

# Religious Education in Homes and Protestant Mission in Brazil during the Vargas Age

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**Abstract:** *The aim of this study is to analyze the strategies of consolidation and missionary expansion of Protestants in Brazil through educational integration in homes. The ecclesiastical leaders believed that such a method would be of fundamental importance for the maintenance of the "true Christian principles" in Brazilian evangelical families. Catholics were seen as defilers of society and the "believers" should present themselves as different in the face of such. Families were instructed to keep themselves away from the "world" and walk in accordance with the "laws of the Lord." Such teachings were spread through newspapers that were distributed in the churches, which were the main mean of communication in that period. Discourses and Protestant representations that are regarded as ideal for "exemplary family" are to be analyzed as well as the use of periodicals (Baptists and Methodists) and part of the historiography that deals with the theme. Thus, we intend to contribute to the discussions on Protestant missionary strategies, particularly as the participation of the family in the process of consolidation of evangelistic faith is regarded*

**Keywords:** *Protestantism, Religious Education, Vargas Age, Mission, Brazil.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to analyze the strategies of consolidation and missionary expansion of Protestants in Brazil through educational integration in homes. The ecclesiastical leaders believed that such a method would be of fundamental importance for the maintenance of the "true Christian principles" in Brazilian evangelical families. Catholics were seen as defilers of society and the "believers" should present themselves as different in the face of such. Families were instructed to keep themselves away from the "world" and walk in accordance with the "laws of the Lord." Such teachings were spread through newspapers that were distributed in the churches, which were the main mean of communication in that period. Discourses and Protestant representations that are regarded as ideal for "exemplary family" are to be analyzed as well as the use of periodicals (Baptists and Methodists) and part of the historiography that deals with the theme. Thus, we intend to contribute to the discussions on Protestant missionary strategies, particularly as the participation of the family in the process of consolidation of evangelistic faith is regarded.

## II. THE PROTESTANTISM AND THE RELIGION EDUCATION IN HOME

There was a particular strategy adopted by Protestants, considered to be effective by many in the attempt of a cultural and religious insertion in Brazil. That was the educational insertion at homes. It is certain that before 1930 evangelical already had used such method to indoctrinate the newly converted and to get closer to those who still did not practice the Protestant faith. However, the greater emphasis of this educational

methodology can be noticed in the documents produced during the government of Getúlio Vargas hence some peculiar characteristics of this period of Brazilian history [1].

After the coup d'état of 1930, the Catholic Church, even non-officially, had joined into an association with the State and began to have a sort of political influence that was not perceived in other periods of the Republic. The Church, which was seen by evangelicals as the main responsible for the social, political and religious backwardness throughout its history, was seen as an enemy to be fought and evangelicals should be aware of the steps that the Church was about to take. It was necessary to be different. Evangelicals claimed that the believer should not align themselves with what was the standard of the "world", with in many writings were confused with the Catholic moral standards [2].

Many missionaries were convinced that they should civilize the country which they have selected as their field of mission. To achieve that educational strategies, which were set in the homes, were used with a great emphasis on behavior, attitudes and habits [3]. The "future mothers and housewives" were taught how to behave with their husbands and children [4]. Various Protestant periodicals had articles to "warn" parents on how to educate their children. Children, adolescents and young adults should present themselves in an exemplary manner inside and outside the family environment. There were several concerns. One of which was regarding the testimony, in order that the children of believers were to be different from the children of the "world" [5]<sup>1</sup>.

The importance of family in education was perceived as fundamental. The time to eat, to set the table, the way to dress and behave made it clear that the little ones were being guided by their parents. Even the garments worn were seen as the clearest form of distinguishing themselves from the "immoral", which in that case were Catholics. Protestant parents should primarily teach young girls how to behave not to sin, nor drive others into sin. The "fashion", considered to be the great responsible for the degeneration of the soul and female simplicity was to cause profligacy amongst evangelicals, abusing and desecrating the "pure and Christian" customs. That "monster" had the power to enslave the female mind, and consequently turn the masculine mind into sin, as women were becoming "shameful" and escaped from the feeling of what would be the "true happiness", which is, a life that was far "beyond appearances". Such moral precepts were constantly dictated by Protestant missionaries in several periodicals. There was a great fear for the "appeals of modernity". Primarily mothers should take full care for the education of the "little daughters". Only the "denatured" mothers did not watch over the morality and good manners of their young [6].

