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James Leo Garrett Jr. and the
Southwestern Theological Tradition



JAMES LEO GARRETT JR. AND THE SOUTHWESTERN THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

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This issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* is designed to focus on the life, thought, and work of James Leo Garrett Jr. (1925-2020), a faithful Christ follower, a gentleman and a scholar, an influential Baptist thinker, and a systematic and historical theologian who invested most of his career at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. This article will attempt to offer insight regarding the theological tradition at Southwestern Seminary and the role it played in influencing Garrett's work as a theologian as well as looking at the important role he carried out in shaping this tradition.

I. SHAPERS OF THE SOUTHWESTERN THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

Garrett's theology did not develop in a vacuum, having been largely formed while studying with his mentor, W. T. Conner (1877-1952), who taught theology for four decades at Southwestern, an institution founded in 1908 by the visionary B. H. Carroll (1843-1914). We will seek to understand Garrett's theological contribution to Baptist and evangelical life by understanding better the context in which he did his work, a context informed and shaped by Carroll and Conner over the first four decades of the seminary's existence. Garrett enrolled as a student at Southwestern in the 1940s during the final decade of Conner's tenure. One cannot understand the Southwestern theological tradition apart from understanding the contributions of Carroll, Conner, and Garrett.

1. *B. H. Carroll*. Unlike the founders of the first seminary in Southern Baptist life, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary now located in Louisville, Kentucky, who were educated at and influenced

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by Brown University, Princeton Seminary, and the University of Virginia, the Southwestern founder lacked formal theological education. Carroll, who was largely self-taught, was, however, often described as brilliant by those who knew him.¹ Through his disciplined practice of reading nearly 300 pages each day, Carroll was regarded as the most thoughtful of Christian leaders in the Southwest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition, he was a powerful preacher, gifted leader, and a person blessed with insightful organizational skills.²

While serving as the pastor of the highly regarded First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas, Carroll proposed a new Baptist state convention for Texas in the 1880s. This plan called for the consolidation of Waco University and Baylor University, with the newly created institution to be called Baylor University at Waco. Ministerial students were to be taught by university president Rufus Burleson and Carroll, in what was an expanded and escalated version of what had been practiced at Waco University since Carroll became pastor of First Baptist in Waco in 1871.³

Carroll immersed himself in this educational effort, which, prompted by personal circumstances in his life, eventually led to his transition from the tall-steeple church pastorate in 1899 to become the first secretary of the Texas Baptist Education Commission. One of the priorities of this new Commission called for enlarging the sphere of ministerial preparation at Baylor University at Waco. A new theological department was established at the school in 1901 with Carroll serving as head of the department, which had two other faculty members, including A. H. Newman, the outstanding historian from McMaster University in Canada.

¹Jeff D. Ray, *B. H. Carroll* (Nashville: The Baptist Sunday School Board of the SBC, 1927); W. W. Barnes, "Biography of B. H. Carroll," in Index of the Carroll Collection, Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Also, see Franklin M. Segler, "Carroll, Benajah Harvey," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, ed. Norman Cox (4 vols., Nashville: Broadman, 1958), 1:232-33.

²J. B. Gambrell, "The Home Going of President Carroll," in *Dr. B. H. Carroll, the Colossus of Baptist History*, ed. J. W. Crowder (Fort Worth: self-published, 1946), 101; James T. Spivey, "Benajah Harvey Carroll, *The Legacy of Southwestern: Writings that Shaped a Tradition*, edited by James Leo Garrett Jr. (North Richland Hills, TX: Smithfield, 2002).

³Robert A. Baker, *Blossoming Desert: A Concise History of Texas Baptists* (Waco: Word, 1970), 134-52; also, L. R. Elliott, ed., *Centennial History of Texas Baptists* (Dallas: Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1936); Leon McBeth, *Texas Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History* (Dallas: Baptistway, 1998), 143-50.

Just a few years later, in 1905, Baylor's theology department was enlarged into Baylor Theological Seminary with Carroll named as dean. The faculty included Newman, Calvin Goodspeed, C. B. Williams, and L. W. Doolan. At the opening of the Baylor Seminary, Carroll set forth his vision for theological education grounded in biblical orthodoxy, which was combined with a zeal for denominational unity and cooperation. This seminary eventually separated from Baylor and was granted an inaugural charter to form a new institution on March 14, 1908, with Carroll serving as the first president. He proceeded to publish five lengthy articles in the *Baptist Standard*, articulating the distinctive mission of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, which was moved to Fort Worth in 1910, where the work was relaunched with seven faculty members and 126 students.⁴

Carroll believed his vision for the new seminary to be in continuity with Southern Seminary, where he had previously served as a trustee, though it is important to note that this vision was specifically contextualized and adapted for the southwest frontier. Carroll maintained great admiration for James P. Boyce and John A. Broadus, the first and second presidents of Southern Seminary, but Carroll's work was purposefully distinctive. The founder of Southwestern Seminary, who was 65 years old when the institution was started in 1908, died in 1914. Though he only served as president for six years, and a few of those in less than good health, he had established a seminary committed to historic orthodoxy and denominational unity, and characterized by a generous spirit of cooperation. This spirit has continued to influence Southwestern through the years, including the work of W. T. Conner and James Leo Garrett Jr.⁵

