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Frank Worgan

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HARDING COLLEGE LIVING HISTORY OF MISSIONS

Interview of Frank Worgan by Don Shackelford.

Shackelford: We have visiting with us today, March 29, 1974, brother Frank Worgan from Corby, England. Brother Worgan, we are happy to have you with us on our campus, and I'll like for you to first just give us a brief personal history of yourself, your family, and your church background.

Worgan: Well, my family consists of three children and my wife, Isabelle. My youngest, Stephen is now almost 17. I have a 25-year-old daughter, Susan, who is married and a son, Peter, 29, who is an architect. Our background in the church-- I was brought up in the church. My parents are still alive and are still in fellowship with the church at Hendly in Lanchester. My wife has an even longer history in the church because the church in her home town in Scotland, the home of her great grandparents way back, entertained some of the old pioneer preachers of those days (James Anderson and William Hurt who have circulated even in this country today).

Shackelford: Tell us your involvement in preaching now.

Worgan: I preached my first sermon when I was 14. When I was 19 years of age, the elders at the congregation at Henly asked if I would take over the full-time evangelistic work. I agreed to this. They sent me to train privately under one of the older evangelists, brother Walter Coswait. He was a man of tremendous experience, who at that time was about 60 years of age. Leaving him, I did evangelistic work throughout the whole of Scotland for 7 years. In those days, work in England or Scotland consisted of the evangelist being with the congregation for maybe three, four or six months. Bear in mind that in those days there were just two full-time preachers--Albert Winstonly and I, who had been trained by Walter Coswait. We were travelling among the churches in this capacity, in the capacity of evangelist. Most of the congregations were without a resident preacher. The brethren in Britain worked on a principle of what they called "mutual ministry" for a long time, which meant that in theory, the work has been done by local men who had jobs, fair living and secular jobs. For a long time it didn't seem as if they really approved of full-time preachers. Today, there are only 17 full-time preachers and about 50 congregations.

Shackelford: How long have you been working with a congregation fulltime?

Worgan: Well, that's a difficult question. I left to go to Holland in 1954, and I worked for 7 years in Holland, returning in 1961. I came back in '61 to work full-time with a congregation that I had established before going to Holland. When I finished my work there, we had appointed elders and built a building. I was invited to move to Corby, where I am now working, because there they had five members and we anticipated great possibilities of establishing a congregation, a fact which has been realized. That was in 1967. At the time, they were just meeting for worship in the morning and that was just about it.

Shackelford: Tell us something, then, about the history of your work at Corby from that time until now.

Worgan: The church in Corby, in my mind, is one of the best works that I've seen in England. This is not because I am involved but because of the circumstances which have made it that. Corby itself is something different in that Corby is a completely new town consisting today of 55,000 people. This has developed out of a

small 11th century village of 900 people. Everything in the town is new; there is now not a single old building. Everything is very carefully planned. We have over 13 new schools in the town and all the church buildings of all the denominations are fine new buildings. When we went there, we were meeting first of all in a community building owned by the city. This left a lot to be desired because sometimes we would come along on Sunday morning and discover they had had a wedding reception there the night before. I've seen us mopping up the beer from the floor before we could hold worship service. We felt that this simply had to be changed, and we needed a new building, a building of our own. So, I came to the States and visited one or two congregations that I have known for many, many years and in 10 weeks we had the money to put up our building. Now, since then, from 5 members the church has steadily grown until we now have at least 100 members. This is not to speak of others whom we don't really regard as active members, but these are truly members of the church.

Shackelford: Tell us something of the program of work and of evangelistic thrust that you have.

Worgan: Well, our work began very largely because of the influences of cottage meetings. Most of our meetings were held in peoples' homes. Now that we have our building, we still utilize homes a great deal because of the informality and the intimacy that we can develop in the home like that. We have each Monday night a meeting for young people which takes place in one of our classrooms. Tuesday night is the regular mid-week Bible study. Wednesday night is when we visit Rushton, which is a town about 15 miles away where we hold a Bible class with the hope of establishing a church there. We have some members living there. Thursday night is the night for our young Christians Bible study, and we have a very fine group of young people. Friday night, alternately, is a ladies' Bible class or a men's training class.

Shackelford: Tell us, I know from your remarks earlier that you have been involved in the preparation of the Jule Miller film strips and their adaptation to the work. I'd like for you to tell us a little bit about this and also what you feel about the use of Bible School materials that have been prepared in one language and cultural area.

