



**Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood:
reflections on social, educational, evangelization and health actions in the
municipalities of the state of Pará, Brazil (1938 to 1970)¹**

Congregação das Irmãs do Preciosíssimo Sangue:
reflexões sobre as ações sociais, educacionais, evangelização e saúde nos
municípios do estado do Pará, Brasil (1938 a 1970)

Congregación de las Hermanas de la Preciosa Sangre:
reflexiones sobre acciones sociales, educativas, evangelizadoras y de salud en los
municipios del estado de Pará, Brasil (1938 a 1970)

Jamerson Lopes Vieira
Secretaria de Estado de Educação do Pará (Brasil)
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9827-9200>
<http://lattes.cnpq.br/2173836950246002>
jamersonlopesvieira84@gmail.com

Sebastião Rodrigues da Silva Junior
Universidade Federal do Pará (Brasil)
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7308-6990>
<http://lattes.cnpq.br/3931008488643780>
sebast@ufpa.br

Rogério Andrade Maciel
Universidade Federal do Pará (Brasil)
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1673-5215>
<http://lattes.cnpq.br/4171802049479343>
rogeriom@ufpa.br

Abstract

The article aims to reflect on the history of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood due to its social, educational, evangelization and health actions in the municipalities of the State of Pará in the period from 1938 to 1970. For this, documentary research was used, through the analysis of the Preciosinas Menu (1938-1941) and the Constitution of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood (2019). The analysis perspective is based on cultural history with a focus on the cultural practices developed by this congregation. The results point to the history of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood as a female religious congregation. It was born in Italy and spread to other countries, including Brazil, with emphasis on its expansion in the municipalities of the State of Pará.

Keywords: History of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood; Educational Cultural Practices; Women's Religious Congregation.

¹ English version by S.Iacovacci Translation Service. E-mail: siacovacci@gmail.com.

Resumo

O artigo objetiva refletir sobre a história da Congregação das Irmãs do Preciosíssimo Sangue devido as suas ações sociais, educacionais, de evangelização e saúde nos municípios do Estado do Pará no período de 1938 a 1970. Para isso, foi utilizada a pesquisa do tipo documental, mediante a análise do Ementário Preciosinas (1938-1941) e da Constituição da Congregação do Preciosíssimo Sangue (2019-2023). A perspectiva de análise tem como fundamento a história cultural com foco nas práticas culturais desenvolvidas por essa Congregação. Os resultados apontam a história da Congregação das Irmãs do Preciosíssimo Sangue como uma Congregação religiosa feminina. Ela nasce na Itália e ramifica-se por outros países, incluindo o Brasil, com destaque para sua expansão nos municípios do Estado do Pará.

Palavras-chave: Congregação das Irmãs do Preciosíssimo Sangue; Práticas Culturais; Congregação Religiosa Feminina.

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre la historia de la Congregación de las Hermanas de la Preciosa Sangre a través de sus acciones sociales, educativas, evangelizadoras y de salud en los municipios del Estado de Pará en el período de 1938 a 1970. Para ello, Investigación de tipo documental, a través del análisis del Menú Preciosinas (1938-1941) y la Constitución de la Congregación de la Preciosísima Sangre. (2019-2023). La perspectiva de análisis se fundamenta en la historia cultural con enfoque en las prácticas culturales desarrolladas por esta Congregación. Los resultados apuntan a la historia de la Congregación de las Hermanas de la Preciosa Sangre como Congregación religiosa femenina. Nació en Italia y se extendió a otros países, incluido Brasil, con énfasis en su expansión en los municipios del Estado de Pará.

Palabras clave: Congregación de las Hermanas de la Preciosa Sangre; Prácticas culturales; Congregación Religiosa de Mujeres.

Introduction

Research on the history of female religious congregations in the state of Pará is important for understanding the cultural practices carried out within these institutions, whose philosophical principles stem from various cultural practices in the fields of evangelization, healthcare, and education.

In order to address the history of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, it is necessary to examine the historical trajectory of the Congregation, its philosophy of life, and its practices. The origins of these practices lie in Italy. Following its establishment, the movement disseminated to multiple nations, notably Brazil. Upon arriving in the state of Pará, the settlement established itself in several municipalities.

In light of this, the primary objective of this article is to reflect on the history of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood through its social, educational, missionary, and health initiatives in the municipalities of the state of Pará from 1938 to 1970. The fundamental research problem is articulated as follows: A study of the cultural actions and practices developed by the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood as a female religious congregation in the social sphere is warranted. Such a study would include an analysis of the evangelization efforts of the congregation in educational institutions and healthcare settings from 1938 to 1970. In order to respond to this inquiry, an examination of the historical trajectory of the congregation will be conducted, encompassing its establishment, its migration to Brazil, and its subsequent dissemination to various municipalities within the state of Pará.

In terms of methodology, the present study employs the New Cultural History approach, which, as Chartier (1990, pp. 16–17) explains, "has as its main objective to identify the way in which, in different places and at different times, a given social reality is constructed, conceived, and interpreted," in the various forms of constitution of the cultural reality of its subjects, in the ways they appropriate the world through their practices and representations. Consequently, the analysis of the cultural practices of this Congregation, which are rich in representations, forms the basis of this article. The analysis is supported by two primary sources: the document *Ementário das Preciosinas e nas Constituições das Irmãs do Preciosíssimo Sangue*. These sources were used to cross-reference with the bibliographic references. The references adopted regarding the history of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood are as follows:

- *Pequena Biografia de Madre Maria Buchi (A Brief Biography of Mother Maria Bucchi)*, published in 1982. A work published by the Congregation to present the events of the life of the Foundress, Mother Maria Bucchi, through the recollections of the sisters who knew her during the early years of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood;
- the book *Irmã Maria Bucchi – Fundadora das Irmãs do Preciosíssimo Sangue (Sister Maria Bucchi – Foundress of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood)*, by Angelo Majo (1993), which provides an overview of the context of the Diocese of Milan in the second half of the 18th century, interwoven with the biographical journey of Sister Maria Bucchi.

Both books provide a sense of identity to the sisters who are part of the Congregation and serve as a foundation for understanding the events in the subject's life, aspects related to her personality, her experiences of faith, her life in community, and the consolidation of the Congregation in Italy. The Final Course Projects:

- *Irmãs Preciosinas: 50 anos de missão do Brasil (The Sisters of the Precious Blood: 50 Years of Mission in Brazil)*, by Sister Maria do Socorro da Silva (1988);
- *A educação preciosa numa visão personalista: um repensar necessário (Precious Blood Education from a Personalist Perspective: A Necessary Reassessment)*, by Sister Maria José Silva (1990); and
- the book *História da Congregação do Preciosíssimo Sangue no Brasil (History of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood in Brazil)*, by Sister Valéria de Oliveira Silva (2018).

These works have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the legacy left by the first missionaries of the Precious Blood Sisters in Brazil.

The *Ementário Preciosinas* comprises written records in Italian, as well as photographs and pamphlets that depict the experiences of the Italian sisters from 1938 to 1941. The illustrations contained within the *Ementário* offer insight into the practices adopted by the sisters in the municipality of Bragança. These practices include participation in church processions, the inauguration of the Santa Terezinha School, and meetings with the Barnabite priests. Additionally, a photograph was identified that depicted a symbolic moment featuring the missionary sisters with the Mother General in Monza before their departure for Brazil. A drawing of Saint Joseph and the Infant Jesus was also located. The attached pamphlets contained the program for a musical-literary event at the Santa Terezinha School.

Engaging with the documented historical sources and bibliographic references provided the opportunity to understand the history of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood. This history began with the experiences of Maria Bucchi, the Congregation's founder in Italy, and continued through the Congregation's history in other countries, up to the present day. Therefore, it is imperative to delve into the profile of the order's founder, Mother Maria Matilde Bucchi. Facing the challenges of her era, she exhibited remarkable fortitude by nurturing aspirations and attaining her objectives. In collaboration with her sisters, she successfully established the order as a religious congregation.

The journey of Maria Bucchi, founder of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood

The Congregation of the Most Precious Blood has its origins in the life story of its founder, Sister Maria Matilde Bucchi, who was born on May 18, 1812, in Agrate, a village in the Italian province of Monza and Brianza.

Her parents, Giuseppe Bucchi and Maria Teresa Pirola, were peasants. The couple had eight children who were raised in a challenging environment and were raised in accordance with the tenets of the Catholic faith (*Pequena Biografia - Short Biography...*, 1982).

The Catholic values instilled by her parents served as the foundation for Maria's development of an intimate relationship with God from a very young age. According to the *Pequena Biografia (Short Biography)* (1982), at the age of six, she requested her parents' consent to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. These writings reveal that her confession to the parish priest was characterized by innocence and authenticity, leaving the priest surprised and, at the same time, moved by the clear confession at such a young age, prompting him to conclude that the girl was ready for the sacrament. At the age of twelve, she received her First Communion.

Due to her family's limited financial resources, she was only able to attend school for a brief period, during which she acquired the fundamental skills of reading and writing. She was a diligent student who attended classes regularly; however, she was compelled to discontinue her education to assist her parents with farm-related tasks and domestic responsibilities.

During this period of informal education, at the age of 15, she once again aroused astonishment and admiration in her community, as she proved herself to be someone who “knew how to speak of her God with such grace, strength, and persuasion that she even impressed the priests when, on feast days, she explained Christian doctrine in her parish” (Pequena Biografia..., 1982, p. 12).

To help support the entire family, she worked at a young age at Filanda Corti, a typical textile factory on the outskirts of Monza. As Majo (1993) asserts, factories of that era subjected their female workers to excessive working hours, low wages, and precarious hygiene and food conditions, which led to the workers falling ill.

Despite the difficult working conditions, she was viewed by her employers as a dedicated employee. Regarding her skills at the factory, the following text is quoted:

Her work was so precise, fair, and flawless—meticulous and wholehearted—that her employers were happy to have her on their staff. Everything she earned went toward supporting her very poor family, while she herself made do with just a little bread throughout the workday (Pequena Biografia..., 1982, p. 13).

An experience characterized by responsibility, hardship, and discomfort, yet driven by a determination to meet certain basic needs, despite her family's poverty.

During her tenure at the factory, she encountered Ancilla Ghezzi. The two young women established a profound bond of solidarity, providing mutual support in their professional endeavors and engaging in frequent visits to the Church of Santa Maria de Carrobiolo, a place they selected for prayer and communion during their limited personal time.

According to Majo (1993), the congregation encountered the Barnabite priests at the church and engaged in discourse regarding the intricacies of religious life. The Barnabite priests are members of the Religious and Missionary Congregation of the Regular Clerics of St. Paul, which was founded by St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria and was inspired by the missionary work of St. Paul. It is noteworthy that her relationship with the Barnabites persisted over the course of many years, providing Maria Bucchi with the fortitude to overcome the vicissitudes of life.

Following Ancilla Ghezzi's entry into the Monastery of the Perpetual Adorers of the Most Holy Sacrament, Maria demonstrated unwavering dedication to her professional endeavors and to maintaining communication with the Barnabite Fathers, who assumed the role of spiritual mentors. However, she was compelled to relinquish her previous commitments and dedicate herself to the care of her ailing father for a period of four years.

Biographical accounts note that Maria remained faithful to the responsibilities she had taken on during her father's illness, for “[...] when work in the fields was done, she would tend to the silk, and at night, she would keep vigil by her elderly father's bedside” (Pequena Biografia..., 1982, p. 14). After Giuseppe's death, Maria went through other experiences: first, she was hired to work as a domestic servant in several homes in Milan; later, she was invited by the parish priest of Cernusco Lombardone, in the Italian province of Lecco, to assist with pastoral activities, reviving her experience of catechizing youth and adults.

Some time later, she returned to her hometown to care for a family member; shortly thereafter, she was invited by Father Giovanni Riboldi to assist with the care of the sick in the parish he led. According to her *Short Biography* (1982, p. 15), “[...] her favorite place was the bedsides of the sick; she treated them with great tenderness and comforted them, alleviating their pain.” Here we can see that her life's journey is devoted to working with the poor, the sick, and those most in need.

On May 17, 1852, she was invited by Tereza Corti, Mother Superior of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity, to provide educational instruction to 20 poor girls as part of a social and educational project for the students at the Canossian Institute in Monza. This Congregation was founded by Saint Magdalene of Canossa. The daughter of a noble and very wealthy family, Magdalene Gabriela Canossa was born on March 1, 1774, in Verona, Italy.

According to Majo (1993), Maria Bucchi would have no difficulty carrying out the tasks involved in her new career (educational work as a teacher, similar to that of a caregiver/counselor), with a monthly salary of six lire, as she had already gained experience guiding young people and children in catechism study and recreational activities.

In her new work experience, she realized that the activities of teaching catechism, reading, recreation, and manual work, such as embroidery and sewing, had expanded to the point where she needed more help. And so, with the support of the Mother Superior of the Daughters of Charity, she managed to enlist five friends—Maria Meroni, Giuditta Ferrario, Orsola Rusconi, Marianna Missaglia, and Stela Merline—to assist her in the institute's work, expanding educational services to more low-income girls (Majo, 1993). From there, the seed of a community began to take shape, organized in a simple way but with a firm commitment to providing a Christian education for girls from less affluent backgrounds.

After two years working as a teacher at the Canossian Institute, she fulfilled her greatest wish. On September 29, 1854, she wore the black veil and became a postulant in the Third Order of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity, along with her five friends. The community of Tertiaries was a structure conceived by Magdalene of Canossa along the lines of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity; to join the community, one had to make a profession of faith: poverty, chastity, and obedience (Majo, 1993). This explains the existence of a “Congregation” within another Congregation.

The following year, the young postulants took their religious vows before the community as Tertiary Sisters of the Daughters of Charity, subordinate to the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity, to whom they owed obedience.

During this same period, the Tertiaries moved the institute to a new adjacent building on Sant'Ágata Street, further expanding the capacity to meet the growing demand for educational services for young women (Short Biography, 1982).

The sisters excelled in their educational work with young women and harbored hopes of autonomy from the Daughters of Charity. But to achieve this, it was necessary to obtain pontifical approval for the foundation of a new Congregation. However, as the Short Biography (1982) emphasizes, the sisters faced two major challenges:

- endure the constant refusal of ecclesiastical authorities to approve the religious statutes (the set of rules for an institute approved by the Pope or a diocese), based on the rules drawn up for the Tertiaries by Saint Magdalene of Canossa, since they could not find a legal solution for the Tertiaries' autonomy from the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity, as the order's regulations were strict, admitting only the recognition of one category of religious within its order; and furthermore,
- the Mother Superior of the Daughters of Charity's refusal to relinquish her authority over the Tertiaries, since it was not in the Congregation's interest to give up the educational work carried out by its Tertiaries.

In 1867, Monsignor Luigi Nazari di Calabiana was appointed Archbishop of Milan. For various reasons, the sisters had high hopes for the new church leader, to the point of submitting a letter requesting that he intercede in the drafting of the Congregation's first rules; however, they were initially unable to enlist the priest's support for this endeavor.

The Biography of Mother Maria Buchi (1982) notes that both the Barnabite priests Luca Galbiati and Giusto Pantalini (Majo, 1993) made a significant contribution during the period when the sisters were organizing the institution's rules; they first encouraged Sister (and teacher) Giuseppina Sommariva to begin writing the rules, and the second took responsibility for organizing the rules, in addition to interceding on behalf of the sisters with the clergy of Milan.

In 1974, through the intervention of the Archbishop of Milan, the Tertiary Sisters terminated their agreement with the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity; as a result, they were compensated for the services rendered to the Congregation and relocated the entire community to a new site: the Benedictine Convent of Santa Margherita (Short Biography..., 1982).

On May 17, 1876, the Archbishop of Milan, Monsignor Luigi Nazari di Calabiana, personally visited the Convent of Saint Margaret to present the Sacred Rules, and the sisters, together, chose consecration to the Most Precious Blood. At that moment, the archbishop declared Sister Maria Bucchi the foundress and Mother Superior General of the Congregation.

Thus, on July 10, 1934, it was recognized as an Institute of Pontifical Right—an international congregation organized into territorial divisions united by the charism that defines it (Constitutions of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, 2019).

The work carried out by the sisters in the early days of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood was not easy, especially since Mother Bucchi taught without any formal pedagogical training. She had to turn to Sister Giuseppina Sommariva, the only sister with a teaching degree, to ensure the continued operation of the Congregation's first school. They faced financial crises but managed to overcome the obstacles and foster the growth of the Congregation, which grew stronger each day, enabling the expansion of educational services, evangelization, and healthcare services to other regions of Italy. Currently, the Congregation maintains a presence in Europe (Italy), the Americas (Brazil and Haiti), Africa (Kenya), and Asia (East Timor and Myanmar). As can be seen on the world map in Figure 1.

Figure 1—A planisphere showing the countries where the Congregation is present



Source: Adapted by the authors (2024).

The cultural practices adopted by the sisters of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood in various countries are rooted in Article 3 of the Sisters' Constitutions, whose purpose is to "[...] proclaim the redemptive work of Christ within the Church and in the world through prayer, educational work, support for the most vulnerable, and care for and outreach to the sick and the poor" (Constitutions of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, 2019, p. 9).