Carroll regularly taught the entirety of the English Bible in four-year cycles, both at Baylor and at Southwestern. His final lectures on the inspiration and authority of the Bible continue to serve as an important source for understanding Southern Baptist views of Scripture at the turn of the twentieth century. Unlike Conner and Garrett, Carroll, himself, was not a writing theologian. He employed

⁴Robert A. Baker, *Tell the Generations Following: A History of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1908-1983* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983), 23-109; Also, see W. K. Penrod, "A Plea for a Great Southwestern Seminary," *Baptist Standard* (October 17, 1907); B. H. Carroll, "Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary," *Baptist Standard* (November 16, 1905).

⁵Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 53-109.

sermons, editorials, addresses, debates, and private correspondence to communicate his theological commitments.⁶ Essentially, as James Spivey has noted, “he was an expositor and polemicist with a biblical pastoral theology who made little attempt to systematize doctrine.”⁷ Carroll’s theology can be found in sermons and lectures, but his thought reflected an overall faithfulness with the New Hampshire Confession (1834/1853).

The Bible was the focus of Carroll’s career. His widespread reputation as a champion of Baptist orthodoxy was closely associated with his doctrine of Scripture. He confessed the Bible to be the written revelation of God. The affirmation undergirded Carroll’s entire theology and exegesis of Scripture. While noting a close relationship between revelation and inspiration, he nevertheless went to great lengths to differentiate between revelation, inspiration, and illumination. Carroll clearly and enthusiastically emphasized that the inspiration of Scripture ensures a perfect standard of instruction, conviction, and a profitable work for correction and training in righteousness.⁸

While recognizing that the biblical writers were moved along by the Holy Spirit, Carroll rightly recognized that inspiration applies primarily to the writings of Scripture. He carefully developed his argument for biblical inspiration from a Baptist context, building on the affirmation of Scripture in Article One of the New Hampshire Confession. Carroll built his course for the Bible’s inspiration by piling up the Bible’s testimony about itself. He defended the inspiration of every word in Scripture almost excessively. Probably indicating his lack of formal education, he incorrectly attempted to defend the Hebrew vowel points in this process. Nevertheless, his bottom-line conclusion that the very words of the Bible were chosen by God was consistent with the work of J. L. Dagg, Basil Manly Jr., and James Boyce. Carroll rejected all forms of limited or partial inspiration, saying that “when you hear the silly talk that the Bible contains the

⁶See B. H. Carroll, *The B. H. Carroll Pulpit*, ed. Adam W. Greenway (Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill Press, 2021).

⁷James Spivey, “Benajah Harvey Carroll,” in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 70; also, see B. H. Carroll, *Inspiration of the Bible*, ed. J. B. Cranfill (New York: Revell, 1930).

⁸Carroll, *Inspiration of the Bible*; also, see Timothy George and Richard Land, eds., *Baptist Why and Why Not Revisited* (Nashville: B&H, 1996).

Word of God and is not the Word of God, you hear a fool's talk.”⁹

Because Carroll emphasized the product of inspiration, he was largely silent on the method of inspiration. He highlighted the result of inspiration, which he believed to be an infallible Bible. Carroll also affirmed the Bible to be inerrant, true, trustworthy, irrevocable, and irrefragable. Carroll applied this inerrant quality only to the original writings of the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible.

Carroll standardized orthodoxy in the southwest region of the country. As others have observed, Carroll championed Christian truth and Baptist unity, faith, and practice whether in his roles of pastor, educator, leader, or denominational statesman. Having observed Charles Spurgeon's efforts to push back against the tides of modernism in Great Britain, the Southwestern Seminary founder seemed always ready when necessary to put on his apologist or polemicist hat to affirm biblical orthodoxy and to counter liberalism, heresy, and schism.¹⁰

Carroll affirmed the biblical doctrine of creation, including an early earth, a literal Adam and Eve, and a historical fall.¹¹ His soteriological commitments reflected a modified Calvinism, without the precision of many Reformed thinkers. He rejected double predestination, affirming the spirit of the New Hampshire Confession. Since his writings were more expositional than systematic, his views on the extent of the atonement are not clear, though he seems to have leaned in the direction of a general or universal atonement, without any form of universalism.¹² He was more concerned to refute Arminianism, Campbellite teachings, “second blessing” theology, antinomianism, and the anti-missionary approaches of hyper-Calvinism. Carroll also countered extreme Landmarkism, though he himself rejected an understanding of a universal church.¹³ He challenged the growing popularity of premillennialism. In fact, Carroll's entire theological hermeneutic was staked on a postmillennial understanding of

⁹Carroll, *Inspiration*, 20; also, see David S. Dockery, “The Crisis of Scripture in Southern Baptist Life,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9:1 (2005): 36-53.

