

# THE “THOMAS” IN THE W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS MEMO- RIAL LECTURESHIP

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**L**EWIS SPERRY CHAFER met William Henry Griffith Thomas in 1903 when Thomas, evangelical Anglican pastor of St. Paul's, Portman Square, London, arrived at Dwight L. Moody's popular Spiritual Life Conference in Northfield, Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> Their two lives bore some similarities, but the contrasts would have been more immediately impressive. The twenty-nine-year-old Chafer had first come to Northfield in 1901, using it as his summer home, a residence in the off season when there were few calls for his specialty, the work of conference evangelism.<sup>2</sup> There he owned a farm, complete with a field manager who counted bushels of corn and apples, and a home freshly purchased for a below-market price from A. T. Pierson. The latter was anxious to sell his farm because he had been appointed to succeed Charles Haddon Spurgeon at the tabernacle in Southwark, London.<sup>3</sup>

## TWO REMARKABLE CAREERS

At this time Chafer was only beginning to enter the larger world of North American evangelicalism, emerging gradually through the “university of adversity and travail.” Though he had attended the

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<sup>1</sup> M. Guthrie Clark, *W. H. Griffith Thomas, 1861–1924* (London: Church Book Room, n.d.), 13; and idem, “The Northfield General Conference for Christian Workers,” *Record of Christian Work* 22 (September 1903): 563–65.

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes of the Sixty-eighth Annual Meeting of the General Association of New York* (Walton, NJ: Reporter, 1901), 48.

<sup>3</sup> Wally Howard, “Accident Man,” *Sunday School Promoter* 6 (June 1944): 53.

Conservatory of Music at Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, for three nonconsecutive semesters and dreamed of advanced voice studies in Milan, Italy, lack of funds prevented his attaining a degree.<sup>4</sup> Initially traveling with evangelists as a manual laborer and soloist, he entered the world of conference evangelism after his marriage in 1896 with his musically talented wife, Ella Loraine Case. His ordination in 1900 brought him formally into the world of New England Congregationalism, the denomination of his church-planting father, and, most importantly, to the interdenominationalism of Moody's famous conference center. In contrast, the forty-two-year-old Griffith Thomas came to Northfield known for his scholarly acumen, pastoral gifts, godly demeanor, and teaching talent.

Chafer was born in the modest home of a Congregationalist pastor and had the benefit of caring parents who pointed him to the Savior at a young age. But Chafer's serene childhood was shattered by the wrenching cough of his father that brought him to an early grave and the subsequent financial exigencies that threatened the family with poverty. Thomas, in contrast, was born into the home of a widow, his father having died shortly before his birth. Though separated by an ocean, neither had a father when they needed comfort and direction as they emerged from the protective cocoon of childhood. Unlike Chafer's mother, Thomas's mother remarried, but economic hardship caused him to suspend his educational progress just as it had Chafer's.<sup>5</sup>

Both Chafer and Thomas experienced the redemptive mercies of God's grace, but in different circumstances. Chafer was six years old when he came to understand God's forgiveness, but he sensed a call from God at age thirteen in the context of his father's death and hearing an Ohio evangelist.<sup>6</sup> Christ brought Thomas into the heavenly fold as a teenager in 1878, the same year as Chafer's conversion, through the witness of two friends.<sup>7</sup> Chafer and Thomas, bereft of their fathers, each had an adult male mentor who shaped their lives. For Chafer it was Jacob Tuckerman, a former professor of his father at the Farmer's College in Cincinnati, Ohio, who sub-

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis Chafer, "Autobiography" (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers, Archives, Dallas Seminary); and letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to Ella Loraine Case, October 27, 1895 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers).

<sup>5</sup> Clark, *W. H. Griffith Thomas*, 4–5.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Some Facts concerning My Conversion," *Evangelical Christian* 16 (March 1920): 80; and John F. Walvoord, "Lewis Sperry Chafer," *Sunday School Times*, October 11, 1952, 855.