Worgan: Yes, this is a very real problem and one that we encounter all the way down the line, not just with Bible School material but with literature, tracts and so on. We have used, for some time, the Jule Miller film strips right from the very beginning. But we have always encountered a bit of a problem because the American accent was not always understood and sometimes in the material itself, words or phrases were used which were certainly not English. Some would not even be understood by the people listening. We felt the need for a tape in English-English, so to speak. We also felt that some of the pictures were not suitable for cultural reasons in England, and it was decided by two of our American brethren who are over there and are involved in the work, to produce a film strip that showed English scenes and in the church, English services, and try to eliminate one or two of the frames in the film strips which were just a little bit difficult for us to understand or follow. We feel that now that we have the new films and the new commentary, it is going to prove an even more effective tool. We are always struggling with the problem that is encountered in all mission fields, I know, the difficulty that the people have in understanding that the church is not an American church. If it is possible to get literature or tools in the language or style of the native country, it is far better to do that. This is one of the problems with literature. Very often the language is not English, the grammar is not English, the phraseology is not English; it is obviously American. The style is American and

very often the illustrations used are those adapted for use in this country, you know, and it really does give the wrong impression, if we're trying to make people understand that we do not have our origins in America but in the New Testament. For us to persistently use American literature is not a very wise thing to do. I'm sure you would agree with me on that. The same is true with Bible study material. I think that our attitude in England toward Bible study is rather different than the attitude over here. We find it extremely difficult, for example, to get grown-ups to use a workbook and to answer true or false. The British mentality, it seems to me, makes it seem beneath their dignity to do this kind of thing; it is better to use one without this kind of questionnaire at the end of each lesson.

Shackelford: Tell some form of the cooperation among brethren in England. I know, for example, you have a magazine that one of your brethren publishes, and there are, I'm sure, cooperative efforts. Just tell us a little bit about this.

Worgan: Well, the magazine that you are speaking of is the one for which I am the Staff writer, TRUTH FOR TODAY. Brother Lynn Channing of the church at Ailsbury is the Editor. We think it is very modern in its format, and we try to keep it a magazine that is fit to be placed into the hands of non-Christians. This means that we don't have correspondence and we don't have controversy. It is simply a preaching and teaching magazine. I think it does come to the States; in fact, I'm pretty sure it has a wide circulation over here. This, I think, is a very effective tool. It is read by quite a number of non-members in some of the elevated places and appreciation has been expressed of the magazine. So, brethren do cooperate in this way. Apart from that, there is the usual fellowship. For example, in May, we had a holiday fellowship in Corby, which is very much like a lectureship or a miniature lectureship, you could call it. Last year we provided accommodation for 75 to stay during the period of the lectureship, and our ladies provided meals each noon and each evening. We had brethren coming from 26 congregations; so, this kind of thing does go on. Of course, when meetings are held in various places, support is given by sister congregations.

Shackelford: Turning from the English aspects of it, what advice would you give to Americans who would be coming to work in England or considering toward working in your area?

Worgan: I've seen Americans come to England and they come convinced in their own minds that there are differences and this obsession of the differences tends to exaggerate them. I would say in the first place, recognize that there are differences but try to cypher them out by not emphasizing the fact that you are an American. Do not try to be entirely British, but be yourself. Realize that there are cultural differences. My experiences in Holland, for example, teach me that very often people find it extremely difficult to avoid making comparisons between things in Europe and things back home. Some of the people suffered from culture shock without a doubt because they never seemed to get away from the thought that everything back in America is superior to anything found in Europe. This is just not true any way. Ultimately, after a couple of years, they discover that some of the products they can buy in Europe are better than anything that they had ever bought back here. Now for the first year, it is permissible, it is forgivable, for a person to be aware of the fact that he has come to a new country. It is permissible to suffer from culture shock and to be allowed to make comparisons. But after that, if this persists, I think that there has not been a real adjustment. I'm happy in that while I was in Holland, ultimately, the brethren would say that I was a Dutchman. In fact, two Dutch brethren, Hank Kelkins and
 Were over in the States. I visited the states, too, from Holland,

and when I returned to Holland, back to the church in Amsterdam, I was happy to hear one of the brethren say during one of the services, "It was good for us to know that we had three dutch brethren in America". So, they had begun to think about me as one of them. That really is what a missionary should aim at. He should aim at identification with the people with whom he is working. They should not any longer think of him as a foreigner. This is a prime consideration, I think.

Shackelford: What special training could he get here that might be helpful as you see it?

