



**The catechism at school and the formation of the Church.  
The João Alcântara School Group and religion (1938-1962)<sup>1</sup>**

O catecismo na escola e a formação da Igreja.  
O Grupo Escolar João Alcântara e a religião (1938-1962)

El catecismo en la escuela y la formación de la Iglesia.  
El Grupo Escolar João Alcântara y religión (1938-1962)

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**Abstract**

The present work aims to investigate the presence of Catholic precepts on the Grupo Escolar João Alcântara in Porteirinha/MG during the period from 1938 to 1962. We will investigate how some papal guidelines were put into practice in everyday school life. Investment in education was a powerful strategy when it came to expanding and maintaining the power of the Catholic Church. The work advances by showing how the Catechism and printed compendia were integrated into everyday school life. As a research method, we propose Bibliographic Research carried out in books, articles, dissertations and theses. In addition, we employ Documentary Research, which includes the analysis of sources that were circulating at the time, such as: minutes books of teacher meetings, local newspapers, laws and decrees of the local executive, pontifical and episcopal documents, manuscripts, photo albums, books of minutes of religious associations and their manuals, parish records books. It is concluded that children and young people in Porteirinha/MG, during the period studied, were enrolled in the Catechism of the Church. The instruments used for this were, above all, the combined action of the press and the school. This front of action also provided people with religious instruction through the presence of Catechism and Religious Education classes. As for the press, newspapers, pamphlets and books became not just a religious apparatus, but objects of religious culture.

**Keywords:** Catechism; Education; School Group; Catholic church.

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## Resumo

O presente trabalho tem como objetivo investigar a presença dos preceitos católicos no Grupo Escolar João Alcântara de Porteirinha/MG durante o período de 1938 a 1962. Indagaremos como algumas orientações papais foram postas em prática no cotidiano escolar. O investimento na educação foi uma poderosa estratégia no que diz respeito à expansão e à manutenção do poder da Igreja Católica. O trabalho avança ao mostrar como as aulas de Catecismo foram integradas ao cotidiano escolar. Como método de investigação, propomos a Pesquisa Bibliográfica realizada em livros, artigos, dissertações e teses. Além disso, empregamos a Pesquisa Documental que inclui a análise das fontes que circulavam na época, como: livros de atas de reuniões de docentes, jornais locais, leis e decretos do executivo local, documentos pontifícios e episcopais, manuscritos, álbum de fotografias, livros de atas das associações religiosas e seus manuais e livros do tomo paroquial. Conclui-se que as crianças e a mocidade em Porteirinha/MG, durante o período estudado, foram arregimentadas no Catecismo da Igreja. Os instrumentos utilizados para isso foram, sobretudo, a ação conjugada da imprensa e da escola. Esta frente de ação também nutriu o povo de instrução religiosa por meio da presença das aulas de Catecismo e do Ensino Religioso. Quanto à imprensa, os jornais, os panfletos e os livros passaram a ser não apenas um aparato religioso, mas objetos da cultura religiosa.

**Palavras-chave:** Catecismo; Educação; Grupo Escolar; Igreja Católica.

## Resumen

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo investigar la presencia de los preceptos católicos en el Grupo Escolar João Alcântara de Porteirinha, Minas Gerais, entre 1938 y 1962. Investigaremos cómo se pusieron en práctica algunas directrices papales en la rutina escolar. La inversión en educación fue una estrategia poderosa para expandir y mantener el poder de la Iglesia Católica. El trabajo avanza mostrando cómo las clases de catecismo se integraron en la rutina escolar. Como método de investigación, proponemos la investigación bibliográfica realizada en libros, artículos, disertaciones y tesis. Además, empleamos la investigación documental, que incluye el análisis de fuentes que circulaban en la época, como: libros de actas de reuniones de profesores, periódicos locales, leyes y decretos del ejecutivo local, documentos pontificios y episcopales, manuscritos, álbumes de fotos, libros de actas de asociaciones religiosas y sus manuales y registros parroquiales. Se concluye que los niños y jóvenes de Porteirinha/MG, durante el período estudiado, fueron reclutados en el Catecismo de la Iglesia. Los instrumentos utilizados para ello fueron, sobre todo, la acción conjunta de la prensa y la escuela. Este frente de acción también nutrió al pueblo con instrucción religiosa mediante la presencia de clases de catecismo y educación religiosa. En cuanto a la prensa, periódicos, panfletos y libros se convirtieron no solo en un instrumento religioso, sino en objetos de cultura religiosa.

**Palabras clave:** Catecismo; Educación; Grupo Escolar; Iglesia Católica.

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## Introduction

From 1938 to 1962, the *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara*, the main educational institution in the city of Porteirinha, Minas Gerais, was a continuation of the Catholic home, and the atmosphere sought to be identical in both educational settings. Education had to be shaped by Christian principles, and the school's main focus was educational projects and initiatives with religious values. There was a prominent "school" project that extended from the *Igreja Matriz de São Joaquim* to *Grupo Escolar*: the teaching of the Catechism.

Thus, children and young people were recruited for Catechism instruction, a central concern of the then-vicar of the city, Julião Arroyo Gallo. The time period studied coincides with Father Julião Arroyo Gallo's greatest activity as head of the Porteirinha parish. Extremely doctrinaire, he arrived in the city in 1941, interacted with political, social, and educational authorities, and, by structuring the parish, reshaped and redefined the Catholic practices of the time. Julião was an intellectual who received a better education than much of the local population and was one of the few who left behind numerous texts, found in newspapers, institutional Church books, and manuscripts, about the social, political, cultural, and educational aspects of the region.

Father Julião was the spiritual director and Christian guide for the teachers of the city's school group, conducting their confessions, weddings, communions, and baptizing their children. The parish priest was regularly present at projects, social events, and regular faculty meetings, and worked attentively both inside and outside the school walls, including serving as president of the school fund. In the priest's view, people owed obedience to the Church, as it was the place where man was truly born into the divine life of grace through baptism and formed a family. Thus, the Church considered itself a society of supernatural and universal order, a *Perfect Society*,<sup>2</sup> because it held within itself all the means for the eternal salvation of mankind. For him, the task of the *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara* was to teach and educate, to show the youth the path of duty, to set them on the path of virtue, and to accustom them to the principal practices of religion to sanctify their souls.