<sup>7</sup> Clark, *W. H. Griffith Thomas*, 4–5.

sequently had opened a preparatory school in New Lyme, Ohio. Tuckerman was pivotal in his father's conversion and challenged Chafer to enter Auburn Seminary and go into the ministry. Chafer's widowed mother desperately wanted her son to be under his godly tutelage.<sup>8</sup> As a teenager Thomas came into contact with Canon Howell, a local vicar. This accomplished Welsh preacher encouraged Thomas and served as a model of evangelical conviction, shaping, like Chafer's Tuckerman, his future course.<sup>9</sup>

Like Chafer, Thomas's education was interrupted by his social circumstances. However, the disruption came at different times in their lives. Chafer had a normal elementary and secondary education, but was not able to finish college. Thomas was forced to leave school in 1880 before entering college, in order to earn a living working with his stepfather's brother in London. Both Chafer and Thomas manifested an unrelenting appetite for learning and pursued it the remainder of their lives. Thomas taught himself New Testament Greek by studying between 10:30 P.M. and 2:00 A.M. daily for three years.<sup>10</sup> Both began their ministries as apprentices. Chafer joined various evangelists and learned the work by doing it until he became an evangelist himself in 1896. Thomas became a lay curate in 1882 at St. Peter's, Clerkenwell.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Chafer, Thomas continued his education, despite interruption, to the highest level. He attended lectures at King's College, Cambridge, and earned the Theological Associates degree. Later he was appointed a curate at St. Aldate's, Oxford, continuing his education while in ministry. At Oxford University he earned the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1895, Master of Arts in 1898, the Bachelor of Divinity in 1901, and the Doctor of Divinity in 1906.<sup>12</sup>

Though Thomas had more extensive pastoral ministry than Chafer, the latter being principally involved in evangelism, both had pastoral experience. Chafer was director of music in Painesville, Ohio, in 1896; an interim pastor at the First Presbyterian

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<sup>8</sup> Jacob Tuckerman, "Obituary of Thomas Franklin Chafer," *Rock Creek [Ohio] Banner*, May 31, 1882; and Chafer, "Autobiography."

<sup>9</sup> John S. Reynolds, *Canon Christopher of St. Aldate's Oxford* (Abington, UK: Abbey, 1967), 255.

<sup>10</sup> Clark, *W. H. Griffith Thomas*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Richard A. Lum, "W. H. Griffith Thomas and Emergent American Fundamentalism" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1994), 38. For information on Thomas the present writer is deeply indebted to the work of Dr. Lum.

<sup>12</sup> "Dr. Griffith Thomas: Appointed Professor of Apologetics, Wycliffe College, Toronto," *Record*, May 20, 1910, 485.

Church, Lewiston, New York; and an associate pastor at the First Congregational Church, Buffalo, New York.<sup>13</sup> As already noted, Thomas was initially a lay curate at Clerkenwell and then a curate at St. Aldate's under Canon Christopher. From 1895 to 1904 he was a curate at St. Paul's, Portman Square, London, where he excelled in Bible teaching, prayer, and a love for missions.<sup>14</sup>

Ironically both men attended meetings of D. L. Moody before meeting at his famous conference ground in 1903. Thomas heard Moody when the North American was in London for a crusade in the early 1880s. Chafer briefly attended Moody's school in Chicago and participated in the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 as well as other meetings with Moody in the 1890s.<sup>15</sup> Both Chafer and Moody belonged to Congregational churches and both men shared a calling from God to evangelism. So it is not surprising to find Chafer at Northfield, the missions and evangelism citadel of evangelicalism.<sup>16</sup>

An example of contrasting yet convergent paths taken by these two men is seen in their ministries before and after 1903. Chafer went from an evangelistic ministry to a Bible conference ministry in churches and then into the classroom. At age fifty-two he founded a fledgling school with twelve students, who were housed in rented apartments, with classes held at the nearby First Presbyterian Church of Dallas, Texas. At age forty-four Thomas left the pastorate in 1905 to begin a teaching career. For five years he served as principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, giving lectures on the Bible, Christian doctrine, pastoral ministry, and apologetics. A total of eighty-six students prepared for the ministry under his teaching there.<sup>17</sup> In 1910 Thomas accepted a teaching position at Wycliffe College, Toronto, Canada, but he left the institution in

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<sup>13</sup> Chafer, "Autobiography"; "A Church Music Director," newspaper clipping, n.d. (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers); Ella Loraine Case file, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio; letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to Lomira Chafer and family, September 11, 1899 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers).