¹⁰See David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority, and Interpretation* (Nashville: B&H, 1995), 189-91; also, Dockery, *Southern Baptists Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Theological, and Historical Proposal* (Nashville: B&H, 2008).

¹¹B. H. Carroll, *Christian Education and Some Social Problems*, ed. J. W. Crowder (Fort Worth: self-published, 1948), 14-15.

¹²Spivey, “Carroll,” 173-74.

¹³Spivey, “Carroll,” 175-76.

Scripture, which provided his great zeal for missions.¹⁴

His influences were Boyce, Broadus, and Spurgeon. Yet, he also showed dependence upon and appreciation for the work of A. H. Strong and the various aspects of Landmarkism found in J. R. Graves and J. M. Pendleton. He held these tensions together by appealing for the importance of Christian unity to counter the spirit of Christian divisiveness. Carroll's commitment to the local church, to the gospel, to the importance of missions, and his unwavering conviction regarding the truthfulness of holy Scripture shaped his life, his thinking, and his work. Carroll was primarily a pastor, a preacher, a homiletical and pastoral theologian. His thought was somewhat systematized through the editorial work of J. W. Crowder and J. B. Cranfill. Carroll called for more than an articulation of the tenets of Christian doctrine; he appealed for an experiential response of obedience to theological truths.¹⁵ W. T. Conner maintained that the two ideals that shaped Carroll's life and thought were "an authoritative Bible and the reality of Christian experience."¹⁶ Theology was intended to equip and serve the church. While Carroll was surrounded by scholars like A. H. Newman and Calvin Goodspeed, it was one of his students who would take up the theological mantle and influence generations of Southwestern students over the next decades; that student was W. T. Conner.

2. *W. T. Conner.* W. T. Conner was born on January 19, 1877, in Cleveland County, Arkansas. When he was 15, his family moved to Texas where he was baptized at the Harmony Baptist Church at Caps, Texas. Conner received a B.A. and M.A. from Baylor University where he was influenced by the missionary zeal of John S. Tanner. Conner was a member of the first graduating class at Southwestern Seminary in 1908 with a Th.B. degree. At the recommendation of both Professors Newman and Goodspeed, President Carroll invited Conner to join the Southwestern faculty. While urging him to receive additional preparation, Newman and Goodspeed encouraged him to go to Rochester Seminary where he studied with A. H. Strong and Walter Rauschenbusch, among others, receiving a B.D.

¹⁴Spivey, "Carroll," 176-77; also see Tom L. Watson, "The Eschatology of B. H. Carroll" (Th.M. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960).

¹⁵Spivey, "Carroll," 177-79; See Michael Wade Crisp, "The Pastoral Theology of B. H. Carroll: An Examination" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

¹⁶W. T. Conner, *Southwestern Evangel* (December 1925), 6.

degree in 1910. Following his graduation from Rochester and a brief period at the University of Chicago, Conner returned to teaching at Southwestern. He was later given a leave of absence in 1914 to pursue Th.D. studies with E. Y. Mullins at Southern Seminary, writing a dissertation on “Pragmatism and Theology.” He later wrote an additional thesis on the theology of John to receive his Ph.D. from Southern.¹⁷

Conner wrote important books on *Revelation and God* (1936), *Christian Doctrine* (1937), *The Faith of the New Testament* (1940), *The Gospel of Redemption* (1945), and *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (1949). His primary works were published by Broadman Press, but he also wrote for evangelical publishers like Zondervan and Revell.¹⁸ Conner carried out the role at Southwestern Seminary as primary writing theologian in a manner similar to what E. Y. Mullins had done earlier done at Southern Seminary. Conner’s most significant contribution to the subject of biblical authority is contained in his volumes *Revelation and God* and *Christian Doctrine*. During his life, the influence of Carroll and Goodspeed waned and that of Mullins and Strong increased. While Conner wrote with regular appeals to the biblical text, doing so with greater regularity than other Baptist theologians, his work was also shaped by the emphasis on experience found in Mullins’s methodology and William James’s pragmatism and empiricism.¹⁹

Conner emphasized the personal nature of revelation as well as its progressive nature. He clearly affirmed biblical inspiration, but, like Carroll, did not contend for a model of inspiration. It would not, however, be unfair to suggest that his understanding differed from Carroll’s, reflecting an approach more akin to that of Strong and Mullins. He sought to balance carefully the divine and human aspect of Scripture. He did not discuss inerrancy or infallibility though he never indicated errors in the biblical text. His approach to

¹⁷James Leo Garrett Jr., “Walter Thomas Conner,” *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, 202-07; also see Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 449-54; Stewart Newman, *W. T. Conner: Theologian of the Southwest* (Nashville: Broadman, 1964).

¹⁸Conner wrote *Personal Christianity* (1937) and *The Christ We Need* (1938) with Zondervan. He penned *The Epistles of John* (1929) with Revell.

