

**EUROPEAN PENTECOSTAL REACTIONS TO TOTALITARIANISM:
A STUDY OF ETHICAL COMMITMENT IN THE 1930S**

1. INTRODUCTION

The resurgence of an ideological polarization in many religious groups seems to indicate the difficulty many believers have orienting themselves socio-politically in a fast-changing world. A historical study of the recent past might provide us with some insight as to the issues involved. This is especially true for religious movements like Pentecostalism which had their beginnings within the very recent past and, consequently, are not able to draw from a long tradition of theological reflection.

This study will investigate the attitudes of Pentecostal church leaders in Europe toward the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s. In the first part the emphasis will focus on Pentecostalism in Germany. In the second part observations relating to France, Italy, and Switzerland will be taken into account. Questions concerning ethical commitment will be asked in a reflective conclusion

To begin with, a preliminary remark needs to be made in order to facilitate the discussion of the subject matter, for any study involving Pentecostalism inevitably confronts a question of methodology. Pentecostals have generally been people of the spoken, rather than the written, word. They rely to a large extent on oral forms of religious communication such as songs, sermons, visions and testimonies. What was especially the case in the early days of Pentecostalism can still be maintained in the present; narrative communication constitutes the “library” of many a Pentecostal believer.¹ Consequently, most of the historical research on the present subject matter is ultimately based on oral sources, rather than on chronicles, periodicals and books. The main sources for this study are therefore to be found in autobiographies and remembered visions, prophecies and events (usually written, after the second World War, with the wisdom of hindsight). But it is in these materials that information about the ethical commitment of Europe’s Pentecostals during the totalitarian periods of the first half of this century can be found.

2. PENTECOSTALISM IN GERMANY

2.1 The Years Before the Confrontation

The Pentecostal movement in Germany began in the year 1907 in the context of a preceding revival that had touched evangelical free churches and the Lutheran church as well. After a first time of approval the Pentecostal movement was soon considered as unorthodox, even as having a demonic origin.

The final division between the conservative Lutherans, Evangelicals and Pietists on the one side, and the Pentecostals on the other side came on the 15th of September 1909. Fifty-six religious leaders gathered in Berlin to sign the so-called Berlin-Declaration which rejected Pentecostal spirituality as unchristian.²

It appears that from this point onward the German Pentecostals treasured a twofold concern. First, they felt obliged to pursue the possibility of reunification with the Evangelicals. Second, they tried their best to achieve acceptability in the eyes of the government. These two ideas preoccupied them intensely in the early thirties.

But as Walter Hollenweger points out, “As early as the first world war, there was enthusiastic support for the war in the ranks of the Pentecostal movement...”³ He quotes from three different Pentecostal periodicals that unanimously supported the emperor’s proclamation of war with a most colorful vocabulary. One example will suffice:

¹ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Erfahrungen der Leibhaftigkeit*, Interkulturelle Theologie I (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1979), pp. 69-84.

² Ludwig Eisenloeffel, *Bis alle eins werden: Siebzig Jahre Berliner Erklärung und ihre Folgen* (Erzhausen: Leuchter Verlag, 1979), p. 110; cf. also Paul Fleisch, *Die moderne Gemeinschaftsbewegung in Deutschland* (Leipzig: Verlag von H. G. Wallman, 1912), pp. 581-589, on background information.

³ Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 232.

The Kaiser calls to arms, and God calls to repentance. The whole of Germany has followed the Kaiser's call. The single-minded response ...is magnificent, splendid and without example...like the earlier Germanic migrations. ...like a gigantic machine ...In all this the single-mindedness of our whole people is an ineffably great miracle, an unsuspected gift of divine grace.⁴

As soon as the first war was over, prominent church leaders worked for reunification between the Evangelicals and the Pentecostals, but without success. Many personal letters were exchanged between the Christlicher Gemeinschaftsverband GmbH Mülheim/Ruhr, the largest Pentecostal body in Germany at that time, and the Evangelical Alliance.⁵ The yearning for unity intensified in the early thirties. The quick succession of political events seemed to amplify the awareness that denominational fragmentation had a paralyzing effect on the community of believers. In reference to the Disarmament Conference in 1932, C. O. Voget, a Lutheran pastor who had become a key figure in the Mülheim Association, is quoted as having said, "When will the disciples of Jesus hold their disarmament conference?"⁶ Similarly, the formation of the Confessing Church was regarded as a clear call to unity. Some Pentecostals were hopeful for the role of Friedrich von Bodelschwingh junior (son of the famous evangelical theologian, socialist, and founder of homes for the ill and unemployed) when he became Reichsbischof. Toward the end of 1933 consultations with representatives of the new religious hierarchy had begun. The aim was to do the best within the given situation even though it was not ideal.⁷ Paul Fleisch gave the following account of a remark by Voget:

The apparent struggle our people are going through, in order to achieve life for our evangelical church in all its diversity, cannot leave us indifferent. It must be of more than church political interest. From a representative of the Bishop of the Reich we heard in official conversation the statement, that it is finally time that the Lord Christ receives his rightful place in the German Lutheran church, and that everything else moves into second place.⁸

