



Southwestern

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY



James Leo Garrett Jr. and the
Southwestern Theological Tradition



CURRENTS, METHODS, AND TENDENCIES IN THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF JAMES LEO GARRETT JR., 1950–2015

Wyman Lewis Richardson*

Perhaps the most common complaint leveled against James Leo Garrett Jr.'s two-volume *Systematic Theology* is that, having provided copious and encyclopedic citations of the views of others, Garrett is too reticent in providing his own. Indicative would be David Smith's 1991 review of volume 1 in *Didaskalia*. There, Smith, while deeply appreciative of the volume, notes that "Garrett frequently leaves one guessing where he stands on an issue, but seldom sure," and later conjectures, with a seemingly sincere desire to understand Garrett's approach, that "some readers may prefer not to be bothered by an author's own conclusions."¹ John Moe's review of volume 2 in *Logia* makes similar observations. Moe, less appreciative than Smith, writes that Garrett is "careful not to be dogmatic" to the point that the work often lacks "a clear indication of which the author considers to be correct." Moe observes that Garrett's "conclusions are as tentative as it is possible to make them."² William Hendricks found Garrett's conclusions in volume 1 "well thought through" but nonetheless "sparse."³ Again and again this recognition is made by reviewers—either as a complaint or as an acknowledgment with varying degrees of sympathy.

Paul Jensen, reviewing volume 2 in *The Reformed Theological Review*, chafes perhaps most intensely of all published reviewers under the insufficient presence of Garrett's own views. He writes:

¹David Smith, "Review, *Systematic Theology* (Vol. 1)," *Didaskalia* 2, no. 2 (April 1991): 35.

²John Moe, "Review: *Systematic Theology* (Vol. 2)," *Logia* 7, no. 2, (1998): 63.

³William Hendricks, "Review: *Systematic Theology* (Vol. 1)," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 42.

*Wyman Lewis Richardson is pastor of the Central Baptist Church in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

Is all this unfair to Garrett? Possibly. But I would love him to restrict himself to two hundred pages, and tell us, with passion, and in the light of all that learning, what he believes, and how it all hangs together.⁴

Here one detects not only frustration at the lack of Garrett's views, but also at what Jenson perceives to be a lack of engaging tone and personal investment in Garrett's *Systematic*. Jenson "would love" for Garrett to tell us what he thinks "with passion."

While I do not fully agree with these criticisms and believe that, to an extent, they represent a misunderstanding of what Garrett was seeking to do in his *Systematic*, *they are not utterly devoid of merit. Regardless, the fact that the vast majority of published reviews of the Systematic* articulate some expression of curiosity at the absence of Garrett's own personality from his major work should be noted.

It is at this point that the availability and study of Garrett's collected writings can offer a helpful nuance and compliment to his major works. One benefit of having Garrett's shorter writings collected and arranged first topically and then chronologically is that the reader and researcher will be allowed more easily to observe currents, methods, and tendencies in Garrett's approach as a theologian, educator, churchman, and writer. Garrett's collected writings consist of articles (journal, magazine, and news), essays, sermons, a pamphlet, booklets, lectures, book chapters, interview transcripts, and a hymn, roughly spanning the sixty-five years from 1950 to 2015. With few exceptions, when I refer to Garrett's "collected writings" I am referring to those pieces that will comprise, when finished, the eight volumes of *The Collected Writings of James Leo Garrett Jr., 1950-2015*. These works, again, with very few exceptions, were arranged with Garrett's agreement, cooperation, and assistance, and, until his death, he was still finding and recommending the inclusion of previously forgotten pieces. By "collected writings" I refer to the Garrett corpus outside of his major works: the two-volume *Systematic Theology* and his *Baptist Theology*.

I hope to demonstrate that Garrett's collected writings, while bearing, of course, the marks of Garrett's approach in the major

⁴Paul Jenson, "Review: *Systematic Theology* (Vol. 2)," *The Reformed Theological Review* 55, no. 3 (September-December 1996): 155-56.

works for which he is best known, not only occasionally reveal some qualities, attributes, and tendencies not always overtly present in the major works, but also provide the reader with a picture of Garrett's maturation and evolution as a writer and scholar that will enrich the reader's engagement with the major works. What is more, the collected shorter writings show us more of Garrett himself and, indeed, more of the "passion" that Jensen regretted missing in the *Systematic*.

I. METHOD

1. *Writing for All*. One aspect of Garrett's method that the collected writings make clear is his penchant for addressing many of the topics and issues he addressed in both scholarly and popular venues. In his preface to volume 2 of *The Collected Writings*, Garrett speaks of his intentionality in this regard:

First, I have tried to write both for the broad readership of Southern Baptist church members and for pastors and teachers who pursue questions intensively. My earliest writing was for Baptist state papers, wherein I tried to communicate with the rank-and-file of Southern Baptists. My professors Drs. W. T. Conner and T. B. Maston excelled in such communication, and I sought to learn from them.⁵

One cannot help but feel that this life-long refusal to retreat exclusively into scholarly journals and monographs was fueled in large part by Garrett's high view of and deep involvement with the local church and the people of it as well with seminary students and pastors.

2. *Thoroughness*. Many of the qualities one finds in the collected writings are evident throughout all of his works, collected and major. For instance, the collected writings evidence the same degree of thoroughness for which Garrett is known in the major works. The eight volumes of these writings, for instance, contain approximately fifty-six-hundred footnotes, many of them quite extensive, across one-hundred-and-sixty-three chapters. This penchant for meticulous

⁵James Leo Garrett Jr., "Preface," in *The Collected Writings of James Leo Garrett Jr., 1950-2015*, [with the final three volumes forthcoming], ed. Wyman Lewis Richardson, Rick Willis, and Michael F. Kennedy (5 vols.; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018-2022), 2:xiii.

attribution was either appreciated or it was not, as two reactions to Garrett's extensive defense of congregational polity in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views on Church Polity*, demonstrate. In response to Garrett's thirty-seven-page chapter and its three-hundred-and-seventeen footnotes, many of them containing several lines, Danny Akin summarized the chapter as "classic James Leo" and asserted that "the bibliography above justifies the value of the chapter." Less enthused was Paul Zahl:

The weakness of the piece lies in its format. There are just too many footnotes... What is weak about the text is its undigested scholarly apparatus, which floods the reader with lists of commentaries and resources rather than digesting and integrating them.⁶

This thoroughness extends somewhat famously, we might say, to Garrett's penchant for providing middle names and birth/death dates for most of the figures he cites and references. This is evident in the collected writings.

This commitment in relation to sources occasionally assisted him in confrontation and made him a formidable debater. For instance, in a September 8, 1960, edition of *The Voice of St. Matthews and The Voice of the Highlands*, a newspaper in St. Matthews, Kentucky, a letter appeared from young Professor Garrett expressing concern about two statements that were made by Father Roger Bartman in his message at St. Margaret Mary, which had been reported on in the August 4, 1960, edition of the paper by the editor, Emil M. Aun, who was present when Father Bartman spoke. Garrett objected to two of Bartman's reported statements: (1) "that of the original American colonies, only Maryland...did not have an Established Church"; and (2) that "not a single Catholic country anywhere in the world...demands that its chief executive be a Catholic."

These two points, Garrett said, "are clearly contradicted by the facts of history and contemporary world government." He then proceeded to argue that it was "well known" that the first statement was

⁶Daniel Akin, "Response by Daniel L. Akin," in *Perspectives on Church Government*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B&H, 2004), 195; Zahl, "Response by Paul F. M. Zahl," in *Perspectives on Church Government*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B&H, 2004), 207.

false and that such could be “readily demonstrated.” Garrett appealed to Anson Stokes’s three-volume *Church and State in the United States* and documented that Rhode Island had no established church and that, technically, neither did Pennsylvania. To the second point, Garrett used Amos Peaslee’s three-volume *Constitutions of Nations* to show that, in point of fact, Bartman was, once again, “quite incorrect,” and documented that Spain, Argentina, and Paraguay “all require that their chief executives be Roman Catholics.”

