

OPPRESSION OF CHRISTIAN MINORITIES IN INTERWAR ITALY INCLUDING THE TRIESTE REGION: THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE FASCIST REGIME AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

The author, on the basis of the sources of the ‘two powers’, the State and the Catholic Church, analyses various levels and forms of violence exercised by the Fascist regime against religious minorities in Italy in the 1920s and the 1930s. The ‘intimidations’ were in most cases incited by the Catholic Church, which disapproved especially Protestant proselytic activities and requested intervention of civil authorities. The interference increased after the signing of the Lateran Treaty and the introduction of the Law of Allowed Religions in 1929. Particular attention is dedicated to Seventh-day Adventists, which among all non-Catholic Christians in Venezia Giulia experienced the most oppressive measures. Moreover, many Adventists were Slovenians, which made them more suspicious in the eyes of the regime.

Keywords: religion, Fascism, oppression, religious minorities, Catholic Church, Italy, Trieste, Venezia Giulia

L'OPPRESSIONE DELLE MINORANZE CRISTIANE IN ITALIA E NELLA PROVINCIA DI TRIESTE TRA LE DUE GUERRE: LA PROSPETTIVA DEL REGIME FASCISTA E DELLA CHIESA CATTOLICA

SINTESI

L'autore sulla base delle fonti archivistiche dei “due poteri” – Stato e Chiesa cattolica – analizza i diversi livelli e forme di violenza esercitate dal regime fascista contro le minoranze cristiane in Italia tra le due guerre. Le intimidazioni erano nella maggior parte dei casi istigate dalla Chiesa cattolica che disapprovava in particolare il proselitismo dei protestanti e chiedeva l'intervento delle autorità civili. L'intromissione crebbe in seguito alla firma del Patti Lateranensi e all'introduzione della legge sui culti ammessi nel 1929. Un'attenzione particolare è dedicata agli Avventisti del Settimo Giorno che, tra tutti i cristiani non cattolici della Venezia Giulia, hanno subito le misure più oppressive. Inoltre, molti Avventisti erano di nazionalità slovena, un fatto che li rendeva ancora più sospetti agli occhi del regime.

Parole chiave: religione, fascismo, oppressione, minoranze religiose, Chiesa cattolica, Italia, Trieste, Venezia Giulia

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS¹

The article on Fascists' control over, oppression and persecution of religious minorities, which was often incited by Catholic officials, firstly dwells on Italy as a whole, including referential legislation, and afterwards focuses on the particular situation in the borderland city of Trieste and its hinterland. The matter of religious minorities under the Fascist regime in the interwar period is in the region of Venezia Giulia (the Julian March) a scarcely researched issue, with an exception of the repression of Jews after the introduction of the Italian Racial Laws. Although the vast majority of the population in Italy and the northern Adriatic were Catholic, whether of Italian, Slovenian, Croatian, German, Friulian or other origin, and only approximately 135,000 people belonged to non-Catholic religions (Piccioli, 2003, 497), we must take into account that major centres, including in the borderland, displayed religious diversity in the 19th century and even before. For instance, Greek-Orthodox and the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Jewish community, and the Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Evangelical Methodist Church and the Anglican Church all have a long tradition in Trieste, and to varying degrees in Gorizia, Rijeka and Pula; and several other Protestant denominations appeared in this province in the interwar period (such as the Waldensian Evangelical Church and the Christian Adventist Church [The Seventh-day Adventist Church]) – and some of these communities enjoyed substantial socio-political influence.

New Protestant religious communities – Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals, Methodists and others – spread into Italy mostly through Italian immigrants to North America, where a small but significant minority converted to Protestantism. The returning emigrants helped to found many small Protestant communities in their places of origin (Zanini, 2015, 688) and thus vitally contributed to the diffusion of these locally novel forms of worship.

The present contribution provides an overview of studies on the oppression of Christian (non-Catholic) minorities during the period of interwar Italy and an archival study of the situation in the multicultural borderland of Venezia Giulia, particularly in Trieste and its surroundings. The focus is on the entanglement of similar interests (though of different motivation) of two institutions – the Fascist regime and the Catholic Church – in relation to the minorities in question. These are the viewpoints that will be examined, dwelling on the sources of the state and church archives in Trieste and Ljubljana, which exhibit specific discourse of exclusion with references to 'freely interpreted' legal documents (foremost the Lateran Pacts and the Law of Allowed Religions). The primarily 'top-down' approach is complemented by the concepts of 'the Other' (religious and national) and power relations that will enable a comparison of commonalities and differences between the politics and practices towards religious minorities of the state apparatus (state and

1 The author acknowledges that the research project (Antifascism in the Julian March in Transnational Perspective, 1919–1954, J6-9356) in the scope of which this publication was published, has been financially supported by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS).

secret police, prefectures and other facets of the civil administration) and the party militia on the one hand, and the Catholic clergy, episcopate and the Holy See on the other.

The perspective primarily emphasises the issue of the power relations between majority and minority religions (cf. Ghanea, 2012, 60–61) in respective overlapping religious fields, and the inconsistencies of the promoted ‘Fascist’ discourse of one national culture that assumed further solidification by promotion of religious (Catholic) unification (cf. Mack Smith, 1981, 159–163). This was to some degree challenged in the case of national minorities of non-Catholic belief. Such a study contributes to the well-established field of the History of Fascism, as well as of religions, of which in the region of Venezia Giulia there is a gap.

In the case of Italy we can speak of a *Catholic* religious field, as the Catholic Church was (and still is) the dominant religious entity in the country. In terms of this religious field, Italy exhibited the characteristics of an overwhelming Catholic society, a society that for centuries has been dominated by the Catholic Church, similar to Lithuania, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Poland (Schröder & Petrušauskaitė, 2013, 70; Bourdieu, 1991, 20–25). The main features of predominantly Catholic society is

the marginal position of other religions, and the fact that the statistical dominance of the Catholic Church masks a wide variety in the attitudes toward Catholicism and modes of belonging to the Catholic Church throughout the population, as well as substantial differences within the Church itself. (Schröder & Petrušauskaitė, 2013, 70).

