<div align="center">**DIVERSITY AND FAITH:**</div>

<div align="center">Sexualities and Religious Practices among New Evangelical Movements in Brazil</div>

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I.   Introduction

The idea that religion is not only part of everyday life, but also fundamental to understanding interpersonal relationships and structural changes during the Demographic Transition is not new in the field of Demography. In Notestein's (1945) classic work on the decline in fertility, religion was highlighted as an explanatory factor, acting as a mechanism to control this component through marriage, understood as an ordinance for sexual activity and, above all, for procreation. In fact, this consideration was nothing new. The theory of Thomas Malthus - the forerunner of demographic thinking - already highlighted religion, especially Christianity, as a mechanism for the moral control of society. Sacramental and marriage ordinances, according to him, contributed directly to birth control. It is worth remembering that Malthus was an Anglican pastor in the 18th century, which contributes to this intersection between religious morality and demography.

The theory of the Demographic Transition then marked the 20th century as an explanation of the transition from a regime of high mortality and fertility rates to one of low rates. Throughout this period, a vast body of literature sought to describe, analyze and explain the similarities and differences in the experiences of different regions of the world. In the last decades of the last century, a new theoretical effort emerged: the Second Demographic Transition (SDT).

The fall in the fertility rate and the fact that it remains below replacement level, the increase in consensual unions, the growth in out-of-wedlock births and the postponement or postponement of marriage and parenthood are all factors described by the SDT as cultural and ideational transformations in the context of modern societies (LESTHAEGHE, 1983; van de KAA, 1987). Religion appears in this context as a reflection of these changes: secularization, one of the pillars of the SDT, represents the weakening of religious influence on decisions about life, as post-modern and individualistic values gain ground. While in the Demographic Transition

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religion was a central explanatory factor, in the SDT it remains relevant, albeit with a new contour.

Whether due to its preponderant role in justifying the fall in fertility, or its possible disimportance in contributing to ideational changes, religion is placed in the demographic field beyond a variable that expresses a binary difference between being or not being affiliated to a religious community and even as the practice of a religious *ethos*, but rather as a cultural dimension that also allows us to understand demographic behavior (PERI-ROTEM, 2016; 2021; KOLK & SAARELA, 2024).

Preliminary results from the last Demographic Census, in 2022, show that Brazil has more religious temples than health and education facilities. For the first time, the Census mapped the type of building, pointing to a ratio of 286 religious establishments per 100,000 inhabitants, to the detriment of 264 and 247 per 100,000 inhabitants in education and health establishments, respectively[3] . Even though there are limits that make this comparison impossible, this data shows the prominent role that religion plays on the national scene.

In this sense, the aim of this text, as part of this author's thesis research, is to present a preliminary view of the Brazilian inclusive religious field, focusing on a large Brazilian city as a case study. Broadly speaking, the thesis aims to understand and discuss the influence of theological dogmas on sexual initiation and marital union among LGB people over the age of 18 who belong to inclusive evangelical churches in Belo Horizonte. Specifically, the aim is to: i) collect, analyze and discuss the demographic, social, economic and household profile of those who attend these churches; ii) collect and analyze data in order to generate and discuss information on affective and sexual trajectories among sexual minorities; iii) identify and discuss how and when sexual initiation occurs; and, iv) identify and discuss how and when marital union occurs. Methodologically, the research will use concomitant mixed methods, considering the collection of quantitative data (via an online survey), qualitative data (via semi-structured interviews and participant observation) and the technique of analysis based on content analysis and hypothesis testing - which are described in detail in section 3 of this qualification project.

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[3] For more information, visit: https://g1.globo.com/economia/censo/noticia/2024/02/02/brasil-tem-mais-templos-religiosos-do-que-hospitais-e-escolas-juntos-regiao-norte-lidera-com-459-para-cada-100-mil-habitantes.ghtml. Accessed on: 28 Feb 2024.

In addition to this quick introduction, the second section summarizes some notes on religion and sexual minorities and the third section provides some notes on the first interactions with the research field, in the sense of the data collection itself.

II.   Contexts and Connections between Religion, Sexualities and Demographic Events

Understanding this growth, as well as the positions, is crucial when one considers that religion is a factor that socially organizes individuals. In Brazil, this process takes place not only in the act of religious affiliation but also in the massive presence of temples, the construction of a cultural language based on *gospel* music, the presence in communication through television programs and channels, as well as the active participation and political articulation expressed in the evangelical caucus and its interference in public policy designs. This field, understood as heterogeneous, disseminates agendas based on biblical dogma, but also articulates issues present in society, aiming for mechanisms to reshape its participation.

Figure 1 shows two measures of the Brazilian population by religious affiliation. Considering the selection of some religious groups, it shows i) the percentage composition of the population and ii) the intercensal growth rate by major region. The first measure compares the trajectory of growth or decline of the groups over the last five Demographic Censuses; the second measure indicates how much the group varied in growth or decline (in red) between the last three Censuses. This figure shows that the Catholics category remains the majority of the Brazilian population, but with a downward trend; the Evangelicals category (which here includes historic/protestants, Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals) shows an upward trend; the No Religion category also points to an increase in the percentage of the population; and the other religions, in the graph categorized as Other[4] , represent a lower percentage compared to Catholics and Evangelicals.

However, it can be seen that the growth rate of each category of religion in Brazil differs from the other Brazilian regions, as well as in the municipality of Belo Horizonte, the spatial focus of this thesis project. While in the first census interval Catholics showed a positive rate, in the second the rate became negative, which indicates a decrease in this population group; however, the Central-West region was the only one with growth in this group between 2010/2022. On

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[4] All other religions were categorized as Other because they have a small percentage and it is not the focus of this study to analyze them.

the other hand, for Evangelicals, the growth rate decreased in the second interval, although it was still positive. Finally, of the locations selected, Belo Horizonte was the only one to show a decline in Catholics in the first interval, 2000/2010.