Finally, Garrett gently scolded Bartman and called for precision and accuracy in one’s research:

“While citizens do differ in their beliefs and opinions, there are certain facts of history that call for precise and accurate interpretation by any who would speak or write authoritatively about them. I trust that you and Professor Bartman will take notice of these erroneous statements and will hasten to make a statement of correction for the benefit of all your readers.”⁷

Garrett likewise utilized his well-known thoroughness and accuracy with sources in his most well-known debate, an encounter with Glenn Hinson. In the exchange, Garrett alleged that Hinson’s failure to differentiate between and define “voluntarism” and “voluntaryism” leads to confusion as does his less than convincing equation of “voluntarism,” as he defines it, with E. Y. Mullins’s soul competency. Garrett goes on to pronounce Hinson’s reckoning of E. Y. Mullins as “the supreme Baptist theologian” to be “unsafe, if not dangerous” in that it allows “one Baptist theologian...to speak for all Baptists.” Shortly thereafter Garrett observes that Mullins, “in the very paragraph in which he defined his concept of soul competency” declared Baptists to be “in substantial agreement with the evangelical world in general.” This was a somewhat poignant and, if I may, devastating move on Garrett’s part, as it served the two purposes of (a) reminding the reader again of how Mullins’s understanding of soul competency differed from Hinson’s and (b) highlighting how Mullins likewise disagreed with Hinson’s thesis on Southern Baptists and Evangelicals.

⁷Garrett, “Letter to Editor (1960),” *The Voice of St. Matthews and The Voice of the Highlands* (September 8, 1960): 4.

Even with these pointed offensives in debate, we still find Garrett's customary irenicism and even-handedness. Garrett clearly respected Hinson, for example, who was a friend and colleague, and expressed that their debate was "a fraternal one" and that Garrett "accepted my assignment to prepare a reply or rebuttal to my friend and long-time colleague" with "some reluctance." What is more, he hoped that he has conducted himself "in a spirit of humility and love."⁸

A perusal of the collected writings will confirm the validity and rightness of Malcolm Yarnell entitling his February 2020 Southwestern Seminary chapel address on Garrett, "Blessed are the Gentle: The Legacy of James Leo Garrett Jr." One fails to find anything like *ad hominem* arguments in Garrett's writings. On the contrary, Garrett's concern for treating others fairly and rightly has been encapsulated in a formula that has been called the "James Leo Garrett Rule." Bart Barber attempted to call Twitter to the "James Leo Garrett Rule" in 2019, and he summarized the rule thus: "Only when you can state your opponent's position so well that they themselves say, 'Yes, that's what I believe,' can you then begin to debate."⁹ The clearest articulation of the "James Leo Garrett Rule" from the pen of Garrett can be found in his 2005 "Baptist Identity and Christian Unity," when Garrett wrote: "In all interconfessional dialogues in which I have been privileged to participate, I have sought to maintain two standards: first, to represent the beliefs of Baptists accurately, faithfully, and representatively, and second, to attempt to state the positions of others in terms the accuracy of which others would readily affirm."¹⁰ Here we find in the collected writings Garrett's call for irenicism and precision and care alongside his demonstration of these same qualities.

3. *Balance.* The judiciousness and balance rightly hailed in Garrett's major works is abundantly evident in the collected writings as well. Garrett shows time and time again in the collected writings a concern that extremes be avoided. Oftentimes, he utilizes the image of

⁸James Leo Garrett Jr., "A Response to Professor Hinson," in *Are Southern Baptists "Evangelicals"?*, James Leo Garrett Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 195.

⁹It should be noted that Twitter appears *not* to have heeded Barber's call. See Bart Barber, @bart-barber, "Only when you can state your opponent's position so well," Twitter, September 26, 2019, 6:45 a.m., <https://twitter.com/bartbarber/status/1177187496200953857>.

¹⁰Garrett, "Baptist Identity and Christian Unity," 2:252.

the pendulum to accomplish this. For instance, in his 1997 “Should Southern Baptists Adopt the Synod of Dort?” he employs the image as a summary and cautionary statement of the frequent imbalances one finds throughout Christian history.

Indeed we need to recognize that the extreme swing of the pendulum in Christian history has often meant the road to heresy, and the balance has often been the cry of orthodoxy. In the person of Jesus Christ, his deity and his humanity need to be balanced. In the Holy Scriptures, the word of God and the word of man need to be balanced. So also in the intricate interconnectedness of God’s sovereign authority, agency, and power and our human responsibility and accountability, there needs to be balance.¹¹

Garrett seems especially concerned with balance in his calls for a return to regenerate church membership and church discipline. In 1961, he wondered aloud whether or not “Baptist churches that have abandoned the negative aspects of congregational discipline” can “restore the same without some of the abuses of the past.”¹² In his 1962 call for the recovery of church discipline in Baptist churches, Garrett sees the possibility of imbalance in the direction of “a new Pharisaic legalism” as “probably the greatest problem” and calls for care in its reinstatement.¹³

On another front, in 1995 we find Garrett responding to Robert C. Campbell in Baptist World Alliance conversations between Baptists and Pentecostals/Charismatics and calling upon Baptists to “deal with the lists [of gifts of the Holy Spirit] in a balanced and comprehensive manner.”¹⁴

Perhaps one of Garrett’s most striking examples of his commitment to balance and the avoidance of extremes can be found in his important 1972 article, “Biblical Infallibility and Inerrancy According to Baptist Confessions.” After surveying numerous confessions, Garrett

¹¹Garrett, “Should Southern Baptists Adopt the Synod of Dort?” 2:190.

¹²Garrett, “Seeking a Regenerate Church Membership,” 3:144.

¹³Garrett, *Baptist Church Discipline*, 3:177.

¹⁴Garrett, “Baptists and the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements,” 2:241.

carefully concludes:

This distinction in historic usage suggests that we can and ought to differentiate a functional infallibility (the Bible's role as the supreme rule of faith) from a modal infallibility (the inspiration of words as well as thoughts by a method akin to dictation by the Holy Spirit, with a consequent de-emphasis on the freedom and responsibility of the human authors and a rejection of biblical criticism except for textual criticism).

His carefully worded proposal concerning the utilization of these terms by Baptists shows a desire to honor the reality of the ways the terms have been used alongside the implications of these usages. He is careful, nuanced, and balanced in his proposal.

While many present-day Baptists may not be inclined to express their view of biblical authority in terms such as "infallible" and "inerrant," it is possible to discern in the functional usage of 1677 and 1742 something that is more viable than the modal usage of 1905 and later. If and when infallibility is taken to exalt the divine inspiration to the virtual suppression of the human so as to have a "docetic" Bible or when it is a call to reject virtually all literary criticism of the Bible, it would need to be resisted for the sake of an open Bible. On the contrary, functional infallibility served to place the Bible high above natural religion, general revelation, and the historic Church with its tradition as the supreme source of Christian truth. It could be reinterpreted today in terms of the supremacy or finality of "special revelation" as climaxed in Jesus Christ in the face of the rival claims of non-Christian religions and ideologies. When infallibility is virtually a synonym for the unique authority of the message of the Bible, it need not be resisted but perhaps only translated and then affirmed.¹⁵

¹⁵Garrett, "Biblical Infallibility and Inerrancy According to Baptist Confessions," 1:130–31.

