

William H. Brackney *Baptists in North America: An Historical Perspective*, Malden MA, Blackwell, 2006 (296pp)

Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005 (315pp)

Not surprisingly, these two very useful surveys have much in common. Each traces a story of diversity across four centuries and both seek to portray the complexity and richness of Baptist life as it stands today. It is a curious quirk of geographic identity that Brackney's work, although its title includes a qualifier, actually covers a wider area than Leonard's. Brackney includes Canadian Baptist development whilst Leonard is focused on the story in the United States. This obviously creates some differences of content and approach but the two studies nevertheless address many issues, movements and people in common. Both books are volumes in more general series. Leonard's is a contribution to the *Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series* whilst Brackney's is part of Blackwell's studies of *Religious Life in America*. Each book is therefore tied to the demands of its series. Both trace a more or less chronological development and then turn to various themes such as theology, politics and gender. There are advantages of course to this helpful shape and the constraints of publication make both books of accessible length and coverage. The intended readership is also important. As elements of general series the books are written for non-specialist and, indeed, primarily non-Baptist markets. They are as much introduction and explanation of Baptist characteristics and foibles as historical studies. As such they should not be looked to for groundbreaking new scholarship, although the work of such leading interpreters of American Baptist life inevitably provides new and fresh perspectives.

Are there, then, points of difference to note? Brackney, having to cover a wider field, elects a greater chronological focus, giving four chapters to the history up to the start of the twentieth century. Leonard gives only one. Brackney thus tends to weave themes into the historical development; Leonard prefers to tell the story through the lens of his chosen themes. Each achieves his aims very well, making both books excellent resources for historians of other traditions or of Baptist life in other regions. Both books include full indexes. Brackney's bibliography is more comprehensive and is divided by subject. Leonard's is helpfully annotated but more

selected. For the non-specialist scholar, then, Brackney's list is probably the more useful.

There are some areas in which the limits of the formats probably prevented adequate coverage. A point of interest for non-specialist Baptist scholars for instance is the role and response of American Baptists to slavery. Here neither treatment is entirely satisfying. Both authors note the divisions in Baptist attitudes to slavery in the nineteenth century but emphasise the progressive approaches. Brackney discusses the issues as part of Baptists' activism for human rights. Leonard places slavery within the broader question of race relations. For the reader seeking to comprehend pro-slavery positions of many Baptists, especially in the South, there is a disappointing paucity of analysis. There is perhaps a hint of 'whiggism' here, with the more palatable emancipation efforts being stressed.

It is, however, always a little uncharitable to criticise works, especially survey treatments like these, for what they leave out. Both Brackney and Leonard offer excellent introductions to Baptist history and development in the most Baptist region of the world, providing considerable insight to students in places and cultures where the story is very different.

Martin Sutherland
Carey Baptist College

D.G. Bloesch, *Spirituality Old and New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life*. Grand Rapids: IVP; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007. (191pp.)

Spirituality has become one of the most written about subjects in contemporary thought – both secular and Christian. Most of these works are consumed with defining 'spirituality' and articulating its importance or otherwise for the targeted readership. Many Christians see the spirituality renaissance as something of a boon, an open door to Christian evangelism. Donald Bloesch is not so optimistic. Bloesch, Professor of theology emeritus at Dubuque Theological Seminary, is well known to most Evangelicals in the academic world