



Concordia Special School between Lutheran religion and religiosity (1966-1996)¹

A Escola Especial Concórdia entre a religião e a religiosidade luterana (1966-1996)

Escuela Especial Concórdia entre la religión y la religiosidad luterana (1966-1996)

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Abstract

This paper examines the aspects of Lutheranism, from its historical formation to the development of its religious characteristics. In Rio Grande do Sul, Lutheran members were responsible for the first movement of religious confession focused on Special Education with the founding of the Concórdia Special School. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze this educational institution within the context of Lutheran religion and religiosity. The theoretical framework is based on the studies of Weiduschadt (2007) about Lutheranism, and Manoel (2007) and Siqueira (2013) about religion and religiosity. Raymann (2001) and Kuster (2022) are considered for their contributions to the history of the school. The analysis reveals that the educational initiatives of the Concórdia Special School played a pivotal role in shaping a distinct Lutheran Deaf Culture, encompassing both community and religious aspects.

Keywords: Institution History; Special Education Institutions; School-Church Relationship; Deafness.

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Resumo

O presente artigo tematiza alguns aspectos do luteranismo, desde sua constituição histórica até a forma como se configuraram as particularidades dessa religião. No Rio Grande do Sul, membros luteranos foram responsáveis pelo primeiro movimento de confissão religiosa voltado à Educação Especial, por meio da fundação da Escola Especial Concórdia. Diante disso, este artigo objetiva problematizar essa instituição educativa no contexto da religião e religiosidade luterana. Para tanto, utiliza-se como aporte teórico os estudos de Weiduschadt (2007), sobre o luteranismo, e de Manoel (2007) e Siqueira (2013), sobre os conceitos de religião e religiosidade. No que se refere à história dessa escola, foram considerados os trabalhos de Raymann (2001) e Kuster (2022). A análise evidenciou que a atuação educacional da Escola Especial Concórdia foi crucial para a constituição de uma cultura surda específica, comunitária e religiosa luterana.

Palavras-chave: História das Instituições Educativas; História da Educação Especial; Relação Escola-Igreja; Surdez.

Resumen

El presente artículo aborda algunos aspectos del luteranismo, desde su constitución histórica hasta la forma en que se configuraron las particularidades de esta religión. En el estado de Río Grande del Sur, los miembros luteranos fueron responsables del primer movimiento de confesión religiosa dirigido a la Educación Especial, mediante la fundación de la Escuela Especial Concórdia. En este sentido, el objetivo de este artículo es problematizar esta institución educativa en el contexto de la religión y religiosidad luterana. Para ello, se utiliza como apoyo teórico los estudios de Weiduschadt (2007) sobre el luteranismo y de Manoel (2007) y Siqueira (2013) sobre los conceptos de religión y religiosidad. En lo que respecta a la historia de esta escuela, se consideraron los trabajos de Raymann (2001) y Kuster (2022). El análisis evidenció que la actuación educativa de la Escuela Especial Concórdia fue crucial para la constitución de una cultura sorda específica, comunitaria y religiosa luterana.

Palabras clave: Historia de las Instituciones Educativas; Historia de la Educación Especial; Relación Escuela-Iglesia; Sordera.

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Introduction

The movement that gave rise to the Lutheran Church took place in 16th-century Germany, precisely in 1517, and featured Martin Luther (1483-1546) as its central figure. Luther, still a Catholic monk, was dissatisfied with prevailing doctrine, which preached that divine forgiveness could be obtained through the purchase of indulgences². This disagreement led him to affix 95 theses to the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, in which, in addition to criticizing Church doctrine, he proposed some reforms. Based on his studies of the Holy Scriptures, Luther argued that forgiveness could not be purchased or obtained through individual merit or effort, but only through faith and grace.

After this action, by refusing to comply with the Catholic Church's demand for retraction, Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X. Even unintentionally, Luther's actions resulted in the separation of part of the German population from the Roman Church. Luther's proposed renewal of the Church was based on the preaching of the Gospel, the rejection of the veneration of saints, and the questioning of mandatory celibacy. The movement led by Luther crossed the borders of Germany, spreading to other European countries, and arriving in Brazil with German immigration in 1824.