The attention will be dedicated mostly to Protestant communities that at some point became one of several ‘internal enemies’ (cf. Gentile, 2012, 95) or were at least suspected of subversive actions. No significant pressure on Christian Orthodox Churches has been noticed during that time, while the case of Jews has already been quite extensively explored (by authors as: Bettin, 2007; De Felice, 2001; Bon, 2000) and is in Italy very specific, so will only be mentioned to contextualise the opposition to religious minorities more in general.

Bourdieu’s postulation that human existence is essentially conflictual can serve as an opening in the case at hand. Nevertheless, we need to be aware that conflicts can take many forms depending on the kinds of ‘capital’ that agents or actors own (Benson, 2009, 175–197).

FASCIST ITALY AND THE LEGAL REGULATION OF NON-CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

The Italian Fascist regime’s attitude towards non-Catholic minority religions, especially Evangelical Churches, was deeply dependent on the state of the relationship between the civil authorities and the Holy See. Even though some incidents have been registered from before 1929 (see: Scoppola, 1973, 334; Davis, 2010, 66), the year the Lateran Pacts and the so-called law on ‘admitted cults’ or Law of Allowed Religions n. 1159 [la legge sui culti ammessi n. 1159] were passed, is a turning point. With the Lateran

Treaty the Catholic Church in Italy was explicitly acknowledged as the State religion:

*Italy recognizes and reaffirms the principle established in the first Article of the Statute of the Kingdom of 4 March 1848, according to which the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Religion is the only religion of the State.*²

Mussolini's government followed the politics of re-confessionalization, recognizing Article 1 of the Albertine Statute. This clause was ignored in pre-war Italy with the gradual liberalization of legislation regarding non-Catholic religions, especially with the 1889 Italian Penal Code, commonly known as the Zanardelli Code, which guaranteed equality before the criminal law for all religious communities (Tokri, 2015, 52–53). The Italian legal experience, however, was still based on the principle of tolerance that assumes an unequal treatment of religious minorities, and was for many years a condition for the non-Catholic religions that were reaffirmed in 1929 with the effects of the Lateran Treaty and particularly of the Law of Allowed Religions, which due to the absence of a general law on religious freedom is still in force today for those religious communities that did not sign an agreement with the state (Ervás, 2017, 874), should have adequately regulated the various religions in the country.

At first, the law of 1929 was reasonably well accepted by the Protestants, as the legislative context in which the confrontation between the Catholic Church and Protestant religious communities took place changed from tolerated to allowed (Rochat 1990, 127–147; Spini, 2007, 127–130; Zanini, 2015, 690–691). The Catholic perception that the change of status of minority religions was the basic reason for the recommencement of Protestant Proselytism and a deviation from the Lateran Pacts, resulted in a fervent response on the part of the Italian episcopate, the Holy See and Pope Pius XI (Perin, 2011, 154–165; Zanini, 2015, 691).

If Article 1 of the law of 1929:

*Cults other than the Apostolic and Roman Catholic religion are allowed in the State, provided they do not profess principles and do not follow rites contrary to public order and morality. The exercise, even in public, of these cults is free,*³

does seem to support some expression of religious freedom, the Royal Decree – no. 289 (28 February 1930) that was to implement the law of the prior year – ‘clarifies’ some of the questions that were left open to interpretation. The Fascist authorities legalized the policy of unequal treatment of religions by reconciling with the Catholics on the one side, and returning to jurisdictionalism for non-Catholics on the other. The law provided a system suitable for guaranteeing political control and extensive interference with faiths

2 For the text of the Lateran Treaty see: <http://www.vaticanstate.va/content/dam/vaticanstate/documenti/leggi-e-decreti/Normative-Penali-e-Amministrative/LateranTreaty.pdf>

3 For the text of the Law of Allowed Religions see: <http://win.minervaistruzione.it/cd/testi/leggi/L.%201159%2024-06-1929.pdf>

other than the Catholic through a series of considerable restrictions on the freedom of religion. One extreme act of intervention of the Law of Allowed Religions and the Royal Decree was that religious officials of admitted religions had to be appointed by the Minister of the Interior. Furthermore, especially restrictive were conditions for the opening of a temple or oratory that also required specific approval of the Minister of Justice and Affairs of Religion in agreement with the Minister of the Interior. The proselytic activities of non-Catholics were also constrained (Madonna, 2016, 13–14).

According to Art. 2 of the Royal Decree No. 289,⁴ the members of an admitted religious community could hold ‘public meetings’ in places of worship, on condition that they were presided over or authorized by an approved religious official. In this case, the prior authorization according to Art. 18 of the Consolidated Law on Public Security [Testo unico delle leggi di pubblica sicurezza], approved by the Royal Decree No. 773 of 18 June 1931, was not required. However, the same Art. 18 provided that a meeting, although held in a private form, could also be considered public due to the place where it was held or the number of people present or the purpose or the subject of the meeting. The police applied this last provision to religious meetings of non-Catholics in private places, forbidding and dissolving by force those meetings which were not authorized. This was a serious breach of basic religious rights when even worship at home could thereby be denied (Madonna, 2016, 13–14).

Broader discrimination of religious minorities was enforced in 1930 by the Rocco Penal Code, which outlined a specific protection for the Catholic Church. The punishment was less severe if a crime was committed against a person of a minority religion than it would have been against a Catholic (Tokri, 2015, 55).

The legal order of treatment of religious communities by the State had in fact three levels: the Catholic Church with the Concordat regained the position of an established Church in Italy, some minority religions recognized by the State had a special juridical status (e.g., Waldensians, Baptists, Methodists, Jews, etc.), while all other religious communities that did not make an agreement with the State (e.g., Pentecostals) or chose not to (e.g., Adventists) were subjected to the common law, and were most vulnerable to attacks (with the exception of Jews).