Starting with descriptive population statistics, the following is a demographic overview based on information on religious affiliation reported in the most recent Demographic Censuses[5] . The information was extracted from *IPUMS International* and we chose to work with the 2000 and 2010 censuses because they offer the variable related to religious affiliation, with the possibility of cross-referencing with sex and five-year age group[6] . Brazil and Belo Horizonte were used as the spatial units of evaluation and ages were grouped into five-year age groups (the last open age group).

Before dealing with the data itself, it should be noted that some stratifications of religious denominations existing in 2010 were not present in 2000. This is due to the process of improving the questionnaire, as well as the perception that some religious denominations have gained their own category in the stratification, since the population of these denominations has increased over the census period. However, for the purposes of this exhibition, we have grouped the data into four large groups :[7]

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[5] The 2022 Demographic Census has not yet been included in this analysis because the religious affiliation variable is not yet available. It is believed that by the time this thesis is defended, scheduled for March 2026, the data will be available, which will offer a discussion and comparison of what has happened over at least the last three censuses, both in Brazil and in Belo Horizonte.

[6] It is important to note that in the tabulations available on the SIDRA/IBGE platform, for the religion variable, the age groups available are decennial from the age of 30 onwards, which made it impossible to use the official Brazilian base for this analysis.

[7] For a discussion of the names of denominations by category, see Santos, 2014.

Figure 1 - Composition of the Population and Intercensal Growth Rate by Religious Affiliation - Brazil and Some Selected Regions, Census Year, 2008 Brazil and Some Selected Regions, 1980, 1991, 2000, 2010 and 2022 Demographic Census.

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION BY RELIGIOUS GROUPS - **BRAZIL**
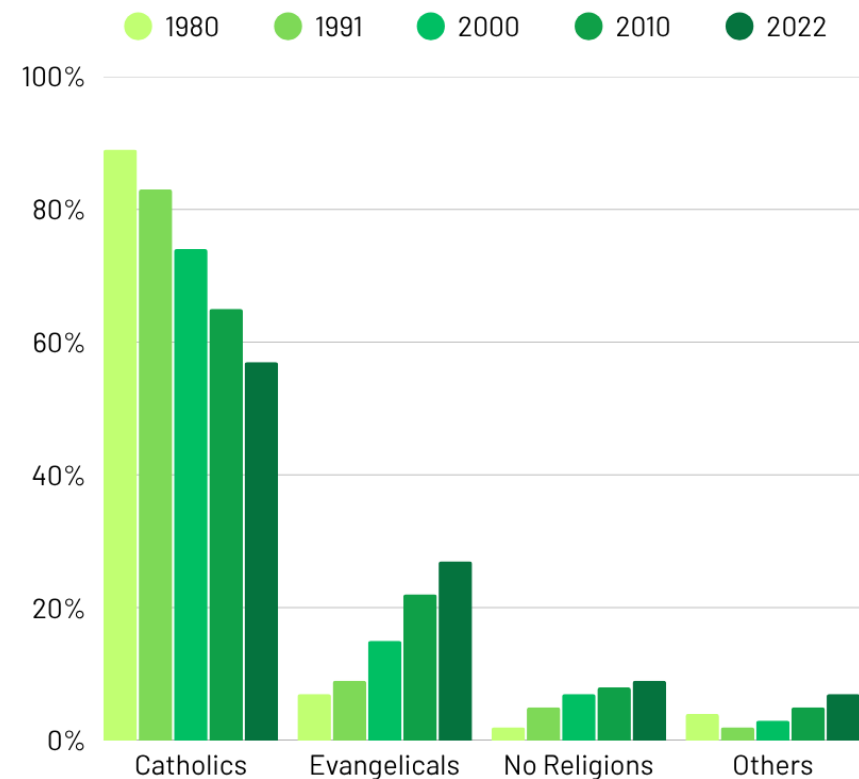
INTERCENSUS GROWTH RATE - **SOME LOCATIONS**

	2000/2010			2010/2022		
	CATHOLICS	EVANGELICALS	NO RELIGIONS	CATHOLICS	EVANGELICALS	NO RELIGIONS
Brazil	0.4%	5.3%	2.9%	-0.4%	2.5%	2.0%
North	1.1%	6.4%	4.5%	-0.5%	3.4%	1.6%
North East	0.6%	6.2%	2.8%	-0.5%	3.3%	1.2%
Southeast	0.0%	4.9%	2.5%	-0.6%	1.9%	2.1%
Midwest	0.9%	5.9%	3.2%	0.3%	2.9%	2.0%
South	0.4%	4.1%	3.6%	-0.2%	2.4%	4.3%
Minas Gerais	0.4%	5.4%	2.4%	-0.4%	2.6%	1.6%
Belo Horizonte	-0.3%	4.4%	1.3%	-1.2%	1.0%	1.6%

Source: Own elaboration using IBGE data, 2025.

1. Brazil and BH (Belo Horizonte): represents the total Brazilian population, or the population of Belo Horizonte; sets 2, 3 and 4 described below are included;

2. Catholics;

3. Pentecostal Evangelicals: denominational categories defined as Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, undetermined and other evangelical religions;

4. Historical Evangelicals: denominational categories defined as Mission: Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Adventist and other Mission .[8]

In order to understand the dynamics of this population, we will use age pyramids and sex ratios to discuss population composition by religious affiliation. Graph 1 shows the age pyramids for the four groups in Brazil, based on the 2000 and 2010 censuses. Graph 2 shows the same order applied to Belo Horizonte (BH). The aim is to make a comparison between the groups, years and spatial sections.

