

# Pages from the professorship: A study on the teaching profession and education in the catholic periodicals (1930 — Brazil/Portugal)

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## ABSTRACT:

This text aims to carry out a reflection on teacher training strategies channelled through the Catholic press, which was considered an important tool for moulding souls. A comparative analysis will look at the weekly sections published in Catholic newspapers that circulated in Brazil and Portugal, in the 1930s, and which are aimed at teachers.

## KEYWORDS:

Catholic press, Teacher training, Catholicism and education, History of Brazil-Portugal compared education.

## CATHOLIC PRESS AND THE EDUCATIONAL SCENE

The Catholic press has proven an important source and object of research for the history of education. The purposeful doctrinal lines it takes, in seeking to mould consciences in accordance with the Catholic project, translates into an expressive educational milestone, considering here the notion of education in a broader perspective.

In the 1930s the Catholic Church was heavily involved in steering, at international level, the Catholic Action movement. Stimulated by its hierarchical entities in many countries, such as Brazil and Portugal, this movement was led by multiple organisations, bringing together wide-ranging social sectors. In this laymen mobilisation project, under the guidance of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, in order to fight against what was represented as the evils that undermined the society of the time, caused by the dissemination of laicism and other values linked to modernity, the press was conferred a key role.

In the Brazilian society of the time, the actions carried out by the Church and especially by the Catholic movement, organised institutionally since the previous decade, showed the educational field had been identified as a target of the utmost importance. The arrival of Getúlio Vargas to power in 1930 paved the way to a new array of possibilities<sup>1</sup> for the movement, mobilised, among other pillars, around the return of religious education lessons in public schools, which had been abolished upon the

implantation of the republican regime in 1889. This political background of the start of the 1930s, marked by indefiniteness, intense debates and fierce disputes as regards the educational policy of the new regime, brought the Catholic educators into conflict with another group of educators who shared, in general, the philosophy of the New School — commonly referred to as the *escolanovistas* (newschoolers)<sup>2</sup> — who were advocates of a laic public school model and also wanted their say in Brazilian educational life. Faced with instability as regards the directions the country was taking, the Catholic press acted in the debates with a view to nurturing unity around the principles of the Church, contributing to obtaining expressive victories in the Getúlio Vargas regime, especially the return of religious education in the Brazilian public schools in 1931.

Also in Portugal, under the aegis of Salazar's regime, whose close ties to the Church are well documented, including in the educational field, one can observe a significant investment in the establishment of consensus around a political and religious creed, a task that would be undertaken in the same way in Brazil, among other means, through the Catholic press. In the context analysed, the regime had already been institutionalized, with the New State in place since 1933. And although this had not been established as a confessional State, "the hierarchy of the Church was charged with the task of the 're-Christianisation' of the country, after decades of republican and liberal secularisation, closing the political sphere as unnecessary and opening up the

social and religious sphere” (Pinto, 2007, p.35). In this background the “reinforcement of the unity of the Catholics, the brushing aside of the political divisions and the development of a re-Christianisation project for society called for the development of the Catholic press” (Fontes, quoted by Barreto & Mónica, 2000, p. 247).

Both in Brazil and Portugal a wide range of Catholic periodicals circulated at the time, some of which are dedicated more precisely to the educational topic. This group of publications also included, in the two countries, daily newspapers that had a broad scope and were aimed at a wide range of the population, in which, in the midst of pages dedicated to varied matters and reports, keeping track of the day-to-day events in society in its multiple aspects and also international events, the forming of Catholic souls was also given a big emphasis.

While, in the case of the Catholic press, the educational/doctrinal profile appears as a shared mark, one can observe among the publications selected that some were chiefly aimed at teachers. As well as the importance attributed to teacher training in specific institutions, from many years earlier, by the Church and especially by the religious orders, other initiatives along educational lines were also valued. In the case of the Brazilian society, the multiple editorial strategies implemented by the Catholic movement are worthy of mention — as well as the strategies equally devised by the New School movement (Carvalho, 1994, 1998a), many of which were aimed chiefly at teachers or future teachers.

