

“RIDICULOUS CHARLATANS OR LUNATIC NECK CUTTERS”: IMAGES OF SPIRITISM IN THE CATHOLIC “GOOD PRESS”

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Abstract

With the ultimate triumph of liberal Republicanism in 1889 in Brazil and the adoption of a constitution promoting the separation of Church and State, the formerly dominant Roman Catholic Church entered a long period of struggle to recover its lost position, fighting both the liberal and secular character of the new regime and increasing competition on the “market of faith”.

Spiritism in its originally Brazilian form proved to be one of the key Catholic adversaries during the First (1889-1930) and Second (1930-1937) Republic, provoking continuing attempts within the official Church to confront and discredit the movement. This paper explores such an effort through the Catholic portrayal of Spiritism in its official press, focusing on the way its authors formulated both their theological and “scientific” arguments and how they contributed to the creation of the stereotypes linked with it. Its core is based on an analysis of primary sources, mainly the influential biweekly magazine *Mensagem da Fé*.

Keywords: Catholic Church; media; “other”; Spiritism; stereotype

“The Catholic Church is currently facing legions of enemies it must fight. Enemies that don’t cease to surround and attack it from all directions, in all possible ways and using all the available means. [...] Protestantism, Spiritism and Masonry are just among the many man-made creations sworn in their absolute hatred of Jesus and his Church.”¹

This 1919 quotation from the *Mensagem da Fé* described the feelings shared by many Catholics and certainly by the Catholic hierarchy during the “liberal” period of the First (1889-1930) and Second (1930-1937) Brazilian Republics. Catholicism, not only the true religion but also what was in their view the defining *national* Brazilian religion, was surrounded by powerful enemies that forced its separation from the State between 1889-1891, drove it out from public institutions and enabled competing denominations and religions to openly spread their false ideas and beliefs.

Among these competitors in the newly pluralistic religious landscape were not only various Protestant churches including American Pentecostal missions, but also adherents of Spiritism, originally a Western mix of religion, esotericism and “science” that gained a specific and predominantly organized religious form in Brazil.

¹ “A Imprensa entre os catholicos,” *Mensagem da Fé*, Salvador, 19/1/1919.

Over the course of several decades, Spiritists became one of the groups most vigorously targeted by Catholic clergy, intellectuals and press, literally symbolizing the “madness” of a state deprived of its natural religion.

In this article I will examine one side of this ideological conflict, looking into the Catholic portrayal of Spiritism and Spiritists and its image of the symbolic, spiritual and political foe in the context of the wider struggle of the Catholic Church to regain hegemony and influence over the state that eventually led to approximation during the Second Republic and finally culminated in the creation of the “New State” (*Estado Novo*; 1937-1945) by Getúlio Vargas in 1937, restoring, at least in part, previous Catholic dominance. As official Catholic media played crucial role in this struggle and as they voiced the positions of the Church hierarchy, I base my description of the Catholic image of Spiritism on analyzing the *Mensagem da Fé*, the influential biweekly magazine published by the Order of the Friars Minor in the city of Salvador, combined with official local church documents.

The *Mensagem*, published uninterrupted since 1902, continues to be a surprisingly widely unknown and unused source for this episode of Brazilian Catholic history, even though it boasted more than forty thousand subscribers at the peak of its influence, and even though it gained a unique position in its native state of Bahia where, unlike in central and southern Brazil, only few other Catholic magazines and newspapers firmly gained ground in the early twentieth century.

1. Brazilian secularization, liberalism and *República Velha*

The later Catholic struggle with Spiritism must be seen in the context of the shocking event for the Roman Catholic Church that was the establishment of so-called *República Velha*.² The last decades of Brazilian Empire (1822-1889) were already marked by various challenges to Catholic hegemony, as the Imperial administration showed mostly reluctance and even lack of interest in stopping the dissemination of Protestantism that first arrived on Brazilian soil with British merchants in 1820s. But in the years after the Republican *coup d'état* (1889), the Catholic Church found itself unusually marginalized. As early as in 1890, by the 119-A decree of January 7, Catholicism was declared equal alongside all religious beliefs.³ And in the constitution enacted a year later, it was officially separated from the State, banned from public schools, and deprived of state funding for its clergy and charitable institutions.⁴

In the newly-created “United States of Brazil” the Catholic Church had initially no political influence and was isolated from power by hostile liberal forces that supposedly schemed against it in broad alliance with atheists, socialists, and of course Masons; this list occasionally included Jewry as well, especially during the Dreyfus affair in France.⁵ Protestants and Spiritists, obviously, also took part in this

² The “Old Republic”; i.e. the First Brazilian Republic.

³ Israel SILVA DOS SANTOS, “A Igreja Católica na Bahia da Primeira República (1890-1930),” *Revista Aulas* 4, Campinas 2007, pp. 1-24.

⁴ Patrícia MOTA SENA, “O Episódio Dos Perdões e a Restauração Católica na Bahia,” Master’s thesis, Salvador: Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2005.

⁵ See e.g. “Anatole France,” *Mensagem da Fé*, 22.8.1909 where “Jews, Protestants, atheists and other infidels” are listed side by side and Anatole France is described as “defender of Zola and Dreyfus”.

anti-Catholic conspiracy, both because they were direct religious competitors but also because of their support for religious liberty and separation of Church and State which, in the nineteenth century Catholic perspective, were by definition inseparable.⁶ “This sect has defined itself, above all, as an anti-Catholic organization, and as such is anti-clerical. For this reason it works hand in hand with Masonry, its sister and companion in the war against the Church.”⁷ Some Catholics even feared that the “natural religion of Brazil”⁸ might soon not be tolerated in Republican Brazil at all – that it might find itself prosecuted just as in the time of Ancient Rome: “If the State tolerates us today, who knows if tomorrow it won’t harass and persecute us?”⁹

In reaction to this challenging situation, the Brazilian Catholic Church embarked on a complex program of “restoration” or “re-spiritualization” of the state, aiming – in the long-term perspective – to change the secular character of the Republican regime.¹⁰ To achieve such a final objective, the Catholic Church found it necessary to reform and modernize itself on almost all levels, mobilizing, reforming and often creating new formal and informal means to regain political and social influence in the country.¹¹

On the one hand, it was necessary to reorganize archaic Catholic institutions and organizational units especially on the diocesan level; this was carried out by strong reformist prelates such as Dom Sebastião Leme, who also authored the defining document of the Brazilian Catholic restoration and its objectives, his pastoral letter from 1916.¹² In Bahia, where the *Mensagem da Fé* was published and where it had most of its audience, institutional reforms were carried out by Archbishop D. Jerônimo Thomé da Silva (1894-1924) and his successor Archbishop D. Augusto Álvaro da Silva (1925-1968).

