

History and Development of Pentecostalism in Germany: A Review of Resources and Literature in the German language

By Paul Clark – February 2010

D. Paul Fleisch, a Lutheran theologian from Hannover, was the first German author to write an extensive academic historical treatment of the Pentecostal movement in Germany. His book entitled *Geschichte der Pfingstbewegung in Deutschland von 1900 bis 1950* is a standard work for students of German Pentecostalism. In 1914, Fleisch had already contributed to a two-volume history of the *Gemeinschaftsbewegung*, writing a chapter with the profound title “The Tongues Movement.” Fleisch’s work is invaluable in that he was an astute first-hand neutral observer of Pentecostalism during its first 50 years of development.

Christian Hugo Krust’s book *50 Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung: Mülheimer Richtung* presents an excellent overview of the Mülheim Association which organized in 1913 as the first Pentecostal fellowship in Germany. Krust himself was a member of the Mülheim Association’s executive leadership, and his work has become a standard resource for understanding the development of the first fifty years of German Pentecostalism, especially in the Mülheim tradition.

Reimer’s Dietze’s unpublished work *Deutschlands freikirchliche Pfingstbewegung auf dem Vormarsch: Ihr Weg von den Anfängen bis zur Gründung der “Arbeitsgemeinschaft” 1947* portrays the development of several quasi independent Pentecostal groups outside of the Mülheim Association which were primarily founded in the 1920s and 1930s. Several of these groups would join together to form the ACD in the late 1940s which would be renamed the BFP in 1982. Dietze’s study is somewhat critical in nature, as he successfully helps the reader grasp the points of contention between the various Pentecostal groups.

Walter Hollenweger, a former Pentecostal minister in Switzerland before he became a Reformed Church minister, wrote his seminal work in 1969 *Enthusiastisches Christentum: Die Pfingstbewegung in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. In 1972 this work was published in English with title *The Pentecostals* and would earn him international acclaim as one of the most foremost experts on world Pentecostalism. His insight into early German Pentecostalism is striking in that he asserts that founding of the Mülheim Association was an unsuccessful attempt to develop a Pentecostal Movement in the Reform tradition. Hollenweger also takes to task the leaders of the *Gemeinschaftsbewegung* who overplayed their hand in categorically rejecting the Pentecostal Movement through the Berlin Declaration without even having an official meeting with their former friends and colleagues who had become Pentecostal in experience. For Hollenweger the emotional excesses of early Pentecostalism in Germany, which the *Gemeinschaftsbewegung* deplored, were created by its own overemphasis on personal holiness and its obsessive expectation of a soon to come great revival. Hollenweger also sheds much light on the ACD and its later development, which he describes as a very aggressive Free Church in the *Volkskirchen* context. Hollenweger himself was the executive secretary of the World Council of Churches when several ACD leaders along with other European Pentecostal leaders had their first official meeting with the WCC during 1966 in Switzerland.

Ludwig Eisenlöffel's *Freikirchliche Pfingstbewegung in Deutschland: Innenansichten 1945-1985* provides the necessary backdrop toward understanding the events that shaped and formed the ACD. Eisenlöffel was a member of the ACD executive board during the 1960s and 1970s and also directed his denomination's Bible School in Erzhausen for over 10 years. Eisenlöffel's insider perspective facilitates an in-depth understanding of the BFP's internal workings especially from the 1950s through the 1980s. Eisenlöffel's exhaustive work provides much insight into the BFP's relationship to other Pentecostal and Evangelical groups within the German context. He himself led many of the inner-church

dialogues that took place in the 1970s between the ACD and the Evangelical Alliance, the ACD and the Ecumenical Movement, and the ACD discourse with the emerging Charismatic Movement.

Gottfried Sommer's 156 page MA Thesis *Die Sammlung deutscher freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden in der Zeit des Wiederaufbaus 1945 – 1955 zur Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Christengemeinden in Deutschland (ACD) – Entwicklung und Selbstverständnis* specifically focuses on the ACD during its formational years, which runs parallel to Germany's rebuilding following the devastation of World War II. Sommer's detailed study with 411 footnotes provides an extensive overview of the resource literature available to the student of German Pentecostalism. Sommer asserts that there has never been one German Pentecostal movement, but rather a number of independent minded groups, each bringing to the table its own Biblical interpretations and doctrinal positions that at times have been very contradicting and diffuse. Sommer contends that one of the weaknesses of the BFP today is its lack of identify because it truly is a diverse mix of varying theological positions and Pentecostal traditions. Also Sommer's paper *Die Pfingstbewegung und die Judenfragen im Dritten Reich*, offers a look at how Pentecostalism in Germany responded and reacted to Anti Semitism during the Third Reich era of Adolf Hitler.