Contrasting the two Censuses, it is possible to see the trend marked by the fall in fertility and the ageing process of the Brazilian population: a narrowing of the base of the pyramid and a tendency for the intermediate and older age groups to grow. As for the pyramids of the "Catholics" group, their behavior is similar to that of "Brazil" in both years, but with the emphasis on a greater relative participation of the aging population, i.e. the age groups over 60. This similarity of behaviour can partly be attributed to the fact that a large proportion of the Brazilian population is made up of people who self-identify as Catholic: as shown in the introduction to this text, the defining characteristic of religion in Brazil is that more than half of the population self-declares as Catholic, which for many authors is a trace of the process of Portuguese colonization in the country. Therefore, it stands to reason that the age composition of the country as a whole is similar to that of this specific group (Catholics).

Graph 1 shows something interesting: the different shapes of the age pyramids for "Pentecostal Evangelicals" and "Historical Evangelicals". In 2000, Pentecostals showed a common format for what is expected of populations in the early stages of the Demographic Transition: concentration of the highest percentages of the population at the base of the pyramid, pointing to high fertility. In 2010, for this same group, it is possible to see a tendency for the base of the pyramid to shorten and the "echo" to act, i.e. in 2000 the largest age group in terms of

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[8] The expression "Mission Evangelicals", used by the Demographic Census, was adapted to "Historical Evangelicals" or, at times in the text, only as "Historical", as a way of contextualizing the data set in accordance with the discussion that exists on the terminology "evangelicals".

percentage share of the population was the 5 to 9 year olds, in 2010, the largest group is the 10 to 14 year olds, and due to the drop in fertility at work, the initial age group is not the largest in terms of percentage share of the pyramid. A similar behavior can be seen among the Historical Evangelicals, but in both cases, the initial age groups on the one hand help to understand the behavior of the population spatially at the stage it is at in the Demographic Transition, but for the religion variable it imposes a limitation that may come from the relationship between religion and family: the initial ages may be a reflection of the religious affiliation of the parents and in this sense not exactly be the religious option of the person. As this is a household survey in which one person reports all the information about the household, there is also the possibility of bias if the interviewee does not actually report the religious affiliation to which the other members of that household belong.

Graph 1 - Distribution of the Population by Selected Religious Affiliation, by Sex and Five-Year Age Group - Brazil, 2000 and 2010 Demographic Census.
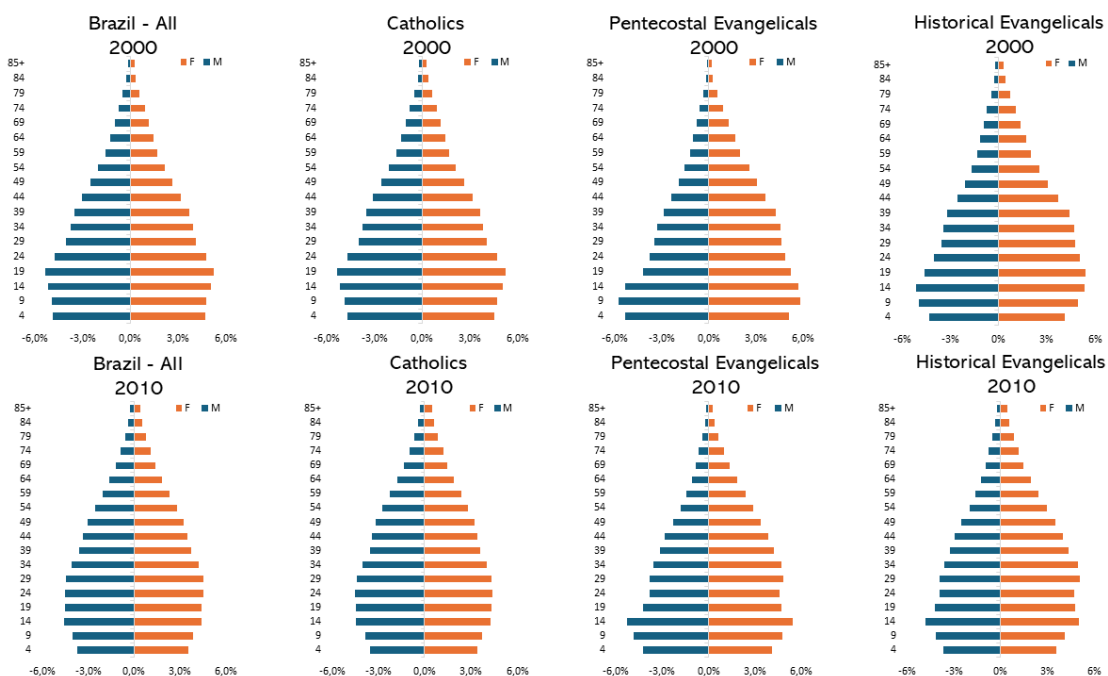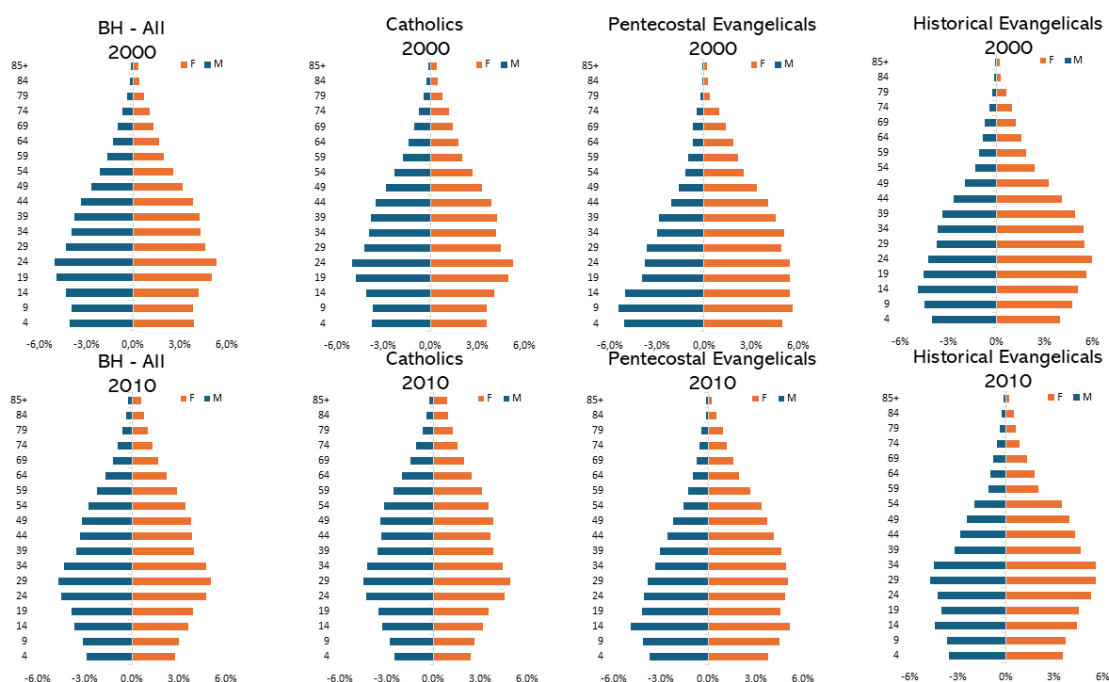

