

Bill J. Leonard

James and Marilyn Dunn Professor of Baptist Studies
and Professor of Church History, Wake Forest Univ. School of Divinity

March 18, 2014

All events are open
to the public

*Scholarship
Justice
Practice*

BRITE DIVINITY SCHOOL

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Bill Leonard is a popular writer, speaker and observer of religion in America. He is the author or editor of some 22 books including *Christianity in Appalachia* (1999); *Baptist Ways: A History* (2003); *The Challenge of Being Baptist* (2010); and *Can I Get a Witness?: Essays, Sermons and Reflections* (2013). Leonard is currently involved in research for a book entitled *A Sense of the Heart: Christian Religious Experience in the U.S.* He writes a twice-monthly column for the Associated Baptist Press. Bill is an ordained Baptist minister (American Baptist Churches, USA).



- **11:00 am**—"The Things that Make for Freedom"
Guest Preacher, Brite Chapel Service, Robert Carr Chapel
- **12:00 pm**—Community Conversation
(\$5.00 charge)
- **7:00 pm**—"Joel Osteen, 'Nones,' and the Non-Denominationalizing of American Religion"
Evening Lecture, Bass Conference Center

Osteen and Lakewood Church set the scene for a discussion of the non-denominationalizing of American religion, a trend long present in American religious life, but with significant expansion in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This trend suggests that denominations, once the primary way of organizing religious life in the United States, are in a state of permanent transition, realigning, reassessing, reconfiguring and coming apart in a variety of ways. If some speak of this as a post-denominational era, they surely mean that religious communities are rethinking their identity, reorganizing responses to their society, and re-forming their theological outlooks, even as most lose or cannot find significant numbers of members. Denominations remain on the scene, but are only one of a growing number of options for organizing and experiencing the life of the church in American society. Yet all these ecclesiastical options--denominations, mega-churches and emerging movements--now find themselves impacted by the dramatic rise of the 'nones,' those one in five Americans (1 in 3 under 35) who claim no religious affiliation and/or engagement. Those issues are worth exploring, and soon.