In parishes, the sisters collaborate with priests on projects proposed by the Church, engaging in evangelization and support for the most needy; in Italian and Brazilian schools, the sisters aim to guide students with a focus on faith and the meaning of life, among other educational initiatives; *in healthcare settings*, they seek to be close to those who suffer; in care at military hospitals, attention to the elderly, people suffering from malnutrition, work with natural medicines, and diseases that marginalize and compromise the dignity of life.

According to the testimony provided by Sister Liodelza Silva (Silva, personal interview, 2023) and research conducted on the Congregation's official *website* in Italy, the sisters carry out work in the educational field at the Educational Institute and Arts High School in Monza, as well as at the Educational Institute in Milan and the High School of Humanities. There are other facilities administered by the sisters: the Motherhouse, a Holiday Home, and a Home for the Elderly; in addition, they are dedicated to evangelization in the parishes.

In Haiti, evangelization efforts go hand in hand with work dedicated to caring for orphaned children. In East Timor, there is parish work through catechesis and a small school dedicated to early childhood education. In Kenya, there is an orphanage and a mobile ambulance service, and in Myanmar, the sisters provide shelter for people in socially vulnerable situations.

History of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood: The First Mission in Brazil, Bragança, Pará.

According to Silva (1988), September 29, 1937, marked the beginning of a new project for the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood. On that date, the Italian priests Idelfonso Maria Clerici and Eliseu Maria Coroli, members of the Order of the Clerics Regular of St. Paul, known as Barnabite priests, visited the Mother General of the sisters in Italy and expressed their intention to rely on the missionary work of the religious sisters in the municipality of Bragança, located in the interior of the state of Pará, in the mid-region of northeastern Pará, specifically in the Caetés micro-region, 210 kilometers from the state capital, Belém (2022).

The Superior General of the Congregation, Mother Domenica Ruggeri, was responsible for the decision to expand the work of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood to another continent, however, as Silva (1988) points out, the request was initially denied, as Mother Domenica preferred to carefully consider the priests' invitation, understanding that serving the Bragança community through apostolic work focused on Christian formation would not be easy, given that it was an unfamiliar place with cultural, political, and social aspects entirely different from the Italian context.

At that time, Father Eliseu Coroli was responsible for developing various initiatives in the fields of health, education, and religious life through the parish of Our Lady of the Rosary—the seat of the Prelature of Guamá in the municipality of Bragança, PA.

In Bragança, he continued to harbor the desire to have the collaboration of the religious sisters in the church's pastoral work; for this reason, he remained in constant contact with Mother Superior, providing reports on the social and religious landscape of his parish, and insisting that she authorize the sisters' journey to Brazil.

Silva and Oletto (2010) note that the Barnabite priests encountered many difficulties in launching groundwork in the Bragança region due to several factors::

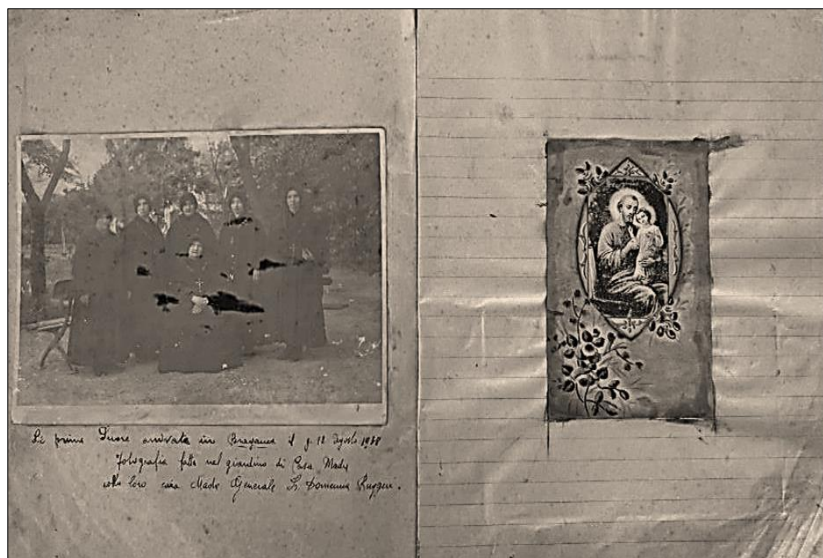
- the level of illiteracy among the population;
- religious indifference toward the Catholic Church;
- the dispersion of the population and, above all, the lack of qualified catechists.

Hence the need to rely on the sisters' support in the work of evangelization in missionary lands. The possibility of the sisters' journey overseas became clearer once Father Eliseu Coroli was appointed by the Holy See as Apostolic Administrator of the Prelature of Our Lady of the Rosary of Guamá on December 9, 1937. According to Silva (1988), this new position facilitated the priest's meeting with his ecclesiastical superiors and secured authorization to bring the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood to the Bragantina Amazon region.

On April 10, 1938, at the Church of Santa Maria de Carrobiolo in Monza, as Silva (1988) recounts, the followers, as well as the entire community of religious sisters and other ecclesiastical leaders, gathered for a farewell ceremony to formalize the presentation of the missionary crucifix to the sisters chosen for the work in Bragança, namely: Sister Lúcia Colnago, Sister Celina Casati, Sister Vitória Benaglia, Sister Adelaide Borroni, and Sister Maria Viganò. In a second event, they went to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome to receive the blessing of Pope Pius XI.

The *Ementário Preciosinas*, shown in Figure 2, is a book of memories whose physical form still withstands the test of time, as it is kept in the archives of the Provincial House of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, located in Belém, the capital of the state of Pará.

Figure 2 – Pages from the *Ementário Preciosinas*



Source: *Ementário Preciosinas* (1938-1941).