Source: Own elaboration using data from IPUMS, 2025.

Another point that draws attention is the discrepancy in the division by sex: the pyramid of the group of "Pentecostal Evangelicals" points to a greater participation of females, as well as a pattern that is repeated in the group of "Historical Evangelicals". Looking at the 20-24 age group, there is a greater percentage trend among female Pentecostal and Historical Evangelicals. However, it is for the Pentecostals that there is an even greater concentration of

females along the entire length of the pyramid, which differs from the "Brazil", "BH" and "Catholics" groups in both spatial modalities - as can also be seen in Graph 3.

Graph 2 - Distribution of the Population by Selected Religious Affiliation, by Sex and Five-Year Age Group in Belo Horizonte - 2000 and 2010 Demographic Census.

Source: Own elaboration using data from IPUMS, 2025.

Graph 2, which provides information for the municipality of Belo Horizonte, shows a behavior similar to that seen in Brazil. However, what is added to the analysis here is the contour in the comparison between the two spatial units (Brazil and Belo Horizonte), which is manifested by the municipality indicating a more advanced stage in the Demographic Transition to the detriment of the country: the bases of the pyramids being even narrower for the categories "BH" and "Catholics", and for the categories "Pentecostal Evangelicals" and "Historical Evangelicals", the greater participation of intermediate age groups in the pyramid (especially 30 to 39 year olds) - visually understood from the narrowing of the pyramid.

The expression "Evangelical" carries with it possible different understandings depending on the context, precisely because in the national context a differentiation is made between them and Protestants. Thus, as Soledade (2022) points out, evangelicals in Brazil include Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal denominations, excluding historical Protestantism. On the other hand, in the evangelical field, the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal frameworks are not always feasible, since rites and symbols can confuse what the literature in the area tries to systematize. This is

because, in Cunha's (2004) expression about *gospel* in Brazil in the middle of the last decade of the 20th century, it is *new wine in old wineskins*. To explain the use of this biblical expression, common to Christian speech other than evangelical, this facet of action in the cultural field mixes elements of a new format for being Christian, but also carries elements of Puritan Protestantism, with its distancing from *the things of the world* - which in turn Pentecostalism uses as its dogma. It is worth reiterating here that, while the research in question does not set out to focus on the evangelical historiography produced in Brazil since the mid-1960s-90s, some sparse elements are cited to position the discussion.

The end of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century were marked by what authors in the demographic field have called a religious transition: a shift from Catholic to Evangelical hegemony as a Christian religious affiliation in Brazil (ALVES, BARROS and CAVENAGHI, 2012; ALVES, CAVENAGHI and BARROS, 2014; ALVES, CAVENAGHI, BARROS and CARVALHO, 2017), coupled with an increase in the population that self-identifies as having no religion. The religious transition is not purely explained by the change in the *status of* religious affiliation, but it is advocated in the demographic field precisely because it is perceived from the changes in the different age and gender groups of the population, both structuring variables of production and analysis in Demography as an area of science. According to Alves, Cavenaghi and Barros (2014), the reduction in the self-identified Catholic population in the Demographic Censuses from 1991 onwards can be seen among the younger age groups, with no significant changes in the older age groups. On the other hand, as will be shown below, the 2000 and 2010 Censuses show that among the evangelical population, there is a higher percentage of middle-aged age groups and of women.

The area's interest in religion takes on the challenge of trying to answer how much it influences the demographic behavior of the population. Soledade (2022), when referring to the direction taken by the inclusive strand among evangelicals, proposes thinking not about how much the religion influences, but how much the debate around sexuality has influenced and shaped new evangelical alternatives. In this way, the causal relationship is not analyzed in a linear way, but rather positions the population and institutions as political entities in dispute in a dialectical relationship.

