

H-Net Reviews

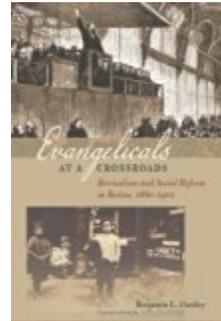
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Benjamin L. Hartley. *Evangelicals at a Crossroads: Revivalism and Social Reform in Boston, 1860-1910*. Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011. xi + 288 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58465-928-0; \$39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-58465-929-7.

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The Other Boston Protestants

Benjamin Hartley's *Evangelicals at a Crossroads* is an important contribution to the history of religion and social reform in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Boston. Readers familiar with the literature on settlement houses, the story of the displacement of Brahmins by Irish Catholics, or the history of the modernist-fundamentalist controversies will find themselves in new territory, and this alone would make this a significant book. Opening the first chapter with Dwight L. Moody's spectacular 1877 revival, Hartley weaves a complex narrative of the individuals and institutions that transformed the social and religious landscape to a degree often overlooked today.

The evangelicals of Hartley's title are more specifically those evangelicals who contributed to or emerged from the holiness movement of the nineteenth century. Methodists, conservative Episcopalians, and the leadership of the Salvation Army in Boston are at the center of this narrative. Methodists in particular, like the popular preacher Henry Morgan and the founders of Boston University, rose to prominence in the city at a time when they were seen by their critics and supporters alike as less educated and less privileged than the Congregationalists and Unitarians who had dominated the religious culture of the city. Establishing churches and missions among the immigrants of Boston's North End, these Methodists exemplified the dynamic tension of nineteenth-century evangelicalism, a Christianity that worked to reform society while maintaining the preeminence of personal sal-

vation in their theology.

As a result of their social status and egalitarian theology, the Methodists in the nineteenth century were often more sympathetic to the plight of working-class Bostonians than were many other Protestants. Nevertheless, they were more likely to express a virulent anti-Catholicism. Hartley traces this to their rural origins and migration to a Boston culture whose Brahmin leaders already were developing uneasy alliances with an ascending Catholic power. Controversies over the election of members to the Public School Committee in the 1880s focused the city's attention on religious animosities, but Methodists like Henry Morgan already were attacking the Catholic hierarchy with lurid accusations of rape and drug abuse. However, these attacks were not usually directed at the Catholic laity. Evangelicals worked hard to provide social services for Catholic immigrants, even as they assailed the clergy and tried to convert the parishioners.

The activities of women are at the center of Hartley's analysis. The egalitarian theology of Methodism and the holiness focus on personal piety provided evangelical women a platform unavailable to them in other institutions. Mary Livermore and Frances Willard were accepted in the pulpit. The women of the Methodists' Deaconess Home and Training School and the women of the Salvation Army worked alongside male colleagues throughout the city.

The theological disputes of the era regarding modernist theology or the social gospel that so sharply divided many denominations did not draw such clear lines among Hartley's subjects. He contrasts the premillennialism of A. J. Gordon's Evangelistic Association of New England with the social gospel focus of Edgar Helms and the Morgan Memorial Church, and finds institutions moving in different directions rather than engaging in conflict. Boston's Methodists were more concerned with doing the work of reform or evangelism than with purging their denomination of perceived heresies.

In a chapter on Boston's North and South Ends, Hartley highlights the tensions that these competing strains of evangelism and reform created in a city that was becoming increasingly immigrant and Catholic. Methodists, including those affiliated with Boston University, established settlement houses in the heart of immigrant neighborhoods. The University Settlement House was established in the Italian North End, and was soon followed by a new church. Much of the Methodist success in the North End was the result of the work of a dynamic Italian immigrant convert, Gaetano Conte, whose background made him no more sympathetic to the Catholic Church than were the rural, native Methodists.

Hartley concludes with two twentieth-century revivals, bookends to Moody's great revival that introduced the book. Gipsy Smith led a successful revival in 1906 at the Baptist Tremont Temple, with a reported 2,500 converts. In 1909 a coalition of evangelical leaders organized a citywide campaign with simultaneous meetings at a variety of churches. Both of these events received favorable press, but neither had the impact in the city that Moody's revival had. The upstart evangelicals were no longer outsiders to the region's Protestant establishment. Nevertheless, the later revivals and their aftermath demonstrated the persistence and the variety of evangelical influence in Boston, and the nimbleness with which Methodists in particular adapted to a changing city.

Hartley's focus on the evangelicals of the holiness tradition allows him to delve into distinctions and alliances that were important to his subjects, but it also excludes the Congregationalist, Presbyterian, and Baptist reformers, who despite their Calvinist roots were solidly evangelical long before the twentieth century. Even so, *Evangelicals at a Crossroads* is a useful and corrective addition to the rich literature on the most chronicled city in American religious history.

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