This image shows the opening pages of the *Ementário*; on the left, we see a photograph depicting the moment just before the sisters' departure for Brazil. According to the photo caption, the garden of the Motherhouse was the setting chosen for the farewell, in the presence of the Mother General of the Congregation, in Monza.

On the same page, we see that the sisters were dressed in black outfits, a common practice among women's religious orders in Italy at the time. The color was adopted by the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood from the time the Congregation's founder, Mother Maria Bucchi, became a Tertiary Postulant of the Daughters of Charity, receiving her "[...] black outfit, black cap, and black veil of pure muslin, and a medal of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Lady of Sorrows" (Majo, 1993, p. 31).

The illustration on the right depicts the figure of Saint Joseph, traditionally venerated by the Catholic Church and recognized within the Congregation as a symbol of loving devotion, care, and paternal responsibility. The image is set within a paper frame decorated with hand-painted flowers, an aesthetic feature that reinforces its devotional and artisanal character.

According to Silva (1988), the five sisters left Monza, Italy, accompanied by Bishop Eliseu Coroli, on April 14, 1938, bound for Naples, the final stop on land before their journey to Brazil. They disembarked from the ocean liner *Neptunia* in Rio de Janeiro on May 5 of that same year. This ship brought the first five missionaries, accompanied by Monsignor Eliseu Coroli, to Rio de Janeiro. The journey was long, lasting twelve days, but it was filled with joy (Silva, 2018).

They were welcomed to the city by the Barnabite priests and the sisters of the Angelic Congregation of St. Paul, a religious order founded in 1535 in Milan, Italy, by St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria. The missionaries remained there for two months, during which time Bishop Eliseu Coroli devoted himself to raising funds for the establishment of the mission in Bragança, while the sisters collected donations at the doors of several churches in Rio de Janeiro.

They left Rio de Janeiro on July 16, 1938, bound for the capital of the state of Pará. They arrived in Belém on the 27th of that same month and were welcomed at the home of the Sisters of St. Anne, where the Gentil Bittencourt School is located. Some time later, they continued their journey by railroad to the municipality of Bragança, reaching the final destination of their trip on August 12, 1938. The railroad was a large-scale project, designed with the purpose of connecting the main population centers of the Bragança region. Its construction spanned from 1883 to 1908, establishing itself as an infrastructural milestone for the development of many cities. The railway line remained in operation until 1964, the year in which it was officially decommissioned (Lima, 2015).

Figure 3 – Reception for the priests and sisters in Bragança, PA



Source: *History of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood in Brazil*, Silva (2018).

In this image, we see a moment of celebration among the people of Bragança. The photograph was taken on the steps of the Church of the Parish of Our Lady of the Rosary. In the photograph, it is clear that the church's façade has become a welcoming space for the newly arrived priests and nuns, surrounded by men, women, and children, symbolizing a unique and festive moment for the city at that time.

The nuns were introduced by Bishop Eliseu Coroli as “[...] generous souls who, sparing no sacrifice, crossed the seas and became messengers of the blood of the Redeemer, shed to redeem and rescue humanity” (Silva, 1988, p. 28). Here we see that Bishop Eliseu’s words align with the charismatic ideals expressed in the *Constituição da Congregação* (Constitution of the Congregation, 2019, pp. 9–10), namely “to serve one’s brothers and sisters” and “to accept with resignation any risk”—including all the difficulties that arose from contact with the new language, the customs of the

people of Bragança, and the harsh weather, such as the lack of running water for bathing, the use of wood or charcoal stoves for cooking, sleeping in hammocks, and eating flour (Silva, 2018).

Upon settling into a residence, they engaged in teaching catechism to children and youth during morning and afternoon sessions. At the end of the day, they assisted the novices of Santa Terezinha (candidates for religious life) with pastoral activities, cared for the sick at the clinic, prepared meals, laundered the vestments of the priests and sisters, and taught knitting, painting, and embroidery classes to some of the boarding students (Silva, 1988).

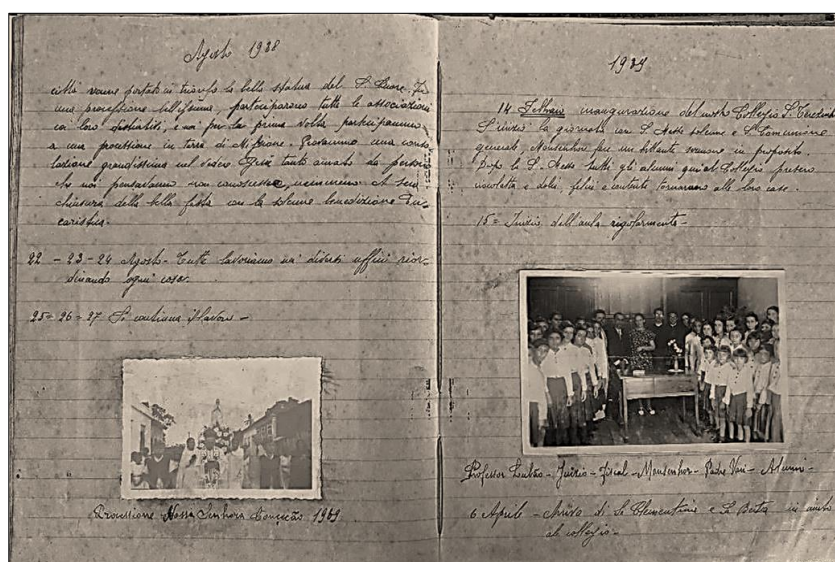
Among the cultural traditions that stand out in the municipality of Bragança, we highlight the procession of Our Lady of the Conception. As shown in the photograph featured in the Ementário das irmãs (Figure 4), we can see the route of this religious procession winding through the houses lining one of the city's streets, where we observe the participation of part of the Bragança community: women carrying the flower-adorned float bearing the image of Our Lady, accompanied by the bishop, adults, children, and a nun from the Order of the Most Precious Blood.

