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**Confessional impartiality in Europe at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.  
Projects, networks and cultural transfers**

Adelisa MALENA

Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the notion of “impartiality” appears in various areas of knowledge and with different connotations. This emerges very clearly from a collection of essays edited by Kathryn Murphy and Anita Traininger, *Emergence of Impartiality*, the fruit of an interdisciplinary research project<sup>1</sup>. The starting point was a search for this term in the emblem books, lexica and dictionaries of the early modern age. The discursive contexts in which this notion first appears are military and political (“parts” – parties), followed, at a slightly later stage, by juridical, ethical and moral settings. Impartiality is a term that can have a positive connotation of openness, lack of prejudice, fairness, or detachment. However, it also has negative associations that cause it to be seen as an enigmatic quality, as a reluctance to take sides in situations where alignment might be necessary. Depending upon the discursive context involved, it may take on the meaning either of neutrality or of objectivity: as in journalism, for example, or in scientific settings. So far, however, research has merely touched upon religious contexts, not investigating this area in any depth<sup>2</sup>.

The radical Sebastian Franck (1499-1542) adopted an approach that he defined as one of “impartiality”, not only in the bitter disputes with the Church of Rome but also with regard to dissension among the different Protestant groups and to radical currents in Protestantism. Franck argued that the true invisible church was not to be found in this world, calling instead for a “free, non-sectarian, impartial Christendom under an impartial God” (frei/onsectisch/onparteisch Christenthumb), within which differences and divisions would concern only superficial and external matters that did not put at risk the unity of belief (*Paradoxa Ducenta octoginta*, 1534)<sup>3</sup>. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this attitude was a sort of “marker” of the idea of an invisible church within the radical currents. However, in the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it would develop more nuance, becoming an integral part of different experiences and visions<sup>4</sup>.

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this term would return in the vision of a “sectarian” Christianity and in the conviction that the different “sects” all referred to a single God,

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Murphy and Anita Traininger (eds.), *Emergence of Impartiality*, Leiden, Brill 2014. The essays in the volume consider the concept of impartiality on a general epistemological level, exploring especially discourses such as philosophy, law, ethics, science and politics (impartiality as objectivity).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *Introduction: Instances of Impartiality*, pp. 1-29. The religious field is not addressed more fully in this volume.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23. Sebastian Franck, *Paradoxa Ducenta octoginta*, Ulm, Hans Varnier, s.a.[1534], *Vorred*, c.4v.

<sup>4</sup> Adelisa Malena, “Promoting the Common Interest of Christ”. H.W. Ludolf’s “impartial” Projects and the Beginnings of the SPCK, in *British Protestant Missions and the Conversion of Europe, 1600-1900*, Simone Maghenzani, Stefano Villani (eds), London, Routledge 2020 [Early Modern Religious Dissents and Radicalism], pp. 140-162.

who was at the centre of the various irenic projects. For example, the circle around Samuel Hartlib, which was made up of his various European contacts, believed in the need to reunify the various Protestant factions, but disagreed on how this was to be brought about. Johann Moriaen (c.1591-1668), one of Hartlib's correspondents based in Amsterdam, suggested that Protestant unity could be attained in the name of impartiality by neglecting details, writing: "My advice, in my simplicity, would be that, given such diversity of sects and opinions, one should keep oneself disinterested and impartial as far and for as long as possible, keeping to generalities and not entering into particulars"<sup>5</sup>.

It was not until the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the notion of impartiality as a "habitus" – as Martin Mulso wrote – would emerge more strongly within the religious debate<sup>6</sup>.

The following pages aim to focus on this particular historical moment, at the height of the confessional age, when the term "impartial" became a catchword. The context to which I will refer is predominantly that of German pietism – with both Lutheran and Reformed tendencies –, where this term – used with different meanings – would acquire vital importance<sup>7</sup>.

In the sources that I will analyze, this notion can be considered as the criticism of confessional barriers or as the refusal to accept dogmatic and doctrinal distinctions or even as an attempt to establish contacts or a dialogue between individuals and/or groups belonging to different confessions (in some cases groups that exist on the margins of these confessions or even outside of them)<sup>8</sup>. I will try to show that this category does not infer mere latitudinarianism or a lack of a clear confessional identity, nor a mere "anticonfessionalism" (intended as *pars destruens*). My proposal is to explore this category by referring to two closely linked aspects:

1. Cultural practices, works, and literary genres;

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<sup>5</sup> Murphy – Traninger, *Introduction: Instances of Impartiality*, p. 23. On this correspondence see John T. Young, *Faith, medical Alchemy and Natural Philosophy: Johann Moriaen, Reformed Intelligencer, and the Hartlib Circle*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 1998, pp. 83-84.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Mulso, *Impartiality, individualization, and the Historiography of Religion: Tobias Pfanner on the Rituals of the Ancient Church*, in Bernd-Christian Otto, Susanne Rau, Jörg Rüpke (eds.), *History and Religion: Narrating a Religious Past*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2015, p. 257: "The emergence of Impartiality as a habitus in the seventeenth century was a complex process, which was comprised of various elements, such as the argumentation *in utramque partem*, religious tolerance, eclecticism, literary practices like the inversion of perspectives, the separation of the spheres of politics, religion and morality, philological criticism and the discarding of the theological *elenchus*. During this time '*unpartheyisch*' grew to become a catchword".

<sup>7</sup> Adelisa Malena, *Ecclesia Univera: "Imparzialità" confessionale e transfer culturali tra Sei e Settecento. Note su una ricerca in corso*, in Lucia Felici (ed.), *Ripensare la Riforma protestante. Nuove prospettive degli studi italiani*, Torino, Claudiana, 2015, pp. 283-309. Erich Beyreuther, *August Hermann Francke und die Anfänge der ökumenischen Bewegung*, Hamburg, 1957.

<sup>8</sup> Adelisa Malena, *Imparzialità confessionale e conversione come "rigenerazione" nel pietismo radicale. La "Historie der Wiedergeborenen" di J. H. Reitz (1698-1753)*, in Maria Cristina Pitassi, Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci (eds.), *Les modes de la conversion confessionnelles à l'époque moderne. Autobiographie, altérité et construction des identités religieuses (XVI<sup>e</sup> – XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Firenze, Olschki, 2010, pp. 63- 83.