¹⁹Garrett, “Conner,” 207-11; also, see David S. Dockery, “Walter Thomas Conner (1877-1952),” *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, edited by G. T. Kurian (4 vols., Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1:615-16.

theology tended not to spend time on what he considered speculative matters like divine decrees or theories about the original autographs of Scripture. Conner affirmed the Bible's trustworthiness and its full authority, stressing the Bible's focus on the spiritual dimensions of life. His ultimate concern emphasized the function of Scripture in leading men and women toward freedom in Christ. The bottom line for Conner was the authoritative character of Scripture.²⁰

Conner expressed greater openness on the relationship of science to the Bible as he advanced in his career. In 1925, he penned a strongly worded negative review in *The Southwestern Evangel* on the work of W. L. Poteat, president of Wake Forest College and one of the first public advocates for evolution in Southern Baptist life. Both Stewart Newman and James Leo Garrett, Conner's two primary interpreters, have suggested that years after writing this review, sometime later in his career, Conner had a growing openness to theistic evolution, similar to the thought of A. H. Strong.²¹

While Conner relegated discussions regarding theories of inspiration to theological obscurity, he confessed the Bible's authority for faith, life, and practice, stressing redemption as the Bible's central interest and the person and work of Jesus Christ as the hermeneutical key to its unity. He emphasized the Bible's divine origin and absolute authority in all matters. Conner gladly confessed his commitment to scriptural authority, the Holy Trinity, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, Christ's redemptive death and his victorious resurrection, salvation by grace through faith, the church, the importance of the kingdom, and the return of Christ.²² Affirming historical orthodoxy in these major doctrines, it must be noted that his methodology and emphasis on Christian experience together with his hesitancy to affirm biblical infallibility set a trajectory somewhat different from Carroll and Goodspeed. In fact, he thought Carroll to be too rigid and inflexible, reflecting elements of medieval scholasticism.²³

²⁰Helpful interpreters of Conner's understanding of Scripture include James Leo Garrett Jr., "Theology of Walter Thomas Conner" (Th. D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1954). Also, see L. Russ Bush III and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1980) and Dwight A. Moody, "The Bible," in *Has Our Theology Changed?* ed. Paul A. Basden (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 7-40.

²¹Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 196-97; Newman, *Conner*, 104-38.

²²See W. T. Conner, *Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman, 1937).

²³See William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of the Baptists* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004), 420-29; see Conner's review of *Fundamentals of Christianity*, by F. C. Patton in *The*

Still, there is much to appreciate in the work of W. T. Conner. Though not well known or influential beyond the world of Southern Baptists, Conner's impact on Southwestern Seminary and Southern Baptists remains significant. Like B. H. Carroll, Conner believed theology should serve the church and strengthen the Christian experience of believers. His work was grounded in Scripture, generally seeking to avoid speculative interpretations. As others have noted, if Carroll can be called a pastoral/homiletical theologian, it would be appropriate to think of Conner as a biblical theologian. His writing style was clear and understandable, though not simplistic. His emphasis on Christology, the doctrine of revelation, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, sanctification and the Christian life, and his understanding of the church as both local and universal were important and commendable contributions.²⁴

His approach to the attributes of God and his emphasis on God's holiness demonstrated thoughtful reflection, leading him to consider the worship of God as the highest calling for the church and individual believers.²⁵ Like Carroll, he worked from a broadly Reformed framework regarding soteriology, affirming both unconditional election and the perseverance of the saints.²⁶ Conner, like Carroll, rejected federal headship in thinking about the sinfulness of humans. He stressed the universal intent of Christ's provision, stressing God's purpose in salvation rather than speculation about the divine decrees.²⁷ As previously noted, his work on sanctification remains worthy of commendation, but his approach to justification was rather problematic in the way he blurred justification and regeneration.²⁸

Conner's theology was certainly more systematic than Carroll's,

Southwestern Evangel 10 (May 1926): 45.

²⁴Garrett, "Conner," 211-12.

²⁵Garrett, "Conner," 209; also see W. T. Conner, *Revelation and God* (Nashville: Broadman, 1936).

²⁶Garrett, "Conner," 209-10; also, see Paul A. Basden, "Theologies of Predestination in the Southern Baptist Tradition: A Critical Evaluation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986), 208-29; Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986).

²⁷See Walter D. Draughon III, "A Critical Evaluation of the Diminishing Influence of Calvinism on the Doctrine of the Atonement in Representative Southern Baptist Theologians: James Petigru Boyce, Edgar Young Mullins, Walter Thomas Conner, and Dale Moody" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987).