It is likely that the Protestant free churches could not realize the full political implications of the government's suggestion for a national evangelical (i.e., Lutheran) church; especially not as it was presented in religious terminology (i.e., "unity in Christ"). As Adolf Hitler became more aggressive against the churches, religious leaders also became more explicit as to the kind of unity they hoped for. In a letter written on the 10th of April, 1934, E. Humburg, chairman of the Mülheim Association, addressed himself to pastor D. W. Michaelis, chairman of the Gnadauerverband, as follows:

We are seriously concerned that the people of God is torn apart, and that the concentric assault of the anti-Christian powers will have a devastating effect. This is why we thought it would be important to suggest the necessity of building a common brotherhood to our brethren.⁹

The submission of all cultural activity to political reason (*Gleichschaltung*) imposed by Hitler had thus also ecumenical repercussions among the larger Christian churches alarmed by the rise of unchristian aspects of National Socialism.

Smaller Pentecostal denominations were faced with other problems. For instance, Chr. Roeckle,¹⁰ the founder of the Philadelphia Bewegung, thought it quite acceptable to support the National Socialist government. He thought that Hitler's ideas were politically, economically, and socially sound. Relying on paragraph 24 of the constitution,

⁴ Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, p. 232; quoting G. von Viehbahn, *Allianzblatt: Pfingstgrüsse* 7, 8 (22.11.1914), p. 57.

⁵ Ernst Giese, *Jonathan Paul*, pp. 196-201; translation.

⁶ Paul Fleisch, *Die Pfingstbewegung in Deutschland* (Hannover: Heinrich Feesche Verlag, 1957), p. 317.

⁷ Paul Fleisch, *Die Pfingstbewegung*, pp. 346-46. More than 25 years ago Paul Fleisch, a non-Pentecostal, did thorough research concerning the origins of the Pentecostal movement using documents that are no longer available.

⁸ Paul Fleisch, *Die Pfingstbewegung*, p. 348.

⁹ Ludwig Eisenloeffel, *Bis alle*, p. 86; on correspondence see also Christian Krust, *50 Jahre Deutsche Pfingstbewegung: Mülheimer Richtung* (Altdorf: Missionsbuchhandlung und Verlag, 1958), pp. 171-185.

¹⁰ Christian Roeckle was a surprisingly ecumenical figure. He was associated with the following churches: 1899 Methodists, 1903-1911 Basler Mission, 1919-1943 Altpietistischer Gemeinschaftsverband, 1940-1943 substitute for pastors in military service in the Lutheran Church of Württemberg, associated with the Lutheran Church till 1952.

which mentioned a tolerant attitude toward “positive Christianity,” he saw no threat to Christianity.¹¹ Roeckle, mostly engaged as an evangelist, even lectured on the relationship between Christianity and National Socialism. In one such instance, on January 30, 1934, he mentioned how wonderfully God had given Hitler as a gift to the German nation and emphasized that this was especially significant because God had used a foreigner to accomplish such a transformation in Germany. But Roeckle also stated that one should not have any false illusions about the Third Reich, for no human kingdom would last forever and that Christians must set their eyes on the eternal Kingdom of God. He was immediately reproached by the Nazis attending the meeting, because he had called Adolf Hitler a foreigner and because he had “prophesied” the downfall of the Third Reich.¹²

Not long after this incident, however, Roeckle changed his attitude toward Hitler. Two theology students told him that Hitler wanted to eliminate Christianity, and that “positive Christianity” according to paragraph 24 meant nothing but respect for the sublime and the beautiful.¹³

By this time C. O. Voget had also become more critical. A rather lengthy quote from Fleisch demonstrates the kind of politically and emotionally ambiguous situation many pastors found themselves in:

Generally speaking the people were hiding in their quietism and spoke little about worldly things. But they could not be overlooked completely. In vol. 17 of the *Heilszeugnisse* (1932) Voget wrote about the threatening danger of a catastrophe for Germany. “In the east the sickle and the hammer, in the South the Fascists, in the West the French air force. As sign of salvation, that millions of compatriots enthusiastically expect, they see the swastika appearing, a sign that our heathen forefathers hoped in, and not the cross of Christ.” It is significant to hear that the readership protested, saying that Voget had attacked the Hitler party. Voget defended himself saying, “My concern is to look at everything, even political parties, with the eyes of Jesus. In view of this position, I cannot but state that I am a faithful friend, a true, dependable and genuine friend of Hitler.”

However, he added further down, “we cannot sell ourselves to any party, not even to most sublime human system.”¹⁴

As the clouds of confrontation drew closer pastors chose from time to time equivocal texts for their sermons in order to indirectly warn the faithful of the danger of National Socialism. This was especially expedient since Pentecostals were eager readers of the Bible who carried their personal copies to church. A meditation on Psalm 146 is an example for such a cryptic communication.¹⁵

¹¹ “Im Programm der NSDAP vom 24. Februar 1920 heisst es im Punkt 24: ‘Wir fordern die Freiheit aller Religionsbekenntnisse im Staate, soweit sie nicht dessen Bestand gefährden oder gegen das Sittlichkeits- und Moralgefühl der germanischen Rasse verstossen. Die Partei als solche vertritt den Standpunkt eines positiven Christentums, ohne sich konfessionell an ein bestimmtes Bekenntnis zu binden.’” Jos Schroeteler, “Nationalpolitische Erziehung,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 124 (Freiburg: Herder, 1933), p. 105.

