
**Religious minorities as drivers of change:
The case of Protestantism.**

May 20th 2024 | 8:30-15:15 Palermo EuARe 2024 | Marionette - Biblioteca

8:30 - INTRODUCTION

Presentation of the Minority Protestants Network: Laura Popa (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen / Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide) & Karina Wendling (Université de Lorraine / IDEA)

INTRODUCTION – Eugenio Biagini, Professor (Sidney Sussex, Cambridge)

The minority question is frequently discussed nowadays, and more particularly as new religious minorities raise concerns about integration, assimilation, and domination. But what is a minority group? Though the answer depends on historical context, in general a group becomes a ‘minority’ not primarily because of its numerical size, but because of its de facto and often de jure inequality within a given political and social system. In other words, minority status depends on power relations and is accompanied by relative marginalization, political disenfranchisement, and cultural segregation. Stausberg, Van der Haven and Baffelli raise the issue of ‘minoritization’ and its corollary ‘majoritization,’ and the dilemma they pose for states. Thus, minorities can be set aside by something in their behaviour, beliefs or collective identity that creates the perception – and the historical experience – that they are different from ‘the majority’ in some important aspects, but also by identifying some of their characteristics as a threat for the rest of society. According to Finet, a minority is “a group subjected to a relationship of domination [...] that pushes [its] members [...] to unity”, the latter becoming a matter of “self-affirmation [...] to resist the [...] process of assimilation.” Their marginalization may thus be implemented constitutionally, but can also proceed from a majority reaction to their social practices (Weber, 1971: 41). Hence, their aspiration to both integration and preservation of their specificity creates a tension, often reflected in their political behaviour. The underlying question is therefore that of agency: is minority status always imposed on these religious communities or do they participate in the underlying processes? Studying minorities leads us to explore the related concepts of marginalization justified with appeals to race and ethnicity, religion and beliefs, and gender identity, among others. In the case of religious minorities, it is their religious diversity that gives them identity and cohesion. This panel aims at offering space for the comparison of multiple approaches and territories where Protestantism – broadly defined – contributed to a paradigm shift in community relations and the perception of other religious minorities, whether former Christian minorities or Jews. It therefore intends to examine the diverse relationship between Protestantism and domination, as well as the various forms of resistance that Protestant minorities have aroused, depending on their constitutional or social status. The Reformation provoked societal changes and crises that partook in the emergence of modernity and religious plurality led to a renewed religious competition in the age of nation-states. We may thus wonder how, and to what extent, did the secularizing trend it introduced favour the emergence of religious freedoms and civil rights? With the spread of Protestantism worldwide, how do states and their majority populations deal with the phenomenon of religious conversion throughout space and time? Has it provoked shifting patterns in dealing with religious minorities? All in all, how do these

receptions relate to religious freedom in general and the integration of minorities in past and in present societies?

8:45 – 9:35 WOMEN CHALLENGING ‘MINORITIZATION’

Chair: Professor Philipp David (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen)

8:45-9:00 - Laura Popa, PhD candidate (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen) / Research Associate (Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide)