<sup>14</sup> Lum, "W. H. Griffith Thomas and Emergent American Fundamentalism," 41–44.

<sup>15</sup> Chafer, "Autobiography."

<sup>16</sup> Letter, First Congregational Church of Buffalo, New York, to the First Congregational Church of Lockport, New York, March 26, 1900 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers); letter, Mary Plummer, Presbyterian Historical Society archivist, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to John D. Hannah, November 5, 1985 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers).

<sup>17</sup> For details of this period as well as Thomas's years in Toronto see Lum, "W. H. Griffith Thomas and Emergent American Fundamentalism," 44–52.

1919 under strained conditions.<sup>18</sup> His remaining days were spent in Philadelphia in “retirement,” where he continued his scholarly endeavors and participated in the emerging conservative/fundamentalist movement.

Both men were also writers. Each published a systematic theology, among their many writings, and both edited important theological journals (Thomas, *The Churchman*, and Chafer, *Bibliotheca Sacra*). Thomas’s lectures at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, became the nucleus of his book *The Principles of Theology* (1930), a much-heralded survey of theological thought from his Anglican perspective. Chafer completed an eight-volume systematic theology framed by dispensational, premillennial doctrine in 1948. Eleven books, numerous articles, and countless book reviews flowed from Chafer’s pen. Of Thomas’s twenty published books three were like Chafer’s *He That Is Spiritual* (1918), *Grace* (1922), and *Major Bible Themes* (1926) in enduring popularity; these are *The Catholic Faith* (1909), *The Holy Spirit of God* (1909–1910), and *The Work of the Ministry* (1911). In addition Thomas wrote commentaries on Genesis (1900), Acts (1904), and Romans (1911). The number of magazine and journal articles he wrote is staggering.

Both men married, yet their experiences were different. Chafer married Ella Loraine Case of Ellington, New York, in 1896,<sup>19</sup> and Thomas married Alice Monk in 1898.<sup>20</sup> The Chafers had no children; the Thomas’s buried two children in infancy but had another child who survived. Thomas was an Englishman, a devoted Anglican cleric and scholar, who came on the scene when theology was in transition, his nation was the world power, and Queen Victoria reigned. Chafer became a refined North American, but his roots were the grasslands of mid-America; his nation was an emerging power in a world that was rapidly changing and the hegemony of traditional Christian views was threatened. The divine hand of providence wove Chafer and Thomas together, and each in his way contributed to the birth of Dallas Theological Seminary.

#### TWO CAREERS INTERTWINED

As pastor of a prestigious London church and a Bible teacher, Thomas stepped into American evangelicalism when he went to

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 52–62.

<sup>19</sup> Chafer, “Autobiography”; and letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to Ella Loraine Case, April 10, 1896 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers).

<sup>20</sup> Lum, “W. H. Griffith Thomas and Emergent American Fundamentalism,” 40–41.

Northfield in 1903. Chafer's wife played the organ at the Northfield conferences, and Chafer assisted in the singing ministry under the direction of George C. Stebbins.<sup>21</sup> Chafer was yet to enter the Bible conference scene; Thomas was entrenched in it. Chafer was awakening to a more cohesive understanding of Christian truth under the tutelage of C. I. Scofield at the conference training school.

#### THEIR INTERTWINING OF MINISTRIES

Thomas and Chafer met through two mutual friends, C. I. Scofield and Charles H. Trumbull, and had common theological interests, ministry perspectives, and an educational passion. In 1917 Chafer dedicated his book *Salvation* to Thomas, who revealed his Anglican orientation by stating in the volume's preface, "This work by my good friend, Mr. Chafer, is in true 'Apostolic Succession.'" Chafer dedicated *Grace* (1922) to Scofield, "his father in the Faith." When Chafer published *He That Is Spiritual* in 1918, which was criticized by B. B. Warfield of Princeton Seminary, Thomas responded with two major articles in *Bibliotheca Sacra* in 1919.<sup>22</sup> Chafer's first published book, *Satan* (1909), included a preface by Scofield. Thomas expressed gratitude when he received a copy of Chafer's *The Kingdom of God and Prophecy* in 1915 and offered some criticisms of its content. Trumbull owned and edited the *Sunday School Times* in Philadelphia, a prominent conservative periodical. Thomas regularly wrote for the journal after 1912 as did Chafer after 1918.

