Evangelicals at a Crossroads
Revivalism and Social Reform in Boston, 1860-1910
Benjamin L. Hartley

The story of Boston revivalism and social reform

Benjamin L. Hartley brings to light the little-known story of relative latecomers to Boston’s religious scene: Methodist, Salvation Army, Baptist, and nondenominational Christians. Focusing on Congregationalists and Roman Catholics, Boston urban historians have largely overlooked these groups. Hartley, however, sheds light on the role of immigrant evangelical leaders from Italy, Sweden, and elsewhere in revivalism and social reform in postbellum Boston. Further, examining the contested nature of revivalism and social reform in a particular, local nineteenth-century context provides a basis for understanding the roots of current divisions in American Protestantism and the contentious role of evangelical religion in American politics. Hartley documents the importance of the American holiness movement as a precursor to the significant presence of Pentecostal groups in urban America, adding an important historical context for evangelical social action today.

BENJAMIN L. HARTLEY is an associate professor at the Palmer Theological Seminary of Eastern University in Philadelphia.

“Concentrating on the upstart revivalism and social reform of the Methodists, Baptists, and Salvationists in late nineteenth-century Boston, Hartley’s carefully researched and well-written book is a landmark study of urban evangelicalism in post-Civil War America. In particular, he shows how eclectic, cantankerous, and contentious evangelicals, both men and women, brought together revivalism and social reform, anti-Catholic and labor politics, and local revivals and international mission. Evangelicals built institutions, addressed the evils of the city, fought with each other over doctrines and priorities, and eventually saw their influence ebb in the face of new forces at the beginning of the twentieth century. Hartley’s terse and persuasive analysis of urban evangelicalism before fundamentalism gathered traction fills a significant gap in our knowledge.”

David N. Hempton, Alonzo L. McDonald Family Professor of Evangelical Theological Studies, Harvard Divinity School

Recipient of the Jesse Lee Prize awarded by the General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church

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