On the other hand, the same prelates in their respective provinces locally led and nationally coordinated¹³ efforts to mobilize the Catholic population and gain the silent majority of Brazilian population for its cause. As initial attempts to form a strong Catholic party failed,¹⁴ major Catholic feasts and celebrations turned out to

⁶ Marcos José DINIZ SILVA, “Catolicismo e Espiritismo: Dimensão Conflituosa do Campo Religioso Cearense na Primeira República,” *Revista Brasileira de História das Religiões* 4, Maringá 2009, pp. 123-144.

⁷ “A Imprensa entre os catholicos,” *Mensagem da Fé*, 19.1.1919.

⁸ “A ignorancia religiosa,” *Mensagem da Fé*, 18.4.1937.

⁹ “O Brasil catholico,” *Mensagem da Fé*, 16.2.1919.

¹⁰ Francisca Rafaela PARGA, “Católicos em ação: Imprensa Católica Militante – Fortaleza: 1922-1930”, in: Marieta de Moraes Ferreira (ed.), *Anais do XXVI Simpósio Nacional de História – ANPUH*, São Paulo, 2011.

¹¹ Riolando AZZI, *A Neocristandade: Um Projeto Restaurador*. São Paulo: Paulus, 1994.

¹² Dom Sebastião LEME da Silveira Cintra, *Carta Pastoral de Dom Sebastião Leme, Arcebispo Metropolitanano de Olinda, Saudando os seus Diocesanos*, Petrópolis: Vozes, 1916.

¹³ While every bishop or archbishop pursued a slightly different strategy, Brazilian Church officials attempted from the beginning to jointly formulate and coordinate their agenda on a national level, most often in the form of collective pastoral letters. The first such letter was published as early as 1891. See PARGA, “Católicos em ação”.

¹⁴ *Partido Regenerador* founded in Minas Gerais or *Partido Nacional* in Bahia are just some of the most known of many examples of failed Catholic attempts to gain a permanent foothold in politics on

be much more successful enterprises with hundreds of thousands of people attending the National Eucharistic Congress in Rio de Janeiro in 1922, the Marian Congress of 1929 and the official proclamation of Our Lady of Aparecida as “Queen and Patroness of Brazil” by the 1930 papal bull.¹⁵ Furthermore, the Brazilian Catholic Church attempted to mirror its many opponents by establishing organized movements of different groups in society, from *Aliança Feminina* (1919) to *Círculos Operários Católicos* (1930), to *Juventude Universitária Católica* (1930) that were brought under the joint coordination umbrella of *Ação Católica* in 1935.¹⁶

2. The Catholic media and *boa imprensa*

In the effort to “re-spiritualize” Brazil, the Catholic Church found inspiration from its adversaries in one more way, by emphasizing the need of a strong and influential voice: the press. Or, in local Catholic terminology, the “good press” (*boa imprensa*), in contrast with the “bad press”, which was an official term to describe all liberal-leaning or pro-secularist newspapers and magazines.¹⁷

The importance of the Catholic press was well-summarized by the archbishop of Paraíba, D. Aduauto Aurélio de Miranda Henriques: “The Catholic press is, in the first place, dedicated to the mission of revitalizing and saving the society”.¹⁸ An anonymous contributor to the *Mensagem da Fé* in 1919 reminds readers of the famous quotation by the bishop of Mainz Wilhelm Emmanuel Freiherr von Ketteler: “Journalism has so much power in the world of intelligence and no less in the world of heart that one great prelate of the Church used to say: ‘If Saint Paul returned today, he would become a journalist.’”

From the formation of the Republic, various institutions of the Catholic Church, from dioceses to religious orders and fraternities, began to publish Catholic magazines and newspapers across the country. The vast majority of them were situated in the richer and more developed central and southern states of the federation – for example, the emblematic *A Ordem* magazine, founded 1921 in the capital Rio de Janeiro that joined together leading Catholic intellectuals, from the editor-in-chief Jackson de Figueiredo to Jonatas Serrano, Osvaldo Aranha and many others.¹⁹ The Franciscans from the central province published *Revista Vozes*, the Jesuits had their the *Mensagem do Coração*, and the Salesians had *Leituras Católicas*.²⁰

The Mensageiro da Fé as a representative of boa imprensa

Some representatives of the “good press”, however, even set foot in the poor and often neglected Northeast. For instance the daily newspapers *O Correio do Ceará* (founded 1915) and *O Nordeste* (founded 1922), both published in Fortaleza (Ceará),

both the state and the national level. For more information on this topic, see SILVA DOS SANTOS, “A Igreja Católica”.

¹⁵ PARGA, “Católicos em ação”.

¹⁶ MOTA SENA, “O Episódio Dos Perdões”.

¹⁷ PARGA, “Católicos em ação”.

¹⁸ Oscar de Figueiredo LUSTOSA, *Os Bispos do Brasil e a Imprensa*, São Paulo 1983, pp. 98-99.

¹⁹ PARGA, “Católicos em ação”.

²⁰ AZZI, *A Neocristandade*.

and the main source of this article, the *Mensagem da Fé*, that was published in Salvador (Bahia) continuously from 1902 by the Franciscan province of Santo Antônio and its own publishing house *Editora Mensageiro da Fé* created in 1894. The publishing house founded originally by Jesualdo Machetti, a Franciscan missionary, in Manaus that moved into Salvador convent in 1890s, gradually became the largest Catholic publishing house in the Northeast during the Old Republic and the later years of Vargas' dictatorship.²¹ The biweekly *Mensagem da Fé* became widely popular among the Catholic readers especially in the state of Bahia, claiming 22,000 subscribers in 1919 and already more than 44,000 subscribers in 1922 – for comparison, the aforementioned daily *O Nordeste* only had about 2,000 regular subscribers.²²

It is necessary to point out that, unlike many other Catholic newspapers and magazines from this period, The *Mensagem da Fé* was not created with the sole purpose of fighting the secular state and combating competing ideologies – and probably for this reason did not cease to exist in late 1930s. Instead, it was designed as a complex magazine serving as the voice of local and global Franciscan movement, as the voice of official Church authorities (publishing its documents, for instance pastoral letters and encyclicals), and also as a source of information on Brazilian and global politics, as it published renowned Catholic journalists from the capital and beyond, such as Soares de Azevedo, and borrowed content from other influential Catholic media across the country.

