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A Heritage of Learning

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A heritage of learning

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Dr. J. Gordon (Jim) Henry, former teacher, Academic Dean and later Vice President of Academic Affairs at Liberty University, visited campus in June, presenting Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr. with several items for the school archives.

Henry was at Liberty from 1972-78 and was instrumental in attaining Liberty's accreditation through the Southern Association of Schools and Universities (SACS), which was received in 1980.

"He was the guy who gave Liberty University academic credibility early on," Falwell said. "He led Liberty to accreditation in record time."

Chancellor Falwell said his father, Liberty University founder Dr. Jerry Falwell, Sr. was "committed to academic excellence from the beginning" and brought Henry on to carry out the task. "[Dad] wasn't just interested in being another unaccredited Bible school," he said.

Henry presented Chancellor Falwell with the school's first purpose and mission statement (which he helped write), a personal letter of "Memories of Dr. Jerry Falwell & Liberty University," the text of his academic dean addresses and his portrait that was used at another institution where he had served.

In the letter, he talked about the first time he met Jerry Falwell, Sr. and Liberty co-founder Elmer Towns.

From his office at a college in Kentucky, "The Holy Spirit brought forth an idea that I should learn more about the new college in Virginia," he writes. "I felt that I should visit Lynchburg and see for myself what God was doing. I attended a Wednesday evening service and met Dr. Elmer Towns. He said that I was the very person that LBC needed to help develop the program.

"Before leaving Lynchburg, Dr. Falwell urged me to join hands with him. I asked two questions: first, 'Do you intend to develop a "real" college?' and 'Will the college attack other believers?' His answers were direct. He said he wanted to be a quality academic program and become known as the 'Harvard' of the evangelical Christian world. He invited me to listen to tapes of his radio/television programs and see for myself that he did not attack other believers.



Dr. Henry (center) presented his portrait to Chancellor Falwell, Jr. (right) and Provost Dr. Boyd Rist on June 15

“I left with a contract that included primary duties to help develop the academic program that would merit accredited recognition of (SACS) and, especially a teacher education program so that our graduates would be certified to teach in Virginia. Incidentally, Dr. Falwell told me that my salary would be higher than his salary. He meant business in getting experienced administrators.”

Mark Hine, Liberty’s current Vice President for Student Affairs, was a student under Henry’s leadership. He recalls how Henry would go out of the way to meet students’ academic needs.

“He would say in convocations, if we had issues or questions with transcripts, classes for graduation, that he was in his office at 6 a.m. every day and we could go meet with him. I went early one morning. He took my status sheet and looked it over, and was able to help me graduate.”

Watching the 2009 Commencement from his Lynchburg home, Henry said he was reminded of Liberty’s early graduations; the first four were at Thomas Road Baptist Church, but the fifth was held outside on Liberty Mountain, the future site of the new campus. He writes:

“As we sat there on the platform that beautiful May Sunday afternoon, Dr. Falwell reached over and took my work copy of the Graduation Bulletin in which I had made my organizational notes. He proceeded to write something in my bulletin and handed it back.”

Henry presented that bulletin to the chancellor at his June visit. It reads:

“To Dr. and Mrs. Jim Henry, Your contribution has helped, probably more than any other single family, to make LBC a college. I shall be forever grateful. And Sue—your care for Mom will never be forgotten. —Jerry Falwell”

(Henry’s wife, Sue, took care of Falwell Sr.’s mother as a nurse in the Intensive Care Unit at Virginia Baptist Hospital).

Henry said Falwell, Sr. had wanted him to accept the position of Executive Vice President when it was created, but Henry declined due to his pastorate at a Lynchburg church. But Henry suggested Pierre Guillermin and the choice was made.

Henry left Liberty in 1978 to become president of Northeastern Bible College in New Jersey.