

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

By Harvey Cox

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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.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Pentecostal Christianity, which emphasizes the immediate experience of God through speaking in tongues, trance and ecstatic bodily motion, is not a backward-looking movement, declares Harvard theologian Cox (The Secular City), but an ecumenical force that speaks to the spiritual emptiness of our time by tapping the core of human religiousness. The author describes his visits to Pentecostal churches from Boston to Rio de Janeiro to Seoul. He delineates the movement's interracial beginnings in Los Angeles at the turn of the century, tracks its lightning spread around the globe and explores the pivotal role of women, which led, he asserts, to a conception of a nonjudgmental God with "distinctively feminine" qualities, making Pentecostalism a force challenging patriarchal cultures around the world. Cox expresses his misgivings about "unattractive political and theological currents" in the U.S. Pentecostal movement, including a fixation on demonic spirits and a "dominion theology" that supports ultraconservative public policy. An engrossing and illuminating report.
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From Library Journal
Cox (The Silencing of Leonard Boff, Meyer Stone Bks., 1988) gives an objective view of Pentecostalism. He is neither an insider nor a skeptic. In this study, he includes descriptions of his own experiences and reactions in Pentecostal churches as well as an accurate history of the movement's origins and development. He looks at its rapid growth in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America as well as in the United States. The author finds reason for both hope and misgivings in this popular religious revival and its relationship to late 20th-century society. Cox feels that both science and traditional religion have been rejected by many people as sources of ultimate meaning. He feels Pentecostals have tapped into genuine spiritual energies but warns that "the fire from heaven can burn and destroy as well as purify and inspire." This is a reasoned, dispassionate study; recommended for academic and public libraries.
C. Robert Nixon, MLS, Lafayette, Ind.
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From Booklist
In his famous and influential *Secular City* (1965), Cox strove, he says, "to work out a theology for the `postreligious' age many sociologists confidently assured us was coming." Surprise! "Today it is secularity, not spirituality, that seems to be headed for extinction." As far as Christianity is concerned, the reason for this religious resurgence is Pentecostalism, whose history Cox traces and whose attractions and pitfalls for new and renewed believers throughout the world he explains. His book is no arid study, though. It is a very personal travelogue that brings us into congregations in Rio's slums, in Sicily, where Pentecostalism is helping overthrow the Mafia, in Korea and Zimbabwe, where Pentecostalism is absorbing native religions into Christianity, and in Kansas City, where we see materialism butting its ugly head into worship. Although in the wind, as Cox shows, among the religious intelligentsia who gathered for the World Congress of Religions at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, modern Pentecostalism began more humbly. In a wooden bungalow in Los Angeles in 1906, the spirit descended and worshipers who were gathered with itinerant black preacher William Seymour began to speak in tongues. Spiritual conflagration was immediate. In less than two years, missionaries were spreading the new faith worldwide. Cox locates Pentecostalism's appeal in its egalitarianism, experientialism, and healing practices. The polar opposite of fundamentalism, it is a religion of the common people and, as Cox sees it, stands to be an immense force for liberation of the human spirit from both spiritual and social oppression. Informed by his knowledge of

theology and the sociology of religion (see the bibliographic notes) as well as by a keen human sympathy, Cox's vision is so cheering that we pray it may prove true. It has already eventuated in an enthralling, inspiriting book. *Ray Olson*

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