

In his summary about the behaviour of the Pentecostal churches in the “Third Reich” Walter J. Hollenweger comes to the conclusion that Pentecostalism did not prove substantially more steadfast to the National Socialist seduction, but under no circumstances more susceptible than the *Gemeinschaftsbewegung*<sup>1</sup> and the remaining Christians in Germany.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact one must differentiate the behaviour of different Pentecostal groups due to the nature of the Movement at this time. With the exceptions of the Mülheimer organisation and the Elim movement, we cannot talk about one distinctive denomination, but rather of groups with strong leadership personalities.<sup>3</sup>

The research is additionally complicated by the limited amount of source material for this time period.<sup>4</sup>

From its beginning the situation of German Pentecostalism was altogether more difficult than anywhere else in the world. The reason being that the church’s “*Gemeinschaftsbewegung*” became the cradle of German Pentecostalism<sup>5</sup> which was however rejected radically soon after its inception by its religious fathers.<sup>6</sup> The growing German Pentecostal Movement hoped that in spite of the Berlin Declaration there would be no final separation. Conferences were held seeking to re-establish the unity so quickly lost and two declarations were issued by representatives of Pentecostalism and the so-called Neutrals.<sup>7</sup> Even in 1913 they did not believe in a definite separation from the *Gemeinschaftsbewegung* and therefore pursued no attempts to form their own organisation. However, in order to attain a general legal

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<sup>1</sup> The *Gemeinschaftsbewegung* is a Pietistic Revival Movement, which emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century in conjunction with the German Lutheran State Church. In many places this led to the establishment of *Gemeinschaftskreisen* (Fellowship Groups), which exist today in connection in and with the traditional churches, but which have their own independent fellowship life and expression.

<sup>2</sup> Viz. Walter J. Hollenweger, *Enthusiastisches Christentum*, 217ff.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Schmidgall, *Hundert Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung*, 287-294

<sup>4</sup> Modest archives exist belonging to *Christlichen Gemeinschaftsverband Mülheim/Ruhr*, the *Bund Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden* und the *Gemeinde Gottes*, many sources are missing or held in private archives, c.f. Schmidgall, *Hundert Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung*, 294

<sup>5</sup> Paul Fleisch, *Die Pfingstbewegung in Deutschland*, 88

<sup>6</sup> Ludwig David Eisenlöffel, *Freikirchliche Pfingstbewegungen in Deutschland*, 25

<sup>7</sup> Autumn 1910 in Patmos (Geisweid) with Jakob Vetter, later in Vandsburg at the invitation of Pastor Krawielitzki, c.f. Christian Hugo Krust, *50 Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung, Mülheimer Richtung*, 81

status they provisionally accepted the title “Christliche Kolportage-Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung zu Mülheim Ruhr” (Christian Colportage Society Ltd. at Mülheim Ruhr) in 1914.<sup>8</sup> That probably happened, because they did not want to become a new “free church”.<sup>9</sup> They did not regard it as their task to form a separate Denomination but regretted that they felt compelled by the circumstances to organize themselves independently.<sup>10</sup> In 1938 a change occurred because of certain machinations of the Nazi regime, as due to the law for the protection of the terminology of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party) of 7.4.1937, RGBI. I, P. 442 the Mülheimer Verband, which saw itself as the “German Pentecostal movement”, had to be renamed, and they took the title “Christlicher Gemeinschaftsverband G.m.b.H. Mülheim Ruhr”.<sup>11</sup> The new constitution had to contain “a clear confession to the German people and the Fatherland”, and in view of a threatened prohibition, precarious political statements were also adopted.<sup>12</sup> The statements from the year 1938 are a clear contradiction of the comprehensive evaluation of the Nazi time by Christian Hugo Krust, who describes the dispute with the Nazi regime as a time of resistance.<sup>13</sup> Not until the “Hauptbrüderstag” of the

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<sup>8</sup> Krust, 50 Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung, 122. Also Paul Schmidgall, Von Oslo nach Berlin, 87

<sup>9</sup> Eisenlöffel, Freikirchliche Pfingstbewegungen, 33

<sup>10</sup> Krust, 50 Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung, 144

<sup>11</sup> Christian Hugo Krust, 50 Jahre deutsche Pfingstbewegung, 173-74.

<sup>12</sup> Gottfried Sommer, Die Pfingstbewegung und die Judenfrage im „Dritten Reich“, unpublished Manuscript (Singen 2006), 14-15; c.f. Ekkehart Vetter und Adelheid Junghardt, ed., Ruhrfeuer, 146.; Schmidgall, Hundert Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung, 295-297. Excerpt from the Constitution. “*In der Rassengesetzgebung ersehen wir eine gottgewollte und biblisch begründbare Bestrebung zur Reinigung und Reinerhaltung des Volkes vor fremdrassiger Vermischung. Die Herausführung der Juden aus der Gemeinschaft unseres Volkes wie auch der anderen Völker ist für uns ein Vorgang nach göttlicher Vorsehung und göttlichem Willen.*” (In the Racial Laws we see a God-willed and biblically based pursuit of cleansing and maintaining the racial purity of peoples. The expulsion of Jews from our society, as with other peoples, is for us a procedure in accordance with the providence and will of God).