Among these interventions in the editorial field, one can place, for example, the *Revista Brasileira de Pedagogia*, which contained as an interesting mark the dialogue established with the propositions of the *escolanovistas*<sup>3</sup>. In this publication aimed at teachers, this approximation can be observed from the starting point of examining the sections discussing pedagogical topics, with the discussions backed up by several fields of knowledge which were growing strongly at the time, in an era when the educational field itself was also being constituted in Brazilian society. Sections such as “Educational Philosophy and Psychology” and “Educational Sociology”, were dedicated to the publication of different articles concerning these areas of pedagogical knowledge, which attained increasing relevance

in a backdrop of the constitution of the “education experts”. The pages of the journal are replete with constant suggestions of useful reading for educators, as a strategy linked to providing the basis of their educational practice. In a scenario marked by the progressive scientification of the pedagogical knowledge and the educational practices, one can observe that the Catholic educators, although coming into confrontation with the *escolanovistas* in several aspects, such as the defence of the laic school and co-education, incorporated other common points in their formulations. They especially value those directly related to pedagogical practice, “how to teach”, an aspect considered valuable in the training of the educator, the applicability and efficacy that the propositions of the *escolanovistas* had shown in the epoch. This mark, observed in the journal in question, set the tone, for example, of the section that was also published on a regular basis entitled “Debates on the New School”.

What one can see in the case of this journal is a heavy investment in the transmission of knowledge considered important for the training of teachers and to keep educators permanently updated, backed up by references valued in pedagogical terms. In the case of the Portuguese journal *Edificiar* (1935-1944), pedagogical and religious topics are also dealt with, such as how to provide support for the educators’ work<sup>4</sup>.

## LEAFING THROUGH THE PAGES OF THE PROFESSORSHIP

It was not only the journals dealing with educational topics that provided a forum, on their pages, for the issue of education. The matter was also given a lot of emphasis in Brazil’s daily newspapers, as shown by the strength of the educational debates in the 1930s<sup>5</sup>. In the Catholic field, the newspaper *O Diário* was produced by the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte, through the publisher *Associação da Boa Imprensa*, an entity linked to the Catholic Action movement. Although published in Belo Horizonte, the newspaper circulated beyond this city and even outside the state of Minas Gerais, reaching Rio de Janeiro for example, the capital of the republic, which did not have its own Catholic daily newspaper.

The newspaper began to be published in 1935, in a different political background to the start of the decade, but still not very consolidated in terms of education policy. Despite the resumption of religious education in the state schools, this was still an aspect that was vehemently fought against by the educators who defended laicism in public education, at a time when discussions took place regarding the formulation of the National Education Plan, which would define a single educational model for the country, and as such it was important to reaffirm the standpoints of the Church. As for the demeanour of the Vargas regime, in 1935 one witnessed a growing process of closure of channels of political participation in society, with a progressively more authoritarian attitude adopted, which would be consolidated definitively with the 1937 coup. At this point the dictatorship of the New State was officially implanted, and it is significant that the new regime was baptised with the same name as the Portuguese regime that was in force at the time, as pointed out in other comparative studies<sup>6</sup>. In this background, the Catholic Church and its representatives formed partnerships separated from the Vargas regime, coming together, for example, in the defence of positions of authority and anticommunism. This symptom would be observed in a particular way in the educational field, as could be seen, for example, through the constant presence of Catholic leaders in the office of the Education Minister, Gustavo Capanema.

In the *O Diário* newspaper, from July 1936 a section started to be published aimed at teachers, the *Página do professorado* (professorship page), under the responsibility of Father Guilherme Boing, presented as the president of the Minas Gerais Regional Centre of Catholic Teachers, a division of the Brazilian Catholic Confederation of Education (CCBE)<sup>7</sup>. The weekly page was published over a period of seven months, often including a dominical supplement that also included other sections aimed at other actors also considered strategic in the construction of a “Catholic nation”: women and children. The existence of sections aimed at the teacher, meanwhile, was not restricted to that page of that newspaper. Both in a prior period and after publication, other sections also appeared in the pages of the newspaper.