2. Transconfessional networks and shared projects (completely or partially shared) involving various supporters of impartiality.

### 1. Cultural practices, works, and literary genres

The first name that should be mentioned in this regard is that of the Pietist Gottfried Arnold. In his monumental *Impartial History of the Church and Heretics*, he describes the different Christian churches undergoing a common process of corruption, which would mark their historical development from Constantine onwards<sup>9</sup>. The history of the Church is therefore presented as a chain of controversies, characterized by the tendency of orthodoxies to “hereticize” the dissenters. Extraordinarily innovative on a historiographical level, this work proposes an interpretation of the history of Christianity that is not determined by the criteria of dogmatics but only by the authenticity of religious experience: the lived religious piety (*Frömmigkeit*) of the faithful, even when they were considered as heretics. In order to do so, Arnold assumed a point of view that was supposedly above and beyond that of the various denominations. Yet his professed impartiality is coupled with a highly “partial” criticism of the antagonistic sects that obstruct true piety and he sees all established and institutionalized churches as “sects” to be rejected. Arnold’s “impartiality” was anything but neutral. As Douglas Shantz wrote: it “is not the objectivity of the modern historian. Arnold was the historian of the invisible spiritualist church for whom sectarian differences of dogma and ritual were subordinate to faith and love”<sup>10</sup>. Arnold wanted to give a voice to the true Christians – men and women, individuals and groups – who, both within the various churches and outside of them, have kept the light of true faith burning through history. From this perspective, impartiality is strictly connected to religious individualization and – as Mulsow noticed – “the experience of individualized religiosity calls for a revision of the historiographical canon”<sup>11</sup>. Arnold brought the same impartiality to his historical sources and his works draw upon a staggering base of erudition. He was also a tireless translator and editor of sources originating from a variety of confessional contexts. The fourth volume of the *Impartial History* contains translations of “all kinds of documents and writings as [further] explanation/exemplification” of part I to III<sup>12</sup>. It includes translations of early Church fathers, Manicheans, Donatists, medieval German mystics, selected 16<sup>th</sup> century protestant reformers and reformation radicals (such as David Joris), early modern Spanish, Italian and French mystics, English puritans, member of

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<sup>9</sup> In the German context Arnold’s work is the most important example of the use of the notion of “impartiality” both in historiographical and religious fields: Gottfried Arnold, *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie, vom Anfang des Neuen Testaments biss auff das Jahr Christi 1688*, Frankfurt am Mayn, Fritsch, 1699-1715.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas H. Shantz, “Back to the sources”: Gottfried Arnold, Johann Heinrich Reitz, and the Distinctive Program and Practice of Pietist Historical Writing, in C. Arnold Snyder (ed.), *Commoners and Community: Essays in Honour of Werner Packull*, Kitchener, Ontario, Herald Press, 2002, pp. 75-100; p. 86.

<sup>11</sup> Mulsow, *Impartiality*, p. 257.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas Shantz, *Pietism as a Translation Movement*, in Id. (ed.), *A Companion to German Pietism, 1660-1800*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2015, pp. 319-347; p. 327. Arnold, *Unpartheische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie [...]*, *Vierter Teil, Bestehend in allerhand nöthigen Documenten, Tractaten und Zeugnissen, Acten und Geschichten von vielen Religions-Streitigkeiten*, Frankfurt am Mayn, 1729, p. 375.

the Dutch *Nadere Reformatie*, Jacob Böhme and various 17<sup>th</sup> century radicals like Antoinette Bourignon and Friedrich Breckling<sup>13</sup>. The aim is two-fold: on the one hand, Arnold intends to give a voice to individuals by allowing the “heretics” to speak for themselves<sup>14</sup>. On the other, however, he insists upon his readers’ right to impartiality, offering them the opportunity to become acquainted with the sources translated into German. As a result, his “impartial readers” – an expression that appears in all of the prefaces written by Arnold and by many of his contemporaries – will be able to develop their own unbiased opinion. Rather than superficially redeeming heretics, Arnold rejects the very concept of heresy and proposes a critical re-reading of the history of the Church and of a vast variety of sources such as records of trials, writings by the heretics themselves, biographies, chronicles, and so on.

This same approach to the history and individual stories of true Christians is at the heart of a literary genre characterizing German Pietism. I am referring to *Vitensammlungen*, or collections of lives with an edifying purpose<sup>15</sup>. This genre seems to embrace all the main features of the spiritual literature of Pietism: both in its theological foundations, which are distinguished by interconfessionality; by an antidogmatic, practical attitude that is open to the multiple paths of the religious experience, and in its vocabulary, style, and argumentative structure. Arnold was the author of the collection titled *Lives of the Faithful* printed by the Halle Orphanage press in 1701<sup>16</sup>. The collection, which had a strong “impartial” slant at a confessional level and was very egalitarian with regard to gender relations, contained biographies of “witnesses of the truth” living in the past two centuries (1500-1700), including several Catholics (such as Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Genoa, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Jeanne de Chantal, etc.). In fact, Arnold believed that true Christians could be found in the Catholic Church as well as in other confessions, given that “[God’s] true Israelites had always been concealed in all sects”. In his eyes, the true “history of the Church” was represented by the hidden, little-known lives of these men and women, not by the “hypocritical Christianity of the State”<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Shantz, *Pietism as a Translation Movement*, p. 328.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330. Arnold, “Vorrede auf die letztere zwey Bücher, oder Den zweyten Theil”, *Anderer Theil der Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie von anno 1500 bis 1688*, p. 453: “So möchte ja wohl desto heylsamer seyn, wo an statt des eitelen ruhms und so vieler falschen vorurtheile einmal aus denen domestiquen urkunden eine prüfung des eigenen zustandes angestellt würde. Wozu den aus gegenwärtigen und andern dergleichen aufrichtigen ungeheuchelten beschreibungen ein gutter anfang gemacht warden konte, und zwar nicht allein von denen, die vor andern in possession der orthodoxie seyn sollen, sondern auch von den übrigen partheyen und secten allen, als welchen auch hiezu in diesen 2 büchern genugsam anlaß gegeben wird”.

