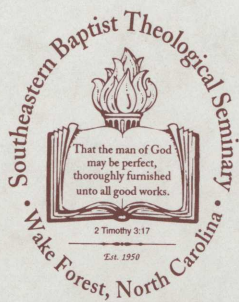


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THE YEARS OF BEGINNING -- AN EVALUATION

Luke 10: 27

Founders' Day Address
Dr. J. Glenn Blackburn
February 18, 1960

I was not one of the "Founding Fathers," but I was here when they arrived. I did not make any of the personal sacrifices, but I watched with deep satisfaction. I saw real courage as men became "partners in adventure" with a creating God.

I could wish myself an artist. I would get out of my mind and on to canvas the picture of travel-weary families of faculty and students getting their first look at a little town and an old campus. I don't remember any excitement or celebrating; it was just the place they had talked about. This was it. They had come here to live.

Today, we may talk about adventure. Then, it was "camping out" while they built or remodeled a house. The heat in the barracks took some of the glory off the privilege. If their minds dreamed, their hands were dirty and tired.

These were not dreamy-eyed men adventuring bravely or pioneering an unknown way. They knew what they had come to. They didn't know how it would come out; but they knew they would have some times of anxiety, disappointment, hard decisions and a lot of hard work. They did not run in excitement. They walked as men with heavy loads going to a tough job.

I remember being disappointed at some of their disappointments. I looked for men who had dreams to share, but I saw fear and selfishness and doubt. Still, they moved in. They came not as conquering heroes, but as men going to an assignment. There was humility and comradeship and manliness. They were men with desires, needs, weaknesses and courage. One impression lingers -- they had come, not with dreams of their own; they were serious-minded men who had been possessed by the dream of God. Whatever the cost, they were willing to dream His dream, with Him.

Founders' Day Address
Rev. J. Glenn Higginbotham
February 18, 1960

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In one office a new typewriter began to sing. In another, the president unpacked his books. Someone answered the telephone and said, "We plan to open in September." I thought of the lines, (Shaemas O'Sheel)

"He whom a dream hath possessed, knoweth no more of roamings,
All roads and the flowing of waves and the speediest flight he knows,
but wherever his feet are set, his soul is forever homing,
And going, he comes, and coming he heareth a call and goes."

In the fall of 1951, President Stealey, four faculty members and 80 (?) students got down to business. A new "school of the prophets" was born. The next few years were to mean many changes in the physical plant and real quality of schoolmanship firmly implanted by faculty, students and convention.

The view from the outside is reflected in some newspaper stories and appropriate headlines. Consider these: Funeral Service Called Off, Wake Forest Plans Revival, Seminary Calls Down Noise-Makers! (What an indictment of preachers -- May she never fail to do it.) Wing Contract is Let -- Not to be awarded with diplomas! Dangers of Limber-Lips Cited! Ranking Baptist Visits Seminary. These and others tell a quite human story of the working-out of the Divine will.

The progress and development of the Seminary along with the growing faith of others in it are reflected as the headlines continue. These tell of things that could be seen, but not of the work and struggle and meaning for those responsible. Remember these: Chapel to be Remodeled; Library Dedication Set; Williamses' to Give Organ to Seminary; Nursery Unit to Honor Miss Reid; Cafeteria to be Ready -- and on and on. None of it without hard work, thrift, and vision.

But of more importance are these: 77 to Receive Degrees from Southeastern; Enrollment Breaks Record; Seminary to Graduate 101; Dixie Baptist Seminary Will Admit Negroes; Southeastern Seminary Accepted by American Association of Theological Schools; Seminary Elects New Dean -- and with

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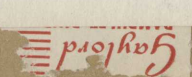
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it all, a messenger from an older school came to warn against Whining, Shining and Reclining.

What shall we say of these things? Of course, we know that buildings do not a Seminary make. It is true that bigness threatens quality; but neither does smallness mean superiority. Pliny is reported to have said, "When we Romans cannot make a thing beautiful, we make it big." It has certainly not been our main desire to make this institution big, though the needs of many have constantly pressed in upon us. We -- administration, faculty, trustees, convention and friends -- have prayerfully hoped that we were making it beautiful in spirit, big-hearted with concern, strong in faith and uncompromising in devotion to truth.

I could recite many details of things that have happened. Some things we are proud of. Some things we hope to be forgiven for. I can bear personal testimony to real courage on the part of many, but the record will stand as evidence of that. I could talk about sacrifices, but who, having seen the rewards, would want to take credit for them.