²⁸See Robert Keith Parks, "A Biblical Evaluation of the Doctrine of Justification in Recent American Baptist Theology: With Special Reference to A. H. Strong, E. Y. Mullins, and W. T. Conner" (Th.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1954), 147-89.

but still idiosyncratic at times, especially in the order with which he treated theological topics and themes.²⁹ He rejected dispensationalism while moving away from his former postmillennial position toward amillennialism with an emphasis on Jesus and the kingdom. Conner emphasized the redemptive work of Christ, preferring to frame the cross work of Christ in terms of *Christus Victor*. While tensions played out across the country in the 1920s and 1930s with the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, Conner carefully distanced himself from both fundamentalism and liberalism, carrying forward the basic commitments to historical orthodoxy.³⁰

The influence of E. Y. Mullins on Conner, as well as that of A. H. Strong, cannot be missed. Conner, like Mullins, emphasized the role of experience and Christian devotion, which represented the best of pietism as well as some weaknesses from the legacy of F. D. E. Schleiermacher. Like Strong, he grappled with the relational, historiographical, philosophical, and theological challenges brought on by modernity while seeking to maintain and defend the primary tenets of historical orthodoxy.³¹ Conner's warm-hearted devotion to the gospel and to the importance of global missions, which can be traced back to the influence of Professor Tanner during his college days at Baylor, helped him to maintain the balance needed as the primary writing theologian among Southern Baptists in the 1930s and 1940s.³² Several of Conner's students carried forth his influence on the mission field, in the local church, and in denominational settings, but none did so more than James Leo Garrett Jr. in the realm of theological education.

II. JAMES LEO GARRETT JR: BAPTIST AND EVANGELICAL THEOLOGIAN

Born on November 25, 1925, in the shadow of Baylor University, Garrett was called heavenward on February 5, 2020, at the age of 94. Garrett's lofty status as a distinguished theologian emeritus continued

²⁹For example, Conner almost always treated the doctrine of Christ prior to theology proper.

³⁰Garrett, "Conner," 207-12; also see the chapter on Conner in *Baptist Roots: A Reader in the Theology of Christian People*, ed. Curtis W. Freeman, James W. McClendon, and C. Rosalee Velloso DaSilva (Valley Forge: Judson, 1999).

³¹See Grant Wacker, *Augustus Hopkins Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness* (Macon: GA: Mercer University Press, 1985).

³²Personal conversations with both Darold Morgan and James Leo Garrett Jr., who studied with Conner in the final years of his long tenure at Southwestern.

to influence Southwestern Seminary, as well as Southern Baptist and evangelical life well beyond his days as an active faculty member at Southwestern. Garrett graduated from Baylor University in 1945, from Southwestern Seminary in 1948, from Princeton Seminary in 1949, and from Southwestern Seminary with a Th.D. in 1954, after completing a dissertation on his mentor, W. T. Conner, who died in 1952. Garrett went on to complete a Ph.D. at Harvard in 1966 under the supervision of George Hunston Williams.

Garrett taught systematic and historical theology at Southwestern from 1949-59, where he also briefly served as editor of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*. From 1959-73, he held a faculty position in historical and Christian theology at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He served as director of the J. M. Dawson Institute on Church and State as well as professor at Baylor University from 1973-79. He returned to his beloved Southwestern in the 1979-80 academic year to resume his role as professor of systematic and historical theology.³³

Garrett's reputation as a scholar and lecturer was indeed well deserved. He had written widely and was recognized as the premier Southern Baptist theologian of the second half of the twentieth century. Garrett had a rapid-fire method of lecturing that made it difficult to keep up with his pace. His grasp of church history, historical theology, and systematic theology seemed encyclopedic. He pushed students hard; his exams were extremely challenging, and his standards exacting.³⁴

While Garrett was a scholar of the first order, he also was a man of deep and genuine piety, kind and considerate toward others, a devoted churchman, and a faithful follower of Christ. He loved the gospel message and exemplified a confidence in the Scriptures, which he believed to be totally dependable, reliable, truthful, trustworthy, and infallible. Garrett modeled what it meant to be an ecclesial theologian, one who understood that his first calling was to serve the church. In this sense, he followed well his teacher, W. T. Conner. If Conner shaped theology at Southwestern in the first half

³³See Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "James Leo Garrett Jr.," *Profiles of Faithfulness*, edited by Alex Sibley (Fort Worth: Seminary Hill Press, 2021), 177-84; Brackney, *Genetic History of Baptist Thought*, 425; also, see Paul A. Basden, "James Leo Garrett Jr.," *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, 297-98; Basden, "James Leo Garrett Jr.," *The Legacy of Southwestern*, 133-48.

³⁴I had the privilege to study with Dr. Garrett when I was a student at Southwestern (1979-81).

of the twentieth century, Garrett did so in the second half. Indeed, one cannot understand the history and heritage of Southwestern Seminary, and the seminary's theological tradition, without grasping the significance of the Conner-Garrett tradition.

