

## Book Review

### Ethics in the Age of the Spirit: Race, Women, War, and the Assemblies of God

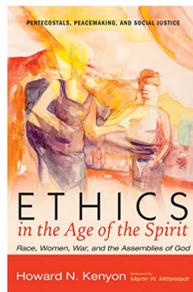
Joseph Nunez\*

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*Howard N. Kenyon. Ethics in the Age of the Spirit: Race, Women, War, and the Assemblies of God. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2019. 320 pp.*

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Howard N. Kenyon compiled an impressive masterpiece detailing the Assemblies of God's history, as the denominational leaders wrestled against and advocated for members of color, women in ministry, and reasoning for resisting or supporting combative war efforts. With each section's information wisely divided, each topic discussed pertinent content in chronological order benefiting readers' comprehensive consumption. From this book, readers gain both insights and understandings for why church leaders reached certain conclusions, only

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\* Joseph Nunez, current student at Assemblies of God Theological Studies earning his Masters of Intercultural Studies, received his undergraduate Bachelor of Arts in both Journalism and Intercultural Studies from Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky. Since 1999 after his first missions trip to Mexico as a teenager, Joseph has felt God's ushering towards ministering for Christ's namesake cross-culturally, after living overseas in Thailand and South Korea for a combined four and a half years. He desires the prospects of serving and living in an Asian or African context upon graduating.

for later generations of leaders to revise such motivations, reasonings, and documentation. To possess such a comprehensive story, with all its merits and mistakes, enables all readers to appreciate how the Assemblies of God denomination has advanced in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ to a world desperately needing it.

The three profiled issues changed through fluid and unplanned means within the Assemblies of God's tradition and its discourses (12). As then this history presents an overall mixed assortment of blessings and burdens historically, Kenyon still compassionately conveys the facts, knowing, and agreeing with Dr. Lois Olena, how the factual information and historical lessons ought to help current generations "learn from the past in order to avoid similar mistakes in the present, and continue to set out specific strategies for the future" (318). As this church tradition influenced and eventually contributed thoughts within American society, emphasis upon the power and anointing through the Holy Spirit enabled this people group's dependence and reliance upon God throughout the process, as the current members reached out to more individuals to join the tradition when God's people pursued His heart (35–36). After defining the historical movement and significant moments through how this tradition both organized and flourished in the book's first five chapters, Kenyon then shared the insights he gained detailing how race, women, and war received developments and benefits in the Assemblies of God's history, of just over 100 years old to date.

First, Kenyon tackled how the Assemblies of God tradition initially stifled but ultimately embraced race relations. Notable highlights from this section centralized upon both the achievements and the struggles, as this predominantly Caucasian tradition gradually expanded its racial kaleidoscope. As a specific event, the Azusa Street Mission revival movement brought all races together and sent them out equally to share the good news with others who did not yet trust God who creates, Jesus who saves, and the Holy Spirit who guides (52–53). Those present received and shared how the Holy Spirit's empowerment and commissioning prepared their calling and confidence for carrying the good news to new lands, as God intended (64). However, Kenyon also profiled groups and individuals resisting such efforts. The fact that some foreign black residents benefited from teachings to then receive approval for clerical appointments, which few of their African American peers experienced, revealed a distorted appreciation for the black race (87). Additionally, the *Pentecostal Evangel's* demeaning portrayals of the American black community with characters possessing "little or no purpose" and articulating thoughts with

poor grammar overshadowed the publication's intents of exhibiting the black community as inspiring heroes (72). The content, often demarcated as "colored," offensively yet accurately echoed the very thoughts of members of those times. While the Assemblies of God General Presbytery's ultimate response in 1957 advocated that God created all human beings, regardless of race, this decision arose after the National Negro Evangelical Association released as its 1956 declaration claiming the same stance (94–95). Established white and black congregations unnecessarily separated God's people out of His intended Will, while continuing tensions and trends prevented interracial dialogues from occurring (95). With what David Wilkerson accomplished through Teen Challenge, his ministry engagement with Hispanic, black, and white youth and adults began the church's gradual embrace for celebrating racial harmony (105). Over time, churches welcomed black members joining their existing congregations, but also the necessary inclusion of opening the ministerial doors for black men and women to receive ordination rites, not just among the Church of God, considered a separate offspring tradition, but also within all Assemblies of God traditions became equally essential (64, 127). Kenyon reminded future generations that segregation within the Assemblies of God tradition ceased when the country legally abolished its practices (138).

Second, Kenyon explored how women struggled to serve with their male ministers by gaining equal ministry opportunities and appreciated authoritarian respect in all levels of church leadership which they earned. Notable takeaways from this section showcased the struggles and successes women both endured and achieved, so that in their pastoral roles, they shone the good news to benefit their receiving congregations. As Kenyon emphasized, women in ministry received approval within the tradition's earliest structural foundations, but actualized representation and impact from women serving in this denomination gradually occurred (139). So, what the documentation stated as permissible for men and women to complete together in ministry did not align with the practices of all-male executive boards for years. Despite this experienced sexism, Kenyon shared that support of and commitment towards women occurred through the service, aid, and support supplied by Adoniram J. Gordon, John Alexander Dowie, and A.B. Simpson, with each of these male leaders contributing positively to women's future incorporations within desired clergy roles (146). In fact, as Kenyon explained, Gordon connected the Day of Pentecost with Joel 2:28's aligning declaration that both women and men receive and administer their giftings in prophecy, thus preparing the justifiable grounds for women to serve,

expanding God's intentionality for how the Age of the Spirit ought to transform even more lives (210). Still, with these helpful but few male leaders supporting sisters in their ministry endeavors, the Executive Council still lacked both tolerance and approval for women to serve as elders at any level of church dynamics for some time (173). While the battle raged on for decades, Joyce Wells Booze offered focus upon how Jesus valued His sisters with equal status to His brothers while completing His ministry and showing the way to Calvary (203). No better example stands evidently to reveal the benefits and purposes for how both genders ought to equally serve Him faithfully as He calls and prepares. Refusing to allow the church polity's behavior of silencing women, tragically derived from New Testament letters that Paul composed, women gained the upper hand with equal representation, ensuring that their sex did not lower them into an inferior status compared against their male counterparts (203, 210). Kenyon demonstrated that historically, women eventually became contributors of the gospel, after the countless obstacles that still hinder their attempts for sharing the good news with others.

Third, Kenyon provided the grounds for grappling with the rollercoaster-like acceptance and rejection of military actions, as endorsed or condemned by the Assemblies of God tradition depending on the given season. In the tradition's history, engaging in war to fight in defending America arose as the second-most debated topic during the first 75 years, with only divorce and remarriage outranking such combative engagement (213). Thus, as Kenyon clearly explained, societal influences changed the majority's stances for either endorsing or condemning pacificism, so a combination of pains and progress both promoted and discouraged militaristic support (39). Those who founded the Assemblies of God tradition embraced pacificism, as the 1917 Executive Presbytery forbid its members to engage in any military action, which naturally trickled down and into the commonplace beliefs of the tradition's local congregations (213). Debate existed within the early church's development, as minority groups advocated their support of war efforts, but the general conscience revealed non-support of the military, with major reasoning relying upon Moses' Sixth Commandment against committing murder (214). The long-term impact and effects, which directed the conversation towards supporting war efforts, occurred when World War II occurred. This global struggle indeed transformed the majority's perspectives and viewpoints supporting the Assemblies of God tradition, as laity took up arms to protect America and the world from Axis Forces, as clergy offered spiritual guidance as chaplains to those fighting for freedom, with both groups running the risks of losing their lives

during the process (28). What passed as church legislation ultimately involved how the fact that if the government did not endorse or promote viewpoints contradicting what Scripture entails, then war-like action against invaders of national interests became permissible for engagement, thus influencing later most 1938 Executive Presbyters to embrace thoughts and legislation in direct opposition of the tradition's founders (251). Since World War II, the Assemblies of God has progressively demonstrated more support to war-like combat, drifting less from its original roots of belief in practicing pacificism. Kenyon supplied in-depth analysis of such struggles as fought in South Korea, Vietnam, and the Cold War which involved American troops.

*Ethics in the Age of the Spirit* provides appreciated transparency and valuable perspectives throughout the Assemblies of God's century-long development concerning its resistance of and association with supporting race, women, and war. With all three profiled topics displayed accurately, the church tradition has benefited from a diverse range of voices resisting the status quo and advocating for change to transform the very thoughts of the people devoted to following this tradition. As long as the Assemblies of God strives towards completing the Great Commission while advocating for racial harmony and collaboration, providing women the same credentialing opportunities as men have received all along, and providing continuing dialogues for supporting or even resisting war-like behavior, the tradition shows that the progress made will lead towards beneficial and prosperous developments. And with the Holy Spirit's empowerment and transformation guiding the people of this denomination into the future during all dialogues and potential policy considerations, Kenyon supplies a book that offers both reality-checks for where the tradition has prospered and struggled, and the hope for how further biblical developments, yet to be written as this book's later editions, will benefit this dynamic tradition.