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Walvoord, Christian H Oral History Interview: Former RCA and Protestant Reformed Church Executives

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HOPE COLLEGE LIVING HERITAGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
1979

DR. CHRISTIAN H. WALVOORD
INTERVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

The HOPE COLLEGE LIVING HERITAGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT consists of a series of interviews conducted during the summer of 1977, with Nancy A. Swinyard, and the summer of 1978, with Conrad J. Strauch, Jr., with past administrators and professors of Hope College. In the summer of 1979, the project dealt with the Reformed Churches and their development. Interviews were conducted by Derk Michael Strauch with past Reformed Church in America Executives and the Rev. Homer Hoeksema of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Upon completion of each session, the taped interview was transcribed and then edited by the interviewer and the interviewee to assure clarity in the interview. While the accuracy of the transcript is desirable, the viewpoint of the interviewee is maintained. Some alterations were suggested by the interviewer during the interview and in later correspondences, but the researcher will discover discrepancies between the interviews themselves and with published materials. Therefore, the researcher must be aware that these discrepancies exist, and seek to understand the perspective from which all statements were made. Tapes of all the interviews are stored in the Archives of Hope College.

No claim is made that the information contained within these transcripts is absolutely accurate. No two people share identical viewpoints, and the separation of time from the interviewee's experiences with the events mentioned, can sometimes intensify this divergence.

Without the support of Dr. Jacob E. Nyenhuis, Dean of the Humanities and the Fine Arts, this project would not have become a reality. Special thanks go to Dr. Elton J. Bruins, professor of Religion at Hope College, who gave constant help and encouragement to the project even though he was busy with his own pursuits. The success of this project can be attributed to the efforts of the interviewees, each gracious, receptive and cooperative.

Interview with
DR. CHRISTIAN H. WALWOOD
at his home in
Holland, Michigan
on
June 18, 1979
with
Derk M. Strauch

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Christian H. Walvoord was born in Byron Center, Michigan, in 1912, and grew up in a parsonage in Upstate New York. He is the son of the Rev. William C. Walvoord who was a minister in the Reformed Church in America. He received his AB from Hope College in 1934 and went to Western Theological Seminary to receive a BD and in 1938 he received an STM from the Biblical Seminary.

He served in the Pastorate in the following Churches: Red Bank, New Jersey; Canajoharie, New York; Hudson, New York; Third Reformed in Holland, Michigan; Oradell, New Jersey; and New Paltz, New York. He served as the Executive Secretary of the Board of Education in the Reformed Church in America from 1963-1968. He presently is the Minister Emeritus at the Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. He has also served the Reformed Church in the following: Board of World Missions (1946-49), New Brunswick Theological Seminary Board of Superintendents (1945-50, 1963-67), Western Seminary Board of Trustees (1963-67), Hope College Board of Trustees (1963-68), Program Board of the division for Christian Education of the National Council of Churches (1968) and was the Vice-chairman (1967-68), World Institute of Christian Education (1967), President of the Board of Warwick Conference Center (1969-70), Vice President of the General Synod (1970), and President of the General Synod in 1971.

He is the father of three children: Barbara Fassler, who is an instructor at Central College; Linda Girard, and Dirk Walvoord who teaches music in a public school.

He currently resides on the Northside of Holland, Michigan, with his wife. He is the Minister Emeritus of the Third Reformed Church.

STRAUCH: First I'd like to begin with any incidents in your life that lead you into the Ministry, and then into Christian Education.

WALVOORD: I can't think of any. When I was in my junior year in college I made the decision to go into the ministry, not on the basis of any particular event, but just because I arrived at the conclusion that that was where my talents lay, and my background, with my father being a minister, would make it a little bit easier for me to go. Plus the fact that we had a seminary right across the street.

STRAUCH: Also, I remember that there was a lack of ministers when you were in college. Did this affect your decision in any way? And was there a general religious mood on campus, and one of missions also?

WALVOORD: I didn't feel that. Of course, I was brought up in a Christian home, all the way. It would have been very unusual if there had not been a religious influence on the campus. But I wasn't aware of it. There certainly wasn't any pressure, and I think, in many respects, there was more of a lack of religion than there was when I was minister at Third Reformed Church.

STRAUCH: Was there any reason why there was a lack of religion?

WALVOORD: I don't know, except that it may have been the mood of the times. I know I came to Third Church, as a minister, and the fraternity asked me to come for a Bible Study. I was shocked to think that (laughing) they should want a Bible Study! What's a fraternity doing with a Bible Study?

STRAUCH: You've mentioned your ministry at Third Church. Was there much interaction between the Church and the College then?