RELIGIOUS MINORITY WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF THE ITALIAN NATION-STATE BUILDING, 1860-1915

This paper examines the often-overlooked experiences of religious minority women during the process of Italian nation-state building, with a focus on the Waldensian Evangelical Church from 1860 to 1915. Historically persecuted by the Catholic Church, the Waldensians actively supported the Italian Unification movement, known as *Risorgimento*, and employed their own strategies for nation-building. Despite significant involvement of women schoolteachers in the Waldensian project, little attention has been paid to their role in shaping the Italian nation-state. The paper proposes a theoretical framework drawing from Nationalism Studies, Cultural Studies, Women's History, and Religious History. It critically engages with concepts such as “imagined community” (Anderson 2006 [1983]), “hybridity of imagined communities” (Homi K. Bhabha 2004 [1994]), “citizens’ empowerment” (Eugenio F. Biagini 2021), and “Protestant International” (Christopher Clark/Michael Ledger-Lomas 2012). Benedict Anderson’s theory of nation as an imagined political community highlights the late eighteenth-century elite’s use of national educational systems to propagate nationalist ideologies. However, Anderson’s framework overlooks gender and the historical contributions of religious women. Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of the hybridity of imagined communities offers a critical perspective that challenges the homogeneity of national cultures, emphasizing ambiguity and minority perspectives. Eugenio F. Biagini’s concept of citizens’ empowerment within the nation-state provides insight into the nuanced historical experiences of minorities. The Waldensian Church, which had ties to European and transatlantic Protestantism, was part of the “Protestant International”, an international community emerged in the nineteenth century within evangelical movements striving for global evangelization. To conclude, this paper contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Italian nation-state building by illuminating the multifaceted experiences of religious minority women. By integrating gender perspectives and exploring the complexities of religious affiliation, it offers insights into the diverse and often overlooked contributions of Protestant minority women to the construction of national identities.

9:00-9:15 - Karina Bénazech Wendling, Associate Professor (Université de Lorraine / IDEA)

EXPERIENCING THE POWER OF CHANGE? PROTESTANT WOMEN CHALLENGING GENDER ROLES IN THE IRISH MISSION FIELD, 1800–1850

A new figure, that of the missionary, appeared in 19th-century English literature. This presence testifies not only to the new revivalist enthusiasm to “spread the Gospel” to distant peoples, but also to gender relations during the Victorian era, conceived

through the prism of the “separation of spheres,” a doctrine popularized by the famous author Hannah More. Paradoxically, while participating in what More called their “profession,” missionary expansion offered women new opportunities for action in the public sphere. Previous studies have shown how “the evangelical religion was more important than feminism in enlarging women’s sphere of action during the nineteenth century¹,” offering them new opportunities to contribute to the expansion of the movement. Not only did they extend the “domestic sphere” by their involvement in education, but by engaging in literature they also challenged their minoritization in the public sphere. Just as women contributed to pamphleteer culture in mid-17th-century England, the Protestant promotion of the vernacular Bible in the 19th century favoured the emergence of female authors within the mission. Through the interplay of national and local scales, this paper explores women’s involvement in Irish home missionary endeavours and shows how it gave them access to new spaces of visibility and governance, thus emancipating themselves from the boundaries imposed by society. It sheds light on the dynamics of female agency assertion, as women renegotiated their role from auxiliaries to fully recognized actors, even asserting the superiority of their actions over men’s. In doing so, they shifted the gender paradigm far more than is usually recognized for the early-Victorian era.

9:15-9:35 - Discussion

9:35-10:45 - DIASPORAS

Chair: Karina Wendling (Université de Lorraine / IDEA)

9:35-9:50 - Benedikt Brunner, Research Associate (Leibniz-Institute for European History, Mainz)

AUSTRIAN MINORITY PROTESTANTS AS DRIVERS OF CHANGE? THE CASE OF WILHELM DANTINE (1911–1981)

Wilhelm Dantine is one of Austria's most prominent Protestants. His work as a Vienna professor of theology and public intellectual earned him this status. His theological, ecclesiastical, and societal work can be seen as an attempt to give Austrian minority Protestantism a new self-confidence in order to become more active in public arenas.

Due to the problematic role of the Protestant church during the National Socialist era, its own activities after 1945 were decidedly limited to the religious sphere. Since the 1960s, Dantine has been working on a redefinition of the term "diaspora", which should raise awareness and activate the church in a new way for engagement in the world. On the one hand, my contribution will examine the diagnosis regarding the role of Protestantism in contemporary society, which he often associated with the concept of secularisation. This was a task and not a process to which one could simply surrender fatalistically. In his view, it has ethical implications above all, which stem

¹ Hampton, David and Myrtle Hill. *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster*, Oxford: Routledge, p. 126.

from a changed understanding of the world. Secularisation as the coming of age of the world no longer allows the misuse of religion as an excuse but wants the use of faith in relation to the world. According to Dantine, secularisation therefore means that the believer must take his task in this world seriously and help to shape it.