From a theoretical point of view, studies on sexualities were largely shaped by the work of Michel Foucault, especially in his series of publications called "*History of Sexuality*". Foucault explored the genealogy of sexuality in the West, examining how the social control of bodies

manifested itself through population management policies, such as public health and family planning, and even medical interventions to control reproduction. These practices were characterized as *biopolitical* and aimed to frame bodies as desirable and undesirable. The hygienist policies implemented in the West in the 19th and 20th centuries influenced reproduction and regulated the categories of individuals who could and should reproduce (HEILBORN, 1996; NATIVIDADE, 2006; NATIVIDADE & DIAS, 2022; MOURA, 2019; AZEVEDO, 2023). The Christian religion played a central role in formulating this discourse on sex, defining which relationships were acceptable and which were not. For the latter, the language of sin was used to control bodies (NATIVIDADE, 2012; SOLEDADE, 2022).

Figure 2 provides an overview of the main descriptive measures of sexual minority populations for Brazil, considering homosexuals (lesbians and gays) and bisexuals. Through the 2019 PNS, the data presented here is limited to showing Brazil due to the sampling nature of the survey: it only allows disaggregation for the five major regions and metropolitan regions. The aim here is to provide a general overview, since the IBGE highlights the limitations of the data, which because it is the first survey of this magnitude in the country, imposes limitations on interpretation. Given the political and cultural nature to which sexual minorities are exposed in their daily lives, dealing with identity and even sexual behavior can be extremely sensitive to capture in a household survey.

As the Brazilian evangelical universe underwent significant changes in the last decades of the 20th century, the debate on sexual diversity gained prominence not only in society in general, but also within the evangelical context. This runs counter to the dominant interpretation of the Christian tradition, partly based on religious fundamentalism[9] but also aligned with multiple forms of belief, as well as an active response to the social struggles embraced by some progressive religious movements (NATIVIDADE & DIAS, 2022; SOLEDADE, 2022).

There is currently no database gathering information on these churches. As mentioned in the first subsection of this topic, the Demographic Census does not yet capture these evangelical churches as a denominational category of their own. However, in a quick analysis, it was possible to identify at least five large inclusive evangelical denominations present in 19

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[9] It's important to point out that the religious field in recent years has also been marked by conservative and progressive polarization. Part of this clash is already present in national politics, such as the participation of the Evangelical Caucus in the Human Rights Commission since 2006. For a discussion of this issue, see Teixeira and Barbosa (2022).

Brazilian states, including Minas Gerais[10] . These denominations are relatively recent, with establishments dating from the late 1990s to the 2000s. They are mainly made up of believers who were excluded from evangelical churches, which in this research will be identified as traditional, i.e. prohibitive of sexual diversity and in which the experience of sexuality is restricted to the cis heterosexual model.

Inclusive churches have emerged, to a large extent, from internal divisions within traditional churches, but not only, highlighting this striking feature of the Brazilian evangelical scene[11] (NATIVIDADE, 2010). According to Jesus (2013), São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro were the first cities to receive this new church format, initially influenced by the historic denominations to adopt inclusive approaches (as in the case of the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches, which in some units became affirmative) and later giving rise to new denominations due to the need for theological freedom.

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[10] It is important to note that this search was not undertaken systematically, so there were no methodological criteria since there is no database for this information. This initial survey was carried out through contacts with people who currently attend inclusive churches in order to get to know at least some of the major denominations in the country.

[11] The Cidade Refúgio Church, for example, is led by a couple of lesbian women. In terms of the sex assigned at birth, having women in the leadership of a community present in more than 10 Brazilian states could suggest a major differentiation from the traditional evangelical hierarchical structure, since evangelical women generally exercise limited leadership roles.

Figure 2 - Infographic - Descriptive Statistics of Sexual Minority Populations - Brazil - PNS 2019.

Source: Own elaboration using data from the PNS 2019, 2025.

III.   Entering the research field: preliminary notes

It was Sunday in Belo Horizonte, November 17, 2024. I began to organize myself for the first field visit. Everything I knew about Church B up until then had been through social media, especially *Instagram*. I didn't know anyone there yet, nor had I been to the area where the church's address is located. However, knowing that on this day of the week the intervals between buses are long, I decided that the best alternative would be transportation by app, as I would be getting to know the place and the area for the first time. On the other hand, because of the length of the buses, I would arrive very late, after the service had started, or even very early, which would put me in a position of being conspicuous because I was still unknown. At that moment, I tried to control as much as possible these factors involving curiosity about the unknown.

I arrived at Church B at around 5:47 p.m. and the service hadn't started yet; I see some people at the reception desk who greet me. As I enter the physical space, I see other people cleaning the pulpit. I sit in the last row of white plastic chairs. The space is small. I can't guarantee a correct count of the number of chairs in the room, but at that moment of balancing the various emotions of being the first field day of the thesis, as well as getting to know and visit that church and people for the first time, I had to deal with various feelings; but in a quick count, I found about 50 seats. People were coming into the space. A girl at reception took my name and another girl greeted me with a "*welcome*" as soon as I was seated. It was only during the service that I realized that this girl was one of the pastors.

The service then began with a prayer, followed by a time of praise. The liturgy was not dissimilar to that of other neo-Pentecostal denominations. The music was loud; some of the songs were unfamiliar, and only later did I find out from one of the singers that some of the songs belonged to Church B's own repertoire (developed at the São Paulo headquarters as well as another song composed locally). It struck me that one of these unknown songs talked about the certainty of a future, and in this sense I realized that this language was no different from what is usual for evangelicals as a whole. As discussed in the previous section, culture in the *gospel* field has also developed by mixing traces of *pop* music and lyrics that convey the theological thinking of tradition, which Cunha (2004) called the maintenance of conservative traits, even in a modern guise.