What is more, Garrett's balanced approach, much like his thoroughness, manifests itself in controversy. This can be seen in his 2008 *Baptist Standard letter*, "Honor Baptists' Calvinist Roots." In this letter, Garrett objects to something "my friend Fisher Humphreys" (with his co-author Paul Robertson) wrote in their book, *God So Loved the World: Traditional Baptists and Calvinism*. Humphreys and Robertson referred to "traditional Southern Baptists' as non-Calvinist Southern Baptists," while admitting that most "influential Baptist leaders" "of the first three centuries of Baptist history" were indeed Calvinists. Assessing the names of these Calvinist Baptists provided by Humphreys and Robertson, Garrett concluded that they effectively were suggesting "that in reality only the English General Baptists, the later Free Will Baptists, and twentieth-century Baptists have been 'traditional Baptists.'"

Garrett responds that there are legitimate challenges to make against Calvinism. He concludes, however, that it is "only by disregarding the total evidence of Baptist history" that we can "affirm that the majority of past Baptists in Britain and North America have not been Calvinists in some sense of that term."¹⁶ Garrett would allude to this disagreement two years later in his preface to *Whosoever Will* by writing, "We must indeed acknowledge that there has been a major strand of Calvinism in Baptist life, that is, Baptist Calvinism, despite the efforts of some to downplay such." His footnote after this statement was a citation of Humphreys's and Robertson's book.¹⁷

What is interesting about this 2008 public disagreement with Humphreys, is that it came just less than a year after his *Alabama Baptist* articles, "Baptists and Calvinism: An Informational Examination," which, by Garrett's own estimation in 2011, caused some "of the neo-Calvinists" to get "hot and disturbed."¹⁸ This open disagreement with Humphreys so soon after his open disagreement with many thoroughgoing Calvinists shows a commitment to balance but also a refreshing refusal to allow oneself to be owned by any camp to the point of abandoning objectivity. It also shows a willingness to express conviction even if doing so challenged friends.

¹⁶Garrett, "Honor Baptists' Calvinist Roots," 2:211–12.

¹⁷Garrett, "Preface (2010)," 4:40.

¹⁸Garrett, "An Interview with Dr. James Leo Garrett, Jr.," 2:213.

II. COLOR

The collected writings are also intriguing in that they demonstrate the many ways that Garrett brought a sense of literary color to his writings. This was often done through the utilization of metaphors, similes, idioms, and other flourishes.

1. *Geographical and Culinary Imagery.* Garrett had a penchant for both culinary and geographical imagery. At the 1961 “Child Life Conference” hosted by the Baptist Sunday School Board, he observed that failing to teach children “what lay between the age of the apostles and the rise of Baptists” is like “requiring Texas history but not requiring also American history and/or world history.”¹⁹ Forty-four years later he described his 2005 presentation, “Baptist Identity and Christian Unity: Reflections on a Theological Pilgrimage,” as being “like Caesar’s ancient Gaul, divided into three parts...”²⁰ The metaphor for which Garrett is perhaps best known, as it also appeared in the first chapter of the first *Systematic Theology* volume, is culinary in nature.

We cannot dispense with basic Christian doctrine if we are to live and serve effectively today as Christians. We can no more eat delicious beef from a boneless cow or work safely in a tall skyscraper that has no structural steel than we can communicate and live out the Christian gospel without some basic Christian doctrine.²¹

Geographical and culinary imagery are wedded in his 1996 “The Distinctive Identity of Southern Baptists vis-à-vis Other Baptists,” when in writing on “Southernness” and “Sectionalism” Garrett notes that, “In respect to the mid-twentieth-century migration of Southern Baptist families to the Northern and Western states, the Southernness might have been described in terms of grits, ham, and red-eye gravy or steak and gravy and mashed potatoes.”²²

2. *Metaphor and Simile.* The collected writings further reveal a

¹⁹Garrett, “Christian Knowledge and Conviction,” in *Book of Proceedings: Child Life Conference, January 31-February 3, 1961* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1961), 86.

²⁰Garrett, “Baptist Identity and Christian Unity: Reflections on a Theological Pilgrimage,” 2:243.

²¹Garrett, “Seeking to Understand Baptist Theology,” 1:39

²²Garrett, “The Distinctive Identity of Southern Baptists vis-à-vis Other Baptists,” 2:53.

pendant for metaphor and simile. In 1991 Garrett likened certain imperiled Baptist distinctives to those species classified as “endangered” by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and argued that these distinctives “may be in danger of serious attrition, if not full extinction.”²³ In 2005 he likened the “tenuous and uncertain” relations between Baptists and the Eastern Orthodox as “moving at the pace of nearly dried concrete.”²⁴ Seminaries seeking to avoid being impacted by the changes in education sweeping the nation in the 1960s, Garrett wrote in 1967, are said to have assumed “an ostrich position” and to have become “Rip Van Winkle’s” sleeping through a revolution.²⁵ Hyper-Calvinism among early British Baptists is likened to “snow in the spring” that “slowly melted under the warmth of Evangelical Revival.”²⁶ He complains in 1961 of the demise of healthy membership practices and of the fact that church letters have “depreciated” “like Confederate money.”²⁷ He wished the reader to understand the plight of Southern Baptist seminaries and seminary professors in 1967:

The SBC seminaries today are like the six children in a family in which the father, a salaried worker, though he earns more dollars than ever before, because of inflation and the rising income of many of his neighbors, cannot support his family as well as when he had three children.²⁸

Garrett explains idiomatically that he and Myrta, his wife, were “poor as ‘Job’s turkey’” in the summer of 1950 when they made their “way in the back seat of a friend’s car to Cleveland, Ohio, for the eighth world congress of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), where our commitment to the Baptist world family was made.”²⁹

3. *Imagery.* The collected writings reveal an author adept at the effective use of attention-grabbing imagery.

²³Garrett, “Protect Baptist Distinctives from Extinction,” 1:33.

²⁴Garrett, “Baptist Identity and Christian Unity: Reflections on a Theological Pilgrimage,” 2:252.

²⁵Garrett, “Crisis in Theological Education,” 2:18–19.

²⁶Garrett, “Baptists and the Awakenings of Modern History,” 10.

²⁷Garrett, “Seeking a Regenerate Church Membership,” 3:144.

²⁸Garrett, “Crisis in Theological Education,” 2:31.

²⁹Garrett, “Baptist Identity and Christian Unity,” 2:245.

In 1959/60, while describing the persecution of nonconformists, Garrett writes that “Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists nestled together in the same bed of nonconformity.”³⁰ He condemns many eighteenth century British clergymen as men who “thought first of their livings, much of their foxhunts and ale, and only occasionally of their flocks.”³¹ Particular Baptists of the eighteenth century are depicted as “dangerously ill” with “the disease” of “antinomian hyper-Calvinism.”³² Garrett is almost incredulous that “one must come into the twentieth century...to find a major evangelical awakening which has been mothered primarily by the Baptists.”³³ Garrett digs deep in his diagnosis of mid-twentieth-century Southern Baptists: “If our forefathers were petrified on the rock of hyper-Calvinism, we are greased on the slicky-slide of activism.”³⁴ Writing of the Baptist neglect of church discipline in the 1960s, Garrett leaned on domestic imagery:

Church discipline is needed as a deterrent to the moral decline of our time. It used to be said of Baptists because of their congregational polity and tendency to air disputes publicly, “The Baptists wash their dirty linen in public.” One wonders whether the time may fast be approaching when Baptists just “hang their soiled linen out to dry.”³⁵

In 1961, speaking of how both eighteenth century Baptists in Philadelphia as well as the earliest Baptists in Charleston, South Carolina, both held to a careful examination of prospective members, Garrett employed nuptial imagery: “What Philadelphia and Charleston conjoined in experience, doctrine, and conduct, let not contemporary Baptists put asunder!”³⁶ Garrett bemoaned how racism “in utter denial of the reconciling power of the cross of Jesus Christ arises with serpentine erectness to hinder the advance of Christian

³⁰Garrett, “Baptists and the Awakenings of Modern History,” 1:7.