INTIMIDATION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN ITALY BY THE AUTHORITIES AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The situation of religious minorities in Italy since the Risorgimento has been conditioned by the relations between the state and the majority religion. Steps toward secularization of the state with the reforms of legislations in the 19th and early 20th centuries in favour of religious equality were taken primarily because of the anti-Catholic sentiments of the governments in power at the time. Moreover, a major part of Italian Protestants strongly identified with the liberal state, as the regime guaranteed their freedom of

4 For the text of the Royal Decree No. 289 [Regio Decreto 28 febbraio 1930, n. 289] see: http://host.uniroma3.it/progetti/cedir/cedir/Lex-doc/It_rg_28-2-30.pdf

worship and allowed evangelization. Protestant churches did not declare any political positions, although Baptists and Methodists did often actively support the Democratic Left, while Waldensians tended to endorse the ‘trasformismo’ of Giolittian politics – i.e., the flexible centrist position (cf. Valbruzzi, 2015, 32; Mack Smith, 1997, 103). The convergence between moderate progressivism and anti-Catholicism was well represented through tight connections between freemasonry and Italian Protestantism (Rochat, 1990, 12). However, after the Fascists’ measures against freemasons via a decree introduced in 1925 (Fedele, 2006, 678–679; Mithans, 2016, 750–751), all evangelical leaders chose to defend their Churches rather than to maintain good relations with the freemasons. When liberal and democratic political powers and state institutions, including the monarchy, gave support to the introduction of the Fascist regime, despite their sympathies towards *stato liberale* evangelical churches could not but conform and accept Mussolini and Fascism (Rochat, 1990, 12–14).

Basically, the notion of religious freedom initiated in the period of the liberal regime was a product of particular political developments in Italian politics, not an overall acceptance of religious differences (Rochat, 1990, 12–13). A rather intolerant response on the part of several Catholic priests and laity against religious minorities during the interwar years, especially traditional anti-Judaism, was therefore not just a result of Fascist propaganda.

Catholics perceived in the 1920s the ‘Protestant danger’ as an indistinct entity, and, foremost, wanted to oppose the proliferation of that ‘heresy’ among the citizens of central and northern Italy. Protestants bound to liberal policies, a cultural elite and to the Democratic and Socialist circles, were considered more threatening. Hence the fixation of the leading members of the Catholic Church with Waldensian, Baptist and especially Methodist proselytism (Zanini, 2015, 690; cf. Moro, 1998, 45–63). The Fascist authorities, however, as early as 1925 closed a Pentecostal meeting house in Melfi, a small town in Basilicata, and the Interior Ministry in the next decade ordered the closure of others. In the meantime, Protestant pastors and preachers were being arrested on a variety of pretexts, including charges of blasphemy. In April 1927, the regime’s campaign against the evangelical communities took a further step when Arturo Bocchini, Mussolini’s Chief of Police and the head of the Italian secret political police, Organization for Vigilance and Repression of Anti-Fascism (OVRA), instructed the prefects in each province to provide him with regular reports on their activities and memberships (Davis, 2010, 66).

Robert Paxton claims that Italy under the Fascist regime went through several cycles of radicalization and normalization, with Fascist seizure of power, the Matteotti crisis, the Lateran Pacts, the Ethiopian War and the beginning of World War II in Europe as decisive events (2004, 148–153; cf. Ferrari, 2013, 8). Fonio argues that the country also experienced at least two interwoven stages of surveillance. The latter, crucial to maintaining control over all aspects of society, was implemented from 1926 and changed in nature and purpose throughout the dictatorship. Whereas the first stage, that lasted approximately from 1926 until 1938, was characterized by the reorganization of the police under a new chief – Bocchini – the creation of official bodies (e.g., the Political Police or PolPol and the OVRA) and a specific focus on anti-Fascist movements, the second phase was

marked both by the anti-Semitic turn in 1938 and World War II, which fostered categorical surveillance respectively on religious groups and on ‘defeatists’ (Fonio, 2011, 82).

Frequent police reports were filed by anonymous informers, civilians, willing to improve the efficiency of State surveillance, making numerous accusations against Jews, Pentecostals, and other religious minorities (Fonio, 2011, 87). In particular, they collected detailed information on jobs, incomes, and behaviours and attitudes towards the regime (Franzinelli, 2001, 141). Usually the root causes of denunciations were ideological hate, competition in business or mere personal dislike. Accusations by thousands of anonymous informers over the years of the Fascist era show, as Fonio states, that surveillance had become an integral part of Italian society (Fonio, 2011, 87).

Strengthened by the climate created by the 1929 Pacts, Catholic priests and bishops requested the involvement of state authorities in the defence of the Catholic faith (Scopola, 1973, 331–394; Davis, 2010, 66–70). Subsequently, in the 1930s hostility towards the religious minorities increased, usually due to the fear of anti-Fascist/anti-Italian sentiments of their representatives perceived by the State authorities. The suspicions the regime harboured towards any minority, religious or otherwise, which maintained international ties, was combined with a general prejudice regarding the popular classes and their capacity for self-determination (Rochat, 1990, 74–75; Zanini, 2015, 692). Not only did many Protestant churches preserve contacts across the border, many pastors of Adventist, Baptist, Methodist and other denominations were educated outside Italy; and almost all (e.g., except Waldensians as ‘originally Italian’) were funded from abroad to varying degrees, usually the United States of America (Rochat, 1990, 17–20). That raised additional suspicions, especially with further German-Italian rapprochement and when World War II finally broke out. Foreign ‘ethnic’ Protestant Churches, like German speaking Lutherans and Reformed Evangelicals,⁵ as well as Anglicans, were usually not under suspicion by the Italian regime nor an adversary to the Catholic Church as they also did not proselytize outside their ethnic communities (Rochat, 1990, 20, 144–145). A parallel can also be made to the Greek and Serbian Orthodox communities. Of course, for most of the mentioned community the situation changed with the beginning of the World War II; and in the case of religious communities associated with the UK in 1935 with British opposition to the war in Ethiopia.