The absorption of cultural capital through religious literature and reading biblical texts were also part of the parental obligation for children to be initiated in the principles of Christianity still as a child. Those readings could be initially performed at home, as well as at Sunday schools. Catholic parents sent their children to catechism from an early age and Protestants could not leave such practice aside. Walking their children to church was meant to be primarily part of the mothers' agenda, since they were the main responsible for their children spiritual ripening [7].

The representations were clear in the analyzed speeches [8]. There was an ideal to be followed. In that sense, light should be shed over what Eliane Moura da Silva describes regarding the several forms of religiosities. According to the cited historian, religions are cultural representations that aspire to universality that are determined by those who elaborate them. They are not neutral, for they produce norms of conduct in practical life. They reinvent themselves according to the place in which they are inserted and with its historical context. It is not something static, it is modeled and remodeled according to the orthopractices. They influence everyday actions, establish hierarchical relations, rules of conduct and behavior and build representations [2].

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<sup>1</sup>According to Sandra C. da Silva and Maria I. S. Stamatto, the press had been more effective in the Protestant educational and religious project than schools. It was through Protestant writings that the ideals reached the most distant places, thus, making possible the propagation of Evangelical religious principles. It is also interesting to note that even being aware that a great portion of the population was illiterate, several religious denominations were using that method.

In the period in study, an imagination over what was expected to a “son of a believer” was built. Those, when young, could be excluded from their churches or disciplined in case the expected ideal was not represented by them. Conflicts of representation could also be noticed [10]. When comparing the example of what was expected from a Protestant child to what was expected from a Catholic one, they placed the other as a symbol of error, of sin, of the ill-bred.

In 1933 the *O Jornal Baptista*, incisively described how evangelical education was indispensable for a family. Citing biblical passages, it exhorted parents to raise their “[...] children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord” [11] (Our translation). Thus admonished:

The environment of a home without God is unbearable to the Christian; it is intolerable; the Christian cannot be there, they do not feel well; There are people that, in their lives at home, for any reason, call upon the tempter. The interjection that is on the lips at all times is: “What the Devil!” [...] the home without God is a place of fighting, of bad names claiming. We have heard women to send their very children to Hell. In times of anger, of such nervousness, they say to their own children: “Go to Hell!” Imagine if a mother, that should always be a loved one, to send their children, children from her womb, particle of her soul to Hell, to perdition!... What a horrendousview!...[12] (Our translation).

It portrays what would be of a home if it was not with a proper evangelical education, in the view of the writer of the periodical cited. A place in which the Devil would reign. Without dignified conditions for a moral and social environment. The parents would not find love for their children, sending them to the worst place for someone to be according to Protestants. The motherly figure was seen as affable. Even not being explicit in the text, it is noticeable that such lovely woman would be a protestant woman. Those who were not used the Devil as an interjection in their vocabulary when dealing with their children leaving them to perdition. “What a horrendousview!...”.

In the same news, their vision of what the householders were supposed to do in order to be exemplar in the society they lived in is made clear:

Parents, raise your children in the fear of God, in a Christian home, in a house where God is always present. Parents, raise your children in good company; help your children to select their mates to play, walk, etc. The choice of mates and friends é a subject that should interest many parents; with care it is possible to divert the boy or girl from inconvenient company. There are parents who weep because that daughters are disobedient and do not walk the path of God. These parents forget that they are guilty, yes, early, when it was time, they did not avoid the Evil. They left the girl to walk in company and in society which later attracted and diverted her out of the Church. [...] My friends, remember that only by a full Christian education, that begins at home, you may be able to see your children happy [13] (Our translation).

The appeal for a Christian education is explicit in the words of the editor of the *O Jornal Baptista*. The parents would be the primary responsible for the education and promising future of the children. Those who “diverted” themselves did it since they did not have counseling with biblical basis. How to dress, with whom to walk, with whom they should play should be a choice of the parents, or else, they would cry to see their children “outside the Church”. For a “full Christian” raising parents had the obligation to teach children the Bible, which were the “[...] precious treat with which the Lord cheers our homes, a magnificent promise that fill with

jubilation and gives hope to our heart” [14](Our translation). It was necessary to constantly have “[...] talks with the infants about divine things [...]” [15] (Our translation). Protestants see the Bible as the word of God. A book with words that sprout from eternity and were written in time. Does God still speak nowadays? Asks Rubem Azevedo Alves. The answer is yes, but nothing is added or subtracted to what is in the Bible. Combinations and recombination are made. But, it is not permitted to contradict or diminish what was said. It is the divine truth. Life, then, is guided by its text. What to want, think, and how to act and speak is standardized by the Word of God. The individual is then forced to enter into an strange environment denying their origins and submitting themselves to an exterior norm imposed by the community [16].

