

Speaking in the Tongues of Nonviolence: American Pentecostals, Nationalism, and Pacifism

Paul Alexander

Key words: Conscientious objection, nationalism, pacifism, pentecostalism, war

Abstract: I analyze early pentecostals who critiqued nationalism and war in order to encourage and refine a contemporary pentecostal peace witness. First, I relate the anti-classist, anti-racist, and anti-sexist protest theology of glossolalia at Azusa Street and beyond to internationalism (anti-nationalism) and pacifism (anti-war). Second, I reveal the significant critique of nationalism (ethnos) that existed among first generation pentecostals and show that it correlates with a critique of racism (ethnos). Third, by using primary sources I suggest that pacifism constituted a deeply and broadly integrated belief in the early American Assemblies of God in particular and in pentecostalism in general. Finally, based on this "usable past" I present a constructive sketch of what a 21st century prophetic, nonnationalistic, nonviolent, Spirit empowered peace witness might entail.

Nationalism and the body of God form a lethal combination. It leads me to think of one of the most violent games ever invented, and one of my favorites, an entertainment that unites emperor and clergy, military and peasantry in an attempt to defeat the enemy and perpetuate one's own kingdom. The game, of course, is chess. The bishops, the representatives of the people of God, stand closest to the king and queen. They are even closer than the cavalry (the knights) or the siege towers (the rooks). The church entangled in the empire, seeking first its kingdom, striking at an angle for the color of its national kin. Chess is a great game, but it portrays a rather unfaithful theology and practice.

We are now at the one hundredth anniversary of the of the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, California (1906-1909). Pastored by William Seymour (1870-1922), an African-American from Louisiana, this revival greatly influenced the birth of the Pentecostal Charismatic movement that now includes almost six hundred million people around the world, representing over twenty five percent of global Christianity.¹ But what is the nature of the relationship between pentecostalism and the nationalistic violence represented in the game of chess?²

¹"Global Statistics" in Stanley M. Burgess, ed., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 287. Statisticians estimated the global Pentecostal and Charismatic constituency at 523,767,390

Robert Beckford, lecturer in African Diasporan Religions and Cultures at the University of Birmingham (UK), has noted that “at the heart of the birth of Pentecostalism was an anti-oppressive focus expressed in *glossolalia* – speaking in tongues.... William Seymour linked *glossolalia* with social transformation [and his] church developed an anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-classist ministry.”³ Although scholars dispute the extent and duration of these characteristics,⁴ Beckford’s general description is accurate. I would like to explore whether we can add anti-nationalistic and anti-violence to this first generation pentecostal impulse. Do American pentecostals have the historical and theological resources to critique nationalism and war? If, as Beckford claims, “Azusa street teaches us that the Spirit of God is a force for challenging social structures that discriminate in the world today” and that it was a “socio-political happening with profound effects for ecclesiology” then we will find early pentecostal voices prophetically critiquing nations and their wars. Many first generation pentecostals had interethnic worship when doing so could get them killed, they promoted women in ministry and leadership before women could vote in the United States, and they opposed war vociferously even though it meant they were tarred, feathered, jailed, and shot.

Harvey Cox, Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School, has observed that in U.S. pentecostal circles speaking in tongues often functions simply as performance rather than as “protest or as prophecy.”⁵ The chess set often lacks Spirit empowered prophets who protest and provide an alternative to nationalistic and violent civil religion. Yet many first generation pentecostals believed that God had poured out the Spirit to create just such a community to speak truth to power. Though not always seen as a gift either to the church or the world, perhaps the pentecostal movement can offer something in these days of imperialism and war.

Such a contribution must include a critique of the power and place of nationalism (*ethnos*, ethnicity) and patriotism (*pater/patria*, father/fatherland) while encouraging the nonviolent faithfulness of the church. Early pentecostals addressed these identity challenging and character transforming issues by nuancing patriotism and criticizing nationalism, “Christians must lose their

in 2000 with an expectation of 811,551,600 by 2025. A steady growth rate would place the 2006 population at approximately 592,835,600.

²From this point forward I will use the term “pentecostal” (lower case “p”) to refer to both Pentecostals and Charismatics as those who trust the gifts and enabling of the Spirit and the authority of Scripture to help them follow Jesus.

³Robert Beckford, “Back to My Roots: Speaking in Tongues for a New *Ecclesia*” (The Bible in TransMission, Summer 2000), 2. Also see *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000).

⁴See Mel Robeck, *The Azusa Street Revival and Mission* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), Estrelida Alexander, *The Women of Azusa Street* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), and Leslie Callahan, “Fleshly Manifestations: Charles Fox Parham’s Quest for the Sanctified Body,” Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2002.

⁵Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 297.

national preferences and prejudices.... God's people must all get to this place, where national prejudices must die and where the glory of God only will be sought."⁶ The (predominantly Anglo) Assemblies of God (AOG) and the (predominantly African-American) Church of God in Christ (COGIC), along with the majority of pentecostal denominations, believed that Christians should not "participate in war or armed resistance which involves the actual destruction of human life since this is against the clear teachings of the inspired Word of God which is the sole basis of our faith."⁷ I long to draw from the wells of pentecostalism to discover, explore, encourage, and refine a prophetic community that can withstand the fierce gales of nationalistic pride and militarism. I hope to show that pentecostals can witness to the conviction that the holy Christian *ethnos* transcends not only race, gender, and culture, but is also transnational and peaceful, thus embodying in both belief and practice the nonnationalistic and nonviolent theology of many early Christian communities and many first generation pentecostals.

*FIRST GENERATION PENTECOSTAL CRITIQUES OF
NATIONALISM AND RACISM (ethnos)*

Ethnos means "people, nation"⁸ or "people of the same race or nationality who share a distinctive culture." First generation pentecostals believed that Christians are, according to 1 Peter 2:9, a holy *ethnos*/ethnicity/race/nation/people made up of all *ethne*/ethnicities/races/nations/peoples. This prioritizing of the kingdom of God subordinated other *ethnos* claims such as race or nation. Therefore, since nationalism is "devotion to the interests or culture of a particular nation [*ethnos*]" and racism is "the notion that one's own ethnic stock [*ethnos*] is superior,"⁹ many pentecostals rejected both these forms of ethnocentrism when they were used to justify the domination of others.

Grant Wacker, Professor of Church History at Duke University, recognizes rightly that the majority of early pentecostals believed the "Christians' fundamental allegiance should never be lodged with the state since the state was an earthly fabrication. Like the Tower of Babel, the state signaled human presumption at best, the enthronement of godlessness, immorality, greed, and violence at worst."¹⁰ First generation pentecostals like William Burton

⁶J. Roswell Flower, "What Will the Harvest Be? Article in Last Week's Evangel Receiving Just Criticism," *Weekly Evangel*, 14 August 1915, 2.

⁷"The Pentecostal Movement and the Conscripton Law," *The Weekly Evangel*, 4 August 1917, 6.

⁸Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 381-383.

⁹*American Heritage Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985).

¹⁰Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2001), 217. He employs "state" to represent political and governmental structures, "land" to represent the cultural and emotional symbols associated with place, and "nation" to embrace both.

McCafferty (1889-1963), a charter member of the AOG and a conscientious objector from Texas, preached in 1915 that “Our citizenship is not of this world, our citizenship is in heaven. Phil. 3:20. We belong to the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world are not allied. . . .”¹¹ By placing kingdom citizenship above American citizenship McCafferty provided a rationale for denying both the state’s claims to the ultimate allegiance of Christians and the unfaithful practices that follow. Pentecostal pacifists often appealed to the transformation of one’s identity and citizenship to explain their nonviolence.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) charged that Bishop C.H. Mason (1866-1961), founder of the COGIC, “openly advised against registration [for the draft] and made treasonable and seditious remarks against the United States government.”¹² The FBI believed Mason could be convicted of treason, obstructing the draft, and giving aid and comfort to the enemy. Both the FBI and the War Department opened files on Mason and the COGIC, and Mason interviewed with multiple agents. The *Vicksburg Post* ran an article claiming that Mason’s preaching to resist the draft led the state adjutant general to declare that it was virtually impossible to get African-Americans in Lexington to respond. Mason professed loyalty to the United States but would not let it dominate or silence his kingdom citizenship, even in the midst of intense patriotism during World War I.

Frank Bartleman (1871-1936) condemned specific injustices of many nations, from England and America to Germany, Russia, Italy, France, and Japan, declaring that “We speak without fear or favor. . . . We favor no country.”¹³ His Christian citizenship provided the critical distance needed to call out the sins of all nations. Lest anyone question his lack of loyalty to the government of the United States, he provided his attitude toward national fidelity. “Patriotism has been fanned into a flame. The religious passion has been invoked, and the national gods called upon for defense in each case. What blasphemy!”¹⁴ He continued his tirade against nationalism, defended the disenfranchised, and added a call to repentance, “It is not worth while for Christians to wax warm in

¹¹Burt McCafferty, “Should Christians Go To War?” *The Christian Evangel*, 16 January 1915, 1. McCafferty eventually served as a professor and Academic Dean of Southwestern Bible Institute (now Southwestern Assemblies of God University) in Waxahachie, Texas from 1931-1963.

¹²Agent M.M. Schaumburger to Bureau of Investigation, September 24, 1917, Old German case file 144128, Record Group 65, Investigation Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, National Archives. Cited in Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., “Race and Conscientious Objection in World War I: The Story of the Church of God in Christ,” in *Proclaim Peace: Christian Pacifism From Unexpected Quarters*, edited by Theron Schlabach and Richard Hughes (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 61.

¹³Frank Bartleman, “The European War,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 10 July 1915, 3.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

patriotism over this world's situation. . . . American capitalists, leaders and manufacturers are as deep in the mud as the others. . . ."¹⁵

Bartleman believed that "there is no righteous nation in the earth today" and blamed "nominal Christianity," the opposite of radical prophetic pentecostal Christianity, for the disastrous atrocities perpetrated by America. "We have killed off about all of our American Indians. What we have not killed outright we have starved. . . . We have stolen the land from the North American Indians. . . . Our wrong to the black people was avenged in blood. What will the next be?"¹⁶

Stanley Frodsham (1882-1969), editor of *The Pentecostal Evangel* for nearly thirty years, believed that "when one comes into that higher kingdom and becomes a citizen of that 'holy nation' (1 Peter 2:9), the things that pertain to earth should forever lose their hold, even that natural love for the nation where one happened to be born, and loyalty to the new King should swallow up all other loyalties."¹⁷ Some pentecostals saw the slavery, genocide, and greed in the American experiment clearly and attempted to speak prophetically about it. These pentecostals were not the bishops allied with the kings, using the peasants on the front lines to advance the empire.

Did critiques of nationalism correspond to the interracial impulse in early pentecostalism? Frodsham linked it explicitly, "National pride, like every other form of pride, is abomination in the sight of God. And pride of race must be one of the all things that pass away when one becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus."¹⁸ Multiple nationalities as well as ethnicities worshipped at Azusa Street and scholars agree that at least some interracial character existed in the early pentecostal movement.¹⁹ But many outsiders, and some pentecostal insiders such as Charles Parham, criticized this aspect of pentecostalism as "rank fanaticism" and tried not to care "if blacks and whites join together and shout themselves into insensibility."²⁰ A headline of one newspaper cried "COLOR LINE OBLITERATED: WHITE AND NEGRO FANATICS HOLD SERVICES."²¹ Frank Bartleman, who critiqued both nationalism and war, rejoiced that at the Azusa Street revival "the color line was washed away in the blood [of Jesus]."

¹⁵Frank Bartleman, "What Will the Harvest Be?" *The Weekly Evangel*, 7 August 1915, 1.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷Stanley H. Frodsham, "Our Heavenly Citizenship," *The Weekly Evangel*, 11 September 1915, 3. Grant Wacker notes that pentecostals often argued that "the United States did not deserve Christians' allegiance" and that "no state, including the United States, had ever been Christian." They preached that the greatest spiritual evil of the age was "immoderate patriotism" that led to "national sectarianism," and that Fourth of July celebrations were wastes of God's money. Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 218-219.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹In April 1914 around 300 Anglo ministers left the Church of God in Christ (which had been a multi ethnic denomination since at least 1907) and officially formed the General Council of the Assemblies of God in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

²⁰Whittier (*Calif.*) *Daily News*, September 8, 1906, p. 2. Quoted in Wacker, 228. Parham was a supporter of the Ku Klux Klan.

²¹*Portland Oregonian*, December 31, 1906, p. 4. Quoted in Wacker, 229.

But whatever existed of interracial worship, pulpit sharing, and multi ethnic fellowship succumbed to accommodation to the greater segregated society, and corresponded to the erosion of the ability of American pentecostals to resist nationalism.

However, some pentecostals distanced themselves from their nationality (*ethnos*) enough to critique it and from their race (*ethnos*) enough to make room for the other. These theological insights, particularly the priority of kingdom citizenship, led to prophetic politics and should be integral to pentecostalism in the twenty first century and beyond. Most may agree that racism has no place in the body of God. I would like to reiterate, along with my ancestors in the faith, neither does nationalism.

FIRST GENERATION PENTECOSTAL CRITIQUES OF WAR

“The War Church is a Harlot Church!”²² So says an early twentieth century pentecostal preacher. This statement offends both the church which supports war and prostitutes. It echoes the Hebrew Scriptures’ comparisons of the unfaithful people of God with people who sell their bodies for sex, and his critique declared that the people of God had sold out, had prostituted themselves, when they supported the European War in 1917 and 1918. The contemporary American church can learn from this first generation prophetic peace witness, but perhaps without the harsh language.

J. W. Welch (1858-1939), the General Superintendent of the AOG during World War I (1915-20, 1923-25), expressed their official opinion regarding military service. He claimed they tried “to interpret as clearly as possible what the Scriptures teach upon the subject, as we have from the beginning declared the Bible to be our only rule of faith and practice.”²³ He told the constituency that they should willingly serve in any capacity that did not require killing and that the idea of pentecostal men bearing arms was appalling:

*From the very beginning, the movement has been characterized by Quaker principles. The laws of the Kingdom, laid down by our elder brother, Jesus Christ, in His Sermon on the Mount, have been unqualifiedly adopted, consequently the movement has found itself opposed to the spilling of the blood of any man, or of offering resistance to any aggression. Every branch of the movement, whether in the United States, Canada, Great Britain or Germany, has held to this principle.*²⁴

²²Frank Bartleman, “War and the Christian” (n.p: by the author, circa 1922).

²³J. W. Welch, “An Explanation,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 19 May 1917, 8.

²⁴“The Pentecostal Movement and the Conscriptio Law,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 4 August 1917, 6. Emphasis added.

The conscientious objection articles in the *Evangel* up to this point outnumbered the combatant participation articles by more than ten to one so the above statement reflected a strong conviction within the AOG.

WHEREAS we, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, believe in implicit obedience to the Divine commands . . . to "Follow peace with all men," (Heb. 12:14) . . . "Love your enemies," (Matt. 5:44); etc., and

WHEREAS these and other Scriptures have always been accepted and interpreted by our churches as prohibiting Christians from shedding blood or taking human life;

*THEREFORE we, as a body of Christians . . . declare we cannot conscientiously participate in war and armed resistance which involves the actual destruction of human life. . . .*²⁵

Most pentecostal denominations, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, officially adopted this position during and after World War I. The U.S. AOG did not change their position until 1967 and the COGIC has not yet changed theirs.

William McCafferty steadfastly opposed combatant participation in warfare and based his argument on references to Jesus, scriptures supporting nonviolence, spiritual warfare, and heavenly citizenship:

*. . . the disciples asked Jesus, 'Lord, shall we smite with the sword?' . . . What was the answer of Christ to the disciples (Christians) to this question? (Matth. 26:51) 'Put up again they [sic] sword into his place.' This is what God is saying to the Christians of today, 'Ye followers of the Prince of Peace, disarm yourselves' for 'the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.' (the musket, sword, siege gun or cannon). . . .*²⁶

McCafferty did not allow accusations of irresponsibility to dissuade him from the serious application of the teachings and example of Jesus. Although it was "natural" to defend oneself, followers of Jesus should do what Jesus himself did:

*The argument that we must go to war in behalf of the weaker nation because of its being in the right, is not consistent with the doctrines of Christ. It is also against the teaching of Christ to fight in self-defense. 'For even hereunto were we called, because Christ also suffered leaving us an example that we should follow His steps, who did no sin (violence, Isa. 53:9) who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. . . .'*²⁷

²⁵Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

²⁶Burt McCafferty, "Should Christians Go To War?" *The Christian Evangel*, 16 January 1915, 1.

²⁷Ibid. McCafferty appealed to the life of Jesus as an example to be followed. In so doing, he aligned with the type of pacifism Yoder called "the imitation of Jesus." "Its content is

Frank Bartleman voiced the concerns of the marginalized in society and condemned war while proclaiming that only hypocrites pray for peace while helping the war to continue:

*The nation, the voters, the church members, could stop this if they would insist upon it . . . [but] we are willing to receive these millions of blood money. We had better pluck out the stars from our flag and instate dollar marks in their place. . . . We will have nations of murderers after this war. A generation with their hands stained with the blood of other human beings. . . .*²⁸

He presented the selfish motives and horrific results of war in such ways that made it completely incompatible with Christian discipleship.

Samuel Booth-Clibborn (b. 1867) employed a Jesus centered approach to show the absolute nature of Christian nonviolence. He separated Christians from “Pacifists” who used mere politics and “Socialists” who, although their “zeal for peace” was admired, worshipped materialism.²⁹ In the context of World War I he addressed his message to Christians:

*Yes, us Christians, who have been preaching this Gospel of LOVE, JOY, and PEACE so loud and so long. Now that it has come to practicing what we preach, now the fiery test will be applied—are we willing to go through for Jesus? Find me in the New Testament where Christ ever sent His followers on such a mission? On the contrary He sent them out to save men—not to butcher them like cattle. . . . No! As far as the Christian is concerned, the “eye for an eye” system has given place to the “Turn to him the other cheek also” of Matt. 5:39-44.*³⁰

He praised the faithfulness of early Christians and radical movements who did not fight with violence and who did not succumb to patriotism. He wanted pentecostals to stay true to their prophetic, Spirit empowered, nonviolent origins.

not abstract commands but rather the life and word of Jesus. His command and example are to be followed without calculation of social possibilities. . . . It does not expect widespread acceptance, but neither does it acquiesce in the world’s noncompliance with Jesus’ norm.” John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless: Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1992), 120.

²⁸Bartleman, “The European War,” 3.

²⁹Samuel H. Booth-Clibborn, “The Christian and War. Is it too Late?,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 28 April 1917, 5. Also see Samuel H. Booth-Clibborn, *Should A Christian Fight? An Appeal to Christian Young Men of All Nations* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, n.d.), 83.

³⁰*Ibid.* For another way to interpret the issue of “eye for an eye” and “turn the other cheek” see “If Abraham is our Father” in John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1998), 91-111.

However, we must recognize the contrasting interpretations of early pentecostal pacifism. Grant Wacker and Murray Dempster have suggested pacifism was a minority position in the early AOG. Wacker states that his own “interpretation runs closer to the older, prerevisionist literature which (for different reasons) minimized the breadth and depth of pacifism in the tradition.”³¹ Dempster decided “the loss of pacifism seems almost incredible within such a short time-frame if pacifism was the majority position among Pentecostals.”³² But AOG pacifism withstood two World Wars and persisted even while numerous other denominations changed their position. The following conversation outlines key elements of my proposition that the majority in the early AOG were pacifists.

Grant Wacker proposed that the AOG only “permitted a variety of views in its official publication until 1917, when the United States entered the conflict” and that “after May [1917], no more articles supporting pacifism appeared in official publications.”³³ However, extensive evidence shows that the AOG published articles and encouraged conscientious objection and noncombatant service during American participation in World War I,³⁴ immediately after the war ended, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and into the early 1940s.³⁵

³¹Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 347.

³²Murray W. Dempster, “‘Crossing Borders’: Arguments Used by Early American Pentecostals in Support of the Global Character of Pacifism.” *European Pentecostal Theological Association Bulletin* 10:2 (1991): 63-80.

³³Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 243, 245.

³⁴The following authors argued for pacifism and conscientious objection in 1917 and 1918, during World War I. These were all printed in *The Weekly Evangel* (which later became *The Pentecostal Evangel*). Baron D’Estournelles de Constant, “The Sinister Education of War,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 20 January 1917, 2. “What is War?” *The Weekly Evangel*, 21 April 1917, 2. “The Crisis,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 21 April 1917, 7. Samuel H. Booth-Clibborn, “The Christian and War. Is it too Late?,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 28 April 1917, 5. “Compulsory Military Service: An English Conscientious Objector’s Testimony,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 28 April 1917, 7. Samuel H. Booth-Clibborn, “The Christian and War,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 19 May 1917, 4. J. W. Welch, “An Explanation,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 19 May 1917, 8. “The Pentecostal Movement and the Conscription Law,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 4 August 1917, 6. “The Pentecostal Movement and the Conscription Law,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 5 January 1918, 5. Oscar Barl, “Reports From the Field: Fort Riley, Kansas,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 19 October 1918, 14. A. B. Cox, “In Prison and Out Again,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 29 June 1918, 14. Arthur Sydney Booth-Clibborn, “Nigh, Even At The Doors,” 7 September 1918, 2.

³⁵The following authors argued for pacifism and conscientious objection in the years following World War I and during World War II. Lydia Hatfield, “The Law of Christ for Believers,” *The Christian Evangel*, 12 July 1919, 3. Arthur Sydney Booth-Clibborn, “European Pentecostal Notes,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 6 March 1920, 11. D. M. Panton, “Coming War,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 25 November 1922, 10. Stanley H. Frodsham, “From The Pentecostal Viewpoint,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 21 June 1924, 4. Donald Gee, “War, the Bible, and the Christian,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 8 November 1930, 6. Donald Gee, “War, the Bible, and the Christian,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 15 November

Furthermore, attempts to change the pacifist article in the constitution and bylaws of the AOG failed in the late 1940s and they did not finally eliminate it until 1967. This alone shows that pacifism was a significant part of the tradition and did not disappear during World War I.

Americans in the spring and summer of 1918 experienced the announcement of the Selective Service Act (May 18, 1917), the wide unveiling of the famous “I Want You” posters, and extremely high patriotism and popular support for the war. American flags draped buildings and avenues throughout the United States, yet the executive presbytery of the AOG could confidently proclaim that “the principles of the General Council were in opposition to war from its very beginning” and that “the General Council meets every requirement of the law relating to religious bodies . . . whose religious principles are opposed to participation in war.”³⁶ This witness by the AOG in the face of intense nationalism and support for war led the U.S. government to recognize it as a pacifist church, and the anti-combatant articles continued to outnumber significantly the pro-combatant articles.