A committed Baptist, Garrett not only completed a splendid two-volume systematic theology in 1995, but also authored a massive work on *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* in 2009, which is the finest source on the history of Baptist thought ever published. It should be noted that Garrett provided significant treatment on at least 100 Baptist theologians over this 400-year period but did not treat Carroll as a theologian. Instead, he merely discussed Carroll's differences with the Baptist anti-missionary movement and his views on Landmarkism.³⁵ While a Baptist by both upbringing and conviction, Garrett led the way in showing others how to engage those in different traditions, doing so with conviction and charity. He served as the Southern Baptist representative at the Second Vatican Council. Throughout his career, Garrett continued dialogue with Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and other Protestants.³⁶

The longtime Southwestern professor maintained an infectious commitment to and hope for the unity of the people of God. In this sense he was not only an evangelical Baptist, but a convictional, denominational, and ecumenical evangelical. Garrett pushed back against the effects of Landmarkism on Southern Baptists, exemplifying the spirit of unity presented in John 17 and Ephesians 4, especially in his labors with the Baptist World Alliance. Garrett deepened his thoughts about what it meant to be a denominational evangelical in an expanded conversation with Southern Seminary historian E. Glenn Hinson called *Are Southern Baptists Evangelicals?*³⁷

In all these ways, Garrett both extended and expanded the work of others who had shaped the Southwestern theological tradition, including not only Carroll and Conner, but also Calvin Goodspeed, Ray Summers, Curtis Vaughan, John Newport, William Hendricks,

³⁵Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 206.

³⁶William Pitts, "The Relation of Baptists to Other Churches," *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church*, ed. Paul A. Basden and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 235-50.

³⁷James Leo Garrett Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull, *Are Southern Baptists "Evangelicals"?* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983); James Leo Garrett Jr., "Are Southern Baptists 'Evangelicals'? A Further Reflection," *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 218-23.

John Kiwiet, Bert Dominy, and Boyd Hunt, among others. His appreciation for the larger world in which Baptists live and serve was particularly notable. In 1965, he authored a work on *Baptists and Roman Catholicism*, a survey and interaction of two centuries of Baptist engagement with Roman Catholics.³⁸ Garrett encouraged further dialogue which took place under the umbrella of the Home Mission Board. Garrett suggested that Baptists could learn to talk with other Baptists and other Protestants, moving them out of their provincial and ingrained world, by dialogue with Roman Catholics. His important 1974 publication, *Baptist Relations with Other Christians*, provided a detailed overview of how Baptists around the world engage with other Christian bodies. In his conclusion, he encouraged greater cooperation in areas of evangelism, missions, education, and publication, which prepared the way for others to participate in broader conversations and shared efforts of collaboration and cobelligerency. Garrett's courage, initiative, and example in this regard was commendable at every level.³⁹

It is Garrett's prolific contribution as historical/systematic theologian that is most noteworthy. The two-volume, fifteen-hundred-page systematic theology surpassed A. H. Strong in quality and comprehensiveness. The volumes reflect an encyclopedic understanding of the issues in every area of theology.⁴⁰ William Brackney maintained that Garrett's unique contributions included defining theology as a ministry-oriented discipline whose aspects include those that are fixed and those that reflect change.⁴¹

Garrett's theological method includes locating and correlating Old and New Testament texts together with significant input from the patristic period to the modern context, asserting that the tasks of theology are instructional, apologetic, polemical, ethical, and missionary. While engaging more broadly with theologians across

³⁸James Leo Garrett Jr., *Baptists and Roman Catholicism* (Nashville: Broadman, 1965); James Leo Garrett Jr., "Protestant Writings on Roman Catholicism in the United States between Vatican Council I and Vatican Council II" (2 vols., Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard Divinity School, 1966).

³⁹James Leo Garrett Jr., ed., *Baptist Relations with Other Christians* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1974); also, see Ryan Fields, "Locating Catholicity: A Free Church Theological Account of the Church's Universality in Dialogue with the Anglican Tradition" (Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2021).

⁴⁰James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (2 vols; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990-95).

⁴¹See Brackney, *Genetic History of Baptist Thought*, 425-29, 503-10.

various traditions, one of Garrett's primary concerns was to help his readers understand who Baptists are and what they believe. As Paul Basden noted, this effort included discovering, uncovering, and recovering basic Baptist distinctives, those beliefs and practices which form the core of Baptist identity. In doing so, he first stressed how Baptists share and affirm similar beliefs with other faithful Christian traditions in the areas of biblical authority, the Trinity, creation and providence, humanity and sin, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, redemption, and last things.⁴² Then he proceeded to point out Baptist distinctives such as believer's baptism by immersion, congregational polity, religious liberty, approaches to church and state, and the responsibility for missions and evangelism. While believing there still exists a reason for Baptist Christians, Garrett stressed that Baptists were only one part of the larger body of Christ, an important aspect of the universal church, one of the places of major theological development from Carroll to Conner to Garrett.⁴³ These reflections also led him to consider the place of Southern Baptists in the larger Baptist family as well as the Believers' church tradition. He led a key conference to explore these important relationships in Louisville, Kentucky, in June of 1967.⁴⁴ Garrett carried out the theological task as a confessional Baptist and as an evangelical while heartily affirming the church as one holy catholic and apostolic.