¹² Christian Roeckle, *Die Fussspuren Gottes in meinem Leben* (Leonberg: Philadelphia Verlag, 1962), p. 213.

¹³ Christian Roeckle, *Fussspuren*, p. 214.

¹⁴ Paul Fleisch, *Pfingstbewegung*, pp. 345-46.

¹⁵ “Ein ungeheurer Selbsterhaltungstrieb beherrscht das Seelenleben der Menschen. Dabei wird vergessen, dass es einen König aller Könige gibt. Man lässt unbeachtet, dass es einen Führer aller Führer gibt, einen der allein helfen kann... Wieviele kluge Anschläge hatte da der Menschengestalt. Die höchsten Dinge greift er an. Und doch ‘muss der Menschengestalt davon, er muss wieder zu Erde werden; alsdann sind verloren alle seine Anschläge’ (Vers 4). Wohl aber denen, deren Hilfe der Lebendige Gott ist! (Vers 5)”

And further, in a prophetic voice as it were:

“Die gläubige Christenheit aller Kirchen wird in nächster Zeit den Beweis dafür anzutreten haben, ob sie himmlischen Grund unter den Füßen hat, ob sie ihren selbst erwählten Standpunkt herauskehrt, oder ob die Gnade Gottes ihr Zeugnis ist, die ihr einen von oben her gewiesenen Standort geschenkt hat... Das uns gegebene Psalmwort ermahnt uns, dass wir uns hüten sollen vor dem Geiste des Menschen, auch selbst wenn es fürstlicher Geist wäre.”

Although this meditation does sound a warning, it does not specify in religious terms (and certainly not in secular ones) what the believer can concretely do about this man-made situation.

Christian Krust, *50 Jahre*, p. 176, quoting *Heilszeugnisse*, Feb. 1, 1934, preached on October 17, 1933.

2.2 The Years of Opposition

The smaller the various Pentecostal denominations were, the easier it was for the Secret State Police (Gestapo) to check their activities. The security service saw the danger of sectarian groups in ten different matters. Three of those were relevant for Pentecostal circles. First, there was the issue of prayer for healing, an important element in Pentecostal spirituality. Second, there was the accusation of the exploitation of the masses with the intention to make them feeble-minded. Finally, Pentecostals were suspected of diverging from the National Socialist theory of race¹⁶ because Pentecostals felt, to a certain degree, a spiritual commitment to the Jews as the people of God. Consequently, one can say with F. Zipfel that it was the “decree of the President of the Reich on the maintenance of inner peace” issued on December 19, 1932 especially the paragraph against high treason and the jeopardizing of public peace, that constituted the most dangerous weapon in the hands of the Security Service against political, religious, and ideological enemies.¹⁷ These were the legal grounds with which the state justified the registration, handling, and surveillance of the individual congregations. The Gestapo followed a strict set of criteria in their systematic investigations.¹⁸ A good description of what was implied is given by Karl Fix, pastor and founder of the Volksmission in Berlin, who experienced scrupulous house calls made by the state police. They interrogated and watched him frequently because he had been a Socialist and a contributor to the Socialist press.¹⁹ They maintained surveillance of meetings, wrote down prayers in shorthand, confiscated pamphlets, and simulated friendships for the purpose of gathering intelligence. They accused him of “trade with unauthorized medication” (i.e., praying for the sick), and forbade the congregation to raise their hands in praise while they were singing or praying, for the authorities claimed that this was a “misleading imitation of the Hitler greeting.”²⁰

The activities of groups that were considered harmless were simply curbed, for the secret service hoped that they could be used as a ferment of fragmentation against the larger churches.²¹ If certain groups were considered dangerous, their meeting halls were closed. This was especially true for churches with international affiliations. This intimidated many Pentecostals from speaking up against the ills of totalitarianism.

The most difficult year for the Pentecostal assemblies in Germany was 1937. The Gestapo was most aggressive in Berlin because of the city’s geographical location and the fact that it was Germany’s capital. On March 11, 1937, the Freie Pfingstgemeinde: Berlin was closed, and on April 16, the same lot befell the Pfingstgemeinde Thabor: Berlin.²² A few churches avoided dissolution by joining larger church bodies. This was the case for the Christengemeinde Elim which entered into an affiliation with the Baptists in 1938.²³

This story of Herman Lauster and his Gemeinde Gottes can serve as an illustration of what happened to those denominations that were forbidden, as well as of the attitudes and reactions of their pastors. Lauster was sponsored by the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) to engage in the work of evangelism in the Swabian section of Germany. He was able to elude the Gestapo for a few years, but was finally arrested and accused of having preached the Gospel in spite of clear prohibitions. His preaching was considered detrimental to national health, and he was sent to a concentration camp. Because of good behavior²⁴ Lauster was soon appointed supervisor (*Raumältester*) to a group of Jews in a cell. He ministered to them in secret with apparently surprising results. Later he was appointed

¹⁶ H. Boberach, *Berichte der SD und der GESTAPO Über Kirchen und Kirchenvolk in Deutschland* (Mainz: Günewald, 1971), p. 923.