The liturgy followed the usual pattern: welcome with prayer, praise, offerings, preaching and closing. Before the offering, I was introduced as a visitor; everyone looked at me. At that moment I was embarrassed. They sang, clapped and some people came to hug me. As we move on to the offering time, a minister gets up on the pulpit and, in a humorous way, makes a joke suggesting or even contradicting a non-correspondence with a standard heterosexual performer. He repositions the minister's table and says "*look at the cat's touch*". One more code of conduct in my mind was broken and, at this moment, it meant a lot to me, because it happened in this prominent place: the pulpit, which in the evangelical imagination is understood as the altar - sacred. He spoke about tithes and offerings, but also about a commitment to life with God that he wanted to transcend from the financial to other facets of daily life.

In this service entitled Missions, the sermon was given by a woman introduced as a worker. She spoke about telling the truth; about the gospel of Christ not being simplified. That salvation was no respecter of persons, but that there were still exceptions. The meaning she gave was that it was necessary to believe and practice and not just say that you know Christ. A dialog that is very close to what Weber (2011) called the ascetic life; however, the question I ask myself at that moment is: if there is a practice, then what is the model that should be followed? During the sermon, he mentioned and pointed to his wife, who was in the church. When talking about his relationship with his mother, he pointed out that she wasn't evangelical and their conversations about the need for conversion. At one point, she described the people who were attending the service as "*being a people who were not a people*". Based on this biblical passage, the idea was that where they came from, the so-called traditional churches, they were not considered to belong because of their deviant sexuality, but that place was intended as a way of re-establishing this condition of belonging.

At 8pm, the service ended and the two pastors came to introduce themselves and talk to me, inviting me to attend the anniversary event of the B Church unit in BH. I told them that I wouldn't be in the city on that date due to an academic conference. They asked how I had found out about Church B. At this point, I introduced myself as a researcher from UFMG and that I had initially met the B Church based in São Paulo, i.e. the initial experience described at the beginning of this section. I briefly told them that I had taken a course there with the maestro (I mention the name of one of the teachers because I believe he is well known to them) and that I am interested in researching religion, and that I would contact them later to talk about it. These few references to this initial experience sounded at the time like someone who was not

at all unfamiliar with the environment, which seemed to me, but especially to them, to be a possible safe relationship. They responded positively when they recognized the conductor mentioned. We said goodbye and, while I was asking for my transportation by app at the door of the church, a woman who was at the service came up to talk to me. When I asked where I was from, I said I was from Bahia and she said she was almost from Bahia too, because she was from the north of Minas Gerais. We laughed together and talked about the reality of being from a small country town living in a large capital city. The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the vehicle; we hugged and I left.

This work is not intended to be an ethnography. My academic career began in a field much more inclined towards quantitative methods, those that aim to describe causal relationships between different variables. However, it was reading ethnographies that somehow sparked my interest in qualitative research, which in recent years has become more common in the field of Demography. In this field, where I am developing this thesis research, the rigor of data production is concerned first and foremost with the conditions in which they were produced and, in this sense, it is clear to anyone who considers that the person interviewed and the interviewer are intertwined in a dialectical relationship.

On Sunday, November 24th, I headed to the service at Church A. Sunday is usually a special day among traditional evangelicals, because it's the service where the largest number of people and visitors are expected, and I'm beginning to realize that in inclusive churches the feeling is the same. Something that had already struck me on other visits was the act of being welcomed. Not in the form of being greeted, but in being used in the same way as other visitors. This only caught my attention because, for me, I'm in that faith community as a researcher; someone from outside that environment, willing to just observe what goes on in the services.

This feeling can only be explained by the reference to greetings among traditional evangelicals. "Peace of the Lord", "peace", "peace of God", "peace be with you" are some forms of greeting among the faithful who belong to the different traditional evangelical churches, and they even function as a differentiation mechanism denominational. However, to a large extent some preserve this greeting ritual among themselves, that is, among evangelicals in their community. In some places the greeting is exclusive to those who belong to the group, thus functioning as a marker of differentiation. Carried away by this experience, the impact of arriving at these churches and being greeted with "*the peace of the Lord, dear*" causes me mental confusion: now, if I recognize myself as a researcher and understand that my objective there is to collect

data for my research, should I respond as one of the members of the group or should I in fact deny the greeting, demarcating boundaries as if from someone who is there, but doesn't see themselves as belonging?

For the benefit of the doubt, I remember Natividade (2008) and his dilemma in relation to attending services in an inclusive community in Rio de Janeiro. The author expresses his doubts as to whether he should keep his eyes open and observe what happens in the services when all the people close their eyes at the moment of devotion, or follow the group mimicking what the others do so as not to stand out from the rest? Perhaps a difficult task to answer, but what matters most in this sense is clarifying the conditions of the collection: what I did and what I didn't do. On this path, which makes sense by contextualizing not only the field, but who I am and how I identify myself, I can be read as a researcher on this subject, walking through these communities of faith.

For this service, contact began on Friday, November 22, 2024, when a woman sent me a message via *whatsapp* thanking me for my first visit on the evening of last Wednesday, November 20, the first national holiday of Black Consciousness in Brazil[12] . I only replied on Saturday, November 23, and asked her how I could talk to the pastor about my research objective at UFMG. She indicated that she would speak to the pastor beforehand. She replied via audio hours later and, on Sunday morning, sent me the folder announcing the evening service. I got back to her apologizing for the delay in replying and confirmed that I would be there.