The *Mensagem* aimed to address important social and political issues from the Catholic perspective. As in the *Mensagem*'s editorial about itself in January 5, 1919: “It is a journal essentially religious and of apologetics, but also focusing, with all kindness, on social issues, and satisfies even the most exquisite taste.”²³ The *Mensagem da Fé* therefore regularly published long articles on the lives of saints, religious celebrations and news from the Catholic world, but it did not cut itself off from being an “apostle of the good press,” publishing a vigorous defense of the Catholic Church against its numerous enemies and dedicating major space to polemics with hostile ideologies and religions including Spiritism.

3. Brazilian Spiritism in context

To understand the animosity between the Catholic Church and Spiritism in Brazil better, one must first understand the specifics of Brazilian Spiritism. Spiritism was, obviously, a global phenomenon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, tracing its origins to the United States of the 1840s, more specifically to the Fox sisters in Hydesville, New York.²⁴ Emerging ideas and concepts including most importantly communicating with the spirits in the afterlife and belief in

²¹ Cláudio SCHNEIDER, “A Editora Mensageiro da Fé”, *Revista Santo Antônio* 1-2, Recife 1966, pp. 97-107.

²² PARGA, “Católicos em ação”.

²³ “Mensagem da Fé”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 5.1.1919.

²⁴ Donald WARREN Jr., “Spiritism in Brazil,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies* vol. 10, no. 3, Cambridge 1968, pp. 393-405.

multiple reincarnation were codified and specified in more detail by Allan Kardec (1804-1869),²⁵ a French writer who authored defining books on the topic of the doctrine he named Spiritism: *The Spirits' Book* (1857), *Book of Mediums* (1861), and *The Gospel according to Spiritism* (1864).

Kardec defined Spiritism more as a philosophy pure religion, working thoroughly with Christian moral doctrine and especially finding inspiration in the Gospels, but at the same time attempting to re-interpret it scientifically, as he strongly opposed the concepts of Heaven and Hell, the Holy Trinity and Jesus' divine nature. Spiritism in his view was, indeed, based on modern scientific knowledge, and he incorporated into his doctrine contemporary theories of evolution and magnetism. The early Spiritists were in fact skeptical about the definition of their philosophy as a distinct religion.²⁶

In Brazil, however, Spiritism took a rather different form. It first appeared on Brazilian soil in early 1850s, as a curiosity for the local press, and became popular among the immigrant community, mostly the French living in Rio de Janeiro who also published some early Spiritist works in Brazil in their language.²⁷ Brazilians did not demonstrate any particular interest in Spiritism and even the French community in the capital Rio de Janeiro soon moved away from their initial fascination with it.²⁸ It was in the Northeastern state of Bahia, however, where the originally *carioca*²⁹ journalist Teles de Menezes (1825-1893) pioneered the spread of Spiritism, beginning by translating excerpts from *The Spirit's Book* and other works by Kardec, and soon publishing his own essays and books on the topic. He also founded the first center of Spiritist studies in Brazil (*Grupo Familiar de Espiritismo*) and attempted to create the Brazilian Spiritist Society (*Sociedade Espírita Brasileira*) as a state-recognized institution.³⁰

Menezes' idea of Spiritism was from the beginning very distinct from Kardec's. He formulated the doctrine in religious terms and even as a new, reformed form of Roman Catholicism. He called himself "Catholic by birth and faith" and claimed that "Spiritism and Catholicism are of the same Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The only thing separating them is time and words. Spiritism is a faithful translation of the Gospel teachings".³¹ While many of Brazilians calling themselves Spiritists did not agree with these claims and preferred to see Spiritism in philosophical and scientific terms, the "mystic group", as Arribas (2008), decisively won this struggle in the final decade of the nineteenth century. The Federation of Brazilian Spiritists

²⁵ Allan Kardec is a pen name; he was born Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail.

²⁶ WARREN, "Spiritism in Brazil."

²⁷ Emerson GIUMBELLI, "Heresia, doença, crime ou religião: o Espiritismo no discurso de médicos e cientistas sociais," *Revista de Antropologia* 40/2, São Paulo 1997, pp. 31-82.

²⁸ Leonardo FERREIRA de Jesus, "'Ventos venenosos': o catolicismo diante da inserção do protestantismo e do espiritismo na Bahia durante o arcebispado de Dom Manoel Joaquim da Silveira (1862-1874)," PhD thesis, Salvador: Federal University of Bahia, 2014.

²⁹ I.e. from Rio de Janeiro.

³⁰ FERREIRA, "'Ventos venenosos'".

³¹ Célia da Graca ARRIBAS, "Afinal, espiritismo é religião?," Master's thesis, São Paulo: FFLCH-USP, 2008, pp. 61.

(FEB; formed in 1884) became the official umbrella for the vast majority of the Spiritist groups and centers in Brazil and its official voice, *O Reformador* magazine, begun to define itself suitably in its frontispiece as the “Journal of Christian Spiritism”.³²

Catholicism v. Spiritism

From the very beginning, Spiritism faced vigorous opposition from the Catholic authorities – both globally and within the Church in Brazil itself. As early as 1856, the Holy Office formally condemned the table-turning séances that were gaining popularity in many countries, and in 1864, all Kardec’s books were put on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, the list of books officially forbidden to Catholics.³³ Then, on 30 March 1898, the Holy Office forbade Spiritist practices “even if intercourse with the demon was excluded and communication was sought with good spirits only”.³⁴