Since then, Lutheranism has acquired several distinctive features in Brazil, such as its connection to educational initiatives. With this in mind, this article focuses on the movement led by members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil when they founded the first Lutheran school for the deaf, fostering a dynamic within the Church that, while maintaining its own interests, aimed at educating these individuals.

The objective of this article is to problematize how an institution whose educational operations focused on deaf individuals had the context of religion and Lutheran religiosity inscribed in its relations. The sources used in the research that gave rise to this article were, for the most part, documents produced by the institution, selected based on the text's central objective—those that demonstrated aspects related to religion and Lutheran religiosity, as outlined above. In working with this data, in addition to the documentary analysis that constitutes the historian's craft, the Conceição Nogueira's (2001) studies also assisted with the analysis of discourse and its influence on social action. Some of the limitations encountered in this study were associated with the limited number of documents belonging to the collection of the institution highlighted in the article. In addition to changes in management, this material was moved from its original location to another location, which may indicate significant changes in its composition.

The article is structured in six parts, in addition to this introduction. The first presents some aspects of the founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil; the second discusses the concepts of religion and religiosity based on relevant studies in the field; the third presents, from a historical perspective, some of the developments in the education of deaf individuals; the fourth addresses the founding of the Concordia Special School as the first religious educational institution for the deaf in Rio Grande do Sul; the fifth discusses the Christian perspectives inherent in Lutheranism and how they were transmitted to deaf individuals by the school; and the sixth presents the final considerations, concluding the proposed discussion.

² In the doctrine of the Catholic Church, an indulgence refers to the total or partial remission of the punishment due to God's justice for sins have already been forgiven. In other words, it is reparation for the harm caused as a consequence of a sin already absolved. Although the guilt of sin is removed, the punishment demanded by divine justice still remains, which must be fulfilled, either during life or after death. In this context, an indulgence offers the sinner the means to pay off this debt during life on earth, repairing the harm caused by sin (Kent, 1910).

1. From the Missouri Synod to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil: Historical Constitution

Founded in the United States by German immigrants from Saxony, the Missouri Synod, a Lutheran religious institution that predates the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil in the Brazilian territory, emerged from doctrinal, confessional, and liturgical differences stemming from the religious reforms in Germany (Weiduschadt, 2007). At the time, some members were dissatisfied with the prevailing doctrinal approach and the movement known as Unionism, which sought to bring church and state closer together. The Synod's founders argued that this movement created confusion by mixing politics and religion. As Weiduschadt (2007) explains,

The Synod justified the consolidation of a pure organization focused on the true principles of the Reformer. One of the obstacles to the church's failure to fulfill its role was its involvement with the state and political issues. This intermingling of the state and church spheres, according to the Synod, hindered the spread of Lutheran orthodoxy. It emphasized that the state should prepare good citizens and the church should care for the gospel, and that those who were good citizens would have a home in heaven (Weiduschadt, 2007, p. 14).

From the beginning, the movement to create the Synod was exclusively linked to religious issues, disregarding other interventions, such as political and social ones. Members were concerned that the institution should dedicate itself solely to the paths of religion, assuming that this was, first and foremost, their main commitment and responsibility. However, it is known that a complete disengagement would not be possible, because, even with the Synod's defense of remaining neutral regarding "worldly matters," religious institutions are directly and indirectly inserted into the political and social spheres (Weiduschadt, 2007).

The institution arrived in the United States with these ideals already established, but encountered difficulties in implementation, as the population did not trust such a fledgling entity. This beginning, riddled with challenges, generated some conflicts among Lutherans.

The struggles naturally arose because, as in Germany, in the United States there were divergent religious positions. Apparently, the Synod remained radical in preserving its beliefs. It considered itself the holder of the truth, hindering rapprochement with other religious denominations (Weiduschadt, 2007, p. 68).

Given this, the Synod's position regarding its mission as a religious institution is clear. Even establishing itself in a new territory and facing resistance from a population originating from other religious traditions, it remained firm in its truth, embracing principles that were also reflected in the educational demands the institution advocates:

the Synod's practical work is systematically organized through control and hierarchical organization within communities, as well as frequent personal interaction with its members. That is, the faithful, along with pastors, mentees, and even religious school teachers, are

involved in the work of the church. [...] since the Synod's establishment, the founding of seminaries and schools, conferences, and visitations have followed a model devised in the United States and disseminated in missionary locations. In addition to these methods, the Synod has invested in the younger generations and children, taking responsibility for their religious and doctrinal education (Weiduschadt, 2007, p. 69).

