CHAPTER NINE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PENTECOSTALISM IN CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES; POLAND, BULGARIA, HUNGARY, CZECH REPUBLIC & SLOVAKIA

1. Poland
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The reception of Pentecostalism at the beginning of the 20th century in Poland proceeded in a complicated and heterogeneous way. The direct cause of this condition was the fact that the Polish State did not exist at that time and the country was divided into three parts by the occupying power. For that reason, Pentecostal piety reached each annexed territory by different routes.

In the South, within the Austrian-annexed territory, the Pentecostal Movement emerged from within the Lutheran Church. During a home meeting, the Holy Spirit fell upon those gathered. They began cultivating their new level of devotion and for that reason were excommunicated from the Lutheran Church. In response to that, they decided to continue their activities independently. On July 15, 1910, the Alliance was legally registered (recognized) under the name ‘Bund für entschiedenes Christentum’ (Alliance for Committed Christianity). The first leader of the Alliance was Jan Kajfosz.¹ The Alliance grew and planted new churches. Unfortunately, in 1920, after the First World War, the Śląska Ciezyński territory was divided into two parts, Polish and Czechoslovakian. As a result, the annexed territories were now on two different sides of a very securely closed border. That did not however hinder evangelistic and pastoral activities right up to the beginning of the war in 1939. At that time, the activities of the Pentecostals were made illegal and an intense time of persecution began.

The reception of Pentecostalism in the eastern part of Poland proceeded along different lines. Pentecostals appeared there quite late, not until after 1920. The spreading of the idea of Pentecostalism was the

¹ Zbigniew Pasek, Stanowczy chrześcijanie, Studium historii idei religijnych, (Kraków: Instytut Religioznastwa UJ, 1993) p. 68
work of repatriates. These missionaries, who found Pentecostal piety in America, filled with the desire to carry the good news to their kinsmen, left America and returned to their homeland with one purpose – to preach the Gospel and propagate the Pentecostal experience. The ending of the First World War and the independence gained by Poland allowed them relatively unhindered opportunity to function. Important figures connected with the growth of Pentecostalism in Poland were: Iwan Haris, Porfiry Ilczuk, Józef Antoniuk, Trofim Nahorny, Grzegorz Kraskowski, Józef Czerski, Stanisław Niedźwiecki, Jan Pańko, Grzegorz Fedyszyn, and Gustaw H. Schmidt. As a result of their activities, many independent Pentecostal churches were established and according to contemporary chroniclers, the number reached into the thousands. That forced the leadership to create a denomination, which in turn would allow them to systematize teaching, work out a strategy for growth, and especially to prepare pastors for service in churches. Twice attempts were made in eastern Poland to create a homogeneous Pentecostal Movement. To that end, two Church unification congresses were held in 1924 and 1928 in the city of Krzemieniec. However, they were local in nature and did not lead to the establishing of a nation-wide Church. Finally, in 1929, the ‘Evangelical Faith Christian Association (Church)’ was created. It was formed as a result of a unification congress that was held in a village named Stara Czołnica, not far from Łucka (currently the Ukraine). Artur Bergholc, a man of German descent and a Pastor in Łódź was named the Chairman. The growth of the Evangelical Faith Christian Association (Church) was impressive. In 1939, right before the Second World War began, the KChWE (Evangelical Faith Christian Association) had about 300 churches which were made up of around 25,000 members.2

A great success for Pentecostals associated with the Evangelical Faith Christian Association was the ability to train their personnel in a Bible School in Gdańsk. The founder of the school was Gustaw Herbert Schmidt. The Bible Institute in Gdańsk began operating on March 2, 1930 through Gustaw Herbert Schmidt’s initiative. During the 8 years it operated, over 1,000 students from various countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Estonia, Germany, and Poland) were trained and many of those later became leaders of the Pentecostal Movements in