The theological reasons for such staunch opposition were obvious. First, there was the communication with the spirits of the deceased through a human medium; while some limited contact with the dead is not unheard of in Catholic tradition, it is unthinkable that spirits could possess a different body from their own. As explained to Catholic readers in the *Mensagem* by Argemiro Soares: “We believe in the existence of the human soul and that every one of us possesses an individual soul or spirit. But this soul is given exclusively to one body; it is born with it, it accompanies it throughout life, and when they are forced to separate at the final hour, the spirit leaves to await the Last Judgment.”³⁵ Noone’s deceased spirit can never possess a living human body in Catholicism and the only spiritual possession that is possible is by “malign spirits”: “If indeed [...] another spirit enters the body of a living human being, it is a malign spirit. A demon.”³⁶

Secondly, Kardec in his works openly challenged the key principle of the Christian faith: that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who performed miracles in his name. For Kardec, these miracles were scientifically explicable and there was nothing divine about Jesus, who was merely a reincarnation of the most advanced form of spirit. “The most deadly error of Spiritism is that it does not recognize the divinity of Christ [...]. They say Jesus was a great prophet, a perfect medium and the most noble and saintly among men that have ever lived on this planet but they refuse to accept [...] that he was the only-begotten Son of God.”³⁷

These “heretical” beliefs were obviously condemned also by the Brazilian Catholic Church, but from a unique perspective, as it had to confront Spiritism that claimed to be Christian and even Catholic, as mentioned above. The primary concern in this first phase of polemics between Spiritism and the Catholic authorities

³² ARRIBAS, “Afinal, espiritismo é religião?”, pp. 86.

³³ FERREIRA, “Ventos venenosos”.

³⁴ Robert KUGELMANN, *Psychology and Catholicism: Contested Boundaries*, Cambridge 2011, pp. 141.

³⁵ “O Espiritismo IV.,” *Mensagem da Fé*, 17. 3. 1929.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ “Incompatível!” *Mensagem da Fé*, 6.12.1925.

was therefore (in)compatibility between Christianity and Spiritism. Menezes' claims about Spiritism being a sort of reformed Catholicism provoked an immediate reaction from the Church officials in Bahia, when D. Manoel Joaquim da Silveira, the archbishop of Olinda himself, wrote a pastoral letter in June 1867, warning the faithful of the errors contained in Menezes' Portuguese translation of selected excerpts from *The Spirits' Book* by Kardec that were published under the name *Filosofia Espiritualista – o Espiritismo*. The bishop's pastoral letter called Spiritist ideas "dangerous superstitions" absolutely "contrary to our religion," and addressed those theological errors of most concern.³⁸ Typically for him, Menezes based his defense of Spiritism on excerpts from the Holy Scripture, but local Church authorities continued their condemnation and the archbishop even successfully intervened in blocking Menezes' attempt to register the Brazilian Spiritist Society officially, doing so "in the name of the Catholic Church, religion of the state, and in the name of science, public morale and family."³⁹

Spiritism v. Catholicism: Ally of the liberal cause

Such an unfriendly response to Menezes' initial conciliatory approach to Catholicism strongly influenced future relations, with anti-Catholic hostility growing within the next generation of the Brazilian Spiritism. While its mainstream branch represented by FEB continued (and continues) to label Spiritism as a Christian movement, it became very critical of the Catholic Church as an organization, blaming it for its accumulation of wealth, ridiculous rituals and reactionary beliefs. While Spiritists, in their own view, represented modernity and progress, Catholicism represented an obsolete and power-hungry institution not allowing freedom of choice and denying Brazilians truly modern religion.⁴⁰

Especially in the course of the Old Republic, the Spiritist press, intellectuals and organizations became strongly aligned with the secular cause, for logical reasons standing on the same side of the fence as opponents of Catholic hegemony, including Protestants, liberals, atheists and even some progressive Catholics. Spiritism, therefore, became an integral part of what was considered by the Catholic Church to be a united, anti-clerical front deadly to its interests – even though Spiritism itself was not fully acceptable even by a significant part of the Republican establishment.⁴¹ The new 1890 Republican penal code actually prohibited Spiritist practices as part of "crimes against public health" and put it on the same shelf as magic and sorcery, setting up severe fines and even one to six months of prison.

After 1900, however, Spiritism-related articles of the penal code became largely obsolete, also thanks to strong criticism in the Spiritist and friendly liberal press, and Spiritist activities begun to spread rapidly in Brazil in the form of new centers, study groups and publishing houses with their respective newspapers and

³⁸ Manoel Joaquim da SILVEIRA, *Carta Pastoral Premunindo os seus Diocesanos contra os erros perniciosos do Spiritismo*, Bahia: Tip. De Camilo de Lellis Masson & C., 1867.

³⁹ FERREIRA, "Ventos venenosos", p. 111.

⁴⁰ DINIZ SILVA, "Catolicismo e Espiritismo."

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

magazines, prompting the Catholic press to warn about dangerous “infiltration”, affecting “every social class”, from intellectuals to analphabets.⁴² “Oh Dear God, we have the laws – and good ones, but what a shame they only stay on paper without being enforced, because of the indifference of those who are responsible for their rigorous compliance!” laments Zacharias Luz on the pages of the *Mensagem da Fé* in 1917, criticizing police authorities for not respecting the Brazilian penal code and allowing “perverse propaganda”, now even among children.⁴³

4. Spiritism in the *Mensagem da Fé*

Previous chapters served to illustrate the context in which the Catholic media – and in this article particularly the *Mensagem da Fé* – constructed and portrayed Spiritism and its adherents during the Old Republic. As already mentioned, the *Mensagem* was not different from the other Catholic press of that period in its aim to help the restoration of ties between Church and State that were forcefully separated by the 1891 constitution, and to defend the Catholic faith against its adversaries.

As an emblematic adversary, both in theological and practical terms, Spiritism turned into a strongly discussed topic on the pages of the *Mensagem*, first significantly appearing on 21 July 1907 in a text called “Spiritism on trial”, reporting on an article by the famous French astronomer and formerly close friend of Allan Kardec, where after years of public support he denounced Spiritist doctrine.⁴⁴ While Spiritism is occasionally mentioned in the following years, especially in theological polemics over compliance between Catholicism and Spiritism, it gets further attention in 1914 when the first articles on dangers of Spiritism (including medical ones) appear, and most visibly from 1916 onwards, when the *Mensagem* published a long pastoral letter from Northeastern bishops called “Spiritist Doctrine”⁴⁵ on its front page.

