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Book Review

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Book Reviews

ELEANOR DANIEL AND MARK LOVE, EDITORS

A Lover's Quarrel: My Pilgrimage of Freedom in Churches of Christ

By Leroy Garrett

Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 2003. 302 pages.

If words might be better understood by their antonyms and political parties by their mavericks, religious movements might be better understood by a study of their heretics and defectors.

So wrote Leroy Garrett in his important 1981 Restoration history, *The Stone-Campbell Movement* (revised/updated 1994). He explained, "The occasional heretic helped the Movement to clarify what it believed and where to draw the lines."

Garrett has been an influential figure in the Restoration Movement (though a heretic to many) for more than half a century. He is unique in also being an authority and author on its 200-year history. Now available to better understand the Movement (and his role in it) is this autobiography, written during 2002, his 84th year. This man of many talents—preacher, debater, teacher, professor, lecturer, traveler, editor, writer, devoted husband and father (and briefly a restaurateur)—was educated at Freed-Hardeman, Abilene Christian, Southern Methodist, Concordia Seminary, Princeton Seminary, and earned a Harvard Ph.D.—all without a high school diploma.

He recounts his 1918 birth into the family's hardscrabble existence in Mineral Wells, Texas. He tells of finding his beloved Ouida about the time he began his teaching career in a Texas public school. After furthering his education, he taught full-time at Montgomery Bible College (now Faulkner University), MacMurray College, Bethany College, Texas Women's University, and Bishop College. Along the way, he also taught an experimental course in philosophy to high school students in Illinois, West Virginia, and Texas. In his "retirement" years in Denton, Texas, there has been part-time teaching at Richland College, Dallas Christian College (Independent Christian Churches), and the University of Dallas (Roman Catholic) while he has continued writing and lecturing and working two

years as a school bus driver to complete requirements for a state pension and insurance.

Garrett's early reputation among Churches of Christ was as a strident opponent of "professionalism" and "institutionalism." The former had to do with "the pastor system" and the other with institutions, colleges in particular, doing the work of the church. The colleges, he contended, produced "the clergy," which in turn influenced the church to support the colleges. But he became a puzzle to many when, in the second decade of his career, along with Carl W. Ketcherside (1908-1989), he seemed to make a pendulum swing from that ultra-conservative wing to advocate greater openness and acceptance among the Movement's three major branches—Churches of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. Both men sought to reach across the divisions and subdivisions that had evolved since the original efforts by Stone and the Campbells to unify Christianity and to restore the New Testament church.

Garrett's self-admitted "heresy" was in advocating "unity in diversity," which, he suggests, has become increasingly less heretical in recent years. But a defector he was not! Except to those who attempted to push him out or who wrote him off and then claimed he had defected. The autobiography offers this explanation:

I still hold the views I did then, albeit more moderately. Or to put it another way, I have shifted my priorities, deeming other issues more important.

Garrett candidly shares how, as a preacher-student at Freed Hardeman in the 1940s, he began a "lover's quarrel with my own people ... that was to last for much of the rest of my life." When asked in later years which denomination he would join should he leave Churches of Christ, he wrote emphatically, "I would never leave the Churches of Christ, never!" But he mused, "While I have never left the Churches of Christ—I thought it might have left me." In concluding his chapter on the Stone-Campbell heritage and his role in it, he says:

I had a quarrel with my own Churches of Christ, but it was a lover's quarrel. I would never leave—never, no matter what. But I would work for change, redemptive change. There was always a growing number who would listen. I came to call them part of “the remnant church.” Together we would make a difference.

Garrett approaches his autobiography in a loosely chronological manner for the first 11 of his 20 chapters, traversing fourscore years with anecdotes from life experiences along the way. He introduces us to his birth family and takes us on an enjoyable walk through childhood years. He tells of his educational pursuits, marrying his devoted Ouida, their adopting of three children, and the distinguished teaching career. He includes the story of his “jailing” at Freed Hardeman. But at this midway point in the narrative, readers who know somewhat of this man may feel that he touches too lightly on his redirection. He holds in suspense those of us hoping to unlock the enigma that is Leroy Garrett.

But we are not to be disappointed! In the second half of this frank reminiscence, he takes us back with him as he retraces some of those years, focusing first on his work as an influential, maverick editor, then on his “unity-in-diversity heresy” (including the hoped-for details of his reprioritizing). This is followed by delightful narratives of international travels over several decades for academic, ecumenical, and evangelistic purposes. In a key chapter, he recounts his early awareness of Restoration history, the evolution of his passion for it, and what led to the production of his “magnum opus,” *The Stone Campbell Movement* (the title of which has increasingly found acceptance and usage as the most accurate name for our heritage). In a late chapter titled “When Brethren and Enemies Are the Same,” Garrett provides a straightforward but not uncharitable review of some of his more difficult relationships within the church.

Ever the teacher, Garrett often lapses from prose into pedagogy. Sometimes it seems intended to explain a bit of why he did what he did. Often, it may just reflect his nature to never miss an opportunity to challenge our thinking. It was usually offered without polemic, and, to this reviewer, was not particularly pedantic. This is not to say that there is any absence of his ample confidence in what he has come to believe and advocate. The book also does not lack his colorful style of speaking and writing as in “Unhorsing ... oppressive logic proved to be our most difficult task.”

Closure is brought to the volume by the inclusion of two heartfelt treatises. In “Addendum #1, My Testament of Faith,” the author candidly summarizes his beliefs in 17 concise paragraphs on God, Christ, Holy Spirit, church, Bible, faith, baptism, unity,

human nature, world, hermeneutics, human suffering, ethics, money, work, the living of these days, and God's tomorrow. “Addendum #2, What I Want for Churches of Christ,” is a forthright set of proposals Garrett hopes “might find a place on the table for discussion” as our churches address what some are calling “an identity crisis.”

This attractive paperback contains more than a dozen photographs, including academic portraits of Dr. Garrett at various career stages. But as a “people-person,” the more interesting views are snapshots with others—Karl Ketcherside, students, Norvel Young, Perry Gresham, and most of all, with family and the lovely Ouida. Demonstrating the extent of his influence is the very useful 18-page Index, containing nearly 500 entries, including more than 90 Churches of Christ where he ministered or had “assignments” described in the book.

No one in Churches of Christ, (or in the other Restoration streams, for that matter) will likely agree with all that Leroy Garrett ever said, wrote, or did, or with all he now believes and advocates. But *A Lover's Quarrel: My Pilgrimage of Freedom in Churches of Christ* is a must-read for those who have any sense of the Stone-Campbell heritage, for those in or from Churches of Christ who would more fully understand our fellowship (past and present), and for those who have been on either side of any issue Garrett ever addressed. Adding this autobiography to his influential *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, to 40 years of his monthly journal (*Bible Talk/Restoration Review*), and to his other writings gives this generation and those to come a broader window to our history and a greater understanding of the original ideals of this rich heritage.

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Reviewer's note: Interest in the Restoration Movement (and my heritage -- a cappella Churches of Christ) began in the 1950s. I am at least a “buff,” perhaps a student, but hardly a Stone-Campbell scholar. Among the valued experiences of numerous readings, forums, pilgrimages, and acquaintances have been opportunities to know Leroy Garrett and to be among the few with whom he shared his autobiography in draft form. This review is largely a compilation of personal notes made when reading that work in 2002. My hope is that at least some others may be encouraged to read what this gentle man is leaving for us.