I got ready for the service and decided to go by motorcycle, since public transport on Sundays operates with very long intervals, as already reported. From my first experiences of visits, I realize that this means of transportation will be standard, since most of them will take place on Sundays. Another issue that crosses my mind is the location of the churches, as they are in areas with no pedestrian traffic on this day and time of the week, but also because I have already been warned by churchgoers to be careful on the local streets. So I decide to go by app-based transport and realize that a motorcycle is the most cost-effective.

Still at home, while I was getting ready, I thought about how I should dress and behave so that I wouldn't be a stranger in the area, with the intention of attracting as little attention as possible.

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[12] Until then, the celebration of Black Consciousness as a holiday was only considered a municipal holiday in some Brazilian municipalities.

People greet me with the *peace of the Lord* and that makes me feel welcome, just as offering a Bible to accompany the reading makes me understand that, in some way, the people there see my existence in the place. At that moment, I made a decision: I remembered that I had a bible stored on the desk in my library. As I picked up the Bible, I was prompted by another memory of a friend saying that only a person who has lived in the same environment would be able to respect the research subjects as they should be respected in their subjectivities. I understood that I hadn't experienced exactly the same context, since I had been part of traditional evangelical churches for many years, but that speech and what I was already beginning to experience made me believe that the welcome I felt was also related to the research subjects' reading of me: this is one of us!

In describing how transvestites fit into Brazilian society through an ethnography in the historic center of Salvador, Swedish anthropologist Don Kulick offers an ethnography in which their sexual orientation, according to him, makes it easier for them to remain among the group, providing an accurate look not only at their field of work on the city streets, but also at the household relationships of this stigmatized population, thus highlighting the forms of family organization[13] . It's no coincidence that not only the people who interact in the field are the object of the researcher's analysis, but that the researcher has possibly been the object of analysis of these subjects.

Being one of us may not be said directly, but it seems to be in the subtleties of the details. In the greetings, the hugs, the glances, the way in which a population is welcomed, sexual minorities as a social group, who have historically experienced exclusion due to the label of difference. Present in the life course, to a large extent the process of exclusion can happen initially in the family context and that is why, as Moura (2019) concludes, one of the central purposes of Inclusive Churches is to re-establish family ties broken by the process of understanding sexual identities. In this way, placing myself as an *insider* in the research, being present even in the writing as a narrator, but also a character, will follow the criterion of dialoguing with past memories that somehow contribute to understanding experiences in the evangelical context. How past experiences in traditional churches can also be highlighted in some way to interpret the collection of field data, to enhance the analysis, but also how they contribute to me feeling "welcome" in this field.

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[13] For more information, see: KULICK, Don. Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

I then ride my motorcycle to church in a somewhat uncomfortable journey: due to the high speed of the motorcyclist, I fear that we will have an accident. When I arrived safely at the church, I realized that the high speed meant that the journey took only a few minutes. It was 6.50 p.m. and I was already at the venue; I put my hair up in an attempt to attract less attention and entered Church A, being lengthened by a few people at the door. I notice more chairs arranged around the venue, people are coming closer and I manage to sit in the last row, the way I wanted to, to get an overview of the space and the actions that would take place that evening.

The person who had sent me the invitation message came up to me a minute later and told me that it was all right to talk to the pastor at the end of the service. Another woman came to hug me and remembered my name, as it was my second visit; at this point, I felt she was trying to reinforce that I was from home, that is, belonging to that community of faith, by demonstrating the attention given to me since my first appearance there a few days earlier. The service began at 7pm with prayer and a woman invited everyone to get down on their knees; however, anyone who couldn't pray should stand. I knelt down and continued to follow the proceedings. A few minutes later, we stood up and the praise period began. Four songs were sung; one of them I didn't know and it seemed to me to be a composition of Church A itself, but I can't say for sure. This liturgical period ended at around 19:45.

I counted just over 40 people there. What caught my attention was the age range, which apparently was 30 and over, with a certain quantitative balance of people performing as men and women. However, a closer look made me realize that there were also non-binary people, with visual performances that transcended the woman/man binary. The sermon began and again I realized that the liturgy diverged from the conventional as well as from Church B, since the moment of offering came after the sermon and the call to accept Jesus or reconciliation. The pastor's sermon was on John 9, telling the story of the blind man healed by the Pool of Bethesda. The sermon shook me precisely because I saw there an interpretation never before seen in other evangelical churches. She said that Jesus' attitude of making mud out of saliva, putting it in the blind man's eye and asking him to wash made sense, because it was common for him to be spat on in that context. People with disabilities were treated as unworthy or cursed because of their sins or those of their parents (hereditary curse). Therefore, receiving the mud of Jesus' saliva meant, according to her, that he would be honored with healing in the place where he had been

dishonored. According to her, "*can you imagine someone being spat on all day; in the place of dishonor, honor happens*" (FIELD NOTEBOOK, OP03, 24/11/2024).

Honor and dishonor is a play on words in the understanding of these faith communities. These two words in discourse can also sound like exclusion and inclusion. This is what Soledade (2022) called the re-signification of faith spaces: if traditional churches are based on a model of sexuality in which any manifestation of diversity is excluded, inclusive churches emerge in this field by rebuilding a space of sociality, faith and support in a way that includes those who feel excluded. In the sermon, he went on to say that humiliated people can even behave as if they weren't, since they have become accustomed to the *smell of saliva* due to repeated exposure, but he emphasized that, based on the book of Genesis, the clay used to shape man was also used to give sight to the blind man in this story. Seconds before she made this quote, loud *cheers* and *hallelujahs* were heard in the audience, on the one hand showing that people understood the reference that would be used simply when they heard from the pastor that they would be reading a passage from Genesis, but also a characteristic that refers to a particular denominational grouping: Pentecostal churches.