<sup>15</sup> On this literary genre see Hans-Jürgen Schrader, *Nachwort des Herausgebers*, in Johann Heinrich Reitz, *Historie der Wiedergeborenen, oder Exempel gottseliger so bekandt- und benant-, als unbekandt- und unbenanter Christen, Männlichen und Weiblichen Geschlechts, in allerley Ständen. Wie Dieselbe erst von Gott gezogen und bekehret, und nach vielem Kämpfen und Aengsten, durch Gottes Geist und Wort, zum Glauben und Ruh ihrer Gewissens gebracht seynd. Ins hochteutsche übersetzt*, Offenbach am Mayn, Druckts Bonaventura de Launoy 1698. [Anastatic edition, edited by Hans-Jürgen Schrader, Tübingen 1982, 4 volumes], vol. 4, pp. 127-203. See also Malena, *Imparzialità confessionale*.

<sup>16</sup> Gottfried Arnold, *Das Leben der Gläubigen, oder Beschreibung solcher Gottseligen Personen/welche in denen letzten 200 Jahren sonderlich bekandt worden*, ausgefertigt von Gottfried Arnold. Halle, In Verlegung des WäysenHauses 1701.

<sup>17</sup> Arnold, *Leben der Gläubigen*, Vorerinnerung n. 15 unpag.

The most important of these collections, published shortly before Arnold's work, is the celebrated monumental *History of the Reborn* by the Reformed Pietist Johann Heinrich Reitz, (the first volume of which was published in Offenbach in 1698 by the Huguenot printer Bonaventura de Launoy), which was so masterfully studied by Hans Jürgen Schrader. Such collections often included other texts and other collections (in abridged form) from different confessional contexts. Reitz' work drew upon the first (partial) German translation of *Spiritual Experiences*, a Puritan collection of predominantly female conversion narratives<sup>18</sup>. Adopting an approach similar to Arnold's, Reitz maintained that church history was "the history of individual believing Christians" and of the Spirit "leading their lives through divine revelations and new birth"<sup>19</sup>.

Although I cannot explore Reitz' work in any greater depth on this occasion, I would like to underline two aspects that are both linked to this impartial perspective: 1. the first regards the close links between the work of Reitz and the Philadelphian movement in Germany. His historical writing must be placed within the Philadelphian conventicle environment in the free imperial city of Frankfurt and in the neighboring Offenbach. Reitz was a member of these groups, which were linked to the Philadelphian Society of London, founded by Jane Leade (in fact, one of the biographies in his collection is dedicated to her)<sup>20</sup>. According to the Philadelphians, the invisible church of the true Christians belonging to all churches would become visible at the end of time, which they believed to be imminent. 2. The second aspect regards the importance of the practice of translation in Pietism – Pietism has been indeed defined as "a translation movement" – which acted as a vital vehicle for cultural transfer between different linguistic and religious contexts<sup>21</sup>. Men like Gottfried Arnold, Johann Heinrich Reitz, and Anton Wilhelm Böhme – whom I will later briefly refer to – translated works of authors of both sexes belonging to different churches and groups, proposing them in the German context and from an impartial viewpoint<sup>22</sup>. A significant example concerns

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<sup>18</sup> [HENRY WALKER], *Spirituell Experiences, of Sundry Belevers. Held forth by them at severall solempne meetings, and confernces to that end*, London, printed for Robert Ibbitson, 1653. This collection was circulated under the name of Vavator Powell, author of the preface to its second edition. On Puritan conversion narratives see Donatella Pallotti, « My conversion was wonderful » : testimonianze di conversione nelle chiese radicali inglesi della metà del XVII secolo, in «Genesis», VI/2, (2007), pp. 33-54. The German translation of this collection had already been inserted in the work of the German Reformed Pietist Theodor Underreyck, *Christi Braut/ Unter den Töchtern zu Laodicea/ Das ist/ Ein hochnöthiger Tractat/ In diesen letzten Tagen. Darinnen Die lebendige Krafft deß seeligmachenden Glaubens von allen Schmach-Reden der in dieser Zeit Christ-scheinender Spötter/ nicht nur auß H. Schrift: sondern auch auß gleichlautenden Zeugnißsen der darin gottseelig erfahrenen und Gott gelährten Männern gereinigt und verthädiget wird*, Hanau, Ingebrand 1670. See Peter Damrau, *The Reception of English Puritan Literature in Germany*, London, Maney Publishing, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Shantz, "Back to the sources", p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> Hans Schneider, *German Radical Pietism*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham – Toronto – Plymouth, 2007, Chapter 2.; Shantz, "Back to the sources"; Id., *Conversion and Revival in the Last Days: Hopes for Progress and Renewal in Radical Pietism and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, in Fred van Lieburg and Daniel Lindmark (eds.), *Pietism, Revivalism and Modernity 1680-1850*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars, 2008, pp. 42-62.

<sup>21</sup> Shantz, *Pietism as a Translation Movement*.

<sup>22</sup> Malena, *Ecclesia Universa*. On Anton Wilhelm Böhme as "impartial" translator and cultural mediator see Arno Sames, *Anton Wilhelm Böhme (1673-1722). Studien zum ökumenischen Denken und Handeln eines Halleschen Pietisten*, Göttingen 1990; Adelisa Malena, *Migrazioni della mistica. Note sulla fortuna di*

Spanish, Italian and French mystic literature from the Middle Ages and early modern age, which circulated in Protestant Germany thanks to this activity of cultural mediation. I am referring, for example, to the biographies and works of Catherine of Genoa, Angela of Foligno, Madame Guyon, Miguel de Molinos, Piermatteo Petrucci, etc<sup>23</sup>. We should remember that most of these texts reached the circles of German Pietism through the French translations and editions of Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), a Huguenot pastor who moved to the Netherlands after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, a reformed theologian, scholar of the philosophy of Descartes and disciple of the charismatic Antoinette Bourignon (1616-1680), as well as an author of mystical works in his own right<sup>24</sup>. I maintain that Poiret's approach to this genre of literature and, more in general, his work as a translator and editor, as well as his many interconfessional relationships, should be interpreted in the light of impartiality<sup>25</sup>. In my opinion, this aspect has been somewhat neglected so far, even in a recent colloque here in Geneva and studies, which preferred adopting the category of "ecumenism"<sup>26</sup>.

