

Paul Alexander, *Peace to War: Shifting Allegiances in the Assemblies of God*, vol. 9 of C. Henry Smith Series, Series Editor, J. Denny Weaver (9 vols.; Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2009).

In *Peace to War*, Paul Alexander has produced the most comprehensive, scholarly-informed yet readable and provocative study of pacifism within the Assemblies of God (AG) to date. Professor Alexander has mined the primary writings of AG leadership and ministers on pacifism from the time of the formation of the AG through the periods of World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War with the Soviet Union, the Vietnam War, Gulf War I with Iraq and Gulf War II with Afghanistan, and the continuing War on Terror since 9.11.2001. Not only has Alexander incorporated these AG primary sources into his narrative to demonstrate “the shifting allegiances in the Assemblies of God” that have occurred between World War I and the present War on Terror, he has also summarized and interacted with the secondary works of AG scholars and others who have provided various diversified interpretations of AG pacifism.

From these primary and secondary sources, Alexander has constructed a narrative that invites the engagement of his readers into a substantive dialog on the decline of pacifism and the influences that have led to its almost complete marginalization. As a committed AG pacifist himself, Alexander explicitly expresses in this book his hope that this “forgotten heritage” of AG pacifism can once again enliven the hearts and minds of today’s generation of AG, Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Christian youth to become Christ-followers of Jesus’ teachings. In short, this book is not only a scholarly treatise; it is also an advocacy manifesto for his readers to follow Jesus and his teaching on the core beliefs and values of love, justice, and peace-making.

While there are so many issues that a review could raise for the reader in this multi-layered narrative, I chose to identify three major contributions of Alexander’s study on AG pacifism for the reader. The first contribution is that Alexander identifies two competing strains of thought and practice within AG leadership, the pulpit and the pew that were both influential, yet not always compatible with each other, on issues of war and peace during the period from 1914-1940, the precursor to the year of the bombing of Pearl Harbor that brought the US into World War II. While these factors have been identified before by other studies of AG pacifism, the way that Alexander uniquely juxtaposes these two strains of thought as competitors for a single-

minded loyal allegiance highlights a factor that helps to make sense out of the demise of pacifism in such a short period of time.

After identifying the historical context in which “first-generation” AG pacifism arose, and the solidarity of thought these AG pioneers had with the pacifist theology of the Peace churches, especially the Quakers, the Holiness movement, and the development of a theology of the “full Gospel,” Alexander focuses on these two strains of thought that co-existed within AG psychology between 1914 and 1940. On the one hand, there was the view during this period of time that pacifism is grounded in Jesus’ ethical teachings for his followers to practice and therefore, “war is not consistent with the doctrines of Christ.” As a consequence of this strain of thought, Alexander chronicles “*The Assemblies of God Peace Witness from 1914-1940*” (131-176).

On the other hand, during this same period of time there was the view that the AG gave “unswerving loyalty to the Government,” and that this loyalty co-existed consistently with Pentecostal pacifism. There was deep concern among the AG denominational leadership at the time of World War I, however, that pacifism and its normative position of Conscientious Objection (CO) might be viewed by outsiders to the denomination as an act of disloyalty to the US government. Therefore, on April 28, 1917—only about three weeks after the United States declared war on Germany—denominational officials stated in the resolution that it sent to President to Woodrow Wilson its allegiance to the government in these words: “While affirming Human Government as of Divine ordination, and affirming our unswerving loyalty to the Government of the United States, nevertheless we are constrained to define our position with reference to the taking of human life.” After citing the biblical support for pacifism, the resolution concludes with these two strains of thought existing side by side: “THEREFORE we, as a body of Christians, while purposing to fulfill all the obligations of loyal citizenship, are nevertheless constrained to declare we cannot conscientiously participate in war and armed resistance which involves the actual destruction of human life since this is contrary to our view of the clear teaching of the inspired Word of God, which is the sole basis of our faith.” Alexander points out how this strain of thought played out with unintended consequences between the world wars: “*Unswerving Loyalty to the Government: The Seeds of Nationalism and Militarism from 1914-1940*” (177-199).

What Alexander has captured in this juxtaposition of two strains of thought is analogous to Jesus’ parable of “the wheat and the tares”

growing together from 1914 through the eve of the US joining World War II. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the US joining the war effort on what was considered the “moral grounds” of defending the nation, the strain of pacifistic thought began to be “choked out” within the AG leadership and its rank and file membership as fewer Pentecostal believers claimed CO status in WWII. As Alexander notes “the seeds of nationalism and militarism” continued to germinate from 1941-1967 and stimulated major shifts in the theological and philosophical thinking in the AG about war and peace. These currents of change finally culminated in the 1967 change of the General Council Bylaws on Military Service adopted by the General Council that stated: “As a movement we affirm our loyalty to the government of the United States in war or peace. We shall continue to insist, as we have historically, on the right of each member to choose for himself whether to declare his position as a combatant, a non-combatant, or a conscientious objector.”

Although Alexander follows the broader list of factors identified by Jay Beaman in accounting for the demise of pacifism within the AG, and adds to the list the flat out post-1967 promotion of the AG leadership of military service in a variety of its publications, Alexander has brought a fresh perspective on a major force in the demise of AG pacifism in the way he has framed the parallel strains of AG theological belief affirming the “unswerving loyalty to the government,” on the one hand, and “conscientiously objecting to participate in war and armed resistance which involves the actual destruction of human life,” on the other hand. When I read again the same lead phrase of “loyalty to the government of the United States” in the 1917 resolution and the 1967 resolution, “the light bulb” went on in making some sense out of the fact that the majority of the AG voting membership believed—mistakenly, I believe—that the 1967 statement that allowed for freedom of choice on military service was consistent historically with the way the 1917 statement was actually practiced by the AG faithful in “loyalty to the government to the United States.” That “unswerving loyalty” strain of thought in AG psychology that was the lead phrase in both 1917 and 1967 resolutions became the defining factor in the attempt to legitimate the transition from pacifism to the individual freedom of choice. As Alexander notes, from 1941-1967, “The ethic of nonviolence among member and ministers began to diminish and the preponderance of articles in the Pentecostal Evangel on issues of war and peace were ‘fighting the battle against conscience with realism’” (200-253).