While denominations were tolerated, their activities were in large part removed from the public sphere, especially ‘religious propaganda’ – proselytizing was strongly opposed by the Catholic Church and often also the Fascist militia. Firstly, the freedom of discussion in religious matters stated in the Law of Allowed Religions, was not understood as permission to proselytize by the Catholic Church; secondly, the religious communities were admitted on condition that they did not profess ‘principles contrary to the public order or public morality,’ verification of which was left to the State apparatus (see: Scopola, 1973, 352–363).

Proselytizing, especially when practiced by the Protestants was a very sensitive matter for the Catholic hierarchy. Even Pope Pius XI on multiple occasions asked civil authorities

5 Cf. ACVCVTs, Prefecture to the Evangelical Community of Helvetic Confession recognizing its ‘Italian character’ and thus considering it as an institution under public law, Trieste, 7. 10. 1924.

to restrict non-Catholic proselytism in the State. The question of ‘religious propaganda’ was discussed in the only meeting between the Pope and the Duce on 11 February 1932. Mussolini seemed to agree to some extent with papal requests, though for political, not religious, reasons (Scoppola, 1973, 340–342).

The Vatican went so far as to send the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through Apostolic Nunciature of Italy a publication titled *Il proselitismo dei protestanti in Italia* [Protestant Proselytism in Italy] (1934) that explicitly demanded the government limit the spread of Protestantism (Rochat, 1990, 49–55). In 1938 Pope Pius XI was pleased when he received the information that the Fascist regime declined to build a mosque in Rome. He also requested control over the missionary activities of Waldensians and other Protestants in newly acquired territories in Africa (Bosworth, 2006, 258).

Nevertheless, the civil administration in some disputes acted as a protector of the rights of religious minorities, particularly Evangelicals, against the pressures of the Catholic Church aligned with the *Milizia volontaria per la sicurezza nazionale* (MVSN, Voluntary Militia for National Security). According to Scoppola, the reasons for this attitude on the part of civil authorities, especially in the case of the General Directorate of Religious Affairs, which in 1931 moved from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of the Interior, may be in the remaining functionaries’ loyalty to the tradition and practices of the liberal state. Even more likely, the cause was related to the regime’s preoccupation with distancing itself from the Catholic Church (Scoppola, 1973, 339).

For instance, in the case of Waldensians in the valleys of Piedmont, the difference in opinions between the Fascist Party (that shared the attitude of the Catholic Church towards Waldensians) and the police was evident. On 30 July 1941 the secretary of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* Adelchi Serena wrote to the secretary of the *Federazione dei Fasci di Combattimento* of Turin:

Irreducible anti-Fascism was reported from the side of the Waldensians in the valleys Pellice and Germanasca /.../ These Waldensians do not hide that they feel foreigners in Italy, they pretentiously speak only in French, they attend political and military events, and give remarks to manifestations only in accordance with their anti-Italian sentiments. The Catholic population lives in those valleys in condition of true humiliation, also because the Waldensians seem to have succeeded to acquire all leading positions in the public life. (Scoppola, 1973, 356; cf. Viallet, 1985, 287–290).

The police reports, however, in large part do not confirm these allegations, stating that no specific elements that can be interpreted as manifestations of anti-Italian views – i.e., none of the proclaimed pro-American/pro-British attitudes, or usurpation of public offices – could be found (Scoppola, 1973, 356).

It is important to point out that while surveillance and intimidation of Protestant groups was part of the everyday life during the interwar years in Italy, we cannot in fact speak of *persecution* prior to 1939. Only the years of the war would clearly show that those legal acts concealed a wide range of possibility of administrative intervention according to the changing political directions. In the first decade of the application of the

Law of Allowed Religions, interpretation of that law was not generally hostile to religious minorities, with the exception of the Pentecostals (Scoppola, 1973, 346; Rochat, 1990, 241–274) and the Jews.

Furthermore, as Ebner points out, political and social repression of the Fascist state and party coercion was never constant or evenly distributed, but also evolved over time. While binaries such as Fascism and anti-Fascism, perpetrators and victims, consensus and resistance, may be useful to some extent for understanding aspects of police-state repression and resistance to it, they do not take into account the context that affected everyday lives of people living under the Fascist regime (Ebner, 2017, 79).

In the case of the Pentecostals, Catholic hierarchies had always shown a deep aversion towards the diffusion of this denomination in Italy. The approaches of the Fascist state were different and more complex. If generalisation must be made, the bureaucracy and the police apparatus had always shown a measure of diffidence towards Pentecostals. The police showed interest in the Pentecostal community in Rome around 1927 after multiple complaints of the Catholic clergy. In 1928 the Catholic Church presented the first medical-psychiatric evaluation by doctor Osvaldo Zacchi, who concentrated on the emotional aspects present in Pentecostal worship, such as certain ‘convulsive’ movements made by the faithful during prayers. These were the first attempts to portray Pentecostal worship as dangerous to public health and morals. The Zacchi report played an important role in developing the regime’s suspicion towards Pentecostalism; in fact, it represented the point of departure for all subsequent inquiries. Still, Pentecostal services were not prohibited yet and prayer halls continued to function. The change in the attitude towards Pentecostalism occurred between 1933 and 1934, characterized by a shift of attention from the cities of northern Italy to the rural areas mostly in the south. In addition, the 1929 economic crisis in Italy appeared to favour a Protestant proselytism, since Protestants were perceived as having unlimited financial resources, and, therefore, could attract the impoverished population. The result of these changes was that the Pentecostals, who, up until 1932–1933 had been considered just one of the adversaries, began being perceived as the greatest danger to Italian Catholicism (Rochat, 1990, 74–75, 113–122; Zanini, 2015, 692–693).