Many of these German translations, as well as various works of Arnold, were printed in Halle, by the Orphanage Print, under the patronage of one of the father of Lutheran Pietism: August Hermann Francke.

## 2. Transconfessional networks and shared projects

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*Caterina da Genova nel pietismo tedesco*, in *Scritture, carismi, istituzioni. Percorsi di vita religiosa in età moderna. Studi per Gabriella Zarri*, a cura di Concetta Bianca e Anna Scattigno, Roma, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2018, pp. 389-412.

<sup>23</sup> Adelisa Malena, „Gefährliche Nähe“. *Die Rezeption der mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen weiblichen Mystik im Radikalpietismus und in der antipietistischen Polemik*, in *Gender im Pietismus - Netzwerke und Geschlechterkonstruktion*. Hg. v. Pia Schmid in collaboration with Ruth Albrecht, Ulrike Gleixner, Eva Kormann, Katja Lißmann and Christian Soboth, Halle, Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen Halle - Harrassowitz Verlag in Kommission, 2015, pp. 157-176.

<sup>24</sup> Among Poiret's translations see: *Theologie du coeur, ou Recueil de quelques Traités, qui contiennent les lumieres les plus divines des Ames simples Et pures [...]*, in Cologne, by Jean de La Pierre [i.e. Amsterdam, Heinrich Wetstein], 1691, which included *Le Berger illuminé* and the French translation of the Italian *Breve compendio di perfezione cristiana* written by the pious lady Isabella Cristina Berinzaga and the Jesuit Achille Gagliardi; *Theologie de l'Amour, ou la vie et les oeuvres de Sainte Catherine de Genes*, in Cologne by Jean de la Pierre [i.e. Amsterdam, H. Wetstein] 1691; *Theologie de la Croix de Jesus Christ, ou les oeuvres et la vie de la bienheureuse Angele de Foligni*. In Cologne, by Jean de La Pierre [i.e. Amsterdam, Heinrich Wetstein], 1697; *La vie de madame J. M. B. De la Mothe GUION. Ecrite par Elle-même*, in Cologne, by Jean de La Pierre [i.e. Amsterdam, Heinrich Wetstein], 1720.

On Poiret see Marjolaine Chevallier, *Pierre Poiret (1646-1719). Du protestantisme à la mystique*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1994; Ead., *Pierre Poiret*, Bibliotheca Dissidentium t. 5, Koerner, Baden-Baden, 1985. Max Wieser, *Peter Poiret. Der Vater der romanischen Mystik in Deutschland*, München, Müller, 1932; Gustav Krieg, *Der mystische Kreis. Wesen und Werden der Theologie Pierre Poirets*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979.

<sup>25</sup> On Poiret as "cultural intermediary" see Ernst Schering, *Pietismus und die Renaissance der Mystik. Pierre Poiret als Interpret und Wegbereiter der romanischen Mystik in Deutschland*, in D. Meyer (ed.), *Pietismus – Herrnhutertum – Erweckungsbewegung*, Rheinland-Verlag, Köln, 1982, pp. 39-70. On this cultural transfer see Hartmut Lehmann, Hans-Jürgen Schrader, Heinz Schilling, *Jansenismus, Quietismus, Pietismus*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> *Pierre Poiret: Pasteur et Passeur. Mystique et protestantisme. Colloque à l'occasion du tricentenaire de sa mort*, Université de Genève, Friday 3 May 2019.

The names of Francke and Halle will help me introduce the second part of my paper about impartial networks and projects. August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) needs little introduction: Lutheran pastor and a celebrated scholar of oriental languages, he was also known as a social reformer and the founder of various charitable institutions (the Francke Foundations in Halle included schools, an orphanage, a pharmacy and a printing office) and missions like the Danish-Halle mission in southeastern India (Tranquebar), which contributed to the global expansion of Pietism<sup>27</sup>.

Strictly connected to Francke and to the Halle Pietism is Heinrich Wilhelm Ludolf (1655-1712)<sup>28</sup>. Ludolf belonged to a patrician family from Erfurt and was the nephew of the famous orientalist Hiob<sup>29</sup>. He studied oriental languages at Jena, and spent a period in Holland before moving to England, which became his second home. He was secretary to Prince George of Denmark (later Queen Anne's husband, 1653-1708) from 1686 until 1691 when he stepped down, officially for reasons of health. The prince subsequently paid him an annual pension that allowed Ludolf to live comfortably and devote himself to his studies and travels. He continued serving both English and Danish interests.

Between 1692 and 1693, Ludolf travelled to Russia, where he learned Russian, acquiring numerous contacts within the entourage of Peter the Great and with politicians, scholars, and members of the Orthodox church. It was more or less in this period that his contacts with August Hermann Francke in Halle became increasingly close<sup>30</sup>. The two men shared converging though not identical positions and aims, and were very

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<sup>27</sup> There is a vast literature on August Hermann Francke. A useful introduction is provided by Martin Brecht, *August Hermann Francke und der Hallische Pietismus*, in *Geschichte des Pietismus*, hgg. of M. Brecht, K. Deppermann, U. Gäbler und H. Lehmann, Band 1: *Der Pietismus vom siebzehnten bis zum frühen achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993, pp. 439-539.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Stupperich, "Ludolf, Heinrich Wilhelm" in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 15 (1987), S. 304 f. [online version]; URL: <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd115754571.html#ndbcontent> (last access 25.10.2020).

<sup>29</sup> Hiob Ludolf see Eike Haberland, "Ludolf, Hiob" in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 15 (1987), S. 303-304 [Online-Version]; URL: <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118817167.html#ndbcontent> (last access 25.10.2020).