³¹Garrett, “Baptists and the Awakenings of Modern History,” 1:8.

³²Garrett, “Baptists and the Awakenings of Modern History,” 1:9.

³³Garrett, “Baptists and the Awakenings of Modern History,” 1:11.

³⁴Garrett, “Baptists and the Awakenings of Modern History,” 1:12.

³⁵Garrett, “Recovering Church Discipline,” 3:134.

³⁶Garrett, “Seeking a Regenerate Church Membership,” 3:143.

witness” in 1963.³⁷

Vivid imagery also helps Garrett in his assessments of modern Baptist controversies. David Allen and Steve Lemke are said in 2010 to have “put in place” “some heavy artillery” in their considerations of limited atonement and irresistible grace (or effectual calling).³⁸ In the same year Garrett asks, “Can Baptists be expected to lead Muslims to saving faith in Jesus Christ if their doctrine of the Trinity is stored in mothballs?”³⁹

Effective imagery is also applied beyond the Baptist fold. Luther is said to have “pour[ed] out the very last dreg of epistemological content” from “the cup of faith” in the way he “[drove] a wedge between faith and the Word of God” in his defense of infant baptism, in Garrett’s 1964 “Luther’s Developing Doctrine of Baptism.”⁴⁰ In 1972 Garrett refers to Arnold Toynbee, Paul Tillich, and John Macquarrie as “three present-day Goliaths.”⁴¹

Arid, this is not.

4. *Sarcasm*. Only rarely did Garrett utilize sarcasm in his collected writings. He does chide in 1967 that:

Theological professors do not want to live in luxury. They only want to be able to purchase and pay for their residences, support their families and put their children through college without the necessity that every wife should be employed outside the home and every husband must take additional engagements so that he works eight days a week and fifty-six weeks a year!⁴²

³⁷Garrett, “Authority for the Christian World Mission,” in *Christ for the World*, comp. and ed. G. Allen West Jr. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963), 74.

³⁸Garrett, “Preface: *Whosever Will*,” 4:40.

³⁹Garrett, “The Future of Baptist Theology with a Look at Its Past,” 2:72.

⁴⁰Garrett, “Luther’s Developing Doctrine of Baptism,” 4:54.

⁴¹Garrett, “Three Present-Day Goliaths,” 4:11. Only once, in 1961, does Garrett indulge in alliteration, when he observed, “Many churches have more statistics than sainthood, more conformity than Christlikeness, more diplomacy than discipleship.” It should be noted, however, that this indulgence occurred in a sermon preached before Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Allowances must be made. Garrett, “The Renewed Congregation,” 3:147.

⁴²Garrett, “Crisis in Theological Education,” 2:21.

5. *Humor*. Even less present are instances of humor in Garrett's works. The one instance in the collected writings is so out of character that the reader (and the editor!) cannot help but wonder if Garrett was truly aware of what he was referencing. In an almost surreal turn, Garrett, in his "Who are the Evangelicals?," an entry in his "debate" with Glenn Hinson, quotes a *Wittenburg Door* editorial aside regarding Richard Quebedeaux to the effect that the editors, after the interview, "were not sure whether Mr. Quebedeaux is an evangelical, a Moonie, an evangelical Moonie, an academic evangelical Moonie, or an evangelical who moons Moonies."⁴³

6. *Prophetic Rebuke*. Garrett's prose in the collected writings was sometimes even colored by the heat of prophetic rebuke and challenge. We find, for instance, the thirty-four-year-old Garrett chastising domesticated, materialistic, safe, American Christianity in tones reminiscent of Kierkegaard.

We applaud the statement, "Worship God, not the state," and fail to realize that it also means, "Worship God, not mammon." Church membership and crime both are registering record highs. The line of demarcation between church and world sans church discipline is often not perceptible. Magnificent new edifices, misnamed "churches" or "sanctuaries," perhaps to the poor of the world point as much to American materialism as to the gospel of the lowly Nazarene. Facing a worldwide opportunity for the Christian gospel, we falter impotently with a substandard discipleship.⁴⁴

One does not necessarily get this kind of stridency in the *Systematic*, for instance, but one needs to know that this heart still beats in the author of the *Systematic*. Once again, we find Garrett thundering:

Some churches have seemingly become country clubs

⁴³Garrett, "Who Are the Evangelicals," 2:105, n. 110. There is some self-effacing (and perhaps unintentional) humor in Garrett's 1962 recollection of how, as a younger man, he "had gathered a sheaf of texts from the Epistle to the Hebrews into what I then called a sermon...and preached it lustily to the members of the congregation I was then serving and repeatedly elsewhere." Garrett, "Recovering My Priesthood," *Home Missions* (February 1952): 14.

⁴⁴Garrett, "Baptists and the Awakenings of Modern History," 1:12.

whose standard of membership is lower than that of the P.T.A. or the civic clubs. A new book has just appeared in our country entitled “The Suburban Captivity of the Church.” Are the churches truly captive to materialism, to “the American way of life,” to racial segregation, or, as James W. McClendon has recently put it, to “Mickey Mouse morals and middle-class mores”? If so, then the time for renewal is here.⁴⁵

Garrett was clearly not averse to confronting his audiences with prophetic challenge. This can be seen in his defense of Baptist distinctives. After outlining what he saw as threats to the Baptist distinctives of “believer’s baptism by immersion, religious freedom for all human beings, and cooperative missions,” he called for the listeners to take an active role in safeguarding these: “Who will prevent three major Baptist beliefs from becoming extinct among the Baptists? Will you?”⁴⁶ So too with the distinctive of regenerate church membership: “Could it be that we Southern Baptists are not exemplary in regard to a regenerate membership because we have to a degree abandoned in practice what we have formerly advocated in principle?”⁴⁷ And again, Garrett asks, “Can we have renewal without a more adequate concern and method in receiving members into our churches and maintaining the integrity of our churches?” His conclusion: “A mere human association can afford to dismiss such a question; the people of God cannot.”⁴⁸

These examples and others like them in the collected writings are significant. They reveal not only Garrett’s personality and convictions but also, yes, the passion with which he held and articulated them.

III. INNOVATION

One revelation arising from the collected writings is the reality that Garrett was at times innovative and even creative, attributes not frequently used to describe him by readers and reviewers of the *Systematic* alone. Sometimes this innovation took the form of unique

⁴⁵Garrett, “Baptists and the Awakenings of Modern History,” 3:148.

⁴⁶Garrett, “Protect Baptist Distinctives from Extinction,” 1:37.

⁴⁷Garrett, “Seeking a Regenerate Church Membership,” 3:135.

⁴⁸Garrett, “The Renewed Congregation,” 3:149.

terminology that, if not necessarily originating with Garrett, was at the least popularized by him, certainly in Southern Baptists contexts.

1. *Dortian Calvinism*. Take, for instance, the term “Dortian Calvinism.” Garrett’s earliest usage of the term in print would appear to be in his 2007 *Alabama Baptist* articles—written at the invitation of editor Bobby Terry and published later as a booklet—entitled “Baptists and Calvinism: An Informational Examination.” Here and elsewhere, Garrett defines “Dortian Calvinism” as the five tenets popularly described by the TULIP acrostic.⁴⁹

We cannot say that this terminology originated with Garrett. There is a 1984 reference to “the staunch principles of Dortian Calvinism that the early settlers brought with them” in *American Colonial Writers, 1606–1734*, and Ronald J. Vandermolten wrote of Daniel Whitby’s denial of “Dortian Calvinism’s five points” in the 1992 *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*.⁵⁰ Of these two references, Vandermolten’s is the one most likely consonant with Garrett’s usage of it. While we must stop short of saying that the terminology of “Dortian Calvinism” originated with Garrett, it is certain that Garrett is the theologian most identified with the term and there can be no denying that this language seems to proliferate in Southern Baptist written sources and online *after* Garrett’s usage of it.⁵¹

“Dortian Calvinism” did not appear without some measure of pushback. Two years after the *Alabama Baptist* articles appeared, Michael A. G. Haykin, writing at the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies, addressed the term:

Recently I was asked by hereiblog: Can you explain the difference between “Dortian” Calvinism and “regular” Calvinism? Historically, the first term has no history. Those using Dortian Calvinism seem to mean 5-point

⁴⁹Garrett, “Baptists and Calvinism,” 2:194-95. See also his reference to “Dortian Calvinism’s five points” 2:199. He employs “Dortian” some thirty-three times in these articles.

