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BOOK REVIEW

Stephen G. Parker and Tom Lawson, eds. *God and War: The Church of England and Armed Conflict in the Twentieth Century*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012. 239 pp. Pbk. ISBN 1409471209.

The two editors (also contributors) are Stephen G. Parker, Head of Postgraduate Studies in Education at the University of Worcester, UK, and Tom Lawson, Professor of Holocaust Studies at the University of Winchester, UK. The fact that this volume reads as a cohesive work is a testimony to the editing aptitude of Parker and Lawson; it is also because the contributing authors met in a colloquium to discuss and coordinate the content and trajectory of the volume (an ideal to strive for in any edited project). The result is an immensely helpful volume of essays that traces the evolution of Anglican discourse, beliefs, and practices throughout the bloodiest century in the history of warfare.

On the one hand, this volume appears to reinforce popular assumptions about the church and warfare. Certainly the widespread support among Anglican clergy and laypeople for the nation's wars lends itself to the view that the church failed to offer a prophetic voice of peace in times of violence, war, and jingoism. The response to the First World War is the most striking example in this regard. The silencing of dissenting clergy suggests a church too enamored with its established status and a misunderstanding of the role of an established church. The willingness to let religion be identified with opposition to the enemy—such as Nazi Germany or communism—led to a dangerous fusion of God, cause, and country.

On the other hand, this volume challenges easy assumptions, and sweeping generalizations regarding the church and war. While the “official” position of the church on a particular war may have been supportive of the state, there is ample evidence of dissenting

leaders and congregants. These voices of dissent throughout every conflict indicate that there never was a homogeneous Anglican voice during any conflict. The ambiguity and lack of consensus around moral issues such as the development of the atomic bomb reveals a church struggling to discern a gospel perspective in the midst of technological changes that challenged the very possibility of traditional just war thinking.

This volume portrays a church wrestling with understanding not only the Christian response to aggression in the midst of the dismantling of empire and the rise of a bi-polar world of two nuclear armed superpowers, but also its very role in a rapidly secularizing nation. It depicts a church seeking to deal with pressing social issues, such as the campaign against VD in the Second War World, in a way that seems quite odd and indeed counter-productive to the twenty-first century reader (yet made sense to church figures at the time). The archbishop's recognition of international law under the auspices of the UN to determine legitimate conflict reveals the changing dynamics of the postwar world, as well as the innovative nature of some the church's leadership. The concluding chapters on the Falklands War and military interventions or wars (Kosovo, Kuwait, Iraq) especially reveal an established church struggling to find its voice, as well as underestimating its influence from the margins (although it seems odd to say an established church is "on the margins").

It would have been helpful to have the Anglican position contrasted more frequently with that of other denominations, for one is not sure how Nonconformists mirrored or departed from Anglican sentiments. Nevertheless, I highly recommend this volume, and hope that others follow its lead by publishing similar work for their own denominations.

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