¹⁷ F. Zipfel, *Kirchenkampf in Deutschland 1933-1945* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), p. 175.

¹⁸ Their reports were classified, for instance as follows: a) overview of ideology and historical development, b) leadership, preachers and key persons, number of members or followers and their former political views, c) customs, rituals, celebrations and symbols, d) attitude toward the church, connections with Freemasons and Jewry; Marxist and Communist influences, e) congregational and educational activity, f) attitude toward National Socialism and the state, g) cultural influences. H. Boberach, *Berichte*, p. 923.

¹⁹ Karl Fix, *Preiset mit mir den Herrn! 30 Jahre Volksmission entschiedener Christen Berlin: Zeugnischrift* (Schorndorf: Karl Fix Verlag, 1957), p. 19.

²⁰ Karl Fix, *Preiset mit mir*, pp. 1 8-30 see also Christian Krust, *50 Jahre*, pp. 174-75.

²¹ F. Zipfel, *Kirchenkampf*, pp. 203-212.

²² J. S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933-1945* (London: Weinfeld & Nicolson, 1968), pp. 372-73.

²³ Kurt Hutten, *Seher, Grübler, Enthusiasten* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1966), p. 524; and Paul Fleisch, *Pfingstbewegung*, p. 348 .

²⁴ Lauster submitted to all demands of the Nazis in order to be released as soon as possible, so that he could secretly minister to his congregation again. The ethical justification is here clearly of pragmatic nature.

first cook of the concentration camp and, thereby, his apparent freedom to evangelize was taken away. When he was released from camp, he considered his main duty to be the “feeding of the hungry sheep.”²⁵

This episode is characteristic for it underlines, firstly, the principle of non-interference with the state whenever possible, and secondly, the priority of pastoral responsibilities. These attitudes were shared by most, if not all, Pentecostal pastors in Germany. Individualistic ethical categories were applied, but these were not without problems as can be gathered from a quotation of Gerhard Krueger.

War stood in front of the door. The prophecies and visions were very serious. Often I had to speak about the end times. There were many tears, true tears of repentance. And the one that truly converted to God, or the Christian that had brought order into his live before God, was spared from the great temptation that soon broke in, he did not soil himself with looting and hatred of the Jews.²⁶

In all admiration for Krueger’s sense of spiritual responsibility, two criticisms nonetheless need to be voiced. First, it seems risky to claim, in a postwar reflection that the rejection of National Socialism functioned as a religious “shibboleth” to divide the true from the uncommitted and nominal Christians. Second, it is significant that the “tears of repentance” were a result of self-examination. Seemingly, there were no tears of repentance for the sins of omission on the societal and political level. It was good enough to internally disagree with the Nazi harassment of the Jews. They did not, however, feel visibly responsible either as individuals or as churches to actively alleviate the Jews’ distress.²⁷

Concluding this section three remarks can be made relating to the moral responsibility of war-torn Pentecostals in Germany.

First it must not be forgotten that the terror of totalitarian rule was very real. For instance, not to hoist the German flag on Hitler’s birthday was considered to be a dangerous negligence, or a self-defeating act of defiance. Many believers would have liked to show his displeasure with governmental policies had he had a right to do so.

Second, their leaders were trying to play cautiously for safety. As someone summarizes the happenings in 1933, “The year of 1933 was rich in revolutionary changes. . . We wait and see into what things will develop and as to what God intends to do in these days.”²⁸ Moral attitudes depended on a variety of relevant factors. With the exception of evangelism there was no consensus as to the pertinence of primary ethical values in comparison to secondary ones.

Third, one notices the tendency toward opportunistic interpretation of political events. In principle, National Socialism, its ideology, and the war were to be condemned. In practice, however, many events were welcomed and considered to be God-sent. The one-party-system, for example, was received by some with acclamation, and it was hoped that clear leadership would solve the political and economical crises.²⁹ The Gleichschaltung was hailed as the solution for the reunification of the Pentecostals with the Evangelicals and the Lutherans.³⁰ The annexation of Austria was considered an opportunity for new evangelistic endeavors.³¹ And the invasion of Poland was regarded as an act of divine protection on behalf of the German minority against the infuriated Poles.³² From a pastoral point of view these interpretations are understandable, but moral questions relating to social responsibility remain, even today, often unanswered. Or putting it in other words, in view of the origins of Pentecostalism in the Holiness movement, W. J. Hollenweger asks whether sanctification, which is also a sanctification of thought, is neglected as political and societal diacony.³³

²⁵ Herman Lauster, *Vom Pflug zur Kanzel* (Krehwinkel: Verlagsgesellschaft W. Greiner & W. Schmid, 1964), pp. 60-72.

²⁶ Gerhard Krueger, *Erlebte Gottesgnade* (Erzhausen: Leuchter Verlag, 1970), p. 86.