⁵⁰Emory Elliott, *American Colonial Writers, 1606–1734* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1984), 98; Ronald J. Vandermolten, “Gill, John (1697-1771),” in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 153.

⁵¹Malcolm Yarnell has acknowledged Garrett’s use of the term and points, specifically, to Garrett’s 2007 *Alabama Baptist* articles. Yarnell, “Calvinism: Cause for Rejoicing, Cause for Concern,” in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 80. Mark R. Stevenson, *The Doctrines of Grace in an Unexpected Place* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 40.

Calvinism and have coined the term after the Synod of Dort that made the 5 points important. If you read Calvinists prior to the last decade you can find nobody talking about Dortian Calvinism. But, from its usage it appears to be a bad term—and it appears that by it one should read “unevangelistic Calvinism.”⁵²

Haykin’s dislike of the term also likely serves to identify Garrett as the popularizer of it when, in seemingly his only other reference to the term in his 2007 “Brief Reply to Dr. Garrett,” Haykin applies quotes to Garrett’s use of “Dortian Calvinism.”⁵³

We may conclude that Garrett brought the obscure language of “Dortian Calvinism” into wide usage among Southern Baptists who discuss these issues.

2. *Suprema scriptura*. So, too, with Garrett’s use of *suprema scriptura* as a corrective for and nuance of *sola scriptura*. In 1978, Garrett, in his “Sources of Authority in Baptist Thought,” demonstrated that Baptist confessions and theologians “have affirmed the supreme authority, as distinct from the sole authority, of the scriptures.” Alongside these Garrett noted the many who hold to the Bible as the sole authority and concluded that “Baptists have regarded the Scriptures as either the sole or the supreme doctrinal authority under the Lordship of Christ or the sovereignty of God.”⁵⁴ While Garrett did not explicitly use “*suprema scriptura*” in this 1978 article, he would nine years later refer to this article as his “historical study of *sola scriptura* and *suprema scriptura* among Baptists.”⁵⁵ Here, then, is where Garrett first fleshed the concept out in print.

The term was important to Garrett. He used it frequently and even in the context of debate, as when, in *Perspectives on Church Government*, he challenged James White to acknowledge that he actually holds to *suprema scriptura* since the term would “enable Dr. White to attain his goal of examining all tradition ‘in the light

⁵²Michael A. G. Haykin, “‘Dortian Calvinism’ and ‘Regular’ Calvinism,” *Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies*, August 17, 2009, <http://andrewfullercenter.org/media/blog/2009/08/dortian-calvinism-and-regular-calvinism?rq=Dortian>.

⁵³Michael A. G. Haykin, “Baptists and Calvinism: A Brief Reply to Dr. Garrett,” *Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies*, August 6, 2007, <http://andrewfullercenter.org/media/blog/2007/08/baptists-and-calvinism-a-brief-reply-to-dr-garrett?rq=Dortian>

⁵⁴Garrett, “Sources of Authority in Baptist Thought,” 1:152-63.

⁵⁵Garrett, “The Teaching of Recent Southern Baptist Theologians on the Bible,” 1:211, n. 108.

of Scripture.” He pressed Danny Akin on the same point in the same work.⁵⁶

What has been the impact of Garrett’s concept of *suprema scriptura*? First, many acknowledge Garrett as the originator of the term. Gabriel Fackre referenced in 1993 “Garrett’s introduction of the phrase ‘*suprema scriptura*’ in the place of the traditional *sola*.”⁵⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Daniel J. Treier refer to “the Latin term *suprema scriptura*” as “James Leo Garrett’s suggestion.”⁵⁸ Rhyne Putman writes that Garrett “offers the helpful term *suprema scriptura*...”⁵⁹ and has more recently asserted that Garrett “coined the phrase *suprema scriptura* as a helpful complement to the Reformation phrase *sola scriptura*.”⁶⁰

In terms of the abiding influence of Garrett’s championing of this terminology, the impact would appear to be significant as even a cursory examination of how frequently the term arises, with or without attribution, largely, but not exclusively, among Southern Baptists who write about issues of scripture and authority will reveal. In his *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, Malcolm Yarnell observed that Garrett “proposed the nuanced category of the supremacy of Scripture (*suprema scriptura*), in contradistinction to the simplistic Reformation category of Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*).” Yarnell went on to argue that Garrett’s “proposal is linguistically and pneumatically preferable to the Reformed suggestion concerning the adoption of the alternative category of unaccompanied Scripture (*nuda scriptura*).”⁶¹

Pastor Kurt Jurgensmeier is persuaded by Garrett’s use of *suprema scriptura* and argues for its preferability in his pastor’s training curriculum.⁶² In 1999, Warren McWilliams published *Dear Chris* with Baylor University Press, a series of letters between a fictional professor

⁵⁶Garrett, “Response by James Leo Garrett Jr.,” 285, 186.

⁵⁷Gabriel Fackre, “The Surge in Systematics,” *The Journal of Religion* 73, no. 2 (April 1993): 226.

⁵⁸Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Daniel J. Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015), 81. Steve Harmon writes of “[s]everal Baptist theologians” who “are increasingly willing to speak of the Bible as the supreme authority for faith and practice, while explicitly admitting other subordinate sources to a pattern of religious authority,” naming Garrett first among these. Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 32.

⁵⁹Rhyne R. Putman, *In Defense of Doctrine* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 214.

⁶⁰Rhyne R. Putman, *The Method of Christian Theology* (Nashville: B&H, 2021), 132.

⁶¹Malcolm Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 28.

⁶²Kurt Jurgensmeier, “Training Timothy,” *New Life Community Church*, June 2012, <http://trainingtimothy.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/23190826/7.10-The-Limitations-of-Scripture-Not-All-the-Information-We-Need.pdf>.

and former student addressing various issues of the Christian life and ministry. When Chris mentions “sola scriptura” to “Dr. Mac,” he responds by saying that he personally “like[s] a suggestion by one of my seminary profs. He proposed *suprema scriptura* or the supremacy of Scripture as a more accurate depiction of our view.” Dr. Mac goes on to define the term: “The Bible is our highest authority, but we acknowledge a limited role for other authorities.” In the endnotes McWilliams cites Garrett as the source of the proposal.⁶³

Perhaps most significantly, Steve Harmon speaks of “Garrett’s suggestion of *suprema scriptura*” and observes that Garrett’s “suggestion...has influenced the text of the reports from the conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Anglican Consultative Council and from the second series of conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Catholic Church, both of which describe the Baptist perspective as ‘*suprema scriptura*’...”⁶⁴ Is it at least possible that Garrett’s most innovative contribution to theological discourse is the introduction of *suprema scriptura* to the lexicon?

3. *Hyper-Calvinism*. Another area of innovation is Garrett’s proposed definition of hyper-Calvinism. This is interesting insofar as Garrett seemed aware of the possibility of his creative contribution in this regard and alluded to this possibility more than once. In his 2010 article, “The Future of Baptist Theology with a Look at Its Past,” Garrett writes:

I have offered, possibly for the first time, five distinguishing marks of Hyper-Calvinism: the supralapsarian order of divine decrees, the pre-temporal covenant of redemption made by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, eternal justification somewhat separated from the exercise of faith in time, rejection of offers of grace to the non-elect, and antinomianism.⁶⁵

He asserts the same possibility later in his interview with A. Chadwick Mauldin.⁶⁶ Whether or not Garrett was indeed the first to propose

⁶³Warren McWilliams, *Dear Chris* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1999), 90, 183, n. 90.

