



EXPLORING PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES OF RELIGIOUS SCIENCES: A JOURNEY OF EXPERIENCE AT THE SÃO FRANCISCO CULTURAL CENTER

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ABSTRACT

The present work aims to present the results of the supervised internship II that was carried out at the Centro cultural São Francisco, highlighting the experiences lived during this curricular component. Methodologically, this is a study with a qualitative, bibliographical approach and reports experienced during this curricular experience. The specific objectives outlined were: to contextualize the Centro Cultural São Francisco; plan activities that will be developed at the São Francisco Cultural Center; relate theory and practice during activities at Centro Cultural São Francisco. Methodologically, this is a study to be carried out based on the following activities: visits to the cultural center; readings; searches in databases such as Scielo and Google Scholar; organization and exhibition of the ex-voto. The results obtained during the internship aimed to carry out an innovative survey in the field of religious sciences, exploring the collection of ex-votos of the Cultural Center to highlight the significance of popular religiosity and the culture that these objects represent. The study will include an exhibition of traditions votives of the faithful demonstrating gratitude for the graces achieved through this invention it was possible to understand the history and spirituality related to these objects of connection between the Divine and human, as well as the reasons why people materialize their faith through these ex-votos. Therefore, it is necessary to highlight the visibility we need for the objects involving ex-votos, which was done through the exhibition, as well as deepen our studies on the topic under study.

Keywords: Ex-Votos. São Francisco Cultural Center. Exhibition.

INTRODUCTION

The work is the result of an academic activity that is part of the curricular component of supervised internship II. We understand that this activity is a demonstration and, at the same time, a reflection on the professional practice that was developed at the São Francisco Cultural Center. Furthermore, this curricular component is a way to analyze the content

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obtained at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) with the professional daily life.

The objective of this investigation is to reflect on the activities that were developed at the São Francisco Cultural Center so that we can relate the theory learned at the university to the reality of a religious scientist. The specific objectives outlined were: contextualize the São Francisco Cultural Center; plan activities to be developed at the São Francisco Cultural Center; relate theory and practice during activities at the São Francisco Cultural Center. Methodologically, it is a study to be carried out based on the following activities: visits to the cultural center; readings; research in databases such as Scielo and Google Scholar; organization and exhibition of the ex-voto. In this sense, it is necessary to mention that the internship was carried out at the São Francisco Cultural Center during the semester 2023.1. This space has been visited by numerous people from João Pessoa and other states, as stated in the theoretical foundation.

Therefore, the study is divided into the following phases: a theoretical reflection on the ex-votos and a brief characterization of the São Francisco Cultural Center, a reflection on the activities developed during supervised internship II. Finally, the concluding remarks.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

In this topic, we will divide it into two moments: in the first phase, we write about the concept of internship, and then we reflect on ex-votos so that we can insert the experiences lived during the internship at the São Francisco Cultural Center in the 2023.1 period.

Internships And Their Importance For The Scientist Of Religions

As previously mentioned, we emphasize the importance of supervised internships for the academic and professional development of students. In this sense, the purpose of this first topic is based on a theoretical discussion and then the methodology we used during the internship. Based on the



Pedagogical Political Project (PPP) of the bachelor's degree in religious sciences, the internship is one of the

[...] Methodological principles of scientific research applied to the study of religions and religiosities. Measurement instruments used in the contexts of religiosity. Introduction to descriptive and inferential statistics. Forms of organization of quantitative data in statistical packages for social sciences. Types of variables and corresponding statistical tests (UFPB, 2011, p.24).

Given the above, we justify the importance of relating theory to practice and vice versa, considering that supervised internship II is based on a methodological principle regarding an investigation that permeates scientific research.

Another justification used to support this article revolves around the need to think about updating the knowledge that is built during university. In this sense,

[...] provides a reflection on the knowledge absorbed by teachers, allowing the student to update their knowledge, thus achieving a greater complementation of their goals and strategies, which will necessarily be linked to their teaching practice (GUEDES, 2018, p.31).

The internship is an important moment for any students due to the need to apply the knowledge acquired in university. In this regard, Guedes (2018, p. 17) emphasizes:

[...]The internship experience is closely intertwined with the integration of theory and practice as inseparable processes, allowing for a strong connection between the theories absorbed during the course and practical application.

This fact about the inseparability between theory and practice needs to be problematized in the students' education due to the reflection that is built from the visits to the internship field. Moreover, this debate contributes to (re)affirming our professional identity.

In this context, it is necessary to problematize the theme of the exhibition that revolved around the topic of Ex-Votos. The exhibition, titled "Ex-Votos: Faith, Promise, and Gratitude," was the result of this relationship between theory and practice experienced during the internship.



