



Fire From Heaven: The Rise Of Pentecostal Spirituality And The Reshaping Of Religion In The 21st Century

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It was born a scant ninety-five years ago in a rundown warehouse on Azusa Street in Los Angeles. For days the religious-revival service there went on and on-and within a week the *Los Angeles Times* was reporting on a "weird babble" coming from the building. Believers were "speaking in tongues," the way they did at the first Pentecost recorded in the Bible?and a pentecostal movement was created that would, by the start of the twenty-first century, attract over 400 million followers worldwide. Harvey Cox has traveled the globe to visit and worship with pentecostal congregations on four continents, and he has written a dynamic, provocative history of this explosion of spirituality?a movement that represents no less than a tidal change in what religion is and what it means to people.

Fire From Heaven: The Rise Of Pentecostal Spirituality And The Reshaping Of Religion In The 21st Century Details

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Esther says

It seemed a somewhat fair history.

Comelibros says

Me gusto la idea que tenían los romanos de los cristianos, como también la forma de comportarse la gente del imperio, que choca con nuestros principios y costumbres de nuestra era.

Rick Hogaboam says

Fair analysis from a significant mainline Protestant.

Brian Leport says

Some misunderstandings of the nature of global Pentecostalism and its origins, but overall a very challenging read that helped me think in a more nuanced way about my time in the movement and its importance for Christianity.

Jared says

Some scholars have described pentecostalism as the "most important event in religious history since the reformation." Harvey Cox, Professor of Religion at Harvard, traveled the world and his own inner soul (at times) in this history of the pentecostal movement, comparing it to jazz and contrasting it to a another "millennial" historical event around the same time: The Great Columbian Exposition of 1893. While this event hosted the "Worlds Parliament of Religions," (which without trying to celebrated white America as the "new jerusalem") near the turn of the century, with a white washed plaster casted city in the heart of Chicago, a little storefront on Azusa street saw tongues of fire and a break in the racial divide. Thus began a small wave of what would eventually be the fastest growing religious movement in the 20th century.

Harvey Cox is a humble man to have written this book. He takes seriously the pentecostal movement when most of his professorial colleagues derided it. This is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of American Spirituality.

Cody Case says

As always with Harvey Cox, the man can explain Super String Theory to children using magic markers. He's a wonderful articulator to lay-women and men. "Fire from Heaven" accounts the historical origins and development of the pentacostal movement. I found this book intriguing because Cox characterizes a vastly different spirit within the pentacostal church now than was present in the beginning. For instance, we all know that pentacostals now use "speaking in tongues" as "proof" that one is truly saved. But in the beginnings of this movement in the early 1900's, the reason that speaking in tongues was so important was because that early group believed racial unification was a sign of a true Church of God. No church claiming God could be segregated, therefore the early pentacostals prayed to God that they would receive a language which allowed everyone to communicate together.

This is only one example of the intrigue of "Fire from Heaven." I recommend the book to anyone who feels strongly about, has been burned by, or who belongs to pentecostal christianity.

I only give it 3 stars because there's much information that I sensed he included as space-filler.

Susie Meister says

Fire from Heaven is written in response to secularization theory, which did not prove to be accurate for the American religious landscape. With worldwide membership at 410 million, Pentecostalism represents the vibrant religious life of so many with some seeing this time as another "great awakening." While many equate fundamentalists with Pentecostals, fundamentalists are suspicious of Pentecostals focus on experience (see also Blumhofer) and emotion rather than the specifics of the text. Pentecostalism began as a restorationist movement that was looking back in order to move forward. The Azusa St. revival with Seymour was something they were praying for and lasted for 3 yrs in LA, which has always been tolerant of new religion. Initially they were not self-promoters and were simply waiting in hope for the next phase. Cox claims this tradition is based in primal piety (which includes a link between spirit and body) and primal hope (which continues to be a huge part of their appeal). This tradition went beyond racial lines and its members were waiting for the next age. Their hope for a new age was increased as they felt alienated by science and modernity. Cox argues that more than a religion, Pentecostalism is a "mood". Cox agrees with Blumhofer's that music and women played an important part in the success and identity of Pents, yet they both agree that women were never treated equally to men. Also agrees with Blumhofer (in her bio of Aimee Semple Macpherson) that she represents the traditions ability to shun the world while using the tools the world offers to expand its message. Cox also agrees with Blumhofer that this tradition's focus on the people rather than the elite makes them focused on the popular opinion. Interestingly, Cox points out how while the prosperity message is often not discussed, it is implicit in their style and message. Experiential spirituality often demands practical results. The current growth of the movement is in Hispanic and Black members.

Susie says

An excellent and balance history of the pentecostal movement.

Michael Walker says

Liberal theologian Harvey Cox takes a rather sympathetic look at Pentecostalism. OK, but Hollenweger's tome is better.

Robert says

An informative history of Pentecostalism from its 1906 origins in a converted warehouse in Los Angeles through its expansion across the globe, it is written by probably the best known sociologist of religion and is valuable for his thoughtful evaluation of the reasons for its astonishing growth and for his reflections on its future promise.

While Harvey Cox is not a pentecostal, he is more than respectful to this movement. He seems to be powerfully attracted by its vital spirituality, by the intensity of the personal meaning and spiritual satisfaction it evokes in its adherents, by their emotional apprehension of God, by their awareness of His real presence in their worship and lives. In his "Secular City" (published in 1965) Cox literally wrote the book on the increasing secularization of modern culture. Having expected a future of coolly rational or formalistic religiosities at best, and more likely a vast desert of secularism, he has stumbled upon a refreshing oasis of fervent spirituality. It is no wonder he is enthusiastic.

What Cox admires most is the Pentecostal orientation towards the Spirit. Admires the movement's openness to, and validation of, the direct spiritual experiences of people. The Spirit, as it makes itself known to the faithful, is the ultimate authority - not scriptures or a particular creed or a church hierarchy. Cox argues that this lack of impersonal authority constitutes the heart of Pentecostalism, is its strength. Argues that this openness to the primal spirituality innate in all human beings, is the basis for its universal appeal - that this respect for the actual experience of the individual, whatever his position in the social scale or wherever in the world he might live, enables Pentecostalism to adapt to different environments, different cultures. Freed of a defined orthodoxy, it is more respectful of, and more welcoming to, indigenous spirituality. Its trust in the workings of the Spirit enable it to incorporate a wide diversity of beliefs and practices, thus empowering a syncretism with previously existing faith traditions that encourages conversion. And its congregational structure, its lack of a central hierarchy, its organization as a loose association of churches, while having the negative effect of proliferating a host of pentecostal denominations and sub groupings, has the positive effect of enabling local churches to institutionalize their adaptations to indigenous cultures and beliefs - to create local churches that reflect local culture. This adaptability enables it to seamlessly incorporate, for examples, the shamanism of the Koreans, the mariology of the Sicilians, the liberation struggles of the Latin Americans into its faith and practices.

When this book was written in 1995, Cox was uncertain about the future of Pentecostalism. He hoped that it would preserve its Spirit orientation. He even dared to hope that as a people's religion particularly responsive to lay direction, reflecting the physical and emotional needs of common people, it might embrace the tenets of liberation theology, might join in its search for social justice. On the other hand, he feared that it would align itself with the fundamentalist churches, with their right-wing political goals, would become less free, more judgmental. He was troubled by its increasing embrace of the prosperity gospel, of the "name it and claim it" theology. He is now less hopeful. In his most recent book, "The Future of Faith", Cox relates the failure of many of his hopes for Pentecostal, and looks elsewhere to find his desired spirit orientation. Despite this subsequent evolution of the author's thought, this earlier work is still worth reading. It remains a

great introduction to the too little-known history of this significant religious movement. And it is both a respectful explication of its thought and practices and a still relevant analysis of its strengths and weaknesses.

Kyle says

I enjoyed reading this from a liberal's perspective.

Paul Rack says

Very good intro to Pentacostalism. In spite of some tangents and the occasional bout of judgmental superiority (normal for Cox) this is an excellent book. He is very sympathetic to the movement and gives a helpful summary of its history and manifestations in different global situations. Mainliners and emergents should read this.

Diane says

This book begins with a history of Pentecostalism, and traces the movement through the present day. It ends with a survey of Pentecostal movements and churches around the world, and offers some of the author's insights on what has made Pentecostalism such a successful movement. For an academic theologian, the author is very sympathetic to his subject, and provides insight into an understudied phenomenon. However, I felt that in some instances he expressed his own views a bit too forcefully, in a way that detracted from his observations.

Pamela Tucker says

I will just start studying this book and so far it could be the best Pentecostal Book, and there are not that many Books written which is ironic since there is fire from Heaven moving all over the World. Meaning mainly the people in the south are experiencing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit just before the return of the Lord.

This is really well written, and one of the better Christian books I have read. Enjoy reading as I am.

Rick says

This was on a list by a leading Pentecostal leader. Although Cox is not Pentecostal, we writes a balanced and sympathetic critique. Enjoyed it more than I expected.