²⁷ Christian Roeckle displays the same community oriented morality, but Karl Fix represents an exception. Being a former socialist, he insisted that one third of the monthly surplus of the offerings was to be used for the poor. Karl Fix, *Preiset mit mir*, p. 32.

²⁸ Paul Fleisch, *Pfingstbewegung*, p. 346; translation. Unfortunately, Fleisch rarely documented his sources.

²⁹ Paul Fleisch, *Pfingstbewegung*, p. 346.

³⁰ Ludwig Eisenloeffel, *Bis alle*, p. 86; Paul Fleisch, *Pfingstbewegung*, pp. 346-348.

³¹ Karl Fix, *Preiset mit mir*, p. 37.

³² Gerhard Krueger, *Gottesgnade*, p. 89.

³³ W. J. Hollenweger, *Handbuch der Pfingstbewegung*, II Hauptteil, 1. Halbband (Genf: Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde, 1965), p. 1583.

3. THE PENTECOSTALS IN FRANCE

Although there had been small groups of Pentecostals in Paris and Le Havre since 1909, it was not until 1931 that the movement gained a foothold in France.³⁴ This means, from a practical point of view, that the movement did not have the time to develop a common position on current events. André Nicolle confirms this when he says, “We had no sort of movement or organized Assembly in those days; we just ‘went ahead’ in faith, with nothing but the promises of God to guide us.”³⁵

This meant that innumerable *ad hoc* decisions were made. When confronted with a problem the Pentecostals sometimes understood a spontaneous reaction to be the answer and no further reflection was considered necessary. On occasion this autonomy allowed church leaders to “cut through the red tape.” Surprising and quick decisions were made. An example is an incident that involved a group of approximately a hundred Communists that was violently disturbing a prayer meeting in a private house near Rouen in spring 1937. The incident attracted the attention of the *Journal de Rouen* which gave extensive coverage. The article noted that “one is not at a loss to explain the attack on the rights of people, because the disciples of Stalin forbid all liberty, even that of religion and free enterprise.”³⁶ This incident naturally evoked antipathy against the Communists. The Pentecostals would for many years avoid contacts with representatives of the left and “lent a deaf ear” to some of their legitimate humanitarian concerns. The opposition was purely religiously motivated.

An example of courageous and autonomous decision-making is seen in the role of French pastors who collaborated with the Resistance movement. People like André Nicolle helped to rescue allied airmen who were shot down and to hand them over to the underground that prepared their escape to Spain.³⁷

Viens et Vois, the official publication of the Assemblées de Dieu de France, began in 1933 to publish articles dealing with international news items and those that they called “the signs of the times.” Being strongly biblicist and relentless students of the apocalyptic, they were very much concerned with events relating to the Jews. To those Pentecostals, “The Jew-Arab hostility and the persecution of the Jews in Germany indicated the nearness of Christ’s return.”³⁸

G. Stotts has collected further examples.³⁹ An article inspired by the civil turmoil in Spain appeared in September 1935. Adolph Hunziker admonished the Pentecostal believers to avoid any participation in political activities. The only genuine and valid revolution, in pastor Hunziker’s estimation, was that of the mind.⁴⁰ After visiting Germany, Ove Falg, writing on Hitlerism, warned his readers that they must not preoccupy themselves with political systems of the world, nor should they be overly concerned with political and social crises. God, according to him, would watch events and intervene according to his will. Pentecostals, he concluded, were to live a peaceful life in all piety and honesty.⁴¹ Daniel Guillaume dealt with the block of nations in south and southeastern Europe. His article in January 1933 pointed out that according to biblical prophecy those nations played an important role in the end-time drama. He related the rise of Italy under Benito Mussolini to an anti-Christian restoration of the ancient Roman Empire.⁴² Guillaume also represented an exception among the writers of *Viens et Vois* in so far as he voiced

³⁴ Leonhard Steiner, *Mit folgenden Zeichen* (Basel, Verlag Mission für das volle Evangelium, 1954), p. 67.

³⁵ J. T. Nichol, *The Pentecostals* (Plainfield: Logos International, 1966), p. 203, quoting G. Atter, *The Third Force* (Petersborough: The College Press, 1962), p. 171.

³⁶ George R. Stotts, “The History of the Modern Pentecostal Movement in France” (Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1973), pp. 151, quoting “Caudebec en Caux Le Trait,” *Viens et Vois* 6,1 (April 1937), pp. 20-21, as reported in the *Journal de Rouen*.

³⁷ George Stotts, *History*, pp. 170-71.

³⁸ George Stotts, *History*, p. 164.

³⁹ The following examples are taken from: George Stotts, *History*, pp. 159-163.

⁴⁰ Adolph Hunziker, “La revolution et les signes des temps,” *Viens et Vois* 5,6 (Sept. 1936), pp. 130-131.

⁴¹ Ove Falg, “L’Evangile en Allemagne,” *Viens et Vois* 3,3 (June 1934), pp. 41-42.

⁴² Daniel Guillaume, “Les signes des temps,” *Viens et Vois* 10 (Jan. 1933), pp. 196-197. Cf also D. Guillaume, “Simple reflections sur les signes des temps,” *Viens et Vois* 3, 10 (Jan. 1935), pp. 230-231.

a concern for politic social issues. He reasoned that in view of what was happening in Germany and Italy, France had to be more attentive to its own social conditions if it wanted to avoid a similar dictatorial upheaval.⁴³

Generally the articles emphasize that only a sense of humiliation and repentance could prevent impending disaster. In other words, the aim of the authors was to invite their readers to a self-examination in the Holiness tradition. It was not an examination of what the individual or the religious community could do in terms of social responsibility and justice. A point that could have been argued from the prophetic tradition of the Bible.

4. THE PENTECOSTAL PHENOMENON IN ITALY

In 1908 an American-Italian began the Pentecostal work in Italy, and in less than 25 years the Pentecostals became by far the largest Protestant body in that nation.⁴⁴

The Holy See, deeply involved in a power struggle with the Fascist government, was extremely suspicious of all Modernist, Masonic, and Protestant influences.⁴⁵ The Lateran Treaty and Concordat, undoubtedly constituting a necessary step in Roman Catholic Church history, brought with it most tragic consequences for the Pentecostal movement in Italy. A. Rhodes summarizes the religious implications, somewhat light-handedly, as follows:

Catholicism was recognized as the State religion... Religious education in schools was made compulsory. The propaganda of Freemasons, Methodists and other heretics could in certain cases be a penal offense; as could dancing and other uproarious activities during Lent.⁴⁶

The fact was, however, that Article I of the Lateran Treaty and the Concordat respectively⁴⁷ gave the Fascists unlimited powers to suppress non-Catholic religious activities. The government used this decree as a weapon to

⁴³ Daniel Guillaume, "Actualités et signes des temps," *Viens et Vois* 5,6 (1936), pp. 130-31. Unfortunately, as Stotts notices, Guillaume did not venture to suggest what measures could alleviate the miserable social conditions in France. George Stotts, *History*, p. 163.

⁴⁴ "La police fasciste estimait à 150'000 le nombre des pentecôtistes, groupés en 400 communautés; ces chiffres e'taient jugés très fortes par un périodique pentecôtiste suisse (L'Appel du Tessin: Belinzone, fév 1946). Mais le pasteur H. Parli présenta au Comité américain de Secours aux Eglises évangéliques d'Italie, au moment de la liberation, une liste de 20'000 enfants nécessaires appartenant à des familles ratachées à ces communautés, soit le double des demandes du reste du protestantisme italien." Emile G. Leonhard, *Histoire générale du protestantisme*, tome III (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), p. 517. See also: L. Steiner, *Zeichen*, p. 67; and Silvo Tramontin, *Un Secolo di Storia della Chiesa: Da Leone XIII al Concillio Vaticano II*, Vol. I (Roma: Edizioni Studium, 1980), p. 277.

⁴⁵ A letter of Pope Pius XI to Secretary of State Cardinal Gasparri, written on May 30, 1929, after the presentation of the Lateran Treaty and the Concordat to the government, expresses the fear of a Protestant intervention. It is interesting to note that basic ethical questions such as those relating to the freedom of speech and to personal conviction (freedom of conscience) are not necessarily easier to formulate in highly institutionalized religious bodies like the Roman church which are in possession of an elaborated theological apparatus.

"Ma qui e dove la Nostra aspettativa 'e stata duramente delusa. Diciamo aspettativa delusa, perché alle migliori aspettative Ci avevano dischiuso l'animo le lunghe per quanto non sempre facili trattative, e men che tutto Ci aspettavamo espressioni ereticali e pegaio che ereticali sulla essenza stessa del Christianesimo e del Cattolicismo mescolata spesso di inesattezze e di errori, massime per subiti influssi protestantici e modernistici.

Culti "tollerati, permessi ammessi": non saremo Noi a fare questione di parole... purchè sia e rimanga chiaramente e legalmente inteso che I a Religione cattolica é, e sol' essa, secondo lo Statuto ed i Trattati, la Religione dello Stato con le Iogiche e giuridiche conseguenze di una tale situazione di diritto costitutivo, segnatamente in ordine alla propaganda...

Più delicata questione si presenta quando con tanta insistenza si parla della non menomata libertà di coscienza e della piena libertà di discussione.

Non 'e ammissibile che siasi intesa libertà assoluta di discussione, comprese cioè quel le forme di discussione, che possono facilmente ingannare la buona fede di uditori poco illuminati, e che facilmente dannosa alla Religione del Stato e, per ciò stesso, anche allo Stato e proprio in quello che ha di più sacro la tradizione del popolo italiano e di più essenziale la sua unità.

Anche meno ammissibile Ci sembra che si sia inteso assicurare incolume, intatta, assoluta libertà di coscienza Se si vuol dire che la coscienza sfugge al poteri dello Stato, se si intende riconoscere, come si riconosce, che, in fatto di coscienza, competente è la Chiesa, ed essa sola in forza del mandato divino, viene con ciò stesso riconosciuto che in Stato cattolico, libertà di coscienza e di discussione devono intenders e praticarsi secondo la dottrina e la legge cattolica...."