WALVOORD: In our day, the main interaction then between the college and the Church was between Hope Church and the campus, for several reasons. First of all, they had a popular minister; secondly, many of the college professors went to Hope Reformed Church, and in the third place, and I feel this was the most important, they had an eleven o'clock service and the kids could lie in bed half the morning and still get to Church. But that has changed over the years. I think the change came pretty much after I left, but I think it developed during

the time that I was in Third Church, and I really don't know just why. We attracted quite a few of the faculty. There were some who had come already; President Wichers was a member of Third Reformed Church, and we always had a class for the college and seminary students, a Sunday School class. Most college students didn't want to stay for that, but a few did. John Ver Beek taught it for a while, Roger Rietberg taught it for a while, and so did several others.

STRAUCH: So there already was some student interaction. Also, at Third Reformed your writing career pretty much began. Most of it dealt with the pastorate and the future ministers. Why did you feel the need to write such articles at this time?

WALVOORD: I suppose that was my whole life and so it just was a natural. And our family was a word family. We were not without pictures and visual images, but we were "word-smiths." So it was very natural, when I had something on my mind, to grab a pen and put it down on paper, and send it off somewhere. In fact, after I got home from the last meeting of the General Synod (June 1979) I felt the same way, so I wrote an article and sent it out to John Stapert. I don't know if he'll print it, but I sent it in.

STRAUCH: So your writing career hasn't ended?

WALVOORD: No, no.

STRAUCH: Do you feel that the general mood or attitude of that time concerning the ministry has carried over to today? Many ministers claim that there is a rapid change in the ministry now.

WALVOORD: I can't say whether or not the attitudes of young men have changed or if our adult ministers changed, because I know only one generation. But the difficulties of serving as a minister have changed. It used to be that each church had a suit of armour waiting for the new minister when he came. You jumped into it and, if you fit into it, you worked pretty well; if the armour didn't fit you squeaked in certain places. (laughing) But today, that's not true

a layman doesn't want to see that armour like he used to. He used to want a knight in shining armour, but today he wants a fellow who is stripped of all that stuff, and so, when a young fellow goes into the ministry, he almost feels naked as far as his person is concerned, because he must reveal himself and his own reactions. That's what people go for now, so its much more difficult. And not only that, but the people of the Church have models that they see on television and they are really accomplished fellows like Bob Schuller and Norman Vincent Peale. When people come to church they ask, "Why can't our minister be like that?" And sure, you practice up, and do some things to make it as perfect as you can and not everybody has those talents. So it's hard.

STRAUCH: I'd like to turn to when you moved into the National Headquarters. How did you see yourself shifting into the National Headquarters?

WALVOORD: Oh, I suppose to be in the National Headquarters was something to be desired by a minister. Ever since I had been a child, the executives from 475 had come into our home and we'd entertain them in my fathers home. He was a minister and when I became a minister we used to entertain men, Lumen Schaffer, Ray Drucker, and Duke Potter, and people like that were pretty well known in our home. So there was an idea that that would be great and wonderful. And they used to come riding in by train and you'd drive to the station and roll out the red carpet for them. I found, when I got into the job, that all that had changed. Instead of coming to meet you at the station, they would quite often let you rent a car, and you came rolling into their home, and then they weren't really expecting you and they weren't as well prepared to entertain you. So this matter of riding around the country in a royal state never really came off. Today I think the executives go scurrying around where they have to go, and then they go back to their homes.

STRAUCH: Do you have any idea why this changed, that the executive branch was

no longer welcome?

WALVOORD: Just the mode of living, partly, and it is pretty hard in some congregations to find someone to entertain - - and that wasn't always true. There were people who kept spacious establishments in almost every church and so you had a chance to entertain and be entertained. I guess that's the reason, and, oh well, also there is an anti-establishment move in the Church. They don't listen to everything that they say at 475 and they don't care to hear it either. So they don't, they aren't willing to entertain them.

STRAUCH: It's become more of a burden now?

WALVOORD: Yes.

STRAUCH: How did you move into the position of Executive Secretary of the Board of Education?

WALVOORD: Well, I was the president of the Board of Education and, as president of that Board, I was chosen to be on the committee to seek a new executive Secretary when Bernie Mulder retired. So we met together, and we first called Harvey Hoffman, and we considered a lot of people in the Church. We also considered present staff and wondered if there was anybody that wanted to have that job. But we thought that it would be pretty hard for anybody on the present staff to step up into Bernard Mulder's shoes. He had been there for twenty years (1945-1965) and had done a pretty good job in many respects and generally did really run it with a pretty firm hand. So finally they asked me, and I was living right across the river in New Jersey, and I was very honored to serve the Church and I accepted. This was the summertime and I had been in the Oradell Church for four years, so I went.

STRAUCH: It wasn't a slight shift at first, you were simply moved up. How did you feel, taking over Dr. Mulder's position at first?