According to Silva and Oleto (2010), three months after returning from Italy, Don Eliseu oversaw the establishment of the Colégio de Santa Terezinha, an educational institution that would become the third Teacher Training College in the state of Pará, following those in the capital Belém and in Santarém, designed to train teachers to meet the demand for primary education.

After a visit to the Federal Interventor in Pará, José Carneiro da Gama Malcher requested that the Primary and Normal courses be brought up to the same standard as those of the State Teacher Training School of Pará. The decree granting the status of Teacher Training School was signed on November 23, 1938, news that was widely celebrated by Bragantinos of means, who had been sending their children to study in Belém.

On February 14, 1939, the inauguration of Colégio Santa Terezinha took place. The following day, as described in the Ementário Preciosinas, classes began regularly with a Primary Education class (held in a space attached to the school) and another for the Teacher Training Program, offered in a small building, serving both boarding and day students. This was recorded as the first experience of formal education, supported by the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, outside of Italy, becoming part of the historical and social evolution of Bragança.

Figure 4 – Pages from the *Ementário of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood*



Source: *Ementário Preciosinas* (1938-1941).

Upon examining the photograph on the right side of the Ementário (Figure 4), we can see that the mandatory school uniform was being worn: the older girls wore a pleated skirt that fell below the knees, a long-sleeved white blouse, black knee-high socks, and black shoes. The

younger girls followed the uniform standard, wearing knee-length skirts, but with short socks. It was not possible to identify the boys' attire.

In the same photograph, we identified a small room with wood paneling and a wooden floor, a table decorated with a vase and flowers, a woman in the center (possibly a teacher) flanked by Fathers Eliseu Coroli and Vitaliano Vari, Judge Joaquim Lobão (mayor at the time), a prosecutor, and a Precious Blood Sister.

The efforts of the Barnabite priests to establish the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, specifically in Bragança, were decisive in solidifying a mission centered on three pillars: evangelization, health, and education. Upon taking responsibility for Colégio Santa Terezinha, the priests and sisters sought to carry out selfless and patient work focused on the Christian formation of young people and children—a model of Catholic education that became more than just an interest for members of the Catholic Church and instead evolved into an educational model of interest to a significant portion of Bragança's population.

With all the work accomplished, the number of sisters in the municipality had already grown. Starting in 1939, the arrival of the missionaries is recorded: Clementina Colnago, who, although having a college education, lacked the pedagogical qualifications to teach and thus became a student in the Teacher Training Program; and Sister Francisca Berta, who was in charge of the girls' domestic training in embroidery and painting, and was also responsible for supervising the young boarders during their baths in the stream (Silva, 2018).

So far, we have seen that the sisters and the priests maintained a good relationship as they carried out their missionary work. Figure 5 shows a moment when they gathered together in the backyard of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood's residence. The sisters are standing side by side, while the priests are seated in chairs; in the center, we see a table decorated with a white tablecloth and flowers, with a prominent image of Saint Thérèse, patroness of the Missions, expressing the Barnabite priests' devotion to the French saint.

Figure 5 – Photograph included in the *Ementário das Preciosinas*

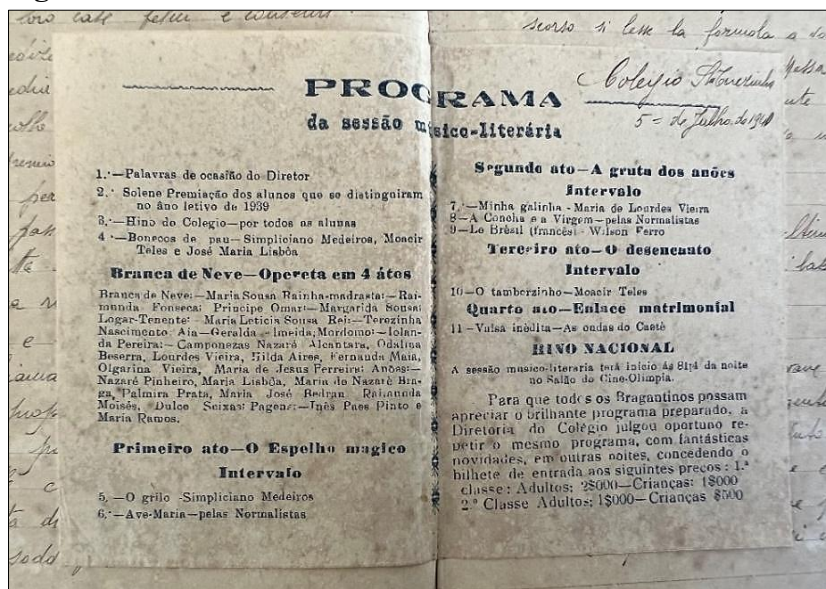


Source: *Ementário Preciosinas* (1938-1941).

The sisters' strong evangelizing presence served as an example for other young women from Bragança. Silva (1988) asserts that the first young women to become enthusiastic about the possibility of pursuing a religious life were Antonia Almeida de Moura and Arminda Pessoa. They received the postulant attire on March 25, 1940, at the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary in Bragança, marking the inauguration of the St. Joseph Novitiate, coordinated by Sister Lúcia Colnago, who at the time served as Mother Teacher and Regional Superior of the Congregation.

Committed to collaborating with the movement led by Bishop Eliseu, the sisters mobilized students and teachers to organize cultural events designed to entertain the people of Bragança. In Figure 6, we see attached to the *Ementário* a pamphlet with the program for the “musical-literary session,” scheduled to take place at the Olímpia Movie Theater in Bragança.

Figure 6 – Brochure attached to the *Ementário das Preciosinas*.



Source: *Ementário Preciosinas* —1941.