Garrett, more so than Carroll or Conner, was a systematician, but he excelled as a historical theologian. He sought to be as exhaustive as possible to help his readers understand the various positions on almost every issue. He treasured the authority of Scripture, maintaining it to be supreme in comparison to tradition, reason, experience, or any other proposed source of authority.⁴⁵ His treatment of the Trinity is thorough and classical, affirming God's oneness and threeness in a manner faithful to the early church councils from Nicaea to Chalcedon. Garrett affirms general revelation but rejects natural theology. He affirmed God as creator, rejecting evolutionary naturalism as well as what is sometimes called creation science.⁴⁶

Garrett was at his best defending the virgin birth of Christ and

⁴²See Basden, "Garrett," in *Theologians*, 299–316.

⁴³Basden, "Garrett," in *Theologians*, 299–300.

⁴⁴Pitts, "The Relation of Baptists to Other Churches," 236–37.

⁴⁵Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 1:155–82.

⁴⁶Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 1:291–319.

Christology in general, again affirming Chalcedonian conclusions.⁴⁷ As Jason Duesing has pointed out in a presentation for the Center for Theological Research, Garrett's treatment given to the Holy Spirit is thorough, giving careful attention to spiritual gifts.⁴⁸ Like Carroll and Conner, Garrett presented his soteriology in a modified Reformed framework. His conclusions were nuanced, maintaining God's sovereign authority and human responsibility. Affirming both individual and corporate election, Garrett emphasized the corporate aspect, reminding his readers that God is saving a people for himself.⁴⁹

Contrary to Conner, he maintained a traditional understanding of the doctrine of justification, contending that men and women are declared righteous by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Following Millard Erickson, he opted for a universal understanding of the work of Christ while affirming both *Christus Victor* and substitutionary atonement. He clearly dismissed any notion of universalism and, also, rejected annihilationism. Garrett maintained the reality of hell as eternal punishment and the hope of heaven as the complete manifestation of God's glory. Like Conner and Carroll, Garrett rejected dispensational premillennialism.⁵⁰ He offered an extensive treatment of the doctrine of the church, refuting Landmarkism and rejecting hierarchical forms of church government. He viewed the church as a redeemed community, a gospel herald, a suffering servant, as well an organism and an organized institution. To no one's surprise, he clearly articulated Baptist beliefs regarding ecclesiology.⁵¹

Garrett's work is comprehensive in its scope, but sometimes lacking in reaching conclusions regarding disputed areas of theology. He

⁴⁷Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 1:620-25; James Leo Garrett Jr., "A Reappraisal of Chalcedon," *Review and Expositor* 71 (1974): 31-47; Garrett, "Why Systematic Theology," *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989): 259-81.

⁴⁸Jason Duesing shared privately with me a copy of an insightful work he presented in 2006 for the Center for Theological Research at Southwestern Seminary with the title "Power in the Seminary: 20th Century Pneumatological Differences at Southwestern Seminary." In this paper, Duesing thoughtfully traces the theological development in the thought of Carroll, Conner, and Garrett regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit, with important implications for other aspects of their theological commitments, which I have found helpful, adapting aspects of Duesing's insights for the overall work on this article.

⁴⁹Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:432-54; also see James Leo Garrett Jr. "Should Southern Baptists Adopt the Synod of Dordt?" *Baptists Today* (26 June 1997), 18-19; David S. Dockery, "Southern Baptists and Calvinism: A Historical Look," *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad Waggoner (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 29-46.

⁵⁰Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:705-69.

⁵¹Basden, "Garrett," in *Theologians*, 291-304.

carries forward more aspects of Conner than Carroll, while continuing and extending the Southwestern trajectory in a laudatory manner. The subtitle of the two-volume systematic theology, “biblical, historical, and evangelical,” should probably more accurately be stated as “biblical, historical, Baptist, and evangelical.” Some may question the value of Garrett’s encyclopedic work, but as Basden has observed, “if his purpose is to lead evangelicals, especially Baptists, to understand the length and breadth and height and depth of Christian doctrine as it has been formulated for two millennia, then he succeeds beautifully.”⁵² His purpose in his writings, as was the case in his classroom, was to bring illumination to controversy, to be convictional when needing to defend cardinal doctrines, and to avoid agitation with fellow believers with whom he differed. In doing so, he brought together his commitments to confession theology, a hopeful catholicity, and Christian unity.⁵³

III. CONCLUSION: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN THE SOUTHWESTERN TRADITION

In sum, there is both continuity and discontinuity in the work of these three important shapers of the Southwestern theological tradition. Carroll was primarily a preacher and denominational leader, not a writing theologian or a systematician. Conner wrote for Baptists and did so in a most effective way as the most widely read Baptist theologian for almost a quarter of a century. His work was biblical and focused, more engaging than Carroll. As the years passed, Conner clearly echoed more the influence of Strong and Mullins rather than Carroll or Goodspeed. Garrett’s work was clearly more comprehensive, but there is a sense in which Conner’s influence was always present in the background. Garrett’s engagement was far broader than either of his predecessors, avoiding any narrow provincialism or parochialism.