<sup>30</sup> Hermann Goltz, *Ecclesia Universa. Bemerkungen über die Beziehungen H.W.Ludolfs zu Rußland und zu den orientalischen Kirchen (Ökumenische Beziehungen des August-Hermann-Francke-Kreises)*, "Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe" 28 (1979), pp.19-37; Daniel L. Brunner, *Halle Pietists in England. Anthony William Boehm and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge*, Göttingen 1993; Eamon Duffy, *The Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge and Europe: The Background to the Founding of the Christentumgesellschaft*, "Pietismus und Neuzeit", 7 (1981), pp. 28-42; Renate Wilson, *Continental Protestant Refugees and their Protectors in Germany and London. Commercial and Charitable Networks*, "Pietismus und Neuzeit", 20 (1994), pp. 107-124; Ead., *Heinrich Wilhelm Ludolf, August Hermann Francke und der Eingang nach Rußland*, in *Halle und Osteuropa: zur europäischen Ausstrahlung des hallischen Pietismus*, ed. by J. Wallmann, Tübingen 1998, pp. 83-108; Alexander Schunka, "An England ist uns viel gelegen." *Heinrich Wilhelm Ludolf (1655-1712) als Wanderer zwischen den Welten*, in Holger Zaunstock et al. (Ed.), *London und das Hallesche Waisenhaus. Eine Kommunikationsgeschichte im 18. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden 2014, pp. 43-64; Id., *Zwischen Kontingenz und Providenz: Frühe Englandkontakte der halleschen Pietisten und protestantische Irenik um 1700*, "Pietismus und Neuzeit" 34 (2008), pp. 82-114; Scott Kisker, *Pietist Connections with English Anglicans and Evangelical*, in Shantz (ed.), *A Companion to German Pietism*, pp. 225-255.

attuned to each other, both on a religious level and with regard to more specific projects for missions and relationships with other Christian churches. Between 1698 and 1700 Ludolf went on a journey to the Near East, keeping Francke constantly briefed, especially with regard to the contacts that he had managed to establish with people that he identified as “real Christians”<sup>31</sup>. Ludolf’s polyglot body of letters (mostly conserved in the Archiv of the Francke Foundations in Halle) – written in German, Latin, English, Dutch, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Russian, Hebrew, Ethiopian, Ottoman, etc. – describes a dense and extraordinarily wide-reaching map of relations based on contacts from Stockholm to Moscow, from Constantinople and Smyrna to Alexandria, from Amsterdam to London, Rome, Livorno, Paris and beyond. The recipients are primarily German and Danish Protestant nobility, diplomats, leading figures in the various European courts, titled ladies as well as ecclesiastics belonging to various confessions: Catholic prelates (like Francesco Bellisomi and members of the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, like the Croatian theologian Ivan Pastric), and then Pierre Poiret, the Philadelphians Francis Lee and Robert Hales, as well as members of the Greek Orthodox Church, Armenian Orthodox Church and Coptic church of Ethiopia. His key partners were Christians living in conditions of danger and persecution.

One of his main areas of concern was the East and the Orthodox Church, which were both at the heart of a project that he shared with August Herman Francke. In fact, the project, which promoted the translation and publication of a New Testament in modern Greek, led to the foundation, in 1702, of a *Collegium Orientale* in Halle whose aim was to train pastors specialised in Oriental and Slavic languages<sup>32</sup>.

Trade networks played a key role in these missionary activities: individual merchants and companies financed many of the initiatives, and men and books travelled along trade routes. Ludolf and Francke were both aware of the close links between their missionary aims and the use of diplomatic and trade channels for their promotion<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> On Ludolf’s journey in the Holy Land see Hendrik Budde and Mordechai Lewy (eds.), *Von Halle nach Jerusalem. Halle – Ein Zentrum der Palästina-Kunde im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, Halle 1994; Anne Schröder-Kahnt, “beym Umgange mit allerhand nationen und religionen ein und ander Vergnügen beschehet”. *Heinrich Wilhelm Ludolfs Reise in den Orient*, in Anne Schröder-Kahnt and Claus Veltmann (eds.), *Durch die Welt im Auftrag des Herrn. Reisen von Pietisten im 18. Jahrhundert*, Halle 2018, pp. 161-176; Malena, “Promoting the Common Interest of Christ”.

<sup>32</sup> In 1710 Ludolf tried also to establish in Jerusalem a “Seminarium oder Collegium” to promote the “real Christianity” in the East, opposing to the Catholic offensive. This project failed. See Schunka, “An England ist uns viel gelegen.”, p.58. On the Collegium orientale in Halle see also Ulrich Moennig, *Die griechische Studenten am Hallenser Collegium orientale theologicum*, in *Halle und Osteuropa*, pp. 298-329. The pillars of Ludolf’s projects for the East were described and explained in *A Proposal Relating to the Promotion of Religion in the Oriental Churches, offered in the Year 1700 to the Honourable Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge*. Ludolf’s Proposal, presented by him to the SPCK, was published by Böhme after Ludolf’s death in the collection: *Reliquiae Ludolfianae; The Pious Remains of Mr. Hen. Will. Ludolf; consisting of: Meditations upon Retirement from the World; Also upon divers Subjects tending to promote the inward Life of Faith etc.; Considerations on the interest of the Church Universal; A Proposal for promoting the Cause of Religion in the Churches of the Levant; Reflections on the Present State of the Christian Church; Homily of Macarius, [...]. To which is added, his funeral Sermon Preach’d by Anthony William Boehm, Chaplain to his late Royal Highness Prince George of Denmark*. London, printed and Sold by J. Downing in Bartholomew Close near West-Smithfield, 1712, pp. 145-152.

<sup>33</sup> Wilson, *Continental Protestant Refugees*, p. 113.

Moreover, Ludolf was one of the founding members of the Anglican Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in London (SPCK); Francke was one of its corresponding members and Ludolf's disciple and spiritual heir, Anton Wilhelm Böhme was a very active member of the SPCK and the principal agent of its connection to Halle<sup>34</sup>.

Ludolf's involvement in the SPCK, his links to Halle, and his projects in general should all be interpreted in the context of the "Universal Church" – "Ecclesia Universa", "Allgemeine Kirche" – that was at the heart of his religious vision. He had a Pietist idea of "real Christianity" as inner regeneration and new birth in Christ: the Church – the only true church possible – was a universal community of men and women who had been "reborn" in Christ<sup>35</sup>. Ludolf's Universal Church was indeed an impartial church: an invisible "imagined" church that could become visible whenever networks and shared projects came into being between "true Christians". Although impossible to attain in this world, it remained a project that he would constantly pursue throughout his life. Therefore, Ludolf's aim was not proselytism to a universal Church structure. His goal was to create links and develop shared actions between true Christians regardless of their confessional membership (or lack of it). He wished to set aside the confessional divisions of the Orthodoxies, the divisions between churches, which he defined as "sects" or "partial churches", made up of a small number of true Christians but in which the majority of members are hypocrites and Pharisees. This idea of impartial church that runs through all Ludolf's letters is also the subject of one of his writings published by Böhme as part of the *Reliquiae Ludolfianae*: the *Considerations on the Interest of the Church Universal*<sup>36</sup>. From Ludolf's point of view, denominational divisions were not just overcome but condemned as an expression of pride, selfishness and sectarianism: "Though it be one of the greatest absurdities to think, *that Christ died for this or that Sect barely*, and that Heaven must be stocked only out of one particular Church"<sup>37</sup>.