Thomas met Scofield for the first time at Northfield in 1903 and formed a friendship that lasted until Scofield's death in 1921. Chafer met Scofield in 1901 in a Bible class at Northfield. He later wrote, "Until that time I had never heard a real Bible teacher. . . . It was a crisis for me. I was captured for life."<sup>23</sup> He later spoke of his relationship to Scofield "as a son may know a father."

The lives of Chafer and Thomas converged through mutual participation in the emerging Bible conference movement, the prophetic movement, the rise of the conservative/fundamentalist movement, and common theological views. Beginning in the 1890s

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<sup>21</sup> "The Northfield General Conference for Christian Workers," 568; and John F. Walvoord, "Lewis Sperry Chafer," *Sunday School Times*, October 11, 1952, 855.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas responded to Warfield in two articles: "The Victorious Life, I," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 76 (July–September 1919): 267–88; and "The Victorious Life, II," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 76 (October–December 1919): 455–67.

<sup>23</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, "When I Learned from Dr. Scofield," *Sunday School Times*, March 4, 1922, 120.

Thomas participated in the Bible conference movement in England as well as North America. After 1909 Chafer took part in the movement through the impetus of Scofield (Scofield by then had returned to conference work, having published the Reference Bible that had consumed his time for eight years). Chafer and Scofield joined forces: Scofield traveled, teaching on eschatology,<sup>24</sup> and Chafer taught on the spiritual life. Chafer and Thomas even shared conference ministry together.

Chafer's rising status in the conservative/fundamentalist movement, as it intersected with the British scholar, can be seen through the lens of two major events in the second decade of the twentieth century. Chafer and Thomas participated in the Prophetic Conference of New York City in 1918.<sup>25</sup> More important in light of subsequent events was their participation in a developing coalition of conservatives throughout North America to resist the inroads of liberalism in seminaries and churches. That coalition, the World Christian Fundamental Association, was created in Philadelphia in 1919.<sup>26</sup> Thomas was active in the 1919 meetings, serving as chairman of the Committee on Resolutions, which drafted the association's doctrinal statement, and serving on the Committee on Textbooks. Chafer was one of the conference speakers. Among the agenda items was the creation of an evangelical, premillennial seminary.<sup>27</sup> Evidence suggests that Thomas favored the idea of starting a school and some felt that he was posturing to become its dean.<sup>28</sup>

However, there was a problem. The leadership of the WCFA became increasingly embarrassing to moderates like Chafer.<sup>29</sup> For

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<sup>24</sup> Letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to Ella Loraine Chafer, March 2, 1909 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers); letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to Ella Loraine Chafer, March 5, 1909 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers).

<sup>25</sup> David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism since 1950* (Greenville, SC: Unusual, 1986), 99–100.

<sup>26</sup> Willard B. Gatewood Jr., ed., *Controversy in the Twenties: Fundamentalism, Modernism, and Evolution* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 16–18; and Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918–1931* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 49–56.

<sup>27</sup> "A Great Evangelical Premillennial Theological Seminary," *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 5 (July–September 1923): 10.

<sup>28</sup> Letter, A. B. Winchester to Lewis Sperry Chafer, January 6, 1922 (A. B. Winchester Papers, Archives, Dallas Seminary).

<sup>29</sup> "The Fundamentalist Movement has been reduced to the influence of about four men: Dr. Riley, Dr. Munhall, Tom Horton and J. Frank Norris. Just what these four plunging men will do before they are checked remains to be seen. But it certainly is

a brief time, 1919–1920, Thomas vehemently opposed the WCFA’s interpretation of the effects of the war and the mounting cultural crisis. His inflammatory rhetoric excited the militants in the movement to press their unique combative spirit, marked by anti-modernist and antievolutionist polemics.<sup>30</sup> However, it was not the approach either Chafer or Thomas felt was the best antidote to the problems in the seminaries and churches. The approach should be positive, not adversarial. It should proclaim the truth and not become preoccupied with the predator or enmeshed in vitriolic rhetoric.<sup>31</sup> As the WCFA leaders became more strident, Thomas withdrew from the school project and aligned with Chafer’s vision. At the fourth annual meeting of the WCFA in 1922 in Los Angeles, California, where Chafer was a platform speaker, the organization became militant under William B. Riley and J. Frank Norris. The latter became known as the “Texas Tornado” and “the Tiger of Texas.” The mood was defensive, venomous, and negative.<sup>32</sup> Later that year Chafer talked with Thomas and others about starting a new kind of seminary. The comic atmosphere of the fifth annual meeting of the WCFA held in Norris’s church in Fort Worth in 1923 ended any further participation in it for Chafer and Thomas.<sup>33</sup>

