (should be viewed) as praxis—the combination of interpretation and action... the kiss was not just an object of discussion, but also a physical action.”⁵¹ This liturgical embodied gesture can help us go from the secure mode of inter-religious dialogue to the more scary space of praxis.

More than that, the ritual kiss became a way of life, a connection between faith and familial kinship, a social bond. For a brief moment, the ritual of kissing each other would break the class boundaries and social status, the insurmountable divisions that were existent in that society. Michael Penn writes about the ritual of kiss as social bound and community building that has similarities with our inter-religious dialogical praxis. While he is writing about the Christian communities, one can say that the blurring of boundaries during that time can be correlated with the blurring of social and religious boundaries of our time. He says:

First, the familial connotations of the Greco-Roman kiss help portray the Christian community as family. Second, its connections with spiritual exchange emphasizes community member's pneumatological bond to each other. Third, especially as the kiss moved from a seal of prayer to part of the Eucharist service, Christian leaders attempted to decrease internal tensions by fashioning the kiss into a reconciliation ritual. Finally, the kiss as a physical action uniting two individuals was correlated with the creation of a unified body.⁵²

Expanding on these reasons, we could say that liturgical kiss can enable us to expand the idea of family beyond the boundaries of Christians beliefs. As Philip Penn notes, "the parameters of kissing could be expanded regularly to include nonfamily members, or those whom one kissed during Christian rituals could be redefined as family."⁵³

Second, since the kiss emphasizes the connectivity through the breath, the belief that one would share one's very soul to another through the kissing, we can also say that the pneumatological presence of the Holy Spirit/Axé can be our common sharing, the offering of our best gifts. In this offering to each other what we have as the most precious, we can engage our bonds of affection and belonging to each other through the exchange of our kisses. To kiss is to draw one's heart into somebody else's, it is to receive his/her breath, his/her very life into my body. To kiss somebody is to establish a bond of peace and I cannot withdraw my body and myself from this person anymore. I am bonded to this person now. That is why a kiss might be a scary gesture, especially when we are trying not to interfere in each other's lives and being civilized and respectful in this a individualistic culture. The "spirit" of our culture is a spirit that does not want to share, to exchange, to live together. The promise and hope of the exchange of the Spirit is what these religions can offer to the Brazilian culture and to the world. The Holy kiss is a collective practice that goes against the tide, one that perhaps can challenge this narcissistic culture that pushes people into withdrawing from one another.

Third, the Holy kiss as a bond, a gesture of deep commitment, of forgiveness, a familiar gesture of affection, an affirmation of belonging, an act of love, social, and communal love. That is why it was done first

during the Eucharist. Penn reminds us “the ritual kiss can unite the participant’s souls and cause individuals to forgive any wrongs.” There is a powerful event happening when we kiss each other. John Chrysostom wrote: “The kiss is given so that it may be the fuel of love, so that we may kindle the disposition, so that we may love each other as brothers [love] brothers, as children [love] parents, as parents [love] children. But also far greater, because those are by nature, these by grace. Thus our souls are bound to each other.”⁵⁴

Finally, The Holy kiss is a liturgical gesture that connects individual bodies to a larger body, the social body that we might call the body of God. Michael Penn says that “several early Christian writers connected the kiss, spiritual exchange and group cohesion.”⁵⁵ When I kiss somebody, I give this person a part of myself that only this person will know. Moreover, I offer to this person my social group, I open the entrance door for the other to be part of my family and life. Thus, through the participation of several groups of affection and social connections, we become responsible for each other. When we do it in an inter-religious dynamics, the radical other changes its status: from a threat, the Candomblé people become a blessing to me, a help for my Christian living in society, an assurance of larger double belonging, an expansion of my soul, a respectful touch in my body, a gift to my faith and vice versa.

