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Baptists In The Balance: The Tension Between Freedom And Responsibility



Synopsis

This collection captures the thoughts and experiences of a variety of Baptists and others who observe Baptist life in the late twentieth century.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Most of the contributors to this volume belong to the American Baptist Churches, USA (the former Northern Baptist Convention), but there are also contributions from National Baptists (African-American) and Southern/ex-Southern Baptists. The essays explore the classic Baptist tensions between an emphasis on liberty and the individual and the emphasis on gathered community (both as local congregations and associations) and responsibility to fellow Baptists, other Christians, and society. All of the diverse authors agree at least on this much: that the creative tension must not be relaxed. If/when the individualist/liberty pole is/has been overemphasized, Baptist identity has often been amorphous. On the other hand, if/when the corporate/gathered community pole has been overemphasized, the result has always been authoritarian tyranny and loss of the freedom that characterized Baptist life at its best. (The now-fundamentalist controlled Southern Baptist Convention, my former denomination, is the perfect example of the second problem.) The now-fundamentalist Southern Baptist Convention, because of its huge size, has almost defined "Baptist identity" for everyone in the U.S. by default. It has left non-fundamentalist Baptists (whether evangelical, centrist, or progressive/liberal in theological orientation) searching struggling for a sense of "who they are." All too often, the temptation has been to define themselves

by reaction: We are not like the fundamentalists who currently lead the SBC. But it is not enough for individuals or groups to say what they are not. That's why there has been a rash of books like this one where non-fundamentalist Baptist have attempted to articulate a clear identity. The current work, as a collection, doesn't crystalize a single vision, but it does help define the pitfalls in overemphasizing certain classic polarities that, for authentic Baptist life, are better kept in creative tension.

This work is the best I have read on the Baptist tradition and the challenge it poses for faithful Baptists. There is a nod to Baptist history, but modern directions and conflicts will captivate many readers. The list of chapter authors reads like a who's who of modern Baptist leadership.

Awesome book has helped me in ministry greatly. Being in the Christian Education Ministry, this book has helped me with various teachings we have done in the church.

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