In this sense, the teachers (public servants), guided by the vicar, worked in catechism and combined roles in the Catholic Church, such as caretakers of the *Sagrado Coração de Jesus*, the *Pia União das Filhas de Maria*, among other activities.

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<sup>2</sup> The Modern Age already bears different marks. The Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563, reworked the medieval conception and updated it to facilitate coexistence between Church and society. The second conception, called the *Perfect Society*, was developed more precisely by decree; it did not culturalize like the first. The Perfect Society emerged on the historical scene, engineered for the Church to justify itself and defend itself from a religiously divided society (the Protestant Reformation); politically more autonomous, at least in relation to the Catholic Church; economically, under the impulses of a timid but emerging capitalism; culturally imbued with the ideals of the Renaissance, a vehicle for a humanism hostile to Catholicism. Thus, the Church emerges as the Perfect Society to compete with the unfolding of the new society (Araújo, 1986, p. 49). In the Perfect Society conception, the Church is a legally perfect society. According to Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Immortale Dei* (On the Christian Constitution of States), of 1885, he clarifies this conception of the Church by stating that "God divided, therefore, the government of the human race into two powers: the ecclesiastical power and the civil power; the former predicated on divine things, the latter on human things. Each of them in its own kind is sovereign; each is enclosed within perfectly determined limits" (Leo XIII, 1885, p. 9).

The Catechism instruction combined tradition and conservatism, responsible for maintaining the roots and principles that characterize the foundation of Religious Education<sup>3</sup>, with the elements of Modern Pedagogy. This teaching approach utilized techniques based on active methods, which valued observation, investigation, and the student's personal experience in practical teaching and learning situations. It placed the student at the center of the action, fostering a passion for Religious Education. Ultimately, teaching the Catechism captured the child's attention, ensuring their interest and engagement in school and parish activities.

This study aims to investigate the presence of Catholic precepts in the educational activities of the João Alcântara School Group in Porteirinha, Minas Gerais, from 1938 to 1962, through Catechism classes. We will investigate how papal guidelines were put into practice in daily school life. This research will delimit a time and place where the production of educational and social practices expressed a broad, national trend. Therefore, the city of Porteirinha, Minas Gerais, was connected to the Brazilian religious and pedagogical movement.

As a research method for this work in the field of History of Education, we propose bibliographical research conducted in books, articles, dissertations, and theses. Furthermore, we employ documentary research, which includes the analysis of sources circulating at the time, such as: minute books of teachers' meetings, local newspapers, laws and decrees of the local executive branch, pontifical and episcopal documents, manuscripts, works of memoirists, photograph albums, minute books of religious associations and their manuals, and registers. Finally, to maintain the "sense of the times," the grammatical norms of the time were preserved.

The work will be divided as follows: first, we will present the time and space of the school and its connections with the Catholic Church from 1938 to 1962. Second, in order to understand the education project for children, men, and women in the city, we will analyze the teaching of the Catechism in the School Group. As we move through the text, we will discuss how the Catholic legacy penetrated the cultural pores of the city. Finally, final considerations and references conclude the work.

By gathering official sources, speeches, and written documents, we know that Catholicism was a kind of "moral uniform" for the school. We know that there were many students who were children of Protestants, Spiritists, or people who followed African-based religions, such as *Candomblé*.<sup>4</sup> However, it is important to highlight that we find no trace of the presence of these religions in the official documents of the Church or the school. What was recorded and maintained historically was the Catholic memory. Ultimately, we can conclude that Catholicism and the school produced the citizens of the time.

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<sup>3</sup> The Francisco Campos Reform, implemented in 1931, introduced Religious Education as an optional subject in public schools. This reform aimed to modernize secondary education and promote moral and civic education, with religious education considered an important element in this goal. Francisco Campos, who was the Minister of Education at the time, believed that religious education was fundamental to moral and civic education, and that the Catholic religion should be recognized as the religion of all Brazilians (Carvalho, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> According to the IBGE Demographic Census (1950, p. 430), "99.5% of the people in the municipality of Porteirinha were Catholic; there were a total of 71 people who followed Protestantism, 31 were spiritualists and 3 declared themselves to have no religion, which represented 0.53%".

## The Catechism in School and the Church Formation

As soon as a child reaches the age of seven, the first thing he or she must learn is the catechism, because it is in this important summary of Christian doctrine that the principles of a child's moral education are found.

Unfortunately, an impious law prohibited the teaching of the catechism in schools because some politicians consider it superfluous.

But it is in the pages of the catechism that one finds good advice; in them, one finds certain examples that are deeply engraved in the minds of young people.

Today, not all parents have their children taught the catechism because, often, not believing in religion, they mistakenly consider it a story invented by priests.

A child who grows up without knowing the summary of the Christian Religion can never show due decorum to his parents; before a cultured and religious society, he has no value; finally, when he marries, he cannot be a good father.

Let us now examine this man born and raised without knowing the catechism.

Not knowing what a son should be to his mother and father, not knowing the examples Jesus Christ gave us with his Most Holy Mother, and finally not knowing the duties of every Christian man, he gives himself over to the illusions of the world and ends up deeply regretting not having learned the catechism.

The child must, therefore, learn the catechism from an early age and know the Catholic Religion, the only true one, and, in short, the only worthy one, because it was not invented by Luther or other debauchees, but planted in the heart of man by He who, nailed to the cross, once an instrument of ignominy, gave us all good examples, obeying his Eternal Father until death only to save us (A Verdade, 1907, p. 2).

The excerpt from the newspaper *A Verdade* highlights the existence of the Catechism as a Catholic enterprise dedicated to explaining behaviors and attitudes to be observed in the daily lives of citizens. The Catechism sought to extol the Christian model of the child, of the woman and the man, of the father and the mother; to instill a feeling of repulsion toward ideological movements opposing the doctrine of the Church; and to affirm the Catholic religion in the population as something indispensable for achieving an education based on the principles of Christ. Thus, childhood would be the main target of Catechism classes, as we saw in the excerpt that opened the section. According to Jedin (1961, p. 140),

The Catechism of the Holy Council of Trent represented a teaching manual of the Church's dogmas, whose objective was to shape the educational and practical values formulated in the sixteenth century and the assimilation of the internal reforms of the Church carried out in Trent in the minds of Christians.