Wacker also stated that “no one requested prayers for conscientious objectors.... One can only assume that they were either too few to count or that editors screened out such requests, knowing how most readers would react.”³⁷ Yet the April 28, 1917 edition carried exactly such a request and testimony of a Pentecostal conscientious objector.³⁸ Wacker reasons that published prayer requests for soldiers shows the lack of commitment to conscientious objection, yet the very issue he quotes (October 5, 1918) also contained Arthur Booth-Clibborn’s article advocating nonviolence, “the true conscientious objector is the sort of Christian who is gladly willing to go unarmed among the savage heathen, far beyond the ‘protecting’ reach of a six inch shell. He is equally willing to dispense with all ‘protection’ in ‘civilized lands.’”

E.N. Bell (1866-1923), General Superintendent of the AOG in 1914 and from 1920-1923, supported Christian participation in war more than any other leader in the early AOG. Wacker suggested that “there is no evidence that any elected official within the denomination publicly resisted Bell or his point of view.”³⁹ However, ample evidence indicates that at least thirteen different authors wrote articles in the *Evangel* that opposed Bell’s view. These included three General Superintendents, two General Secretaries who also served as

1930, 2. “War Behind the Smoke Screen,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 6 December 1930, 3. Ernest S. Williams, “In Case of War,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 19 March 1938, 4. “The Christian and War,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 29 July 1939, 2. “War and Christianity,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 23 September 1939, 10. Edmund B. Chaffee, “The Early Church and the Sword,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 27 January 1940, 3.

³⁶Ibid., 7.

³⁷Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 247.

³⁸“Compulsory Military Service: An English Conscientious Objector’s Testimony,” *The Weekly Evangel*, 7.

³⁹Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 247.

editors of *The Pentecostal Evangel* for a combined thirty-six years, and a college dean.⁴⁰

In fact, just shortly after Bell's death the "darkening clouds" of war prompted an article by elected leader and editor Stanley Frodsham in which he encouraged the constituents not to participate should the occasion arise. He quoted a Quaker resolution passed in Philadelphia that called violence "unchristian" and renounced "all participation in war."⁴¹ He then stated that:

*When the editor [Stanley Frodsham] of the paper [The Pentecostal Evangel] received a copy and handed the same to the Chairman of the Council [General Superintendent], Brother Welch expressed the warmest sympathy for the sentiments of the Friends. The statement on our Council minutes concerning nonparticipation in war is somewhat stronger than the above.*⁴²

Frodsham confidently and rightly recognized that the AOG had adopted a stricter stance against war than the Quakers themselves, and this in 1924. During wartime Bell cautiously supported the authority of the Christian's individual conscience to allow him to fight, but those preceding him and most of those following him for the next two decades consistently presented conscientious objection as the pentecostal path of faithfulness.

Even while Bell was General Superintendent several articles appeared promoting pacifism. In 1920 Arthur Booth-Clibborn claimed any participation in warfare cheapened both Calvary and Pentecost and was "a disaster of untold magnitude."⁴³ In 1922 the *Evangel* printed an article by D.M. Panton (1870-1955):

The Church's right attitude to war [is to] at least refuse to participate in war herself, and so make good her profession of peace. In the first two centuries of our era, so swordless was the Church of Christ, that Celsus, the Gnostic, in the first written attack ever made on the Christian Faith,

⁴⁰John W. Welch, Earnest S. Williams, and Donald Gee (in Great Britain) were superintendents and Burt McCafferty was a college dean and founding member of the Assemblies of God. Stanley Frodsham was elected as General Secretary (1916), Missionary Treasurer (1917), and then editor of all Assemblies of God publications (1921-1949). J. Roswell Flower, also a founding member of the Assemblies of God, served as its first Secretary-Treasurer (1914) and founder and first editor of the *Evangel* (1913-1920). He continued in elected leadership until 1959.

⁴¹Frodsham, "From The Pentecostal Viewpoint," 4.

⁴²Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁴³Arthur Booth-Clibborn, "European Pentecostal Notes," 11.

*grounds his censure on this very fact, and says: The State receives no help in war from the Christians. . . .*⁴⁴

Rather than Bell representing the attitude of the AOG and the pacifists constituting the minority that quickly disappeared, it seems that Bell was actually almost a lone voice who could not silence the conscientious objectors. Pacifist authors contributed articles to the primary AOG publications before, during, and after Bell's time in office.

In fact, the peace witness within the AOG existed right up to World War II. In 1938 the General Superintendent of the AOG in the United States reprinted the pacifist position statement, wanting to reflect on war "while free from the emotional effects of such events."⁴⁵ He desired to "assist the thinking of our youth in the event that they should be called for military service" and emphasized the nonviolence to which the AOG committed itself. "Could not such a one [if drafted] serve as a cook, a helper in a hospital, a stretcher carrier, a driver of an ambulance, or of a truck? There are many services which one could fulfill without 'armed resistance which involves the actual destruction of human life.'"⁴⁶

In 1939 the *Evangel* published articles declaring, "War does not fit in with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is in accordance with the Christian teaching of the first three centuries," and "it was usual for a soldier to lay down his sword when he accepted the truth of Christ. The declaration of faith has become historic: 'I am a Christian, and therefore I cannot fight.'"⁴⁷ A powerful promotion of conscientious objection by Donald Gee, the leader of the AOG in Britain, appeared in May, 1940.⁴⁸ The timing of this article by the American AOG revealed that they tried to hold to their peace witness, for one month later the American General Superintendent quoted the *Pacifist Handbook* as listing the AOG, with 173,349 members, as the third largest church in America that "opposed . . . war."⁴⁹ He then said, "The AOG may well be classified among the 'conscientious objectors.' It is doubtful that it could be classified among the unqualified 'pacifists,' since it is pledged to 'assist the Government in time of war in every way morally possible.'"⁵⁰ As late as October, 1940 the *Evangel* proclaimed that the "*universal feeling in the ranks of the AOG [is] that military service is incompatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that a Christian*

⁴⁴D. M. Panton, "Coming War," 10. Although Panton was not a pentecostal, Stanley Frodsham quoted his articles quite often from 1919-1925. Panton also founded and edited the British end times periodical *The Dawn*.

