

EDITORIAL

This second volume of the 65th issue of the new series¹ of *Southwestern Journal of Theology* continues to show our appreciation for the Southwestern theological tradition by taking up the subject of one of the most significant contributions of James Leo Garrett Jr. to recent theological discourse. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the genesis of a formal debate over whether Southern Baptists may also be described as “evangelicals.” The executive editor and managing editor have both written on this subject, but we have set aside our own statements to return attention to the original question and to evaluate the answer we believe Garrett crafted and argued so well.

The 1983 publication of *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?* by Mercer University Press presented a lively discussion between Garrett of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and E. Glenn Hinson of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. James E. Tull of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary introduced the question of that volume. The scholarship and churchmanship of all three Southern Baptist seminaries were well represented in that book. Tull framed the question. Hinson argued that Southern Baptists must be distinguished from evangelicals and Garrett argued that Southern Baptists were a particular type of evangelical. Numerous books and articles have been written through the years to continue that conversation.

We begin with an interview of Timothy George by David Dockery regarding his own reflections on the interlocutors and the progress of the original debate. George and Garrett both earned doctorates at Harvard University, both engaged in ground-breaking ecumenical discourse as convictional evangelical Southern Baptists, and both contributed so very much to contemporary theology. We are thankful for George’s willingness to share his insights on the question of Southern Baptists and evangelicals and his appreciation for Garrett. After the interview, Malcolm Yarnell

¹The first series of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* began in 1917. The new series began under the editorship of James Leo Garrett Jr. in 1958.

presents the fruit of his research into the question of the spiritual and theological identity of Southwestern Seminary. His conclusion is that Southwestern was founded as a “soul-winning evangelical Baptist” institution. The details regarding that three-fold identity illuminate the character of this seminary specifically and the identity of Southern Baptists more generally as they entered their period of greatest sustained growth as a missionary denomination.

The next two essays offer a summary historical definition for each of the two communities considered in the ongoing conversation begun formally by Garrett, Hinson, and Tull. Blake McKinney, assistant professor of history and humanities at Texas Baptist College, addresses the first question, “Who Are Southern Baptists?” McKinney recognizes the difficulty in answering the question but, after careful evaluation of the evidence, concludes that Southern Baptists are “denominational evangelicals committed to cooperation for the sake of fulfilling the Great Commission.” Robert W. Caldwell III, professor of church history at Southwestern Seminary and a widely recognized authority in American evangelical history, answers the second question, “Who Are American Evangelicals?” Caldwell looks at the utility and definition of the term, “evangelical,” evaluates evangelical demographics, and offers three “takeaways” from the historical evidence, including that evangelicals should retain their denominations while also praying and working together for the advance of our common mission.

Gregg R. Allison, professor of Christian theology at Southern Seminary, contributes his own answer to the question, “Are Southern Baptists Evangelicals?” Following a method which Garrett would greatly appreciate, Allison approaches his answer by comparing the Southern Baptist confession, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, with a volume of essays from 1990 titled, *Evangelical Affirmations*. Allison’s careful evaluation of the evidence under his confessional microscope reaches the simple conclusion, “yes, Southern Baptists are evangelicals.” Allison, who comes into the Southern Baptist Convention from a different evangelical background, pictures the relationship as akin to a Venn diagram. Nathan Finn, provost and dean of the university faculty at North Greenville University, is an historian and historical theologian well known among Southern Baptists. Finn argues that “Southern Baptists (and other Baptists) are at our best when we understand ourselves to be simultaneously catholic, reformational, restorationist, and evangelical.” After examining the evidence, he concludes that Southern Baptists should move “toward a confessional

evangelical Baptist future.”

In the final article, Trevin Wax, vice president of research and resource development at the North American Mission Board, considers the question of “Denominations and the Hope of Evangelical Renewal.” Wax borrows from David Bebbington and Thomas Kidd to arrive at a two-fold definition of evangelicals as “aspirational” on the one hand and “cultural” on the other. Wax believes that evangelicalism would best be defined as a movement of “renewal.” He uses the illustration of a neighborhood to argue for maintaining denominational identity in a healthy way. He concludes with an excellent appeal for Southern Baptists not to see ourselves as opposed to other evangelicals, but as “among and for” them.

The Issue concludes with a dozen careful reviews of significant books that have been recently published. The reviewers, experts in their respective fields of study, come from both Southwestern Seminary and other evangelical institutions. They continue the legacy of the founder of Southwestern Seminary, Benajah Harvey Carroll, who read vigilantly and wrote helpful reviews of important theological texts on his long train rides so that he might help build the churches. May we who are evangelicals continue the positive kingdom-building work of evangelical Southern Baptist forefathers like Carroll and Garrett.

Soli Deo Gloria

David S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell