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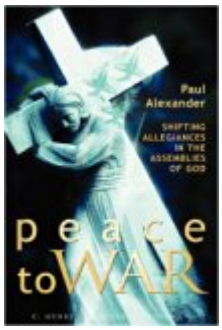
Paul Alexander. *Peace to War: Shifting Allegiances in the Assemblies of God.* Telford: Cascadia Publishing House, 2009. 429 pp. $26.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-931038-58-4.



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Commissioned by Gene Mills (Florida State University)

Peace to War covers the Assemblies of God church's changing position on Christians and war. Founded April 2, 1914, in Hot Springs, Arkansas, the Assemblies of God now comprises about 7 percent of global Pentecostalism (the church counts approximately forty-eight million globally, with about three million of that figure in the United States), which makes it the largest Pentecostal denomination. Paul Alexander develops a historical and a theological thesis. The historical argument is that between 1917 and 1967 the American Assemblies of God changed its official teaching on war from "absolute pacifism to authority of the individual conscience" (p. 30). Theologically, the book argues that pacifism is the appropriate Pentecostal response to war. Although Alexander commends pacifism as the proper Christian reaction to issues of force and violence, he is unenthusiastic about the word "pacifist" because it has become synonymous with passive and anemic. His preferred alternatives to pacifism are "crucifism" and "crucifist." These words connect more directly to Jesus's exhortation to bear the cross and thus inspire a more active and vigorous posture for peace proponents.

Structurally, the book develops in three phases. The first chapter sets forth the key issues, questions, and synopsis of the history of pacifism in the Pentecostal movement. Chapters 2 through 7 comprise the second part and provide a detailed history of the Assemblies of God's relationship to pacifism. Chapter 2 draws out the broader historical context of the Assemblies of God--racism and segregation, social exploitation of the working classes and economic opportunism of the industrialists, and the imperial expansion of the state that characterized national life in the early twentieth century. Christian attitudes toward the changes during this period ranged from premillennial pessimism toward the government, efforts to weld traditional evangelical faith with social reform, to outright efforts to Christianize America through legislation (e.g., Prohibition). As the First World War commenced and the prospects for American involvement loomed larger, acrimonious diatribes were exchanged between conser-

vatives who tended to be antiwar and liberal theologians who were more prone to a pro-war stance. Most of these groups, however, rallied behind the war effort once American troops were fully engaged in 1918. The exceptions were the political pacifists and the peace churches, which remained faithful to their pacifist perspective and opposed the war. Most Pentecostals were among the latter group.

Chapter 3 identifies the theological antecedents and sources of early Pentecostal pacifism. The early Pentecostals were significantly influenced by the pacifistic perspectives of the Quaker and Wesleyan-Holiness movements. Sharing with their Quaker and Wesleyan-Holiness counterparts, the Pentecostals believed that the restoration of the church according to the New Testament vision of Christlike holiness and goal of worldwide evangelism was incompatible with war-making. Christ called his disciples to love their enemies and lay down their lives for others and not to slaughter them on the battlefield. Eschewing violence was the practical manifestation of Pentecostalism's Jesus-centered theology.

Chapters 4 and 5 detail the Assemblies of God's position on war and posture toward the government from 1914 to 1940. During the First World War and through the interwar years, the Assemblies of God officially affirmed pacifism and its members practiced it, which is indicative in the disproportionate number of Pentecostals detained at Fort Leavenworth as conscientious objectors relative to their percentage of the population in the United States. At the same time, the Assemblies of God remained loyal to the government, embraced and ministered to military personnel, and granted conscientious combatant participation in war to its members.