This shift in opinion occurred during the third phase of interwar Catholic anti-Protestantism according to Renato Moro, following *national* anti-Protestantism of the 1920s with hostility towards Protestants as *foreigners*, and the phase of *national religion* and *national-Catholic ideology* in the years between 1929 and 1933, which was marked by the hostility towards Protestants as *enemies of religious peace* between the Catholic Church and the state in the time of serious crisis over the question of Italian Catholic Action and its autonomy in 1931. The third phase of *catholic Fascism* of the mid-1930s with hostility towards Protestants considered as *anti-Italian* (Moro, 2003, 318) were years of convergence between the Catholic Church and the regime that lasted until 1938. Then frequent protests of the Catholic side were mostly backed up by the State authorities, supporting the argument of the Catholic clergy based on presumption that Pentecostals’ service and customs were dangerous to the public. On 9 April 1935 the Pentecostal denomination was banned on the grounds that its rites had proved “*harmful to the physical and mental health of the razza*” (Scoppola, 1973, 359).

In spite of this animosity in police reports, it was almost always protests from the Catholics which initiated inquiries or restrictive orders. The local authorities rarely raised the measures on their own. After all, Fascist bureaucrats were aware that the Pentecostals represented no political threat whatsoever (Zanini, 2015, 692), and the same was true for other religious minorities in Italy. Ultimately, therefore, the Protestant Churches until 1939 appeared closed in their isolation and continuously controlled (see: Scoppola, 1973, 351). In addition, Protestants usually were not politically active and can be designated as ‘a-fascist’.

The situation profoundly changed in the last years of the regime, after the alliance between Italy and Nazi Germany, which also marks the rupture in the agreement between Italian Fascism and the Catholic Church. Of Protestant groups, again the Pentecostals were most severely persecuted as they could continue their activities only at clandestine meetings. These gatherings were often reported to the police by the Catholic clergy with a request to intervene against this community. It is significant and distressing that the bishop of Benevento’s attempt to put the Pentecostals into a bad light in the eyes of the Government was based on the accusation of defeatism and espionage, and that in this case the civil authorities dropped the allegations. Although, as Scoppola points out, numerous files on confined Pentecostals in *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* are based on the accusation of antimilitarism (Scoppola, 1973, 352–363; Piccioli, 2003, 496–510).

The Salvation Army, which has also had a hall in Trieste, was another religious group that was dissolved by the Fascist authorities by the provision dated 17 August 1940. At first, the authorities did not know how to legally handle this organization, which the General Directorate of Religious Affairs considered more as a militant religious order than a Church and was during most of the interwar period treated as a non-recognized religious community. The Salvation Army in Italy did seek to be allowed to function as an autonomous organization distinguished from other Protestant religious groups. Considering their characteristics, such as a profoundly British appearance and direct dependence on London, their paramilitary character, and that they as the only religious entity in Italy allowed women to become preachers, it was almost inevitable that the Fascist regime would eventually perceive them as a threat or at least enough of a nuisance they would need to be moved against. By 1934 the situation for the Salvation Army deteriorated to the point where several halls were closed (although a year later during the moment of great tension between Italy and Great Britain, due to British opposition to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, a compromise was reached allowing the organization to reopen the halls, without recognition of the Salvation Army as a religious organization). However, in February 1936, deputy chief of the Italian police, Carmino Senise, ordered prefects to exercise strict control over the activities of the Salvation Army that should be considered outside the directives pertinent for religious associations. A short period of frequent police interventions, provocations and Catholic mobilizations against the Salvation Army followed, when a diplomatic agreement between the Foreign Office and Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Galeazzo Ciano, was made in favour of the Salvation Army. During the years 1937–1940 they were allowed to resume their activities on a nearly regular basis, but the war made life for the Salvationists difficult again (Rochat, 1990, 229–239).

Jehovah's Witnesses were, especially during the 1920s, a Christian religious group with a negligible number of adherents scattered around Italy that were connected almost entirely by their publications (e.g., *The Watchtower*) and correspondence. Usually civil authorities thought they were Protestants, and most often mistook them for Pentecostals or Adventists. As Rochat argues, the differences between the non-Catholic Christian Churches mattered to the Fascist regime only if they had political implications, while the Catholic Church fought all without exception (1990, 275). Eventually *The Watchtower* was prohibited on the grounds that the publication conflicted with the politics of the regime and attacked the Catholic Church. A smaller group of people formed in the province of Trento and was only one of the four communities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Italy that was oppressed by the regime before the summer of 1939. The prefect in his report to Rome on 30 September 1936 firmly stated that the 'sect' functioned as an instrument of disintegration and in their pamphlet *Un governo desiderabile* [A desirable government] openly criticized the authorities, politics, religion, and even patriotism. Consequently, four people were confined for five years, let out after a couple of months, and later arrested again. The reason for the arrest was, according to the prefect of Trento, their continued proselytism. In 1937, another five Jehovah's Witnesses were confined, and the group was disbanded (Rochat, 1990, 275–280). In 1939 and 1940 the oppression of this group reached its peak, when OVRA became involved and due to a combination of different factors began to persecute Jehovah's Witnesses in even more 'efficient' ways than Pentecostals. This group came under the radar of OVRA because they thought they were Pentecostals, which exaggerated their supposed threat; furthermore, the doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses rejected the moral authority of the State (which did not mean disobedience or rebellion). Still, Fascist authorities, sensitive to any form of dissidence, mostly on the grounds of their refusal to join the army (see: Piccioli, 2003, 501–510) and relations with foreign powers, systematically intervened against Jehovah's Witnesses. Several Jehovah's Witnesses were prosecuted also at the Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State, the community considered a form of political opposition disguised as a religious organization (Rochat, 1990, 275–302).