This period coincides with the spread of Spiritism into the Northeast and with the escalating “re-spiritualization” campaign of the Brazilian episcopate, including the very active Archbishop of Bahia. In late 1910s and 1920s, Spiritism reoccurs periodically almost every month, with the *Mensagem* getting into much detail about its doctrine, daily practice, and supposed mental/spiritual threat. In 1925 first warnings appeared, disseminated in the middle of unrelated articles over the pages of the *Mensagem*, writing: “Beware of SPIRITISM!”⁴⁶ Its presence only becomes significantly less important after 1937 Vargas’ coup and during his “New State” (*Estado Novo*), that once again re-established a “special relationship” between the State and the Catholic Church and Spiritists, especially “lower Spiritists,”⁴⁷ started to be more actively prosecuted, culminating in the 1941 police closure of all Spiritist centers.

⁴² DINIZ SILVA, “Catolicismo e Espiritismo”, p. 132.

⁴³ “Propaganda perversa!”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 4. 11. 1917.

⁴⁴ “O Espiritismo em julgamento”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 21.7.1907.

⁴⁵ “Doutrina Espiritista”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 6.2.1916.

⁴⁶ Much earlier, similar warnings appeared related to other Catholic adversaries, e.g. Protestantism – “Beware of Protestant propaganda!”

⁴⁷ A somewhat derisive name used for the adherents of Umbanda, a religion mixing Afro-Brazilian tradition with Spiritism and Catholicism.

As for the literary tropes which inform us about Spiritism, there is a very colorful spectrum that can be divided into following categories:

1) Publication of official Church documents: As did other Catholic media of that time, the *Mensagem* served to spread official church documents from different levels, such as local or collective pastorals and “warnings” (*aviso*). Some of these also concerned Spiritism and formulated the official positions of the Brazilian Catholic Church. For instance, in “collective pastorals of bishops and archbishops from dioceses of Rio de Janeiro, Mariana, Sao Paulo, Cuyabá, and Porto Alegre,” the Brazilian episcopate jointly issued a “unanimous condemnation of Spiritism” and called for “all Catholics to abstain from its superstitions and malevolence”.⁴⁸

2) Original theological/political essays: the *Mensagem*’s own writers and contributors regularly engaged in fierce polemics with Spiritist doctrine and its political views and positions, often as mere part of wider set of anti-clerical foes, accusing them of being allies or even puppets of atheist or Masonic interests.

3) “Objective” informative essays on the history, doctrine and dangers of Spiritism: the *Mensagem* defined itself as a serious, objective journal and so it regularly published long articles, sometimes over several issues, explaining chapters of Church history and of the history of important movements including Spiritism. In this category, I also include “scientific” texts on the dangers of Spiritism to mental and even physical health, usually accompanied by an expert’s (e.g. psychiatrist’s) opinion.

5) Apologetics of Catholic faith (against Spiritist accusations): These articles, explaining and defending the truth of the Catholic faith and the positions of the global or Brazilian Catholic Church, mostly reacted to particular texts recently appearing in Spiritist media, such as *O Reformador*, the official magazine of the FEB.

6) Calls for conversion: Several articles or their parts were formulated to address an imagined Spiritist audience directly, warning them of the mortal sin they were committing, and calling for their conversion back to Catholicism before it was too late. “You are deluded, weak, fascinated by the evil serpent! Run away from the abyss you’re rushing into! Do not believe in false promises of salvation and happiness!” dramatically pleads, for instance, one of the *Mensagem*’s regular authors, writing under the pen-name of Paulo de Damasco, in his text called “To the Spiritists!”⁴⁹

7) Mocking stories: the *Mensagem* was no stranger to satire, publishing short stories and episodes from life of its contributors with a moral overlap and often with visible political agenda. In the *Mensagem*’s satirical texts, Spiritism appeared occasionally to be ridiculed for its charlatanism or stupidity, describing fake table-turning at séances and similar.

8) Local and global news: the *Mensagem* aimed to inform its readers regularly on important national and global news, ranging from local curiosities to politics and religious affairs from Catholic Churches all over the world, including defamatory information on other faiths or prominent conversions to Catholicism.

⁴⁸ “Recomendações oficiais do Episcopado Brasileiro”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 5. 1. 1936.

⁴⁹ “Aos Espíritas,” *Mensagem da Fé*, 7. 8. 1932.

9) Readers' questions & answers: Questions from anonymous readers on a wide range of mostly theological and political topics formed an integral part of every the *Mensagem da Fé*, with its authors providing spiritual guidance for a good Catholic life. Questions related to Spiritism and its practices, such as séances, appeared on several occasions.

5. Five images of Spiritism in Brazilian “good press”

First image: Sectarians, heretics and servants of the devil

As already mentioned, theological criticism of Spiritism was first and foremost picked up by the Catholics, including the *Mensagem da Fé*. Brazilian Church officials repeatedly condemned Spiritist beliefs as heretic, and the first articles concerning Spiritism from 1909 were obviously published with the intention to convince Brazilian public that Spiritism and the Catholic faith were *incompatible*: “Well, Spiritists do not believe that Jesus Christ is God, so it means Spiritism and Christianity are contradictory”⁵⁰ and its attempts to define itself as Christian could not be taken seriously. “On the one hand, it presents itself as a continuation of Christianity. But on the other, it eliminates all its mysteries and interprets the doctrine of Jesus Christ in a rationalist way, conformed with the passions of our times.”⁵¹ And while extensively using the bible for their own purposes, it meant nothing for them: “From time to time, they seem to respect the bible, quoting even sections from the ‘word of God’. But in fact, the bible for them has no more value than any other book.”⁵²

Therefore, Spiritism is a heretic and “abominable sect”, as one of the most common labels is present in almost every article concerning it, “a disgusting caricature of religion”⁵³ that is “first and foremost forbidden by God”⁵⁴ and no true Catholic can ever tolerate it, as he cannot tolerate other heretic religious movements, such as Protestant “sects”.

But its practice of speaking with the presumed spirits of the dead makes it even more abominable and truly a “diabolical invention,”⁵⁵ as these spirits have certainly nothing in common with the true souls of the deceased. No Christian is ever allowed to take part in Spiritist séance, because “the spirits that usually appear there are not and could not even be good spirits. They are, therefore, evil spirits or demons and under no circumstances is it allowed to invoke or consult a demon.”⁵⁶

To demonstrate the demonic nature of the Spiritist “sect”, the *Mensagem* published some illustrative stories: for instance, the story of a French cardinal and the Archbishop of Rouen, H  nri de Bonnechose, who personally attended a s  ance in his diocese. What he witnessed was indeed telling: “The cardinal placed a cross on

⁵⁰ “Espiritismo: Pode o Christao Cat  lico ser espirita?”, *Mensagem da F  *, 1. 2. 1914.