Ex-Votos: Between Concepts And Contexts

The theme of ex-votos consists of the graces that have been obtained through religious faith. We observe that it is a concept that needs to be intensified in the Religious Sciences course due to its importance and representativeness for religions.

Therefore, the theme that was worked on during the internship, as well as chosen for the exhibition produced by interns and collaborators, was ex-votos. According to Teixeira et al. (2010, p. 123), the concept of ex-votos means:

[...]The fulfillment of the vow emphasizes the testimonial nature of the private gift, usually performed in the presence of another person. Despite the devotee's private and individual request to the deity, the acknowledgment of the grace received has a public character, both regarding the exhibition of the ex-voto in the miracle room and the testimonial condition of the vow's fulfillment involving the votive practice. This "give and receive" logic, prevalent in devotion practices, implies exchanges not only of material but also of spiritual nature, as there is communication between souls, allowing intersubjectivity. When offering the ex-voto, the devotee gives something of themselves to the saint, reciprocating the received gift. For those who believe in divine powers, there is nothing strange about it, even if it involves great effort: paying the vow allows the petitioner to make another vow if necessary. Not fulfilling the vow brings bad consequences, a sense of guilt, fear that materializes in punishment, and loss of credibility before the higher being (TEIXEIRA ET. AL, 2010, p.123).

During the development of this internship, we observed the existence of houses, as well as parts of the human body such as breasts, legs, heads, feet, among others. We understand that there is a representation and/or symbolism in these images, as they represent graces that were achieved by an individual. In this sense, the ex-votos became fundamental in this internship due to the objects present in the Centro Cultural São Francisco, which represent the need to discuss this theme for the Bachelor's in Religious Sciences course and for the internship field itself.

As mentioned earlier, it is necessary to provide a historical context about the location where the supervised internship II took place. The Centro Cultural São Francisco was built with the presence of Portuguese and Spanish settlers



who came to establish themselves in Paraíba. In the current scenario, it has become a space for tourists to visit, as well as for weddings, as follows:

[...]The use of this church for weddings of people living in the capital (in the chapel Casa da Casa de Oração Ordem Terceira de São Francisco), and it also serves religious groups in the population for retreats, due to the bucolic nature of the location. This museum, known as the Centro Cultural São Francisco, is where the tourist aspect of visiting one of the striking attractions of cultural and historical tourism in the city of João Pessoa is effectively developed. This complex has been listed as a cultural and historical heritage site by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage since 1938 (MEDEIROS, 2010, p. 10).

Therefore, we proceed to describe the activities that were developed in the internship field, which represent the activities carried out during this period.

THE INTERNSHIP REPORTS: EXPERIENCES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE SCIENTIST OF RELIGIONS

At this moment, we stopped to reflect on the activities that were developed during the Supervised Internship II, which took place at the São Francisco Cultural Center.

Activities Developed In The Internship Field - Internship Report For August 16, 20

On the sixteenth day of August, the São Francisco Cultural Center, located on São Francisco Hill, s/n, in the center of the city of João Pessoa in the state of Paraíba, welcomed a group of interns from the Religious Sciences program to fulfill the four-hour weekly workload required for the practical internship. The interns were tasked with organizing an exhibition using the collection of ex-votos available in that cultural complex. The proposal aimed to explore theoretical and practical aspects as support for the exhibition and public understanding of the ex-voto context and its typologies in the state of Paraíba, based on the Penha pilgrimage, considered intangible heritage in the state of Paraíba. On that occasion, a set of activities was proposed to contribute to the realization of the exhibition.



Table 1 - Internship Organization

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
Objective	<p>General Objective: Curate and culturally produce an exhibition with the ex-votos collection of CCSF.</p> <p>Specific Objectives: Develop a solid curatorial approach; research and select the works to be exhibited; draft the curatorial text; create the visual identity of the exhibition; organize the arrangement of works in the exhibition (exhibition design); set up the exhibition; document all stages of the process through written and photographic records.</p>
Schedule	<p>The meetings will take place weekly, preferably on Tuesday afternoons, although adjustments to the schedule may be made regarding the day or time of the activities.</p>
Work Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reading selected texts. ✓ Conversations with invited professionals. ✓ Guided tours. ✓ Practical activities in the pre-exhibition, exhibition, and post-exhibition phases.

Source: Developed by interns and collaborators (2023)

On August 29, 2023, we held a crucial meeting for the development of the stages of the exhibition with the theme "Ex-Votos: Faith, Promise, and Devotion." During this meeting, we defined the title of the exhibition, discussed the connection of ex-votos with the Penha Pilgrimage, as well as the materials of the objects to be used in the exhibition. Additionally, we addressed the selected typologies, the narrative we wish to convey, and the



visual identity of the exhibition, including colors, typography, and images. Here is a summary of the main decisions made during the meeting:

Exhibition Title: During a meeting between the interns and collaborators, the title of the exhibition was decided as "Ex-Votos: Faith, Promise, and Gratitude."