According to studies by Orlando (2013), as an important tool of catechesis, the Catechism, originating from the Greek *katechismós*, means to teach the word, to instruct. In a broader sense, catechesis is a concept that refers to the ecclesial action that leads both individuals and communities to maturity in faith, while the Catechism is a compendium of the Church's doctrine that essentially expresses its fundamental truths of faith, necessary for salvation. The Catechism text serves to systematize catechetical action through teaching, adapting the methodology used to the age and circumstances in which it will be applied. Considering transmission through intensive or extensive reading, "catechism manuals constitute reliable and authentic reference texts for the teaching of Catholic faith and doctrine, illuminated by Apostolic Tradition, the Magisterium of the Church, and Sacred Scripture" (Orlando, 2013, p. 70).

Thus, faithful to the apostolic oath, during almost every meeting of the *Apostolado da Oração* of the city of Porteirinha and the *Pia União Filhas de Maria*, the main lay religious associations, Father Julião Arroyo Gallo drew the attention of the caretakers to a role very important to the Catholic Church: the need to encourage members to teach the Catechism to children and their perseverance in fulfilling their duties<sup>5</sup>. In the minutes of the *Apostolado da Oração*, dated November 9, 1941, the following passage was recorded:

Father Julião took the floor and spoke about the need to teach catechism to children, appealing to the caretakers to further awaken the spirit of God in the little ones, and for them not to miss catechism, otherwise the desired and necessary success would not be achieved. Significant progress related to the good fruits of this teaching (Paróquia São Joaquim, 1941, p. 4).

Teaching the Catechism was one of the tasks of the *Apostolado da Oração*. The parish priest always praised the teachers of the *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara* in Porteirinha as catechists for always being close to the children and for possessing the pedagogical knowledge that aided in teaching and learning. According to the *Manual do Apostolado da Oração* (1923, p. 133), the caretaker's responsibility was to "be ready to teach the catechism, adorn the altars and chapels, especially when the president [priest] so orders."

However, it was a so-called noble duty, as not just anyone could serve as a catechist. The desired profile of a catechist was one who: "should avoid bad company, worldly gatherings such as games, sales, dances, cinemas, clubs, theaters" (*Apostolado da Oração*, 1923, p. 120). The profile also defined that the catechist should have a good intellectual background and good pedagogical equipment. Thus, the most devout teachers, those who had a good knowledge of Catholic doctrine, were chosen to teach the Catechism to children. The idea was that the children, by observing the example of the catechist, would end up imitating her way of life.

In May 1945, a letter from Father Julião also corroborated the information that teachers were heavily involved in Church affairs, especially in preparing children to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist:

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<sup>5</sup> Data obtained through a survey of all minutes from the following sources: 1) 1st Minutes Book of the *Apostolado da Oração do Sagrado Coração de Jesus da Paróquia* of the Parish of Porteirinha, October 30, 1941 to September 11, 1949; 2) 2nd Minutes Book of the *Centro do Apostolado da Oração do Sagrado Coração de Jesus da Paróquia* of Porteirinha, October 9, 1949 to March 3, 1957; 3) 1st Minutes Book of the *Pia União das Filhas de Maria da Paróquia* of Porteirinha, October 10, 1951 to December 19, 1966.

### Catechism

More than 70 children are preparing to make their First Communion, receiving the necessary instruction daily from competent and dedicated teachers. [...] They also receive daily instruction from the delicate and selfless collaborators in religious functions (Gallo, 1945, p. 35).

The meeting minutes of the *Grupo Escolar* teachers also recorded the teaching of the Catechism in this space: "[...] on May 17, 1958, the wise principal Lourdes Irlanda Matos asked the teachers to prepare the students, especially those in the first grade, to receive First Communion, in one or two catechism classes per week" (Grupo Escolar João Alcântara, 1958, p. 27). We note that the principal directed the catechism teaching primarily to younger students. This was undoubtedly in response to a request from the local parish priest to the school to select those children.

The Catholic Church has always had a special focus on children. Counted in parish records, baptisms and First Communions constituted important numbers. If the number of Eucharists, baptisms, and confirmations were increasing, it would be a positive indicator for the development of the local parish.

By identifying moral formation with religious education and transferring responsibility for people's moral formation to the Church, the school was meeting the demands of the Catholic Church's national project and, at the same time, remaining faithful to the authoritarian conception of the time, seeking to establish mechanisms to reinforce discipline and authority. In keeping with this national political and Catholic project, we observe that the school principal, through an excerpt from meeting minutes, outlines the parameters of religious education practices and states that "the following aspects should be addressed in the various grades of primary education":

- Human duties toward God and neighbor.
- The need for a religion to situate humanity in the universe and to establish a correct scale of values.
- The value of prayer as a contact between the creature and the Creator.
- Spirit and matter. The principle of human identity despite physical mutability (Grupo Escolar João Alcântara, 1942, p. 50).

Finally, the principal concluded the Religious and Moral Education program by proposing the methodology to be used in the classes:

The desired self-realization, integration, and conscious participation are conditioned by the student's global and integral development. Home, religion, school, and society must provide children with conditions that allow them to develop harmoniously in spiritual, moral, intellectual, emotional, physical, and social aspects (Grupo Escolar João Alcântara, 1942, p. 50).

In light of this *modus vivendi*, the school defends Catholic principles and highlights the need to incorporate them into society and the educational policy of the time. The principal also cites the techniques and methodology of the *Revista do Ensino*<sup>6</sup>, which, incidentally, were read at pedagogical meetings and served as ongoing training. Note that the modern proposals of the New School reached the School Group and reconciled them with conservatism and moral and religious principles.