From this analysis, Dantine developed a new definition of the concept of *diaspora*, which will be examined in the second part of the talk. He had already described the role of Austrian Protestants in 1959 as a Protestant adventure in a non-Protestant environment. However, the adventure to be completed must first experience a "demolition of the ghetto". Because for the Protestant minorities, also elsewhere in Europe, it is true, and I quote: "They harbour a spiritual treasure that is still largely lying dormant. Uncovering this treasure would be an adventure." An adventure that seems particularly necessary due to the societal circumstances. Dantine is aiming for a church that lives in the world and for the world. He wants "the best for the country" to be sought "without any proselytising". Minority Protestantism must develop from a curiosity into a city on a hill.

The third and final step is to illustrate a specific example in which Dantine himself became a driver of change. He advised the Austrian Minister of Justice, Christian Broda, on questions of criminal law reform from an ethical perspective. My contribution would therefore like to trace the development of Austrian Protestantism into an active societal and politically heard actor using a biographical example.

9:50-10:05 - Paula Malan, PhD candidate (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris)

SOLIDARITIES AND DISSENSIONS WITHIN PROTESTANTISM: THE CASE OF THE WALDENSIANS IN THE RÍO DE LA PLATA REGION (1856-1870)

Following the signature of the Utrecht treaty in 1713, the British Empire has gradually established its presence in the Río de la Plata region. In the early 19th century, this presence came to play an important role in the promotion of freedom of conscience and religion within the emerging independent states. The signing of a *Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation*, between the Empire and the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata, in 1825, guaranteed these freedoms to the subjects of the Empire residing in the region, and opened the door to the establishment of protestant communities.

In 1857, the consular chaplain of the British residents at Montevideo engaged with the first Waldensian families immigrating from the Piedmont valleys to the young Republic of Uruguay. Serving as their protector vis-à-vis the government of the Republic on matters of religion, the British chaplain took an active role in the foundation of the first Waldensian colony in the region - *Rosario Oriental*. The subsequent arrival of the first Waldensian pastor from the Valleys to this newly founded colony set the ground to leadership struggles, which fractured and divided the Waldensian community for over a decade, eventually demanding the intervention and mediation of the official representative and administrative body of the Waldensian Church - the *Table Vaudoise*.

Based on a historical research, covering an abundant correspondence between the involved parties, preserved in the historical archives of the Waldensian Church in Torre Pellice (Italy) and Colonia Valdese (Uruguay), this paper explores alliances,

disputes, and resistance strategies of the Waldensians in their process of identification within Protestantism.

10:05-10:20 - Nesrin Ünlü, Associate Professor (Faculty of Theology, Marmara University)

LIVED RELIGION AND CHURCH AMONG PROTESTANT GROUPS IN TURKEY

On the basis of my fieldwork conducted in İstanbul, this paper presents how the concept of religion and church emerges among Protestant groups in Turkey vis a vis the Muslim majority. Although a tiny minority, Protestants in Turkey display astonishing diversity among themselves. However, there are repeated patterns of thoughts emphasized in contrast to the majority such as the ideas that “Protestantism is not a religion” and “church is wherever two or more believers of Jesus come together”. These ideas are closely connected to another repeated idea that “Christianity is lived better as a minority faith”. Being a minority automatically eliminates the need to have a certain degree of institutionalisation of church as well as formal and distant relationships among members of the church congregation. Furthermore, via the argument to dissociate from religion in other words to distance from systematic and institutionalized change of society, Protestants also argue for legal security and moral upper hand. In this context, being a minority paradoxically invigorates the Protestants in upholding and practicing some of the basic tenets of their faith. In short, this paper will discuss how the lived religion and church unfold in the Protestant vision in Turkey by presenting diverse instances and experiences from Protestant groups.