⁵¹ “O Allanismo”, *Mensagem da F  *, 16. 11. 1924.

⁵² “Espiritismo: Pode o Christao Cat  lico ser espirita?”, *Mensagem da F  *, 1. 2. 1914.

⁵³ “Illusao perigosa”, *Mensagem da F  *, 16. 11. 1924.

⁵⁴ “O Espiritismo I.”, *Mensagem da F  *, 3. 2. 1929.

⁵⁵ “Aos Espiritas”, *Mensagem da F  *, 7. 8. 1932.

⁵⁶ “Espiritismo: Pode o Christao Cat  lico ser espirita?”, *Mensagem da F  *, 1. 2. 1914.

the table. The cross was, however, immediately thrown on the floor, without anyone being able to tell by whom. When it was once again placed on the table, the same scene was repeated. So the cardinal got proof that the spirits were not friends even of a mere image of Our Lord.”⁵⁷ And as demonic possession requires a Catholic response, holy water could “certainly succeed, because when confronted with diabolical arts, such means serve as a remedy,” as suggested by Mons. Fernando de Mello.⁵⁸

It is no surprise that those Catholics who took any part in Spiritist activities or even visited or financially supported their institutions, such as hospitals or asylums, would be committing grave sins and could not be considered Catholics any more, as an official statement of the archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro warned: “Even mere attendance from curiosity is gravely illicit, being the sin of companionship, acclaim and indirect cooperation with an evil cause. Those who accept and profess Spiritist doctrine [...] cease to be Catholics, and even if they claim to be, they are not and cannot call themselves Catholics. They must be treated [...] as true heretics.”⁵⁹

Second image: Enemies of the Catholic Church

The first image was dominantly theological in its core, building arguments on the Catholic interpretation of the bible and later tradition condemning the summoning of evil spirits and being inseparably connected to the Roman Catholic notion of concepts such as heaven, hell and resurrection. But there was also strong political argument, seeking to portray Spiritists not only as enemies to Jesus Christ and God Himself, but also as staunch adversaries of the Catholic Church that do not miss any opportunity to attack it. Of course, these two portrayals cannot be completely separated, as the Catholic Church defined itself at the time as the only relevant representative of Jesus Christ and Christianity in Brazil.

It was already noted that the Brazilian Catholic Church felt besieged by enemies during the Old Republic; it is not uncommon to read worried comparisons of Republican Brazil to France, Mexico or revolutionary Portugal.⁶⁰ How numerous and diverse were the enemies of Catholicism can be seen in article written by Soares d’Azevedo in 1919,⁶¹ where he attempted to summarize the challenges that Roman Catholics must be currently fighting, noting that there are many more and these are only the greatest:

- Theatre and cinema
- The “bad press”
- Different kinds of anarchism
- Attacks on the Papacy
- Religious ignorance

⁵⁷ “A estas linhas de nosso dedicado collaborador accrescentamos as seguintes, tiradas do ‘Lar Catholico’ de Juiz de Fóra”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 3. 2. 1929.

⁵⁸ “O Allanismo”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 16. 11. 1924.

⁵⁹ “Sessoes espiritas”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 4. 1. 1925.

⁶⁰ On many occasions, very openly e.g. Soares d’Azevedo in “Contra as igrejas e contra a Igreja”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 18. 5. 1919.

⁶¹ “Defesa de Todo o Geito”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 2. 3. 1919.

- Workers' demands
- Protestantism, Spiritism and Masonry
- Female education
- Atheist state

It is not a coincidence that Protestantism, Spiritism and Masonry are named in one line, as they seemed to be the most important “spiritual” foes of Catholicism, interconnected and defending each other on the pages of their media and being similarly heretical in their nature.⁶² Furthermore, they shared the same “hatred” (ódio) for the Roman Catholic Church – Argemiro R. Macedo Soares calls Spiritism “the sister of Masonry and its companion in attacking the Church.”⁶³ In his view, Spiritism is inherently anti-Catholic, anti-clerical, even favoring persecution of the clergy.⁶⁴

This “hatred” for the Church and the anti-Catholic nature of Spiritism and its supposed allies actually refers mostly to public criticism of the behavior of the Catholic Church as an institution, both in Brazil and globally, that was common at the time in much of the pro-secular media, including the Spiritist press. For instance, it criticized the Catholic Church’s wealth: “These dangerous sectarians say that Christ lived in poverty, while popes, bishops and clergy live their life in wealth. That everything that Church does is just focusing on lavish bell ringing and fireworks for the celebrations of feasts,”⁶⁵ complains Macedo Soares.

Another source of criticism was Catholic intolerance of different opinions and religious beliefs: “Should not the Catholic Church be a little more condescending and tolerant with the adherents of other religions, for example Protestants, Spiritists, Masons etc.?” asks an anonymous reader in the *Mensagem*, echoing calls for less combative treatment of Catholic competitors that appeared periodically in Brazilian press. The answer was, of course, a strict no. “For the error of Protestantism, of Spiritism, of Masonry etc., we are and always will be intolerant, because error is error and can never be approved. [...] Tolerance for the error would mean betraying the truth,” explains “F.B.R.” official position of the Brazilian Catholic Church that did not yet intend to resign its dominant position in the country’s religious landscape.

Third image: Charlatans and imposters

Somehow contrary to the first image, those practicing Spiritism were often accused of being simply fake, serving rather as means to gain personal wealth than as actually being capable of summoning evil spirits: “The marvels of Spiritism were unmasked countless times as ridiculous charlatanism and magic tricks.”⁶⁶

⁶² Sometimes there were subtle hints of Judaism being part of this “front” as well, mentioning for instance the Jewish origins of prominent Spiritists, séances taking place in synagogues, and connections between the Jewish nation and Masonry, such as sharing the same press and general influence over journalism. See e.g. “Jornal Catholico”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 2. 3. 1919.

⁶³ “O Espiritismo I.”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 3. 2. 1929.