The case of Jews is very different and too complex to be discussed in detail in this contribution. While many members of the Catholic hierarchy and Catholic newspapers did not agree with the Racial Laws – i.e., racial anti-Semitism (cf. Moro, 2015, 87) – the traditional form of Catholic anti-Judaism gave rise to the aversion of a significant number of Catholics in Italy towards the Jews (cf. Miccoli, 2000, 605–606). Despite the opposition of the Catholic Church towards such repressive anti-Jewish legislation, no official rupture between the Catholic Church and the state occurred, although the relationship evidently deteriorated, even more because the Catholic Church generally disagreed with the 'friendship' between Mussolini and Hitler (see: Gentile, 2015, 40–41).

Complaints against several religious minorities after 1938 and especially with the involvement of Italy in the war were followed by hostile measures much more than in the past: premises were seized under the laws of war, oratories were closed, and permits for particular religious officials were revoked (Scoppola, 1973, 352–355; cf. Rochat, 1990, 256–330).

The exaltation of the national value of the unity of faith propagated by Fascism created an illusion of a confessional restoration, which incited the spirit of intolerance while the illiberal mentality of conservative Catholics assured the success of the regime's intention to use religion as a political instrument (Scoppola, 1973, 367).

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN THE TRIESTE REGION AND VENEZIA GIULIA

When referring to 'fascismo di confine' (see: Vinci, 2011, 7) in Venezia Giulia often that which is specific to this area is stressed, and consequently similarities with other parts of Italy or Europe are undermined or even overlooked. This contribution attempts to address both, by presenting the issue of religious minorities at both the local and national levels.

The great majority of Protestants in Trieste, the seat of the province of Venezia Giulia, were of Italian or German background. A nuncio to Vienna, Emilio Taliani, made an observation in the beginning of the 20th century to the effect that Italian believers converted to Methodism not to 'become Slavs.' However, Methodist Pastor Dardi did imagine a 'Methodist mission' to bring a concord between Slovenians and Italians by eventually converting also the former to Methodism. His mission among Slovenians was not particularly successful because Methodists did not have enough resources and people that could speak Slovenian (Carrari, 2002, 122).

As many Protestants were members of the Masonic lodges, organisations that were banned in 1925 by the state authorities due to their supposed anti-Fascism, in 1927 the prefect of Trieste raised the alarm that Protestant Churches were taking cautious anti-Fascist action through their dependent institutions as well, which was disapproved by the police. The surveillance of the Waldensian Evangelical Church, the Evangelical Church of Helvetic confession, the Methodist Church, the Anglican Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church continued as in other parts of Italy due to Bocchini's order, but no particular information that would disturb the authorities was found (cf. Carrari, 2002, 156–158). Although some individuals were suspected to have anti-Fascist sentiments, among them pastor Umberto Ghetti from Pula and pastor Dardi, no measures were then taken (Carrari, 2002, 158). The 'suspicious behaviour' of Protestants in Venezia Giulia were thus especially in the 1920s mostly related to their involvement in Freemasonry.⁶ However, in Trieste, also leading members of the Jewish community were freemasons (Apollonio, 2004, 78–80; Pirjevec, 2016, 722), which was a peculiar occurrence.

In Venezia Giulia the oppression of some non-Catholic religious communities intensified during the years before World War II. Most evidently in the case of Jews after the introduction of the Italian Racial Laws in October 1938, when Mussolini chose Trieste as a central stage for the attack. Previously, Jews were very influential in Trieste, with high-ranking members even in the Fascist Party. Jewish communities also existed in other cities in Venezia Giulia, such as Gorizia, Rijeka and Opatija.

Anti-Semites were in the time of the implementation of the Italian Racial Laws warning people of a 'Jewish conspiracy,' including that they possess too much power in the

6 ASTs, 37, 11511/481. The letter of the prefect of Trieste to the attorney general. Trieste, 5. 4. 1930.

economy and in politics in proportion to the Catholic majority (Podbersič, 2016, 843; Bon, 2000, 85–86). In Venezia Giulia the society was overrun by the strong emotions of nationalism and ethnocentrism of so-called border fascism that had since the rise of fascism a clear ‘racial’ connotation especially in relation to Slovenians and Croats. The public had no particular issues accepting discriminatory measures against another ethnic/religious community (Podbersič, 2016, 845; Bon, 2000, 85–86, 153). However, there was also some weak opposition to the Racial Laws, particularly based on two grounds: some entrepreneurs noted the unfavourable economic effects of these measures on the commerce, while politically the difference in opinion arose in regard to the relations with the Third Reich and especially the Anschluss (Bon, 2000, 154).

Another religious denomination that was in other parts of Italy relatively tolerated by the authorities, but stands out due to state oppression and the opposition of the Catholic Church in Venezia Giulia, is The Seventh-day Adventists that formed its first group with a pastor, Franco Einspieler, in Trieste in 1925. There is not much information on the early years of community’s existence present in the city of Trieste and the countryside area between Trieste and Koper, but when in 1939 pastor Loosen returned to Germany, a crisis emerged. Consequently, part of the followers joined the movement called ‘reformed Adventists’ [avventisti riformati], while at the same time the community underwent increased police oppression that nearly put an end to this church. Only after World War II, however, the Adventist church really started to prosper (Rochat, 1990, 187; Carrari, 2002, 152).

In the borderland, forced Italianization made the Catholic Church and Fascist regime more susceptible to any form of ‘disturbance’ (cf. Pelikan, 2018a, 208–211; Pelikan, 2013, 314–316) that did not fit their image of *italianità* (cf. Batič, 2016, 819–820). As among the front-runners of the Adventist Church were Slovenians, a ‘double minority’ (cf. Măran & Đurić-Milovanović, 2015, 87) – i.e., a religious and national ‘Other’ – they were a more likely target of denunciations and police surveillance. Moreover, some Adventist publications were printed in Yugoslavia – although ‘pacifist’ Christian groups (Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses, Nazarenes etc.) were not recognized there and thus all gatherings were technically prohibited (Đurić-Milovanović, 2017, 450) – which brought about further suspicion (Rochat, 1990, 187; Sala, 1974, 37–41).

