

Both Brazilian and Protestant: Ecumenical Brazilian Protestants' Case for Political Legitimacy and Patriotism, 1934–1964

In the 1930s, Brazilian Protestant leaders faced the challenge of proving their patriotism, freedom from foreign control, and overall benefit to Brazilian society. The time was one of political turmoil, and Brazilian Protestants found themselves as a religious minority, with suspicions foreign connections, competing with a strong Brazilian Catholic Church to secure political recognition and benefits. To gain what they sought (such as an option for Protestant classes in public schools, redress for vandalism of Protestant churches, and a laicized state with no Catholic privilege), Brazilian Protestants had to make a case that they truly represented their nation and were patriotic.

In this paper, I use the documents of the Confederação Evangélica do Brasil (CEB), from its inception in 1934 to the beginning of the military dictatorship of 1964 (when the CEB fragmented). In the 1930s and 40s, the CEB conspicuously supported Vargas, especially his campaigns for public health and literacy, while speaking out to him and to other governmental leaders to secure freedom of worship and to register complaints about attempts of the Catholic Church to secure symbolic or social dominance. As the CEB moved into the 1950s and early 1960s, a new generation of leaders began to express dissatisfaction with the government, especially in agrarian reform. Throughout these changes of orientation toward government, the CEB leaders used their international links with the emerging Protestant ecumenical movement to prove their benefit, as Protestants, to their own nation.