
Reviewed by Murray W. Dempster

Even though Jay Beaman came from a Pentecostal background, he was surprised when, as a student at North American Baptist Seminary in 1980, he first learned about the pacifism that was part of his own religious tradition in its formative years. His curiosity to discover the facts about this forgotten heritage led him to an independent study which expanded in short time into an M.Div. thesis written under Professor Stephen Brachlow. After completing the thesis in 1982, Beaman's academic interest in pacifism was further fueled by his faculty appointment at Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas, a Mennonite Brethren liberal arts college closely associated with the publisher of this book.

*Pentecostal Pacifism* is the slightly revised publication of Beaman's masters thesis. The substance of the book benefits in targeted areas from Beaman's conceptual refinements and his use of secondary studies published subsequent to his thesis, particularly the work of Roger Robins on pacifism in the Assemblies of God and of Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. on the thought of Frank Bartleman. Aside from these updates and a stronger, more engaging literary style, Beaman has left the overall conceptual framework, chapter divisions, content and main argument almost entirely intact from his earlier thesis. The publication of *Pentecostal Pacifism*, therefore, represents a culmination of Beaman's own personal and academic association with Pentecostal, Baptist and Mennonite Brethren institutions and traditions over the past decade.

The purpose of Beaman's study is to trace and interpret the change that has occurred during this century in the Pentecostal view and practice of pacifism. After sketching the story of "the origins, development and rejection of pacific belief among the Pentecostals," Beaman addresses the critical question that rests at the heart of his inquiry: "... have Pentecostals altered their pacific views as a result of new Biblical insights or cultural accommodation?" (viii). In light of the lack of an explicitly developed biblical rationale to justify the shift in position concerning military service among Pentecostals and the presence of historical factors which can be identified to account for this change, Beaman gives the nod to cultural accommodation as the better explanation for the loss of Pentecostal pacifism.

Beaman deserves high praise for this pioneering and thought-provoking interpretation of Pentecostal pacifism. The careful documentation from the original sources of the various forms and expressions of early
Pentecostal pacifism should establish, in and of itself, the long-term importance of this study for Pentecostal scholarship. A bibliography—divided among books, articles, pamphlets, letters, minutes and interviews—provides a goldmine of sources for the reader. From these sources, Beaman’s study makes clear that many early Pentecostals, both at the levels of leadership and at the grassroots, paid a steep price for their uncompromising pacifistic convictions at the hands of their own governments. The details of Pentecostals refusing to use church facilities to sell Liberty Bonds to support the war effort, or preaching from the pulpit against an unqualified American patriotism, or counseling young people about the moral obligations of Christian conscience, or being humiliated in the military camps because they refused noncombatant service are culled out of the archives of history and brought to life in a compelling manner. The facts uncovered are captivating and Beaman also narrates the story well.

Balance is another virtue of Beaman’s study. Beaman rightly points out that from the beginning the Pentecostal attitude toward a Christian’s participation in military service was not a unified one. Even during World War I when the Executive Presbytery of the Assemblies of God (A/G) sent its now famous resolution to President Woodrow Wilson declaring the A/G to be a pacifist church and later indicated that the A/G position represented the Pentecostal Movement as a whole, Beaman notes that a pluralism of positions existed among Pentecostals on the morality of participating in the war. Beaman thus distinguishes the fact that the Pentecostal church was “officially” a pacifist church from the fact that the Pentecostal church was a monolithic body of pacifist churches and individuals, which it was not. Such a distinction instructs his readers to develop an understanding of early Pentecostal pacifist sentiment that is properly nuanced and appropriately qualified.

Against the backdrop of these balanced qualifications, Beaman’s sociological explanation for the loss of pacifistic belief among Pentecostals makes good sense. No doubt, as Beaman argues, the rise in social and economic status among Pentecostals, the “moral” aura surrounding World War II, the leadership role of the A/G and its membership in the National Association of Evangelicals, and the institutionalization of the Pentecostal chaplaincy all played major roles in changing the attitudes and beliefs about the church’s earlier “official” pacifism. Certainly no future studies explaining this change in the church’s position will be considered adequate without addressing the factors that Beaman has so skillfully brought together.

Not only has Beaman’s interpretation shed new light on the nature of pentecostal pacifism, but as John Howard Yoder notes in his foreword to the volume, Beaman has also laid the foundations for important future analyses. The greatest contribution of Beaman’s study may turn