10:20-10:45 - Discussion

10:45-11:00 - Break

11:00-12:10 - THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE

Chair: Laura Popa (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen / Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide)

11:00-11:15 - Eugenio Biagini, Professor (Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge)

‘ENLIGHTENED’ PROTESTANTISM, ANTIMODERNISM AND ECUMENISM IN TWO MINORITY SITUATIONS: IRELAND AND ITALY 1900-1948

Higher Criticism and theological liberalism had a major impact on Protestant churches wherever the latter represented a majority of the population. However, how did it impact churches which were minority groups? The present paper explores this question with reference to the impact of ‘enlightened’ theology on Protestants in Ireland

and in Italy, between the beginning of the 20th century and the onset of the Cold War. Protestant 'modernism' – as the new light was also called – was welcomed by some Italian Protestants for the disaggregative power it was expected to have on Roman Catholicism, facilitating a proto-ecumenical dialogue through which the Waldensians sought to encourage an internal reform of Catholicism. By contrast, the Irish churches were very reluctant to accept the historical-critical method and, when they did, they vigorously denied having done so. As an Anglican vicar wrote in 1937, “[it was] the glory of the Church of Ireland that it was [so] faithful to the creeds” that it had been “little infected by Modernism”. Others would have taken a more cautious line, but they agreed that modernism was a kind of “disease” of the Roman church, contagious, but containable. The Dublin Episcopalians' sense of superiority also extended to the Church of England, which had generated (or de-generated, some Irish would have said) its own current of historical-critical Protestantism. The conclusion is that minorities adopt a situational approach to intellectual innovations, situating themselves in ways which are expected to maximize their bargaining power in a given historical situation.

11:15-11:30 - Philipp David, Professor (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen)

ENLIGHTENED PROTESTANTISM TODAY: BETWEEN CRISIS AND PROGRESS

The term “Enlightened Protestantism” refers less to a church denomination than to a way of thinking. For a long time, this attitude, characterised by the mentality traits of freedom, subjectivity, and criticism, determined a large part of modern German-speaking Protestant theology in its view of lived religion. The development of a liberal religion specifically was one of its main concerns. Beyond the institution of the church, it was supposed to act as a motor of individual education and social change in order to impregnate culture with Christian ideas. However, with the current dramatic decline in church membership in Germany, liberal religion also seems to be disappearing. In view of the decline of traditional Christianity, this article asks about the future of enlightened Protestantism. Is it an obsolete model? Or does it still have the power as a religious minority to be a driver of change? If so, where might its potential lie today?

11:30-11:45 - David Nash, Professor (Oxford Brookes University)

ATHEISM AND RELIGION IN THE ENGLISH SPEAKING WORLD CONFRONT THE 'NONES'. A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR ATHEIST AND RELIGIOUS CAMPAIGNING IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Atheism and Secularism's history shows us that identities were formed in rebellion against the experience of being in a society with a pervasive religious influence. In England their writings and journalism focussed upon removing the power of the Established Anglican Church. This was to occur through destabilising the text of the Bible and of undermining central religious doctrines. It also involved arguments for the dismantling and disestablishment of the Anglican Church's privileged position. By the end of the nineteenth century Atheists considered that the ideological world was theirs, they had shifted the paradigm of belief. But they also debated the fate of their identity which focussed upon removing religion. What had this paradigm shift given

both sides? Whilst some atheists believed they had triumphed, others were wary of the easy Anglican surrendering of previously absolutist doctrinal and ideological positions. Atheists wondered about the reasons for Anglican Christianity's surrendering doctrinal and explanatory positions. Was it surrender in the face of overwhelming odds/ Or was it to preserve the essence of religious identity and its power to create a less demanding and more popular 'looser' Christianity. This would expand still further the Anglican concept of a broad church that would be a 'rainbow' of minority religious positions. Atheists still found themselves, nonetheless at the centre of a debate. The most perceptive of them argued that if doctrines, the unimpeachability of texts and concepts like the Devil, creationism and the nature of the resurrection could be surrendered – then what still constituted Christianity or even religious belief? Would a secular society still face battles with surviving religion (or religious feelings) or would progressive rational philosophy create new non-religious identities?