Acta Apostolicae Sedis: Commentarium Officiale, Vol. XXI (Romae: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1929) pp. 297-306.

⁴⁶ A. Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of Dictators 1922-1945* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973), p. 45.

exert pressure upon the Holy See to submit to certain politically relevant demands.⁴⁸ At first, the activities of the Protestants in general were either curbed or made dependent on governmental permission.

It was, however, the *Buffarini Circular*, published on April 9, 1935,⁴⁹ that introduced periodically a serious persecution of Pentecostals in Italy, which was to last for more than twenty years. Churches were to be closed immediately and all activities suspended. As was the case with German National Socialism, the Italian state considered Pentecostal practices as contrary to the social order and dangerous to the physical and psychic integrity of the race.⁵⁰ Walter Hollenweger summarizes:

From 1935 to 1958 the Italian Pentecostals were severely persecuted. All gatherings held in whatever fashion or form (*tenute in qualsiasi modo o forma*) were forbidden. This decree led to ridiculous arrests e.g. when Pentecostals greeted each other on the street or came by for a visit, it was considered to be a meeting or manifestation held in whatever fashion or form.⁵¹

The systematic suppression of Pentecostal activities by the official representatives of the state and of its legitimate form of Christianity led to an alienation of the Pentecostal believer from all forms of national institutionalized hierarchy.

What, then, was the Italian Pentecostals moral attitude towards others during these bitter years? There was a deep mistrust against the Catholic clergy, who generally, by necessity and/or conviction, collaborated with the

⁴⁷ Article I of the Treaty

L'Italia riconosce e riafferma il principio consacrato nell' articolo I dello Statuto del Regno 4 marzo 1848, pel quale la religione cattolica, apostolica e romana è la sola religione dello stato.

Article 1 of the Concordat

L'Italia, ai sensi dell' art. 1 del Trattato, assicura alla Chiesa Cattolica il libero esercizio del potere spirituale, il libero e pubblico esercizio del culto, nonchè della sua giurisdizione in materia ecclesiastica in conformità alle norme del presente Concordato; ove occorra, accorda agli ecclesiastici per gli atti del loro ministero spirituale la difesa da parte delle sue autorità.

In considerazione del carattere sacro della Città Eterna, sede vescovile del Sommo Pontefice, centro del mondo cattolico e mèta di pellegrinaggi, il Governo italiano avrà cura di impedire in Roma tutto ciò che possa essere in contrasto col detto carattere.

Acta Apostolicae Sedis, Vol. XXI, pp. 210, 276. A decree valid for Rome, would automatically be applicable for all of Italy!

⁴⁸ See: Walter Hollenweger, *Handbuch*, p. 1956; and by the same author: *Pentecostals*, p. 254.

⁴⁹ The text of the *Buffarini Circular* is worthwhile quoting in full:

Ministero dell'Intero
Direzione generale dei culti

Roma, 9 aprile 1935

Circolare no 600/158

Oggetto: Associazioni pentecostali

Essistono in alcune provincie del Regno semplici associazioni di fatto che, sotto la denominazione di pentecostali o pentecostieri o nematici o tremolanti, attendono a pratiche di culto in riunioni generalmente presiedute da "anzianil."

Il culto professato dalle anzidetto associazioni, non riconosciute a norma dell' articolo 2 della legge 24 giugno 1929 no. 1159, non può ulteriormente essere amesso nel Regno, agli effetti dell' articolo 1 della citata legge, essendo risultato che esso si estrinseca a concreta in pratiche religiose contrarie all' ordine sociale e nocive all' integrità fisica e psichica della razza.

Pertanto le LL. EE. provvederanno subito per lo scioglimento, dovunque esistano, delle associazioni in parola, e per la chiusura dei relativi oratori e sale di riunione, disponendo conseguentemente anche per una opportuna vigilanza, allo scopo di evitare che ulteriori riunioni e manifestazioni di attività religiose da parte degli adepti possano aver luogo in qualsiasi altro modo o forma.

Si gradirà sollecita assicurazione dell' adempimento.

Giorgio Peyrot, *La circolare Buffarini-Guidi e i Pentecostali. Attuare la Costituzione 26* (Rome: Associazione Italiana per la Libertà della Cultura, 1955), pp. 12-13; quoted in Walter Hollenweger, *Handbuch*, p. 1848.

⁵⁰ Walter Hollenweger, *Handbuch*, p. 1848.

⁵¹ Walter Hollenweger, *Handbuch*, p. 1824; S. Tramontin, otherwise impressed with the role of Pentecostalism in Italy, seems to overlook the problematic completely and only mentions a "eccessiva prudenza delle Chiese ufficiali," *Un Secolo*, p. 280.