<sup>13</sup> Krust, 50 Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung, 175: “... *etliche unserer Brüder wurden mit ‚Verwarnungen‘, andere mit ‚Redeverbot‘ belegt. Wieder andere hat man verhaftet und ins Gefängnis gesetzt. Einige sind durch wunderbare göttliche Fügungen knapp dem Tode entronnen ... Wohl keiner unserer Brüder war im politischen Denken geschult und daher kam unser Widerstand gegen das Regime von unserer Seite nicht aus politischen Beweggründen. Wir wussten aber um die ‚unterirdischen Geistesströmungen‘, um das Dämonische dessen, was da in Deutschland zur Herrschaft gekommen war, und aus dieser Erkenntnis heraus ergab sich unser Widerstand. Nicht in erster Linie angreifend und kämpferisch wie beim politisch urteilenden Menschen, sondern leidend und das Kreuz erdulnd, wie es Zeugen Jesu nicht anders können. Wenn Gott das Opfer unseres Lebens gefordert hätte, wären wir dazu bereit gewesen.*” (Many of our brethren were given warnings and gagging orders. Yet others were arrested and imprisoned. Some narrowly escaped death by miraculous divine intervention... None of our brothers were trained in political thought and therefore the opposition to the Regime from our side had no political motives. We were aware of the dark spiritual forces of a demonic nature of that which had come to reign over Germany and our opposition resulted from this knowledge. Not primarily attacking or fighting as politically minded people, but suffering and bearing the cross, as witnesses of Jesus we could do no other. If God had wanted us to

Mülheimer Verband in the year 1991 was “an explanation for the position of the Mülheimer Verband during the time of the National socialism” accepted by the recent generation.<sup>14</sup> After the beginning of World War II, the leaders of the Mülheimer Verband considered, after exploratory discussions with the Baptists and, in particular, the Methodists to join one of these two free churches. It led to some inconclusive meetings with representatives of the Methodist church, which were interrupted in the year 1941 by the increasing intensity of the war.<sup>15</sup> In the end however, the Mülheimer Verband succeeded in making it through the confusion of the war years without damage.

On the basis of my current state of research there is still no clear picture about the “free Pentecostals”.

It can be seen however that apart from the Mülheimer Verband a variety of independent fellowships and free churches soon evolved, which though they probably represented Pentecostal theology partly dissociated themselves from the term “Pentecostalism”.<sup>16</sup> Already at the beginning of the “Hauptbrüderstag” in 1911 some brothers (Meyer, Maute, Schilling, Stürner) separated to create free Pentecostal churches as they did not wish to submit themselves to the authority of the “Hauptbrüderstag”.

The Elim movement, centred around Heinrich Vietheer, evolved to become the second largest German Pentecostal group in the Weimar period, after the Mülheimer Verband. Under increasing pressure from both the ecclesiastical and political authorities in the middle of the thirties, its rapid growth was stopped.

The life of Heinrich Vietheer (1883-1986)<sup>17</sup> seems to be a typical example of the diverse situation in Germany. After his conversion in 1904/05 in the YMCA in Berlin he travelled vocationally to Mülheim Ruhr in 1906/07, where he came in contact with

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lay down our lives we would have been ready to do so.) See also Schmidgall, Hundert Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung, 300

<sup>14</sup> c.f. Ekkehart Vetter und Adelheid Junghardt, ed. Ruhrfeuer, 147. This confession and repentance may be downloaded from [www.muelheimer-verband.de](http://www.muelheimer-verband.de)

<sup>15</sup> Krust, 50 Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung, 179-85.

<sup>16</sup> Gottfried Sommer, ‘Die Pfingstbewegung und die Judenfrage im Dritten Reich’, unpublished manuscript (Singen 2006), 2; c.f. Gottfried Sommer, ‘Anfänge freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden in Deutschland zwischen 1907 und 1945’, unpublished manuscript (Gießen 1998).