When the *Página do professorado* started to be published, a weekly space was dedicated to the educational topics, which was subsequently enlarged and began to occupy a whole page of the supplement, which included diverse material, articles written by Brazilian educators, translations of texts on an educational theme, book reviews, suggestions of didactic works, letters from readers, stories of a religious nature, propaganda, news of the career of teachers, as well as opinion articles by Father Boing. In these articles the editor of the page dedicated himself to a wide range of topics about the life of teachers, such as defending the interests of the profession, its prestige and the proper preparation of teachers, which led him to encourage his readers to group together in “special congregations and associations so that they could better cultivate the spirit, given that they are fully worthy of being held up and promoted as powerful and noble aids of the ‘Catholic Action’” (*O Diário*, 26/7/1936, p. 6). Therefore, Father Boing also stimulated the engagement of his readers towards the regional centre of the CCBE, which he presided over. The publication also dealt with the training administered in the teacher training schools, which he considered of poor quality, calling for reforms with a view to making them more appropriate for the exercising of what he considered “‘the art of the arts’ (...), of directing and shaping youth” (*O Diário*, 26/7/1936, p. 6).

The functioning of other aspects of the Brazilian education system was also the target of his criticism, along with the poor efficacy of the religious education, which he deemed to be excessively intellectualistic. On this matter he advocated actions aimed at bringing religious education closer to the pupils’ day-to-day experiences, so that they took on board the essential truths of the Catholic faith. This concern, pointing out the need for investment in the quality of religious education that had been adopted in the country, was made the main focus of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Congress of Catholic Education, an event with national repercussions, held in October 1937, in Belo Horizonte, under the presidency of Father Boing and covered in depth in the *Página do professorado*<sup>8</sup>.

This issue was related, in turn, to the idea of integral education, constantly defended in the section under analysis, as it was within the scope of the positions adopted by the *escolanovistas* — albeit in a

very different perspective — insofar as Father Boing, and his peers, did not conceive the possibility of the teachers being able to supply integral education to their pupils without recourse to religious training on a Catholic basis. Education, in this case, is presented in a very different register from that of instruction. And it should involve the construction of a place of authority for the teacher, not based on imposition, an attitude viewed as ineffective and which would provoke the opposite of the desired reaction in the pupils, but as a constructed and legitimised place based on the example given by the educators, in line with consistent moral values backed up by their practice.

While the topic of authority was presented by the editor of the section as one “of the most difficult problems (...) above all in our time in which the spirit and the tendency to freedom reigns” (*O Diário*, 8/11/1936), other aspects of the “pedagogical novelties” of the epoch, commonly identified with the New School, were also questioned in the *Página do Professorado*. In an article published in the first edition of the section that Father Boing wrote, he defended the adoption of secure references to counteract the disorientation caused by the new thinking brought to the education field: “also today many people are surprised and feel pushed by the ‘new’ pedagogical ideas or lack the firmness of character and religious conviction not to give way to the pedagogical spirit of our times” (*O Diário*, 19/7/1936). Despite this threatening situation, the vision transmitted by the educator, in pursuing his reflection, was that the new ideas should under no circumstances be thrown out automatically: “a selfish dismissal of the intense pedagogical action of our times is neither reasonable nor excusable nor in accordance with the spirit of the papal encyclical. At the same time we should have the courage to examine modern pedagogy according to its value and fight against its partiality or even its anti-Christian spirit”.

What one can observe from the examination of the *Página do professorado*, and especially the articles written by its editor, is the intention to bring about consensus within the Catholic teaching circles, in order to prepare for the challenges faced and to be faced. Seeking to achieve this goal, both through the disclosure of pedagogical knowledge — through articles and publicising of books — and the

reinforcement of the spiritual preparation, also considered a crucial factor for the construction of the good Catholic teacher. Therefore, although representations of vocation and divine selection/mission do come to light in the section analysed, this same space highlights the notion of a teacher in construction, in permanent preparation, a process which the *Página do professorado* aimed to contribute to.

Still looking at the images of the teacher that emerge from the pages focused on, one can observe that they do not distinguish, in general, between the genders. The author of the articles addresses, for example, the “professors (teachers)”, “professoras e professoras (female teachers and male teachers)”, “educadores (educators)”, “mestres (masters)”, “professorado (the teaching profession)”<sup>9</sup>, indicating a generic reference to a set of actors involved in the educational practices, when, at least with regard to primary education both in Brazil and Portugal most of the teachers were females. This approach can be explained by the fact that secondary school and higher education teachers were also the intended audience of this section, making up part of the large group of “Catholic teachers”, who, regardless of the teaching level they were at, should carry out the same doctrinal and civilising mission in the name of the Church, inspired, in turn, by the example of Jesus Christ.