After the sermon, the song *Cura-me* by *gospel* singer Fernanda Brum was sung. The lyrics are intense, proposing the healing of memories. A denser musical tone wove through each bar of the song, which was used at that moment as a way of fixing and closing the sermon. The announcements began, I went to the restroom and the moment of offerings took place. When I came back from the restroom, they were talking about Black Awareness Day (last Wednesday) and, at that moment, black people from the church went to the front of the stage (pulpit), occupying both the central area and the edges in a human wall format, while a woman spoke for the group. One of the workers called me to join the group in the action. I said no from my seat, but she wasn't satisfied and, with a smile on her face, came to get me, saying that the group was also for me. I didn't hesitate to go, even though I was surprised by her attitude. That attitude, even though it made me feel embarrassed to be in front of other people, especially as it was my second visit to that community, made me feel at least two recognitions: as a black person, since I wondered how possibly black people with red skin saw me (colorism) in the place, but it was also another manifestation of welcome and belonging .[14]

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[14] A light-skinned black person like me can experience situations of non-recognition or doubt, because even if other phenotypical traits are latent, such as hair, skin tone tends to be a social marker in this sense.

The girl with the microphone at the time was talking about colorful clothes, turbans and braids. She said that a black woman with a turban who is part of the group had already suffered racism in that church. The speech, the exposure of the group and even the case of racism also caught my attention because it is not a common topic dealt with in traditional evangelical churches. After the speech, the song *Vai na Fé* by the singer Negra Li was played and all the people in front danced, including me. The service ended at around 9pm.

After the service had finished, the woman who had invited me a few days earlier took me to the pastor. After she had attended to a few people, she met me right there at the door of Church A and, even though we were both standing, I told her about my research objectives. She was very supportive, happy with the topic, said she was a theologian and added in her speech that she thought education was important as a way for people to learn about the inclusive church. She said that, in general, they have been present in Brazil for around 20 years as an institution and, in Belo Horizonte, for around 14 years. He added that I'll spend months, maybe a year, doing my research, but living with the brothers and sisters of that church, I'll end up spending my whole life there. They both laugh. She gives me permission to stay for the research and makes her private phone available.

Based on these initial reports, in which I describe two of the five visits I've already made, three points stand out that may prove opportune for understanding the conditions of entry into this field of research. These possibilities are not only open to me, but also because the way I am read may make a lot of sense to the audience of this research, and in this sense three points stand out:

1. Visual: black man, light skin, curly and big hair;
2. Gender performance: the possibility of being read as a *gay* man through performance attitudes (tone of voice, body articulation);
3. Name: my name denotes that I or at least my family structure belongs or belonged to an evangelical or Protestant church . [15]

In these three points, the possibility that is revealed to the research subjects is that I am an eligible candidate to join that community. After all, with all these characteristics, I could be someone excluded who needs to be included. As with all research, data can suffer from various

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[15] It should be noted that according to some authors, being an evangelical is something that is passed down through the generations, i.e. from parents to children.

limitations and biases. It would be no different here; however, the subjective tone of my presence, much more than being annulled in writing as a way of hiding something that is inherent in social interaction, offers the possibility of the person reading minimally knowing that they see, read and interpret from a certain perspective that was chosen by me through the methodological criteria described in the previous topic.

After the conversation between the pastor and me, I began to call the vehicle by app, which took a few minutes. While I was waiting, a man who explained some of the ads greeted me and said that he had seen me somewhere connected to church activity. I thought about it for a moment and, a few minutes later, said that I had once been connected to the evangelical context in the state of Bahia. I quickly remembered and told him that I had taken part in a black collective belonging to another inclusive church in Belo Horizonte, giving a talk on race and color in the Demographic Census and that the event had been publicized on social networks. He said he thought he might have seen me there. He took advantage of the opportunity to invite me to an upcoming meeting the following Saturday, a themed service organized by some of the men in the community. I confirmed my interest. I leave the church at 9:28.

As I write this qualification project, it becomes clear how much the news media has intensified the dissemination of news related to the preliminary data on religious affiliation presented by the IBGE. Several publications discuss the growth of evangelical churches, while others highlight the increase in the number of people who declare themselves to have no religion. In this context, Rio Grande do Sul stands out as a possible case study: it is the state with the highest percentage of people affiliated to religions of African and Afro-Brazilian origin, while at the same time it is home to municipalities with high proportions of both evangelicals and Catholics.

At the same time, I see the growing visibility of videos from inclusive evangelical churches, often shared and debated by digital influencers. These videos often become the target of controversy and questioning: are these really "evangelical churches"? The provocation usually arises from media clippings that emphasize non-normative gender performances, which contributes to feeding discourses that delegitimize these religious spaces. The public judgment on what characterizes a "true" evangelical church reveals not only theological disputes, but also socio-cultural tensions around sexuality, morality and religious authority.

An important analytical key to understanding the emergence of theological re-readings that seek to welcome sexual diversity can be found in what Montero (2012, p. 176) calls "strategies for producing visibility" in the religious field. If, on the one hand, the demands for recognition of sexual diversity broaden the possible identities in the religious space, on the other, these inclusive churches seem to articulate new forms of evangelical belonging, negotiating both ruptures and discursive continuities with the traditional religious field.

The next steps in the research, after validating the work plan and the qualitative scripts, will include collecting data from leaders and believers in inclusive churches. This empirical survey will not only be able to delve deeper into the local dynamics of religious affiliation and identity but also give visibility to movements that remain on the margins of more conventional statistics. By combining census data, religious territoriality and trajectories of religious and sexual mobility, this research aims to contribute to the demographic debate on recent transformations in the Brazilian religious field, reflecting on how cultural, generational and political changes have been redrawing the contours of religious affiliation and belonging in the country.

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