Der Auftrag bleibt: Der Bund Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden auf dem Weg ins dritte Jahrtausend (in English, *The Mandate Never Changes: The Union of Free Pentecostal Churches in Germany on the Way into the Third Millennium*). This book published in 2009 is authored by Gerhard Oertel, Richard Krüger, and Dieter Hampel, who served as long-time members of the executive leadership of the BFP in Germany. This reference volume provides a detailed historical overview of the BFP during the last two decades of the twentieth century and a wealth of data related to numerous changes that occurred during this period of time. German reunification, several Pentecostal fellowships joining the BFP, and the growth of

ethnic churches within the BFP has forced changes in Germany's largest Pentecostal denomination.

This volume also looks back to the development of German Pentecostalism during the Nazi era and Post-World War II Germany. The authors trace the formation and development of numerous local congregations, providing insight into various periods of modern German history which, to say the least, was very turbulent at times. The authors provide names of missionaries from Scandinavia and the U.S. Assemblies of God who worked to train leaders and establish local congregations through intentional church planting. Much historical attention is also given to the establishing of the Bible school in Erzhausen by Assemblies of God missionaries after World War II.

Ekkehart Vetter, the current President of the Mülheim Association, in his well-researched book, *Jahrhundertbilanz: erweckungsfaszinierend und durststreckenerprobt: 100 Jahre Mülheimer Verband Freikirchler-Evangelischer Gemeinden*, has chronicled one hundred years of his fellowship's history. The Mülheim Association was the first officially recognized Pentecostal Movement in Germany, which stemmed from a revival in the city of Mülheim, located in Germany's industrial Ruhr Valley, with 3,000 reported conversions over a six-week period in 1905. Vetter goes to great lengths to trace the genesis and development in the early years by carefully examining Pentecostal periodicals that were prominent during the beginning decades of the twentieth century. Vetter also describes in detail, how in the first decades, the Mülheim Association never intended to be a denomination and remained hopeful to someday reuniting with the *Gemeinschaftsbewegung*. After World War II it became apparent that the Mülheim Association was an established Free Church denomination. Vetter takes a very critical look at his own church, listing at the end of this volume, ten reasons why the Mülheim Association dramatically declined in numbers over the years. One century later,

the Mülheimer Association has evolved to become, as it now describes itself, an evangelical charismatic church that has gradually and gracefully left its Pentecostal roots.

Tim Linder's biography, *Hermann Zaiss: Einblicke in sein Leben* tells in narrative form the history of the Ecclesia fellowship of churches which joined the BFP in 2000. The *Volksmission* headquarter in Stuttgart published a 50th Anniversary Book *Missionarisch in die Zukunft: 50 Jahre Volksmission entschiedener Christen* which tells their own history, including the reasons why this fellowship of church joined the BFP in 1988.

Paul Schmidgall's two books *From Oslo to Berlin: European Pentecostalism* and *Hundert Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung: 1907 – 2007*, present a history of various European Pentecostal movements and especially gives attention to the history of Pentecostalism in Germany. Schmidgall directs the European Theological Seminary in Germany, which is affiliated with the Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee. As an insider, Schmidgall also presents a history of the Church of God, which is the second largest Pentecostal denomination in Germany, founded in the 1930s.

Free Churches in Germany

Erich Goldbach's book, *Freikirchen – Erbe, Gestalt und Wirkung*, presents an extensive history of the various Free Churches in Germany, which he has researched since the 1960s. As a Baptist Theologian, Goldbach has taught at various Universities, specializing in comparing the confessional stances of Free Churches, including their similarities and differences with the Protestant Church.

Karl-Heinz Voigt's book *Freikirchen in Deutschland (19. Und 20. Jahrhundert)* gives the reader an historical overview of the Free Church tradition in Germany since the nineteenth century. Voigt, a German Methodist minister, has represented his denomination for numerous years in the ecumenical movement and is very familiar with the challenges faced by all Free

Churches in a culture dominated by the Protestant and Catholic State Churches. The last chapter of this book is especially helpful for this study as Vogt deals with the topic of Free Churches at the turn of the twenty-first century.

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