

Oral History Interview of Dr. Elmer Towns

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Name of Interviewee: Dr. Elmer Towns

Name of Interviewers: Lowell Walters and Cline Hall

Transcriber: Jesse Ronda

Interview Length: (1:47:31)

Notes:

Walters: (0:01) Welcome to this interview in the oral history project of the Liberty University archives. This interview is being conducted on July 15, 2010. Today is the second part of our interview with Dr. Elmer Towns. My name is Lowell Walters and I will be conducting the interview today along with Dr. Cline Hall.

Hall: (0:21) Good afternoon.

Walters: (0:23) It's good to be here and greetings, Dr. Towns.

Towns: (0:27) Thank you for this privilege of answering these questions. I looked forward to this interview.

Walters: (0:33) Well, let's pick up at uh...in the previous interview we were talking about the earliest days of the University and I'd like to start off today talking about the first facilities. Tell us about what the first facilities were like that you used and how you used them and how they got established throughout the city of Lynchburg and then migrated to Candler's Mountain here.

Towns: (0:55) We began in Thomas Road Baptist Church. Our classrooms were the Sunday school rooms of Thomas Road. Our chapel was the sanctuary of Thomas Road. Our library, in those days because Thomas Road Baptist Church had LCA, it had really first rate library and so our library was with the LCA library. We began without a single book. Now, within the first week, I went downtown to meet a lady named [Murell] Taylor. She gave me an original copy of the Jeffersonian Bible. Now that's worth quite a bit today as an antique and I kept it on my desk for the longest time and...I not on my desk, but right behind my desk in the bookshelf on top of the credenza. And the faculty would always say, "Put it in the library,

that's where it belongs." I said, "I know it belongs there but if I put in there, somebody will steal it." And I was ragged on for almost two years by all faculty, "When you going to put that Bible up there?" So when I left in 1973, I gave it to Ella Wright who was our first librarian; E, L, L, A, W, R, I, G, H, T. She was a member of Thomas Road Baptist Church and she was also a deaf interpreter and she had worked as a librarian. Uh...no, she had worked in a library over at LC but she was not a librarian nor was she trained but she kept our books for us. I gave it to her and when I came back three and a half years later, it was gone. And I, to this day, I bleed and I blame myself for listening to the pressure of all my faculty. Now, you asked what it was like. We used the, the church gym; we used all the church facilities. About a month before school started, I went across the street, there were little World War II houses, two bedroom, kitchen, dining room, put together one bathroom and I started buying those houses; the first one in the neighborhood of eight thousand, then after a while nine thousand, then ten thousand, then eleven thousand dollars. One of the reasons we decided to move is that we realized all those houses would go up because the people new they could sell them to Thomas Road Baptist Church or the new college, Lynchburg Baptist College. Now, immediately across the street was a place called um...oh, it was a neighborhood. There were fifty-two houses in this neighborhood. It was out on a bluff. You have to go to it to see it because the bluff is surrounded with trees grown up on the edges. And this road went around and one road, there were fifty-two houses in this neighborhood and Jerry and I talked in terms of building the un...the, the college right there at Thomas Road. And we were going to buy all the houses, all fifty-two houses and one day we drove through and we were joking together. I'd say, "Oh, that house is the math department, that house is the history department, that house is the Bible department. That's going to be the registrar." And Jerry began to talk, "We can save money." He said, "The, the footprint of each of these houses, we don't have to build streets, we don't have to put in water, lights. We can just tear the house down and build..." We, he conceived a three story buildings all the way around. Now, whether you realize it or not, down in what is called the lower parking lot, there is a blue print somewhere of twenty-two dormitories. Each dormitory was three stories tall and if you look at that blueprint today, you go down and you find it surrounded by sidewalks. There was not one parking space anywhere down by those dormitories. But that's when we were talking in terms of having five thousand students. You know, Tennessee Temple had four thousand, five hundred. Bob Jones had four...we were going to have a little bit more, a little bit more. And so we had this blue print drawn up and I look back today and I absolutely laugh at it. The ridiculous, he didn't think of it, I didn't think of it. How can you build a campus without parking space for kids? But back then, not that many kids had cars, so we were going to use the church parking lot. Now, we went outside of Thomas Road and we went outside and there were large two and three story houses around the city. We rented those and put boys in those houses. We put the girls in the houses where they could walk to Thomas Road. So, those were our facilities. I hired three ladies from the church to be our cooks and in the early days we would cook and serve three meals a day. Now, the first meal was basically bacon and eggs every morning, oatmeal, cold cereal. Put it on the

table and the kids would come in and milk and coffee and orange juice; as much as they wanted. At lunch, we had a hot meal. And everyday I can remember it was stuffed pork chops and mashed potatoes the first Monday. Tuesday it was Swiss steak and mashed potatoes. And Wednesday it was meatloaf and mashed potatoes. And the three ladies who worked for me, I think they're all with Lord so I'll say, they, they were overweight. They loved mashed potatoes so we had mashed potatoes five days a week. And in those first days, we would put the bowls on the table and the girls would sit together and they would run to sit together because if they got with the football guys, they wouldn't get enough to eat...

Walters: (6:27) [*laughter*]

Towns: (6:28) The guys would eat everything. But that, that dining room, very small dining room, was enough for us. And the greatest thing about the school was the friendship and the fellowship. We just had great time together. From day one, I already explained, I was going to make it academic. Good classes, quizzes, and I said, "We're going to be serious and have the kids study from day one. This is not camp. This is going to be a college." And so we were very serious about studying and I think that some were along the line, Jerry saw something in that first year. He saw a seriousness and he saw some quality kids. We had some very good kids. They were learning, they were sharp. And I think it's along about that first or second year, he jumped it from five thousand to fifty thousand; blew me away when he said fifty thousand. Didn't talk to me. He announced it from the pulpit. I said, "Jerry, where did you get fifty thousand from?" He said, "I think God's going to give us that amount." And, and he really believed it. Now, I wanted it, I would have loved it, but I had no faith to believe God would give us fifty thousand. I had no idea all the infrastructure, the library, everything that was necessary, I have no idea of it. God was stretching me as this new school was growing. And so fifty thousand students, I think it began but today, as we make this thing, we have about, what is it, about fifty-four thousand online students in this calendar year and twelve thousand, seven hundred on residence this calendar year. That number's not our exaggeration, that's what we've reported to the Department of Education. So that's over sixty-four thousand, sixty-five thousand students. And somebody was saying, "What would Jerry say?" I think he would bend over the banister rail of heaven, look down, and say, "I told you so."

Hall: (8:30) [*laughter*]

Walters: (8:31) Sure.

Towns: (8:32) I just think that he is not surprised like I've been surprised because he was a man of faith. He really believed that God would do something. So, young people living in, living in these houses, coming to school everyday. All, now, the first two years all the classes were held at Thomas Road itself. All uh...the Sunday school rooms were not used by LCA. The LCA had its own classrooms in those days. So we used the Sunday school rooms. We used the auditorium. Now, if you've ever been in the auditorium, we've got a large foyer on

the north and the south end and a second floor large foyer and we used classrooms in both the first foyer, first floor and the second floor of the foyer. Now, we always joke about we had classes in the bathroom. Now, in the men's bathroom and in the ladies bathroom, they had very large locker rooms. And these locker rooms were not technically the bathroom but they were locker rooms where the kids would change. We had our P.E. classes in those locker rooms. And so, we used every available space, just packed the kids in. That was in the first and the second year. And the first year we had a hundred and fifty-four, the second year we had four hundred and twenty, we had four hundred and twenty students.

Walters: (9:52) And so then did you start...I know the athletics started to use Treasure Island at some point and then uh...

Towns: (10:02) In the second year, the only thing we had for sports was basketball and Dan Manley was our basketball coach. And that first year, our record was six and for. Now, I think Dan had a different number than I do so I don't know that anyone knows the exact number but I think we, we won a few more than we lost. I told Dan, I said, "Dan, you've got to hang some wins around the necks of these guys." I said, "If we go out and play all the big teams and we get beaten ten, fifteen, twenty times," I said, "that won't accomplish anything." I said, "Schedule us with teams that we can beat." And I think the very first game we had was with John Wesley College down in High Point. I remember going down, staying in a Rodeway Inn and we played this college and they were just a pickup college and we blew them off the court. And so that first year, we played primarily the military schools around. Hargrave and those types of schools...

Walters: (11:10) Sure.

Towns: (11:11) that have both a high school and a, a first two years of college, they were college prep type of schools, and so we played quite a few of those. And I went to every game and I would get really involved. I can remember in about the fifth or the sixth game, I was there and a call had gone against us and I was just really chewing on the ref and he turned around and he gave me a technical.

Walters: (11:34) *[laughter]*

Hall: *[laughter]*

Towns: (11:35) Yeah and he gave me a technical and I would like to say I've never yelled at a referee again, I can't say that. But I really toned it down a lot after that.

Walters: (11:44) Well, you mentioned the football players, the girls talking about not getting enough to eat if they sat by...

Towns: (11:50) Well...

Walters: (11:51) When did all that come about? And didn't Jerry have an emphasis on reaching the youth through music and sports and...?

Towns: (11:56) Well, the, in doing, the second year we hired our football player Rock Royer to begin football program began in the third year. And, and Rock Royer made all the guys play above themselves until he was killed in a, a plane accident. And in the third year we began our baseball program. Al Worthington was hired in the second year to begin. I think that Al, I hired Al, he came wanting a job and so we sat down and told him all that we had. He said, "I'll take it." Al was a man of faith, a man of God and, and so we are eternally blessed because of what Al Worthington has done for us. And he trained, he put his guys' discipleship into the big leagues and I think of Lee Guettermin was trained by Al Worthington...

Walters: (12:44) And we've had an interview with Sid Bream and he has affirmed that too.

Towns: (12:48) Sid Bream was trained by Al Worthington, yes.

Walters: (12:49) Yeah.

Towns: (12:50) Al was just great man of God. We could, and as was Rock Royer. We...

Hall: (12:55) Of course we didn't have sports facilities. I remember when I came here, the first basketball we, I attended was at Jefferson Forest High School.

Towns: (13:00) Yes, they...

Hall: (13:01) What...

Towns: (13:02) went from LCA to Jefferson Forest...

Hall: (13:04) Ok.

Towns: (13:05) and we played baseball over at For...uh...Miller Park and we played football in the City Stadium. So we, we, we acted like we were bigger than what we were.

Walters: (13:15) Sure.

Towns: (13:16) We acted higher and, you know, we acted like we were on a higher level than what we were. We acted, we said, "If you want to be first rate, you have to act first rate before you get to be first rate." And so that was kind of Jerry's...

Walters: (13:27) Sure.

Towns: (13:28) whole concept of what we should do.

Walters: (13:29) Now when did you start housing folks in what was known as “the hotel” and then...

Towns: (13:33) That was in the third year.

Walters: (13:35) Ok.