The concern with the initiation and preparation of children for the Catholic sacraments was so significant in Porteirinha that in 1955 Father Julião, together with the *Apostolado da Oração*, founded the *Cruzada Eucarística Infantil* (Paróquia São Joaquim, 1955, p. 23). Created in 1916 to meet the needs Inspired by Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922), the *Cruzada Eucarística Infantil* aimed to encourage frequent communion among children. During World War I (1914-1919), "the Pope asked children, adolescents, and young people to join in a Universal Crusade, praying for peace in the world" (Fraternidade Sacerdotal São Pio X, 2017). The appeal caught on, and by 1933, the Eucharistic Crusade had nearly three million members internationally.

The Eucharistic Crusade in Porteirinha brought together children aged eight to fourteen, of both sexes, with the goal of supporting their formation in Christian life, both at home and in the community. The "little crusaders," as they were called, wore white vestments and wore a small yellow ribbon with a blue cross. Dressed in this way, they participated in masses and processions, and enthusiastically sang the Children's Crusade hymn *Somos Pequenos da Cruzada*, presented below:

***Hino da Cruzada Infantil***

*Somos pequenos da Cruzada  
Terna esperança do Senhor  
Somos nós a geração formada  
Na escola do nosso Deus de Amor.*

***A Cruzada Infantil***

*Vem trazer ao Brasil  
Um vigor novo e forte  
Dos Pampas ao Norte  
Dos campos às serranias  
Das praias ao sertão  
Nós havemos de ouvir  
O Brasil repetir o seu nome cristão*

***Só o amor à lei divina***

*Tornar-se-á bom cidadão  
Quer no lar, no campo e na oficina  
A Deus sirva como um bom cristão.*

(Manual do Apostolado da Oração, 1923, p. 205).

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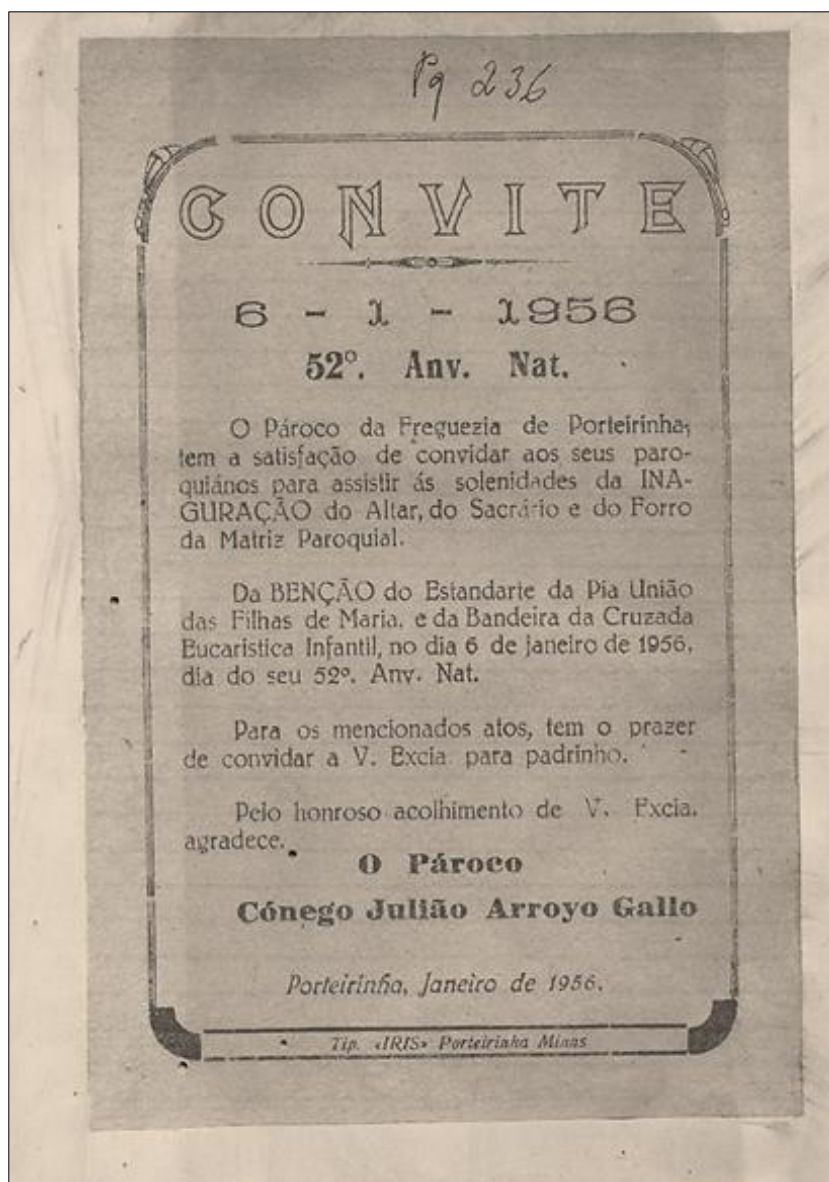
<sup>6</sup> According to Souza (2002), the *Revista do Ensino* was created at the end of the 19th century during the Afonso Pena administration, which implemented the first educational reform of the republican period. However, the journal's more effective publication would only occur in 1925, during the Fernando Mello Vianna administration, when a reform of public education in the state of Minas Gerais was implemented. According to Biccás (2008), the *Revista do Ensino* was an official pedagogical publication aimed at teachers, principals, and technicians in the public education system of the state of Minas Gerais. The journal can be analyzed as a "technology of power," as it served as an object of action and control by the Minas Gerais government over teaching activities, supporting laws, standards, and recommendations for educational guidelines during its period of publication.



The anthem alluded to the country's past Christian name (*Terra de Vera Cruz*), thus, the expectation of its return was real. The anthem also evoked a sense of belonging to the group; its members would be the generation educated in the school of Jesus Christ, who would bring to the country a new and strong vigor of faith. Children from every corner of Brazil would make up this new religious army and learned from an early age that becoming a good citizen, a good son, and a good worker required obedience and respect for divine law.