Such divisions, which were based solely on external forms of worship and different doctrinal opinions, would have produced inauspicious results.

Ludolf took a stand on denominational irenicism and on the various projects for unification between Protestants that were being discussed at that time. Such as the projects involving the reformed theologian Daniel Ernst Jablonski and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz<sup>38</sup>. Despite being promoted by "divers pious souls", they could

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<sup>34</sup> Brunner, *Halle Pietists in England*; Duffy, *The Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge and Europe*; Schunka, "An England ist uns viel gelegen."

<sup>35</sup> Goltz, *Ecclesia Universa*; Malena, "Promoting the Common Interest of Christ".

<sup>36</sup> *Considerations on the Interest of the Church Universal*, in *Reliquiae Ludolfianae*, pp. 126-142. In the frontispiece the text is presented as "second edition": the first edition must have been published by Ludolf himself. Until now I wasn't able to find the first edition of this work. A Latin translation was printed in Halle in 1731: Henrici Guilelmi Ludolfi, Aulæ Anglicanae Secretarii, *Consilium de Universae Ecclesiae Salute Procuranda*. Collegit atque Illustravit Christianus Pamphilus, 1731.

<sup>37</sup> H.W. Ludolf, *Considerations on the Interest of the Church Universal*, in *Reliquiae Ludolfianae*, pp. 126-142; p. 128.

<sup>38</sup> See D. E. Jablonski, *Kurtze Vorstellung der Einigkeit und des Unterscheides, im Glauben beyder Evangelischen so genandten Lutherischen und Reformirten Kirchen* (1697), published by Hartmut Rudolph in Martin

only be sterile and useless given that they merely concerned outward forms: “it would not signify much neither, if all the men in the world resolved upon using the same external form and expression, and the same church-service, continuing all the while slaves to the kingdom of darkness. Whereas holiness, or real christianity, sincerely pursued, in the several particular Churches, would bring people over to that sweet and heavenly temper, to which jarring and disquiet is a perfect stranger”<sup>39</sup>. This theme often emerges from Ludolf’s correspondence, as in a letter written to G.W. Leibniz from Copenhagen on 19 November 1703 where he writes to be “more and more convinced” that all the projects to unite Christians “in a certain system of opinions and outward worship” will fail. In fact, Ludolf’s project was alternative to those kinds of irenicism, and was based on other premises:

Instead I felt deeply united with some good souls whom God had led to the centre of the love through an outward worship quite unlike the one in which I have been raised. However, it is a great satisfaction for me to realise that *in almost all the sects God begins to enlighten somebody*, to recognise the absurdity of imagining that heaven is tied to the System of a single sect<sup>40</sup>.

In the same years Leibniz was engaged in the so-called “negotium irenicum” aiming to a theological reconciliation among the Protestants, therefore Ludolf was taking a critical position towards this project<sup>41</sup>. Whether Ludolf was also trying to persuade Leibniz of

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Fontius, Hartmut Rudolph and Gary Slimith (eds.), *Labora diligenter*, Stuttgart 1999, pp. 128-164. Joachim Bahlcke and Werner Korthaase (eds.), *Daniel Ernst Jablonski. Religion, Wissenschaft und Politik um 1700*. Wiesbaden 2008; Alexander Schunka, *Daniel Ernst Jablonski, Pietism, and Ecclesiastical Union*, in Fred van Lieburg and Daniel Lindmark (eds.), *Pietism, Revivalism and Modernity. 1650-1850*, Newcastle 2008, 23-41; Id., *Irenicism and the Challenges of Conversion*; Howard Hotson, *Irenicism in the Confessional Age. The Holy Roman Empire, 1563-1648*, in Howard P. Louthan and R.C. Zachman (eds.), *Conciliation and Confession: The Struggle for Unity in the Age of Reform, 1415-1648*, Notre Dame 2004, pp. 228-285. On Leibniz and Jablonski see Maria Rosa Antognazza, *Leibniz. Una biografia intellettuale*, Milano 2009, pp. 421-423; pp. 449-461. Dietrich Meyer, *Daniel Ernst Jablonski und seine Unionspläne*, in Ham Klueting (Hg.), *Irenik und Antikonfessionalismus im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim- Zürich New York, 2003, pp. 153-175. On projects of unification among Protestants see also Maria Cristina Pitassi, « Nonobstant ces petites différences » : enjeux et présupposés d’un projet d’union intra-protestant au début du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, in Guy Saupin, Rémy Fabre et Marcel Launay (eds.), *La Tolérance. Colloque international de Nantes, Quatrième centenaire de l’édit de Nantes*, Rennes, PUR, 1999, pp. 419-426.

<sup>39</sup> H.W. Ludolf, *Considerations*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>40</sup> H.W. Ludolf to G.W. Leibniz, Copenhagen, 19 November 1703 (AFSt/H D 23, fols. 140v-143, in French) published in Tetzner, *H.W. Ludolf und Russland*, pp. 134-135. “[...] Et je me confirme de plus en plus dans le sentiment, que tous les projets, qu’on fait en divers endroits pour unir les Chrétiens dans un certain système d’opinions et de culte extérieur, que l’esprit humain sauroit inventer, s’en iront en fumée au lieu que je me suis senti uni de la manière la plus fort avec quelques bonnes âmes, que Dieu avoit conduit au centre de l’amour, par un culte extérieur assés différent de celui, dans le quel j’ay été élevé. Cependant cela m’est une grande satisfaction, que je m’apperçois, que quasi dans toutes les sectes Dieu commence à éclairer quelques uns, pour reconnoître la sottise des imaginer, que le ciel est attaché au Système d’une seule secte”.