This paper investigates the long-term history of the ideological battle between religious and secular world views and the tactics and strategies used to convince individuals about belief or unbelief. This equation changed in the new millennium with the coming of religious indifference and the category of the religious 'nones' – individuals with no connection to religion or rational belief systems, neither through conviction nor upbringing. This relatively quickly cast both Atheists and the Religious as minorities pursuing relationships with a majority that neither actively embrace or reject. Both Atheists and the Religious are in a sense revisiting their battle of 120/130 years ago about what constitutes belief and disbelief. They thus have seen the need to retune their strategies to embrace this paradigm shift. As such they have become (strange) fellow traveller minorities with the urge to save all from the identity of 'post everything.'

11:45-12:10 - Discussion

12:10-13:30 - Lunch Break

13:30 – 14:30 - PROTESTANTS AND POWER

Chair: Paula Malan (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris)

13:30-13:45 - Benyamin F. Intan, Professor (International Reformed Evangelical Seminary, Jakarta)

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF PANCASILA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ABRAHAM KUYPER'S CONCEPT OF PRINCIPLED PLURALISM

During the three-and-a-half centuries of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, Protestant churches in Indonesia had become familiarized with Calvinistic teaching and Reformed ideas. From the perspective of principled pluralism, the Principle of One Lordship guarantees not only religious freedom but also the role of religion in the public sphere. With regard to the implementation of the first principle of Indonesia's national ideology – Pancasila, namely, the Principle of One Lordship – the Indonesian

government requires citizens to embrace any one of the six religions formally acknowledged by the state, i.e., Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Kong Fu Chu. One implication of this regulation is the rejection of both atheism and mysticism, despite these being views and attitudes that a number of Indonesian citizens adhere to. Thus, the enforcement of the formal state religions on Indonesian citizens has resulted in efforts to criminalize non-recognised religions within the Constitution of Criminal Law (KUHP). Because of these efforts the former governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok), was attacked. The author, by analyzing the Principle of One Lordship from the perspective of Kuyper's teaching on principled pluralism, argues that the imposition of formal state religions that peaks in the criminalization of non-recognised religions denies religious freedom guaranteed by Chapter 29 of the 1945 National Constitution (UUD). The Principle of One Lordship must therefore be interpreted anew.

13:45-14:00 - Anke Silomon, Research Associate (Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Leipzig)

THE LIMITATIONS OF POWER: PROTESTANTS AND THE STATE IN THE GDR

In the GDR the Protestant Church was forced into a minority position by the SED dictatorship and its atheistic ideology. The Protestant church was not only viewed as a threat to the enforced conformity of GDR society, but also, due to their remaining connection to the Protestant Church in the Federal Republic, seen as a gateway to the western "imperialistic ideology". Above all, the influence on youth (Junge Gemeinde=Protestant youth organization versus FD Jugend=Socialist youth movement) and education (religious instruction versus socialist education) was to be prevented and the Protestant Church was reduced to the practice of Christian faith. By interfering in foreign and domestic politics and taking on a kind of representative role for society, the church exceeded its limits set by the government. The Protestant Church brought up socio-political issues that the GDR did not strive to resolve because they couldn't be solved without correcting the socialist system itself by democratizing it.

The Protestant church in the GDR was bitterly opposed and the SED leadership attempted to suppress Christians and others who deviated from the socialist norm with restrictive, sometimes draconian measures. This paper will show that the SED's policy towards "dissenters" did not achieve the goal of making the church and non-conformist people disappear or silencing them. Rather, the opening of the Protestant church to the critical potential of citizens, most of whom were initially only looking for a space for open dialogue, created the fundament for the development of an opposition and democracy movement. This was a pivotal factor for the Peaceful Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall, and it contributed crucial competences to the development of a democratic culture.

