

Influential Baptist theologian James Leo Garrett Jr. dies at 94

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(Courtesy of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary)

James Leo Garrett Jr., known as the “dean of Southern Baptist theologians,” died February 5 at the age of 94.

Garrett is credited with helping to shape the Southern Baptist Convention as it grew into the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. During his 48-year academic career, he taught theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Baylor University in addition to heading the Baptist World Alliance’s Study Commission on Cooperative Christianity and lecturing around the world.

He also wrote two of the most influential works on Baptist theology: *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* and *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study*.

Garrett was an early proponent of racial justice in his mostly white, socially conservative denomination. The theme came up in his writing, and in 1964 he was among the Southern Seminary faculty members who refused to rescind a speaking invitation to Martin Luther King Jr. Garrett and his wife, Myrta Ann, were members of Meadowridge Community Baptist Church—whose tagline is “all races united in Christ”—in Fort Worth, Texas.

On Twitter, Albert Mohler, president of Southern Seminary and the likely next president of the Southern Baptist Convention, called Garrett a “towering figure in Baptist theology.”

“Dr. Garrett personified the best of Baptist scholarship for more than two generations of Baptist leaders in the US and around the world,” Preben Vang, director of the doctor of ministry program at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, told the *Dallas Morning News*. —*Christian Century* staff