<sup>41</sup> Antognazza, *Leibniz*, pp.449-461; Wolfgang Hübener, *Negotium irenicum. Leibniz’ Bemühungen um die brandenburgische Union*, in Hans Poser and Albert Heinekamp (eds.), *Leibniz in Berlin*, Stuttgart 1990, pp. 103-112; Mogens Laerke, *Leibniz et le Jus circa sacra*, in “Bulletin Annuel. Institut d’Histoire de la Réformation, Genève”, XXXVIII (2016-2017), pp. 35-52. On Leibniz’ view of a “universal church” see Antognazza, *Leibniz*, pp. 383-384.

the righteousness of his position through a “missionary” letter, it remains – in my opinion – an open question. Ludolf believed that rather than seeking to promote the universal church through denominational irenicism and protestant union – as Leibniz did –, they should engage in a continuous endeavour to build contacts and links between the real Christians that belonging to the different churches.

I maintain that the “pars construens” of Ludolf’s proposal – that is, the possibility of creating a universal church by building up links and “correspondences” between individuals – represents the most radical and original aspect of his concept of impartiality, which did not mean neutrality between the different churches but a relationship between “real Christians”, beyond the confessional boundaries. Ludolf’s universal church is a spiritual rather than an institutional union, basing on a voluntary choice by “reborn” Christians. Although numerically few, its members are called upon to be the leaven and “salt of the earth” in their single churches. In his aforementioned letter to Leibniz, Ludolf went on to write:

Though I cannot boast of having met a great number of such Christians to whom one may apply the glorious characters that holy Scripture gives to the true faithful: namely, persons whose deified souls reflects the rays of Divinity united with humanity by a living faith in Jesus Christ. However, even amidst the ignorance of the Eastern Church, I met a Metropolitan in Constantinople, who believed that the bond, which was to unite all Christians as one body, was only in the spirit of Jesus Christ<sup>42</sup>.

All the churches – or “sects” in Ludolf’s words – had experienced the same process of corruption during their historic development. However, by establishing correspondences and shared projects, the handful of real Christians within the churches would be able to contribute to the construction of the Universal Church (“every particular congregation contributing what they can, towards building up the walls of Jerusalem on their Side”)<sup>43</sup>.

Ludolf believes that establishing links, dialogues, and connections by focusing on the truths of the Christian faith is the only way of “promoting the common Interest of Christ against the Kingdom and Power of Darkness”<sup>44</sup>. In an apocalyptic perspective, he considers his times as the final phase of a battle between darkness and light whose

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<sup>42</sup> Tetzner, *H.W. Ludolf und Russland*, p.135 (see note 40). He concluded this passage with a rhetorical question: “But how to convince Ecclesiastics of all confessions, with the exception of a very small number, that in all those fine talents they are so proud of, there is more human spirit than the Spirit of God [?]”. “...Quoyque je ne puis pas me vanter d’avoir rencontré un grand nombre de tels Chrestiens, auxquels on puisse appliquer les glorieux caracteres que la sainte Ecriture donne aux veritables fidelles, comme des gens, dont l’ame divinisé reflechit les rayons de la Divinité, qui est reunie avec l’humanité par une vive foy en Jesus Christ. Cependant j’ay rencontré meme parmy l’ignorance de l’Eglise Orientale un Metropolitte à Constantinople, lequel étoit persuadé, que la liaison, qui devoit unir comme un seul corps tous les Chretiens, ne se trouvoit que dans l’esprit de Jesus Christ, mais quel moyen de convaincre les Ecclesiastiques de toutes les communions a l’exception d’un tres petit nombre, que l’Esprit de Dieu a beaucoup moins de part que l’esprit de l’homme dans tous le beaux talens par lesquels ils se donnent des airs [...]”.

<sup>43</sup> H.W. Ludolf, *Considerations*, p. 138.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

“signs” can be distinguished in the agitation sweeping through churches of all denominations and shaking their foundations. In a letter to the catholic abbot Ivan Paštrić (1636-1708), (member of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide), with whom he came in contact when he was in Rome, he writes:

In this country, as elsewhere, there is a spiritual ferment of souls. Yet only a few make true progress along the road of light. In general, the learned men are more zealous in defending the opinions and external worship of their *sect* than in promoting *the essential practice of Christianity* through their example [...]. The glorious period of the church, when the gospel of Christ is put into practice, will come about on the day when the examples of those who have experienced *metamorphosis* become more frequent [...]<sup>45</sup>.

Ludolf invites the Catholic Paštrić to a cooperation, in spite of their confessional differences, trying to “convert” him to his universal project:

*Although our hypotheses may differ* on this point, I nonetheless hope that we can practice Christ’s great law by loving one another. The greater light our light, the greater our reason and our capacity to pray to God and involve the other<sup>46</sup>.

The religious network built up by Ludolf, also through his continuous travels as a “Christian pilgrim”, and the correspondences that he sought to establish between Christians from different churches were all pieces belonging to the impartial Universal church to which he dedicated his every effort throughout his entire life<sup>47</sup>. It was at the

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<sup>45</sup> On Ivan Paštrić see Tomislav Mrkonjić, *Il teologo Ivan Paštrić (Giovanni Pastrizio) (1636-1708): Vita, opere, concezione della teologia, cristologia*, Roma 1989; Id., Pastrizio (Paštrić), Giovanni (Ivan), in *Dizionario Biografico degli italiani*, vol.81, Roma 2014 (online edition): [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-pastrizio\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-pastrizio_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (accessed 26.10.2020).

<sup>46</sup> Halle, AFSt H D 23 b 1, Letter by H.W.Ludolf to Ivan Pastric, Copenhagen, 26 November 1703 (Italian): “In questo paese come in altre parti comincia anche la fermentatione spirituale negli animi: pochi nulladimeno mostrano gran progresso nella strada della luce; generalmente i Dottori mostrano maggior zelo per diffendere le opinioni et il culto esteriore della sua setta, che per promuovere tanto coll’esempio quanto colle parole la pratica di quella regola essenziale del Christianesimo [...]; quando una volta saranno più communi gli essempli di coloro, ne’ quali sia fatta la *metamorfofi*, allora si avvicinarà il glorioso periodo della chiesa, dove sarà adempito il vangelo di Cristo [...].  
Benché le ipotesi nostre siano differenti in questo punto, spero nulladimeno, che con tutto questo potremo praticar la grande legge di Christo di amarci l’un l’altro, quello che ha maggior grado di luce, ha tanto maggior ragione, et capacità di pregar Iddio, accioché ne facci partecipe l’altro”.

