

The Forming of Dallas Theological Seminary

This is a transcription from an audio recording where Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer talks about the forming of Dallas Theological Seminary. It seems like he is addressing a group of students. I am not sure when this recording was made. I have tried to match the punctuation to his voice inflexion. Some of the words I had to guess at.

In bringing you a report of the early impressions of the forming this school, it's going to be necessary for me to use the first personal pronoun far more than I like to do. I apologize once for all at the beginning.

A peculiar thing you'll discover, I think, if you observe it in connection with the books that have been written on theology, that the first-person pronoun doesn't appear there as representing the author at all. I've never given opinion of my own under the word "I" in connection with those books at all, not once. I try to keep away from that pronoun as much as possible and I think it has been done pretty well. The men who went over proofreading had this in mind and I think they've eliminated everything of that kind, if there was anything.

But I have to use the word "I".

The first impression that came to me with regard to the founding of a school came when I was teaching a secular subject up in Mount Herman Massachusetts, the L Moody School of Boys. There were older men there, the average I think at about 20 years of age. And we had some excellent fellows.

And one night after I had finished my last class, two senior boys that were especially spiritual and had my heart fully came to see me in the classroom and made a peculiar request. They said, "Once you resign from teaching here and take a pastorate and open your study for us to come and study with you privately for the ministry." And I said to them, "Why don't you go to theological seminary?" And then they gave me their arguments as to why that they wouldn't go to a seminary, didn't want to.

And all of that developed a great deal in my own mind and I began to wonder why we couldn't have a seminary that would include what these young men desired. And I began at once to work on it in my mind. It was at that time, I suppose about 1910, it was fully 10 or 15 years before we founded this school. At that time, I began to study the thing.

And as I went to back on the road as a teacher and evangelist, I was thrown in contact with a great many educated pastors, men who had thorough preparations as far as seminary work is concerned. And I made it a point always to ask them two questions just for the sake of getting their reaction.

I said first of all, "You're out of seminary and you have a chance to test your ministry. What do you think you lacked in your training in the seminary?" That was question one. The second question was, "If you had to make the curriculum for the study of a student for the ministry, what would you put into it?" And I began to get material, of course, from these earnest and faithful men.

To the first question, the answer was always one thing, "We didn't get any Bible at all. The one thing we needed when we got out to work, we didn't have at all. We didn't have the Bible."

And I want to say that at that time - which, of course, isn't true at the present time for things have changed a great deal - at that time men were going to seminaries like Princeton and others of like character and taking a three-year course and then going for one or two years more to a Bible Institute in order to get Bible to supplement what they did not get from the seminary. And all of that was impressing me very much.

Answer to the second question was, "Put the Bible first in the curriculum." And one couldn't hear that thing more than a score of times without being impressed with it.

So, I began to wonder if we couldn't formulate a training, a curriculum, which would include all the Bible that a man needs for his ministry; at the same time give him all other standard required subjects in connection with the theological course. And on that I worked constantly.

And finally, later, I wrote quite a long letter - which is on file somewhere here in the seminary for I have seen it since then - I wrote a letter to Dr. Griffith Thomas who was our most thoroughly educated man in the pre-millennial fundamental group of the United States at the time. He was trained in Oxford and was an Englishman by birth. He had a Dr. of Divinity degree that took him nine years to earn. It wasn't a donated dignity at all. But he earned it with nine years of seminary work. And not one year such as you have, but 11 months to every year. And he was justly proud of that degree. An orthodox biblical man; pre-millennial, dispensational and faithful.

I wrote to him and told him, gave him an outline of the curriculum that I had in mind. And I was pleased to see 2 or 3 years after the seminary had begun here that we had incorporated practically exactly the very things that I had laid out years before in connection with the work.

Now, it's something of a problem to settle a question as to what it means to found a school. And I don't want to assume anything dear friends. But if this theological seminary was ever born in anybody's mind, it was born in mine about 1910. And I never had a moment's rest until it was underway.