The education of children and youth was, therefore, one of the ways in which the Synod sought to expand its doctrine in both the United States and Brazil. In Brazil, the Missouri Synod also consolidated its religious foundations through education, as, in their view, Lutheranism represented:

one of the only religions that enabled knowledge of the true Lutheran faith. Furthermore, they believed that these values could only be assimilated into Brazilian communities if they were disseminated through doctrinal knowledge. The concern was not with the number of believers, but rather with their quality for the expansion of their projects (Weiduschadt, 2007, p. 70).

There was, therefore, an intertwining of religiosity and schooling. According to Weiduschadt (2007), religion and school:

have specific aspects in their formation within the Missouri Synod, but appear to be integrated into a whole and likely maintain a relation within the Synod's theological-pedagogical project. It is also interesting to note that the forces measured in this field will be constantly differentiating and, at the same time, will become complementary (Weiduschadt, 2007, p. 72).

In this sense, Weiduschadt (2007) argues that the Missouri Synod maintained its connection with faith, viewing education as a priority for the expansion of its beliefs. It was, therefore, a true project. These concepts continued to influence the Missouri Synod when it began to call itself the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil. Its members were immersed in a specific school culture, which encompassed both regular and special education.

In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Lutheranism was one of the main religious, educational, and social guiding principles for German immigrant families arriving in Brazil (Dreher, 2014; Kreutz; Luchese, 2012; Rambo, 2024; Weiduschadt, 2007). This influence helped establish roots that sustain the foundations of the religion to this day and shaped the religiosity that permeated these communities. Lutheran educational institutions, generally linked to churches, had their pedagogical processes deeply influenced by religion, as Weiduschadt and Castro (2015) point out:

So-called confessional schools, that is, those organized by communities linked to a religious institution, were present among German immigrant communities, especially in Rio Grande do Sul. In the southern region of the state, immigrant communities, mostly

Pomeranians, maintained forms of school community organization linked to religion (Weiduschadt; Castro, 2015, p. 175).

Religion and religiosity, although closely related, have distinct meanings. Before exploring how these concepts apply specifically to Lutherans, it is important to take a moment to understand them.

2. Religion and Religiosity: Concept and Aspects

Durkheim (1989) states that the functioning of religious institutions and the structure of society interact with each other. Religious beliefs and practices also act as cultural mechanisms, validated as forms of regulation of human relations, a process that generates and provides stability to society. In line with this, Manoel (2007) asserts that:

Religion and religiosity are human productions situated in the sphere of culture, or the superstructure, if you will; they are therefore historical, but are sometimes interpreted as ahistorical and, moreover, they themselves propose to establish a concept and a philosophy of history (Manoel, 2007, p. 105).

Authors considered classics in different fields of knowledge, such as Freud (1974), Marx and Engels (1979), and Weber (1992), emphasized in their works that religion constitutes a form of social production, functioning as an institution, congregation, and illusory and socializing norm (Siqueira, 2013). In this regard, Deis Siqueira (2013) adds that:

Many definitions of religion have been developed, just as various concepts and categories have been created to account for the complexity and changes that have been occurring in the field. Among them, for example, that of denomination [...]. In other words, religious groups do not consider themselves to be the Church, but rather as parts of its construction (Siqueira, 2013, p. 123).

For Manoel (2007, p. 107), religion is a "[...] set of institutionalized doctrines and practices, whose object and objective is to bridge the connection between the sacred and the profane, the path of rapprochement between creature and creator, Man and God." Masferrer Kan (2004), in his attempt to define a concept of religion, highlights the clerical dimension, stating that religion is configured as a ritual, symbolic, and mythical system, developed by specialists, such as theologians. In line with this, Mallimaci (1997) emphasizes that religious structures, as well as the people who believe in them, reinforce the institutional aspect and the spirituality produced from institutionalized religion. Hervieu-Léger (2005), in turn, emphasizes that belief tends to be expressed in an individualized and subjective manner, regardless of the authority exercised by religious institutions. In this sense, Siqueira (2013, p. 124) observes that "[...] the main ecclesiastical doctrines and institutions continue to be a source of symbols and beliefs, but the aspect that stands out is the dimension of subjectivity in the construction of religion and the growing individualization of religiosity." Regarding the turning inward through religion, the author further states:

Although deities and masters are revered, and references to God are constant, the idea that the divine is found within the individual, an intrinsic part of them, is strengthened. It should be developed and cultivated. There is a need for inner transformation of the individual (self-knowledge, self-improvement, spiritual development). Through techniques, exercises, and meditations, the individual could become more powerful, detaching themselves from the social and emotional dimensions of everyday life and the ego and approaching the Inner Self, the Higher Self, the Greater Self, the Christ Self—that is, the true, inner dimension of each person (Siqueira, 2013, p. 125).

For Siqueira (2013), the divine is not only located externally, but also within each individual. This perspective points to the spiritual potential inherent in each person, indicating that the personal journey leads to a heightened state of consciousness and fulfillment. This movement, according to the author, originates:

from a place that claims to be almost opposite to institutionalized, sacramental, doctrinal, ecclesiastical religion, with its demands for regular participation and formation of religious *habitus*, whose model, generally remembered, is the Catholic Church. Hence the movement that instituted the use of the concept of religiosity instead of religion, once again indicating the rich dialectic that exists between changes in reality and advances in theoretical bodies (Siqueira, 2013, p. 126).

This is one of the particularities linked primarily to individuals who, regardless of the nomenclature of their religion, construct a way of being and acting that permeates their experiences and relations with the world. Even associated with the divine aspect, these practices remain, in a certain sense, particular and directly associated with the concept of religiosity. Marlon Xavier (2006) points out in his studies that the concept of religiosity has meant a connection with a more institutional meaning. Individuals define religiosity based on their engagement in rites, celebrations, and collective and cultural practices (Xavier, 2006). In this sense, what characterizes religiosity are the particular attitudes of a consciousness that has been transformed by experience (Jung, 1990). In the works of Fornazari and Ferreira (2010), religiosity is seen as contributing to the conviction of the existence of a higher dimension that is responsible for what may or may not happen in life, empowering individuals to deal with the events that surround them with greater calm and confidence. For Oliveira and Junges (2012), the experience of religiosity is part of the life of a human being who explores the power of their spiritual dimension.

Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, whose actions fueled the first Lutheran Special Education movement in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, were initially driven by this intrinsic religiosity, subsequently promoting a more active participation in religion—that is, the Church itself.

3. A Brief Overview of Deaf Education

Throughout history, educational programs aimed at deaf individuals were theoretically intended to fully develop their capabilities. In practice, however, the opposite occurred, as these individuals were not considered fully capable, and this education was viewed more as a pedagogy of care, training, and an attempt to cure deafness (Kuster, 2022).

According to Rosana Glat (2005), Special Education, as a field of knowledge and practice, was established as a medical or clinical model. The author states that: "From this perspective, disability was understood as a chronic illness, and all services provided to this population, even when involving education, were considered therapeutic (Glat; Mascarenhas, 2005, p. 5).

Wealthy families are associated with the first attempts to implement education for the deaf. Teachers involved in these movements believed that in the absence of spoken language, the individual could read words. In this vein, these teachers initiated instruction focused on reading and writing, providing techniques that could develop other skills, such as lip-reading and the articulation of words themselves. The number of deaf people who did not receive care was significant, which did not prevent them from developing specific types of sign language, originating from their interactions in the spaces and groups in which they were inserted (Kuster, 2022). By bringing sign language into the discussion, two opposing educational proposals emerged that guided the paths of deaf education: oralism and gesturalism (Lacerda, 1998).

The proponents of oralism, called oralists, believed in the rehabilitation of individuals, requiring them to overcome deafness through speech and adopt behaviors that did not indicate deafness. Thus, oralization was imposed as a form of social acceptance, pushing deaf individuals away from educational opportunities, personal development, and true integration within society (Lacerda, 1998).

Proponents of gesturalism, called gesturalists, were more tolerant of the difficulties of deaf individuals. For them, the different forms of language these individuals possessed opened up possibilities for new forms of communication.