Connection to the Penha Pilgrimage: We discussed the importance of highlighting the relationship between ex-votos and the Penha Pilgrimage, as this pilgrimage plays a significant role in the religious culture of Paraíba. This connection will be explored in our exhibition through visual and narrative elements.

Object Materials: We conducted a survey of the materials of the objects comprising the ex-votos collection at CCSF to understand their characteristics and meanings. This allowed us to choose representative objects for the exhibition.

Typologies: We identified the main typologies symbolizing the ex-votos to be addressed in the exhibition, each with its specific narrative and historical context.

Visual Identity: We initiated the discussion on the visual identity of the exhibition, including colors, typography, and graphic elements. These aspects will be further developed to create a cohesive visual experience for visitors.

Deadlines: We set the delivery dates for the curatorial text (October 4) and the laid-out material (October 23) as important milestones for the project's progress.

Selection of Ex-Votos: We have established criteria for the selection of ex-votos to be presented in the exhibition, considering their historical relevance, aesthetics, and representativeness.



Distribution of Objects in Spaces: We planned the arrangement of the display cases in the exhibition spaces, aiming to create a cohesive and engaging visual narrative.

This meeting was productive and marked the effective start of the development of the exhibition "Ex-Votos: Promise, Faith, and Gratitude." The discussions and decisions made on this occasion will serve as a foundation for future work as we progress in creating this meaningful and enriching exhibition for our professional development.

On September 5, 2023, we gathered at the Centro Cultural São Francisco to continue the activities related to the Supervised Internship II course. On this occasion, various important aspects related to the exhibition project were discussed and defined. Below, we detail the main topics discussed and decided upon:

1 Exhibition Title: It was finally decided that the exhibition title will be "Ex-Votos: Faith, Promise, and Gratitude."

2 Project Synopsis: A project synopsis was drafted, summarizing its objective and content.

3 Project Justification: A justification was presented explaining the project's importance, emphasizing the cultural and religious relevance of ex-votos.

4 Target Audience: It was established that the target audience for the exhibition will consist of devotees of the Romaria de Penha, as well as scholars, individuals interested in the theme, and the general public.

5 Objectives: Objectives, both general and specific, were established for the project:

General Objective: Promote the understanding and appreciation of ex-votos as expressions of faith and religious culture.



Specific Objectives: Specific objectives related to research, production, dissemination, and education were detailed.

6. Project Execution Period: The project will begin on November 23, 2023 and will finish on January 23, 2024¹.

7 Project Execution Location: The project will be carried out at the São Francisco Cultural Center.

8 Action Plan: The practical part of the project has been divided into three distinct stages:

Pre-production: Includes activities such as research, defining the collection, narrative development, exhibition design, technical specifications, curatorial text, visual identity, and press advisory.

Execution: Involves setting up the exhibition, holding the vernissage, and engaging in educational interactions with guides and schools.

Post-production: Encompasses dismantling the exhibition, media clipping, preparing the final report, and a final meeting for project evaluation.

It is important to mention that the target audience for this exhibition consists of the devotees of the Penha Pilgrimage, as well as other interested individuals and scholars in the field. We hope that the exhibition will be a unique opportunity to explore and understand the significance of ex-votos in expressing faith, promises, and gratitude in different religious contexts. We look forward to welcoming all those interested in this journey of discovery and reflection.

We understand that ex-votos consist of the thanks given by the population for having seen their requests fulfilled, and their symbolism lies in

¹ We inform you that there has been a change in the date of the exhibition, which is still undefined.



the acknowledgment of answered prayers (TEIXEIRA et al., 2010). Furthermore, ex-votos represent a religious identity. Another characteristic of ex-votos is the faith that surrounds each object and its connection to the accomplished goal. Therefore, the symbols constructed by each one represents a narrated story.

The theme of the exhibition arose from the observation of personal objects that materialize this faith, taking as an example the extensive collection of ex-votos in the Historic Center São Francisco, primarily fueled by the collection of the Penha Church. Hence the importance of developing an exhibition based on this theme due to the lack of awareness among the population itself, as well as its significance for society as a whole.

This exhibition will not only unveil the richness of local religious culture but also allow people to understand the profound connection between faith, promises, and gratitude that ex-votos represent. According to Teixeira et al. (2010, p. 122), they emphasize, "[...] The offered ex-votos show the ways of constructing subjectivities, as devotees commission the object according to their particular characteristics, emphasizing the unique traits of their suffering and the grace obtained." With this, we hope that all visitors will be moved by these stories and objects that witness the devotion and spirituality of our community.