In the case of the female teachers, although they were not singled out as special targets for the messages transmitted, they appear as the object of analysis by the author of the articles in matters linked to two topics. On the one hand, Father Boing states he is in favour of pedagogical celibacy, arguing that when a woman marries she should move out of the teaching profession. On the other hand, although sporadic, criticism is made of female teachers who do not behave in line with the standards of morality considered appropriate for exercising the function. One must remember that in that environment, while the moral question was a fundamental aspect in the constitution of any Catholic educator, the female teachers had defined requirements in terms of morality and virtue, in both of the societies this study focuses on, based on extremely strict standards, which should be understood from a perspective of gender, indicative of the definition of the social positions and roles attributed to subjects and



demanded of them in social life. In a note entitled “*Lá em Portugal (There in Portugal)*” — showing the parallels established with Portuguese society — praise is given, for example, to the regulations established in that country, according to which make-up and immodest clothing was forbidden (*O Diário*, 26/7/1936).

In the same period as the publication of the Brazilian *Página do professorado*, the Portuguese Catholic newspaper *Novidades* also published a page with a very similar format. Its heading also reminds one of its Brazilian counterpart: *Página escolar*. In the case of the Portuguese section, it was published over a longer period of time, from 1927 until 1937, when it was replaced by a supplement called *Ação Escolar*, which would be edited for many years. It was edited by Antônio Leal, an educator, and collaborator in several other Catholic periodicals and president, at the time, of the Catholic School League (Remédios, 2003, p. 13). The page included, for example, unsigned opinion articles, which suggested they were written by the editor, as well as articles written by other authors, responses to teacher queries and information about journals received, of interest for teachers.

In the case of this Portuguese section, with particular focus on the period which coincides with the publication of the Brazilian section, situated between 1936 and 1937, and considering especially the editorial opinion articles, one can see points of contact in relation to the Brazilian *page*, in terms of the topics dealt with concerning the educational life and the social role of the teacher.

Likewise, the idea of integral education is defended, necessarily including the religious education aspect. The reading educators are also recommended to establish contact with the new pedagogies presented at the time, as can be seen through the words: “the Catholic pedagogical school cannot remove itself from the intellectual movement that is sweeping the world in the domain of pedagogy. It needs to keep track of what is said and what is done and filter all the knowledge through its own criteria, clarified through the essential truths of its faith” (*Novidades*, 19/1/1937).

Science is valued in its educational application — relative to experimental psychology, for example — although it is emphasised that “education grounded solely on positive scientific data,

(...) is the most dangerous kind (...)” (*Novidades*, 19/5/1936). As such, the doctrinal dimension of the teacher’s role, defined in the name of God and Country, was stressed in the section.

As such, teachers were assigned with exercising an unlimited educational action, with the relevance of their function referenced by the minister of National Education, Carneiro Pacheco, whose frequent appearances in the *Página escolar* is worthy of mention. On the pages of the Portuguese publication, the direct presence of a voice representing the nucleus of the state power is an important indication of the strong partnership between the Church and the Salazar regime, transmitted to the teachers so as to engage them. This was the case, for example, of the educational reform brought about by the same minister, which received generous praise in the section, one of the decisions of which entailed the compulsory placement of crucifixes in primary schools. This decision, in turn, was reported and commented upon in positive fashion in several editions of the *Página escolar*, in order to reinforce educators’ engagement in implementing the measure, stimulating them to serve both God and Country, which accepted Catholicism as its official religion. Also, in order to complete the triad of the regime, the Family was also an institution that merited the reflection of many articles in the section, where the approach was to highlight the essential role it played in the formation of individuals, and whose collaboration was indispensable for schools.

The spiritual and doctrinal lines as a fundamental mark of education and the teaching role, emphasised in the section, is justified to a large extent by the threats represented by communism — and in the case of Spain, in civil war, it was presented as an example of the supposed reality of the danger — and the need to fight against it. And, according to the section, “the anticommunist pedagogy has to be Christian” (*Novidades*, 15/6/1936). As regards anti-communism, the similarities as regards the Brazilian *Página* are obvious, given that in the latter publication one can also see repeated references to the Spanish case, presented as a negative international scenario interspersed with political radicalism.