Still, as in other parts of Italy, in Venezia Giulia the oppression of the non-Catholic population was almost non-existent before 1938. In addition, there was no Pentecostal community in the region. The Serbian Orthodox congregation, for example, was allowed to have a non-Italian school in the region, which continued to operate after 1930, though only citizens of Yugoslavia were allowed to visit it (Bajc, 2003, 34). Still, Protestants and ‘other religious sects’ were under surveillance by the police from as early as 1927 and a subject of reports by anonymous informants. Worse oppression was experienced only by Jews and Adventists (particularly beginning in 1940) in Venezia Giulia. Adventists were several times reported to the police by the diocesan curia bothered by the ‘religious propaganda’ of various evangelical groups (Sala, 1974, 40). In the document from the Diocesan archive of Trieste sent by the police commissioner of Trieste to the bishop of Trieste and Koper Antonio Santin on 7 November 1938 the dissemination of the Adventists’ periodical (*L’Araldo di Verità*) is mentioned, a matter which had been reported by

the Office of the Bishop to the police already in September 1936 and dealt with. The commissioner concluded with the words that he would examine whether the same or other people were engaged, and proceed according to the findings.⁷ This interference and breach of religious autonomy was just a prologue. The curia in January 1940 received a complaint by the Slovenian Catholic priest Mazzarolli [Macarol] from Servola/Škedenj. Among the ‘disturbances’ stated by the priest Mazzarolli was Adventists’ non-attendance at school on ‘Fascist Saturday’ because their masses took place on that day of the week.⁸ Accordingly, the Bishop’s office ordered a report on the activities of Adventists also from the parish priest of S. Antonio Taumaturgo in Trieste, where religious services took place every Saturday at Via Coroneo. This Adventist community was, according to the priest, comprised of about 150 people, and the service was hosted by a Slovenian family.⁹

Following the response of the Bishop’s office to the reports of the priests on Adventist proselytization, the police commissioner agreed with the Catholic curia about the seriousness of the ‘issue,’ indicating that Adventists’ activities were false and subversive propaganda that divide people, citing Mussolini that what is done against the State and the Nation is a crime.¹⁰ Naturally, the police measures became more aggressive towards Adventists soon after Italy joined the war; many of the Adventists were Slovenians and so considered more likely to be a fifth column; they were associated with the United States as well, and promoted pacifism as did certain other Protestant denominations. The priest Mazzarolli correctly foresaw in his letter from August 1940 that

*the civil authority will do much more [than before Martial law was imposed] because, the sect takes advantage of the war by paying the poor people to join their flock, they draw children in their midst while their fathers perhaps pour their blood for their country.*¹¹

The hint of bribery, that may not have any foundation, is present also in a report from a priest from Trieste who mentioned that most of the adherents are poor workers to whom, ‘in a certain abundance,’ subsidies (money, food and clothing) are distributed. Often, in this way, whole families would be supported.¹² In fact, Adventists in Italy were dependent on the Adventist mission, in particular the European division located in Bern, who appointed their leadership and provided the necessary funds, in addition to a very high level of internal contributions (the Adventists paid a tithing) for the maintenance of

7 ADT, 1938/623, Curia vescovile di Trieste e Capodistria, Police commissioner of Trieste to the bishop Antonio Santin. Trieste, 22. 11. 1938.

8 ADT, 1940/40, Curia vescovile di Trieste e Capodistria, Propaganda protestante. Priest of Servola/Škedenj to the Office of the Bishop of Trieste and Koper. Trieste, 8. 1. 1940.

9 ADT, 1940/40, Curia vescovile di Trieste e Capodistria, Propaganda protestante. Priest of S. Antonio Taumaturgo to the Office of the Bishop of Trieste and Koper. Trieste, 5. 3. 1940.

10 ADT, 1940/40, Curia vescovile di Trieste e Capodistria, Propaganda protestante. Police commissioner of Trieste to the Office of the Bishop of Trieste and Koper. Trieste, 4. 4. 1940.

11 ADT, 1940/40, Curia vescovile di Trieste e Capodistria, Propaganda protestante. Priest of Servola/Škedenj to the Office of the Bishop of Trieste and Koper. Trieste, 5. 8. 1940.

12 ADT, 1940/40, Curia vescovile di Trieste e Capodistria, Propaganda protestante. Priest of S. Antonio Taumaturgo to the Office of the Bishop of Trieste and Koper. Trieste, 5. 3. 1940.

an exceptional number of full-time pastors and missionaries, and also peddlers for the dissemination of biblical texts and widespread evangelization (Rochat, 1990, 19). Whether or not Adventist funding was dependent on their success in proselytizing, throughout history in times of civil strife poverty and repression have indeed been engines of religious change, while during times of plenty evangelicals rarely succeed in adding to their flock by preaching in suburbs of plenty.

The war did change the attitude of the civil authorities towards the Adventists. In December 1940 one of the weekly reports of the police in Trieste to the Ministry of the Interior stated:

*[...] the Catholic organizations grouped in the Catholic Action are directed by the Curia and have for some time shown a certain awakening, especially to counteract the Adventist action. The activity of these organizations has so far remained within purely religious limits [...]*¹³

The next section of the report mentions:

*[...] various Protestant and pseudo-religious sects that exist in this province do not cause excessive concern, because they still have little adherents and limited activity, with the exception of the 'Adventists', a community which has been recently developing especially among Slovenians. Their development has been cut short by known repressive measures and the Adventist sect is currently completely disorganized.*¹⁴

If the police on the volition of the Catholic diocese intervened against the Adventists in 1940, the year when Italy entered World War II, based on their likely 'subversive' actions due to the significant number of Slovenians in this religious organisation, connections with the United States and proclaimed antimilitarism, the opposition of the Catholic Church was a response to the increased Adventists' proselytization activities. Furthermore, two different, but partially overlapping discourses of 'Othering' (Dervin, 2016, 43–55) are present regarding *Slovenian* Adventists in particular: discourse, mostly propagated by the Catholic officials considering Slovenians as 'buona gente', good naïve peasants, who needed to be protected, and another, anti-Slavic discourse based on assumptions of the Fascist authorities that recognized Slovenians as inherently anti-Fascists (cf. Klabjan, 2007, 250–252) – i.e., separatist terrorists who just seek to avoid their military and other duties to the *patria*. However, both authorities – civil and Catholic – in Venezia Giulia, agreed that non-Catholic 'religious propaganda' was unacceptable as it threatens the unity of the nation.