On September 12, 2023, we began by discussing the content of the narrative text that will be used in the exhibition. We analyzed the language and narrative to ensure that this text effectively conveys the desired message. We also assessed the budget available for the event and how we could allocate it efficiently to ensure the expected goal in the exhibition, as observed below:

Exhibition Rehearsal: We conducted a rehearsal of the exhibition, placing the display stands in their designated positions and partially adjusting their distribution to create the desired atmosphere.

Furniture Color: We decided on the color white for the furniture to be used in the exhibition, considering the event's aesthetics.



Counting of Display Stands: We checked the quantity we will use as a safety margin to ensure that there are enough display stands for the excellent execution of the work.

Handling of Artifacts: To preserve the integrity of the selected pieces for display, we used gloves for handling, avoiding direct contact with the selected items.

Theoretical Points: In addition to practical aspects, we also discussed theoretical concepts related to the exhibition. In particular, we explored the concepts of pilgrimage, pilgrimage, and procession.

At the next meeting, there was a deepening of research into the concepts and meanings of ex-votos in a more comprehensive sense for the curatorial text of the exhibition. This was a productive day for the event's preparation, emphasizing both practical and theoretical aspects related to the planned success of the exhibition.

On October 3, there was a session with a presentation led by a collaborator from the São Francisco Cultural Center, focusing on the arrangement of objects for the planned exhibition. The event took place at the São Francisco Cultural Center and was attended by interns and other collaborators from the internship field. The discussion included how these devotional objects would be exhibited to emphasize the dialogue with the faithful.

The collaborator discussed with the interns the design and distribution of invitations for the mentioned exhibition, considering the importance of attracting a diverse audience interested in the theme. Additionally, there was a presentation of the printed text on the invitation and the format, emphasizing that the text was drafted by the interns and highlighting how the theme would be crucial in communicating with exhibition visitors.

The contributions of the collaborators were informative and enlightening, providing a clear insight into the exhibition strategy. The



discussions represented a significant advancement in the project's development and served as a starting point for the implementation and guidelines presented for the success of this project.

On October 10, a debate took place about the planned exhibition by both parties, and on that occasion, it was communicated that there would be a change in the order of the theme previously presented by the interns. The collaborator suggested changing the exhibition theme to improve the aesthetics and proposed changing it to "Promise, Faith, and Gratitude." The reordering of elements was based on the quest for a better visual and narrative aesthetic in the exhibition. The discussion was directed towards how this reorganization could provide a more impactful and coherent experience for visitors. Additionally, during the meeting, points such as:

Developing a questionnaire: It was suggested that a questionnaire be created to collect feedback from visitors about their experience with the exhibition. This would allow for the assessment of the event's effectiveness in terms of communication, message delivery, and audience engagement. Additionally, there was a discussion about the expographic resources that would be used in the exhibition. Therefore, there was the classification and organization of objects, images, and visual elements that were part of the exhibition. The meeting was productive and represented a significant step in the project's development. The change in the order of theme elements demonstrated a commitment to aesthetic and narrative quality aimed at pleasing visitors, primarily.

The meeting was conducted productively, with the participation of the entire team. The developed questionnaire will serve as a way to assess the quality of our internship and exhibition, as well as the impact they had on visitors, allowing us to obtain meaningful information. The idea of creating a questionnaire for visitors aims to contribute to the improvement of activities at the Centro Cultural São Francisco and strengthen the connection with the audience that visits the space, providing knowledge about the religious and cultural practices developed in this venue.



Therefore, Internship II was an enriching experience of knowledge exchange. Additionally, it is necessary to mention that it was an opportunity to align practice with theories received within the scope of the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB). This path allowed me to deepen my understanding of religious practices, including ex-votos, which reveal an important relationship between faith and cultural expression.

The organization of the exhibition "Ex-votos: Promise, Faith, and Gratitude" allowed us to comprehend the concept of ex-votos and the symbolism that exists in objects obtained through each individual's religious beliefs. Furthermore, the exhibition's organization enabled us to understand the functionality and/or contribution of materials such as body parts and houses that are present in the Centro Cultural São Francisco.

Internship II also allowed me to analyze more consciously how ex-votos play a significant role in preserving religious memory and understanding the interactions between people and the divine. This experience enriched my understanding of religious dynamics and the importance of symbolic expression in devotion.

CONCLUSION

The study and research conducted by the scientist of religions play a significant role in the context of the São Francisco historical center. The internship contributed to the understanding of religious diversity, belief systems, and spiritual practices that shape culture and history. Additionally, it helps promote inter-religious dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect among different religious communities, which are essential for harmonious cultural coexistence.

Therefore, it involves interdisciplinary work, combining elements of anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, psychology, and other areas of knowledge to understand religions in their cultural and social context, avoiding religious bias and the promotion of a specific religion. This work



contributes to society's understanding of religions, their influences on history, culture, and politics, fostering religious tolerance and peace.

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