

The Beginnings
of
Southeastern Seminary



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THE BEGINNINGS OF SOUTHEASTERN SEMINARY

BY W. PERRY CROUCH

As one who has been associated with Southeastern Baptist Seminary since it was only a dream in the minds of a few individuals, I have been asked to outline the early beginnings of the institution.

It would be impossible to trace fully the dreams of so many people who have lived in the eastern states of our Southern Baptist Convention concerning the need and possibility of a great seminary in this region. However, we will attempt to trace the tendencies and needs as they were uncovered and expressed by our leaders, culminating finally in the establishment of this institution which has now officially opened her doors as a part of the family of our Southern Baptist Convention.

By the year 1944 our Southern Baptist Convention territory reached from the Atlantic to the Pacific, embracing an area over 3,000 miles in breadth. As our Southern Baptist territory increased, the members of our churches likewise increased. By 1944 we were reporting 25,965 churches with a combined membership of 5,667,926. It became evident to the leaders of our Convention that we must greatly expand our three seminaries, or establish new ones, or follow both courses. New churches require new ministers, and on the whole, our churches were requiring better trained ministers. Indeed, the need was larger than the training of ordained ministers who would serve as pastors. Our people were beginning to see the tragic need of our world. Some were talking about a great Foreign Mission Advance. Instead of a few hundred missionaries, we ought to have several thousand in many countries of earth. Our Foreign Mission Secretary realized the great need for trained missionaries and made an appeal before the Executive Committee of our Convention several years ago, urging that our seminaries be undergirded and strengthened just as rapidly as possible.

As the number of our churches increased, many were increasing in their local membership. Churches beyond

seven to eight hundred were beginning to employ secretaries and assistants. Churches of 1,000 to 2,000 were often employing two or more workers besides the pastor. Churches above 2,000 were finding it imperative that they have a trained staff, perhaps consisting of an Associate Pastor, Educational Director, Youth Director, Elementary Director, Music Director and several secretaries. Workers needed specialized training for this task. The demand for these trained servants for our local churches, both lay workers and ministers, was far beyond the number graduating from our seminaries from year to year. If ever a need gave birth to an idea, and an idea became the fore-runner of an institution, it was true of Southeastern Seminary.

While the need for trained ministers, missionaries and lay workers was increasing, something was happening in the hearts of our young people. During the war years, many young men have heard God's call to His service. The Government, through its G. I. Bill, made it possible for these men to enter school almost immediately after their discharge from the army. As a result, our Seminaries were besieged with applications for admission beyond their ability to care for them. Some became impatient and entered seminaries of other denominations or non-denominational institutions. To have increased our present seminaries to meet this demand would have been to make them of university size, and thus greatly lessen the possibility of securing work in local churches or mission stations, and lessen the value that comes from faculty and students working together in a smaller institution.

However, a study of our three older seminaries will indicate a steady increase in the number of students during the past ten years. Perhaps it will be difficult to set a maximum enrollment for any given seminary and close the enrollment when that figure has been reached. But the fact remained that in 1946 there were many more young men entering the ministry and young men and women beginning full time service than our three existing seminaries could properly accommodate.

Many of our pastors and leaders along the eastern seaboard had been talking about the need for a seminary in this section for a number of years. Many had pointed out the fact that in 1945 there were 2,001,901 members of Baptist Churches and 8,721 churches in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Virginia, District of Columbia and Maryland which are the Southern Baptist states along the eastern seaboard. 2,700 of these churches were in North Carolina. Students from any of these states must travel several hundred miles to reach one of our Southern Baptist seminaries. In many instances it was much nearer to Northern Baptist schools or non-denominational schools. If Southern Baptists were to continue to train the leadership for our churches in the eastern part of our Convention, it was evident we must locate a seminary in this territory.

In December, 1945, the Buncombe Baptist Pastors' Conference meeting in Asheville, N. C., prepared a Memorial to be presented to the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention requesting that the Executive Committee consider the possibility of using the property at Ridgecrest, N. C., as a possible location for an Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary to help take care of the many men returning from the armed forces who were seeking admission to a Southern Baptist seminary. Dr. C. C. Warren, Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charlotte, N. C., and I were at that time the members of the Executive Committee from North Carolina. We jointly sponsored the memorial before the Executive Committee which met in semi-annual meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, December 14, 1945.

The idea of using the assembly grounds at Ridgecrest did not seem very popular with the Executive Committee, but the need for an eastern seminary was hard to ignore. After much discussion, a small committee of three men was appointed to study the possibility of the need of a seminary in the eastern part of our Convention. This committee made a brief report to the Executive Committee in June, 1945, to the effect that all of the State Mission secretaries on the eastern seaboard and other Baptist leaders in that

area who had been consulted believed that there should be a Southern Baptist seminary in the eastern part of the Convention.