The Crusade's weekly meetings addressed issues appropriate to the participants' age group, in addition to planning and participating in religious festivals, outings, and leisure activities. The group had a flag that was raised and displayed during major parish activities. On January 6, 1956, Father Julião invited parishioners to attend a series of activities at the church, including the blessing of the flag of the *Cruzada Eucarística Infantil* of Porteirinha, as shown in the pamphlet shown in the following figure:

**Figure 1** - Invitation from Father Julião Arroyo Gallo.



**Source:** Gallo, Julião Arroyo. [invitation]. Porteirinha/MG, January 6, 1956.

The teaching of the Catechism to children and youth was recorded in the *Carta Pastoral Conjunta*<sup>7</sup> of 1915, led by the Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, Arcoverde de Albuquerque Cavalcanti. The document was transcribed in the book of records of the Parish of Santo Antonio:

To the Clergy and Faithful of Our Dioceses, Greetings, Peace, and Blessings in Our Lord Jesus Christ. [...] Let us take care of children and youth by teaching the catechism with true commitment, by striving to distance them from and protect them from vices, by urging their parents to dedicate themselves to the Christian education of their children. Priests should strive to imbue families with the Christian spirit, ensuring that they practice common prayer at least in the morning and at night, pray the Rosary daily, respect the laws of God and the Church, and ensure that the example of their parents' piety is a norm and encouragement for their children's conduct. They should choose schools for their children that best preserve the Christian spirit [...] (Paróquia Santo Antonio, 1913, p. 31).

In the *Carta Pastoral*, the episcopate draws the attention of clergy and parents to the care of children and youth. It reinforces the need to teach the Catechism, the practice of daily prayer, and the Rosary. The Church also tells parents that they are an example for their children and that their choice of school should be guided by one that values Christian education.

In Porteirinha, on November 19, 1949, the then mayor of the city and treasurer of the *Apostolado da Oração*, Altivo de Assis Fonseca, during the monthly meeting of this association, “took the floor and proposed to the members present that a vote of praise and gratitude be recorded in the minutes for the Reverend Director of the Apostolate, Father Julião Arroyo Gallo, for his invaluable services to the parish” (Paróquia São Joaquim, 1949, p. 27) and for his work in teaching catechism to children. Following this, Father Julião thanked the parish and “addressed the subject of teaching catechism once again. He said he was pleased with its progress” (Paróquia São Joaquim, 1949, p. 27). However, the priest was never satisfied with the numbers and always asked everyone to make the greatest possible effort to constantly improve the catechetical preparation of children.

On this same occasion, the priest “proposed that a vote of praise be included in these minutes for catechists Idalice Coêlho and Carolina Vieira.” These two catechists, members of the *Apostolado da Oração* and the *Associação Filhas de Maria*, were staff members of the School Group. Through the minute books of teachers' meetings and school records, we arrived at an approximate number of teachers who worked at this school from 1938 to 1962. The survey revealed that 35 teachers passed through the school. Below is the complete list of teachers who worked at the school from 1938 to 1962:

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<sup>7</sup> Pastoral Letter signed by the Cardinal Metropolitan Archbishop of S. Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro, the Metropolitan Archbishops of Marianna, S. Paulo, Cuyabá and Porto Alegre and the Bishops of five Southern Provinces of Brazil *40 Clero e fiéis de Nossas Dioceses, Saudação, Paz e Benção em Nosso Senhor Jesus Christo*. Nova Friburgo/RJ, January 17, 1915. In: *Livro do Tombo da Paróquia Santo Antonio de Grão-Mogol*, 1913, p. 28-37.

**Chart 1** - Teachers of the *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara* (1938-1962)

N.	Teacher's name	Participated of <i>Apostolado da Oração</i> or <i>Filhas de Maria</i>
1.	Adelaide Cardoso dos Santos	
2.	Amelia Maiabe	
3.	Aurea Antunes Câmara	
4.	Aurenívia Gomes	
5.	Clotildes Mendes Carvalho	
6.	Dalva Caldeira Tolentino	
7.	Dedesia Angelica Teixeira	
8.	Delza Mendes Teles	
9.	Durçulina Antunes Câmara	X
10.	Eva de Oliveira Azevedo	
11.	Francisca Maria de Brito	
12.	Gecy Lima	X
13.	Geni Albuquerque Teixeira	
14.	Gertrudes Amaral	X
15.	Hilda Martins Gomes	X
16.	Idalice Coelho	X
17.	Ilca de Carvalho	
18.	Joana Álvares Morais	
19.	Letícia Coelho	X
20.	Lilia Alvarenga Carvalho	
21.	Lourdes Irlanda Matos	
22.	Lúcia Tibo	X
23.	Lucila Araújo Mendes	
24.	Maria Gildésia Angélica Brito	X
25.	Maria José Lacerda	
26.	Maria Lisbela Pereira	
27.	Mércia Maria de Mendonça Azevedo	X
28.	Milva Monção	
29.	Miraci Teles de Brito	X
30.	Noemi Dalva Silva	X
31.	Palmyra Santos Oliveira	X
32.	Rosalva Antunes da Silva	X
33.	Stela Jansen	
34.	Suzete Teles de Brito	
35.	Terezinha Teles Santos	X

**Sources:** 1) *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara*. Monthly Bulletins of school records, 1944 to 1955; 2) *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara*. Book of exam minutes, promotion terms, installation of the school in this city, 1946; 3) *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara*. Minutes Book of teachers' meetings, 1956; 4) *Pia União das Filhas de Maria*. Minutes Book of the *Pia União das Filhas de Maria*, 1951 to 1966; 5) *Paróquia São Joaquim*. 1st Minutes Book of the *Centro do Apostolado da Oração*, 1941 to 1949; 6) *Paróquia São Joaquim*. 2nd Minutes Book of the *Centro do Apostolado da Oração*, 1949 to 1957; 7) *Paróquia São Joaquim*. 3rd Minutes Book of the *Centro do Apostolado da Oração*, 1957 to 1967.

From these, 40% of the teachers (14) served on the boards of directors of the city's religious associations, holding important positions such as secretary, director, treasurer, and catechist. They are:

1. Durçulina Antunes Câmara,
2. Gecy Lima,
3. Gertrudes Amaral,
4. Hilda Martins Gomes,
5. Idalice Coelho,
6. Letícia Coelho,
7. Lúcia Tibo,
8. Maria Gildésia Angélica Brito,
9. Mércia Maria de Mendonça Azevedo,
10. Miraci Teles de Brito,
11. Noemi Dalva Silva,
12. Palmyra Santos Oliveira,
13. Rosalva Antunes da Silva,
14. Terezinha Teles Santos.