13 ARS, SI AS 1829, t.e. 31, a.e. 575. Report on political and economic conditions in the province of Trieste. Trieste, 28. 12. 1940.

14 ARS, SI AS 1829, t.e. 31, a.e. 575. Report on political and economic conditions in the province of Trieste. Trieste, 28. 12. 1940.

CONCLUSION

The reasons for the Italian Fascist regime to intervene against religious minorities were usually based on suspicion of a non-Catholic community being involved in subversive activities, particularly in cases of connections with foreign powers, or when the state powers expected to gain some political advantage by supporting the accusations of the Catholic officials. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church sought every opportunity to condemn the 'heretics,' the religious 'Other.' On the other hand, civil authorities sometimes – within limits that suited them – backed Christian minorities, mostly in order to reduce the power of the Catholic Church. Throughout the years of the regime the surveillance and intervention intensified, the religious communities that experienced severe oppression in Italy aside from the Jews were especially Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Salvation Army, and mostly after 1938 and during the war when special laws were applied. For example, the Anglican Church in Trieste was closed in 1939 and the community dissolved (Carrari, 2002, 139, 156–157); and the Greek Orthodox' members found themselves in a difficult situation. Moreover, many religious minorities were dependent on financing from abroad and had central leadership in foreign countries that were not Italy's allies, which complicated their existence and relation with the Italian state.

In Venezia Giulia, on the one hand, there seem to have been fewer attempts on the part of the Catholic clergy and state regime to undermine non-Catholic religious groups than in other parts of Italy. After all, plenty of Catholic priests of Slovenian and Croat origin were already under surveillance, intimidated and confined (Kacin Wohinz & Verginella, 2008, 82–83), evidently oppressed by the Fascist regime due to their support of anti-Fascism or because they tried to preserve their national minority's language and heritage. These issues of the Fascist regime and since mid-1930s of the exclusively 'Italian' Catholic hierarchy with the Slavic Catholic clergy at least to some extent decreased their dislike of religious minorities. We should not assume, though, that Catholic clergy in Venezia Giulia was religiously tolerant or rather that the co-existence of religious communities was exemplary in the border region (cf. Pelikan, 2018b [forthcoming]), but foremost that where other divisions existed religion was not as important a divisive factor. On the other hand, as previously indicated, in the case of Adventists the reaction of the Catholic clergy and hierarchy as well as the police was practically the same as in other cases of intimidation of minority Christian groups all over Italy. The police proceeded in the way the Catholic Church wished.

If the treatment of Protestants and some other marginal religious groups in Fascist Italy was dependent on the relations between the Catholic Church and the state authorities, the situation in Venezia Giulia was even more complicated and forced assimilation of national minorities left even less space for pluralism of any kind.

ZATIRANJE KRŠČANSKIH MANJŠIN V ITALIJI IN NA TRŽAŠKEM MED OBEMA VOJNAMA IZ PERSPEKTIVE FAŠISTIČNEGA REŽIMA IN KATOLIŠKE CERKVE

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POVZETEK

V članku je analizirano stopnjevanje fašističnega nasilja nad verskimi manjšinami v obdobju med obema vojnama v Italiji. Na podlagi arhivskih virov predvsem policije in tržaško-koprške škofije ter literature so obravnavana posredovanja bodisi Fašistične milice bodisi civilnih oblasti, ki jih je večinoma spodbudila Katoliška cerkev. Le-to so izrazito motile prozelitistične dejavnosti protestantskih skupnosti. Vmešavanja v avtonomijo nekatoliških verskih skupnosti so se povečala po letu 1929, ko je bila podpisana Lateranska pogodba, ki je ponovno potrdila Katoliško cerkev kot državno Cerkev, in s sprejemom Zakona o priznanih verskih skupnostih istega leta. Ta zakon, ki mu je sledil dopolnilni dekret leta 1930, je na videz strpno urejal razmere med državo in verskimi manjšinami, dejansko pa so bile določbe zakona kasneje, predvsem po letu 1939, zlorabljene za upravičevanje nasilnih ukrepov proti priznanim in nepriznanim verskim skupnostim. Tako so binškoštnike leta 1935 prepovedali na podlagi argumenta, da so njihove aktivnosti v nasprotju z javno moralo; preganjane so bile med drugimi tudi Jehove priče, zlasti zaradi njihovega antimilitarizma in povezav s tujino.

V okviru raziskave razmer na področju Julijske krajine, kjer so bili v ospredju medetnični spori, se posebna pozornost namenja adventistom v Trstu in okolici. Ti so bili med vsemi ne-katoliškimi krščanskimi skupnostmi podvrženi najbolj nasilnim ukrepom fašističnih oblasti na pobudo škofijske kurije v Trstu. Ta sprega med najvplivnejšima institucijama v državi se pojavlja kot vzorec v celotni Italiji. Mnogi adventisti so bili slovenske narodnosti, kar je bil pri fašističnih oblasteh dodaten razlog za sumničavost, saj so pripisovali domala vsem pripadnikom narodnih manjšin protifašistična 'čustva'. S posredovanjem leta 1940 je kvestura izrazila strinjanje s katoliško hierarhijo, da verska propaganda protestantov škodi enotnosti italijanske države, in tako povzročila skorajšnji razpust Krščanske adventistične cerkve na tem območju.

Ključne besede: religija, fašizem, zatiranje, verske manjšine, Katoliška cerkev, Italija, Julijska krajina, Trst

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