⁴⁵Williams, "In Case of War," 4.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷*The Pentecostal Evangel*, 29 July 1939, 2. *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 23 September 1939, 10.

⁴⁸Donald Gee, "Conscientious Objection," 4.

⁴⁹Ernest S. Williams, "The Conscientious Objector," 4. The two larger ones were the Churches of Christ (433,714) and the Brethren (192,588). The Quakers were listed as having 105,917 members.

⁵⁰Ibid.

cannot fully follow the teachings of his Lord and Master if he engages in armed conflict.”⁵¹ The author exhorted the constituency to be sure that they were true conscientious objectors and not just “hid[ing] behind the position of the church to which they belong.”⁵² He also recommended the *Pacifist Handbook*. The leaders of the AOG claimed that the “general belief” of AOG members in 1940 was that combatant participation in war was wrong.⁵³ The sincerity of this claim can be doubted, but the fact remains that they continued to teach conscientious objection.

In view of the significant participation of AOG men in World War II, the 1947 General Council appointed a committee to evaluate the appropriateness of the article on military service. They realized that their actions as a fellowship had not exactly corresponded to their stated position. However, the committee reported that they had not found it necessary to change the position:

*After considerable thought and prayer on this very vital subject, your committee feels that it will be unable to formulate an article on Military Service that will better represent the attitude of the AOG than that which is now a part of our General Council By-laws.*⁵⁴

They adopted this report *without debate*. One can doubt the extent of AOG pacifism in 1947, but the ministers and elected officials did not take this opportunity to change the pacifist doctrine. Perhaps at this point the fellowship was not ready to overturn the strongly worded Jesus focused scriptural support for nonviolence, or perhaps so much of the leadership still agreed with it that they did not want to change it. The fact that thousands of AOG men had chosen noncombatant service also meant that the statement did in fact still represent many Pentecostals. Regardless of the explanation, the AOG reaffirmed the pacifist doctrine in 1947 and it lasted another twenty years before the Vietnam era constituency finally deleted it.

My interpretation of pacifism within the early AOG in particular and early pentecostalism in general supports those scholars who argued that pacifism was the majority position.⁵⁵ First generation pentecostals wrote about and promoted

⁵¹“The Attitude of the General Council Toward Military Service,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 13. Emphasis added. Based upon the context of the other articles that supported noncombatant service, this article probably referred to combatant military service.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴*General Council Minutes*, 1947, 13.

⁵⁵Jay Beaman, *Pentecostal Pacifism: The Origin, Development, and Rejection of Pacific Belief Among the Pentecostals*. Forward by John Howard Yoder (Hillsboro, KS: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1989); Roger Robins, “A Chronology of Peace: Attitudes Toward War and Peace in the Assemblies of God: 1914-1918,” *Pneuma* 6 (Spring 1984): 3-25; Howard Kenyon, “An Analysis of Ethical Issues in the History of the Assemblies of God,” Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1988; Dwight J. Wilson, “Pacifism,” *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988).

conscientious objection in official publications quite often, the denominational leadership continued to support the stance publicly until at least 1941, and the constituency reaffirmed it in 1947. Furthermore, “the great majority”⁵⁶ of men in the third largest peace church in America (the AOG) serving as conscientious objectors and noncombatants during World War II is best explained by the interpretation that first generation Pentecostals integrated pacifism deeply and broadly into their worldview.

Perhaps this reading of AOG history can help provide pentecostals today with a “usable past” that is certainly not flawless but that can be legitimately employed to help them imagine pentecostal practices of faithfulness that are less nationalistic and less violent than the contemporary American AOG. Harold Bender (1897-1962), a prominent Mennonite theologian, and many of his students, one of whom was John Howard Yoder (1927-1997), provided just such a “usable past” for Mennonites by carefully studying sixteenth century Anabaptism.⁵⁷ Mark Thiessen Nation observes that this past was “usable” because “what was learned from the sixteenth century was to be used to bring critique and renewal to contemporary Mennonite life.”⁵⁸ Yoder himself explained that they had “gone beyond studying the Anabaptists and admiring their depth of conviction and reached the conclusion that on many points they were right and should be followed. The claim is not that the Anabaptist movement was infallible but that on a surprising number of points they were led to right answers which retain an exemplary value for our time.”⁵⁹ Yoder devoted his life to directing this message toward “both Mennonites and non-Mennonites.”⁶⁰

It should be clear from the previous examples of early pentecostal pacifism that a usable past does not have to be fabricated, it emerges from a careful examination of the primary sources. Furthermore, the early pentecostals, as fallible as they were, identified, adopted, and proclaimed better theology than worse when they took their stand as peace churches. I hope the revisionism that has perhaps reflected an embarrassment about the early peace witness can be corrected and that a theology of pentecostal peacemaking can emerge. To one beginning attempt we now turn.

⁵⁶Carl Brumback, *Suddenly . . . From Heaven* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), 312. J. Roswell Flower said “quite a large number” were COs. “The Plight of the Christian in the Present World War,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 12 June 1943, 6.

⁵⁷Albert N. Keim, *Harold S. Bender, 1897-1962* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 33.

⁵⁸Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 42.

