PENTECOST AND THE END OF PATRIOTISM:
A CALL FOR THE RESTORATION OF PACIFISM AMONG
PENTECOSTAL CHRISTIANS

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The War Church is a Harlot Church

This essay is intended to be prophetic in nature. By this I do not mean that it is written to foretell future events or to express its author’s particular charismata, but that it is meant instead to ‘reinforce a vision of the place of the believing community in history, which vision locates moral reasoning’.2 The argument presented here is hardly a complex one; simply put, I claim in what follows that the 1967 decision of the Assemblies of God officially to abandon its historical position as a


2. John Howard Yoder, ‘The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood’, The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 29. Yoder remarks: ‘Prophecy is described as both a charisma distinctly borne by some individuals and a kind of discourse in which others may sometimes participate as well’. I take my writing to be an expression of the latter, rather than the former, understanding here. This understanding of prophecy, says Yoder, ‘is a matter of simple trust that God himself, as Spirit, is at work to motivate and to monitor his own in, with, and under this distinctive, recognizable, and specifically disciplined human discourse’. Yoder suggests that persons engaging in this discourse may be referred to alternatively as ‘Agents of Direction’; in either case, the intent is to suggest to the community the need for a reorientation of its moral vision.
pacifist church was a grievous error; that it was, as Murray Dempster has said, 'a funeral service for the conception of the church associated with it'. In making official the transition from a pacifist church to a non-pacifist church, I shall argue, the Assemblies of God ceased to exist in a way consistent with the radical eschatological vision which energized it from its beginning.

This is perhaps an unusual, albeit not a unique, claim about the demise of Pentecostal pacifism. In his 1990 article 'Reassessing the Moral Rhetoric of Early American Pentecostal Pacifism', Dempster correctly identifies an increasing militarism among contemporary American Pentecostals, a disposition is one particularly noticeable sign that these communities have abandoned their heritage and have become highly accommodated versions of what Yale Professor Harold Bloom refers to in his book of the same title as The American Religion. In Bloom's interesting examination of American Christianity, the Jesus who gathered a community of women and men to follow him in the way of the cross is replaced by an altogether different figure, 'a very solitary and personal American Jesus, who is also the resurrected Jesus rather than the crucified Jesus or the Jesus who ascended again to the Father'. This different figure, it seems, is the conceptualization of Jesus which has become more common among North American Pentecostals.

Dempster's article, which he says 'aims to analyze the moral rhetoric of early pentecostal pacifists in order to determine the way they thought theologically about the church's moral responsibilities to the larger society', will serve as a significant conversation partner here. Where Dempster denies, however, that his primary goal is to 'provide a basis from which to assess the normative relevance of pacifism for today', I shall make the provision of such a basis my principal objective. I want to offer, in other words, a theological rationale for my assertion that the gradual and eventually complete loss of its pacifism is among the most

3. Dempster, p. 33. My arguments here are concerned with the Assemblies of God, simply because this is the community of which I am a member and with which I am most familiar. Insofar as the Assemblies may be regarded as a paradigm for much contemporary American Pentecostalism, however, the arguments presented here are applicable to that wider community.


5. Dempster, p. 23.