Chapters 6 and 7 chart the gradual erosion and eventual repudiation of pacifism by the Assemblies of God. During World War II, the Assemblies of God, both in its published opinions and member participation in military service, shifted from pacifism to support of the Allied war effort. This period also witnessed the emergence of a more strident patriotism in place of the more traditional stance of loyalty to the government that did not include support for its war efforts. Patriotism and recognition and promotion of combatant participation in war continued to gain prominence in the Assemblies of God churches over the course of the Korean War, Vietnam War, and Cold War. The 1967 General Council of the Assemblies of God formally ratified its move away from pacifism by altering its statement on military service. Essentially, it replaced the ***institutional*** affirmation of noncombatant and conscientious objector status with a statement that made participation in combat a matter of ***individual*** conscience. Alexander concludes that the authority of scripture and Jesus gave way to a "theology ... centered on national loyalties and the authority of individual conscience" (p. 238). According to Alexander, the reasons for the shift away from pacifism in the Assemblies of God lie in its increasing association with mainstream American culture and Evangelicalism. After the official change in 1967, the Assemblies of God increasingly adopted Americanism, which entailed a vigorous assimilation of American values, especially as represented by the Republican Party, and exuberant support of U.S. military personnel and interventions.

The final two chapters provide critical interaction with and theological assessment of the Assemblies of God's relationship to pacifism. Chapter 8 chronicles the scholarly analysis of Pentecostal pacifism. Chapter 9 sets forth Alexander's theological appraisal of the Assemblies of God's disavowal of pacifism. Although the shortest chapter, it delivers the strongest punch. In brief, Alexander maintains that following Jesus means loving people not killing them. Moreover, though he has the early history of the Assemblies of God on his side, Alexander believes the theological argument for crucifism is paramount. The Assemblies of God's effort to achieve acceptance by mainstream American culture and Evangelicalism

was ultimately a Faustian bargain that resulted in the loss of their "Spirit-empowered message of love for a more popular and less critical Americanized religion" (p. 330). Furthermore, the denomination exchanged the ethics of Jesus for the values of conservative politics and American nationalism. He ends the chapter with a call for the Assemblies of God to re-embrace not only its historic position on war, but more important, the Spirit empowered way of Jesus Christ as well.

This book has several compelling features. Alexander meticulously builds his case on a thorough investigation and documentation of Pentecostal primary sources. He also brings to light an often neglected part of Pentecostalism, which, given the tendency of contemporary Pentecostal churches to align politically with Republican politicians and hawkish attitudes toward the deployment of military force, many Pentecostal church members will find surprising and maybe even disturbing. An additional appealing aspect of the book is that Alexander's telling of the history of the Assemblies of God and pacifism is also the story of a personal religious awakening. His research and writing on Pentecostal pacifism was a way of working out his faith. Thus, this book is about discipleship, the original and ultimate purpose of theology. Moreover, whether or not one finds his vision of crucifism convincing, his personal courage to remain faithful to what he believes is the way of Jesus should be commended (he lost a longtime faculty post at an Assemblies of God university for his advocacy of crucifism).

In respect to the theological thesis of the book, I have two comments. First, what are people in general and Christians in particular supposed to do in a world in which others are more than willing to kill, torture, exploit, and enslave them? It seems mendacious to opt for the position that military action is legitimate for those who are not Christians, but unacceptable for Christians. Pacifism, at least in Western states, seems to entail the pacifist's luxury of protesting violence while conveniently standing behind those who bear arms in their defense. Moreover, if pacifism is primarily the posture of the community of Jesus, then the result is a two-tiered ethics system. Members of the Christian community should follow the Prince of Peace, but those who are not Christians are free to follow Mars, the god of war. I am not convinced that Alexander thinks this way, but the emphasis on the Christian community as a peace witness can give that impression.

Second, Alexander's point seems unassailable that the example of Jesus, at least in the gospels, provides little basis for war. Yet, in the final biblical book of Revelation, the Prince of Peace returns as the Man of War to vanquish the forces of evil in ways that are less than pacific. The Old Testament also frequently portrays war as the mechanism through which God exercises providence in human history--the conquest of Canaan being both an illustrative and troubling case in point. Thus, the biblical canon as a whole seems to be more accepting of the use of force than if one focuses specifically on the gospels. In the end, both pacifists and conscientious combatants can perhaps find support for their position in the Bible.

Overall, this is a fine example of historical scholarship and an inspiring theological case for pacifism both in terms of the theological argument and the personal story that undergirds it. This book would make an excellent text in classes on Christian ethics and treating the relationship between the church and culture and/or state. It is also written in way that it is accessible for nonacademics, yet is nonetheless a sophisticated historical argument.

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