⁵⁹John Howard Yoder, “What Are Our Concerns?” *Concern* 4 (June 1957): 20-21, as quoted in Nation, *John Howard Yoder*, 43.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

*PROPHETIC PATRIOTIC PEACEABLE PENTECOSTALISM, OR
SPIRIT EMPOWERED NONNATIONALISTIC NONVIOLENCE*

First generation pentecostals prophetically protested violence and nationalism. They combined the practice of biblical interpretation with social and political analysis. They focused on Jesus and highlighted the biblical themes of justice, peace, mission, the Kingdom of God, and Spirit empowerment. These contrasted with their analysis of the situation of the world: injustice, war, jingoism, and xenophobia. American pentecostals have the heritage and theological resources to enable a contemporary critique of nationalism and war, and should seek a post critical reappropriation of this counter cultural witness. I propose prophetic patriotic peaceable pentecostalism as a possible way forward.

First, the prophets of God name and expose the injustices and violence among the people of God and in all the nations of the world. *Vox populi* (the voice of the people) and *realpolitik* (pragmatic politics) do not determine their actions or their messages. They humbly and powerfully speak the words of God in a sinful world, and they often experience popularity problems. The kings tortured Jeremiah, the empire and the religious elite crucified Jesus, and Dr. King fell to an assassin's bullet.

A historically important passage of Scripture for pentecostals is Acts 2, part of which is a quotation from Joel, "in the last days I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy...." To prophesy, even to be eschatologically driven, is not to predict the imminent end of all things. It is to have the courage of the biblical prophets to speak out loud in public about the idolatry of nationalism, the hoarding of wealth at the expense of the poor, and the dependence on military strength and violence for security. This prophetic voice was one significant reason why pentecostals were disliked by both liberal and fundamentalist Christians in the early twentieth century. Pentecostals blamed compromising Christians for slavery, massacres of Native Americans, and war. The charismatic prophet today, if influenced by these aspects of early pentecostalism, would illuminate connections between the complicit church and the injustice and violence of the state. This places her in a dangerous tradition.

Second, American Christians of almost every political type argue about who is the most patriotic. Anti war folk say the most patriotic action that supports the military and the nation is not to have invaded Iraq in 2003 and to bring the troops home now (or soon). Those who support the war in Iraq say they are being patriotic by continuing the fight. Most want to be considered American patriots and cherish the label. But the prophetic, pentecostal Christian need not seek that title. Many early pentecostals would have said, "You think I am not patriotic; perhaps your patriotism is a worshipping of false gods." Nevertheless, patriotism is a powerful concept and can perhaps be put to work within the pentecostal prophetic tradition.

Pentecostals are called to be citizens and patriots in the Kingdom of God, a kingdom that, according to Christian claims, transcends and outlasts all other

kingdoms, empires, and states. Pentecostalism highlights this important biblical theme, and this is true freedom. It enables an internationalism not captivated by or subordinated to any particular nation. Prophetic patriotic pentecostals should be able to say again, “we speak without fear or favor, we favor no country,” for Yahweh is our God and God’s kingdom transcends and outlasts all other kingdoms and nations. To be eschatologically driven is to live now in Jesus’ “kingdom that will never pass away.”

I advocate neither withdrawal from society nor abdication of one’s ethnicity or nationality or gender, but a thoroughly Christian relationship to each. Miroslav Volf achieves a healthy balance with his explanation of distance and belonging.⁶¹ Like Abraham, we must depart our country (national loyalties), cut the ties that so profoundly define us, and become strangers.⁶² Neusner claims that the monotheistic traditions, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, “insist upon the triviality of culture and ethnicity, forming trans-national, or trans-ethnic transcendental communities.”⁶³ Like Muslims or Jews who place their faith above their nationality, we pentecostals should never be Nigerian, Mexican, Korean, British, or American first, for “at the very core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty, from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures.”⁶⁴ We distance ourselves from our natural birth and reprioritize genealogy for the sake of equality in Christ: “there is neither Jew nor Greek” so “faith in Christ replaces birth into a people.”⁶⁵

But departure and distance should not end in isolation or an empty identity or a disdain or contempt for one’s nationality, ethnicity, or gender. Instead, we are embodied selves of a particular hue, gender, ethnicity, and nationality. Our “bodily inscribed differences are brought together” in the pentecostal unity of the Spirit who “does not erase bodily inscribed differences” but grants access to all.⁶⁶ Our particularities and genealogy matter, even our nationality, but we should not ascribe any religious or holy significance to them. To de-sacralize, to take the “holy” away from one’s nation, especially America at this point in history, is radical and can sound treasonous. But it is necessary for ultimate allegiance belongs to God and *Christ’s* body is the Holy Nation (*ethnos hagion*).

How then do we live? Departure and distance are not spatial categories but “take place within the cultural space one inhabits.”⁶⁷ We belong within our particular cultures, nations, and ethnic groups, and do not have to leave them, but

⁶¹Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 35-55. Volf was reared in a pentecostal pacifist home in Croatia.

⁶²Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 39.

⁶³Jacob Neusner, “Christmas and Israel: How Secularism Turns Religion into Culture.” In *Christianity and Culture in the Crossfire*, edited by Daved Hoekema et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). As quoted in Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 39.

⁶⁴Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 40.

⁶⁵Ibid., 45.

⁶⁶Ibid., 48.

⁶⁷Ibid., 49.

they should never be the primary source of a Christian's identity. We must have belonging and distance. "Belonging without distance destroys" for if I'm so white that I can't love a black sister, I'm too white. If I'm so American that I can't love a Palestinian, I'm too American. As a pentecostal preacher might say, if I bleed red, white, and blue then I need a blood transfusion so I can bleed Jesus. "Distance without belonging isolates" and can degenerate into living a hateful and exclusive way of life that expresses unchristian vitriol toward one's own nation, ethnicity, or gender. Pentecostals should be truth tellers who speak as honestly as their perceptions allow about the good, the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful in any nation.