The discussion of this committee report was enlightening and helpful in getting the matter before the leaders of our Convention. Again Dr. C. C. Warren, Mr. M. A. Huggins, and I had an opportunity to push our claims for an institution that would provide training for church leadership in this great area. The result was a recommendation from the Executive Committee to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in St. Louis, May, 1947, "that a committee of nine be appointed to study the whole question of theological education in the light of suggestions concerning the establishment of a new theological seminary."

At this same Convention meeting in St. Louis, in May, 1947, a memorial was presented from the Southern Baptist General Convention of California requesting the appointment of a committee to make a study of the proposed plan to receive the Golden Gate Theological Seminary as an institution of the Southern Baptist Convention. A committee of nine was appointed to study the whole question of theological education and recommend concerning the possible need of a new seminary in the eastern part of the Convention and the memorial concerning the Golden Gate Seminary in California. This committee consisted of John H. Buchanan of Alabama, chairman; Wade Bryant, Virginia; R. C. Campbell, Arkansas; Douglas Hudgins, Miss.; Edgar Godbold, La.; J. W. Storer, Okla.; Wallace Bassett, Texas; A. L. Aulick, N. M.; Paul Caudill, Tenn.

This committee began work immediately with three aims in mind: (1) "To find our present and prospective needs for theological education with especial reference to our pastors"; (2) "to discover our present facilities for meeting these needs"; and (3) "to arrive at the changes, additions or eliminations that should be made in our present educational set-up in order to provide for these needs most efficiently and economically." The committee was divided into sub-committees for work, and the part-time services of

Dr. J. E. Dillard and Mr. Porter Routh were secured to help complete a thorough survey.

We will not attempt to reproduce the complete report of this committee, but some of the facts secured and resulting conclusions are important to the background of our eastern Seminary:

1. "All of the Seminaries are over-crowded. While no students were turned away last year for lack of classroom, the classes themselves were in many cases so large as to make the best teaching impossible; approximately 270 students in 1947 and 400 in 1948 were not able to secure lodging at all, and a larger number had to live off the campus."

2. "The information given by alumni pastors from the three seminaries is in line with that given by the faculties and students, viz.: that the enrollments are too large for the facilities, the classes are too large for the best teaching methods, that more and better equipment should be provided, and that we need more seminaries."

Some of the conclusions of the committee on the survey were:

(1) "Southern Baptists ought to have a well-informed and well-trained ministry. Our position of leadership, being the largest evangelical body in the territory of the Southern Baptist Convention; our principles, especially the right of private interpretation of the Scriptures; our church polity, the equal rights and responsibilities of church members; our program, seeking to enlist all our people in all our work; our problems of education, enlistment, and evangelism; these and the conditions of our times make it imperative that we have a cultured, consecrated, cooperative leadership. Such a leadership cannot be had without adequate educational facilities.

(2) "Southern Baptists do not have as highly trained ministerial leadership as we need. Many men are ordained to the gospel ministry who have not and perhaps will not receive the technical training they greatly need. These are usually good men doing good work; many of them entered the ministry late and have family and financial bur-

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dens that make it difficult if not impossible to pursue an education in a systematic way. Approximately one-third of our ministers never went beyond high school; another third have not been beyond college; and less than one-third have both college and seminary training.

(3) "Our need for a well-trained ministry is rapidly increasing. The general culture of the people calls for well-trained men; the normal increase in the number of our churches; the changing status of our churches, quarter-time churches becoming half, or full-time, and half-time churches becoming full-time; the replacements necessary because of deaths, retirement, etc.; and the expanding population being served by Southern Baptist churches, these all and each call for more trained men.

(4) "Our three seminaries as they are now equipped are not able to meet the growing need for well-trained men. They are over-crowded, undermanned, and inadequately equipped.

(5) "We believe Southern Baptists should have two more seminaries to relieve our present congestion, provide facilities for the increased number of men who ought to have theological training, and to serve great areas now remote from the seminaries we have.

(6) "Southern Baptists should have a well-thought-out long-range, comprehensive policy and program of theological education to meet the needs of all sections of our territory and to offer training to all our God-called ministers."

(7) "That two new seminaries, one in the West and one in the East, be established as soon as suitable sites can be had and adequate plans be made for financing the same without injury or impairment to our existing seminaries."

(8) "That this Convention appoint a committee of one from each state to promote the long range seminary program in cooperation with this Convention and the several state conventions.

(9) "That such committee be authorized to recommend sites, enlist financial support, draw up charters, and

perform other necessary duties pertaining to the carrying out of the above recommendations.”