As can be verified in the notes in the brochure, the cultural event took place on the day the cornerstone was laid for the new Colégio Santa Terezinha building. The brochure outlines a set of protocols that were to be strictly followed, in a program that emphasized the authority of the school’s director, Bishop Eliseu—respect for student values—the school anthem—religious tenets—the Hail Mary prayer—patriotism—the national anthem—and student participation in performances and award ceremonies.

In December 1943, eighteen female students and one male student from the Teacher Training class completed the program and received their degrees as teachers. The graduation, in addition to being an unprecedented event, represented an opportunity for professional advancement for the new graduates. Among the teacher-training students, we highlight the Italian nun Maria Vigaò and Brazilians Zarife Sales, who entered religious life in 1948, and Sister Maria do Rosário Antunes, who used the training they received to contribute to education in the municipality and surrounding region.

Starting in 1944, the missionary work of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood in the Amazon expanded to other municipalities in Pará. This process of decentralization from Bragança, Pará, began once the sisters’ work had achieved a certain level of stability, marked by the graduation of the first class of teacher-trainers.

According to a statement by Sister Liodelza Silva (Silva, personal interview, 2023), in addition to cities in the state of Pará, the sisters also work in Cajazeiras and Fortaleza (state of Ceará), carrying out social work and evangelization activities in the parishes. In Trizidela do Vale (State of Maranhão) they are responsible for administering an elementary school. In Tuntum (Maranhão), they carry out social initiatives and assist with parish projects.

When analyzing the history of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, we recognize the importance of the human and spiritual experiences lived by the order's founder, which contributed to the expansion of the educational work initiated in Italy. The Congregation's presence in the Amazon has become notable through works with a strong Christian focus, reflected in its activities in school, healthcare, and social settings.

Reflections on the Activities of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood in the Municipalities of the State of Pará

In light of the Congregation's missionary purpose to expand its work in the areas of social service, evangelization, health, and education, prior to their final departure from Bragança-Pará, some sisters settled in the municipality of São Miguel do Guamá, located in the state of Pará. On March 15, 1944, they arrived in the municipality at the invitation of Father Ângelo Bernard to work as educators and catechists in an educational initiative grounded in "firmness, kindness, study, work, and prayer" (Silva, 1990, p. 26).

At this point, it is worth noting that, according to Silva (1988), the Mother Superior of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood closed the Congregation's operations in Bragança, as she had been informed that some religious leaders in the municipality were interested in replacing the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood with the Missionaries of Saint Thérèse, a female religious order founded by Bishop Eliseu Coroli, who have been responsible for the administration of the Santa Terezinha Institute in Bragança to this day.

The Sisters of the Most Precious Blood's first work in São Miguel do Guamá focused on the Santo Antônio Maria Zacaria Day School, run by the Barnabite Fathers, providing primary education. Over the years, they expanded their educational services to include two early childhood education schools, with human and financial resources funded by the municipal government. In addition, they supported the parish priest in catechesis and liturgical celebrations (Silva, 1990).

As part of the expansion of their educational mission, beginning in 1951, the sisters took on the responsibility of educating children in the municipality of Castanhal. The school was temporarily housed in the building that had previously served as the Catholic Action center, offering a day-school program. It was a shared space that served as a residence for the nuns and a school for the community; furthermore, the sisters assisted the priests in their pastoral work, teaching religious education classes in some public schools and offering courses in arts and crafts (Silva, 1988).

In 1951, the Congregation transferred the facilities of the São José Novitiate, headquartered in Bragança, to the municipality of Castanhal. The new location facilitated the arrival of several young women from the region, who, drawn by the desire for religious life, were welcomed by the sisters. The novices had the opportunity to deepen their biblical studies and experience the sisters' missionary work, including activities in catechesis and teaching some classes at São José School (Silva, 1988).

The establishment of the Community in the municipality of Inhangapi, located near the municipality of Castanhal, a little over 6 km away, made it possible to begin a new mission in 1970. According to Silva (1988), in that municipality, the sisters carried out initiatives in the social and religious spheres, such as a cultural and creative club, the apostolate of prayer, home visits to the city's ailing, a mothers' club, religious education classes, literacy programs for the rural population, among other teaching and evangelization activities.

The Sisters of the Most Precious Blood remained committed to their missionary project; they arrived in the municipality of Vigia, located in the state of Pará, in 1953. According to Silva (1988), they were welcomed by the residents with music and fireworks. The authorities provided financial support for the establishment of the sisters' new house, strengthening the

educational ministry at the Nossa Senhora das Neves School, which began by offering primary education to thirty-seven students. The sisters' presence fostered the consolidation of the Church's involvement in education in Vigia, a role that continues to this day.

In some cities, there were already very fruitful initiatives under the coordination of the Catholic hierarchy; in Belém, the capital of the state of Pará, for example, there was the philanthropic work carried out by the Jesuit priest José Torres da Costa on behalf of the most needy children. The favorable conditions under which these initiatives were carried out made it possible for Sisters Enrica Melzi, Lucia Isella, and Maria de Nazaré Menezes to establish a new community linked to the social project conceived by the priest. During this period (1953), the Berço de Belém daycare center was founded, enrolling nine children. It is currently known as Escola Berço de Belém, operating in an area adjacent to the Provincial House, founded in 1989 (Silva, 1988).

The sisters arrived in the municipality of Capanema, located in the state of Pará, in 1957, invited by Canon Inácio Magalhães, and settled in a house next to the Mother Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. They began their first educational activities focused on primary education in the Parish Hall. Their work expanded following the move to the building that would house São Pio X School, whose construction began in 1959.

The school's new facilities enabled the creation of new programs at the institution. In the early 1960s, these included the Teacher Training Program, which began with the enrollment of forty students, followed by the Pedagogical Program and the Lower Secondary Program. These programs continued the Congregation's historical trajectory in the municipality by offering different levels of education, adapting to changes in educational legislation.