Pedagogical practices with deaf students and their advances were the focus of the First International Congress on the Instruction of the Deaf, held in Paris, France, in 1878. The event provided a space for debate on experiences and impressions of the work carried out with deaf individuals. Some achievements for the deaf community were secured. From this Congress onwards, such as the right to sign documents, for example, which removed these individuals from social marginalization but still kept them distant from the true possibility of social integration (Lacerda, 1998).

The Second Congress, held in Milan, Italy, in 1880, is largely responsible for the change in the path that deaf education had taken up to that point. This congress was organized by oralists with the primary objective of strengthening their propositions regarding deafness and deaf education. The major decision made directed that gestural methods be banned, which also meant the disappearance of deaf teachers from schools. After the Milan Congress, oralism became the primary reference worldwide, and its educational practices began to be developed and disseminated (Lacerda, 1998). What began to be expected of schools was that they normalize deaf children through oral skills so that these individuals could be integrated into classes with hearing children. Even with the prohibition of the use of gestures and Sign language, some schools and institutions for the deaf developed their own forms of communication, against the system.

4. The Concordia Special School: the first Lutheran institution for the deaf in Rio Grande do Sul

Reverend Dr. Martin Carlos Warth and his wife, Naomi Hoerlle Warth, played a central role in the actions that led to the founding of the Concordia Special School. In addition to their influence as active members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, they are notable for their involvement in the process of institutionalizing deaf education in Brazil, especially in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Kuster, 2022).

Among the couple's responsibilities in the Church were religious education classes for children. These meetings sought to establish age-appropriate dialogue with the children, as well as to strengthen the doctrine and knowledge related to the Lutheran religion. During one of these meetings, one of the students, Elizete Linden, during an activity proposed by Professor Naomi Warth revealed that she had deaf siblings:

I have two mute brothers. But I show them a picture of Jesus and show them that Jesus loves them and they love Jesus. One day they'll speak, I pray to God [...] Jesus, one day my little brothers and I will sing a hymn my teacher taught (Linden, 1964, n.p.).

Beyond Elizete's desire to see her siblings actively participating in church settings, her religiosity was evident even in early childhood, as she believed her siblings would eventually speak through divine intervention. By referring to them as "mute," she denounces the scars of the treatment of deafness at that time.

Teacher Naomi, touched by the story, tried to connect with the children but had communication difficulties due to their lack of spoken language. Feeling frustrated but driven by a desire to help, she traveled to the United States in 1964, accompanied by her husband and daughter. While Martin Warth devoted himself to his theology studies at the University of Missouri and the work he was developing toward his Master's in Systematic Theology, Naomi approached Professor Richard Silverman with the intention of learning at the Central Institute for the Deaf, affiliated with the University of Washington, and was welcomed by the institution. Both Naomi and her daughter, Beatriz, received training, despite the method being prohibited in Brazil³, and this experience provided the foundation for her to work more effectively with deaf children nationally (Raymann, 2001).

After the family returned to the country, contact with deaf children highlighted the need for appropriate spaces, adequate equipment, and more professionals from different fields, as well as greater attention to literacy. The work coordinated by Naomi, initially with three children, soon expanded throughout the Lutheran community, which began referring other children to participate in the meetings. Thus, in 1966, Naomi founded the Concordia Special School, although this was not her initial intention. In the early years, the school was housed in one of the bedrooms of Naomi's own home:

the basement of the Warths' residence became the audiology/speech therapy center, with an audiometer, a testing booth, a speech trainer, and a space for rhythm activities. Another basement was that of the Raymanns' home. Martim and Naomi's daughter, Beatriz, married a pastor, Rev. Acir Raymann, also a seminary professor, who lived on campus. In 1979, her basement became the first Parents and Children program, a home-based demonstration center based on Beatriz

³ The imposition of oralization on deaf people was based on the belief that their integration into society would only be possible through speech. The use of signs, therefore, was prohibited, and specialized institutions were forced to adopt oral methods for a long time.

Raymann's experience at the Central Institute for the Deaf (St. Louis) [...] (Raymann, 2001, n.p.).

The Concordia Lutheran Congregation, located in the city of Porto Alegre, capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, offered the Concordia Special School its stage at its parish school to do the works. The Concordia Seminary, an important Lutheran educational institution whose basement was often used for cultural gatherings of the Lutheran community, was considered the best available space at that time for the school's work. With the approval of the Seminary's then-president, Rev. Arnaldo João Schmidt, the Concordia Special School took over this space and occupied it for 18 years. A history produced by the institution indicates that the school's maintenance was carried out "by loaned or volunteer teachers; donations from friends, members, the League of Lutheran Ladies of Brazil, funds from governing bodies, and others" (History, n.p.)⁴.