Reformed/Candomblé people eating together: a practical itinerary

If Christianity works around the spiritualization of the body through acts of sanctity such as Eucharist, penitence, fasting, privation, etc; Afro-religions works around is the embodiment of the spirit through the coming of the entities that possess the bodies and dance, eat, celebrate, talk, laugh, etc. These different forms of movement around the sacred are both a challenge and a blessing and must be considered as we plan this dialogical praxis.

Both religions have embraced foreign elements into their structures of faith and practices, adapting themselves to their surroundings through different processes. Neither Christianity nor Candomblé are pure, autonomous, culture-free, and homogeneous religions. Moreover, it was the presence of each other that ended up defining their ways of being in Brazil. After living together for almost 500 years, offering an open table to share the Eucharistic food with Candomblé brothers and sisters and having

Christians eat at a Candomblé festivity should not be a strange move or an act of infidelity from both parts but instead, a mutual offering of a blessing and a gift.

This movement of mutually going after each other must be carefully crafted and created according to the conditions of possibilities that this impossible gathering might be. The itinerary has to be done by the two communities once they have established a bond of trust and accept that this dialogue/engagement entails a great amount of vulnerability. Christians should be reminded by what Paul Knitter said: “to be loyal to Christ, one must be vulnerable to others.”⁵⁶

As we ponder about possibilities of dialogue and life together, we must consider strategies that come up from practice through and across the folding of differences. Starting points, movements of the sacred, and end results are completely different. What can we learn from each other? Around the relation spirit/body body/spirit, we can expand the possibilities and understandings and practices of faith.

In order for this dialogue to happen, a lot of misunderstanding will happen. Our theological work is to help each other undo, as much as we can, these misunderstandings, knowing however, that the incommensurability of each religion will always remind us of this impossible dialogue.

From the Reformed traditions perspectives, this impossible dialogue must carry that aspect of the Protestant principle which is to call into question any and every aspect of the Christian faith so it does not run the risk of becoming an idolatrous worshiping community and continue the perpetual movement “to be” reformed: *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*.

This itinerary imagines God coming after,⁵⁷ as after us helping us to get together, but coming after as showing up later, after we have gone through the hardships of a possible dialogue and engagement. Concrete steps might attend to the following: first, we visit each other’s sacred spaces to see each other in our own worship services. Then, we gather to eat a common non-religious meal together and bring about questions on our practices thus initiating the conversation. For this gathering we start by greeting each other and kissing each other’s cheeks. Then, when we eat together again. Before we eat, the Yoruba people explain why and how they do what they do, especially their food offerings. Then Christians explain why they do what they do and explain the Eucharist. Both

show each other what is at stake in their celebrations and the living of their faith. Then we decide what we can or cannot do/eat together for now and try to formulate possibilities within these fundamentally different rituals. Then, we go back again to each other's worship services and try to participate as we are allowed. Songs, prayers and passing of the loving kiss of peace are shared. Then, we eat again and we bring the elements of our celebrations to show people how we do it. Then we allow those who want to take a step further to participate at each other's tables. We start with the hospitality of the Eucharistic table, writing a Eucharistic prayer that welcomes our brothers and sisters from Candomblé and evoke Axé and the powerful history of Candomblé in Brazil to make who we are. As we continue, the next time at an Eucharistic table, Candomblé people are invited to talk and bring foods offered to the Orixás. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist we eat a whole meal at the table.

Within this process asking questions is fundamental: Besides the questions about practices we, as Christians, must engage questions regarding our own involvement and mutual knowledge: (1) If we are to eat together, how should we do it? (2) If I participate in the Yoruba meal, what and how will this participation change in my own view and practice of the Christian Eucharist? (3) What might the Yoruba meal change in my own understanding of community, resistance, memory, ancestry, commensality, thanksgiving, possession of the Spirit? (4) Can we share prayers and songs together? (5) What is community for me as a Christian after that experience? (6) What is the memory process here and how does it affect my own understanding of memory here? (7) As a Christian, if I participate in the Yoruba meal, what does this participation change in the Christian Eucharist? (8) What does the Yoruba meal/food offering change in my own understanding of memory, of resistance, of community? (9) What is the sharing of the meal invested with? (10) What are the theological aspects of it? Learning from religious others engages our total being. Emotions, feelings, body, mind, and spirit are all intertwined in this process. How can we be informed and reformed in this bodily engagement?