Following the report of the Committee to Study Theological Education, the Convention adopted the Committee's report and appointed a large representative committee to carry out the recommendation of the survey committee. Dr. J. W. Storer of Tulsa, Oklahoma, was named chairman of the committee. A steering committee was named and the larger committee was divided into sub-committees for more effective work. We are concerned with the sub-committee named to locate a site for an eastern seminary and to recommend a charter for same. This committee was composed of Dr. Claude Bowen, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Greensboro, chairman, Vernon B. Richardson of Maryland, W. Douglas Hudgins of Mississippi, Thomas Hansen of Florida, Louie D. Newton of Georgia, A. E. Tibbs of South Carolina and Wade Bryant of Virginia.

The decision was not an easy one, or one that could be quickly made. The facilities at Wake Forest College, soon to become available because of the removal of the college to Winston-Salem, were finally chosen as the permanent location for the new Seminary in the East. Several reasons were evident: (1) The college plant at Wake Forest, comprising 469.7 acres of land, 19 college buildings, 10 residential buildings, an athletic field, a stadium, all weather tennis courts and a nine-hole golf course was offered to the Southern Baptist Convention for a price of \$1,600,000. A recent evaluation by a recognized firm had placed the value of the campus and buildings, less depreciation, at more than three million dollars. Surely this campus which had long been the center of Baptist culture and leadership would be an ideal place for a great seminary. Surely such an offer could not be duplicated in the entire country. (2) Wake Forest was located near the center of the Baptist population of the eastern states of our Convention. Virginia, District of Columbia and Maryland were on the North. South Carolina, Georgia and Florida were on the South. The town of Wake Forest is on the main line of the Seaboard

Air Line Railroad running from New York to Miami, and just forty miles from the main line of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. It is easily accessible by plane, car or train. (3) The town of Wake Forest would give a home-like atmosphere to the seminary. Nevertheless, it is only 16 miles from Raleigh, N. C., and 19 miles from Durham, N. C. Both of these cities would have excellent hospital facilities and good shopping centers. (4) To the northeast and southeast of Wake Forest are large rural sections with many rural churches that would furnish opportunities for practical work in this field. To the west of Wake Forest lies the great industrial section of North and South Carolina and Virginia. This should furnish many opportunities to students for practical work and study of the spiritual needs of our industrial people. (5) Within a radius of twenty-five miles there are located several colleges and universities of national influence. Libraries and conferences conducted by these schools would be available to seminary students. (6) North Carolina, the home state of Wake Forest, has long been one of our strongest Baptist states with 2,915 churches and 687,760 members of our churches. The missionary spirit of the churches of this state should furnish excellent surroundings for the new seminary.

After several public hearings, a delegation representing North Carolina and Wake Forest College made a final offer to the committee in session at Nashville, Tennessee. The offer had the sanction of the Board of Trustees of Wake Forest College and the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. The committee unanimously recommended the Wake Forest property to the Executive Committee of the Southern Convention and they in turn joined the Theological Committee in recommending it to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Chicago in May, 1950. The Convention approved the action and named the first Board of Trustees of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The Trustees of the new institution held their first meeting at Wake Forest College in June, 1950. Dr. C. C. Warren was named chairman of the Trustees. An Execu-

tive Committee was named and other necessary committees appointed. A committee composed of Dr. Marshall Craig of Dallas, Texas, Dr. Fred Brown of Knoxville, Tennessee, Dr. Harold Seever of Mobile, Alabama, Dr. Claude Bowen of Greensboro, N. C., with Dr. W. Perry Crouch of Asheville as chairman, were named to nominate the first President of our Seminary. After many months of work and many meetings of this committee, they unanimously recommended to the Trustees in annual session of Wake Forest, N. C., February, 1951, Dr. Sydnor L. Stealey as President. This recommendation was accepted and Dr. Stealey became our first leader. He began his work officially on June 1, 1951. The Seminary, opened September 11, 1951 with an excellent faculty and student body doing regular seminary work, became a living testimony of the spirit and zeal of its beloved President.

This brief sketch of the history of our Seminary would not be complete without paying tribute to those who first dreamed dreams of such an institution and to the many who have worked hard to bring these dreams to realization. We mention particularly the work of Dr. C. C. Warren, a member of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee from North Carolina and the first chairman of our Trustees; Dr. John Buchanan, chairman, and the members of the Theological Survey Committee; Dr. J. W. Storer and the members of the committee on Theological Education; Dr. Claude Bowen, chairman and the members of the committee to locate the Eastern Seminary; Dr. Duke McCall, Executive Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention; Dr. Louie Newton, member of the Executive Committee from Georgia; M. A. Huggins, Secretary of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention; Rev. Eugene Olive, Assistant to the President of Wake Forest College; Dr. L. L. Carpenter, Editor of the Biblical Recorder; Mr. Claude Gaddy, Secretary of the Council of Christian Education in North Carolina; Dr. Ralph Herring, pastor, First Baptist Church of Winston-Salem, N. C.; and many others who have worked hard to make this institution a reality.