Rather, I would like to tell you how it has seemed to me that God was again getting into the human situation in a particular and special way. As trustees came and went, it was as if they had seen a vision and were willing to follow it. As the convention heard appeals and responded; it was as if they had heard and had believed. As faculty members arrived, each going to his own place, it was as if they had heard a voice and were willing to obey. As students came, it was as if they were saying, "We believe, help our unbelief."

Being privileged to see a Seminary in the making, I have tried to see the motives, the manner, and the meaning of it. I have wanted to lay over it all, that that our Lord called the greatest commandment and see how what we have done fits: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind; and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbor as thyself."

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 and thy neighbor as thyself."

If we have the nerve to measure the work of our minds and hands by that we may still need to knock off some things, add on some others, and we may find that something here is of everlasting worth. Let's put what we have done up beside it: "Thou shalt love ---" Here we began not with a set of rules to determine orthodoxy of belief or behaviour. We had not a lesson in the ceremonial and how to attract attention. Concern was not given to right connections and position for prestige. Our leaders moved off as if they had only recently heard someone say -- "Thou shalt love ---."

This school was conceived and begun, not as a place for giving the rules of the road and teaching men how to save themselves by keeping them. The motive and the method and the purpose were to be found in the agape of God. If this venture was prompted by and to witness to the love of God, then our decisions and deeds needed always to be sanctified in this love. This was the desire of all, again and again patiently and sacrificially demonstrated.

The historian who reads the record with a careful and discerning eye will discover in the speeches that were made and in the mail that went out -- not appeals for endowment or building or increase in faculty salary, but, first of all, a burning concern to help students have food and shelter while they studied. The history of the student aid fund with available gifts being kindly given is a worthy example of the love that has guided and strengthened the hands of our leaders during these years. It is not our duty to offer financial security; nor our privilege to make life easy for "promising preachers," but it is our duty and privilege to offer them the security of love and a lesson in sharing.

When busy men gave multiplied hours to planning and policy-making; and highly qualified men kept coming here to work and teach, it obviously was not for material gain or the applause of men. Underneath, over, and through these days and doings, there has been the pull and push of God-given love.

1. "Thou shalt love --- with all thy heart . . ."

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"Thou shalt love --- with all thy heart . . ."

Here, the pressure for "whole-life" commitment has been constant. The prospective faculty member was confronted, not with an "attractive offer," but with a job that would test his dedication. He was offered not an opportunity for advancement and to satisfy personal ambition, but an invitation to lose himself that others might learn and love and live. Whatever the quality of their work or how multiplied their mistakes, let us not forget that they responded as people who had come only to serve.

While from the beginning there was evident a desire to have students of ability and adequate preparation, this did not overshadow the primarily important matter of unhesitating commitment to the will of God. As far as humanly possible, the undedicated have been left for other schools and callings, while the serious and sincere have been given faithful encouragement.

On every school day, faculty and students have turned aside for a period of community worship. This was not because it was expected or would make a good impression. First, it was a natural thing for people of faith. Then, it was a deliberate discipline set to remind all that our calling and our help are from beyond ourselves. It was, and is, the wisdom of keeping our lives exposed to the word of God. It was, and is, the active knowledge that not even the dedicated live by bread alone. It was love for the communion of saints and the beauty of truth. It has been as if our leaders felt the constant pressure of the command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul." They could not and would not forget.

2. "----- and with all thy mind . . . "

For these years there has been fidelity in worship and devotion. At the same time, there has been a studied effort to avoid substituting piety for hard and clear and courageous thought.

In all honesty, this is something we hesitate to do in school and church. Just as Moslems leave their shoes outside, Christians want to leave

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their minds at home. Just as church members don't like to be disturbed, so there are young people who come to the Seminary wanting only a little polishing, and to decorate their ignorance with a degree. Just as many people believe doubt to be a sin, so many preachers think these doubts are enemies to be destroyed, or evils that will die if we ignore them.

All of us need to take a look at our confidence in the faith we profess. Are we afraid that too much light will detract from its beauty? Do we actually doubt that this truth is real? Will our house fall if someone finds a weakness? If the Lord who reigns is our shepherd and Jesus Christ is a fact, need we fear the most thorough examination, or hesitate to understand the most difficult and delicate?

We will not get from this effort the rich rewards we need and seek, if we are not careful to keep intellectual freedom and integrity. The student needs the opportunity to ask his most embarrassing question. The professor needs the privilege of full inquiry and uncensored expression. The constituency needs the integrity that gives genuineness to message and mission.

If we have the nerve to provide freedom and demand honesty, we must also require industry. Here is no place for the lazy to hide. This is no time for the fortunate to be at ease in Zion. The world situation is desperate and needing the desperate answer of the Cross. The Gospel demands interpretation and the world waits. We have the bread of life. Will we give them stones or crumbs?