Fascists. At the same time the Pentecostal believers, desperate to find some help, turned to the political opposition. It was the Communists who fought for the rights of the Pentecostals on innumerable occasions.⁵²

It was not until 1955 that the Italian government officially retracted the Fascist regulations against the Pentecostals that for one reason or another had found their way into the Republican constitution of 1948.⁵³ It is understandable, therefore, that even today many Pentecostals vote for left of center parties. The Italian example shows again that the ethical dilemma of Pentecostals in the face of totalitarianism could not have been politically neutral. Decisions were pragmatic in nature.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The diverging reactions of German, French, and Italian Pentecostals can be summarized in the following paradox: an assessment of the totalitarian situation demanded political detachment, but at the same time the ethical commitment of these Pentecostals reasserted sooner or later a political stance. Even the position of Swiss Pentecostals, who were not personally involved in the dictatorial machinery of power, and who claimed, by national conviction at least, to be neutral in foreign affairs, cannot be counted as an example of apolitical Christian ethics.

In April 1932 an article appeared in the periodical *Verheissungen des Vaters* about National Socialism.

This is the beginning of the beast in the idolatrous state, in the vision of world monarchy according to Daniel, on which we refuse to build, for it will eventually be destroyed by the rock without hands.⁵⁴

Admittedly, the harsh rejection of the Hitler party and its program at that early date is positively surprising. Nazism was apparently considered by the author of the essay to be the utmost blasphemy. It could be, however, that he, although using religious terminology, reasoned purely on nationalistic grounds. Another remark, concerning the Confessing Church in 1934, was equally zealous and rather injudicious. Reacting to the conviction of the Confessing Church “that God will not abandon his cause,” the paper critically remarked:

God’s cause, at least as it is commonly seen, does not carry any promise, not to be abandoned during this age. But it is likely that the campaigners of the ecclesial confession groups, put into the phrase that God is not going to abandon his cause, the hope that the church will be spared. Here the ones hoping may be disappointed.. for the end times move on rather quickly.⁵⁵

The serious moral concerns of the Confessing Church were overlooked and replaced with an eschatological sense of the imminent end times. The criticism uttered, regardless of whether it was justified, remained therefore superficial.

From the German point of view the general attitude towards the state was, as mentioned above, that of keeping a distance. Sometimes there was the tendency, as F. Zipfel describes, to try appearing to be conspicuously loyal to National Socialist policy, fearing that otherwise the secret police would intervene and forbid all religious activities of the smaller Christian communities.⁵⁶

It was difficult, however, for the Pentecostal communities to follow a line similar to that of the Confessing Church, because the German Pentecostals were not sufficiently united, and it was easier for the Gestapo to maintain surveillance over such smaller groups. After the war, the Mülheim Pentecostals were not afraid to practice self-criticism.

⁵² Walter Hollenweger, *Pentecostals*, pp. 255-260.

⁵³ Ibid. It must be mentioned at this point that when the Pentecostals went to court to receive legal recognition, they were supported by the Catholic canon lawyer, A. C. Jemolo and by the Church historian at the Pontifical Gregorian University, C. Falconi. These were men who had a deep sense of justice and were not ashamed to unfold the darker pages of the history of their church. Cf. also: A. Rhodes, *Vatican*, pp. 326-329, 333.

⁵⁴ Walter Hollenweger, *Handbuch*, p. 1434, quoting “Vom deutschen Nationalsozialismus,” *Verheissungen des Vaters* 25, 4 (April 1932), p. 15.

⁵⁵ Walter Hollenweger, *Handbuch*, p. 1435, quoting from “Deutschlands religiöser Kampf,” *Verheissungen des Vaters* 27,7 (July 1934), pp. 14-15.

⁵⁶ F. Zipfel, *Kirchenkampf*, p. 206.

Hardly any of our brothers was trained to think politically. Consequently, our resistance against the Regime did not come from political motivation.⁵⁷

Siegfried Keller, a member of this denomination, is said to have admitted that the leaders had not clearly recognized the “signs of the times” and confessed a feeling of impotence and misjudgment. He apparently recalled that at their last national conference before the war several church leaders had their mobilization orders in their pockets, but they dared not say anything.⁵⁸ They were the children of the Lutheran tradition, sharply separating church and state affairs.

As has been shown, there was also not much room for expressing solidarity with the (other) socially oppressed.⁵⁹ Many Pentecostals maintained that social reform could only be brought about if individuals were first converted. In the same way one can understand their attitude and interest toward the Jews. The common denominator of the various reactions cited can accordingly be identified on personalist ethical grounds.

It is easy to argue about the moral involvement of Pentecostals some fifty years after the fact. But more seriously, the analysis does also beg the question whether anything has been learned from past experiences. Some Pentecostals in Europe, America, and especially in the Two-Thirds World, have come to regard their public involvement for social, personal, and by implication political rights, as an important Christian responsibility. Contemporary studies would have to investigate whether this involvement is practiced critically enough, and whether its judgments are sometimes based on vested interests other than Christian ethical/theological concerns. Pentecostals or generally Christians who cherish the importance of charismatic gifts, may again take a keen interest in re-evaluating their prophetic role in society and commit themselves to speak with words of discernment.

⁵⁷ Chr. Krust, *50 Jahre*, p. 175.

⁵⁸ Hans Harter, personal letter, November 16, 1981.

⁵⁹ J. T. Nichol, *Pentecostals*, p. 233.