According to Anna Lúcia Collyer Adamovicz, the history of Baptists in Brazil shows that missionaries used press agencies as a strategy of resistance and to conduce discussions in order to acquire, with discursive bases, the respect and sympathy of their interlocutors. With the commitment of achieving a religious reform, they saw education as an important strategy towards the transformation of the sociocultural space. Its main communication medium, *O Jornal Baptista*, favored the concretion of the missionary and educational ideal of the denomination in question in a way that it made possible the spread of religious values and cultural precepts of this branch of Protestantism. With clear objectives of religious insertion through education, the cited periodical sought to “[...] strengthen the understanding of newly converted on the rules and practical faith historically propagated by Protestantism, fortifying the basis to the formation of a new religious mentality” [17] (Our translation). Vasni Almeida follows the same line of thought. According to the historian, the strategy of Protestant education through press was propagated by the legitimacy that there was a community willing to follow its publications. The periodicals were responsible to publicize rules of social living, as well as rules of conduct both individually and collectively. Besides its moralist proposal, the commitment with the republican order and with the “rules of civility and modernity” were part of the missionaries counseling. It was a way to display themselves as a religious group that is adequate to the aspirations of the 20th Century, on the contrary of the Catholics, sees and morally degraded and religions with African roots, seen as incompatible with a country which aspired modernization [18].

Methodists also agreed to this belief. The family would be the cellular *mater* of society and would need, according to its leaderships, to be preserved. The *Expositor Christão* warned the boys:

- 1) Walk in good company or no company.
- 2) Never be lazy; if your hand cannot be finely occupied, attend to the cult of your intelligence.
- 3) Say always the truth.
- 4) Make few promises and fulfill them faithfully.
- 5) When you are speaking to a person, face them forward.
- 6) Good company and good talks inspire the truth.
- 7) A good character is superior to anything else.
- 8) Your character cannot be harmed for nothing but your own acts.
- 9) If anyone speaks ill of you, act in a way that no one can believe what was told.
- 10) Never drink intoxicants.
- 11) When in bed, think of what was done during the day.
- 12) Never gamble.
- 13) Avoid the temptation, for there will be some you cannot resist.
- 14) Earn the money before spending it.
- 15) Never borrow anything when that is possible to avoid.
- 16) Never speak ill of someone.
- 17) Be fair before being generous.
- 18) Conservate yourselves innocent if you want to be happy [19](Our translation).

Parents needed to be and example for children. It was of no use to teach children if they noticed that their parents were not providing them testimony. Simply attending the cult, listening to the preaching, but not following them, was to mimic Catholics. In the view of many Protestant leaders, they would only go to Mass, did not understand what their priest said, lived a lecherous life, not having the character that a true householder should show to their child. Living a regimented life, showing to the “world” the “example of Christ” was a way

to distinguish themselves from Brazilian Catholicism. It was necessary to have that behavior of “sanctity”, established by leaders and closely followed by all those who claimed to be faithful [20].

The citation of the *Expositor Christão* has several advices for children, which the title suggests that parents also could, or should, follow to have a life of “sanctity”. Being in good company could mean not to have any friendship with Catholic children. They belonged to the “world”, did not follow the same faith, did not have the same belief, they were errant according to the evangelical view. Manual labor or intellectual labor would be rewarding. Living in laze was to disagree with the divine will. Molding the character according to the biblical principles would make the boy to be a great man in the future. Those could not live with lies, unfulfilled promises, saying what was not edifying. The son of a “believer” should always have a good testimony and live with exemplary ethical and moral conduct. Vices, temptations, malice, lust, drunkenness, nothing that could show a disengagement with the Protestant cause could be performed. It was a “divine ordering” [21].

As for women, according to evangelicals, those who received a religious education possibly would be kind daughters and sisters, would become good mothers and housewives. As professionals they would be responsible and committed. When they left to the work of the church, they would become fine Sunday school teachers and, mainly, good missionaries. This concern with the “religious investment” in education and family was seen as a form of disclosure of the “true Gospel” in “Catholic Brazil”. That nation, in the protestant argument, was misled of their moral values for not having the principles the Protestantism rooted in its culture [22].

The *O Mensageiro Evangélico* instigated the parents:

Let's leave aside the mundane theories and teachings of men they call themselves scientists, and let's extract only from the Gospel the true knowledge that we shall transmit to our children with caress and thus we will cooperate for the aggrandizement of the kingdom of God and the nation, providing to our country a strong youth that according to the example of divine Jesus, will grow in wisdom and grace and shall be the continuation of a generation formed in the molds of the Gospel [23](Our translation).