<sup>17</sup> See Vietheer’s biography: Bernhard Olpen, Gekämpft mit Gott und Menschen. Das Leben von Heinrich Vietheer (Leuchter Edition 2007), and his autobiography: Heinrich Vietheer, Unter der guten Hand Gottes (Berlin 1962)

the religious awakening. In 1907 he received a call into full-time ministry and worked together with Jonathan Paul as a tent deacon at the German tent mission. He became engaged to Paul's daughter, who he later married. After theological training he travelled on behalf of the Mülheimer Gemeinschaftsverband ministering to several churches. In the crisis following the Berlin Declaration Vietheer, as representative for the Pentecostals, was striving for reconciliation. When the split came, he belonged to the newly independent Pentecostalism, which became his spiritual home, because in 1912 he had withdrawn from the federation, and made this step public in the well-known Gemeinschaftsbewegung publication "Auf der Warte" in 1914. Vietheer justified his withdrawal from Pentecostalism by referring to their alleged "lying spirit" and "unfair intentions" among other things.<sup>18</sup> Between 1919 and 1922 Vietheer obtained a noted reputation as an evangelist and worked with a broad representation of the German Evangelical Alliance. In 1922 he created, together with Richard Puhle and evangelist Eick, "The Tent Mission Berlin – Lichterfelde e.V." (Registered Society) and its 15 guidelines were formulated to provide a broad acceptance in Alliance circles. Vietheer kept his Pentecostal convictions to himself and only acted it out privately. In 1924/25 however came the separation from the Alliance for different reasons, and thus the basis for Vietheer's ministry was withdrawn. He was now in the same boat as Jonathan Paul and the Mülheimer (Pentecostal) movement. So for him there were also only two alternatives: a complete denial of Pentecostal experiences or complete isolation. After a journey to South America, Vietheer weighed the chances of a closer co-operation with the free Pentecostal churches. Once categorized as a "Pentecostal", he approached these groups, but this attempt failed. After very brief co-operation with the Methodists in 1927 however, he saw himself forced to found his own churches and began to develop the structure of the Elim movement in 1928. The Elim movement was, and desired to be, a charismatic movement. As for the "Pentecostal Movement" Elim neither wanted to be, nor could be part, since this was a synonym for the Mülheimer movement. By no means did they want to be associated with them. Likewise they had no wish to be involved with the scattered, and usually small, free Pentecostal churches. Thus they finally came to

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<sup>18</sup> Auf der Warte, 11, 21, (1914), 12. Cited in Vietheer's biography by Olpen, 33-34.

the defining term “Geistesbewegung” (Spirit Movement).<sup>19</sup> 1931 Vietheer published 13 points on “why we cannot go with Pentecostalism”.<sup>20</sup>

The seizure of power by Hitler on 30 January 1933 was at first joyfully welcomed by Vietheer and he defended his initial positive estimate, for example with the following statement: “since Hitler is in government, the street fights have stopped, and our tent campaigns are no longer disturbed by the communists. Finally we can work again in peace!”<sup>21</sup> On his journeys abroad, Vietheer seemed to be shocked about what in his opinion, was the completely distorted representation of Hitler Germany abroad, and tried to correct this, even until 1936. Because of the prohibition efforts of the Nazis concerning “Elim”, which remained unsuccessful, Vietheer also became acquainted with the negative side of the regime. He was in action non-stop to protect the churches and co-workers. Repeatedly he had to go to Berlin to the head office of the Gestapo (Secret State Police in Nazi Germany).

The first signs of the restriction of liberty had emerged in 1933. The actual fight for independence really began in 1934 and ended in 1938 by merging into the Association of the Baptist churches. For Vietheer joining the Baptists was a less-than-ideal solution, because the terms of the fusion in the Elim churches were that no “chorus prayer” and no “speaking in tongues” should be practiced publicly. Vietheer felt unfairly treated by the Baptists and was absolutely determined to withdraw from the association when hostilities ended. After 1945, the separation from the erstwhile formed “Union of Free Evangelical Churches” took place in the western zones.<sup>22</sup>

The experience of the “Volksmission” under founder Karl Fix (1897-1969), which was established during this difficult time of National Socialism was very different.<sup>23</sup> Fix was urged by the responsible leaders of the Pentecostal churches, prior to their

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<sup>19</sup> Olpen, 87-88: “*Man fühlte sich nicht als Pfingstler, obwohl das Glaubensgut selbstverständlich nichts anderes war als die pfingstliche Botschaft*” (One did not feel like a Pentecostal although obviously it was nothing other than the Pentecostal message).

<sup>20</sup> Article in der January edition 1931 in “Glaubensweg”, 10. (Previously Glaubensherold, a periodical of the Movement), Olpen cited the last three points, 96.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. see Olpen, 126. Vietheer was indignant over an interpretation of a vision of Fritz Fries about Hitler and the Nazi regime, and openly rebuked him.

<sup>22</sup> See Olpen The integration of the Elim Movement into the Baptist Federation and the resultant loss of his leading role was something Vietheer could not cope with and led to a breakdown of his personality. The isolation affected Vietheer’s life deeply and led to further marital difficulties. He was placed under Church discipline in 1941 and for a time not permitted to exercise ministry. See Bernhard Röckle, Geboren in schwerer Zeit. Karl Fix und die Entstehung der Volksmission entschiedener Christen. Selbstverlag der Volksmission, 2004)

prohibition, to unite with them because together one could withstand the all-powerful government authority better than alone. When he prayed about it, he got an answer from Isaiah 8,12f. "Do not join in the schemes of the people". Karl Fix adhered to this word.

