

Entry points: A kingdom of peace, kindness and justice

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [March 9, 2010](#) issue

I have read most of what Harvey Cox has written over the decades. One sign of Cox's longevity is the relative price of his books: my dog-eared paperback copy of *Secular City* bears a printed price of \$1.45. *The Future of Faith*, published last fall, which I just finished reading, cost \$24.99.

The Future of Faith confirms a development I have witnessed as a pastor over the course of Cox's writing career. Today people come to church or join a church not because the church is Presbyterian, Methodist or Lutheran, and not because of the theological nuances that those names represent, but because they want to be identified with a particular community of people who are trying, individually and together, to follow Jesus.

An example: the church I serve has a tutoring program that pairs a volunteer tutor with an inner-city youngster for an hour and a half once a week. Half of the volunteer tutors are nonmembers and many of them are refugees from the church of their childhood. Many have no church background at all. In the course of coming to church on a weeknight to meet their students, something happens. They begin to see a connection between the students, their relationship, Jesus and the church. These people often show up in a new member class. They are new, or renewed, Christians because they have seen what it means to follow Jesus.

I am sure historians will argue over Cox's account of how the early Jesus movement, a movement "of the spirit," was hijacked by male clergy and by concerns about power, authority, and emergent hierarchy and ultimately empire. I am sure theologians will challenge his contrast between the "the age of faith" and the "age of belief," as well as his comments on the role creeds had in the process of defining and punishing heretics. My own ecclesiastical tradition has always emphasized the life of the mind and has invested itself in writing creeds and statements of faith—and I am not ready to walk away from that tradition.

But Cox's description of the "emergent" movement in all world religions, of a movement "less hierarchical, dogmatic, patriarchal" and more practical, of a movement that is more interested in a dynamic life to be lived than a set of beliefs to be affirmed—that description reflects the energy I have seen emerging in the church. People are attracted to a kingdom of peace, kindness and justice already present in the world, and they respond to an invitation to be part of that kingdom by following Jesus.