In this process, we might educate each other by teaching each other about the history of our faith and practices. Both communities could search the history of Christianity/African Religions in Brazil, face the

“cordial racism” in the Brazilian culture, and find places where connections between Christianity and Candomblé were not only about destruction but also about help, protection, and mutual care. In other words, look for ways in which reality supplanted what the official rhetoric proposed and how Africans, Europeans, and indigenous people constructed small harmonies and communal experiences. Zumbi dos Palmares can be a beginning. What were the accommodations made between Christianity and Candomblé? Find where the connections, symmetries, commonalities, and sound parallels were and are. As a theological process, a more socially and historically oriented research could be done to foment a solid theological ground.

We are feeding each other here not only because we are morally obligated to do so. We are gathering together and feeding each other because we must create not only a possible new world but a necessary one, one that will expand our possibilities and make our lives and our country bigger and better for us and for the future generations. We are feeding each other because we must heal the wounds of our common history, and turn to each other in respect and honor. We are learning and practicing and gathering because it is God’s demand that we love and care for each other. We are eating together around our tables/floors because we are offering a radical hospitality to each other and this hospitality can only come if we are bounded by the Spirit.

Conclusion

It is impossible to offer a lucid and honest introduction to Candomblé in these pages. However, the idea here is for us to have a glimpse of this religion so we can honor the people of the Candomblé and start to think why such inter-religious dialogical praxis is not only possible but truly necessary.

Symbiosis and Phagocytosis can be key theological elements to be developed in this dialogue. Also the notion of ritualizing/ritualization as proposed by Catherine Bell and Ronald Grimmes and explained in the next chapter is also an important element of this dialogue as we welcome each other into our rituals and invent other common rituals to enhance our dialogue and mutual care. We have also learned from ritual theorist Jonathan Z. Smith that rituals are also forms of engagement with that which we hope to see happening. When we create our rituals, we are struggling between

the reality we live and the reality we strive for, the reality we want to see happening. In this inter-religious dialogical liturgical praxis, we also struggle between a reality that puts these two religious groups at odds and a reality that see them eating, drinking, praying, and dancing together.⁵⁸

As we are able to explore some of the history of slavery and Yorubá religion and raise new challenges related to the so-called Brazilian religious diversity and its “cordial racism,” also engage the hospitality of the Eucharistic table and the sharing of a Holy kiss, we can find a common space to transform this history and break down historical alienation and religious hatred. The hope continues as we try to foster dialogue and rituals between Candomblé and Christianity as a way to stop violence, engage in deep appreciation of each other’s religious choices and enable each other to be fully humans in and through our deepest religious callings.

At the end, we must remember that our commitment is grounded in love. Marcelo Barros reminds us once again:

“Evidently, every spiritual path is an itinerary of love and cannot be explained intellectually. It is a mystagogy. It is a mystery that can only be explained through an intimate relation of life... We can be lovers that offer ourselves to serve. From what is divine, there is title of property. Access is free to all to search what makes our hearts alive. No mortal can tame the wild wind. Mystery, is our peace and the religious paths, our parables of love.”⁵⁹

And as Ivone Gebara says,

the question of pluralism invites us, again, to the thinking, to the proximity to wisdom, to the friendship with the different, with those who are close by and afar as expressions of this amazing complexity of life. And that is the same for our theologies, because, at the end, its certainties have to do with the weak, uncertain, plural and always renewable trust in this love that sustains us: “Where there is love, Go will be there...”⁶⁰

So this love lived around food and communities. Christians and Candomblé people creating a space of care and love and welcome that there isn’t one yet in society. A place where people is what they hope to be, where their identities are forged, developed, transformed. Like the early Christian churches or the Quilombo dos Palmares. A place to be not what society wants us to be necessarily but place for free exploration of one’s

hopes, beliefs, and dreams. Spaces where respect and protection are intrinsic to it and where we re-imagine our lives and our world. A space to dance samba and sing hymns and Yorubá songs. A rather impossible space for sure. However, we will never know if that is possible or not if we don't try, practically, moving near each other.