The effort has been made to bring here, not men and women who can give pat answers to easy questions, but teachers who know what the important questions are, and who are not afraid to ask them and to seek diligently the true answers. We have hoped that this was becoming a community of learning where teachers and students know a togetherness in asking, seeking, knocking, and in accepting the answer.

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a wholesaler of "sermons for all occasions." May "preaching values" from here and there never be substituted for the meaty lecture. If we must have prejudices, then let them be against ignorance, superficiality and carelessness. Hard words from the Old Testament come at us -- "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord carelessly." May the prophet of God never be replaced by the hail-fellow-well-met. May God forgive us if we are afraid to listen, to think and to stretch our minds after the whole truth. May our people shame us if we ever run from doubt or fail to look the skeptical in the eye. In short -- may we be big enough, strong enough, and have nerve enough to love God with all our minds.

3. " ----- and with all thy strength . . . "

Having looked upon the cross the disciple must not neglect the upper room of prayer and waiting on the Lord. But he must not linger to loaf there. He must go out to teach and to suffer. Having seen the vision and experienced the thrill of truth on the mountain, his prayer must not be, "Lord, let me stay here." He must hear the "Come on," of his Master, and the "Follow me" that takes him into the valleys of defeat and death. We are not given the truth for truth's sake, but, "for their sake."

In the beginning and the first years of this Seminary, special effort was made to avoid the hurting divisions that are known so often. This was not meant to be a theological camp for either conservatives or liberals. It has not been the intent to bring together specialists in various fields. We have not wanted competing schools and self-sufficient departments. If you will look carefully, you will see the working out of a philosophy of each, conscious of, and responsible for the whole. You will see the theology major teaching Greek; the soul-winner teaching preaching, and the pastor teaching Christian Education. This is deliberate, not accidental. It has been as if someone had asked, "Is Christ divided?" or someone thought, "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

In the same way, personal religion has not been divorced from the

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ethical and moral. The man with the vigorous mind was not ashamed to work with his hands, nor did he think himself superior to the one whose hands worked that he might teach.

What has been done could not have been done without the all-out effort of many people. It would not have been done if they had not been sensitive to the call of God and the need of man. Piety for them has been no substitute for work.

As I have tried to look back over these years, it has seemed that I saw men and women who were hearing the great teacher say especially to them, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with heart and mind and hand." Then it has seemed as if their eyes were fixed on a picture. They had heard their teacher and had seen his illustration. It was the picture of a Samaritan stooping to attend the hurting. And did they see underneath it the words, "and thy neighbor as thyself?"

The knowledge we get must be girded with the towel of service. We must never be so far removed that we cannot see and suffer with the stricken; nor too preoccupied to give a helping hand to the fallen.

Here, we hope faculty and students will earnestly ask, "What is truth?" Here we hope they will feel ever more keenly the call of God. Here, we want them to know and love the will of God. But we also hope they will not fail to hear the Lord of life say -- "and thy neighbor as thyself." If faculty or students ever become as Priests and Levites who go by unknowing and uncaring, then our hopes will have been defeated and we will regret our efforts. But if through the loving dedication of your hearts and heads and hands, our Lord finds here a part of the answer to His prayer for the coming kingdom, then should one drop of our joy fall into hell, hell would become a paradise.

These have been years of trial and error, successes and failures, faith and doubt; but also years of forgiveness, comradeship and expanding hope. Having heard the command and seen the picture, men and women have

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given themselves in loyalty to God, love to neighbor, and in service to say to a dying world, "This do, and thou shalt live."

A salute to President Stealey and all who have walked with him. Warmest thanks to everyone who has had faith in our faith. May the beauty of our Lord God ever be upon the work of our minds and hands to establish it. When these buildings have crumbled in the dust, may this witness to the truth and love of God live on in the hearts of men.

I am fond of the story of something that happened in the chapel in Nottingham, England, where William Booth of the Salvation Army was converted. There is on the wall a marker commemorating his conversion. One day the Chaplain went into the chapel and saw an American Negro wearing the uniform of the Salvation Army. He said, "Mister, can a man say his prayers here?" The Chaplain replied, "Of course!" Whereupon the man dropped to his knees, lifted his hands and prayed -- "O God, do it again." As we look back over the first decade of this Seminary with its wise leadership, its dedicated faculty, the growing quality of the student body, the many friends who are active supporters, we hear the command of love and see the need. With gratitude and confidence we would only pray, "O God, do it again!"

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