<sup>47</sup> See for instance the letter that he wrote to Monsieur Benoit Maillet, French Consul in Cairo, London 17 September 1702: (Halle, AFSt/H D 23, fols. 113-114): “[...] Quoique je ne puis pas me vanter d’avoir rencontré un grand nombre de tels Chrestiens, auxquels on puisse appliquer les glorieux caracteres que la sainte Ecriture donne aux veritables fidelles, comme des gens, dont l’ame divinisé reflechit les rayons de la Divinité, qui est reunie avec l’humanité par une vive foy en Jesus Christ. Cependant j’ay rencontré meme parmy l’ignorance de l’Eglise Orientale un Metropolitte à Constantinople, lequel étoit persuadé, que la liaison, qui devoit *unir comme un seul corps tous les Chretiens*, ne se trouvoit que dans l’esprit de Jesus Christ, mais quel moyen de convaincre les Ecclesiastiques de toutes les communions a l’exception d’un tres petit nombre, que l’Esprit de Dieu

same time a utopian project – from a historical point of view - but also a concrete and realistic one. It was his way to impartiality. It's not a coincidence that Ludolf's life has been inserted in Reitz's *History of the Reborn*<sup>48</sup>.

### 3. Conclusions

In my contribution, I have tried to explore the notion of impartiality – an *emic* category given that it is used by the social actors themselves – from various points of view, as a new way of interpreting ecclesiastical history; through translations and the circulation of spiritual literature across the confessional boundaries; and through a specific case study involving networks and projects linked to pietism in Halle at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the single presented case study here presented, we can find various interpretations of “confessional impartiality”: Francke, a promoter of impartial operations and networks, is and remains a Lutheran theologian; Ludolf has his own precise idea of universal church that was at odds with every form of institutionalized church; while Böhme is possibly the most radical in the sense of confessional indifferentism<sup>49</sup>.

The case study gave me the opportunity to place the abstract notion of “impartiality” inspiring my reflections into a concrete, real setting, helping to enrich it and offering it up for further discussions. The impartiality present in the analyzed sources is not a synonym for neutrality, but it is rather a partial or even militant impartiality, a kind of “party for the impartial”.

Although frequently evoked in relation to German pietism, I believe that the heuristic potential of this term remains to be fully explored, even within pietist historiography. Most studies on Gottfried Arnold have examined his impartial proposal in search of elements of “modernity” on a historiographical level, underlining its distance from apologetic, confessional histories. In other cases, they read the *Impartial History* in terms of spiritualism and of the invisible church: as I have sought to show, Arnold's concept was far more radical and firmly rooted in the cultural climate of the turn of 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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a beaucoup moins de part que l'esprit de l'homme dans tous les beaux talents par lesquels ils se donnent des airs [...]”.

<sup>48</sup> Reitz, *Historie der Wiedergeborenen*. Ludolf's life is contained in *Historie* 2, IV (Idstein, Johann-Jacob Haug, 1716), pp. 221-229: “Fünffzehnde Historie/von H. Wilhelm Ludolff/Gewesenem Secretario des Printzen Georgs von Dänemark in Engeland/und Mitglied der Societät de propaganda fide (= SPCK, n.d.a.)”. See also Malena, “*Promoting the Common Interest of Christ*”.

<sup>49</sup> Böhme was Ludolf's disciple and spiritual heir and was the principal intermediary between Halle Pietism and England. He was a dissenting Lutheran with later ties to the Anglican church, translator of numerous works – including Pietist spiritual literature into English, Anglican literature and catholic mystical literature into German. On his “impartial” translations see: Sames, *Anton Wilhelm Böhme*, pp. 100-105; 114-117; Malena, *Migrazioni della mistica*. Böhme translated Francke's *Segensvolle Fußstapfen* into English with the title *Pietas Hallensis: Being an Historical Narration of the wonderful Foot-Steps of Divine Providence in Erecting, Carrying on, and Building the Orphan-House, and other charitable Institutions, at Glaucha near Hall in Saxony [...]*, London, 1705. He also translated Francke's *Nicodemus* and the letters of the Danish/Halle missionaries Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau. Kisker suggested that the translation and “publication of missionary letters was intended to generate English support for the endeavour”, see Scott Kisker, *Pietist Connections*, p. 237. On Böhme's translation of Johann Arndt's *True Christianity* see Brunner, *Halle Pietists*, pp. 141-148.

I also maintain that widely disseminated works like the *Vitensammlungen* were of paramount importance in creating and stimulating a “culture of impartiality” within the wide public of their readers.

I suggest to consider impartiality as a very flexible term, because it makes it possible to recognize points of tangency between visions that do not completely coincide and between projects that only overlap partially: in the name of impartiality, it is possible to achieve cooperation even between people who do not fully share the same ideals and objectives. It seems to be better suited than any other category to defining a specific habitus of this historic period. I am thinking above all of “ecumenism”, for example, which runs the risk of seeming anachronistic and which has, as its starting point, an identification with a specific confession. Or, of Irenicism, which, as we have seen, defines political and religious projects of union and dialogue between confessional orthodoxies in search of shared doctrinal ground or a common institutional model. I believe that, even the leading studies revealing the inter- and transconfessional character of German pietism through a comparative reading of Jansenism, Pietism and Quietism – interpreted as ecclesial renewal movements from the same historical period, with similar characteristics and various points of intersection within the different confessions – have tended to neglect impartiality as a way of approaching these movements, ending up by analysing these currents from the perspective of the Pietist sources, which promoted for instance, the idea of quietism as a religious movement<sup>50</sup>.

In conclusion, I would like to propose considering confessional impartiality as the distinguishing feature of a historical phase, exploring the various forms that it assumed at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This could involve looking at criticism of confessional churches and dialogue between different groups and confessions. It could also take into consideration the attempts to envisage possible alternatives on various levels, from inner spirituality to the area of communal practices, from an intellectual-theoretical level to an eschatological one.

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<sup>50</sup> Lehmann, Schrader, Schilling, *Jansenismus, Quietismus, Pietismus*.