Notes

1. This article was published in *Sacraments and Globalization: Redrawing the Borders of Eucharistic Hospitality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, Pickwick Publications, 2013), pp. 203–241.
2. Harding, Rachel E., *A Refuge In Thunder. Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. xiii.
3. Some Christian friends tell me that several churches have as their mission goal to close down a number of terreiros every year.
4. This question was asked in a plenary of the Cohort II of the Luce Seminar on Theologies of Religious Pluralism and Comparative Theology, developed by American Academy of Religion. Chicago, May 2011.
5. De Alencastro, Luiz Felipe, *As Populações Africanas no Brasil*, <http://www.casadasafricanas.org.br/site/img/upload/680108.pdf>
6. “Cordial man” is an expression created by historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda to describe the ways Brazilians live. See Sérgio Buarque Holanda. *Raízes do Brasil*, (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras), 1997. The book was first published in 1936. However, “cordial racism” was an expression created later to capture the kind of racism in Brazil that is constantly denied. Marcelo Coelho says: “Perhaps, one of the horrors of the ‘cordial racism’ is that prejudice expresses itself when somebody says ‘I don’t have prejudice.’ To say that ‘in there is no racism is true to a certain extent (there are no benches on public square dividing whites and blacks as it was in the United States) but this is misleading in a deeper analysis.” Marcelo Coelho, “Estranhamento conduz ‘racismo cordial’,” (Folha de São Paulo, 28 de junho de 1995). <http://www.cefetsp.br/edu/eso/comportamento/racismocordial.html>
7. Quilombos. These places still feed the memory of black people in Brazil in their struggles today. As new Quilombos continue to exist, African religions are still powerful strongholds of resistance, empowerment and transformation even though mostly forgotten by the government. For more information about Quilombo dos Palmares see: Carneiro, Edson. *O Quilombo dos Palmares* (São Paulo: WMF, Martins Fontes), 2011. Flávio Gomes, *Palmares* (São Paulo: Contexto), 2005.
8. I ask for Agô (permission) to the Orixás, to the Candomblés of Brazil and people of saint to delve into a little their beliefs and practices.
9. Alessandra Osuna: <http://ebomealessandraosun.blogspot.com/2008/04/significado-do-candomble.html>
10. Bastide, Roger, *O Candomblé da Bahia*, (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras), 2009, p. 29. This book is a great resource for understanding the structure, meaning and movement of the ritual services of the Candomblé in general, but most properly of the services done in Bahia.