The objective was to show to the children the moral of a “living religion” centered on the Protestant principles and ethics centered on temperance, which was seen as a remedy for the ills of modern civilization. At home, at church or at schools, parents should be aware to the way their children were educated. The “true knowledge” had to be passed on. Future generations that followed the principle of the “divine Jesus” would be more prepared to face the challenges of life. The goal, according to Lyndon de Araújo Santos, was to ensure a personal and collective moral in private and public life that did not escape the biblical view [24].

Those teachings were meant to be made primarily within the home. “The home and religion are of vital importance in the formation of the character and the development of the individual” defended the *O Jornal Batista* [25]. One of the ways of teaching families to walk the “path of the Lord” was the Home Cult. It was a small celebration between family members. Hymns were chanted, biblical passages were read and interpreted, prayers were made, offenses were confessed and they begged for forgiveness. As they done that, they felt to have a greater stamina to face the challenges of the “world”. It was celebrated daily. In most cases they were conducted by mothers, since they were seen as the main responsible for children's education. The dynamics of a cult was something to be observed. The care for it not to become something monotonous had to be taken. The parents would need to show love to the teaching of the “true religion”. That way, “the blessings and benefits shall be countless and will last until after we have passed from Earth to Heaven” [26] (Our translation). The Ecclesiastical leaderships insisted towards families:

If every believer must have their moments of daily prayer, it is fair that every Christian family do not forget this obligation and privileged. This must be one of

the greatest blessings that we can enjoy on Earth. The worship and supplication made in common at home have the virtue of transforming the environment, of wakening greater sympathy and love between parents, children and siblings [...] The temptations are placed for that duty not to be fulfilled [...] But it is important to put in first place out duties with God. A little will power, firm determination and order, within the home, will permit the achievement, of besides the countless blessings in the worship of the Lord, the blessed fruits of the union, sympathy, understanding and love amongst family members [27](Our translation).

On the relationship that children should have with their mothers and the role that those mothers should perform in the family environment, the *Expositor Christão* again had manifested itself in one of their articles:

It is the family, considered the Cell-mater of societies, of well organized nations, capable of symmetrical development, prevailing, and imposing itself in a natural manner. And, when is spoken about the family, automatically comes its central figure – the Mother. When it is aware of their elevated mission, the home, under their influence, it is a sanctuary where passions, like wild hawks, cover their face with wings. For the child that learnt how to follow the maternal lessons, inspiring themselves in the model, always before their eyes, the name of – Mother, exits like the sound of the clarion, becoming courageous, powerful to face the difficulties and win the battles of life [28](Our translation).

Noting the quote above, we are able to infer some considerations on the conception of family in the Protestant view. The “well organized nations” had hierarchically instituted families, in which the mothers educated their children in the “ways of the Lord”. It was the natural path to be followed. Otherwise it would be an attempt to break the rule. The children of a prosperous nation should always follow the example left the central figure of the family. Thus, they would face the life problems easily, for they would have learned their maternal lessons. Education, primarily of women, was one of the priorities of Methodist missions in Brazil. Protestant education based on North American models was seen as an advance when face with the “backwardness” in the educational Catholic mentality. The United States was seen by many as an example of free nation to be followed. As Americans were in their majority Protestants, many Brazilians believed that if they educated their children on the American fashion, they too would have in the future a prosperous country. Protestants had a “forward” thinking, obtaining support of even the republicans. Women were responsible for the education at home. It was their role to educate their children according to the “principles of the Lord”. If, from an early age, girl were taught the Protestant faith, they believed they were to created great mothers, great wives and great professionals.[29].

The gender roles were also defined both within the church and home. In March 1931, Dr. Pedro Tarsier writing for the *O Jornal Baptista*, claimed to be worried about the social roles that were to be switched. Those patterns could not, in any way, according to his considerations, to be tolerated within evangelical families and congregations. He stated his concerns:

No one, however, can change nature. If it was not so, the old world would end briefly in a dreadful chaos [...] Women should keep their femininity, and, in their own ways; men should keep their masculinity. What is characteristic of the fair gender is the affection that predominates in it, as what is of men is will [...] The place where the woman belongs is in the “house”; and of man is outside the house, in the field, in the businesses, at the workshop, etc. Let’s ask then, what would be of

Christianity if it was directed by women pastors? It, then, truly, would serve a despicable service to the world of grayish hair [...] The seduction towards sin came mostly through the fall of the woman and only afterwards of man [...] Women should learn in silence and humility, not trying to assume what they should not teach. May be far from me such a thought! Women enter, and should enter, in large numbers, teaching, mas not in ministries as only people with high volitions responsibility would. Teaching is the privileged of both sexes [...] As we notice that in many homes such rule is not dominant, they are sad homes, even though they do not regard themselves as such [...] It is only left a salvation, that consists in the return to Pauline advices. Women should occupy themselves with their worthy position of loving and voluntary submission to the husbands, and the permanence at home, and men should direct the social obligations with their superior volition[30] (Our translation).