The Lutheran community's efforts reached another milestone in 1970, when a group of supporters of the school, members of the Church, created the Educational Center for the Hearing Impaired. Although it was not a foundation when it was first established, it provided documentation and legal recognition for the Concordia Special School (Raymann, 2001). The creation of this entity strengthened contact among different Lutheran congregations.

The school's initiatives, over time, led to an expansion of social and bureaucratic contacts, culminating in an intensified search for available jobs. As the number of students grew, the faculty, staff, and equipment needed to follow suit. In this sense, a larger physical space became a pressing need.

As the sponsor, the Educational Center for the Hearing Impaired began planning the construction of the new facility between 1973 and 1974. In the city of Porto Alegre, next to the Lutheran congregation, a plot of land was purchased through installment payments. At a certain point, the Concordia Special School was no longer able to afford the installments due to a financial crisis, which, once again, galvanized the Lutheran community and resulted in the donation of the land that was being paid for by the Lutheran congregation.

According to the architectural design for the building, present in the school's collection and which highlighted the institution's needs, the new building was designed to serve three main segments that the school aims to achieve through its work with deaf students: clinical, educational-pedagogical, and religious. The first encompassed spaces built for medical, psychological, and other specific services for people with deafness. The second consisted of the school spaces themselves, such as classrooms, activity rooms, and recreation areas. And the third encompassed the chapel built within the school grounds, highlighting the concern with maintaining the connection between the Lutheran religion and the school. This last aspect was certainly one of the most important factors in shaping the meanings that this educational institution assumed for different stakeholders, such as students, education professionals, and individuals already connected to Lutheranism. In the 1980s, due to parents seeking school assistance whose children had specific needs other than deafness, a document produced by the school guided family members' recognition of deafness. It states:

Lack of response to sounds: does not react to loud sound instruments (drums, cymbals) or environmental and domestic sounds (door knocks, pots, horns, etc.);

⁴ The history is found among the material in the institution's collection, but without the author or production date.

Does not respond to name;
Significant speech delay;
Does not understand simple commands (Concordia Special School, n.p., 198-?)

These were the conditions that had to be met for the child to be referred to the Concordia Special School. The relations established within this institution were, directly and indirectly, guided by Lutheranism. Lutheran practice, both religious and religious, was ingrained in virtually every aspect of this special educational institution throughout its existence.

5. A Christian Perspective on Life: Lutheranism and the Education of Deaf Individuals

The Concordia Special School sought to develop students as human beings in four main dimensions: spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and social. In its early years, this institution considered deafness a disability, something also common in other parts of the world and in different educational settings. However, Concordia Special School sought to differentiate itself from other institutions geared toward the deaf by promoting student development based on their potential, in an attempt to distance them from the idea of disability. In theory, the school's philosophy was guided by a Christian perspective on life.

Christian human development was one of the institution's main concerns. *A priori*, this prerogative indicated that all education should be guided by faith. To achieve this goal, there was a specific focus on religious education classes, which sought to impart spiritual principles to students and deepen their faith experiences.

From the perspective of school administration, the absence of religious education was seen as a failure in the development of students, who should be taught to be grateful to Jesus in all their actions. Religious education classes were intended to provide students with knowledge of "[...] God, especially his creative work and his great love for humanity when he sent his son Jesus to save humanity" (Warth, 19--?). Birman (2012) suggests that religious practices have the role of shaping, adapting, and acting to provide the necessary religious expressions in a given context; in this case, that an educational institution. Since most of the students at the Concordia Special School were in a situation of social vulnerability and, because they were deaf, were part of a marginalized group, Lutheran religious practices played an important role in seeking to "[...] transform those considered enemies of society into people to save/civilize" (Birman, 2012, p. 219).

When mentioning students from more economically vulnerable backgrounds, it's also important to note that there was a significant number of students who had no connection to Lutheranism. The school, therefore, maintained a certain sensitivity toward these individuals, but even so, it integrated them into its tradition and sought to integrate them into the school's faith-based experience. As a private educational institution, it did not face challenges related to the secular nature of the State, and the institution was free to operate according to its confessional affiliation.

