**Book Review**


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For better and worse, journalists have long given Pentecostal and Charismatic movements notoriety. *The Los Angeles Times’s* jeering of the Azusa Street Revival made the fringe famous. The coverage by *Time* and *Newsweek* of Dennis Bennett brought charismatics to coffee tables. Hardy, a globetrotting journalist and clever storyteller, stands in this lineage. Yet her “exposé” (according to the book jacket) reveals a mainstream giant rather than a marginal movement, a global force rather than a parochial pariah.

Though the breadth of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements is well-known to its scholars and students, the fact is indeed novel for Hardy’s intended readership. Yet breadth is only half of her argument. More significant is the movements’ *depth* within cultural, social, and—most crucially for Hardy—political worlds. The book’s subtitle, *How Pentecostal Christianity Is Taking Over the World*, is thus an apt summation of her thesis.

What, however, is this “Pentecostal Christianity”? The term is a catch-all “to avoid confusion” (p. xii). Indeed, the people she met throughout the world—amid the global pandemic—are rarely self-identified as Pentecostal. These were *evangélicos*, Korean Presbyterians, charismatic Muslims, Zionists, and—perhaps most often—just plain “Christians”. Though several scholars are cited, her bibliography’s wealth lies in interviews and anecdotes. She usually calls this broad movement the “third wave”. This “Pentecostal Christianity” would, however, be more precisely deemed twentieth and twenty-first century charismatic movements, most often but not always Christian.

The book, nonetheless, opens with a group of classical Pentecostals: the “founding trinity” of William Seymour, Charles Parham, and Aimee Semple McPherson—an illustrative if debatable claim (p. 14). This chapter is the most historically cited one, relying heavily on Allan Anderson, Gastón Espinosa, Cecil Robeck, and Grant Wacker. She does not, however, use a good biography of McPherson such as Edith Blumhofer’s or Matthew Sutton’s—an odd omission, especially given the boon the latter author would provide her arguments about Pentecostalism and right-wing politics.

The connection between far-right politics and the “third wave” is the book’s driving force. Though “third wave” is often used capaciously, I agree with Allan
Anderson (2012: 23) that it is “totally inappropriate in a global context.” Coined by C. Peter Wagner concerning his own network, its use is limited in a book as broad as Hardy’s. Of course, she does discuss Wagner (ch. 2) and key connections like John Wimber (ch. 2), Bethel Church (ch. 7), and the “Seven Mountains of Culture” (ch. 7). These topics are significant for her thesis, but the book goes far beyond the pentecostalization of the US religious right.

*Beyond Belief* is a global mosaic. She attends to well-known megachurches and church-planting movements such as Hillsong (ch. 2), Yoido Full Gospel Church (ch. 3), *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (ch. 4), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (ch. 8). Yet beyond these, she discusses more obscure figures and movements such as Alabama snake-handlers (ch. 2), a local *sangoma* in South Africa (ch. 5), Romani charismatics in the UK (ch. 6), charismatic Muslims in Nigeria (ch. 8), and Mayan *evangélicos* in Guatemala (ch. 10). Though the historical connections are sometimes difficult to see, the thematic connections are clear. The mosaic shows religion that appeals to the high and the lowly, the marginalized and the powerful. It offers seemingly endless wealth and political influence whether in South Korea, Brazil, or Nigeria. It offers identity and belonging—though often at the cost of one’s neighbor, the religious other.

The second half and heart of the book is a broad-stroke illustration that spiritual warfare can become war itself. She moves from Bethel’s political domination of the “Seven Mountains of Culture” (ch. 7), to the haunting precipice of Nigerian civil war (ch. 8), to purity culture’s war on prostitution in Texas (ch. 9), and finally to the recent murder of a Mayan medicine man in Guatemala (ch. 10) and charismatics “worshipping the military of another nation [Israel)” (p. 242; ch. 11). The narrative is broad and the suggestion bold. Yet especially with Mayans in Guatemala and Muslims in Nigeria, Hardy well-demonstrates the dire fears already prevalent.

In a book chronicling exploitations, murders, financial frauds, and rightist political movements, Hardy is surprisingly sympathetic. Though she told her interviewees that she was “raised Catholic and am still trying to figure it all out” (p. 123), the reader feels the existential urgency that makes the book so readable: “Whether it was God or his ancestors that were going to deliver, I was thrilled by the prospect that a miracle could happen to me” (p. 97). She even came to believe—following Candy Gunther Brown’s 2010 study—that some miracles were indeed happening.

In addition to scholars already mentioned, Hardy draws background data and history from others such as Kate Bowler; Brad Christerson and Richard Flory; Virginia Garrard; Solomon Kgatle; and Randall Stephens. Of course, there are missed opportunities. For example, the absences of Joel Cabrita and Devaka Premawardhana are noticeable in the chapter on southern Africa.

Nevertheless, *Beyond Belief* is a worthwhile book. Relevant chapters will be useful for undergraduates—rich ideas in page-turning style. For scholars, the book invites questions about global historical connections, grassroots political theologies, and even the role of the global pandemic on the shape of charismatic communities. These and other questions deserve careful investigation. As a public face of Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, the book moreover demonstrates
a need for new research, typologies, and comparative methodologies that can grapple with recently shifting communities like the ones in Mayan Guatemala. In many ways, the tools of the journalist are better able to track recent trends than the historian, social scientist, or theologian. Yet though Hardy may be a reporter, her book is more in line with Harvey Cox’s *Fire from Heaven* than *The Los Angeles Times*’s “Weird Babble of Tongues.”

Reference