It is quite interesting to notice the social role of women and men in the church and family which was well delimited in the citation above. Apparently, such advices were being given for homes and churches were not following the social standards considered to be ideal. It was necessary to use strategies in order to maintain what was thought to be a hierarchical structure that was based in divine principles. Men would work whilst women would dedicate themselves to the housework. A woman would exceptionally work as teacher. As many of them were now occupying positions that were before only held by men, chaos was taking place in the homes and the world.

Such representations which aimed to become universal were built by groups of interest in historical moments full of particularities and ambiguities. These are not neutral, imposing themselves as an authority and legitimating particular conceptions. That is explicit in religion. It establishes the cultural patterns that influence everyday practices, places, hierarchical relations and positions, and the attitudes of the individuals and representations [31]. According to Rubem Azevedo Alves [32], in Protestantism, the representations towards liberties agree with the ideals of discipline and organization. They represent either modernity or liberty. Both conceptions cannot be part of the same ideal. As Protestant seemed to be modern and had adjusted themselves to the ethics and discipline of the capitalist system, it became difficult to withstand the individual, libertarian and critical ideals defended initially by the reformers in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Protestant had seen as a necessity to hinder some of their founding ideals. The ideologies of the different denominations that were created throughout the centuries served the interests of the patriarchal order. That could be perceived in the positions held towards both sacred or secular individuals and institutions.

However, many missionary women that came to Brazil were not following the established standards mentioned by the editor of the *O Jornal Baptista*. Eliane Moura da Silva analyses the life of many of these women that migrated from the United States and did not even marry. The case of the missionary *Martha Watts* is one of the most renowned. A single woman, who used to affirm that she had wed the mission and her children were the hundreds of students of the schools that she had founded in Brazil. In the words of the cited historian those women:

They challenge the images of confinement, of traditional representations that connected to the land and family, the figures of those traditional models that denied the will of escaping and the challenges. If the dominant speeches at the time appealed to the dissymmetry of vocabularies – to men were destined the public spaces as essential to the character and honor of the masculinity whilst for women were destined the home and family – many of which, facing the conditions in which they lived, reinvented the limits of domesticity [33](Our translation).

With internal and external problems that would cause the closure of many churches, the change in conception of the hierarchy of families and congregations was seen as one of the causes of the missionary failure, which in some cases needed to be fought. The strategy in use was the use of biblical interdiscourse[34], to show that the world would live in peace if women occupied “[...] their worthy position of loving and voluntary submission to their husbands, and to the housework; and men should conduct social imperatives with their superior volition” [35] (Our translation).

### III. CONCLUSION

Education as a missionary strategy was used by Protestants to attract members to the congregation, as well as to keep them in the congregational circles. Political, economical, social and cultural issues were seen as a hamper for the project to be successfully achieved. It was not always that people were converted because of the educational methods applied in the schools across the country. Some had quit on education preferring to proselytize just by preaching. Others insisted that institutions could be strong allies in the final objective to be culturally and religiously inserted in the country. They begged that the north-American financing would not cease. Even facing several mishaps to maintain schools open, the idea that the duty was being done in the most perfect order was sent.

As it was impossible to maintain all members, especially the younger ones, enrolled in confessional educational institutions, this effort was made to enter the homes, especially through religious newspapers. It is a fact that not all were subscribers of the periodicals of their institutions, but that strategy was seen as an important media of cultural insertion and family doctrination. The ecclesiastical leaderships defended that the education should begin in the homes, attempting to maintain the congregation aware of how it should behave when facing the issues of the “world”. Not in any form it was expected to withhold the evasion or transit to another religion, or even towards another denomination to occur. The focus was that what was learnt outside their homes (such as in public schools) did not influence negatively children’s lives neither at that time nor in the future. Thence publication of numerous articles in the periodicals that displayed how mothers, fathers and children should behave in a society that was represented by Protestant arguments as if depredated morally by Catholicism.

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