Third, pentecostals have a strong history of pacifism, though they shunned the word. They did not passively avoid conflict and they did risk their lives for the gospel, but they rejected the belief that Christians should kill for their own safety or for the preservation of their nations. Prophetic patriotic peacemaking is nonnationalistic and nonviolent, but not as a position on nation or war per se.⁶⁸ It proceeds from a conviction that the peasant from Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth, revealed the way of God to the world *and* that the Spirit of this God empowers the followers of Jesus to prophetically challenge idolatrous nationalism that requires the sacrifice of its enemies for its own continued existence.

John Howard Yoder noted that early pentecostal pacifism "wrought by the synergy of enthusiasm . . . did not mature into a solid ethical hermeneutic."⁶⁹ I agree and hope to rectify this, and I am not the first to call for the restoration of peacemaking among pentecostals.⁷⁰ However, I also agree with Yoder that pentecostalism calls the whole church to nonviolence in ways not readily accessible within the Historic/Living Peace Churches. Having drunk deeply at the pentecostal and Anabaptist wells, I am convinced that the most faithful and authentic pentecostal witness practices nonviolent and proactive peacemaking.⁷¹

The majority of pentecostals in the world are not United States citizens. For instance, only five percent of the forty eight million AOG adherents are Americans. This is significant because the majority of Anglo pentecostals in America practices nationalism and enthusiastically supports war.⁷² Yet the

⁶⁸See Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

⁶⁹Jay Beaman, *Pentecostal Pacifism*, iii-v.

⁷⁰See Joel Shuman, "Pentecost and the End of Patriotism: The Call for the Restoration of Pacifism among Pentecostal Christians," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9 (1996): 70-96.

⁷¹For a comparison of early Quakerism and early pentecostalism see Paul Alexander, "Historical and Theological Origins of Assemblies of God Pacifism," *Quaker Theology*, vol. 7, no. 1, issue 12 (Fall-Winter 2005-2006): 35-76.

⁷²Paul Alexander, "Spirit Empowered Peacemaking: Toward a Pentecostal Charismatic Peace Fellowship." *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*. Vol. 22, (2002): 78-102. A survey of American Assemblies of God ministers conducted in April 2001 revealed that ninety three percent agreed with the statement, "It is appropriate for a Christian to support war." Sixty five percent of these Assemblies of God pastors agreed that "The principles of Jesus support war." An even greater number, a significant seventy

passionate and articulate multi ethnic voices in pentecostal history show us that resources exist within the “Spirit filled church” that can provide more international and less violent ways of practicing pentecostalism.

Moving from nationalism, which carries with it *de facto* support of war, to just war tradition would be a positive development among American pentecostals since just war tradition begins with a strong presumption against violence. According to Martin Ceadel’s categories, the AOG transformed from pacifism (Christians should never kill humans) to crusading (offensive and preemptive war to establish justice and peace) in less than a century.⁷³ Adopting a critical defencist position (governments may take military action for self-defense as a last resort) that takes just war tradition seriously would be a significant improvement. Hopefully, the American AOG will encourage their theologians and ethicists to provide respectful and nuanced arguments in support of Christian pacifism, just peacemaking, and just war tradition so that pentecostals more clearly hear Jesus’ call to peacemaking.

Finally, rather than being ashamed of the term “pentecostal,” which I was for many years, I now recognize the necessity of emphasizing the enabling of the Spirit to live (and perhaps die) as prophetic nonviolent citizens in the Kingdom of God. Becoming a Christian peacemaker helped me appreciate my pentecostalism. Pentecostals believe that God empowers followers of Jesus to witness faithfully. Acts also says, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses (*martures*, martyrs)...” I do not advocate ‘witnessing’ or missions as triumphalistic colonialism, though this is undoubtedly what many early pentecostals had in mind, but I would argue that a postcolonial pentecostal witness is both possible and necessary. Radical pentecostals who transcend and critique political parties and national policies must rely on the Spirit of God for their sustenance as they participate in the immanent untidiness of peacemaking. Public prophetic witness and work for justice and peace is good news for the poor, weak, rich, and powerful, though the rich and powerful may not receive it as such, and being wisely led and enabled by the Spirit for this mission is indispensable. Pentecostalism exists primarily in previously colonized and majority world countries, the underbelly of the empires, and this is where in the Biblical narratives the Spirit enables prophets to speak and sustains them as their words and actions challenge the oppressors. Luke’s Jesus of an occupied territory said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and has anointed me to preach good news to the poor....” Pentecostals can say the same.

one percent, said that they “would kill in a war.” These are not pentecostal lay people who support war and would kill, these were the pastors of the Assemblies of God churches in America five months before September 11, 2001.

⁷³Martin Ceadel, *Thinking About War and Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). For a detailed account and analysis of this transformation see Paul Alexander, *Speaking in the Tongues of Peace: The American Assemblies of God, Nonviolence, and War*, vol. 9 in the C. Henry Smith Series, co-sponsored by Bluffton University and The Mennonite Historical Society (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing, 2008).

All Christians should embody aspects of Hispanic American pentecostalism as described by Eldin Villafane.⁷⁴ “In a real historical sense they are a pilgrim people.... Being a border people, no matter where we live, we must serve as a means of communication between the rich, over affluent and misdeveloped world of the North, and the poor, exploited and also misdeveloped world of the South. This . . . requires that we continue to be bilingual and bicultural.” I propose that the entire Church, not just the pentecostal family, be a humble, prophetic, transnational, nonviolent, and Spirit empowered *ethnos* who lives and speaks God’s counter intuitive will and way while being on the chessboard, but not of the chessboard.

Paul Alexander is Professor of Theology and Ethics and directs the Doctor of Ministry program at Haggard Graduate School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University, California. He founded and serves on the leadership team of the Pentecostal Charismatic Peace Fellowship, and is an Assemblies of God minister.

⁷⁴*The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 89, 163, 165, 171, 198-199.