#### THEIR INTERRELATED THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS

Though Thomas emerged as a British scholar with a sterling education and prestigious positions in the church and academia and Chafer was a “self-made” student of the Scriptures, the two shared much in common that bound them together. The commonalities were theological and ministerial. Both men were a blend of theological traditions. They were certainly not Arminian, nor were they comfortable with traditional five-point Calvinism; both were conservatives, but they were not fundamentalists.

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a great embarrassment to the rest of us” (letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to Arno C. Gaebelein, November 13, 1923 [Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers]).

<sup>30</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, “Germany and the Bible,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 72 (January–March 1915): 49–66; idem, “German Moral Abnormality,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 76 (January–March 1919): 84–104; and idem, “The German Attitude to the Bible,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 76 (April–June 1919): 165–75.

<sup>31</sup> Letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to James Oliver Buswell Jr., February 14, 1930 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers).

<sup>32</sup> “Inspiration vs. Imagination,” *Sunday School Times*, July 29, 1922, 448.

<sup>33</sup> “Personnally, I deeply regret many things that happened in Fort Worth in the Fundamental conference, but I had nothing to do with it” (letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to Arno C. Gaebelein, July 2, 1923 [Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers]).

Five theological points may be noted about their views. First, both men embraced the Reformation concept of *sola Scriptura*. Unlike his principal mentors, James Orr (professor of apologetics and theology in the United Free Church College of Glasgow, Scotland) and P. T. Forsyth, Thomas believed the Bible was the inerrant Word of God, a conviction on his part that was foundational. His philosophical approach to the Scriptures was not rooted in Baconian empiricism reinforced by Common Sense Realism. He affirmed that Christ is the central, all-consuming point of the Bible and life, and the Bible is the means of cognitively experiencing Him. Knowledge is limited; it can make something seem real, but it requires the witness of the Spirit of God to know that it is true. Thus Thomas did not possess confidence in the role of apologetics that was embraced at Princeton Seminary.<sup>34</sup> As a teacher of apologetics, a position denied him in Canada, he said its role was not to construct the edifice of faith. Why? Because it is not a source of revelation equal to "the revelation of God." Instead the function of an apologist is to demolish his opponent's arguments and to demonstrate the reasonableness of faith. Supernatural truth is not beyond the grasp of knowing, but it is beyond the grasp of a wholehearted affectional embrace.<sup>35</sup> To Thomas and Chafer the Holy Spirit is the only Teacher of religious knowledge because well-crafted arguments can never produce certainty. A correct philosophy of ministry must be erected on a correct epistemology. Consequently the focus of ministry in Thomas's view, and here Chafer would agree, must be on proclamation, not clever arguments or transient contemporary issues.

Second, while Thomas adhered to the Calvinism enshrined in the Anglican Prayer Book and the Thirty-Nine Articles, which he defined and explained meticulously in *The Catholic Faith* and *The Principles of Theology*, his Calvinism was at odds with the Reformed Faith. (Like Chafer, he might be described as a "reluctant Calvinist" and a "marginal Fundamentalist.") Though Thomas knew and embraced predestination as "a Fundamental principle of Protestantism" and his adherence to the doctrine of human deformity and imputed condemnation would rejoice the heart of every true

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<sup>34</sup> B. B. Warfield was confident in the role of reason and argument to verify the Christian faith. He felt, in spite of his doctrine of human deformity, that the believers' task "is no less than to reason the world into acceptance of the truth" ("Christianity the Truth," in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 2:213.

<sup>35</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, "The Incarnate Word and the Written Word," *Record*, August 2, 1901, 774.