⁶⁴Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist, Catholics, and the Whole Church* (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2021), 235, n. 233.

⁶⁵Garrett, “The Future of Baptist Theology with a Look at Its Past,” 2:67.

⁶⁶Garrett, “An Interview with Dr. James Leo Garrett, Jr.,” 2:219.

such a detailed definition of hyper-Calvinism, it is a creative contribution to soteriological theology that he himself acknowledged.

4. *Theological Education*. Garrett was also aware of his role in making unique contributions in the area of theological education. In 2005, he reflected:

At the end of my first year as an instructor at Southwestern—the summer of 1950—I introduced two new courses to the Southwestern curriculum and seemingly to SBC theological education, one on Roman Catholic theology and the other on the history of Baptist theology.⁶⁷

His acknowledgment of the uniqueness of these courses should not be seen as hubris, a criticism one would search in vain to find of Garrett. They rather reflect an honest awareness on the part of Garrett that at the age of twenty-five he was seeking to bring new approaches to venerable established institutions and their coursework.

5. *History of Doctrine Proposal*. Garrett also showed an awareness of his own innovative contributions when, after providing an extensive survey in his 1971 “The History of Christian Doctrine: Retrospect and Prospect” of writings on and the various approaches to the history of doctrine, he offers “a proposal” concerning “one method which has not been, it seems, employed as yet within any published history of Christian doctrine . . . namely, a treatment, at least after the Council of Chalcedon (451), of the history of Christian doctrine according to the major confessional traditions, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant, with the approach of men, movements, councils, and creeds being followed under each confessional division.”

Garrett proposed that the completion of his unique proposal “is hardly possible for one human being.” Then, Garrett made the proposal outright:

Therefore, the writer hereby proposes that a team of closely cooperating scholars carefully chosen but definitely interconfessional, interperiodic, international,

⁶⁷Garrett, “Baptist Identity and Christian Unity,” 2:245.

and intercontinental be convoked to establish a working basis for a new, comprehensive history of Christian doctrine and to pursue to completion the writing and publication of such a multi-volume series. The critical editions of the works of the Greek and Latin Fathers and of the Protestant Reformers produced within the last century afford a reasonably adequate basis for such a project, though the lack of such for the non-Greek Eastern Fathers, for certain medieval writers, and for many Greek and Russian writers is to be acknowledged. The value of a comprehensive new history of Christian doctrine can hardly be overestimated. But for its realization there must be a high degree of dedication as well as competence. Who indeed does qualify?⁶⁸

Here again, Garrett evidenced innovation and creativity. The collected works offer a more full-orbed picture of Garrett the theologian and reveal the development and articulation of ideas, terminology, and proposals that certainly should balance out any suggestion that Garrett was merely a chronicler or arranger of the ideas of others.

IV. ANTICIPATION

The collected writings also reveal that Garrett sought to anticipate theological and ecclesiological trends and movements—sometimes successfully and sometimes not—and, at points, possessed a sense of self-awareness in this area as well.

For instance, one may sense Garrett's frustration at his failure to anticipate in 1954 the "Vital Issues for Southern Baptists" that he articulated in 1968.

The author has had various opportunities during the intervening years to reflect upon these issues and to ask himself to what extent he was correct in identifying the major issues then faced by Southern Baptists and to what extent the issues have changed since that time. The most obvious omission from the 1954 list was the race issue. Here the author clearly failed to

⁶⁸Garrett, "Baptist Identity and Christian Unity," 4:81–97.

anticipate the impact of the Supreme Court decision and of social change upon the lives and consciences of Southern Baptists. Also, one may readily argue that such issues as the nature of biblical literature and the role of biblical criticism, Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper, eschatological differences, and problems of personal and social morality should have been included in the 1954 list of "Vital Issues for Southern Baptists."⁶⁹

Here we see Garrett's typical humility, but we see more than that. We see also his desire to be a faithful and accurate surveyor not only of the current scene but also of movements and questions to come. Again, in the fall of 2017, Garrett reflected in his preface to volume 2 of *The Collected Writings* on what he saw as his failure to anticipate certain trends and movements. Garrett stated that he wished he would have anticipated the rise of "the important neo-Calvinist movement among Southern Baptists with the advent of the twenty-first century."⁷⁰

1. *Southern Baptists and Anabaptist Studies*. In 1957, a thirty-two-year-old Garrett, influenced by George Hunston Williams at Harvard, and shaped in his convictions by his friendships with William R. Estep Jr., John Howard Yoder, Franklin H. Littell, and Harold S. Bender, recognized Anabaptist studies as a lacuna in "Baptist ranks," then moved to a number of concrete proposals for Southern Baptist engagement with this Anabaptism.⁷¹

Six years later Estep would write *The Anabaptist Story*. Four years after that Garrett "had the opportunity to help bring together, in collaboration with Dr. Yoder, the modern heirs of Anabaptism" at the Conference on the Concept of the Believers' Church at Southern Seminary. Fifty-five years after Garrett's initial call for greater engagement, Southwestern Seminary would host the "Anabaptism and Contemporary Baptists" conference.⁷² To be sure, as has been mentioned, there were Southern Baptists engaged in considerations of

⁶⁹Garrett, "Vital Issues for Southern Baptists (1968)," 2:24.

⁷⁰Garrett, "Preface," 2:xiii–xiv

⁷¹Garrett, "Anabaptism," 1:259.

⁷²"Anabaptism and Contemporary Baptist Conference," *Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*, January 30–31, 2012, <http://media.swbts.edu/collection/53/anabaptism-and-contemporary-baptists-conference>.

Anabaptist studies, but, as Garrett said, Southern Baptist engagement was overall tepid. To a very real extent, Garrett, alongside Estep and others, both anticipated and helped to lay the groundwork of increased Southern Baptist interest in and engagement with Anabaptism.⁷³

2. *Regenerate Church Discipline*. It is undeniable that Garrett also anticipated in numerous ways the emphasis on the reclaiming of regenerate church membership that one may encounter in many Southern Baptist quarters today. Garrett emphasized regenerate church membership and church discipline in published works throughout his teaching and writing career, doing so in 1954,⁷⁴ 1958,⁷⁵ 1959/60,⁷⁶ 1961,⁷⁷ 1962,⁷⁸ 1995,⁷⁹ 2009,⁸⁰ 2010,⁸¹ and 2015.⁸² His most prolific contributions to the issue were in the early 1960s, and the most notable of these would have to be his 1962 Broadman Historical Monograph booklet *Baptist Church Discipline*, with its republishing of the 1773 Charleston *Summary of Church Discipline*. Garrett was clearly calling for a renewal among the churches in this area, bemoaning in 1960 that church discipline was “one of the most neglected and unpopular themes of our era” and challenging his readers to act.⁸³ The next year he complained in the pages of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* that while the example of Southern Baptists was sought by others in various areas of church life, there was tragically one where it was not: “a regenerate church membership.”⁸⁴

Garrett’s frustration on this matter would resurface in the 2004 Baptist Standard Bearer republication of *Baptist Church Discipline* when, in the preface, he would observe that “there is little evidence

⁷³Garrett, “Preface,” 1:xviii.

⁷⁴Garrett, “Vital Issues for Southern Baptists,” 2:3; “Ecclesiology: The Crucial Issue (pt.2),” 3:8.

⁷⁵Garrett, “History of Baptist Theology,” 1:3.

⁷⁶Garrett, “Baptists and the Awakenings of Modern History,” 1:7–8; “Recovering Church Discipline,” 3:131–34.