Although from 1935 to 1945 the church was observed by the Gestapo, the "Volksmission entschiedener Christen" interestingly enough was not considered Pentecostal, because those stood under prohibition. Fix mostly explained this phenomenon by referring to the practice of their church services and the reference to 1. Corinthians 14:33.40 "We make sure we have orderly meetings".<sup>24</sup> Fix, probably also due to his rhetorical gift, succeeded in convincing the Gestapo of this apparent difference. He abstained from raising hands when singing and praying in the services, which later was considered as misleading imitation of the Hitler Salute.<sup>25</sup> These experiences during the time of National Socialism led to Karl Fix being still very sceptical about any form of authority after the war e.g. during the meeting planned to name the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft" (ACD, later BFP) in the year 1947, Fix pleaded for a "neutral" name, which would conceal the Pentecostal identity.<sup>26</sup>

Other groupings however could only meet secretly or even had to dissolve because they were banned. In 1937 the "International Church of the Foursquare Gospel" for example gained a foothold in Berlin but did not survive the war.<sup>27</sup> Even the Bible School founded by Herbert Gustav Schmid (1891-1958) in 1930 in Gdansk (Danzig) with the help of the American "Russian and Eastern European mission", had to be closed as early as 1938 because of pressure from the Nazi authorities.<sup>28</sup>

Emil Meyer (1869-1950), who was excluded from the Mülheimer Verband in 1912<sup>29</sup>, had already founded a so-called "Strandmission" (Beach Mission) before its affiliation

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<sup>24</sup> Karl Fix, Preiset mit den Herrn (Selbstverlag 1964), cited by Röckle, 37

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>26</sup> The background of Fix's suggestion of a neutral Pentecostal identity lay in his Berlin experiences during the Third Reich where, in his opinion, his work only escaped prohibition because it was not listed by the Gestapo as Pentecostal. Schmidgall, Hundert Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung, 322

<sup>27</sup> Jürgen Tipusek. Ein Glaube, viele Kirchen (Gießen: Brunnen 1994, S. 406f. cited by Paul Schmidgall, Von Oslo nach Berlin, 97; see also G. Sommer, Anfänge freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden in Deutschland, 27

<sup>28</sup> G.B. McGee; B.A. Pavai, "Schmidt, Gustav Herbert" in International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements. revised and expanded edition. 2002/2003 p.1042-1043

<sup>29</sup> Fleisch, Die Pfingstbewegung in Deutschland, 195

with the Mülheimer Verband in Hamburg. During the Third Reich he became the focus of the Gestapo and as a precaution he withdrew from appearing in public.<sup>30</sup>

Erwin Lorenz (1906-85) took over the church in Berlin after Schilling, Steen and Roos. This church was prohibited in 1937 by the Nazi authorities and Lorenz called into military service. The church met in small groups in private homes. They disguised their services as “house music” or “garden celebrations”, which were politically and expressly desired by the Nazi authorities at that time.<sup>31</sup>

Herman Lauster, the founder of the Church of God in Germany started founding churches in 1937. He was arrested and imprisoned in the concentration camp Welzheim from 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1938 to 16<sup>th</sup> March the 1939.<sup>32</sup> After his release Herman Lauster continued to be observed by the Gestapo. Officially the meetings of the Church of God were stopped, but the members continued to meet secretly in private homes.

Other names could also be mentioned.

All in all we can say that the growth of the Pentecostal Movement in the awakening time after World War I and its consolidation during the time of the Weimar Republic came to an abrupt halt at the beginning of the Third Reich.<sup>33</sup> Through the wartime situation and the repression of the Gestapo during the Third Reich Pentecostal identity was generally hindered and at times virtually impossible to express. Only after the war did a new freedom arise; eventually they were allowed once again to conduct meetings and soon unification aspirations developed.<sup>34</sup> Finally, it can be seen that the history of Pentecostalism in this time period is a diverse one, as diverse as its different leadership personalities.

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<sup>30</sup> Eisenlöffel, Freikirchliche Pfingstbewegung in Deutschland, 34

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 36

<sup>32</sup> Herman Lauster, Vom Pflug zur Kanzel (Krehwinkel:1964), 60-69; Bobbie Lauster, Herman Lauster, One Man and God (Cleveland, Tenn.: 1967), 93-119; c.f. Schmidgall, Hundert Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung, 323-328.

<sup>33</sup> Schmidgall, Hundert Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung, 287

<sup>34</sup> See Eisenlöffel, Freikirchliche Pfingstbewegung in Deutschland.