11. Oliveira, Rafael Soares de, (Org) *Diálogos Fraternos Contra a Intolerância Religiosa* (Rio de Janeiro: DP&A Editora & Koinonia), 2003, p. 14.
12. Gisele Omindarewá Cossard, Awó, *O Mistério dos Orixás*, (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas), 2006, p. 12 (my work will rely heavily on this work).
13. Vilson Caetano de Souza Junior, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuG1StsTVBc&NR=1>
14. Pierre Verger commenting on Candomblé, at Pierre Verger Foundation: http://pierreverger.org/fpv/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=41&limit=1&limitstart=2&Itemid=155
15. Edison Carneiro, op. cit., 20–21.
16. Harding, Rachel E., *A Refuge In Thunder*. Op. Cit., xvi.
17. Ibid.
18. Roger Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia*, op. cit., 27.
19. Babalorixá Luis de Logun Edé, *A Relação da Comida no Candomblé: 25 Anos de Logun Edé.* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lxS7vQUQNg>.
20. Ibid., 123.
21. Maria Helena Farelli describes the essentials in the Candomblés terreiros founded in Bahia: “Black princesses with ivory smiles conducted their god to the dirty streets of the cities and the moonlight of the countryside. And for their divine lords they prepared the best spicy food, cooked with wood in within their mysteries. Were it not for them, queens and African priestess, brought as slaves from Benin and Angola, how would their gods come live in Brazil? . . . Foods for the saints are traditional, necessary, and they make the beauty of the religious festivities. . . Around the terreiros people live in order to adore their gods and ancestors and to them they prepare drinks and food that constitute one of the links between *aiê* (earth) and *orum* (heavean) through the *axé* (the magical force). All of the African-Brazilian supernatural world like food. They must be fed. Blood, *dendê* (palm oil) and *ataré* are part of the menu. If you haven’t eaten the delicious food and the nectar drinks you should experience. If you follow the precepts, the food will be done so well that all of the gods will come from Africa and Haiti. Let us salute our Orixá, the owner of our *ori* (head) and live without the notion of sin, which brought so many bad things to the African who didn’t know what sin was. *Axé* to my ancestors white, black and indigenous, for it is time for the delicious food form Bahia.” Maria Helena Farelli, Op. Cit., p.12.
22. Roger Bastide, Op. Cit., 31. This is a practice in most terreiros/*axé* but some babalorixás like Luis de Logun Edé do not like to offer the food.
23. Vilson Caetano de Souza Junior, “A Relação da Comida no Candomblé: 25 Anos de Logun Edé. Part II” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuG1StsTVBc&NR=1>.
24. Bastide, Op. Cit, p. 34.
25. Ibid., p. 40.
26. Vigil, José M., Tomita, Luiza E., Barros, Marcelo, (Organizers) *Teologia Pluralista Libertadora Intercontinental*. ASETT, EATWOT (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2008).
27. Faustino Teixeira, *A Teologia do Pluralismo Religioso na América Latina*, in *Teologia Pluralista Libertadora Intercontinental*, op. cit., 31.
28. Ivone Gebara calls this study to include women since the “principle that structures it cannot be only male. Its expression has to be multiple, plural, infinite.” Quoted in Faustino Teixeira, *A Teologia do Pluralismo Religioso na América Latina*.

