

Samuel Heinrich Froehlich 1803-1856

Origins of the Apostolic Christian Church

Froehlich family history



- Protestants for many generations – Huguenots (French Calvinists)
- Fled France due to the severe persecution against the Huguenots in the late 1600s
- Changed their name from the French DeJoyeux to Froehlich and joined the Swiss State Church, the Swiss church of Calvinist beliefs

Early Life in city of Brugg, canton of Aarau, Switzerland



- Father (also Samuel Froehlich) was Sexton (church maintenance, bell ringer, grave digger) of the state church in Brugg
- Samuel (younger) was the 6th and youngest child
- Family (as was their tradition) committed one child to the ministry of the church, Samuel was that child
- Admitted that he viewed it as a profession like any other

Undergraduate at University of Zurich 1820-1824



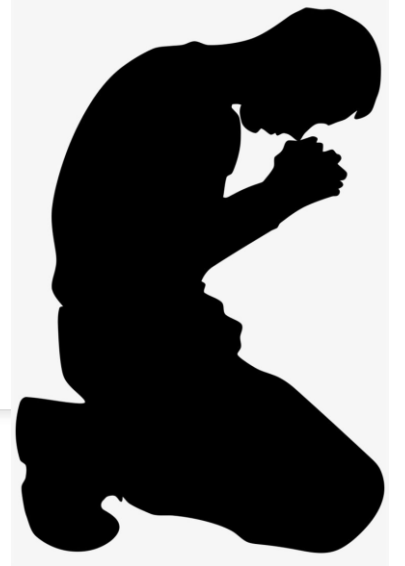
- Taught Liberal philosophies
 - Rationalism (complete trust in the reasoning of man over any outside authority)
- Became convinced by persuasive instructors
- Spoke of a non-belief in hell and the devil
- Greatly saddened parents with his lack of belief

Theology at University of Basel 1824-1825



- Taught further rationalism by instructor considered a ‘nonsupernaturalist’
- Involved in a weekly Greek-New Testament bible study with some who held biblical beliefs (Swiss Brethren), he often opposed them
- Interacted regularly with Passavant (a professor who had a true faith and was interested in Samuel having a personal faith), who would gently press him on the state of his own soul “how are things going in the most important matter of all?”

Call and beginning of repentance



- Home on Easter break in 1825
- *‘a very soft voice, which was neither terrifying or depressing, but nevertheless very convincing and penetrating, spoke in the depth of my soul, ‘It cannot remain thus with thee. Thou must change’ – and at the same time, it drew me irresistibly onward. I knelt for the first time before the hidden God and with uplifted hands solemnly made an oath of fidelity, that from now on it would be different with me.’*

On-going conversion & seeking peace with God



- *‘I went out into the mountain and forest, knelt and prayed and cried out in lonesome places. My whole being was longing, sorrowfulness, and anxiety. I sought the Lord Jesus Christ with ardent fervor and many tears.’*
- Froehlich remained in this seeking state for months after he returned to the university
- *‘For a long time I remained in this fiery furnace until, at length, faith in Jesus Christ, the Crucified, brought me **rest, peace, and light**, and made place within me for a new creation. From then on, Jesus Christ was the center of my whole life and sphere of activity’*

Preaching in the state church



- Left university for lack of funds, returning home and preached occasionally in the Brugg church with mixed reception
- Took exam to become state minister, although his own beliefs now conflicted with those of the state church, failed in 1826, passed in 1827
- As an ordained minister in the state church of Switzerland he was appointed vicar first at Wagenhausen then at Leutwil

Preaching in the state church



- Preached in Leutwil for almost a year – powerful message based in the fundamental gospel of repentance for sin and new birth led many to begin a true walk of humility
- This led to those of neighboring congregations coming to hear his preaching, which led to criticism by other pastors
- He was recalled, reprimanded, and suspended from preaching by the state church officials in October of 1829
- Returned to his family home to await further word on his situation

Conflicting beliefs with state church



- Froehlich studied the scripture and sought the leading of the Holy Spirit – in this he found a number of areas in which he could not reconcile himself to the state church's doctrine
- The new instruction for children (catechism) in the state church was squarely based in rationalism, rather than faith. It stressed reason and logic over belief in scripture
- He also found infant baptism to be inconsistent with the scripture and the pattern of 'believer baptism'

Dismissal & seeking like-mindedness

- Froehlich was dismissed from the state church in 1831 at the age of 28
- Without a 'church home', he first answered a call to minister to a congregation that had left the state church in Willhelmsdorf, Germany, but soon departed from them as they continued to adhere to infant baptism
- Froehlich became connected with the Continental Society of London, a group that supported missionaries on the continent

Continental Society of London

- Through the society Froehlich meet Ami Bost, a pastor in Geneva, who also had left the state church of Switzerland
- Ami Bost baptized Froehlich in February of 1832, when Froehlich was 28

Travels & Preaching in Switzerland



- Froehlich then began to travel and preach within Switzerland – wherever there was interest and willingness to hear his message
- He first traveled back to the canton of Thurgau and baptized 38 souls from his former congregation (Leutwil)
- Froehlich continued to preach powerfully of repentance for sin and new birth, but as yet did not have detailed practices and patterns for his new followers

Travels & Preaching in Switzerland



- Froehlich traveled and preached in the canton of Bern at the city of Geneva, also to Emmental and Giebel, and finally to Zurich and east Switzerland
- In these journeys he often preached & visited with Mennonites and others who had left the state church

Religious toleration in Switzerland



- The state church model was losing influence during the 1830s and 1840s. Individual cantons (similar to US states) were adopting more religious freedom slowly. The nation was coming from a post-Thirty Years War situation of '*curius regio, eius religio*' where the religion of the ruler was imposed on the whole state.
- The 1848 constitution that made Switzerland a federal state granted religious freedom throughout Switzerland, however many cantons still had a significant state-church connection
- As more freedom was given, these groups (such as Mennonites) were officially tolerated by the authorities, but suffered passive persecution of various forms

Interaction with Mennonites of Giebel & Langnau



- Froehlich had communicated with Christian Gerber, a minister in the Mennonite church in Giebel by letter. Christian had concerns about the church's health after years of persecution, physical separation, and infrequent meetings
- Froehlich shared some of his doctrine with the group by presenting his answers to questions put to him by the Continental Society
- Christian Gerber pointed out the absence of a stance on military service, Froehlich subsequently adopted the policy of serving only in non-combatant roles

Establishment of Langnau congregation



- Over the next several years Froehlich traveled to London to meet with the Society, preached in Langnau and elsewhere in Switzerland, resulting in persecution by local authorities
- In 1835 about 60 members left the Mennonite church and with a similar number of those who left the reformed church, formed the first significant congregation under Froehlich's leadership

Further church planting & persecution



- The more souls responded to Froehlich's teaching, the more persecution came to him. Authorities persecuted him due to his marriage in 1836 not being performed by a state church minister. For seven years, he and his wife Susette Brunschweiler were often separated.
- Froehlich finally moved to more tolerant Strasbourg, France in 1844, only 9 years after the establishment of the Langnau congregation

Strasbourg years



- Froelich's health suffered greatly from his travels and persecution
- After moving to Strasbourg his main method of communication was via hundreds of letters written each year to the leaders and congregations
- He also visited Switzerland, but not very frequently and had meetings in Strasbourg with visitors from Switzerland

Strasbourg years



- His many letters in response to questions, concerns, and situations back in Switzerland demonstrate a thoughtful, prayerful, scriptural response to challenges of establishing congregations according to the scriptural pattern
- As the fellowship grew, the need for carefulness and recognition of the high cost of following Christ was apparent. Persecution had not ceased with the departure of Froehlich, the meetings were often broken up and teaching brothers harassed and at times physically abused

Growth of the Evangelical Baptist Church in Europe

- 6 years into his ministry there were 14 churches
- 15 years in there were 55 congregations
- Eventually 110 congregations in Switzerland & Germany
- The movement also spread to the Balkans where it flourished and to America, where Benedict Weyeneth was sent in 1847



Death & Legacy

- Samuel Froehlich died at age 53 in Strasbourg, France
- Although he had not set out to form a new denomination, the congregations he and his followers began constituted a new brotherhood that followed his simple application of the scriptures and inspired message of repentance and living a regenerated life