Moreover, the paper will give an outlook on the question of what the role of the Protestant Church in the GDR means for the EKD (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland) in the present Federal Republic, which now also finds itself in a minority situation – albeit for different reasons and in a democratic system. There are tendencies in the EKD not only to recognise the history of the Protestant Church in the GDR as part of its own history, but also to reconsider which theological and practical approaches can be made in the minority situation of today's post-secular society.

14:00-14:15 - Constance Varoquier, PhD candidate (École Pratiques des Hautes Études / GSRL-CNRS)

REPRESENTING AND DEFENDING EVANGELICALS: THE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF FRENCH EVANGELICALS IN THE DEBATES ON THE LAW CONSOLIDATING REPUBLICAN PRINCIPLES

Since the end of the Second World War, the spread of the evangelical movement in France has provoked mistrust and criticism in French politics and in the media (Liechti, 2017). The mainstream press criticized the movement for its growth, proselytism and even political interference, pointing to the examples of evangelicals in the US and Brazil (Chélini-Pont, 2011). The government, trying to decipher a religious market that abounded due to secularism, categorized evangelical communities as "sects"².

Against this backdrop, and notably out of a desire to no longer be stigmatized, the majority of evangelical representatives overcame their 20th-century disputes and came together in 2010 to form the National Council of French Evangelicals (CNEF). The CNEF, which claims to represent 70% of French Evangelicals, not only promotes fraternity and cooperation among evangelicals, but also "represents and supports the interests and beliefs of all its members [...] before political, administrative and religious authorities"³.

As part of this dual mission – representing and defending French evangelicals in the public sphere and especially in politics –, CNEF leaders took part in the political debates surrounding the adoption of the law consolidating republican principles⁴, which was intended to strengthen the 1905 law on secularism and combat religious "separatism". Indeed, the Evangelical and Muslim communities were particularly impacted by the new cultic restrictions imposed by the law⁵. Nevertheless, the CNEF managed to make its voice heard by the Ministry of the Interior and achieved one of its rare – and relative – successes in terms of political representation. Relying on the strength of its 6,000 members, boasting a long-standing evangelical commitment to secularism and wrapping itself with institutional and legal credibility, the CNEF has sought to embody an ideal that is both evangelical and republican, successfully presenting itself as a balanced partner to the government in the debate surrounding the adoption of the text, while other national religious institutions have mainly opposed it. In addition to this public engagement, the CNEF has sought to promote this ideal internally among evangelicals by sensitizing and training them to the legal requirements of the religious.

² As did a 1996 report from the Parliamentary Commission on Cults in France: Gest, A. & Guyard, J. (1996). *Les sectes en France*, rapport de l'Assemblée Nationale n° 1468.

³ A quote from the CNEF's website (own translation): <https://www.lecnef.org/page/509713-missions-et-valeurs>

⁴ "*La loi confortant les principes républicains*" (own translation), which was finally passed on August 24, 2021.

⁵ Such as Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, who has once legitimized the law by referring to the "very important problem" of evangelicals (own translation). Quoted in: Fath, S. (2021, Février 5). «Non, les évangéliques ne représentent pas un "problème très important" en France». *Le Figaro*: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/non-les-evangeliques-ne-representent-pas-un-probleme-tres-important-en-france-20210205>.

This presentation is part of a sociological and historical doctoral thesis on the emergence of the CNEF from 1969 to the present day and the institutionalization of the French evangelical movement it embodies. It draws mainly on interviews with members of the CNEF board and an anonymous government official, as well as an analysis of CNEF press releases on the law.

14:15-14:30 Discussion

14:30-15:00 - Roundtable

15:00-15:15: Concluding remarks: Philipp David (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen)