

# Review: Baptists and the Holy Spirit

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## *Baptists and the Holy Spirit:*

## *The Contested History with Holiness-Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements*

By C. Douglas Weaver (Baylor University Press)

Baptists may share a common branch on the family tree of faith with Holiness, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians, but they rarely have acted like kissing cousins.

Doug Weaver, professor of Baptist studies at Baylor University, tells the compelling story of how Baptists frequently criticized—and in isolated instances embraced—religious movements in the last century and a half that emphasized the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Holiness movement, early 20<sup>th</sup> century Pentecostalism and the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Charismatic movement each attracted some Baptists. And the greater the magnetic draw, the greater the Baptist opposition.



Baptist opponents of the Holiness movement based their criticisms mostly

on theology—an emphasis, at least in some branches of Holiness Christianity, on achieving sinless perfection and on modern-day healing miracles. Ironically, in due time, many conservative Baptist critics of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement wholeheartedly embraced the Keswick branch of Holiness renewal. Keswick Holiness emphasized a “higher life” or “deeper life” and stressed Spirit-empowered evangelism, without the extreme manifestations of the Spirit that characterized later movements.

Baptists who resisted the Pentecostal movement likewise grounded their critiques in theology, particularly Dispensationalists who taught the cessation of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing after the New Testament era. Likewise, while Baptists and Pentecostals shared a common commitment to be “New Testament churches” and a shared desire to go “back to the Bible,” they differed significantly in what that meant. Perhaps most significantly, many Baptists saw the new Pentecostal churches as competitors, and they felt threatened.

That perceived threat reached new heights with growth of the Charismatic movement. If the Pentecostals were competing to reach the same lost souls as Baptists, the Charismatics seemed to be competing for the same Christians. Not only were some dynamic new Charismatic congregations drawing members from Baptist churches, but some Baptist congregations were leaving the denominational fold and “going Charismatic.” While Baptist opponents of the Charismatic movement continued to cite theological differences, they particularly focused their criticisms on what they saw as the new movement’s threat to church unity.

In addition to examining how Baptist theology sometimes clashed with “gifts of the Spirit” movements, Weaver also provides a penetrating analysis of how gender and class issues factored into the conflict. Baptists often responded negatively to “women preachers” who played key roles in the emerging movements. Because Pentecostalism, in particular, gained

many of its adherents from working class people with limited education, some Baptists saw them as fishers of men in their pond. Others, who were one or two generations removed from the farm or the factory, looked down on the Pentecostals because they offered an uncomfortable reminder of their own roots.

Weaver paints a vivid and illuminating picture of the complicated relationship between Baptists and the Holiness, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. It's not light reading, but it certainly is enlightening.

*Ken Camp, managing editor*

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