Towns: (13:36) Now, the second year had, have I talked to you yet about building dormitories on the island?

Walters: (13:41) No.

Hall: No.

Towns: (13:42) Ok. After the first year, we realized we were going to need something in the second year. So in the summer of 1972, we realized we, all the applications were flowing in and so we went along about the first of June and we couldn't have got a building permit with the city of Lynchburg but the island is in Amherst County. Very, very few building restrictions and so we got all of our building permits through Amherst County. We put down foundations, we had about one or two carpenters who were trained. We had one electrician, one plumber. These were students, older students who were there. We hired them and we just, just began, we began buying materials, having it trucked to the island, putting down foundations. And students would show up for school, we would give them a hammer, a bag of nails and they would start nailing down subfloors. Give them a hammer and they'd start nailing on sheeting for, for the roofing. We had men who would lay out all the rafters and a boy who had never cut rafters in his life, gave him a saw and he started cutting rafters and, and we built seven dorms down on Treasure Island that summer. Now, they were not A1A construction. They were probably B2B construction and but they were very adequate. They had gang showers in them, they had...it was just really a great place to live. The guys and gals loved them because on one row and on one side of a field all of the boys, on the other side of the field, all of the girls. And next to that was, we built a football building down on the island. Now, when we were doing that originally, the buses would take the kids up and down. And about the second year we were doing that, the city came and said, “No, you can't run the bus with the kids on it, it's too heavy for the old bridge.” And so they come down to the bridge, all the kids would get out, drive across, they'd walk across, get back on the bus, and go on to their place on the island. Now, in 1985, a, a flood came and it over whelmed the island. A lot of the old cabins from Treasure Island were washed away. The, there's a great big old mansion down there, two story mansion. Someone apparently had lived on that way back and what had happened, way upstream there was a chemical company or some type of a company that had all types of chemicals. And the chemicals came down stream and the toxin got into all of those buildings and so they are off limits and so no one should go down there because of all the poisonous fumes that are on that island. So, that island is uninhabited today. There's two or three places

you can go to Rivermont and look there and I go and I look down and I said, “It’s amazing what God did in that place, just amazing.” Treasure Island had a swimming pool on it, it had a camp there. Jerry had run a camp for almost fifteen years and offered free camping facilities to any kid anywhere in central Virginia. So...

Walters: (16:53) Did that chemical plant ever offer any compensation for the loss of the island or anything?

Towns: (16:58) Well, in those days...

Walters: (16:59) You don’t know?

Towns: (17:00) we, we didn’t think that way...

Walters: (17:02) Sure.

Towns: (17:03) we were not a litigious society back then...

Walters: (17:04) Sure.

Towns: (17:05) like we are today.

Walters: (17:06) Sure. Now let’s talk about migrating up here to Candler’s Mountain and we’ve heard Dr. Falwell, when he was still with us, talk about flying over the mountain and then his prayer walks through the mountain that...

Towns: (17:19) There’s two stories I need to tell.

Walters: (17:21) Sure.

Towns: (17:22) The first story, I’ve written in a book and Dr. Falwell’s written in a book. No, the first story I don’t think Dr. Falwell ever wrote it down. I heard it directly from Wayne Booth and Bill Burris and there was the lawyer, three men who were business partners in this city bought the, what is called the Carter Glass Farm on the courthouse steps out of bankruptcy. And they owned this thing plus others; they were wheeler dealers; big businessmen around the city. And one day they said, “You know Jerry’s talking about this huge university. Do you think he’d be interested in the Carter grant? It’s right next to the city. It’s not in the city, it’s perfectly...” they said, “Yeah, but man, it’s such a mess. He’ll go out there and think we’re offering him a junkyard or a dump heap, you know?” because it was just tragically looking. So after lunch one day, they said, “Jerry, we want to show you something.” So they drive up the old entrance that goes over the railroad track and they go up to the Carter Glass. Now, you got weeds growing up everywhere, small trees in the middle of the field, weeds and junk and as you approach the house, the people who had lived there after the Carter

Glass family moved out had not taken anything to the garbage dump. They had dumps of garbage all of over the place, all kinds of old, broken, rusty machinery, seven or eight old rusted out cars; weeds growing up through them. The barn; the roof was falling, the stable; the roof was falling. And they drove around the house and Jerry knew it well because it's on the other end of Candler's Mountain from where his boyhood home was. He had hunted rabbits all across the top of that mountain. He said, "I knew it well." And so they took him over there and they took him out to about where today you would find the prayer chapel and they stopped and they said, "What do you think of this place, Jerry?" "It's great." He said, "You know we own this. If you could use this for your college, we could give it to you." And Jerry said, "You mean that?" And they say he almost danced a jig, "You mean that!? We could have this!?" He said, "I could see it all now." And he began to wave, he said, "Over here," and he waved, waved off to his left, "I could put the students over there; dormitories, living over there. Right down in the center we're going to put classrooms and chapel." He said, "I can see the classrooms, I can see it now. Off to the right is going to be athletic fields." He said, "Football fields and baseball fields and a basketball arena." He said, "I could see it all now." And Jim Moon's standing there said, "I don't see anything."

Hall: (19:55) [*laughter*]

Walters: [*laughter*]

Towns: (19:56) And that classic story continues to this day. And within the last two or three months, I told this story to Jim Moon again and he still comes and says to me, "I didn't see anything." And that talks about Jerry, the man of vision and the man of faith; he saw something there. Well, the story goes, the property was transferred. They gave it to us and we gave them a tax write-off. And a few months after that, matter of fact, within the second year, we went up there to take claim of the mountain and we, there's a very famous picture of me and Sam Pate and Jerry Falwell and Percy Hall, he was the Chairman of the deacons of the church, groundbreaking for our first dormitory. And we went in there and we put in the foundations. Those buildings that we couldn't build in the lower parking lot, we were going to build up there; use the same drawings. Now, those foundations were later bulldozed underground and they were never used but we got it started that second year. Now, we were thinking about it and about this time, Jerry flies in and he looks down at the mountain and he says to Bill Burris on the plane, "Who owns that mountain?" And Bill Burris says, "I think it was U.S. Gypsum Company." And Jerry said, "You think they'll sell it to us?" He says, "Preacher, everything's for sale if you got the right amount of money." So Jerry thought about it and he went to his old home and in a three piece suit and wing tips, he walked the whole length of the mountain; rabbit trails he had known as a boy, praying and saying, "God, give us this mountain. God, give us this mountain." And he had faith to believe that God would do it. He phoned the U.S. Gypsum Company and made an appointment to talk to the vice president in charge of real estate holdings. And he and Bill Burris flew up to Chicago, went, got a cab,

went down to their office, went to U.S. Gypsum Company, and walked in with a man and he had all the drawings out on the table. They walked over, looked at it and he said, "Yes, that's what I want." And Jerry touched it and he said, "How much do you want for it?" And he said, "Preacher, how do you know it's for sale?" He said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Last week the Board of U.S. Gypsum voted to divest itself of its holdings. Our capital is short. We've got to raise capital." And he said, "It's for sale." And Jerry said, "How much?" He said, "One million, one hundred thousand." And Jerry said, "I want to buy it." And later the vice president said, "I didn't think that this preacher from Virginia, West Virginia up in the mountains had any money. Especially not a million dollars we were talking about." And he was very eager and Jerry said, "Yeah, how much?" He says, "A million, one hundred thousand." Jerry says, "I want to buy it." And he said, we talked about it, he said, "Now, will you finance the deal for me?" He said, "We've bought other property and it's owner financed. And he said, "Well, I guess we could do that." And he said, "How much do you want down?" And the vice president said, "Ten percent," or a hundred thousand dollars. And so Jerry said, "I can do that." And so he sat down and he said, "But, I don't have that money right now. Can I write you a check for ten thousand dollars and, hold it, and within a week, I'll give you the other ninety thousand." And he said, the vice president, "I was chuckling to myself." He said, "I'll get his check and it probably is not any..." he says, "I'll get his check and we'll never see him again." So he said yes and so they went over and had a secretary type a quit quick, a quick quit uh... deed. And they signed it in an agreement of how much money was to be paid. And when he, Jerry walked out the door, the vice president, "I'll never see him again and he'll never get this money." Jerry came home and because, began calling those doorkeepers. Did I tell you about the doorkeepers last time?

Hall: (24:03) Yes.

Towns: (24:04) The, those envelopes giving us a dollar a week? He called those door, he wrote those doorkeepers, he said, "I know you've given me a dollar, but now I need a hundred dollars." He said, "I need a hundred dollars, I can get the mountain. This is, we got to have it immediately." And the money started coming in and within the week, he had enough money to...oh, by the way, when Jerry walked out the office, he looked, he said, "Oh, by the way, that check is hot. Hold it for about a week."

Walters: (24:32) [*laughter*]

Hall: [*laughter*]

Towns: (24:33) And he said he just laughed and laughed and laughed and said, "Within a week I had the ten thousand covered and within the month I had a hundred thousand paid down." He said, "So God did it," he said, "I knew that God would do it and God did it through the friends who wanted it done."

Walters: (24:48) So were you a, when, when Dr. Falwell's doing all this stuff with the land, are you kind of told the day after or are you right there with him when some of this is going on as far as the communication?

Towns: (25:02) Some of it. Jerry did it himself. He would, matter of fact, Jerry's way was not to discuss it with the deacons or with the Board. He, he was not great into discussion. He would announce it, he ran things from the pulpit, isn't that right Cline?

Hall: (25:16) Yes, he always made an announcement.

Towns: (25:18) He always ran things, he made announcement from the pulpit because sometimes he knew if he sat down and discussed it, people would talk him out of it, they would give the rational reasons and he ran things from, this was a pulpit driven ministry. Is that a right way of putting it?

Hall: (25:34) That, that's right.