⁶⁴ “O Espiritismo I.”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 3. 2. 1929.

⁶⁵ “O Espiritismo II.”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 17. 2. 1929.

⁶⁶ “O Espiritismo é inimigo de Jesus Christo”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 19. 7. 1926.

While some of the accounts found on the pages of the *Mensagem* primarily focused on the diabolical nature of the séances, others portrayed them as deceptive shows that must seem absurd to those with “common sense” (*senso comum*). “Often at such meetings, one or more of the hypnotized, that are previously instructed, speak with cavernous voices to certain determined persons to make them believe a terrible lie.”⁶⁷ And the same can be said about all the claims of practitioners of Spiritism, from their communication with the supposed spirits of the deceased, to their supposed healing powers.

To illustrate this, the *Mensagem*’s editorial from November 11, 1924 called “Dangerous Illusion” narrates a particular story of two “ambassadors of Spiritism” that practiced their tricks directly in Salvador – one calling himself Mozart and the other Maximus Niemeier. Even their names were fake, as they pretended to be Germans but, in fact, they were both secretly Jewish. This Niemeier claimed to be an extraordinary healer, “intending to heal all the illnesses, including cancer, leprosy and affirming even that he can resurrect the dead, if they are not completely dead (!).”⁶⁸ But when he actually attempted to demonstrate these powers in the local hospital, accompanied by a certain Dr. Pinto de Carvalho, he failed miserably, as the doctor himself testified.

On the example of this story, we can see how a Catholic newspaper, mostly strongly opposed to the notions of modernity or scientific authority, did not hesitate to use medical authorities in its effort to defame Spiritist opponents and their practices. Medical authorities and scientific knowledge at that time will, however, play even more prominent role in the following image.

Fourth image: Dangerous madmen and the mentally ill

Here, the Catholic portrayal of Spiritism is inseparable from the contemporary Brazilian medical discourse – but also vice versa, as Catholic doctrine strongly influenced the psychiatric theories on the negative effects of Spiritism, especially its relationship with madness. As Giumbelli (1997) shows, many prominent psychiatrists defined Spiritism in religious terms and using religious arguments, as being not only in contradiction with science but also with “good religion”,⁶⁹ bringing in primitive and superstitious practices harmful to society. While medics and psychiatrists took an interest in Spiritism already during imperial times, “research” on this topic spiked dramatically over the course of the Old Republic, especially in the 1920s and early 1930s, with the involvement of prominent psychiatrists like Henrique Roxo and Xavier de Oliveira from the *Hospício Nacional de Alienados*, who both published numerous influential works on the matter.

Both were also often quoted on the pages of major Catholic journals and newspapers, including the *Mensagem da Fé*, that sought to portray Spiritism as dangerous

⁶⁷ “A falsidade do espiritismo”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 2. 2. 1919.

⁶⁸ “Illusao perigosa”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 16. 11. 1924.

⁶⁹ GIUMBELLI, “Heresia”, p. 38.

to mental health at least since 1914, when the first such notice appeared:⁷⁰ “Spiritism is an imminent danger for the health of its adherents, especially for their mental health, as it easily leads to madness.”⁷¹ This statement was not yet supported by statistics from Brazil itself, basing it instead on European experience. “In Zürich, out of 200 [hospitalized] lunatics, one fourth owed its mental state to Spiritism. In Gand (Belgium), out of 255 lunatics, 95 were Spiritists.”⁷² The article noted that a similar proportion was found in Brussels, Munich and other cities, prompting the German emperor to forbid the practice. Similarly, many prominent Americans petitioned the Congress to do the same, because Spiritism is linked to “adultery, murder, suicide and madness.”⁷³

With the advance of local Brazilian “research” on the topic, coming most commonly from the aforementioned Hospício Nacional de Alienados, the medical argument soon became prevalent and was occurring periodically, supported by authorities from this institution and by the works they published. Spiritism, both in its addictive nature and harmful effects, was compared to drugs and alcohol: “Such as smoking, cocaine, or alcohol, Spiritism, theosophy and magic are poisonous. While the first ones poison the nervous system, these poison the mental health. They all start as entertainment but in the end, it is impossible to be without them,”⁷⁴ quotes the *Mensagem* doctor Gemelli.

In terms of the causes of madness, Spiritism might be also comparable to drugs, alcohol, and syphilis – or maybe even worse, depending on the source and statistics that the *Mensagem* used in a particular article. Macedo Soares believes that Spiritism is “the major factory for lunatics in the whole universe and 90% of those interned in mental institutions had their unfortunate fate caused by that hideous sect,”⁷⁵ basing his 90% on an estimate by Drs. Henrique Roxo and Juliano Moreira, both from Hospício Nacional.⁷⁶ Their colleague from the same institution, the aforementioned Dr. Xavier de Oliveira, however, gave rather different statistics: that out of 18,281 hospitalized in the Hospício Nacional between 1917 and 1928, 1,723 had Spiritism as the direct cause of their mental state.⁷⁷

But even Dr. de Oliveira believed in a strong correlation between Spiritism and madness, listing it as third most frequent cause after alcohol and syphilis and asking every new patient: “What Spiritist center did you visit?” For these purely scientific reasons, the *Mensagem*’s authors argue that the practice of Spiritism must be strictly forbidden in any part of the country, being “dangerous to the population and the Fatherland.”⁷⁸ Who knows if, otherwise, a mad Spiritist will not cut someone’s

⁷⁰ Before this date, arguments against Spiritism were mostly based on theological disputes and warnings for falsely claiming to be Christians.

⁷¹ “Espiritismo: Pode o Christao Católico ser espirita?” *Mensagem da Fé*, 1. 2. 1914.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ “O Allanismo”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 16. 11. 1924.

⁷⁵ “O Espiritismo I.”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 3. 2. 1929.

⁷⁶ “O Espiritismo”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 16. 5. 1926.

⁷⁷ “Espiritismo e loucura”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 1. 11. 1931.

