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Bill J. Leonard. *Baptists in America.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. x + 316 pp. $47.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-12702-8.

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Soul Liberty and Church Purity: The Tensions of Baptist History

Leonard's volume joins a growing number of books in Columbia University Press's ongoing Columbia Contemporary American Religion series. Some featured titles thus far include Jane Smith on Islam in America, Marc Lee Raphael on Judaism, Sarah Pike on Neopaganism, and Randall Balmer and Lauren Winner on Protestantism in America. This series serves the useful purpose of introducing denominations, movements, and broad streams of religious traditions to readers (especially novices, as well as those seeking hits of specific information or tools for reference) in need of some reader-friendly expert scholarly guidance. This is a book for all academic libraries.

Few would be better qualified as a guide to Baptists in America than Leonard, formerly of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, currently dean of the Divinity School at Wake Forest University, and author of numerous noteworthy books and articles on Baptist history, especially concerning the Southern Baptist Convention. Beyond his scholarly credentials, moreover, Leonard also has first-hand experience with some recent Baptist culture wars, notably the massive purge of Southern Baptist moderates at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the 1990s. Leonard and Molly Marshall were two of a number of notable scholars to be either forced out, or to have resigned in favor of more intellectually congenial pastures elsewhere.

The opening chapter quickly surveys the basics of Baptist history from its origins in the early seventeenth century and growth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to a position of cultural dominance in the South in the twentieth century. Subsequent chapters provide summaries of Baptist beliefs and practices in all their bewildering variety, Baptist styles of theology, race and gender in Baptist life and history, and Baptist positions on various sides in the recent culture wars. Curiously underplayed, to my mind, is Southern Baptist history in particular. I say "curiously" given Leonard's preeminence as a cultural interpreter of Southern Baptists. I say "underplayed" given that Baptists reached a predominance in the South, among both whites and blacks, that they did not achieve elsewhere to the same degree. This is an encyclopedic and reference tool sort of book, not a strongly interpretive argument and analysis, but I expected a greater degree of focus on Baptists in the region of the United States where, unarguably, they have played a more significant role than anywhere else.

Baptists appear here as a kind of case study in miniature of some of the broader themes and paradoxes of American Protestant history. Baptist theology is a varied as could possibly be imagined within a generally evangelical framework–ranging from the nearly Universalist "No-Hellers" of Appalachia to the "Hell-for-Just-About-Everyone-ers" of the Primitive and "Two-Seed in the Spirit" varieties, to just about every position on the Calvinist-Arminian spectrum in between for the majority of American Baptists. On questions of social policy, politics, gender, and race, Baptists may be found everywhere on a continuum from, say, proslavery theorist Thornton Stringfellow and racist demagogue Strom Thurmond (misspelled in the book), to social gospel pioneer Walter Rauschenbusch, to civil rights activist Jesse Jackson, to black spiritual earth mother Maya Angelou. What defines Baptist history–and, arguably, all of Protestant history–is the constant tension between "conversionist particularlism and pluralistic libertarianism" (p. 253). Of American thought on ethnicity, the historian David Hollinger once asked, "How wide the circle of we?" Baptists constantly ask the same question and redefine their answers, contingent in part on nearly universal Baptist themes of congregational democracy and soul liberty but also on the threads of associationalism and evangelical standards of sin, redemption, and conversion.

The recent public controversies within the Southern Baptist Convention provide a case in point. R. Albert Mohler (a champion of the conservative cause) has ar-

gued that the divide comes between those in the "freedom" party, who emphasize the Baptist heritage of "soul liberty," and those in the "orthodox" party, who insist that concepts such as "soul liberty" were never meant to encompass any and every manner of religious concept, including those clearly (to the conservative mind) not sanctioned by scripture. Again, paradoxes may be found not just within the tradition as a whole, but even within each side of this divide. The "freedom" party, as David Stricklin has pointed out, had a long history of shutting out or marginalizing conservatives from positions of influence in the SBC denomination prior to 1979. On the other hand, the party of "orthodoxy" has used theological buzzwords such as "inerrancy" to smoke out skeptics and heretics who in many cases simply have advanced positions long a part of Baptist thought and life.

Soul liberty and church purity have long been in tension in American Christianity; Baptists, as is abundantly clear in Leonard's excellent and informative volume, perfectly exemplify this larger story of Protestant paradox.

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