Based on the reflection carried out, one can view the Brazilian and Portuguese daily newspaper sections aimed at the teachers as the intention

to cement their unity around the Catholic principles, which are constituted more and more on aspects that shape the national identity of the countries. The aforementioned words of the Portuguese minister, written in an article published in *Página escolar*, emphasised the importance of the mission attributed to the teachers: “The master is not a bureaucrat, but a moulder of souls and the Portuguese” (*Novidades*, 23/6/1936). The same sections also attempted to provide preparation to the teachers as regards pedagogical and professional issues, presented in inseparable articulation with the religious component.

And although one can observe, in the articles published in the two sections, aspects specific to each of the societies in particular, in both of them one can see more general references to the teachers’ role related to the implementation of a Catholic nation project. Also worthy of note is the presence, both in the *Página do professorado*, and the *Página escolar*, of aspects that indicate the connections between the countries, involving the circulation of Catholic ideas.

But beyond the focus on the national scenarios and the circulation of ideas established between Brazil and Portugal, one can also observe, in the analysis of these publications, their place in the far

broader doctrinal and political project, defined from the hierarchical entities of the Catholic Church, whose directives were — as they still are — universally disseminated<sup>10</sup>. One should consider, therefore, the configuration of an extensive institutional network of a transnational nature, endowed with a considerable degree of cohesion, although one must also point out, on the other hand, the expression of singularities in the forms of appropriation and implementation of these directives by the hierarchical bodies in each country, of the different sectors of the Catholic Action movement in these countries, as well as the Catholic press. The idea of a “top downwards” connection, brought about from a nucleus of defined power, makes it useful to analyse the sections of the Catholic newspapers, albeit not considered as a fixed point of view. Hence, the use of different “scales of observation” (Revel, 1998), where the enlargement or diminution of focus directed on the object — able to be analysed, both in the broader perspective of the *Catholic press*, and that which involves looking at the specific publications in different societies — can prove interesting for reflection on the different layers of meaning that emerge from the reading of the Catholic *Páginas* aimed at the teaching profession.

## ENDNOTES

1. On the notion of the field of possibilities, see Velho, 1994.

2. It is pointed out that both the labels given to the groups in question involve strong imprecision, and one should consider the existence of numerous matrices within each one.

3. Relevant studies within the scope of the historiography of Brazilian education have framed the problem of the notion that the Catholic group and the *escolanovista* group adopted inflexible polarised positions. Work such as that carried out by Marta Carvalho, among others, has drawn attention to the interfaces between the groups, emphasising the existence of appropriations — albeit strongly selective — of the propositions of the *escolanovistas* by the Catholic educators, leading this author to label the concept as *escolanovismo católico* (See Carvalho, 1994, 1998b and 2003; Magaldi, 2007 and Sgarbi, 1997).

4. It has not been possible, up to now, to carry out a meticulous analysis of this journal in order to research, for example, if a dialogue could also be observed, as in the Brazilian journal, with the ideas of the *escolanovistas*. It is pointed out that other publications that succeeded *Edificar*, the *Boletim Mensal da LEC* (1945) and *A Nossa Escola* (1946/1974), were also valuable sources of research for the investigation into our topics in other time frames.

5. See, for example, *Página da Educação*, published every day in the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *Diário de Notícias*, between 1930 and 1933, edited by the poet and educator Cecília Meireles, an advocate of the propositions of the New School (See Magaldi, 2007, Ch. 2).

6. See, for example, Martinho and Pinto, 2007.

7. The CCBE, founded in 1933, was an institution that emerged on the Brazilian educational scene in the wake of the Catholic educators being pushed aside in relation to the *escolanovistas*, which had previously stood side by side in the Brazilian Education Association (ABE), created in 1924.

8. On this event see Narcizo, 2008.

9. Translator's note: "*professores e professoras*" translates as "male teachers and female teachers". All the other terms used refer to members of the profession in the plural, meaning that the gender is not specified.

10. See, in the case of catholic education, the *Divini Illius Magistri* encyclical, of Pius XI, 1929.

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