Princetonian,<sup>36</sup> he did not extend the logic of his theology to double predestinarianism or limited atonement.<sup>37</sup> In explaining the doctrine of irresistible grace Thomas was willing to live with such ambiguity that Warfield furiously condemned him. Yet Thomas was a Calvinist,<sup>38</sup> and Princeton theologians were forced grudgingly to recognize it. Sharing Thomas's Calvinism, Chafer too felt the probing of Warfield's surgical pen. Neither Thomas nor Chafer was Arminian. They shared a modification of Reformed dogma with which they were comfortable. Chafer may have been a little misleading when he wrote in a publicity statement that the curriculum of the new seminary was "in full agreement with the Reformed Faith and its theology is strictly Calvinistic."<sup>39</sup>

Third, while Thomas did not embrace the intricate distinctives frequently made by advocates of classic dispensationalism, he was aware of the stream of dispensational thought that ran from John Darby via James Brookes and C. I. Scofield to Chafer. In organizing and interpreting the Scriptures Thomas adopted a dispensational framework that included "three dispensations of the Divine revelation to man, involving a progressive economy of grace."<sup>40</sup>

There were a few differences between Thomas and Chafer. For example, though a premillennialist, Thomas did not see the millennium as a dispensation (he did not embrace the details of the dispensational system advanced by Scofield and Chafer).<sup>41</sup> By the standards of classic dispensationalism today Thomas might be perceived as suspect, but he was a committed proponent of the system as a whole. When Chafer sent a copy of the proposed doctrinal statement of the new seminary to Thomas for review, Thomas had only two suggestions for revision, neither of which pertained to dispensationalism.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, "Home and Foreign Church News: Toronto," *Canadian Churchman*, December 7, 1911, 748.

<sup>37</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: Longmans, Green, 1930), 164–65, 244. For his view on the extent of the Atonement see his page 58.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of Warfield's evaluation of Thomas's views see Lum, "W. H. Griffith Thomas and Emergent American Fundamentalism," 127–31.

<sup>39</sup> "General Statement concerning the Evangelical Theological College of Dallas" (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers).

<sup>40</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Holy Spirit of God* (Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage, 1913), 70.

<sup>41</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, *How We Got Our Bible and Why We Believe It Is God's Word* (Chicago: Moody, 1926), 47–48.

<sup>42</sup> Letter, W. H. Griffith Thomas to Lewis Sperry Chafer, May 10, 1924 (W. H. Griffith Thomas Papers, Archives, Dallas Seminary). Thomas felt that Article I on

Thomas was an heir of the premillennial tradition within English evangelicalism, though he spoke on eschatological themes with restraint. As he moved outside English evangelicalism, and more so when he moved from Canada to the United States, he increasingly spoke on these themes. Thomas wrote an article in *The Fundamentals* on this theme and contributed articles to the *Sunday School Times* (one of which he coauthored with Scofield), *Our Hope*, *Christian Workers Magazine*, and others. When he chaired the resolutions committee of the World Christian Fundamental Association, he affirmed premillennialism in its creed. Again he was not as detailed in his delineation of premillennialism as Scofield and Chafer, but he was firmly in that camp. "In his dispensationalism, as in his theology in general, Thomas demonstrated his preference for a few major articles and avoided a rigid and comprehensive system."<sup>43</sup>

Fourth, Thomas emphasized the spiritual life, accepting, like Chafer,<sup>44</sup> a form of Keswick theology that rejected perfectionism and taught a progressive, counteractive view of sanctification. Thomas's first appearance as a speaker at the English Keswick Conference was in 1901. After that he spoke there each year with only one exception until he left for Canada in 1910. He returned to England four times to continue his ministry there. In 1913 he spoke at the Oxford Conference, Oxford, Pennsylvania, organized by Robert C. McQuilkin. He was one of the organizers of the Victorious Life Testimony in America, America's Keswick. He served on its board with Charles Trumbull and coauthored its doctrinal statement with McQuilkin.<sup>45</sup>

As Thomas explained, there are three views on the believer's relationship to indwelling sin. One view is eradicationism, the notion that sin can be entirely done away with. This is biblically unjustifiable and contrary to human experience. Another view is suppressionism, the idea that the believer must war against the remnants of sin without any hope of succeeding in this life. But this too is not the teaching of Scripture. Suppressionism, as Thomas called Warfield's view, has the advantage of being more realistic than

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biblical inspiration could be strengthened with the addition of the phrase "[God] gave the very words." Also he preferred the words "total corruption of human nature" rather than "total depravity of human nature."