⁷⁷Garrett, “Seeking a Regenerate Church Membership,” 1:1:35–44; “The Renewed Congregation,” 3:145–50.

⁷⁸Garrett, *Baptist Church Discipline*, 3:151–77

⁷⁹Garrett, “Modern Emphases in Baptist Theology,” 1:62.

⁸⁰Garrett, “My Journey as a Baptist Christian,” 1:114; “Baptist Theology with James Leo Garrett Jr.,” 1:119–20.

⁸¹Garrett, “Should Baptist Churches Adopt Open Membership? No.,” 3:178–81.

⁸²Garrett, “Foreword,” 3:95–96.

⁸³Garrett, “Recovering Church Discipline,” 3:131, 134.

⁸⁴Garrett, “Seeking a Regenerate Church Membership,” 3:135.

of a renaissance of the intentional and consistent practice of any congregational discipline, apart from the discipling of new Christians, in churches related to the larger Baptist conventions in the United States.”⁸⁵ Even so, one might agree that regenerate church membership certainly has not seen the renewal it needs while yet seeing not only positive signs of its recovery in significant ways as well as evidences of Garrett’s own role in anticipating and influencing this partial but significant recovery.

Founders Ministries, for instance, was itself founded by Tom Ascol, one of Garrett’s former students. Ascol republished Garrett’s 1959 “Church Discipline: Lost but Recoverable,” where it is currently recommended more than once on the Founders website under current articles. Over the years Founders has offered a number of other positive references to Garrett and his ecclesiological work (while being a bit less enthused about Garrett’s soteriological work).

Furthermore, at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis in 2008, a resolution on regenerate church membership was passed with final wording resulting from a collaboration between Tom Ascol, Malcolm Yarnell, and Bart Barber.⁸⁶ All three are former students of Garrett who have publicly stated their indebtedness to him. This resolution is one of the great symbolic pieces of evidence of Garrett’s abiding influence on Southern Baptist ecclesiology.

Garrett’s influence on and anticipation of a renewal of emphasis on regenerate church membership and church discipline can be seen in the number of works from Baptist pens now calling for a return to this Baptist ideal as well as the number of works that specifically mention Garrett’s impact in this area. Garrett’s ecclesiological work is referenced in *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* (2005), in *Walking Together: A Biblical Reflection on Biblical Church Disciplines* (2007), for which Garrett also wrote the Foreword, in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (2007), in *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (2012), and many more. Garrett was asked to write the Foreword to the 2015 *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, a book edited by Mark Dever and

⁸⁵Garrett, *Baptist Church Discipline*, 3:152.

⁸⁶ “An Regenerate Church Membership and Church Member Restoration,” *Southern Baptist Convention*, June 1, 2008, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-regenerate-church-membership-and-church-member-restoration/>.

Jonathan Leeman of Nine Marks Ministries.

The undeniable influence of Garrett's writings on regenerate church membership and discipline has been plainly assessed more than once by students and observers. In 1991, David Dockery and Paul Basden wrote that the theme of the church "has ranked foremost in the thought of James Leo Garrett, Jr.," concluding that "he, perhaps more than anyone else in recent memory, has led this current generation of Baptists to focus on the church."⁸⁷ This was written in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church*, a book written exclusively by "former students, colleagues, or teachers of James Leo Garrett, Jr." and dedicated to Garrett.⁸⁸ In 2005, R. Stanton Norman gave extensive space to summarizing Garrett's 1961 call for a renewal of regenerate church membership, finally concluding that "Southern Baptists (and all Baptists for that matter) would do well to hearken to the concerns identified by Garrett" and that "failure to heed these warnings will result in irreparable harm to our churches."⁸⁹ It would not be too much to say that Garrett's connection to current Southern Baptist efforts to affect a renewal in the area of regenerate church membership actually goes beyond anticipation to a degree of causation.

V. EMPHASES

1. *Consistent Opposition.* Before Garrett's most consistent emphases are identified, we should consider what the objects of his most consistently negative assessments are. One of these is Dispensationalism. In 1985, he writes of J. Frank Norris being "sympathetic to a new theological system known as Dispensationalism" and observes that "many Southern Baptists" fail to understand that Dispensationalism "was alien to the Baptist heritage with its strong emphasis upon the churches and the Great Commission." Fifteen years later he lingered on the question at even greater length.⁹⁰ Garrett also observed that Southern Baptists of the 1920s were not "significantly attracted to" Dispensationalism and, in the next sentence, says that they instead

⁸⁷Paul A. Basden and David S. Dockery, eds., *The People of God* (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), ix.

⁸⁸Basden and Dockery, *The People of God*, ix.

⁸⁹R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way* (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 59-61.

⁹⁰Garrett, "Who are the Baptists?," 1:30; "The Future of Baptist Theology with a Look at its Past," 1:30.

“believed, preached, and taught the gospel of Jesus Christ...”⁹¹

Garrett has also consistently critiqued, rejected, and warned against Hyper-Calvinism. The references are numerous and appear time and time again in the collected writings (in 1958,⁹² 1959/60,⁹³ 1974,⁹⁴ 1983,⁹⁵ 1985,⁹⁶ 1997,⁹⁷ 2007,⁹⁸ 2010,⁹⁹ and 2011¹⁰⁰). Repeatedly, Garrett warns that Hyper-Calvinism is missions-killing, church-killing, invitation-killing, and holiness-killing as it is antinomian in its thrust.

Landmarkism is likewise the consistent focus of Garrett’s concern. In 1996, Garrett wrote:

...Landmarkism never was fully accepted or became deeply rooted among the Southern Baptists in the Atlantic coastal states from Maryland to Georgia. Neither English Baptists nor Northern Baptists (USA) had a Landmark movement. Only with the two present-day Landmark Baptist bodies, the American Baptist Association and the Baptist Missionary Association of America, have Southern Baptists in the latter half of the twentieth century had any common Landmark bond.¹⁰¹

Here, as with Dispensationalism, Garrett depicts Landmarkism as a deviation from majority Southern Baptist practice. In 1958, Garrett recounted the Landmarkist “defection” from the Southern Baptist Convention in 1905.¹⁰² Twenty-seven years later he wrote of how Landmarkism wrought conflict in the Convention: “it affected foreign mission work,” it “contributed to the criticism” and resignation

⁹¹Garrett, “Are Southern Baptists ‘Evangelicals?’,” 2:140.

⁹²Garrett, “History of Baptist Theology,” 1:4.

⁹³Garrett, “Baptists and the Awakenings of Modern History,” 1:9-10, 12.

⁹⁴Garrett, “Epilogue (1974),” 2:228.

⁹⁵Garrett, “Southern Baptists as Evangelicals,” 2:169; “Are Southern Baptists ‘Evangelicals?’,” 2:128, 130.

⁹⁶Garrett, “Who Are the Baptists?,” 1:27.

⁹⁷Garrett, “Should Southern Baptists Adopt the Synod of Dort?,” 2:189.

⁹⁸Garrett, “Baptists and Calvinism,” 2:194, 199-201, 206.

⁹⁹Garrett, “The Future of Baptist Theology with a Look at Its Past,” 2:68

¹⁰⁰Garrett, “An Interview with Dr. James Leo Garrett, Jr.,” 2:218-220.

¹⁰¹Garrett, “The Distinctive Identity of Southern Baptists vis-à-vis Other Baptists,” 2:51.