29. Faustino Teixeira, *A Teologia do Pluralismo Religioso na América Latina*, in *Teologia Pluralista Libertadora Intercontinental*, op. cit., 39.
30. Barros, Marcelo, *Múltipla Pertença, o Pluralismo Religioso*, in *Teologia Pluralista Libertadora Intercontinental*, op. cit., 54.
31. "Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates organically, together with itself, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields." by Gramsci, Antonio, "The Intellectuals: The Formation of the Intellectuals," in *Selections From The Prison Notebooks Of Antonio Gramsci*. [by] Antonio Gramsci. (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1971). p. 5.
32. Priests, pastors, professors, such as Carlos Mesters, Ivone Gebara, Leonardo Boff, Milton Schwantes, Richard Shall, Nancy Cardoso, Pedro Casaldáliga, Don Elder Camera, Don Paulo Evaristo Arns, just to name a few, have deeply engaged the life of the poor and with them, organized local and national movements of liberation in Brazil (Pastoral of the Land Commission, Landless Movement, Romaria da Terra, workers' rights, violence against women, etc.), as well as created discourses that were marked both by the intellectual academy and the concerns and needs and wisdom of the poor.
33. J. Edgar Bruns quoted by Sharon V. Betcher, "Take my Yoga upon you: a spiritual pli for the global city" in Catherine Keller & Laurel Schneider, eds., *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (New York, London: Routledge, 2010). p. 72.
34. José Maria Vigil renews Latin American liberation theology's methodology based on Paulo Freire's work: to see, to judge, and to act and frames it around theologies of religious pluralism as "a new way of living religion, a new practice." Vigil, José Maria, *Teologia do Pluralismo Religioso, para uma releitura pluralista do Cristianismo* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2006), p. 15.
35. Gebara, Ivone, "Pluralismo Religioso, Uma Perspectiva Feminista" in *Teologia Latino-Americana Pluralista da Libertação, da Libertação*. Luiza E. Tomita, José M. Vigil, Marcelo Barros, eds, *ASETT, EATWOT* (São Paulo: Editora Paulus, 2006), p. 297.
36. Irarrázaval, Diego, "Salvação Indígena and Afro-Americana," in *Teologia Pluralista Libertadora Intercontinental*, op. cit., 69.
37. Ibid.
38. This notion can be also correlated to the notion of inclusivism. While Christian inclusivism sees value in other religions, it appropriates things to itself but retains only what it recognizes, turning what it appropriates into its own system, holding within itself notions of salvation, truth and revelation that are valid only within the Christian system. What it does not authenticate it demonizes/destroys and dismisses. What Aragão advocates in Candomblé as inclusivism is very different and pertains to symbiosis. Candomblé embraces other beliefs and practices and make it part of its own system without devaluing it into or making it turn into its own categories as a way to destroy other's alterity and relevance in its own way. Instead, this symbiotic process engages different realities to live together to fight a stronger adversary that might want to destroy the larger system. This way of relating to other religions allows Yoruba believers to live religious-inter-religiously since any religion can be of help for the struggles of daily life.
39. Ibid.

40. Barros, Marcelo, "Multipla Pertença, o Pluralismo Religioso," in *Teologia Pluralista Libertadora Intercontinental*, op. cit., 66.
41. Ibid., 67.
42. Invitation to Christ, PCUSA – <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/invitation-christ/>
43. "Axé is the primal force, life principle, sacred force of the Orixás... is power, is charisma, it is the root that comes from the ancestors; we can gain and lose Axé, axé is a gift from the gods...; it is above all, the very house of the Candomblé, the temple, the roça (place where you plant for your family) the whole tradition." Reginaldo Prandi, *Os Candomblés de São Paulo* (São Palo: Hucitec-EDUSP, 1991), pp.103–104.
44. Betcher, Sharon V., "Take my yoga upon you. A Spiritual Pli for the Global City," in Catherine Keller & Laurel Schneider, eds, *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 58.
45. Cited by Betcher, Sharon V., "Take my yoga upon you. A Spiritual Pli for the Global City," in Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider, eds, *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (New York: Routledge), 2010, p. 72.
46. Jaci Maraschin, *The Transient Body: Sensibility and Spirituality*, paper presented at the event "Liturgy and Body," Union Theological Seminary, New York, October 20, 2003.
47. For a fascinating work on this topic see David M. Freidenreich, *Foreigners and Their Food. Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
48. 1 Corinthians 8:8 NSRV
49. Acts 10:15 NSRV
50. 1 Corinthians 8:1 NSRV.
51. Michael Philip Penn, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p. 15, 35, 50.
52. Ibidem., 8.
53. Ibidem., 36.
54. John Chrysostom, In epistulam II ad Corinthios 30.2 (PG 61, 607), in Michael Philip Penn, *Kissing Christians*, op. cit., 34.
55. Michael Philip Penn, *Kissing Christians*, 39.
56. Knitter, Paul, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), p. 209.
57. Taylor, Mark C., *After God (Religion and Postmodernism)* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2009).
58. "Ritual is a mean of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are." Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 43.
59. Barros, Marcelo, *Multipla Pertença, o Pluralismo Religioso*, in *Teologia Pluralista Libertadora Intercontinental*, op. cit., 60.
60. Gebara, Ivone, "Pluralismo Religioso, Uma Perspectiva Feminista" in *Teologia Latino-Americana Pluralista da Libertação*, op. cit. 298.