It is worth noting that the survey was conducted based on signatures recorded in the minutes of the associations and the *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara*. Therefore, the number of teachers who participated in the city's associations may be even higher, given that the board members were the only ones who signed the minutes.

Many of these teachers were trained in religious schools. The number of female principals of the School Group, qualified by *Colégio Imaculada Conceição*, is worth highlighting here, as shown in the following table:

**Chart 2** - Female Principals of the School Group and Teacher Training

Period	Principal's name	Training institution for the Normal Course	City
1933 a 1938	Francisca Maria de Brito	<i>Colégio Nossa Senhora das Dores</i>	Diamantina
1939 a 1940	Stela Jansen	<i>Colégio Imaculada Conceição</i>	Montes Claros
1941 a 1944	Rosalva Antunes da Silva	<i>Colégio Imaculada Conceição</i>	Montes Claros
1945 a 1947	Maria Lisbela de Souza	<i>Colégio Nossa Senhora das Dores</i>	Diamantina
1948 a 1951	Lourdes Irlanda Matos	<i>Colégio Imaculada Conceição</i>	Montes Claros
1951 a 1952	Palmyra Santos Oliveira	<i>Colégio Imaculada Conceição</i>	Montes Claros
1953 a 1967	Lourdes Irlanda Matos	<i>Colégio Imaculada Conceição</i>	Montes Claros

**Source:** *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara. Boletins Mensais dos registros escolares*, 1944 a 1955; Oliveira, 2012.

The *Colégio Imaculada Conceição*<sup>8</sup> was the center of Catholic thought in northern Minas Gerais and, together with the *Colégio Nossa Senhora das Dores*<sup>9</sup> in Diamantina, was responsible for training all of the school's principals from the 1930s to the 1960s.

During this period, catechist training courses were offered to the teachers and principal, such as the " *Conferências de Pedagogia Catequética para Professoras* by Father Alvaro Negromonte," announced in the *Gazeta do Norte*:

<sup>8</sup> The *Colégio Imaculada Conceição* was the first school for girls in Montes Claros. Founded by the nuns of the *Congregação das Irmãs do Sagrado Coração de Maria de Berlaar*, Belgium, in September 1907 (Borges, 2011), its primary objective was to work with education, one of the paths towards the Romanization of the Brazilian Church.

<sup>9</sup> The *Colégio Nossa Senhora das Dores*, located in the city of Diamantina, Minas Gerais, was a religious school for women founded in 1866 by Dom João Antônio dos Santos, the first bishop of Diamantina, and by the French Vincentian nuns who arrived in Minas Gerais in 1848. For details, see Asano (2002).

***Conferências de Pedagogia Catequética para Professoras***

A series of classes on catechetical pedagogy for teachers, taught by Father Alvaro Negromonte, will begin tomorrow at the *Congregação Mariana* at 1:30 p.m. (Gazeta do Norte, 1945, p. 4).

Two works by Father Alvaro Negromonte are noteworthy: the *Manual de Religião* (1941) e o *Meu Catecismo* (1957)<sup>10</sup>, both used in the Catechism teaching at *Paróquia São Joaquim* and the School Group<sup>11</sup>. It is important to emphasize that Alvaro Negromonte's figure is central to the teaching of school catechism during this period. Generally speaking, his books were present in catechism classes in Minas Gerais schools, important arenas for the Catholic reaction to secular education. Through these printed materials, catechist teachers learned the methodological aspects and knowledge of Catholic doctrine and passed them on to the children.

In the next section, we will visit the Catechism class taught at *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara* and *Paróquia São Joaquim*, based on the Father Alvaro Negromonte's works. We will examine, based on the sources gathered and within its limitations, how the Catechism instilled religious and moral habits and values in children, in addition to shaping behavior and forming Christians.

**Visiting the Catechism Class**

According to Orlando (2013), although the existence of catechisms predates modernity, it was during this period that this printed material gained its greatest traction. According to Bollin and Gasparini (1998), the term "Catechism," used to refer to the small book of Christian doctrine, was already used in both Latin and vernacular in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and served to explain Christian doctrine to the ignorant or to children. However, it was after the Protestant Reformation and Luther's use of printed material to propagate the faith that the Church mobilized and began to use the same strategy for instruction and shaping the Catholic faith. Catechisms adopted new forms in modernity. Catechesis, which embraced an apostolic nature, began to be used by the Church from a new perspective: teaching (Orlando, 2013). In the words of Bollin and Gasparini (1998, p. 105), "catechesis is seen as the teaching of Christian doctrine concentrated in the catechism; the book that compiles, in a simple, essential, and complete way, everything the faithful should know."

The production of catechisms In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, debated during the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), bore the marks of new times. New times that called for new objects, new practices, and new representations, specific to the time and place in which they were circumscribed (Orlando, 2013). The multiplicity of catechisms that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to Pope Pius X demanding the creation of a single catechism, a topic already discussed since the Council of Trent and again addressed at the First Vatican Council, but which was never defined.

<sup>10</sup> According to the Minutes Book of the *Pia União das Filhas de Maria* and the 1st Minutes Book of the *Centro do Apostolado da Oração*, Father Alvaro Negromonte's books were the most frequently used in catechism classes in Porteirinha.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to highlight that the Minas Gerais *Revista do Ensino* was also a strategy for training Catholic teachers at the School Group, as previously mentioned. The *Revista do Ensino* contained numerous catechism lessons and conservative and Catholic guidelines (Biccas, 2008).

Following the Ultramontane<sup>12</sup> movement, catechism texts considered unique to those countries were adopted in several countries, such as France, Italy, and Germany. The Church's strategy of adopting a single catechism text suggests that it intended, through religion and print, to shape the Catholic culture of nations in a standardized manner.