Worgan: Well, the most obvious training would be in language. I went to Holland and preached my first sermon in Dutch after nine months. It was two years before I became fully proficient in the language and began to think and dream in the language. When you begin to dream in the foreign language, you are making progress. It seems to me that a lot of time could be saved and a lot of frustration if there were a program by which prospective missionaries could learn the language in this country. Obviously, they are not going to learn the idiom, they are not going to learn the language perfectly, but at least they would have something to work on. It seems to me that you may learn a language from a book or from records, but only when you get with the people do you discover that there are things in the language that you never learn, that there are speech idioms that cannot be checked by any rule of grammar. You simply have to learn. You can't always explain or give a rule for it or know that that's right because it feels right. This is something that you have to learn with the people. This is what is so very important. One of the problems that the Mormans encounter in their mission work, I am sure, is that they send young men over there who normally stay for just two years. By the end of that two years, they are just beginning to learn to speak the language and they are taken out. This has a very detrimental effect on their work.

Shackelford: Elaborate a little bit more on the length of stay. I think this is very important.

Worgan: I have very strong feelings on it, and I feel very strongly, indeed, about the length of stay. I deplore what has been the practice in the past of sending somebody to Europe for two years. By the end of that two years, he is probably just beginning to earn his keep and to make himself useful. To go back, it seems to me, that mission fields have been used as a kind of paid vacation, at the expense of the church. Sometimes, in one or two rare instances I'm happy to say, the cudos of having worked on the mission field is used as a lever to get into some place or position back in the States and that, to me, is abusing mission work. I feel that people should come, planning to stay at least for five years and possibly longer. I admire those people who come over to Europe and who make it a life time work. This is real mission work. It must not be a novelty. People who plan to do mission work must really consider it to be a life's work and not just, "I think I'll do mission work for two years and then I can find a place to preach back in the States".

Shackelford: What would your attitude be towards, say, a young man who is considering England as an area of work, coming over there after having completed his college work and doing graduate work while at the same time getting into the English system? Do you think this would be helpful, or what would be some of the dangers of it?

Worgan: I think I've seen one or two young men go to preacher training schools in this country and go back to England and goto some place where the church does not

exist and want to work alone or perhaps with some other inexperienced young man. I would say to any young man in this position, first, go to an existing congregation where you will be welcome and where you could work under the guidance of an experienced man before you ever think of starting a new work in England. In my own experience, young men have done as I say, they've come over and they have found a place where nobody else has been. They wanted to write back to some supporting congregation in the states and say that they are working, opening up new ground, opening up new fields, real peioneers in their particular work. They can live off of the novelty of that for a short time, but there is such a tremendous disappointment when progress isn't made and the newness wears off. They find themselves encountering problems that they never even imagine d could arise. That's the time when they really need a wiser, older head. I would say that to anybody wanting to come to England, first, get to work with an older, experienced man until you can find your feet and until you are able to look around and see where the real need is and where the real possibilities are, before you launch out into the deep, so to speak.

Shackelford: What do you see some of the challenges for the future in England?

Worgan: The new towns, to me, are the biggest challenge. These are springing up in very many places. There may be twenty or thirty new towns right now, and perhaps others are planned. These are places where people have come out of the cities, even from Scotland, and from other countries. In Corby, we have 47 nationalities. They are people who are at least adventurseom enough to be able to take up their roots. They are not so hind bound and set in tradition and custom that they have got to stay in a certain place. They are willing to go to a new place, to begin a new life, to make new friends and this makes it wide open for teaching.

Shackelford: Explain the government's attitude toward new towns.

Worgan: Well, the government has recognized that some of the existing cities are much too large and are in a sense haveing tremendous accommodation problems. These new towns have in some instances been termed overspill towns. That is to say, population from areas cleared out in some of the larger cities will come into the new towns and employment is made available to them in various fields. Houses are available there. There are very modern houses, in fact, at reasonable rents-- certainly much less than they would pay in the larger places like London and Birmingham. The government has felt that this is a way of utilizing manpower, of creating opportunities for employment and better living conditions. To the government, this is not a nationalized thing at all. What happens is that the government permits the creation of a new cooperation which is a private on, a corporation of professional men, men who are expert in their own field; architecture, development and so on. They accept the responsibility of the building of the new town, and when the town is built and the work is entirely finished, then the responsibility is handed over to the local city authorities.

Shackelford: That is certainly interesting and something that I'm sure no one here in the States knows a great deal about. We appreciate very much, brother Worgan, your giving us this information. I know this will be very helpful to the students, and we are looking forward to having you come.

Worgan: Thank you. I'm looking forward to coming, too.