¹⁰²Garrett, “History of Baptist Theology,” 1:5.

of William Whitsitt, and eventually left the Convention, though its impact lingered “for at least two-thirds of the twentieth century.”¹⁰³ In 2009, Garrett reminisced about how Myrta Ann Garrett’s home church had seen conflict when a division arose “between Landmark and Convention Baptists.”¹⁰⁴ His plainest statement on the matter was in the same article when he wrote under the heading, “The Challenge of Landmarkism”:

Beginning to teach at Southwestern Seminary in 1949 and frequently interim pastor of Baptist churches in North Texas, I confronted Landmarkism—not so much its “trail of blood” successionism but its anti-alien immersionism, local church communion—or communion with “those of like faith and order”—and less than satisfying attitude toward non-Baptist Christians. I was restless in that context and looked for a Baptist heritage other than Landmarkism.¹⁰⁵

2. *The Priesthood of the Believer.* Garrett’s consistent and positive emphases are readily apparent in the collected writings. One such emphasis is the priesthood of the believer. Garrett’s references to the priesthood of the believer are numerous. It is worth noting that one of the organizational categories for volume 8 of *The Collected Writings* is “The Priesthood of All Believers.” This section will consist of six chapters comprised of three works from the 1960s, two from the 1970s, and one from the late 1980s. This does not account, of course, for the other numerous references to and explanations and defenses of the doctrine throughout Garrett’s works spanning the decades.

The most remarkable and the most personal of Garrett’s accounts concerning the significance of the priesthood of every believer is his 1962 *Home Missions* article, “Recovering My Priesthood,” in which he recounts with a degree of feeling how he evolved from seeing this doctrine as espousing the idea “that every Christian had his own access or entrée to God’s mercy-seat unencumbered by other human beings” to a more robust understanding. Through his

¹⁰³Garrett, “Who Are the Baptists?,” 1:29.

¹⁰⁴Garrett, “My Journey as a Baptist Christian,” 1:111.

¹⁰⁵Garrett, “My Journey as a Baptist Christian,” 1:111.

engagements with the Catholic church, through reading Luther deeply, through “the upheaval of theological controversy in denominational ranks,” through deep study of the New Testament (1 Pet 2:4–10; Rev 1:5–6, 5:9–10; Heb 13:10–19), through encountering young Baptists involved in social reform efforts outside of the United States, through encountering a civil rights march in Washington, DC, and then through the influence of his pastor, Garrett came to see both the corporate implications of this cherished doctrine as well as its demands upon his life in the area of offerings of love, peace, and holiness.¹⁰⁶ This piece reveals how the priesthood of every believer was no mere theory for Garrett. It was formative and, in many ways, may be seen as one of the keystone doctrines that shaped his entire life.

One of the more interesting ways in which the significance of this doctrine for Garrett manifested itself can be found in Garrett’s 1956 *Watchman-Examiner* article, “Should Baptist Churches Have Chancels?” Garrett had read an earlier article entitled “A Baptist Church with a Chancel” in which the author described how his church “recently changed its church architecture from the pulpit-centered to the altar-centered arrangement.”

The church building now has a lectern to the right of the congregation, a pulpit to the left of the congregation, choir stalls facing each other, an altar table, reredos, candlesticks, a bronze cross at the center, and behind the cross a stained-glass window depicting the Savior with outstretched hands, and Gothic panels, two of which slide down to reveal the baptistry.

Garrett’s response reviewed the “six reasons...given for the change to a chancel” and pushed back with his objections.¹⁰⁷ It is at this point in Garrett’s conclusion, however, that he expresses his most fundamental objection. The chancel, he argues, “bespeaks separation between clergy and laity” and “stresses the exclusive rights of ordained clergy.” That is, it “contradicts the cherished truth of the priesthood of every Christian believer.”¹⁰⁸ Garrett would prove

¹⁰⁶Garrett, “Recovering My Priesthood,” 14-15.

¹⁰⁷Garrett, “Should Baptist Churches Have Chancels?” 3:185-88.

¹⁰⁸Garrett, “Should Baptist Churches Have Chancels?” 3:185-88.

dogged in this assertion in his architecture articles. Four years after this original protest appeared in *Watchman-Examiner*, Garrett, in his presentation at the March 1960 “Church Buildings and Architecture Conference,” would observe again that chancels are inconsistent with “free church architecture” as they “contradict...the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer.”¹⁰⁹ He would return again to the idea of “the incompatibility of Gothic architecture with the central features of free church worship” near this conclusion of this presentation.¹¹⁰ Again, the next year, writing for *Church Administration*, he made the same argument. Finally, in a 1972 *Quarterly Review* piece, Garrett objects to Southern Baptist churches speaking of “chancel choirs.” He considers it “a bit strange” since “that Italian-derived medieval term, with its implicitly separation of clergy and laity, contradicts the basic belief of Baptists concerning the priesthood of all Christians, the nature of the church, and the nature of worship!”¹¹¹

3. *Unity and Cooperation.* Time and time again, Garrett’s call for unity and cooperation among Baptists and between Baptists and non-Baptist believers can be found in the collected writings. It is a recurring and major theme. One of the ways that Garrett’s commitment to unity and cooperation can be seen is in how frequently he appealed to the High Priestly Prayer in the collected writings. Dongsun Cho has taken note of Garrett’s usage of John 17 to call “his fellow Southern Baptists to be united with one another, other Baptists, and other non-Baptist Christians.”¹¹²

In 1976, Garrett wondered aloud, rhetorically, whether or not we ought to reckon John 17 as “sideline or mainline New Testament teaching.”¹¹³ In 2007, he called upon his readers “to ask whether the distinctives of Dortian Calvinism must always outweigh the great highly priestly prayer of our Lord for the unity of His disciples (John 17:11, 21–22).”¹¹⁴ In 2010, Garrett writes that Baptists “must know... how our Lord Jesus, according to John 17, prayed for the unity of his disciples...”¹¹⁵ Garrett wrote in late 2017, “I have sought to keep

¹⁰⁹Garrett, “Free Church Architecture,” 3:196.

¹¹⁰Garrett, “Free Church Architecture,” 3:202.

¹¹¹Garrett, “Why Build for Worship?,” 3:216.

¹¹²Cho, “Foreword,” 2:x.

¹¹³Garrett, “Problems, Issues, and Challenges in Christian Unity,” 2:235.

¹¹⁴Garrett, “Baptists and Calvinism,” 2:207.

¹¹⁵Garrett, “The Future of Baptist Theology with a Look at Its Past,” 2:76.

ever in mind our Lord's prayer for the unity of His disciples (John 17:21–22) and our failure to attain its fulfilment."¹¹⁶

His most powerful appeal to unity and cooperation can be found in his 2005 Samford University lecture tellingly entitled "Baptist Identity and Christian Unity: Reflections on a Theological Pilgrimage." Garrett concluded with these words:

You may be ready to ask, "Why all this attention to Christian unity? Is it not an impossible ideal, like the cessation of war?" Let us turn to the Gospel of John, chapter 17, our Lord's great "high priestly prayer," for the answer. Four times in this recorded prayer Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples, both present and future (vv.11, 21, 22, 23). Two of the four times he prayed that his disciples might be one as the Father and he are one (vv. 11, 22). Two of the four he prayed that the disciples might be one so that "the world may believe" that the Father has sent the Son (vv. 21, 23). Jesus did not pray that his disciples would be moral; neither did he pray that his disciples would be orthodox, though he could have prayed for either, since he had said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6a). But our Lord did pray, facing the cross, that his disciples might be one. If we love him, as evidenced by obeying him (John 14:23), in view of the brokenness of his body, we must be nothing less than passionate about his prayer.¹¹⁷

VI. CONCLUSION

All of the strengths of the major works are present in the collected writings, yet the collected writings both fill out and flesh out our picture of Garrett as a writer, as a theologian, as a churchman, and as a Christian. Taken together, the Garrett corpus presents us a picture of a very careful, intensely thorough, intentionally balanced, sometimes-innovative theologian who was not averse to writing with passion, with zeal, with, at times, a degree of heat, and with,

¹¹⁶Garrett, "Preface (2017)," 2:xiii.

¹¹⁷Garrett, "Baptist Identity and Christian Unity," 2:255.

ever and always, an eye toward both the edification and the unity of the church.