The main instrument of religious inclusion at the Concordia Special School was the chaplaincy, which represented the school's most direct connection to Lutheranism. Also known as spiritual care for students and their families, the chaplaincy was responsible for teaching classes in religious education programs, in addition to offering individual guidance and counseling to students. This was one way Lutheranism helped with the challenge of combining special education with a religious institution, even given the religious diversity of the students, which, as mentioned, did not pose a problem for the Concordia Special School.

The congregation located next to the school also conducted pastoral visits to families who requested them. As part of the integration process, the congregation offered weekly services and educational and social activities for the deaf youth. The chaplaincy, therefore, served as a bridge between the school and the Church, bringing members of the school community closer to religious life.

The teacher responsible for the chaplaincy, called the school chaplain, was responsible for leading devotions in both the morning and afternoon sessions, in addition to being available to guide students. This practice is common in Lutheran educational institutions, and at the Concórdia Special School, it served to strengthen relations with family members, encouraging greater participation in school and Lutheran Church activities.

The work with students was more direct. In addition to the presence of the Lutheran religion in the school's physical spaces, such as biblical phrases on the walls and moments of prayer before activities, there was a visual catechism, a set of visual resources used in the teaching-learning process that referenced the Bible and the teachings of Christ. Although the chaplaincy was the primary instrument of Lutheran practices at the school, the entire institution was structured to express Lutheran doctrine.

The school's activities, imbued with a religious sense and designed to express Lutheran religiosity, were responsible, on the one hand, for characterizing this educational institution and, on the other, for fostering a path through which students and families who did not belong to Lutheranism voluntarily accepted this religion. This movement occurred naturally, transforming the Concórdia Special School into a space of learning, faith, and communion.

This was an institution that maintained the exercise of faith tied to its work, with Lutheranism permeating its activities. The school's physical spaces featured references to the Bible, teachers integrated the precepts of faith into their teaching practices, and students were involved in various Church activities, mediated by the bridge established between the school and the Church. Thus, the expression of Lutheran doctrine was present in virtually all of the school's work.

In 1996, the period that marks the final timeframe of this article, the Concórdia Special School faced a severe financial crisis. Over the years, important foreign institutions, such as the Christ Blind Mission, based in Germany, and the Mill Neck Foundation, based in the United States, as well as Colégio Farroupilha, in Porto Alegre, and several Lutheran congregations, supported the school's work through financial donations. However, over time, these institutions began to face their own difficulties, resulting in a progressive decline in donations. The solution found by the then-board, anchored in its connection with the Lutheran community, was to integrate the Concórdia Special School into the system of private educational institutions of the Lutheran University of Brazil (Kuster, 2022).

This change was significant for the school, which had to adapt to the characteristics of the other institutions in the system. This relation continued until 2020, when the institution definitively discontinued its activities, citing a lack of resources.

Final Considerations

This article aims to present the Concórdia Special School, an institution founded by members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, which has become a benchmark in education for the deaf. To this end, it was necessary to address the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, enabling an understanding of some of the nuances of its

emergence in Germany and its expansion, reaching other territories and countries, until it reached Brazilian soil. From that moment on, the particularities of its activities, involving religion and expressions of its religiosity, were incorporated into the institution's educational operations.

When considering the appropriation of Lutheranism in this educational space, unfolding some aspects of the concepts of religion and religiosity were important for the writing. Likewise, it was significant to revisit some of the approaches adopted in the history of deaf education throughout history.

In light of the above, this article, by seeking to problematize this educational institution within the context of religion and Lutheran religiosity, notes that the Concórdia Special School, rooted in Lutheranism, underwent a process of expansion, resulting in a notable increase in the number of students from different regions of Brazil was due to the education offered and the support of Lutheran congregations and members, who encouraged access to the school for the children of other members and their acquaintances. The school established itself as an institution that enabled the education of many deaf students, providing them with continued studies and paving the way for higher education and graduate studies. Religiosity and the Lutheran religion formed the foundation that kept families, students, and staff connected to the school. In this way, the Lutheran religion and its practices transcended doctrinal, confessional, and religious issues, promoting a space for knowledge and education.

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