<sup>43</sup> Lum, "W. H. Griffith Thomas and Emergent American Fundamentalism," 142; see also 154–55.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1918; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 3–14.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 169–70.

eradicationism, but it fails because it is too pessimistic. A third view is counteraction, the belief that believers have responsibilities and that spiritual progress and victories are more than an ideal.<sup>46</sup> Though it is frequently asserted that the Keswick motto is “Let Go and Let God,” neither Thomas nor Chafer were passivists; they were, however, triumphalists and this brought on them the wrath of Warfield for their supposedly being too naive.<sup>47</sup> Thomas and Chafer’s view is better captured in the words “Let us go on.”

Fifth, in Thomas’s dispensational approach to Scripture, he believed that the present era is “the age of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>48</sup> He stressed that the work of the Holy Spirit is integral to the Christian faith.<sup>49</sup> The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures, the Spirit alone regenerates, the Spirit is the key to the spiritual life, and the Spirit alone is the believers’ Teacher. Thomas believed, as Chafer often repeated, “at Dallas Seminary we have but one Teacher.” What they meant by this is that the Christian faith is beyond the grasp of the merely rational; being supernatural, it requires a believing, regenerate, affectional heart change. The Christian faith is not merely a careful collection of maxims; it is beyond a teacher’s ability to explain it fully or a preacher’s talents to describe it adequately. To become a Christian, to embrace Christian truth, to have the hope of heaven is to have an assurance of knowledge that is described in the Bible but that goes beyond it to the living Christ described in it. For both men apologetics has a narrowly defined function that was at the foundation of their common educational philosophy.

#### ONE SEMINARY ENVISIONED

It is little wonder that when Chafer chose to explain a vision that had been in his mind since 1912,<sup>50</sup> a dream made urgent by trou-

<sup>46</sup> For a concise summary of Thomas on this point see W. H. Griffith Thomas, “The Christian Life. I. Its Purpose and Privileges,” *Keswick Week* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1912), 56–60.

<sup>47</sup> Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “The Victorious Life,” in *Perfectionism*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958), 360–61.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas, *The Holy Spirit of God*, 70, 281–82. Thomas confirmed the centrality of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and in believers’ lives.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 70–74. This short chapter is a succinct summary of Thomas’s view of the Holy Spirit. Chafer placed particular emphasis on the Spirit’s new ministries after the Day of Pentecost in *He That Is Spiritual*, 19–23, and in *Major Bible Themes* (Chicago: Moody Institute Colportage, 1926; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 73–76.

<sup>50</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, “For the Glory of God,” *Evangelical Theological College Bulletin* 7 (November 1930): 4.

blesome times, that he turned to W. H. Griffith Thomas. Two important private meetings preceded the actual organization of the school by a board of Dallas businessmen. Thomas attended one of the two meetings. In November of 1921 in Portland, Oregon, in a Bible conference at B. B. Sutcliffe's church, Chafer shared his idea with a group of friends. Though Thomas was not present, Chafer wrote him in December and received an enthusiastic response.<sup>51</sup> The following March, Chafer met with A. B. Winchester, a Canadian, and Thomas in Atlanta, Georgia, where plans for the school were put into motion. Thomas suggested the name of the new school, the Evangelical Theological College. Chafer joyfully reported to Sutcliffe, who could not attend this meeting, that Thomas paced the floor exclaiming, "We have made history today."<sup>52</sup>

The plan was that Thomas would become the teacher of theology in the new school. However, the decision to locate the school in Dallas, Texas, and Thomas's unwillingness to relocate from Philadelphia made it clear that such would not be the case.<sup>53</sup> At best, Thomas would join other Bible conference teachers who would come to the school periodically.<sup>54</sup> Somehow the story emerged that Thomas was to be the professor of theology and that Chafer reluctantly was thrust into the task, but a reading of the correspondence clearly demonstrates otherwise. The myth often rehearsed added intellectual credibility to the school by identifying it with one of the few scholars within conservative/fundamentalist/moderate Calvinist circles.