Meanwhile, missionary work continued to expand in some neighborhoods of Belém. In 1959, in the Guamá neighborhood, hospital care services began at the Parish of Saints Peter and Paul; they provided community service through the Children's Ministry and catechism classes for children and young people; subsequently, they established the small Madre Maria Bucchi School to serve the neighborhood's children, which was later replaced by the School of St. Peter and St. Paul, expanding services to a new age group of students. Faced with circumstances that prevented the continuation of activities in the building, the Congregation acquired a plot of land for the construction of a new school, currently named the Madre Zarife Sales School (Silva, 1990).

In the municipality of Santa Maria do Pará, the Precious Sisters arrived in 1966 and initially dedicated themselves to healthcare work at the city's medical clinic. In addition to caring for the ill, they supported the parish in catechesis and other pastoral ministries. They founded a Mothers' Club, as well as the Apostolate of Prayer. The parish house served as both a residence and a classroom for elementary school classes. With the founding of Nossa Senhora Auxiliadora School in 1970, the sisters had the opportunity to continue their educational work in the municipality (Braga, 2016).

According to the testimony of Sister Liodelza Silva (Silva, personal interview, 2023), in the Pará municipalities of Maracanã and Ponta de Pedras, the sisters carry out work focused on evangelization, with the support of the parishes in each municipality. In Ananindeua is located the Preciosino Oasis, a space that combines three environments: House of Prayer, House of Education, and House of Welcome for elderly sisters.

We emphasize that the practices adopted by these religious sisters in educational, health, and evangelization settings have evolved over the years, in accordance with the needs of the people in each municipality where they settled. In Italy and Brazil, they contribute to schools belonging to the Preciosina Education Network and to parishes through evangelization for children, youth, and adults, as well as working with the community in bioenergetic therapy facilities in the municipalities of Capanema, PA, and Castanhal, PA.

Final considerations

We began this text with the aim of tracing the history of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood between the years 1938 and 1970. Documental and bibliographic sources, combined with the testimony of Sister Liodeuza Silva (personal interview, 2023), made it possible to reconstruct the history of the Congregation's founding in Italy and Brazil, as well as its expansion into various municipalities in the state of Pará.

Within the broader historical context (1876–1970), the relevance of this Catholic institution in the field of education is evident, particularly in settings where it sought to disseminate cultural practices linked to evangelization. Also noteworthy is the sisters' presence in parishes, supporting catechesis, and in healthcare settings, with special attention to the lower socioeconomic sectors of society.

We also observe that these missionaries, from the Congregation's origins in Italy to its consolidation in the Amazon, based their work on the principles of faith, education, and healthcare. This presence took shape in various municipalities in Pará: in municipalities such as São Miguel do Guamá, Castanhal, Vigia, Capanema, Santa Maria do Pará, and Belém, they founded schools, in addition to carrying out pastoral and social activities, such as catechesis, mothers' clubs, and hospital assistance. This expansion also included the establishment of novitiates and houses of formation, which attracted young women interested in religious life and strengthened the Congregation's mission in the Amazon region.

This trajectory reveals the Congregation's capacity for expansion and adaptation in diverse geographical and sociocultural contexts, always grounded in its philosophical, educational, and religious principles. Thus, its presence in Pará reflects not only its dedication to local communities but also the strength of its mission, whose reach has extended to many diverse places.

References

BRAGA, Laércio da Silva. *Memorial eclesiástico do município de Santa Maria do Pará*, Belém, 2016. E-book.

CHARTIER, Roger. *A história cultural: entre práticas e representações*. Lisboa: DIFEL; Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand do Brasil, 1990.

CONSTITUIÇÕES das irmãs do preciosíssimo sangue. [S. l.: s. n.], 2019.

EMENTÁRIO preciosinas. Acervo da Casa Provincial. [S. l.: s. n.], 1938 - 1941.

ESCOLAS Preciosinas. Disponível em: <https://scuole.preziosine.it/>. Acesso em: 26 fev. 2023.

HISTÓRIA das Irmãs do Preciosíssimo Sangue. Disponível em: <https://www.preziosine.it/>. Acesso em: 26 fev. 2023.

INSTITUTO BRASILEIRO DE GEOGRAFIA E ESTATÍSTICA (IBGE). *Censo Demográfico*, 2022. Disponível em: <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/>. Acesso em: 26 fev. 2023.

LIMA, Luciano Demetrius. *Dos trilhos às rodas: história e memórias de Capanema*. Belém: Paka-tatu, 2015.

MAJO, Angelo. *Irmã Maria Bucchi: fundadora das Irmãs do Preciosíssimo Sangue*. [S.l.]: Editores, 1993.

PEQUENA biografia de madre Maria Bucchi. Belém: [s.n.], 1982.

SILVA, Dário Benedito Rodrigues Nonato da; OLETO, Leila do Socorro Rotterdam Romyel. Intrépido e incansável: a atuação educacional de Eliseu Coroli em Bragança-Pará, na primeira metade do século XX. *Veredas da História*, v.3, n.2, Belém, p.1-36, 2010. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.9771/rvh.v3i2.48880>.

SILVA, Maria do Socorro da. Irmãs preciosinas: 50 anos de missão no Brasil. 104 f. *Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso* (Curso de Educação Religiosa), Arquidiocese de Belém, Castanhal, 1988.

SILVA, Maria José. A educação preciosina numa visão personalista: um repensar necessário. 102 f. *Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso* (Curso de Pedagogia), Universidade Federal do Pará, Belém, 1990.

SILVA, Valéria de Oliveira. *História da Congregação das Irmãs do Preciosíssimo Sangue no Brasil: uma história iluminada e preciosa*. Belém: [s.n.], 2018.

SILVA, Liodeuza Oliveira. (Silva, *Entrevista*, 12 ago. 2023). Comunidade Irmã Marta - Capanema-Pará.