Now, I want to say that I certainly did benefit by the advice and counsel of many men. And when it came to establishing the work and much in the organization, I had to fall back on the help and counsel of other men. And all of that has given rise to an impression that there were quite a group of men that combined together in the founding of the school. But that is not exactly the case. We had the advantage of the technical knowledge of some men.

For instance, I finally called a meeting, asked for a meeting, of Dr. A. B. Winchester, who was the greatest pre-millennial preacher in Canada and was pastor of the Knox Presbyterian Church of Toronto, with Dr. Thomas, to meet me. And the meeting was slated for a certain day in Atlanta Georgia. And we came together in the morning and set their together all day long, going out only for a moment for lunch. And it was prayer and talk and talk and prayer, and constantly going over all of this. And we had in mind not only the scope and plan of the meeting, where it might be located, but we had in mind also the men that might be secured for faculty service, for they were men who knew the available material perhaps as well, or better, than I did. And all of that together.

I remember one little incident. After we'd made up quite a faculty list, Dr. Thomas stopped and said, "Just a minute." He said, "We haven't anybody of such and such a denomination on that list."

Now, I'm not giving the name of the denomination, but he simply said we haven't anybody. I said, "Stop right there!" And I spoke up with no uncertainty. "Stop right there", I said, "this is not a denominational thing." And I said, "Men are going to be selected because of their ability and not because of their association. We've not got any of it - responsibility to any denomination."

Then came the question of what our relations were. And I fought very vigorously against saying that it was interdenominational because it was not. We're not trying to have all of the denominations represented as is properly expressed by the word interdenominational. And I didn't like the word undenominational less it would sound as though we were opposed to the work that was being done by denominations. Now, we are opposed to dividing the Body of Christ, but we're not opposed to emphasizing the one Body. We were neither undenominational or interdenominational. And I struck upon one word that carried us through the early days. We never hear it anymore. That was, we were denominationally unrelated. We're denominationally unrelated. That was in our literature in the best words of the school constantly, just denominationally unrelated. Nobody's responsible for what

happens. We are entirely independent and we are not accounting to anybody. We are entirely independent.

And that, of course, is true of a great many institutions, practically all of the Bible institutes in the United States today - and we're in the time of an epidemic of the Bible Institutes. And they all are calling themselves interdenominational or undenominational or something. The fact is, they're just denominationally unrelated, that's all. That may be technical language but sometimes you have to have technical language.

Well after, we tried to find out where the school this time should be located. I'm so often asked the question, "Why were you ever called upon to locate it way off here in Dallas Texas?" And I'll give the history of it just as fast as I can.

Further, I was casting around for it was all together in my hands. Nobody else was doing anything about it. I was in correspondence with both Denver and St. Louis with a view to locating. And we came within a hair's breadth of taking over the entire Wheaton property for the seminary. That's a real story. Perhaps I can take time to tell it, a real story.

Dr. Blanchard was president and the school had run down. It got down to about 200 students and he was very discouraged. Dr. Thomas wrote me and said, "I've heard Dr. Blanchard say that he was ready to turn the whole property over to anybody who would take it and run it for the glory of God."

So, I wrote a letter from New York to Dr. Blanchard and told him what we were going to do. Of course, I knew him personally very well. I said, "Now, if you would be looking favor upon this new seminary taking over that property, the buildings, library and everything, wire me to come at once. If you don't favor it, wire me not to come." And in due time I received a wire from him saying, "Come at once."

Well, that looked very encouraging. So, I took a train from New York. I asked Dr. Winchester to join me from Toronto at Buffalo. And he come onto my train. We went on together. We got into Wheaton about 6 o'clock in the evening and Dr. Blanchard was at the train to meet us. And we walked out to a little restaurant and had supper. And we went over to his office and set down. It was quiet for a moment and I said, "Well, what can we say about the terms of the letter that I have written?" just to start the conversation. And he said, "What terms?" Well, I said, "It was understood that you would like to have turned this property over to some other institution and you wired me to come and that was as much as to say yes." "Oh no", he says, "there's nothing of that kind." And he said, "A man gave me \$18,000 today and I can go on quite a while with that." So, I said, "All right then. When does the next car go back to Chicago?" And we took the next car back. Now, we were just that near to it, you see. But God didn't want that and it was far better that it never took place.