Chafer pondered the school's location, facilities, staff, curriculum, and student body. He also saw the need for an adequate library. The possibility of securing Scofield's library, since he had

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<sup>51</sup> Letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to W. H. Griffith Thomas, December 22, 1921 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers); Lewis Sperry Chafer, "A New Departure in Theological Training," *Our Hope* 25 (January 1928): 433; and letter, W. H. Griffith Thomas to Lewis Sperry Chafer, December 28, 1921 (W. H. Griffith Thomas Papers).

<sup>52</sup> Letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to Bert B. Sutcliffe, March 15, 1922 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers); and letter, W. H. Griffith Thomas to Alice Thomas, April 7, 1922 (W. H. Griffith Thomas Papers).

<sup>53</sup> Letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to Arno C. Gaebelin, April 14, 1932 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers); letter, W. H. Griffith Thomas to Alice Thomas, March 8, 1922 (W. H. Griffith Thomas Papers); and letter, W. H. Griffith Thomas to Lewis Sperry Chafer, December 22, 1921 (W. H. Griffith Thomas Papers).

<sup>54</sup> Thomas's limited role was clearly understood by Chafer early in 1924; Thomas agreed to come for one month in the first year of the school's operation (letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to Arno C. Gaebelin, April 15, 1924 [Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers], and letter, W. H. Griffith Thomas to Lewis Sperry Chafer, December 26, 1923 [W. H. Griffith Thomas Papers]).

died in 1921, was promising, but the purchase did not materialize. However, Charles Trumbull learned that Thomas's library might be available in light of his sudden decease in the spring of 1924, and Trumbull urged Chafer to purchase it. At that time Chafer was in Scotland holding evangelistic meetings and staying in the home of William Nairn, a wealthy industrialist. Nairn subsequently purchased for the school the collection of several thousand volumes from Thomas's estate.<sup>55</sup> The acquisition of Thomas's extensive holdings was significant educationally, but perhaps more importantly, it lent credibility to the school.

Thomas's great contributions to the school included his academic credibility, incredible learning, prolific literary production, and public image. However, his deeper contribution and more enduring legacy, was his affirmation of the theology and academic ideals of the new school. Chafer had in Thomas a soul mate. Clearly Thomas had the superior academic preparation, had published in the highest of academic arenas, and held prestigious posts. Chafer was of a different sort. He was intelligent in his own way, a man of faith with a passion for evangelism and the training of ministers.

In the early literature of the school Chafer often spoke of the enterprise as "a new departure in theological training"<sup>56</sup> and as "a very great innovation into the field of training, bold enough to ignore the traditions and ruts of the years that are past."<sup>57</sup> While the school's curriculum covered the basics of theological education, Chafer desired to go beyond it. The course of instruction, he said, was to be centered on the entire Bible, which was to be taught through the interpretive insights of dispensational premillennialism. Also emphasis was to be placed on the development of the students' spiritual character. And the Spirit of God was the real and only Teacher. In speaking this way Chafer embraced the notion that Christianity begins in divine regeneration and matures through divine illumination. He learned his theology by meticulous Bible study in the crucible of evangelistic and pastoral ministry. Thomas, the great scholar, emphasized the same truth.

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<sup>55</sup> Geraldine Taylor, *Empty Racks and How to Fill Them* (Dallas: Evangelical Theological College, n.d.), 10–11.

<sup>56</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, "A New Departure in Theological Training," *Our Hope* 34 (January 1928): 432.

<sup>57</sup> Letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to James R. Gilliam Jr., February 23, 1928 (Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers).

### THE W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS LECTURESHIP

In 1926 the school established an annual lectureship in which leading educators and scholars in the field of ministerial preparation were invited to deliver formal academic addresses in honor of William Henry Griffith Thomas.<sup>58</sup> Had it not been for his untimely death, he would have joined the nonresident faculty of the institution. Of the several men who consulted with Chafer about the founding of a ministerial training school, Thomas alone was a renowned educator-scholar. He gave the school a name, a library, and a reputation. More importantly, he stood beside a visionary, tenacious student of the Scriptures who loved the God revealed in them and encouraged him as a friend. It is entirely appropriate for these reasons and several others enumerated in this article that Dallas Theological Seminary has an annual lectureship in honor of W. H. Griffith Thomas and his contribution to the school.

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<sup>58</sup> "The W. H. Griffith Thomas Memorial Lectureship," *Evangelical Theological College Bulletin* 8 (June 1926): 27.