The second contribution of Alexander's study is found in his analysis of the changes in theological beliefs and philosophical underpinnings on the war and peace issue that transpired between 1917 and the 1967 statements on military service. Alexander observes that the rationale in support of pacifism that was articulated in the 1917 resolution was based exclusively on the Bible, especially the teachings of Jesus and concluded with the resolution that "armed resistance which involves the actual destruction of human life . . . is contrary to our view of the clear teaching of the inspired Word of God, which is the sole basis of our faith." In contrast, Alexander notes that in the 1967 statement, "The theology reflected in the resolution centered on national loyalties and the authority of individual conscience." He notes that ". . . the framers of this resolution and article made no appeal to Scripture or to Jesus. Not a single verse or reference is employed. The only reference to God is qualified by the fact that God required loyalty to the government because God ordained it." Alexander could not resist stating the irony that "The individual freedom of conscience. . . had not justified the consumption of alcohol, smoking, gambling, dancing, or women wearing slacks. But the authority of one's own conscience served as the trustworthy principle that allowed killing in war."

While Alexander has pointed to the theological and philosophical shifts from a Christian community-formed "conscience" in 1917 to an individually-based "realism" in 1967, the characterization of Christian realism may be a bit too generous to identify the rationale in support of the individual freedom of choice on military service. In fact, the AG constituency provided no philosophical theology that grounds the issue of participation in war in a conception based on human nature, its sinful will to power, and its capacity to fuel the national interest of countries. There is no just war theory that was adopted by the AG at the time pacifism was abandoned as the fellowship's normative position, a critique that Alexander makes. As a consequence, there is no teaching from the AG church to provide some kind of guide for young people to distinguish between just and unjust wars. As Alexander rightly points out, AG believers are left to their own conscience without the capacity to make discriminating judgments about participating or not participating in particular wars. I think of the model of Reinhold Niebuhr who was a pacifist in the Fellowship of Reconciliation during WWI but adopted Christian realism with its just war tradition during WWII; he said he did so because "History has Overtaken Us." Niebuhr argued with passion that the way to stop the Axis will-to-power which

seemed to possess a ravenous appetite in conquering its neighbors through the brutality of war was to create an Allied will-to-power to stop the injustice and restore a balance of power among nations. Instead of taking a journey like Niebuhr took, AG young people when facing a call to war are left only with their own individual conscience as a basis for their decision-making, a consequence that Alexander deeply laments.

The third contribution that Alexander makes in his study is profoundly personal and courageous. In his afterword in the book, Alexander tells his readership about his personal faith journey as a first-generation Pentecostal “crucifist” in which peace-making and justice-seeking are a way of life. Alexander explains that a “crucifist” is “a follower of Jesus’ way of nonviolent, cross-carrying, enemy love.” Thus, this identification is more of a holistic term than the term pacifist which focuses primarily on a position about participation in war rather than a comprehensive way of life that is centered in Jesus and therefore that also includes conscientious objection to participation in war and the destruction of human life. He tells the story of his journey that led to a non-renewal of his Faculty contract at an Assemblies of God university after serving there for nine years. His positions on American nationalism and warfare did him in, although he understood that his positions on Americanism, war and peace would ultimately lead to a question of his institutional fit even though he was a credentialed AG minister.

Probably the most defining moment in Alexander’s pacifist journey came in a chapel service at a time after the towers were hit on 9.11.01. There was a surge of patriotic nationalism and violent rage that was pervading the campus community. He admonished the University President as they walked together to the chapel, “We have to remember who *we* are, we’re followers of Jesus; we have to remember who *we* are. A lot of people will be saying a lot of things that are hateful; we have to remember who *we* are.” Professor Alexander sat in the chapel and prayed and squirmed in his seat listening to apocalyptic, prophetic fulfillment talk about “the Middle East, the rapture, Israel, the battle of Armageddon, tribulation, the antichrist, the United States, patriotism, war, and Muslims.”

The chapel was filled with students and Faculty colleagues with about 1,000 people in attendance. After about one and a half hours, he finally went forward believing that he was prompted by the “leading of the Holy Spirit,” asked the President if he could speak, and with microphone in hand he began. He admonished everyone to view

America through the eyes of the rest of the world and to recognize that this tragedy is beyond an American tragedy; it is a human tragedy. He critiqued American greed and hypocrisy and urged the members of his audience to be followers of Jesus and to make sure that their allegiances, loyalties, purposes, visions and dreams are lined up with “what God wants us to be.” The remarks he made that day are found in the book transcribed from an audio CD of the chapel service. He recognized that he spent most of his “capital” that day; he wrote, “That was my coming out of the closet as a peacemaker at my alma mater in front of all the people who had educated, loved, and hired me. There were faculty who did not talk to me for years, and some who tried to get me fired.” Even so, Alexander’s identity as a “crucifist” was crystallized that day.

Alexander went on to be a co-founder of the organization, Pentecostals and Charismatics for Peace and Justice (PCPJ). Alexander is hopeful that PCPJ can provide the social network that will stimulate “the reemergence and resurgence of a powerful Pentecostal peace-with-justice witness that blesses the world far beyond what we could ever imagine” (350). This book is a must read for Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Christians of all stripes who are desirous to join in giving an authentic witness to God’s love, justice, and peacemaking in the world.

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