About that time, I came to the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas as a Bible teacher to conduct a conference for a week. And the pastor was Dr. William M Anderson whose picture hangs at yonder in the lounge; a very, very wonderful young man. And we were out to dinner one night before the evening service and I told him my whole burden about how I was laboring to get this new seminary located and what it was going to do. And of course, his heart was wide open to it and he just rose up and said, "It's got to come here! It's got to come right here to Dallas!" And it did. There was nothing else for it, it came here to Dallas.

And he at once called a meeting of, I suppose, about 60 men of the city; prominent businessmen. And I met with them and they urged me to bring it here and promised that they would stand behind it as best they could - which was all very encouraging.

Later, when we really organized, we took out about 15 men out of that original group here to make up the board of direction. And the others were dismissed though temporarily they gave advice and were with us.

Now, there came up certain questions at that time. I had gone right away after this - it was in the spring of the year. I left for Europe and went over to England and Scotland and spent the summer over there. And I left the organization and getting ready for the first term in the fall - because we were going to open our doors in the fall - I left that with Dr. Anderson and my brother Rollin Chafer who happened to have a great deal of technical knowledge about the work in forming of seminary curriculums and so forth. And he was invaluable in this time in connection with this, the development and the work.

I was in William Lauren's home in Dundee Scotland as a guest. And one morning just at daylight I wakened with such a burden that it seems as though I would die under the impression of it. A terrific burden was laid upon me. I saw this whole situation. I'd got detached from it and I looked back here and I saw that I had tied myself up for life by saying that I would be president of the school as I'd promised before I left. I had the call to it and I had promised to be president. And I saw I'd tied myself up except that I resigned and got out. And I couldn't bear that burden. I simply couldn't stand it. I could not possibly.

So, I got a little relief by praying. I said, "Lord, unless I have evidence today, by next day, that you want this seminary to go on", I said, "I shall have to cable to them and tell them that they have my resignation and I'm out because I can't do this thing. I'm scared to death. I can't do this thing."

And I went down to breakfast later and set at the table right beside William Lauren. Well, Dr. Griffith Thomas had just died and he had been scheduled to be the teacher in theology in this school. In fact, when we told him the school was to be formed, he wrote me and said, "The years of my life that remain", he said, "are all accounted for." Now he said, "I cast in my lot with that new enterprise to the end." And that was something, I'll tell you, for that man to say that. But he died two months before the school had its first session and I was forced to take up the chair of theology and go on as best I could under those conditions.

Well, up to that time I had intended to be a kind of a janitor and office boy along with the presidency. I guess I've served as president and song leader. All of that has sunken in.

Well, I set down at the table to breakfast and we'd been talking about Dr. Thomas as he was just as much loved over there as here and appreciated. We'd been talking together about him. And Lauren turned to me and he said, "What you going to do for a library in that new seminary you're starting over there?" Well I said, "Now Doctor, you've raised a pretty difficult question for me to answer." But I said, "I have been hoping since Dr. Thomas' death that we might be able to get his library; we might be able to get that for a nucleus, a beginning." For there's a very wonderful library that he had; as good, perhaps, as any man, any one man, in the world at the time in the ministry. And all of the scholarly work, not just filled up with anything that came along. He was a great book reviewer but he never kept the books that he reviewed unless they had something worthwhile in them.

I've seen him go out with an arm full of books that he'd reviewed, he'd been wanting to do it, take them over to the second-class store, secondhand bookstore, and to get rid of them.

I said, "I have already written home asking them to have special prayer that we may get those books of Dr. Thomas's." And the matter dropped. My mind was turned on to something else.

Then some man turned to me and he said, "I'm interested in that." I didn't know what he was talking about. I said, "What do you mean." Well, he says, "That you should have Dr. Thomas's library." He said, "Listen, I want you to buy that library for the school and send the bill to me." Now he says, "I want to tell you", he says, "that I expect Mrs. Thomas needs the money so please don't drive a hard bargain." That's a Scotsman, if you please.

Well, I got up from the breakfast table and went upstairs, into a drawing room upstairs, and he followed me up. And he said, "Now you know, we don't give as big stipends in this country as you do in your country." But he said, "I want to share in your salary while you serve that seminary." Well, I said, "You're talking about something that hadn't crossed my mind." I said, "I wouldn't any more think of salary in connection with that school than I would of charging a baby of mine for board. No, I wouldn't."

But he busted his side and he said, "Let that go." He says, "You'll find you need it all right." And he says, "Listen, I'm going to send you", and he put it in the pounds sterling of course, but he said, "I'm going to send you \$1500 a year to apply on to your salary", and he says, "until I have to tell you differently." And he did. I think it went on for about nine years that he sent every year. Well, I began to think the Lord was telling me that he wanted me to go ahead.

At noon, Lauren came up from his office to lunch. And while we were at the table - I should say that at that time I was serving as General Secretary of the Central American Mission among other things. I was pastor of the Schofield Church and secretary of the Central American Mission and now I was president of a theological seminary. I had three desks and three secretaries and I was just going around from one to the other trudging.

Lauren came up and he said, "I ask you, how much would it cost to have a missionary in that Central American Mission that you're directing?" Well, I said, "Mr. Lauren, it just depends on whether you want a native worker or an American with his wife who can head up the work." He said, "I want the American who can head it up with his wife." And he said, "I want you to select for me one that you think I would approve, the very best that you have on the list." He said, "And I will send you \$1500 a year until I have to change it to pay for the salary of that missionary."

Well, I said, "My cup is running over. My cup is running over. God is talking to me. He wants me to go ahead." And if I'd not had that experience yonder in Dundee Scotland with that most gracious man of God, I think I would have given up 1000 times. For I've sailed through bloody seas, as it were, in the establishing of an independent seminary. There was so much of difficulty in the early days, I can't tell you.

Though I had made an absolute requirement that the only one condition I should ever become president of the school was that there never should be solicitation for funds; never any solicitation for funds. Well, it didn't work so well because I put myself in a pretty bad position and that was guaranteeing pay salary to faculty men when no one had guaranteed anything to me at all. And I was just between the pull all the time if I brought them here, from that day until now.

And it was a very difficult problem to shift from three years to four years because we had many men here on a three-year basis and they had entered on that basis and we couldn't force them to a four-year basis unless they chose. So, the two courses had to run along side by side with the difficulties of conflicts and so forth. But we got out of that and we established as a four-year course.

And why not? The things of God and the ministry and the greatest science in the world, the science of theology, why should it not take four years? And it does. And especially if you're going to try to be an expositor of the Scripture. You got to know the thing you're talking about.

Now, the most that we could ever do - I've said this so many times in the past - the most we could hope to ever do would be to give you an introduction to the truth in its various forms and give you some method of study and a little momentum with the understanding that with that preparation you'd go on throughout your lifetime. That's all we can ever do is to give you introductory work and you to carry it out throughout your life.

Older men here have heard me say that a good many times. And we don't say that you're educated when you leave. When you leave here, you've just begun on the biggest problem of training that you've ever had and that's to keep up your work and go on and grow in the knowledge of the truth.

With that in view, the courses of study, perhaps, can accomplish what we'd like them to do. You must have Greek and Hebrew. You must be proficient in these things.

Now, why not do yourself abundantly able to translate and to understand the meaning of translation in the Greek and Hebrew. Why not read in the original text, in the original language? Why not? That's a part of your equipment if you're going to do the work with the right kind of an educated man in the ministry.

And that's what we're standing for. Don't ask me to reduce anywhere in Hebrew or Greek because I'm just adamant. I can't move an inch on that, I can't move an inch. I've seen the value of it and I'm not going to turn aside. And if you don't see it, it's just because you haven't gone far enough to see yet. But you will see in due time and you'll thank God for every hour of language that you had in this institution. I'll have to close now; the time is over. Shall we pray.