In the name of this standardization, in 1905, Pope Pius X published the Encyclical *Acerbo Nimis* (about the teaching of the Catechism), in which he sought to combat what the Roman authorities called the religious ignorance of Catholics, further encouraging the expansion of catechesis in an effective manner (Pius X, 1905). Pius X's insistence on nourishing the people with spiritual nourishment sparked a work that called for volunteer catechists for parish catechisms and Catholic teachers in their classrooms, as they had access to a greater number of children on a more continuous basis. These two fronts of catechesis contributed to the proliferation of the production of catechism manuals, already in progress since the 19th century (Lustosa, 1977).

The *Livro Tombo da Freguezia Santo Antonio de Padua*, in Riacho dos Machados, presents an account by Father Ricardo Alfredo Gnani, dated August 15, 1915, about the challenges encountered in teaching the Catechism to children and the valuable assistance of the teacher in this task:

On August 15, 1915, I celebrated the Festa de Nossa Senhora da Glória, preceded by the devout novena. [...] I wanted to give the children their First Communion. Unfortunately, the parents, understanding nothing about the Eucharist, did not know how and did not want to accept my advice, and many fathers and mothers opposed the sacrament of confession. In this circumstance, the public schoolteacher, Dona Noemi Figueiredo, helped me extraordinarily in preparing the boys and girls for their First Communion. Although a Catholic, with an honest and irreproachable life, she was always the target of criticism and persecution from many of the women of Riacho, who were brutal, ignorant, and irreligious (Parochia Santo Antonio, 1914, p. 11).

Although difficulties are apparent regarding teaching the Catechism to children, as well as regarding the reception of the sacraments by the families of Riacho dos Machados, the parish priest has a strong ally within the public school: the teachers. So much so that Ricardo Gnani gives special thanks to Dona Noemi Figueiredo's work in teaching the Catechism to the children.

The main objective of the Catechism is to teach the precepts of the Catholic Church as absolute truths. According to Orlando and Dantas (2008), for more effective learning, these teachings needed to be ingrained in children without giving rise to further questioning. Thus, the younger students were selected primarily for the School Group, the age of discernment, both for confession and communion, would be around seven years old. From that point on, the obligation arose to fulfill the two precepts of confession and communion by reading the book.

The *Manual do Apostolado da Oração* provides strategies to "effectively combat the deplorable influence of godless schools, safeguard the innocence of children, and prepare Christian youth," through preparing children for their First Communion. At the beginning of

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<sup>12</sup> Ultramontanism emerged in France in the first half of the 19th century and refers to the Catholic political doctrine that seeks its primary reference in Rome. This movement reinforces and defends the power and prerogatives of the Pope in matters of discipline and faith. According to the *Enciclopedia Filosofica* (1979, p. 442) of the *Centro di Studi Filosofici di Gallarate/Italy*, Ultramontanism was a term used outside Italy to designate "the doctrine of action of the theses and interests of the Church of Rome, both in theological and jurisdictional relations with national churches, and in political relations with states, especially in matters pertaining to religious matters."

the text, the manual warns the reader that this preparation "is as easy as it is powerful and, moreover, necessary in our towns and cities. To attract all the children in a parish to communion, it is necessary to resort to various means" (Apostolado da Oração, 1923, p. 67).

According to the printed material, the three fundamental strategies for successfully increasing children's communion attendance in parishes were: 1) the Inauguration, 2) Communion Day, and 3) the Communion Remembrance. The Inauguration refers to the most favorable time to begin working with the children. Note that the time of first communion and the beginning of school are indicated:

Then the children are deeply impressed, and from that day onward, it is easy to make them accept the obligation verbally or in writing, and then the custom of monthly communion is established. The reopening of classes is also a special epoch (Apostolado da Oração, 1923, p. 68).

The *Communion Day* is the second step toward improving communion. On this day, along with the children, catechists, parish priest, parents, and family members, a ceremony is held with pomp and formality to celebrate the completion of the preparation for studying the Catechism and receiving First Communion. For the Church, First Communion signifies the day of forgiveness and the Eucharist. Dressed in white robes and holding the Catechism booklet, during the ceremony, the children light their candles, symbolizing "faith, salvation, and happiness in Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church" (Chevalier; Gheerbrat, 1997, p. 570). The child, "with his or her light, is lit by communion and by Christ himself" (Pedro, 1994, p. 179). At the end of the event, the catechized students receive diplomas certifying their completion of the Catechism and their First Communion.

In the next figure, you can see the students of the *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara* on their First Communion day. Note the rolled-up diploma, the Catechism booklet, and the candle in their hands, symbols used in the ceremony. In the background, the presiding officer, Father Julião Arroyo Gallo.

**Figure 2** - First Communion of the School Group students



**Source:** Gallo, Julião Arroyo. Photo album. First Communion of the School Group students. 1 photograph, Porteirinha/MG, September 1952a.



Finally, the ultimate strategy is the Communion Remembrance. To attract children to Communion, the Church encouraged and rewarded their attendance with small gifts, such as brooches, medals, crucifixes, etc. According to the Manual of the Apostleship of Prayer (1923, p. 69), "from time to time distribute some souvenir to all your young communicants: a medal, a picture, the Children's Manual, and thus you will satisfy them." The Manual contains the following account from a priest:

Do you want to know the means I used to attract all my children to Communion this month? Three times a year I gave them a souvenir. The first time I gave them all the miraculous medal: they wore it on their chests with holy pride! The second time, the blessed bread: it was a joy to see their transports of joy! The third time, finally, on St. Joseph's Day, a beautiful image of this holy Patriarch. Everyone promised to have it framed and placed near his bed (Apostolado da Oração, 1923, p. 70).

The report ends with the following conclusion: "Oh! How little is enough to bring joy to a child and draw him to Our Lord! It is an excellent way to accustom, gently and without difficulty, all the children of a parish to the sacraments" (Apostolado da Oração, 1923, p. 71). It is interesting to note that strategies for attracting children to Communion must also be thought of as products of memory and the creation of emotional bonds and belonging to a community.

Besides securing Communion attendance, it was also necessary to ensure its effectiveness among the children. In Figure 3, we see a student from the School Group who has just completed his preparation for First Communion:

**Figure 3** - First Communion.



**Source:** Gallo, Julião Arroyo. Photo album. First Communion. 1 photograph, Porteirinha/MG, September 1952b.



A disciplined and well-behaved body was produced through reading the Catechism. According to Catholic teachings, the rosary in hand indicated devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, and to the values of the Church. The Catechism at school and the formation of the Church solidified beliefs and behaviors and consolidated the educational project. This formation began in childhood, through the guidance of one's will and the development of one's convictions.

## Final Considerations

Regarding the Church's presence in formal education, and choosing the João Alcântara School Group, we understand that education contributed greatly to maintaining the influence of Catholicism among the people. Even though it was a public educational institution, the Catholic Church held a permanent place there.

In this school, as in many other settings throughout Brazil, the characteristics of a Catholic morality were visible, to the detriment of the precepts of a public school. Although there were students from Protestant and Spiritist families, what was historically recorded and maintained was the Catholic memory. The sources say nothing of other religions. There is a profound silence regarding other faiths. This evidence leads us to the idea of the predominance of the Tridentine conception, which asserted that it was unacceptable for Catholicism to have its place in public schools, given that it considered spiritual guidance superior to temporal ones.

The speeches given by teachers and principals made explicit the protests of Catholics against the secular measures introduced into the Brazilian school system. They operated as a direction and control over the education of new generations. When the administration of a public school says: "Yes, sirs, we want God in the Schools!", the Perfect Society concept was propagated there, and the secular nature of schools was compromised. The school chose to be an ally of the Church, which claimed to possess the truth about everything and all of human life.

Thus, in the Catholic conception of education, teaching was imbued with a religious imprint, and teachers were elevated to the status of one of the main agents in the process of disseminating doctrine in schools through catechism and Religious Education classes. For Father Julião Arroyo Gallo, teachers exercised a true apostolate and needed a Catholic-based moral preparation to carry out their sacrifices and demonstrate the word of Christ, considered a principle of education. Thus, under clerical guidance and blessings, the Tridentine model was amalgamated with the aim of forming Catholics in various sectors of society, especially in education.

According to an analysis of the minutes of religious associations, *Pia União das Filhas de Maria* cherished an ideal of a woman whose natural destiny was to fight alongside Catholic militancy and to renounce worldly pleasures to become a future mother, wife, devotee, and primary school teacher. The teachers at the *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara*, educated at traditional Catholic schools in northern Minas Gerais, such as *Colégio Imaculada Conceição* and *Colégio Nossa Senhora das Dores*, carried and reproduced Catholic beliefs and morals in public spaces. These women assisted the priest in teaching children's catechism, organizing religious festivals, and spreading doctrine. In other words, they performed a valuable role for the Church, working both within and outside these associations.

Under the priest's watchful eye, mothers, daughters, or future mothers, who would later become housewives or teachers, received training in the education of their children and students. Thus, this feminine behavior was objectified in the home, in the family, in the neighborhood, in the church, in public spaces, and at private events, with the Catholic religion as its central focus. Women were given the role of good mothers who care for their children while the breadwinner father went out to work. She was also tasked with teaching, as she was the first educator of her children in Christ, a task that would be continued by the primary school teacher.

Meanwhile, the teachings at the School Group upheld moral order, but to achieve this, it was necessary to emphasize the role of religion in the institution. To this end, it was essential that all teaching and the entire organization of the school (teachers, programs, and projects) be governed by the Christian spirit, under the direction and supervision of the Catholic Church. The formation of new generations, within the precepts of Catholic doctrine, was one of the guiding principles of the pedagogical action of the time, in line with national educational policies.

The role of education acquired in the Catholic family environment played an important role in building a society composed of honorable men and women, God-fearing, and servants of the nation. The education that mothers and fathers provided their children sought to form a good son, an honorable citizen, and a proper Catholic. The importance of providing an education grounded in Catholic principles was emphasized, fostering a morally sound social environment, establishing a constant dialogue between the individual's actions and daily life and the precepts and values preached by Catholicism.

Based on the analysis of the sources, the Catechism class combined tradition and conservatism, responsible for maintaining the roots and principles that characterized the foundation of Religious Education, with the elements of Modern Pedagogy, an approach that was in line with the precepts of the Francisco Campos Reformation. This teaching approach used techniques based on active methods that valued observation, research, and the student's personal experience in practical teaching and learning situations. It placed the student at the center of the action, fostering a passion for Religious Education. Ultimately, the Catechism class captured the child's attention, ensuring their interest and involvement in school and parish practices.

Receiving communion, in turn, was a common practice within the school. According to Catholic tradition, it was intended to spread the sacramental precepts of the Church and served to remedy sins and prepare children for Easter. Concern for the initiation and preparation of children for this sacrament was highly valued; and, in 1955, Father Julião, together with the *Apostolado da Oração*, founded the *Cruzada Eucarística Infantil*.

The number of baptisms and first communions constituted an important parameter. Thus, if the number of Eucharists, baptisms, and confirmations were increasing, it would be a positive indicator for the development of the local parish. The goal at that time and place was the advancement of the sacralization of society; that is, the Church intended to expand the presence of the *Perfect Society* concept and the privilege of being recognized as the exclusive source of moral guidance for people.

According to IBGE data, 99.5% of the inhabitants of the municipality of Porteirinha were Catholic, meaning there were people who followed other religious beliefs, such as Protestantism and Spiritism. However, the Catholic Church's desire at the time was for the city of Porteirinha, Minas Gerais, and the *Grupo Escolar João Alcântara* to be governed by a Christian order.

Following the same path as the national educational project, we concluded that the children and youth of Porteirinha, Minas Gerais, during the period studied, were recruited into the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The instruments used for this were, above all, the combined action of the Church, teacher training, and the school. From this perspective, with the aim of recovering and expanding the influence that the Church had held since colonial times, several Catholic schools were founded with the aim of training a ruling elite in keeping with Catholic tradition and culture. Public schools were not left behind, as a large proportion of teachers were trained in these denominational schools, which carried and reproduced Catholic beliefs and morals in public spaces. This front also provided religious instruction to the people through catechism and religious education classes. As for the press, newspapers, pamphlets, and books became not only religious apparatuses but also objects of religious culture. Finally, written memory, disseminated through the printed Catechism of the Catholic Church, for example, aimed to immortalize values and behaviors, as well as to shape and develop society.

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