⁷⁸ “O Espiritismo”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 16. 5. 1926.

throat, as almost happened in the case of the barber in S. Geraldo, Minas Gerais? According to a short story published in 1938, this barber, a regular visitor of Spiritist sessions, was ordered by a spirit to cut his customer's throat. Thankfully, the poor customer escaped this danger, notified the authorities and barber was imprisoned. But as it turned out he was completely mad, he was hospitalized in a mental institution. "Beware, good men," warns the anonymous author of the story, "before you get yourselves clean shaven, make sure the barber doesn't participate in Spiritist sessions or if he doesn't read Spiritist literature. [...] Beware of the Spiritists... the neck-cutters!"⁷⁹

Fifth image: Poor, uneducated and manipulated

If Spiritism is such a dangerous ideology that can harm both spiritually and mentally those involved, as proved by numerous accounts and statistics in the *Mensagem da Fé*, how does the journal explain its popularity and prevalence in Brazil? And even its rapid spread, about which the Catholics are warning repeatedly? Some part is, of course, the force of its propaganda and the weakness of the "good press": "The Spiritist and esoteric propaganda is intense. Their books and tabloids swarm all over the country, from big cities to the most remote parts of our interior, mocking the apathy of the Catholic press. [...] Spiritism promotes itself with frightening speed. We must fight until as long as we can," writes Armindo Ferreira da Silva⁸⁰ even in 1937, when Spiritism had already ceased to be one of the the *Mensagem*'s hot topics.

But the most vulnerable, those "seduced by the books and conferences of Spiritist propaganda,"⁸¹ were obviously those not gifted with the aforementioned "common sense".⁸² People mentally weaker, acting in "good faith" (*boa fé*), in other words feeble-minded, are the most likely to become Spiritists: "Its unlucky adherents, those weak, acting in good faith, led by the influence of false friends [...], deserve in the first place our compassion, not our harshness."⁸³ This feeble mind is also often associated with low education and poverty, allowing the success of those "tricking the good faith of the people;"⁸⁴ an anonymous author in the *Mensagem* calls it "a new illness of our times" that successfully "embodied itself in the weak body of the poor class."⁸⁵

In this context, Brazil as a country is particularly fertile ground for Spiritism and similar sects, being a country of "absolute religious ignorance in the lower social

⁷⁹ "Espiritismo cortador de pescoco", *Mensagem da Fé*, 2. 1. 1938.

⁸⁰ "Espiritismo", *Mensagem da Fé*, 5. 12. 1937.

⁸¹ "O Allanismo", *Mensagem da Fé*, 16. 11. 1924.

⁸² "A falsidade do espiritismo", *Mensagem da Fé*, 2. 2. 1919.

⁸³ "Aos Espiritas", *Mensagem da Fé*, 7. 8. 1932.

⁸⁴ "Illusao perigosa", *Mensagem da Fé*, 16. 11. 1924.

⁸⁵ "O Allanismo", *Mensagem da Fé*, 16. 11. 1924; Maybe the most striking paradox of this image is that Brazilian Spiritism actually attracted mostly intellectuals and people from higher social classes rather than the poor – as it is until these days, at least based on the census data. For instance, a brief look at the signatories of Teles de Menezes; proposed Brazilian Spiritist Society included noblemen (one viscount and one baron), physicians, lawyers, journalists and university professors. See FERREIRA, "“Ventos venenosos”".

classes,”⁸⁶ or, as put by Ferreira da Silva, having “the most credulous people that exist.”⁸⁷ We should not forget that Brazil is still a very new and immature country that is readily influenced by anything that comes from Europe or United States, and that easily adopts their bad habits – be they Spiritism, Methodism or Portuguese operettas, as Soares d’Azevedo argues.⁸⁸

6. Final remarks

Even with the ascendance of Getúlio Vargas’ autocratic “New State” and 1937 constitution, Spiritism did not cease to be a target of the Brazilian Catholic Church and its press – but its importance as an adversary gradually decreased, as did its presence on the pages of the *Mensagem da Fé* and other Catholic newspaper, giving space to more pressing enemies, most importantly Communism. Besides, the relationship between Church and State evolved more closely; starting already in the early 1930s when the government of the “New Republic” introduced laws restoring religious education in public schools. The 1934 constitution allowed religious marriage alongside the civil union and Catholic Church officials begun to be ever more active and influential in national political life.⁸⁹ Mutual relations grew closer than ever during the Estado Novo period, with Communism becoming the central enemy of both sides.

Spiritism and other competing religious ideologies⁹⁰ were, however, most harshly prosecuted exactly during this era, and the Catholic struggle against Spiritism continued after the re-establishment of democracy in 1945. One of the first acts of the newly established Conference of Brazilian Bishops (*Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil*; CNBB) was to coordinate the all-national anti-Spiritist campaign in 1953 under the leadership of maybe the most prominent adversary of Spiritism in Brazil, frei Boaventura Kloppenburg.⁹¹ The Catholic Brazilian press including the still existing *Mensagem da Fé* was once again mobilized as part of this campaign that considered Spiritism to be “diabolical heresy” and portrayed Spiritism in the same images as described in here, eventually losing the argument of “madness” because of radical changes in psychiatric discourse.

Roman Catholic polemics against other religious ideologies including Spiritism only turned less combative and more conciliatory after Vatican II. But the negative portrayal and exactly the same arguments (both theological and “scientific”) have been since then taken over by rising stars on the Brazilian religious landscape – Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches that mobilize all their substantial

⁸⁶ “A ignorancia religiosa”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 18. 4. 1937.

⁸⁷ “Espiritismo”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 5. 12. 1937.

⁸⁸ “Defesa de Todo o Geito”, *Mensagem da Fé*, 2. 3. 1919.

⁸⁹ Lilian RODRIGUES de Oliveira Rosa, “A Igreja Católica Apostólica Romana e o Estado Brasileiro: Estratégias de inserção política da Santa Sé no Brasil entre 1920 e 1937,” PhD thesis, São Paulo: Universidade Estadual Paulista, 2011.

⁹⁰ Especially Afro-Brazilian cults and traditions.

⁹¹ Michelle Cartolano de Castro RIBEIRO, “O Espiritismo na Visão de Frei Boaventura,” *Revista Brasileira de História das Religiões*, 1/3 (2009), pp. 1-6.

media resources in campaigns against the “diabolical” Spiritism and Afro-Brazilian cults, and also against the secular nature of the state, not unlike the Catholic Church in the period described in this article. Paradoxically, of course, these nowadays influential churches come from the very same Protestant background that was once considered to be aligned with and supportive of the Spiritist cause.

(Written in English by the author)

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