Carroll affirmed and defended biblical inerrancy. Conner emphasized biblical authority. Garrett offered balance, joining Conner with an important articulation of the divine-human authorship of Scripture. All three were unquestionably confessional and orthodox

⁵²Basden, “Garrett,” in *Theologians*, 315.

⁵³See David S. Dockery, “Introduction: Southern Baptists in the Twenty-First Century,” *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 13-22.

regarding the primary matters of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and salvation by grace through faith. All affirmed God as creator, while only Carroll maintained a young earth view. Conner became more open to theistic evolution in his latter years, while Garrett preferred a revelatory day theory similar to Bernard Ramm.

Carroll rejected an understanding of the universal church, which was corrected by Conner and expanded and emphasized by Garrett. Carroll reflected Landmarkist tendencies not found in Conner or Garrett. Carroll worked from a more consistent Calvinistic framework, though none of the three affirmed double predestination nor emphasized particular redemption. Conner affirmed unconditional election while rejecting irresistible grace. Garrett gave greater emphasis to the corporate nature of election. While all worked from a broadly Reformed framework, there was a diminishing influence of consistent Calvinism with Conner and Garrett. Conner, more so than either Carroll or Garrett, emphasized personal revelation and experience.

All three rejected dispensationalism, while Carroll not only affirmed postmillennialism, but used it as a hermeneutical guide for how he read Scripture.⁵⁴ Conner moved from postmillennialism to amillennialism. Garrett recognized and articulated the difficulties in interpreting Revelation 20:1-10. All affirmed the promise of heaven, the reality of hell, and the essential work of gospel proclamation, evangelism, and missions. All saw theology's purpose in light of serving the church, strengthening believers, and advancing the gospel.

Carroll's primary focus was on Baptist matters. Conner, likewise, broadly emphasized Baptist doctrine while engaging the neo-orthodox thinkers of his day and rejecting the liberalism he discovered at the University of Chicago. Garrett maintained a distinctively Baptist and thoroughly comprehensive theology that could be described as biblical, historical, convictionally ecumenical, and denominationally evangelical, emphasizing informed engagement and relations with other Christians while drawing from the best of the Christian theological tradition in every era of the church.

The good news today is that as liberal denominations have lost their theological compass and as progressive evangelicals flirt with the remnants of Walter Rauschenbusch, Baptist evangelicals and

⁵⁴Spivey, "Carroll," 176-77.

evangelical Baptists can find in Carroll, Conner, and especially Garrett an unflinching commitment to confessional Christianity, to the truthfulness of Scripture, the transformational power of the gospel, the importance of the church, and the essentials of historical orthodoxy.

James Leo Garrett's major contributions are his efforts to extend the best of the Christian tradition in his work as both historical and systematic theologian. The clear and consistent methodology, the breadth of his historical understanding, and genuinely charitable spirit, all of which are informed and shaped by his desire for the unity of the church, underscore his work from beginning to end. Overall, his work is biblical, historical, Baptist, and evangelical. His work demonstrates an awareness of contemporary trends and issues while being fully aware of the centuries of theologizing throughout the history of the church, doing so while remaining anchored in historical orthodoxy.

The strengths of Garrett's work are many and the weaknesses are few. His work is more encompassing than almost any other Baptist work of systematic theology. His work is certainly less trendy than Clark Pinnock or Stan Grenz, and less philosophical and journalistic than Carl Henry. Garrett's approach is less defensive and ingrown than J. L. Dagg, James Boyce, or Carroll. It is more comprehensive than James McClendon and more encyclopedic than Millard Erickson, though not as readable or as engaging with contemporary theological, cultural, and ethical issues and trends. Garrett's contribution is more interactive with the great thinkers throughout the centuries than Bruce Demarest or Gordon Lewis, though less pedagogically friendly than Wayne Grudem. His thoughtful catholicity is more nuanced than either Curtis Freeman or Steve Harmon.

Without question, Garrett's work is unapologetically Baptist, demonstrating greater competency, breadth, and depth than Carroll, Conner, Mullins, Dale Moody, Morris Ashcraft, or Fisher Humphreys. The overall significance of his work is greater than that of the influential A. H. Strong. The sum of Garrett's work from his dissertation on Conner in 1954 to his massive study of Baptist theology in 2009 is nothing less than a first-rate achievement. Together with Millard Erickson, James Leo Garrett has provided a standard to which the rest of us should aspire. Contemporary Baptist

theologians such as Albert Mohler, Malcolm Yarnell, Gregg Allison, Stephen Wellum, Danny Akin, Chris Morgan, Adam Harwood, Rhyne Putman, Matt Emerson, Jason Duesing, Nathan Finn, Bob Stewart, Peter Tie, Madison Grace, Matthew Barrett, John Hammett, Dongsun Cho, Juan Sánchez, among others, will be able to build upon this important work, standing on Garrett's shoulders to serve the church faithfully in the twenty-first century. Let us together offer our gratitude to God for the gift of one of his most gifted teachers to his church and to the life and legacy of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, James Leo Garrett Jr.