Towns: (25:35) And so he would, he would do it and then announce it. So many times that was the way he did things and I don't think he was against the people because I believe there was a tremendous faith transfer. I use that word, his faith transferred to the people and they believed God and their faith transferred to him and together in a faith transfer the faith became stronger of all the people together. And so we got the mountain, I want that mountain. And so that was in the spring of '73. Now um...now, let's go back to that first year. You asked me about the question of going to Israel. We didn't talk about that. In that first year, we promised every student who would come a free trip to Israel and we kept that promise in February of 1972. We all got on buses, we went up to Washington D.C., we went to Dulles, got on this big plane, and flew straight into Israel. I think we didn't fly straight there. I think we all stopped in Dublin, Ireland and then flew on into Israel. When we...no, we flew into Cyprus. We got onto a ship in Cyprus and uh...what was the name of that ship? I've got it somewhere. And we, we all stayed, all of our students stayed on that ship; it was a, a tour ship. And we had many other people with us. As I think in terms, there were ninety students free but then Jerry had, I think it was about two, three hundred and fifteen, sixteen people, that's a number that sticks in my mind of the total number and we would go, we'd go from one end of Cyprus, get on a bus and go all the way across Cyprus tracing Acts 13 and the ship would meet us at the other end, we'd get on. Then we went down to Tarsus and we got off the bus, got on a, got off the ship, got on buses, went through Tarsus, went around all the way to Antioch, that's a hundred seventy-five miles by bus. We stopped at several Crusader castles looking at things. We went to Antioch to the first church, went through that city, went got back on the bus and each night we would have church on the bus, on the, on the boat. We would have, we would enjoy ourselves, we would have...Doug Oldham would sing. And then the, the third day we got off at Beirut Lebanon. And we got on buses and went all the way over to Damascus and we got back very late that night, like, midnight. And then we went from the next night down to

Tel Aviv and we went through Galilee. Then we got back on the boat and then we went through Jerusalem area. It was a, a seven day trip but I remember it was a Sunday in Tel Aviv, we were there, and we had all these students and Jerry stood up and he said, "Now, all of you folks have seen these students. We're giving them free scholarships." He said, "Most of them are there free." He said, "I want, how many of you will help me to underwrite these students?" And he said, "I need money." He said, "Some of you folks can write a big check." And I remember it was a Sunday morning on the ship, we had a great service, and the, the plates were passed and all these lay people were put...and boy, in my mind, it seems to me we got something like, a huge amount of money. I'm thinking three hundred thousand, a third of a million. Now, it's interesting, the first two or three weeks we had school, we were having school and these kids would come up and they would bring me a napkin. They had talked to Jerry in a restaurant and he would write, "Give Gary Byers a free scholarship for the whole year. Jerry Falwell." And I went to Jerry and I said, "Jerry, how can I balance the budget? You don't have any money for, I..." have I told you this story before?

Walters: (29:32) I don't know.

Towns: (29:33) You know, I said, "Jerry, how can we balance the budget? You're giving away all of my money." He said, "Elmer, let me give you some insight." He said, "It's easier to raise money than recruit students." Did I say that earlier?

Hall: (29:45) Yeah, I think so.

Walters: (29:46) Yeah, you told us that.

Towns: (29:47) Yeah, and so, I learned that lesson very early. That he could use the students if he had a lot of students to raise money and he always did that.

Hall: (29:56) Well, what was uh...in the development of the curriculum you had Bible, history, what, psychology, some of these courses...

Towns: (30:03) In the, in the first year, I hired Gordon Henry, J. Gordon Henry.

Hall: (30:06) Yeah. What, now, did he come...what year did he come?

Towns: (30:09) He came in '72.

Hall: (30:11) Oh, good...

Towns: (30:12) He came as the academic dean of the college and he's the one who really began to develop the curriculum. I turned it over to him and he took full charge of the curriculum and from '72, and I think he left in 1980 and I, he did an outstanding job. Dr. Henry and I made trips to, to Richmond to talk about uh...it's interesting, July the 1st, 1971,

I've been here one month and a new law had been passed in Richmond and it said every college in the state of Virginia that offered any type of bachelorette degree had to be accredited. Bible College, you could not have a college without accreditation. And some people saw that as the, as the uh...kind of a death-knell over the college, you can't have a college. And so Jerry said, 'We will be accredited.' And I'm thinking, "Oh my goodness. I went through Midwest accreditation, Midwest Bible uh...Winnipeg Bible College accreditation, Trinity; I got to do it again." And so we went down to Richmond. I remember going down by myself and meeting the head of the Department, Commission of Higher Education and he said, "I know all about your college. My mother watches Jerry Falwell every Sunday." And we had his heart and he said, "Let me tell you, you can start it but you have to plan for accreditation. What are your plans?" And I began to tell him what they were going to be and he said, "Fine." And so the second year, we went down to SACS and, and SACS was on Peachtree Street, we met with them, told them what we were doing, laid out a program, and once again, we had their approval. And so, from then on, from 1972 to 1979, that was a seven year we got accreditation voted in 1979.

Hall: (32:12) So it was very, it was the intention from the very beginning about accreditation.

Towns: (32:16) Yes. I remember in 1979 on that particular Sunday, I was sitting on the platform and when Jerry announced, he turned, he said, "Elmer," he said, "when we started this college, you and I promised these students they would have an accredited degree and we've kept our promise." Now, I remember that very, very definitely, yes.

Walters: (32:37) What were the major hurdles that had to be overcome to be accredited?

Towns: (32:43) Oh my goodness. You had to have a budget of X amount of dollars, you had to have a library of so many volumes, you had to have so many Ph.D.'s, you had to have so many um...you had to have infrastructure galore; everything, standards all the way through. You had to have very careful academic standards, very careful living standards, you have to have full, full living...there were standards in every area we had to meet. We were far from meeting any of those standards but we wanted to meet them.

Walters: (33:15) And so, did you tell them, "Here are our plans." And then they give you so long to meet them then at that time?

Towns: (33:21) Yes.

Walters: (33:22) Ok, and then what did the, what was the reaction of the other Christian institutions to Liberty's um...emphasis on that?

Towns: (33:34) We were vilified and attacked and we were told we were compromisers. Bob Jones was anti-accreditation and I think that Tennessee Temple by default was anti-

accreditation. The few schools, Fundamentalists, capital F, Fundamentalists, were so anti-accreditation, “We don’t take any certificate. We don’t take any recognition from the government.” They were so strong that any school that claimed they were going to be accredited, in essence, almost immediately were put in a negative position, in a negative light, therefore they were vilified. And they said, “Well, that’s a compromise school. You don’t want to go there.” And so we were very strong, we were going to be an accredited school, an academic...those three legged stools stood true from the very beginning. Academic excellence um...Dr. Hall, from the very beginning you’ve heard that word, academic excellence. See, that was, that was that first night when Ruth was praying and we were planning, we talked about academic excellence from day one. And that’s something that I, I never backed down from.

Walters: (34:42) And then why did the school seek accreditation then from TRACS as well as SACS?

Towns: (34:48) Well, TRACS um...we were not sure because we listened to all of the people who attacked SACS and stayed in the accrediting agencies; whether they would draw us from our Christian roots and our Christian standards. About that time, there was a great emphasis on the ATS, the Accrediting uh...the Ameri, Accredit...ATS, is that the name of the theological accrediting association of seminaries?

Hall: (35:16) I’ve heard of it.

Towns: (35:18) I think it’s called ATS. Anyway, I used to, when I was the dean of the seminary, when I came back I became dean of the seminary, and I went to those meetings and we were trying to get accredited there and they came in and they tried to force a rule that every seminary must hire a woman. And I remember the Evangelicals and Roman Catholics at seminaries joining hands to vote down the liberal schools. There were about two hundred schools in total and if you put the Evangelicals and the Roman Catholics together, we were a majority. And so we voted that down. And then they wanted to put in a ruling on the recognition of homosexual teachers and we had to vote that down. And I think that scare said that accreditation is drifting liberal. Do you remember Jerry Falwell used to say, he said, “If you take your hands off the wheel, it will turn left.” He said, “It will go liberal as soon as you take your hands off. We don’t let our school...” uh...he said, “We’re not like the insane asylum. The insane asylum is not run by the, the inmates. It’s run by the people on the outside.” And so we were sort of, so Jerry said, “We’re going to form a new accreditation association of Fundamental colleges.” And that’s what TRAC, Transactional Association of Christian Colleges, and so Dr. Henry was the founding Executive Director, I was on the founding board, there were two or three other from Liberty on that board. I can’t remember...

Hall: (36:49) Russell, Russell Fitzgerald, was he part of it?

Towns: (36:52) He took my place when I left.

Hall: (36:53) Ok.

Towns: (36:54) No...yes, he became Executive Director eventually. But there were people from Criswell, there were people...Henry Morris was on that school. But there were many people who felt like us; we were a little afraid of accrediting agencies so we wanted a second one. And that second association, TRACS, when we got TRACS recognized by the DOE, the Department of Education, that gave it, us an authority. The Department of Education gave us an authority to stand up to SACS because we could get federal money, our students could get money, veterans could get money, we could receive foreign students into our schools; all of the things that the, the federal government controls. That doesn't mean money goes to the schools, the money went to the students.

Hall: (37:42) Ok, before we move on, let's talk about that first class. Any particular students that stand out in your mind for the, especially the first year or two?

Towns: (37:51) Oh, yes. Uh...

Hall: (37:52) And, and what are they doing now?

Towns: (37:53) David Rhodenhizer...

Hall: (37:54) Ok.

Towns: (37:55) I think about the first week I was in Lynchburg, David Rhodenhizer had just gotten married, Jerry had married them and he and his wife came in and he was in, had finished his first year at Baptist Bible College in Springfield and was praying about coming to our school. And I said, "David, there's many advantages of going back to Springfield. It's a great school, it's got everything that you need, and look what it did to Jerry and you can become another Jerry. But if you come to Lynchburg Baptist College, you may be a part of something so unusual, a part of history that you'll always be glad you done it." And I said, "You have to go into you heart," I said, "delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." Well, I remember we prayed and he felt God called him. Now, David did come and he did graduate and he went out and planted a great church, Calvary Road Baptist Church in Virginia, that's the greater Washington D.C. area. His children came uh...he's, boy, when I look at all of his children and all of his grandchildren. He's on our Board of Directors now and he's been a very loyal supporter. David Rhodenhizer is one of those outstanding men, built...one of our first graduates to go out and build a church of a thousand. And so David Rhodenhizer is one of those that I remember. I remember Gary Byers. Gary was, he sang in the Chorale and he sat at the very top of the Christmas Tree. He went out and today we works in Baltimore, Maryland. I think in terms of Stan Braun. Stan Braun came, young guy out of Atlanta, Georgia, today he's pastoring his home church. Probably many other that I should talk about. Uh...

Walters: (39:48) Dr. Vernon Brewer? Was he...

Towns: (39:51) Yes, Vernon Brewer was, he was the, he was youth pastor at the church and he had gone to two other colleges and I think he might even tell you he had been kicked out of a couple other colleges and he came and finished up his work and he was the very first graduate...

Walters: (40:04) Was Robbie Hiner here at that time?

Towns: He was also youth pastor...

Walters: (40:06) I'm sorry.

Towns: (40:07) Robbie Hiner came the second year.

Walters: (40:08) Ok.

Towns: (40:09) Yeah, Robbie Hiner came the second year, although he was, he was here during the first year to sing. His father brought him here but he didn't become a student until a little bit later.

Walters: (40:18) Anybody else you can remember?

Towns: (40:21) Oh my goodness.

Walters: (40:22) I want to give you time here, I don't want to skip someone that...

Towns: (40:25) Ok, let's go on. I'll come back and talk about...

Walters: (40:26) Ok, sure thing.

Hall: (40:27) It seems like that, in the early days the emphasis was on training preachers or...

Towns: (40:33) Well, we had...

Hall: (40:34) preacher boys as they were called...

Towns: (40:35) we talked about preachers and very, because of the influence of Gordon Luff. Gordon Luff became the first dean of students and I had a man look after the boys earlier and he was not called the dean of students, he was called the superintendent of men and Mrs. J. L. Grooms was the superintendent of ladies. But they, they helped me supervise the men and women that first year. And then Gordon Luff became the dean and his influence, very strong and so I appreciate the strong emphasis of Gordon Luff and the youth department. Yes, we trained preachers but in the early days, we probably turned out more outstanding youth directors. Within fifteen years, I would say by the mid 1980's, twenty-five percent of the

Southern Baptist mega-churches, twenty-five percent of the Southern Baptist mega-churches, that's the huge churches, had a Liberty grad as their youth pastor. And that, that's saying something, you know, because that recognized the quality of what we were doing.

Hall: (41:45) It seems like now as the years pass, most, many of the student body goes into other areas rather than the Christian vocations. Can you speak to that?

Towns: (41:54) I think from the very beginning a lot of those young men went out and became outstanding young men for God, young men and young women. They went out and did exploits for God.

Hall: (42:08) Ok. When did you become dean of the seminary? I believe you just mentioned it, when you came...

Towns: (42:12) Ok, let me say one more thing about the early days.

Hall: (42:14) Ok.

Towns: (42:15) In the second year, I hired Joyce Wipf...

Hall: (42:18) Yes.

Towns: (42:19) to be head of the English Department. Ok, now, under the English Department, you said, "Did you have any standards, any ideas?" At the very beginning, I knew that Bob Jones was outstanding. Young people from Bob Jones stood on a platform, were clean cut, spoke up, communicated well, you know, they were, they personified Christianity. So, Joyce Wipf had been chairman of the department at Bob Jones so we hired her to be chairman. I said, "Joyce, implement our four things. Grammar, I want them to write well. Speech, I want them to speak well. Literature, I want them to read well. And," he said, "I want you to take that whole department and hire Bob Jones graduates and make it," I said, "I want our young people to be as good as Bob Jones-good." And that was our criteria, without a lot of written work; we knew what we wanted. We knew the end product and we got um...oh, I think that second year I had five ladies to teach in those areas because now we were into two years of curriculum. And so we had, at that time, we had four hundred and twenty students and so, with all of that, I need a lot of teachers. And of those five, Joyce Wipf was one, her husband, Amos Wipf...

Hall: (43:46) Yeah, Amos Wipf.

Towns: (43:47) had three Ph...had three doctor's degrees. One doctor of education, another doctor of chemistry, and I forget what the other one...doctor of biology. And so, he became a great help to us. Very early on we were well aware of our need of earned recognized doctor's degrees to make this an accredited school and so we, we did that...

Walters: (44:05) And what attracted, what was the attract, attracted those folks to Li...here, to leave Bob Jones...

Towns: (44:10) The vision of Jerry.

Walters: (44:11) Ok.

Towns: (44:12) You know, to train young chaplain, champions for Christ to reach the world for Christ.

Hall: (44:20) So, when you returned, you mentioned you became the, is that when you became the dean of the seminary? Or when did...

Towns: (44:26) I told you why I left.

Hall: (44:27) Ok.

Towns: (44:28) I, I just got so frustrated...

Hall: (44:30) Yes.

Towns: (44:31) doing office work, management. I said, "Jerry," I remember sitting there, I said, "Jerry, I'm not mad." I said, "I just am not happy doing what I'm doing." And I had gone to Savannah on one of the holiday breaks. My, my brother and I were on a, his uh...speedboat. We went down a river and we saw a house for sale out on a little island. And in those days, it was out there, we walked around it and I said, "This house is built in the wrong place. They'll never sell it." I walk into church that night, I'm at Bible Baptist in Savannah, which is an importer church. That's the church where all my people from West Minster Presbyterian are now members. So I walk into the church and there's a man standing there and I shake his hand and we got to chatting just, well, he said, "Where you been?" I said, "I've been out looking," I said, "I saw a house today in Rio Vista." He said, "That's my house." He says, "I can't sell that house." He said, he said, "I'm trying to sell it for sixty thousand dollars." And I said, "How much are you, how much would you take for it?" He said, "Are you interested?" And I said, "Well, I might be." He said, "Twenty-five thousand." "Wow," I go, I said, "I'll take it." Just spurred like that and so I bought a house. You know, I, I bought a house because I wanted a house. I had a book and I had just written a book and I got it in advance of twenty thousand dollars. And so I got the advance for the money and I bought the house and I only owed five thousand on it. So I bought this house and a house, I had a house in Savannah, Georgia on, on Moon River. Three houses down from Johnny Mercer who wrote *Moon River*. And Johnny Mercer was a friend of my dad and so I knew the place and, you know, so, and so he had built it at the wrong place and people couldn't get to it and therefore, that's why it wouldn't sell. It was a nice big two-story house, waterfront and all of that. So, I said, "Jerry, I'm going to go to my house. I'm writing, I've got books to write, you know, I got

pastors meetings to go to.” I was still enjoying the fame of having written *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools*. I was invited all over the place. And so in those days I preached in all fifty states of America. I’ve preached in all provinces of Canada. I’m not trying to brag, I’m just simply saying people would say, “Would you come and preach on Sunday schools?” So, I did. And so, uh...and then I was asked, “Would you help with BUA?” And I said, “Sure.” And he said, “Would you come and be a consultant in education and organize that school for us?” So I went in and I spent a day, hundred dollars a day consultant fees. And I spent about two or three days and wrote constitutions and left and they said, “Will you come back open the first school year for us?” “Yes.” “Would you come back once a week and teach for us? We’re in trouble, would you come back and run it for us?” you know. So it’s kind of, they inched me into running this school and all of the sudden, two years later I said, “I’m doing what I, why I left Jerry Falwell.” And I said, “Boy, I don’t want to do this.” You know, I had walked away from two schools because of, of management. And Thanksgiving Day, Roscoe Brewer called me and he said, “Elmer, would you go with me at Christmas time? Day after Christmas, meet me here in Lynchburg, fly with me down to Haiti. We’re going to be in a big feeding campaign. I want you to write the whole story up and do all the scripts and write everything.” I said, “Sure, I’ll come.” I didn’t have anything to do so I, he said, “Oh, by the way, when I come, get me breakfast with Jerry Falwell.” And we’re sitting at breakfast over at the old Holiday Inn and Jerry said, “Are you tired of just writing and are you ready to come back?” I said, “Jerry, I’ll come back but I won’t come back as a, an administrator. I’ll come back if I can teach and write and do research.” He said, “You’re hired.” He, he said, “How much you want?” I said, “Pay me what you wish to pay me.” So we shook on it, we didn’t even talk about the amount of money. And so he said, “When do you want to come?” I said, “Well, I got to give them thirty days notice. I’ll come February 1st.” So I came on February the first and I, I really feel it was of God that I came and so I came back and about three or four days I’m back, we’re driving up uh...we’re driving up to what is called Lookout Mountain over here in the Blue Ridge. And he said, “Now, when you take over the seminary, here’s what I want you to...” I said, “Jerry, I thought we said I wasn’t going to have to...” He said, “Now wait a minute, just listen. When you take over the seminary,” he says, “our dean, Dr. Hughes, won’t have divorced men in.” He said, “Now, you can never say I want them in but we ought to have divorced men because a lot of Southern Baptist, a lot of Independent Baptist Church have divorced men.” I said, “I agree with you.” He said, “Ok. And we’ve got to have women in there. He won’t have women in there.” I said, “I agree with you.” And he said, “We’ve got to have more than just preachers. We’ve got to have counselors and we got to have youth major.” I said, “I agree with you.” He said, “Ok.” And so I came back and for about six months, I, I ran, I was called Editor in Chief. I put out *Faith of Lay* magazine, *Liberty Journal* the newspaper. We put out a broadsheet newspaper. We mailed it to all of his mailing list. At this time huge numbers of people all over America. At that time, in the late ‘70s, postage mailing rates were still extremely low. We could mail and he could get publicity for all, all he was doing. So I did that and in November of that year, Dr. Hughes had a heart attack. And then

Jerry announced from the pulpit that Ed Hindson was going to be teaching in the seminary and Hughes didn't want Ed Hindson teaching because he said, "He's a Calvinist." Now, he wasn't Calvinist. He had Calvinist friends. And so Dr. Hughes, who is now with the Lord, was so upset over that a week later he had a heart attack. And don't make decisions when you are physically weak because they in, they influence mental strength. And he made a decision; he wrote a paper, about a fifteen page letter, Xeroxed the copies, went to every restaurant in town, dropped it on every coffee counter of all the restaurants, blaming Dr. Falwell of compromise. "Dr. Falwell has compromised. Dr. Falwell has not kept his word. Dr. Falwell has compromised." And in this fifteen page, he must have said fifteen times, "Jay Adams, nouthetic counseling." Wrote a book called *Competent Counseling* and on page fifty-nine, he says, "You should not witness to every man because he may not be preordained to heaven. He may be preordained to hell. And you should not do it." And so he quoted that on, on those letters; page after page after page after page. That night, I mean, that was the stir of the town. That night, Dr. Hughes was on channel thirteen. Everyone was watching. And they got him on channel thirteen, I was home watching, and it went like this, "Well Dr. Hughes, tell us about Dr. Falwell's compromise." He said, "Well, Dr. Falwell has let Calvinists get into the school." "What's a Calvinist?" You know, the, the news people didn't have a clue. He began, they said, "No, no, no, no. We want to talk about money." "Well, I don't know anything about that." "Has Dr. Falwell compromised on money?" "No, no, no." "Has Dr. Falwell compromised on women?" "No, no, no." "Has he..." "No, no, no. It's all about Calvinism." And finally the news person looked in the camera and he said, "We'll be right back after a commercial." Dr. Hughes did not come back."

Walters: (52:42) Kind of deer in headlights there for the, you know?

Towns: (52:44) Yeah, they, they were, they were just absolutely caught. Well anyway, about two or three days later, they had a meeting and Pierre Guillermin called me. He said, "Elmer," he said, "you're the new dean of the seminary; Monday morning, go in, you're, you're in. I said, "Ok." I said, "I, I heard it coming." That night, security went down, took all of Dr. Hughes' library, put it in boxes, took it to his front porch, and left them on his front porch. Went to my office, took all of my books, got my secretary up, kept her up all night, they went to my office, put all my books, put everything in place, and Monday morning I was ready to operate; I didn't have to do any moving, it was completely done. It was all done and I walked right in, my secretary was sitting there, we were ready to go. Now, that happened and uh...when, when I walked in, we only lost one of the students. Dr. Hughes was absolutely sure there'd be a mass uprising of all of the students and they would walk out with him. Bill Sheehan called me and Bill Sheehan said, "I am so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry." And I said, "What's wrong, Bill?" He said, "I got to come talk with you." And so I got there at eight o'clock and he was there about eight thirty-five. He walks in, he says, "Dr. Hughes has been planning to take this seminary and steal it from Jerry and take it up to Buena Vista." He said, "He's going to go to Buena Vista. There's a whole college up there he could buy." He said,

“There is a trust fund of money that’s available,” and he says, “and I and Dr. Hughes sign it,” he said, “but it’s Dr. Hughes but it also says president or dean of the seminary,” or whatever it said. He said, “Give me this piece of paper.” He said, he signed it and he said, “Sign that piece of paper.” I said, “What am I doing?” He said, “Just sign it.” And so he took it down, took all the money out of the bank, and walked over and gave it to Liberty University. And so when I became dean, several good things happened. The first good thing, I said, “Jerry, I want to merge the two libraries.” We had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to build a seminary library separate from the University library. Now, we had done that because accreditation, up until that time, had mandated separate libraries. But about that time, beginning to feel economic crunch, they said, “You may put them together if you can validate and recognize what you are doing.” So I, I went to Jerry, one of the first things, I said, “Jerry, we got to put them together.” And Dr. Little, you remember Ernest Little...

Hall: (55:25) Oh, yes.

Towns: (55:26) the librarian? Well we got together, he was overjoyed to put the two. So, the seminary had a staff of about four or five librarians and we immediately transferred those over to the University. We had all these books um...

Walters: (55:42) Can you remember the names of those librarians and was the sem, the seminary library was located where and then the, the other liberal arts...

Towns: (55:49) The seminary, the seminary building down on Church Street.

Walters: (55:53) Ok.

Towns: (55:54) Ok, it had been, it was the old Buick dealership building.

Walters: (55:56) Ok.

Towns: (55:57) And it was down on Church Street and it was about one block from the hotel downtown where students were staying. So, seminary students could walk up and lots of, lots of the college students came up and used the seminary library for studying. Now, Dewitt Braud, who was a board member of the college and of the seminary, very wealthy builder out of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, had gone to England with Dr. Hughes and gone through used bookstores and purchased, like, thirteen, fourteen thousand books and arranged to have them all shipped back to America. So we, we had a very, we had an outstanding quality seminary library and that became the core of the University’s religion library. And so that might...we had a good library. But we put it together to save, we were doing two different things; we were going with the Library of Commerce system in the college...

Walters: (56:58) Classification system.

Towns: (56:59) and we were using the Dewey decimal over at, at...

Walters: (57:01) Oh, oh, I see.

Towns: (57:03) Dewey decimal's very limited.

Walters: (57:04) Right.

Towns: (57:05) It's, it's good but it's very limited.

Walters: (57:06) Right.

Towns: (57:07) And so we merged them together, that's the first thing I did. Second thing I did, immediately, we took girls into the seminary. And the first year, there were six girls. And we called them the six pack because they always ran around together. And um...boy, if given time, I can remember those six girls. They, they all hung together and we had a new master of arts in Christian education and a master of religious education. And they, they were in that program. And then we began to take divorced men into the seminary. And, and so my whole contention is, "Gentlemen," I said, "I don't approve of divorce. But there are many, many men who, pastoring churches, who have been divorced and God's used. Many times the divorce is not of their choosing. It's not a sin, it's for circumstances." And I said, "If God will use you, let him use you." I said, "Understand, divorce closes many doors but not all doors."

Walters: (58:07) What, could you, could you list those doors off the top of your head here for us?

Towns: (58:11) Well, divorce...yeah, you, you could have served as a deacon in many churches. At that time, you could not even serve as a faculty member at Liberty. You could not be a, a pastor at Thomas Road. You could not be a pastor at most Independent churches. About half the Southern Baptists yes, but not, not Independent Baptists. I said, "It closes doors in ministry, it closes mission board. You cannot teach in a single Southern Baptist seminary. So divorce closes doors but it doesn't close all doors. Don't spend your life looking for closed doors, spend your life looking for open doors and walk through and go serve God. Serve God in a happy way, without guilt." I said, "Now, I probably would not ordain you." I have never ordained a divorced person because I don't believe in that. But I'm not against it, that doesn't mean that I'm anti.

Walters: (58:57) Right.

Towns: (58:58) And so, all of the sudden that opened up the seminary and I can remember some men coming into the seminary, they liked that open attitude. The seminary, the first semester I had the seminary, I remember coming up to that, that spring enrollment I had a

hundred and fifty-nine students and we had never had a hundred and sixty. So I looked around and I enrolled my wife...

Walters: (59:26) [*laughter*]

Towns: (59:27) in the gospel of John to take a seminary course and we made a hundred and sixty. Now, next fall, I came up with a hundred and sixty-nine and I needed her and so I enrolled her in another seminary course and she took it and passed it and we made a hundred and seventy. And then, come the next fall, we were up to like, a hundred and ninety-seven, you know, and I really wanted to go to two hundred. I enrolled her for the third course...

Hall: (59:53) [*laughter*]

Towns: (59:54) and she had enrolled and then I said to her, "Look at this. You've got twelve hours towards a thirty-six hour degree. Why don't you just..." She said, "Ok." She never really intended to finish it but once she got those twelve hours of counseling, that, that new counseling program, she went on to get her M.A. in counseling from Liberty University.

Walters: (1:00:15) So you kind of hoodwinked her into that.

Towns: (1:00:17) Ah...

Hall: (1:00:18) [*laughter*]

Walters: [*laughter*] Well, can you...

Towns: (1:00:19) Yes, yes, yes [*laughter*].

Walters: (1:00:20) Can you, can you summarize then, we've talked about the divorce issues, can you summarize what the issues were with women in the seminary at that time and why that was a...

Towns: (1:00:30) Well, well, many Baptist churches to this day will not ordain women. And they believe that the pastor, the senior pastor of a church should be male because if any man desires the office of emission, he desires a good thing. And so they go back to the scriptures and the scripture mandates by direction and by example a man and so people want to be that and uh...I believe that there are...by the way, we have many women who are, especially in our online program, we have many women, and I have in my classes, I'm glad to have them. Now, I would not serve as ordination on one of these women's councils but I would educate them because God can use them. As soon as I get into a roll, into a class of Liberty and the question would come up, I said, "I want to ask a question. How many here grew up, found Christ in a church pastored by a woman?" And there'll always be two or three hands. I said, "I want to recognize those." You know, God has a way of using people that don't seem to be usable and

he uses them for his glory. And I have this little motto about women. I said, "If women had not done what women have done, where would the church be? If men would have done what men should have done, where could the church be?" So, I recognize them; that God uses them but that may not be his first choice.

Walters: (1:02:01) Now I didn't intend to ask you this but since we're on this, we've talked about the seminary, what, can you comment, are you willing to comment on Thomas Road Baptist Church's...where do they stand or where have they stood and evolved on the issue of women and divorce and those sorts of things?

Towns: (1:02:19) Ok, I would say that we stand at the traditional place. According to my understanding, Thomas Road has not hired any divorced pastors. Now, we've hired divorced staff members. And a staff and a pastor, a pastor is an ordained person. And it's my understanding we have never ordained a divorced person and we never ordained a woman. And it's not that we're anti-women, we just feel we're doing what God has told us to do.

Walters: (1:02:46) Ok. Well thank you.

Hall: (1:02:48) Now, during the financial crisis, during the '90s, that adversely affect the seminary?

Towns: (1:02:56) During the '90s, uh...I became the dean of the seminary the very last of 1979. In 1982, Ed Hindson left. And when Ed Hindson left, he was the dean of the, the school of religion.

Hall: (1:03:19) Ok.

Towns: (1:03:20) And because of, even financial pressure and growth back then, before he left, he pushed to have the two of us operate as co-deans. And so for about a year we operated as co-deans together; he of the school of religion, I of the seminary to make sure that we had great unity. And then the following year, he left and I became dean of both. And when I became dean of both, we had a combined faculty meeting of the seminary and in those days, we crossed over very freely and frequently because we used people in their strength, not according to their institution. Carl Diemer has a, has a Th.D. in church history so I used him to teach undergraduate church history and seminary church history. And later when we had to make a complete break, because of accreditation, he didn't have enough classes of church history in the seminary so he had to teach other classes in the seminary. Now, people taught across discipline, across institution lines because of their strength. We used people to teach just Bible or just New Testament or just Old Testament and I think we had a very solid school because of that. Now, in the mid '80s, it was in 1985 that Jim Bakker was reported in the Charlotte Observer of, of financial mishandling, sexual problems, and I don't remember all the things he was accused of, but I do know that Jerry called all of the pastors in. Now, when he

called pastors, that was Thomas Road and in those early days all of the, the faculty in the seminary and the SLR were considered associate pastors of Thomas Road.

Hall: (1:05:16) Ok.

Towns: (1:05:17) At one time, Thomas Road had a hundred and ten pastors and therefore, they would have all juniors and seniors in those schools plus faculty in those schools plus the paid faculty and they were considered under Jerry's assistance. And that was a nice thing to have to go out and use in your resume. And he called us all in, he said, "Tomorrow it's going to be announced that Jim Bakker has had sexual relationship with..." uh...whatever the name of that girl was.

Hall: (1:05:45) Jessica Hahn.

Towns: (1:05:46) Yeah, ok. And he said, "Now, I'm not going to get into it, whether she's right or wrong, whether it happened or not. But it's going to impact us." He said, "It's going to hurt us financially," he said, "it's going to hurt Billy Graham," he said, "it's going to hurt everybody who's on television." Because he was the biggest thing on television then. He was the second biggest uh...chan...cable television; MTV was the biggest in the world and PTL was the second biggest in the world. And Jerry was very concerned because we had gotten on PTL and we got more money from PTL listeners than all of our other listeners put together. So that was uh...it just opened up through the week, listeners for us. It just made many, many friends. Now, I think you have a question here someplace, "Should Jerry get involved in it? What do I think about that?" I think Jerry did what he had to do. He went down to PTL and tried to salvage the situation. Now, he took with him four or five men. I can't name them because I was not involved in that. I didn't want to get involved and so I did not go down. Ed Dobson went down and was very much involved with Jerry in those and I think Cal Thomas was very much involved. And Jerry, I know Sam Moore was put on the board and Tom Zimmerman was put on the board. Tom Zimmerman was from the Assembly of God and Sam Moore was Thomas Nelson. And there was, there was a man put on and I don't know if his family is still living but he owned a large radio network. And Jim Bakker has accused Jerry of trying to steal his network. And I think, from everything I've heard, Jerry never intended to steal, to make it for himself, to take over a Pentecostal network because he knew it wouldn't work. What he really wanted to do is take it and give it to Tom Zimmerman, Assembly of God, and keep it a Pentecostal network and under that he wanted to fly under the banner and continue to get the money for his schools; that's his intent. But this other man went in and it was the other man who tried to do things to steal the network and get the network for him. Now, Jim Bakker turned his uh...his, his attacks against Jerry rather than the other man because Jerry was the, he went down the water slide in a suit, if you remember...

Hall: (1:08:15) Yeah.

Towns: (1:08:16) so because of all of that. Did Jerry do the right thing? I think he did the thing he had to do at the time. He had to do it because of uh...for two or three reasons.

Walters: (1:08:26) What did he have to think or say about then when Jimmy Swaggart had his issues shortly after that?

Towns: (1:08:35) Well, you see, Bakker was down and then almost immediately Swaggart was down. And the both of them, both of them, big television names. Both of them, big television drawers. And Jerry Falwell was about the fourth, when they talk about who is the most watched, it was always Jim Bakker was number one and Swaggart was number two. Swaggart would sit down at the piano, throw his head back, cry, and take hold the ivories and just play and sing to the heart. He was just so good. I had gone and met him at a conference one time and I said, "My wife thinks you're the best in the world." He walked over and picked up about thirteen of his albums and gave them to me and he said, "These," he said, "you give them to that sweet little lady and tell her I love her."

Hall: (1:09:17) [laughter]

Towns: (1:09:18) And so, those were thirty-three and a third albums, and so I'd love the way he did it. And so I don't know who number three was but Jerry was about number four. About that time, he was on the cover, he was the man of the year, *Good Housekeeping* Man of the Year. So, well, very popular, Jerry Falwell was.

Hall: (1:09:39) Ok, other people that's involved here at, at Liberty, people like B.R. Lakin. Is uh...Lakin of course was very closely associated with Falwell and...

Towns: (1:09:49) Yes. I'm dean of the B.R. Lakin School of Religion to...

Hall: (1:09:51) Yes.

Towns: (1:09:52) this day.

Hall: (1:09:53) Yes.

Towns: (1:09:54) Now, when, when we broke off the school of religion, Jerry wanted to recognize B.R. Lakin. He said, "I want that name attached to the school of religion so that after I die the Fundamentalism of B.R. Lakin will keep the school straight." Now, B.R. Lakin was an old fashioned Fundamentalist; well-known among the mountain people. He had pastored Cadle Tabernacle in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Cable, Cadle Tabernacle was an old Billy Sunday Tabernacle and there were a few of those around when I was first in ministry. And the Billy Sunday Tabernacle usually would seat ten thousand people. It was usually a square city block. It was an old, what they would call a pole building. They just drove poles into the ground, dug poles, put a roof over it, made it into a bowl, and Billy Sunday would

preach. I went to the Cadle Tabernacle oh...in the late, late '50s, and Mr. Cadle, after the church went down and down and down and died, the man who took it over turned it into a roller rink; it was a skating rink. And I went there and I thought, "Boy," you, you almost wanted to weep. You heard their hammer organs on kids' skating around, but it just shows you, a church cannot come out of a, a monetary thing. Just because a man owns a building doesn't make a church go. B.R. Lakin had pastored that church and had a great radio ministry. He loved Jerry because he preached for Jerry and that opened up churches all over America and the churches that had him supported Jerry and so that, it was a reciprocal patting one another on the back. Jerry and B.R. Lakin got along well. B.R. Lakin is buried right up next to the prayer chapel and I am linked with him in life because I've been the B.R. Lakin dean since 1982 and I'll be buried right next to him. I plan, when I die, I, I've told everybody, I want my funeral to be held in convocation. I want them to roll the casket in, I want them to sing Great is Thy Faithfulness, the same thing we sang in the first chapel, I want them to say what they got to say about me, preach to the kids to be faithful, "Let's go do something for God," roll me up the hill, stick me in the ground, and forget about me.

Walters: (1:12:21) [*laughter*]

Towns: (1:12:22) Now, um...and that'll be fine with me. Now, you say, "Why do you want to do that?" Well, Fuller Seminary, those people who began Fuller Seminary, those founding members, when they were buried, they had their funeral during chapel at Fuller. I know that because I went to Fuller twice to speak in funerals. One for J. Edward Orr; he was buried in the summer time but they had his memorial service during chapel at the beginning of September. And about six, seven years later, Donald McGavran, founder of their missions program, he was buried in the summer time; had his...So I went up there and I can remember on both occasions they were in the First Presbyterian Church at Pasadena, California, speaking at those funerals. And I thought, "What a great privilege." But that's a way of carrying on and passing the torch on to the next generation. "What this man has done, you go do the same and do it bigger and do it better."

Hall: (1:13:22) So it was Dr. Falwell's wish that his name be put on the school of religion, Lakin, Lakin's name...

Towns: (1:13:28) Yes. Oh, that was Dr. Falwell's choice, yes. By all means, yes.

Hall: (1:13:32) Other people that's been influential, I guess, on Falwell is Dr. Francis Schaeffer.

Towns: (1:33:37) Yes.

Hall: (1:33:38) How was Schaeffer ultimately associated with Falwell and the University?

Towns: (1:33:44) Schaeffer was associated with Falwell, first of all, by his writings and his stand and his defense of Evangelical Christianity. Schaeffer was really a Fundamentalist; used the word Fundamentalist but later in his life used the word Evangelical. And Falwell followed that same tact. Falwell was a Fundamentalist but later he began to talk about Evangelicals because what happens...the media muddied the waters of Fundamentalists. They talk about fundamental Islam and fundamental Mormons and all of that and therefore he stopped using the word fundamental when people got it mixed up. But they understood what the word Evangelical is, the Evangelist; it's the gospel. And so he called himself an Evangelical at the end. Dr. Schaeffer, what he stood for influenced Jerry and then Jerry brought him here and he preached. And the first time he brought him here, he came from Switzerland; his, that place he had there. And do you remember...

Hall: (1:14:41) Yes.

Towns: (1:14:42) he had on knickers?

Hall: (1:14:44) Yes.

Towns: (1:14:45) And back in those days, Falwell was really uh...“If you're going to preach in my pulpit, you're going to wear a suit and tie.”

Walters: (1:14:51) [*laughter*]

Towns: (1:14:52) And he showed up without a suit and he didn't have a tie on. Remember that uniform that had on? Kind of like a, he had a...what do you call it? An ascot around your neck or something; a, a scarf of some sort. And Falwell all of the sudden, trying to uh...justify, he said, “Well, this is because this,” and he said...and I think the more he tried to justify it, the more, I realized, he's justifying it to himself and not to us. What did Shakespeare said? “Me thinketh thou protesteth too much.” And so Schaeffer became a friend of Jerry and, and Jerry took his lead and followed in many things because Schaeffer came right back and supported Jerry's stand on abortion and Jerry's stand on homosexuality, therefore he became very important.

Hall: (1:15:43) And so Schaeffer's views about euthanasia, the whole, and all of those...

Towns: (1:15:48) Euthanasia also, yes.

Hall: (1:15:50) greatly affected Falwell and, and actually the Moral Majority concept too and what...

Towns: (1:15:55) Yes. Now Schaeffer was not linked to Moral Majority...

Hall: (1:15:57) Yes.

Towns: (1:15:58) but he had the same plans as Moral Majority. Everything, everything except Israel. Because see, Schaeffer was a, a Presbyterian and Presbyterians are covenant theologians and that's a whole different realm than Jerry who's a dispensationalist. But he became a very supporter of Jerry. Jerry was a great, a great dispensationalist. This is a good time to talk about 1979.

Walters: (1:16:26) Ok.

Towns: (1:16:28) Jimmy Carter announced he was going to take the money, take some of the money that was given to Israel and give to the Arab nations surrounding it. And it was a, it was a plan to equalize Arabs along with Israel. And Jerry got up and preached strong, "Do not do that President Carter. Do not do that." He preached from Genesis chapter 12. God has said, "I will bless those who bless and I will curse those who curse." Now, at that time, this was in the founding days of Moral Majority and the Moral Majority had two or three planks in their platform and the third plank was the defense of Israel. And so, defense of Israel, Jerry said, "We must," he said, "I want every American to pick up a pen and paper and write a letter to President Carter and say, 'Do not take support, do not cut off Israel, do not support the Arabs. Support Israel.' Write that letter to him immediately." So many letters poured into the White House. So many letters poured in that this is the first time ever in the history of the American President they stopped opening letters. They filled bags and the bags filled the hallways and they went out and rented warehouse spaces and there are figures out there of vast amount of letters and it was running like, ninety-eight to two in support of Jerry Falwell. And I remember Jerry saying, somebody would say, "How do you know, how did you know you had power over politics?" He said, I think he used the word, "Andrew Card," who was an associate staff member for Jimmy Carter, "called me and said, 'Jerry, we give up.' He said, 'Tell them to quit writing the letters; we will not, we will support Israel. We will not support the Arabs. We will support Israel.'" Now because of that, Jerry Falwell was taken to the Knesset, that's the capital of Israel, given the highest award possible for a non-Jew to get. He had, he had lunch with Primary Begin, Prime Minister Begin, they put him in a helicopter, they took him to the top of Mount Tabor and dedicated the Jerry Falwell National Forest. Now, I couldn't go in and so I stayed on the outside. There are two or three of us, they would put us in a jeep and I remember it was an open jeep and no air conditioning, it was hot, and we drove, and it's like sixty miles in a jeep, at break neck speed to get there in time. And while we're, we're driving, they're eating. And then we get there and we go up to the top of Mount Tabor and you go up this mountain, it's right at the head of the Valley of Armageddon. And, matter of fact, every time somebody challenges me and says, "That never happened," I take them to the website and you can still give thirty-five dollars and have a tree planted in the Jerry Falwell National Forest in Israel. It's still there and you can still do it. And so I have pictures of the thing and when we went there, nothing but scrub, gorse, you know, knee high bushes and, you know, lizards and snakes; just nothing on the top of that mountain. Today it's a lovely forest, trees are twelve, fifteen feet high. You know, you just can't believe how nice it is up there. That was in

'79. So we got up there and I'm thinking, "You know," I'm just shaking my head kind of laughing to myself, "this is not an honor..."

Hall: (1:20:00) [*laughter*]

Towns: ((1:20:01) this is not an honor." But, let me just tell you, sometimes the honor is not in the event; it's what the event stands for. And that stood for what Jerry did for the nation of Israel and what he did for America. And therefore, there is a Jerry Falwell National Forest up there and, and I like to say sometimes, "You know, if Jerry was still living and the Battle of Armageddon took place, he'd sell tickets for ringside seats [*laughter*].

Hall: (1:20:31) [*laughter*]

Walters: [*laughter*] So this, this whole initiative then by the Carter Administration, was that before or after the peace accords were signed between Sadat and Begin? Or uh...

Towns: (1:20:45) I think it was after, I, I'm not sure of that. But it was after Iran and the fiasco in Iran if you remember Carter's fiasco there.

Walters: (1:20:51) Right.

Towns: (1:20:52) It was after that.

Walters: (1:20:53) Now we've asked other interviewees this and I'll just ask you as well, since you brought this up. President Carter ran on a Born Again ticket in '76...

Towns: (1:21:03) Yes.

Walters: (1:21:04) but then in '80, Reagan...

Towns: (1:21:06) But...

Walters: (1:21:07) actually has a more conservative platform so to speak.

Towns: (1:21:10) He ran again on a Born Again ticket but he was the most liberal of all presidents we had in the last half of the last century. I've heard many people say that. All of his platforms, all of his initiatives were very liberal; from what you would call a very liberal Democratic ticket. But the south was blinded by his Born Again interview. His, his play, his *Playboy* interview was very famous and the *Playboy* talked about his being Born Again and, "Do you ever have evil thoughts?" And, and he said, "Yes, I do." And he explained as a Born Again Christian you, you have them and he explained the old nature and the new nature and people said, "Yeah, we understand. This man is, he sounds very Christian." Um...anyway, I don't have pleasant memories about what Jimmy Carter did for the nation. Reagan ran as a Born Again Christian, but he was a divorced man. And back when, back in 1979, I was the

Editor in Chief and when Reagan was beginning to run, every Saturday I would drive up to Washington D.C. for a think tank. It was someplace on the Potomac. And all these Republican conservative people would sit around and plan who's going to be the next president, what they had to do, and how they had to get the things together. And they brought me in as a spokesman for Jerry Falwell. And they had pushed a certain candidate very hard, he was a Congressman from Illinois, from Auburn Heights, Illinois. And everybody thought he was going to be an outstanding conservative president and they were really pushing him and he was caught in a hotel room with a prostitute and boom; went down in flames. And I remember sitting there that weekend, all these men came back to me, these political pollsters, and they were surrounding my desk. They said, "If we pushed Ronald Reagan, will Jerry Falwell get on the wagon with us?" I said, "Absolutely not." I said, "Reagan is a divorced man. Jerry won't have anything to do with him." And so they said, "We're, we're going to push him anyway but boy, go back and see what you can do." I said, "I'll try." But I, I wasn't really anxious to push, I was not a Reagan supporter. And I came back to the McDonald's over in Madison Heights and I called Jerry, I didn't have a phone in my car back in those days, I called Jerry...

Walters: (1:23:41) Pay phone [*chuckle*].

Towns: (1:23:42) What's that?

Walters: (1:23:43) You used a pay phone, yeah.

Towns: (1:23:45) Yeah, I used a pay phone. I called, I said, "Jerry, Elmer Towns here." I told him about the meeting, I said, "They asked me if I would support Ronald Reagan. I said, 'Of course not.'" He said, "Jerry..." he said, "Elmer, Elmer, don't do that." He said, "Listen, we aren't electing a pastor. We're electing the next president of the United States. You get on the phone right now." He said, "Take these numbers down [*makes sounds*]." And I mean, I, I'm writing down and I remember holding this, he said, "Write down, write this name down. Write this number." Jerry knew all the numbers. "Write this number down. Write this number." He said, "Phone them right now." He said, "Charge it to the school account." Because it was a long distance call.

Hall: (1:24:21) Yeah.

Towns: (1:24:22) He said, "Call them right now. You tell them I will support Reagan, I will support Reagan. He will make an excellent president." And so I remember uh...I remember talking for so long on the phone with my hamburger sitting there...

Walters: (1:24:36) [*chuckle*]

Hall: [*laughter*]

Towns: (1:24:37) you know, that I remember going back and eating a bite or two and throwing it away and leaving, you know...I immediately phoned them all, "Good news, good news." Well, the first meeting that Jerry had with Reagan, the first time he met him was at the Reunion Center in Dallas, Texas; it was a James Robertson crusade. And Jerry arranged for many men to meet Reagan there in the back of the Reunion Center. And it was a big, big, what you call the Green Room. And there were about, I'm going to say fourteen board members of Moral Majority. Now, in that room was Curtis Hudson and um...oh, help me out. Jack, Word of Life, Wyrzten...

Hall: (1:25:29) Yeah, Wyrzten.

Walters: (1:25:30) Yeah.

Towns: (1:25:31) D. James Kennedy, men like that that were the pastors in the room and I was there but I was, I didn't consider myself, I was standing off to the side. And, and the phone came in, "He's coming." And so as we went down, they started down the stairs, Secret Service sent us all back upstairs. They said, "No, this is the area where Kennedy was shot." The Reunion Center is right almost identical to the same spot where JFK was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald. So they said, "Go back up." They said, "Wait in the room until Kennedy walks in." But I had heard the men talking, you know, some of the men said, "I don't want to support Reagan. He's a divorced person." And they were, the, the room was kind of split; it was not a done deal. You know, they did not like a divorced person in the White House, you know. And you know, that's precedent; boom, boom, back and forth. Anyway, you know, I'm wondering, you know, I, my sentiment is with the anti-divorce crowd, you know, I, I didn't want him in there, I was not there.

Walters: (1:26:34) Well, and divorce at that time was really increasing at a logarithmic rate.

Towns: (1:26:40) The number of divorces were increasing but we didn't want to be on the forefront...

Walters: (1:26:42) Right.

Towns: (1:26:43) I didn't want to be on the forefront...

Walters: (1:26:44) Right.

Towns: (1:26:45) And so we were standing there and all of the sudden, boom, the door opens and in walks Ronald Reagan. My first reaction, "He's not as tall as I thought he was. He's not as tall as I remember him in movies." He walks in with a bag of jelly beans. He walks over to the first guy, he says, "What's your name?" He had memorized every name in that room. He knew, "Oh, Jack Wyrzten." He said, "You have that big camp up in the Adirondacks and you, you've got missionaries all over." And he said, "Boy, praise God. Have a, have a jellybean."

And Jack took a jelly bean and he said, "Boy," he said, "Praise God. I hope God is, helps you do a great more." And then he went to the next guy and every guy he came along, "Curtis Hudson, you got that...you're the postman. You're the guy who never went to college and built one of the biggest churches in Georgia." He said, "I..." And he, he, with jelly beans and knowledge, he won every man that night. That almost made the difference in the history of America; one of those crucial meetings. And he got half way through and he got to D. James Kennedy. Now, Jerry tells this story, he said, "D. James Kennedy." And Kennedy said, "Sir, I want to ask you, if you got to heaven and Saint Peter said, 'Why should I let you in?' what would you tell him?" See, that's, that's e-Evangelism. That's their e-intro, you know, "Why should I let you in?" And Kennedy, and Reagan said, "Oh," he says, "pastor Kennedy," he said, "you know I'm a Born Again Presbyterian just like you are."

Walters: (1:28:15) [*laughter*]

Towns: (1:28:14) He says, and he says, "I appreciate that question and I appreciate the great job that you've done with the e-Evangelism." And, but when he said it, I could just see everybody just die, you know, asking this man if he's been born again but that was the integrity of D. James Kennedy; that was his integrity. And that story was told at D. James Kennedy's funeral; I was there.

Walters: (1:28:41) Well those are excellent insights into the establishment of the Reagan...I had no idea that that started at the, part of that started at the McDonald's in Madison Heights [*laughter*].

Towns: (1:28:52) Ok, well, no, it really, it started two years before that. Jerry was a good friend of John R. Rice. And John R. Rice had something nobody else had in, in America. He had a mailing list of about two hundred thousand pastors. And John R. Rice was to the right of Jerry and I had done a book for John R. Rice, *Great Soul Winning Churches*, and when I left Jerry to go on, independent, I wrote an article a week on the back page, the complete back page of his newspaper. So I wrote for him for two years, these *Great Soul Winning Churches* and then he took all those stories and made them into a book. So John R Rice really liked me and so Jerry said to me, "Come on, let's go spend the day with John R. Rice." So we flew over to Murfreesboro, we went to his headquarters, we went to his house, we went out to eat together, and Jerry was saying to him, Jerry, he said, "Dr. Rice, I want what you've got. You've got a mailing list." He had every Southern Baptist pastor he gave his newspaper away to free. The *Sword of the Lord* was one of the most powerful newspapers in the '70s. And Jerry said, "I want that news, that, that mailing list." And John R. Rice, "What would you do with it?" And, "I, I would sell it." You know, "I would not, I would not sell it." You know, that was not the issue at first. He said, "I would use it, I would mail to people, I would, you know, would send people, and would use to build this great college." And John R. Rice listened all day. His real question was, "Will you sell it?" Jerry said, "I don't sell my mailing list to anybody." He said,

“It’s not for sale. I wouldn’t even sell it to you.” And he said, he said, “Because once again I find myself competing with myself if you have my mailing list,” Jerry said, John R. said, “you promise you won’t sell it?” He said, “Ok, you can have it.” So he made a phone call and Jerry and I drove downtown um...what’s the name of the town he’s in? Um...we drove downtown to a bank. Now, there’s, this story is documented in the book *Falwell Inc.*, that book that was written about four, five years about. He tells the story of us going downtown and getting that mailing list and going out to the car. Matter of fact, they were big, heavy, they were, they were all tapes. This big, heavy plastic cart and they must have weighed twenty, thirty pounds each. And I remember Jerry talking and I doing all the work. And so I’m, I’m the, the donkey there; I go in and bring. So we put it in the back of his car and he said, “Oh...” he had his truck, you know, so we put it in the back of his truck, we got out to the plane, we put them in and, and that, that was magic. Jerry had something going, he could talk to every pastor in America and that ability of Jerry Falwell to mail every pastor in America to support Ronald Reagan, “Put Reagan in office.” That was the key right there.

Walters: (1:32:04) Sure. Well, we started to talk about Dr. Lakin and then Dr. Schaeffer, another person I, we’d like to talk, ask you about was Dr. Tim LaHaye; well-known before he became one of the foun...was he well-known before he became one of the founder of the Moral Majority? And tell us about that relationship with him over the years.

Towns: (1:32:25) Yes, in fact, he was one of the founders. Unknown to most people, if you go to the, the history of the CBA, Christian Booksellers Association, Tim LaHaye had more million seller books than any other man until other people came on the scene. He did several books, the uh...one on temperaments, all these books, every book he did, he did a million sellers. And so he was well-known, well-known. He had, he had the church in San Diego, he had a church with three locations; downtown, out north where he is now, and then up north in, oh, what was the name of that place in north...? I’ve been there to preach for him in all three locations. And so he had a very strong church, Scott Memorial Baptist Church in San Diego. So he was well-known as being one of the mega-churches of America, the founder of Heritage College, and so yes, he was well-known before he became...and he brought a lot of strength to Moral Majority.

Walters: (1:33:32) Well, and then how did his, what kind of effect has he had on the religious views of the University? He is a Board of Trustee member right now, correct?

Towns: (1:33:40) Yes. I think he came to the University because he agreed with what we believed. In other words, Jerry Falwell and Tim LaHaye are the same kind of Baptist. They go right down the line on dispensationalism, right down the line on the second coming of Christ, and so, it was only natural for him to come here. You know why he is, you know why we have the Tim LaHaye Ice Center, don’t you?

Walters: (1:34:06) I do but for the record, go ahead and tell us about that.

Towns: (1:34:09) Ok. His grandson was here and his grandson was on our ice hockey team. And the trouble is, back in those days, the only ice in central Virginia is over in Roanoke and they couldn't get on the ice until eleven o'clock at night. So they ended up leaving campus at about ten o'clock, driving all the way over to Roanoke, practicing for two hours from eleven to one, coming back, getting home at two o'clock, two thirty, getting to bed, getting back up the next morning, and going into class...

Walters: (1:34:39) Right.

Towns: (1:34:40) And our hockey team, and he says, "Grandpa, couldn't you build us an ice pad?" Now, an ice pad probably cost a hundred thousand dollars. The, the material to make the ice is the expense; all the electronic and the technical material. Then they talked about putting a bubble over top of it and then they talked about putting a steel builder around it and then it ended up to be about four million dollars for the, the ice pad, the LaHaye Ice Center that's there. Now, our Ice Center, the very first time we had our first game, I went to the game, Jerry went to the game. We both walked in to, to give a, a pep-talk to all the, there were twenty hockey players; nineteen from Canada, one from the U.S. Now at this time, LaHaye's grandson was gone so he was not there. But I knew hockey because up in Canada...

Walters: (1:35:33) Winnipeg.

Towns: (1:35:34) I had played hockey. Did I tell you about this before?

Walters: (1:35:36) No, but we talked about Winnipeg and Three Hills...

Towns: (1:35:38) Oh, I, I played hockey. Matter of fact, one of the first things I did at Winnipeg Bible College was build a hockey rink outside, down on the riverbank and um...talk about the indignities of the presidency. I ran a hose from the bathroom, through my office, out the window, down the hill to fill the rink. And about once a week they would put that hose back in, down through the president's office, down to fill the rink, you know, and you do everything you can; you just do what you have to do...

Walters: (1:36:10) Sure.

Towns: (1:36:11) and you don't think about the indignities, you just do it...

Walters: (1:36:12) Sure.

Towns: (1:36:13) get the job done.

Walters: (1:36:14) Sure.

Towns: (1:36:15) Well anyway, Jerry and I went into this hockey, at least twenty guys are sitting there and they're getting ready for their first game. This is a big game; the place is bulging with people. And as we're getting ready to go out there, Jerry's talking about being young champions for Christ and being a good witness for Jesus and everything. And the guys are sitting there and they're not saying anything much. Then he prays and he leaves. And I'm standing there and they said, "Dr. Towns, do you want to say anything?" And I'm thinking, "Jerry missed it." I said, "Ok guys, kill them for Jesus' sake..."

Walters: (1:36:42) [*laughter*]

Towns: (1:36:43) And "Ahh!"

Walters: (1:36:44) [*laughter*]

Towns: (1:36:46) And they go charging out of the room to kill them for Jesus' sake. Now, that year we became number seven, NCAA Division 1. And number seventh but it's in the club hockey, in the club sports arena, and we had been everywhere from number seven down to number three every year since then. So we always have a very...and let me tell you why we have strong Canadians; because for years, when Canadian money was worth about sixty cents on the dollar, Liberty always took Canadian dollars at face value and therefore, as soon as they came across the border, their money was worth forty percent more, so that's why they came to Liberty.

Walters: (1:37:27) That's interesting. Tell us what you know about the Tim LaHaye School of Prophecy.

Towns: (1:37:34) All I know, it's a certificate program that's offered through the Old Time Gospel Hour and Liberty Network. That's about all I really know. It's a, a program of, it's taught primarily by Ed Hindson and Tim LaHaye.

Walters: (1:37:48) Ok.

Hall: (1:37:49) Is it still in existence?

Towns: (1:37:50) Yes, as far as I know it is. But I don't think they graduate people. I think they mail those certificates to them rather than bringing them here for graduation but I'm not sure about that.

Walters: (1:37:59) Now you have, you've had an extensive ministry in speaking at colleges, seminaries, and conferences. Name some of those fifty seminaries that you've taught at. Would that be the number and are there any special or unique experiences that you've had at any of these seminaries or conferences?

Towns: (1:38:19) You know, I consider it an honor to teach at other schools. Some of the seminaries that I've taught at; Dallas Theological Seminary, Grace Theological Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, I went back and taught there Fuller Seminary, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Evangel Seminary up in Harrisonburg, Pennsylvania, John Wesley College. I've spoken in every Nazarene college, spoken but not taught a class. I also taught at Trinity Western in Vancouver, Korean Baptist Theological Seminary just this past year, and then every, about...every year for the last four years I've gone back to Indiana Wesleyan University. This year I'll go back for the fourth time to Dallas Theological Seminary and this year for the fourth time I'll go back to Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary usually teaching in the area of church growth. However, they're moving me, slowly, out of church growth into spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and faith.

Walters: (1:39:25) Ok. And then what does it mean to have a visiting professorship in five seminaries?

Towns: (1:39:30) What does it mean? It means that other seminaries recognize our seminary and the people of our seminary. And when you talk about mine, I just want you to know, Gary Habermas is bigger name than I am. He goes to Cambridge and Oxford and he will go to the leading seminaries of the world and you ought to have Gary Habermas on here because of his work on the Resurrection. And his book he did in 1979 on the Shroud sold about four million copies. That, that is astounding for an Evangelical. He was one of, he and his co-author got to examine the, the empirical evidences of the Shroud and therefore, that's qualified for him.

Hall: (1:40:18) Well, since you brought to these dissertations here, maybe this would be a good, before we close, to, to, you want to comment on them, what they're about?

Towns: (1:40:26) There are four dissertations that's been done on my life or my life, and, and usually having to do with writing. The first one was done by Sam Towns, my son. I went to Fuller and got my doctor of ministry, he went to Fuller and got his doctor of ministries, and he calls his dissertation, *Elmer L. Towns, comma, a Biographical and Chronological Presentation of his Writings*, and he summarized everything up to 1984. And when, when he was doing all this research and going through, he said, "Dad, all of the books are going to be lost if they don't codify them." So, when he was going through Fuller, he decided to do this...by the way, Fuller gives a prize each year for the number one Ph.D. dissertation and the number one D.Min. dissertation and he won the prize for his. I didn't win the prize for mine.

Walters: (1:41:22) [*laughter*]

Hall: [*laughter*]

Towns: (1:41:23) And so, Pete Wagner likes to talk about being the mentor for both of us, he said, "Well," he said, "dad, your son did a better job." And Sam went through and I used to

tell people, “Well, I’ve got about a hundred books I’ve written.” He said, “No dad, you’ve got forty-seven.” He said, “I don’t count anything that’s under a hundred pages.” He said, “You got a lot of pamphlets in there.” And so forty-seven and he went through and summarized each one and evaluated each one. And then I said, “I’ve been editor of one magazine.” He said, “No dad, you’ve been editor in, in eight different Christian magazines.” I said, “No I haven’t.” Then he started naming them. I said, “I forgot about all of those.” And so, when you start writing articles every month, they begin to accumulate, you know, they begin to accumulate or...for *Christian Life*, I was with them for, oh my goodness, sixteen years, three articles every month and all of the sudden you begin to accumulate a lot of articles that you’ve written over the years. And so this first one, and then the second one was done by Dave Brown and he took Sam’s model, everything Sam did, and he took me for the next, the next ten years. And he did the same thing, he calls, *Elmer L. Towns, a Biographical and Chronological Presentation of his Writings*; did the same topic but took the next ten years. And he began to note, “What you had done originally, you had changed.” And then Gabe Etzel took the next ten years after that from, from ’94 up to 2004. I hope there’s no more after that...

Walters: (1:42:57) [*laughter*]

Towns: (1:42:58) I think, I, I don’t want anymore after that. But Gabe Etzel went back and traced a history. He said, “You began writing about Sunday schools...” or, “You began writing about youth work.” My first four books were about youth. “And then you came back and you wrote about ten books on Sunday school.” My fifth book was that ten, ten largest Sunday schools. He said, “You went from youth.” I said, “Well, when I was young I taught youth and I was known for youth. Then I began to write in youth work.” And I said, “Then I began to write in Sunday school work and Sunday school growth and that naturally lead into church growth evangelism.” And of course I did the encyclopedia on church growth and I did the Sunday school encyclopedia. So those two encyclopedias were done. And after church growth, all of the sudden, along about 1992, ’93, I began to feel, “You know, the church doesn’t need principles of church growth. We don’t need more programs. We don’t need another Friend Day. We don’t need another activity, a big day. What we need is spirituality.” And that was my heart from Columbia Bible College. And I think that was my life and so I wrote this first book on fasting. And that has, that’s been my biggest seller ever; about three hundred and fifty thousand copies after fourteen years and it, it continues to sell. And so after that, I began to get in the area of spirituality. But underneath all of this, I’ve always done some Bible study books for my classes. And so the third one is Gabe Etzel and Gabe Etzel, you know, carried me through and he, he went through and showed each book and why I did it with charts and prov...now, Rick Rasberry, Dr. Rasberry in our school, took my Friend Day program and I put together a Friend Day program in, in 1984 and it sold about fifty-two thousand churches and that’s bigger than the Southern Baptist Convention; fifty-two thousand, it has been very huge. And he did a survey of five thousand churches that had the Friend Day. So, when I say four about me, this one really is not about me, it’s about a program that I put

together called Friend Day. And it's the Friend Day and he did his doctoral dissertation surveying and drawing conclusions, how big is the Friend Day. The Southern Baptists are planning on a Friend Day on November the 4th, 19 uh...2012. They plan to have the biggest day of outreach and evangelism ever in the, in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention, on that date.

Walters: (1:45:37) We only have about three minutes here left in this session. Can you give us a summary about what Friend Day is? I mean, we can look at that dissertation but, or thesis, but...

Towns: (1:45:50) Friend Day is when a, we organize a church to get everyone to reach out and touch a friend and to bring a friend to church to prepare a friend. Basically, it's about four Sundays of preparation to prepare the people, to motivate the people, to make the people accountable to bring their friend. Then you have a big Friend Day. Not necessarily a big evangelistic day, but a big Friend Day. And the Friend Day teaches the law of three hearings and seven touches. If you can get people to come to your church three times and if you can touch them seven times, they'll become a member. And Friend Day, Dr. Rasberry found out that the average church that ran a Friend Day could keep somewhere in the neighborhood of twelve to thirteen percent of all of its first time visitors if they were really encounter other people and embrace the people and follow-up on the people. So Friend Day is an organized outreach program without a big evangelist, without a big music program. It's basically using your people to reach their friends for Christ.

Walters: (1:46:55) Ok. Well thank you. And with that we'll conclude today's interview with Dr. Elmer Towns. This interview has been conducted as part of the oral history project of the Liberty University archives.

[end of interview]