

SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGY IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY



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Southern Baptist Theology And a Parting Reflection

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The Southern Baptist Convention at the end of the twentieth century was characterized by growth in mission and excitement over theology. The growth in mission was represented in the evangelistic aspirations expressed in the Bold Mission Thrust adopted by the convention. The excitement over theology was recapitulated in the report of the Peace Committee led by Charles G. Fuller and adopted by the convention. This issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* focuses on that second aspect of Southern Baptist life in the latter half of the twentieth century, our theology. This journal is an appropriate venue for rehearsing Southern Baptist theology in the late twentieth century, because Southwestern Seminary often took center stage in that doctrinal drama. (This editorial is also an appropriate venue for some final words from this editor, of which more below.)

David S. Dockery introduces the issue through outlining the historical context of the Southern Baptist Convention as it entered and processed through the twentieth century. During this century of growth, the convention truly had its “coming of age,” bureaucratically as well as theologically. Next, James Leo Garrett Jr. contributes two essays on Herschel Harold Hobbs, a genuine Southern Baptist “Father” whose Biblicist production and steady leadership in the 1960s and 1970s cannot be overlooked. Next, Paige Patterson offers three essays detailing his perspective on the conservative renaissance of the Southern Baptist Convention, a movement that dominated denominational ideas and events throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The issue ends with a collection of critical book reviews written by faculty and graduate students from Southwestern Seminary and other theological institutions around the world.

This issue also draws to a close my ministry as editor for this journal. When originally tasking me, President Paige Patterson required three major implementations: 1) the speedy recovery of three years of prior issues previously neglected, 2) the restoration of a thematic approach to the journal issues, and 3) the creation of a new design that would appeal to pastors as well as scholars. Nine publications from volume 48.2 through 52.2 were dedicated to recovering the serial integrity of our journal with themes ranging from “British Baptists” to “The Family” and “Missiology” to “Biblical Inves-

tigations.” The redesigned journal issues began with 53.1 on the “Dead Sea Scrolls” and have featured, alongside the quality academic material, sermonic contributions, attractive cover art, and a monographic touch. During that time, we have seen the subscriptions of the journal recover dramatically and continue growing. Amidst this vivid recovery, we thank God for the ministry of Madison Grace, Editorial Assistant for this journal, who has also been my coworker in, *inter alia*, the theological studies division, the Center for Theological Research, BaptistTheology.org, and the Oxford Studies Program.

While each issue has been personally important to this editor, this particular one prompts a flood of warm memories. First, the three contributors, as Southwesterners, have played important roles in my own theological development. James Leo Garrett Jr. is a longtime theological mentor, having guided me into a career in systematic and historical theology with his characteristic Southern gentleman’s demeanor. Garrett’s personal and academic gravity and grace are unrivalled by any living Southern Baptist, as so many colleagues will attest. Paige Patterson was a theological teacher and political counselor long before and after he became my seminary’s president. It has been a distinct pleasure to work close beside him these nine years in things biblical, evangelistic, Baptist, and Anabaptist. David Dockery, also a Southwesterner, has been a personal and professional confidant for more than two decades. Dockery’s voluminous writings have covered the gamut of theology, culture, and education, and his burgeoning legacy as an institutional and denominational powerhouse is, Lord willing, incomplete.

A second reason for warm memories concerns the subjects of this issue. Many of the theologians and leaders mentioned herein have provided personal inspiration over the years. The first time I heard Herschel Hobbs preach, our church saw three people converted to Christ, including a senior citizen leaning on his cane and a young man provocatively decorated with an earring. Hobbs had the ability in the same sermon to speak to the budding Christian theologian and all manner of lost human beings, for he was passionate to speak God’s Word clearly. As for the convention sermons of such luminaries as W.A. Criswell and Jerry Vines, mentioned in Dr. Patterson’s conservative memoir, the written word cannot properly convey how powerful their spoken words really were in challenging one generation while forming the next.

A third reason for pleasant thoughts will be found amidst the book reviews. If the late twentieth century was the coming of age of the Southern Baptist Convention, the twenty-first century will be the coming of age of her intellectuals. Read the book reviews carefully, for some are faculty members at Southwestern, and the theological and practical expertise of these gospel ministers are unsurpassed anywhere. Other reviewers are today’s doctoral students who will be tomorrow’s teachers. Their biblical worldviews suffuse their scholarly approaches to biblical studies, theology and history, philosophy and ethics, missions and evangelism, and preaching and pastoral studies. It is in the hands of God to choose the next generation of Southern Baptist

leaders, but I pray he chooses the likes of Madison Grace, Matt Ward, Benjamin Hawkins, Ched Spellman, and John Mann to stand beside the likes of David Allen, Jason Lee, Matt Queen, and James Wicker to further the biblical legacies of Herschel Hobbs, W.A. Criswell, James Leo Garrett Jr., and Paige Patterson.