WALVOORD: I felt like a babe in the woods. Especially managing the financial dealings. There was a man by the name of Sid Holden, in the job of controller of

the Board of Education and like many people who are controlling the financial resources they get a kind of personal feeling about that, as though it were their own money. Not that they are going to steal it, but they feel pretty proprietary about it. And before you know it, they don't tell you everything. When they make the report, they forget to mention that there is \$20,000 in a certain fund that also ought to be counted as reserves. Or they go out and borrow \$10,000 and forget to tell you about that. So I worried because I didn't know anything about it. I'd never been through this stuff before. But, and finally, I got to the point of telling Sid, "Sid, now I want no argument, you're not to make the judgments. I'm to make the decisions and you're to give me all the facts. I want them once a month, on the first of the month." Well, Sid had never heard language like that before and he got kind of upset. So he began to look for another position and he finally found a position in Rochester, New York, and so off he went to a new job, and we were all happy. (laughing) But that was the thing that worried me. Then there were two or three personnel changes that should have been made and I knew that they had to make the changes. One was retiring from the Board after years of good service, and her health wasn't very good and so she wasn't pulling her weight anymore. And then there was Mr. Ver Berkmoes. He was not well accepted in the middle west and he was Dr. Mulder's son-in-law, and it appeared to some people it was thought that there was some favoritism. I don't know if there was, but it seemed to me that we had to have a change. I worked at it very slowly and inside of a year or so, I had eased him out into something outside. I think he was selling insurance. So we were clear of that but then there was a rather bad taste in the mouths of the west, so I was hindered from getting a replacement for him out there. What's happened now is there is a moving out, a diversification of the men of the various boards and agencies, as you know, all over the country now. And I felt that that should have taken place

when I was executive secretary. In fact, I wish I had pushed for that. Harold De Roo, and Dell Vander Haar and Art Van Eck were all working for the Board of Education, and Grace Pelon. I got Winfield Burggraaff to work, and I thought that we really ought to have these people stretched all over the country, situated, say, in Orange City, in Chicago, maybe on the West Coast and in Grand Rapids. But partly due to the fact that we had a bad experience with Ver Berkmoes and partly due to my own inability to make them alive, we didn't do it. And I've been sorry since then. When they accomplished that shift in the Board of Education, and when I left, then, of course, it was possible. The whole board, the whole of the staff, they agreed that people had to be shifted out into the countryside and among the Churches themselves. But I wish that I had been a little bit more forward about that.

STRAUCH: Was this the beginning of the "Regionalization" movement?

WALVOORD: Yes, oh yes.

STRAUCH: Already you had some ideas on regionalization before you were the Vice-president of Synod and chairman of the Steering Committee on Regionalization.

WALVOORD: We had more ideas about regionalization. In fact, the plans had been in my mind and, I think, in a lot of minds, for quite along while.

STRAUCH: You mentioned Arthur Van Eck. When he joined the staff in 1963, was he already seen as somebody to replace yourself eventually? I remember Dr. Mulder mentioning that he had his eye on Art Van Eck from when he was still in Detroit.

WALVOORD: Art Van Eck came to the Board of Education in 1963, and he was enlisted by Dr. Mulder and me. I wasn't connected with the Board, except as president of the Board of Education. When Art said yes to that, we knew that we had a very good man. For one thing, he was a World War II veteran and a pilot in the Air Force, and he had made a pretty fair success in the Detroit area. So we felt we had a very fine man and he had the ability to lead singing, the facility to

lead group activities, and he did very well for us. So, sure, we felt we had a good man, and I think his fulfillment may not have been up to what our expectations had been.

STRAUCH: It was under your administration that the Board of Higher Education came into it's full being, and also it affiliated itself with the College Scholarship Service. Why did it do this?

WALVOORD: You mean the College Scholarship Service of the National Council of Churches?

STRAUCH: No, the service that has its headquarters in Princeton.

WALVOORD: Oh yes, the College Scholarship Service in Princeton was fairly new at that time, and we felt it was very good and we were not prepared to ask the types of questions that they had in the Scholarship Service. Have you ever seen that form?

STRAUCH: Yes, I fill one out every year for school.

WALVOORD: You know then they go into your background very carefully. Its pretty hard without lying, outright lying, not to give a fair picture of what your financial resources are. And I think in our judgement of financial needs of a student , we had never gone as carefully at that as the service did. The Classis ought to judge what the financial needs of the student are. But you know you get the favorite son of the leading man in the Classis and you ask for aid and you had better give it to him. You had better recommend him. The financial judgment could be passed along to the Board in New York and they would judge as to whether or not a person was worthy of it. But we didn't have time for that, to go running all over the country interviewing students, and we didn't have the personnel to do that, and we didn't want the onus on ourselves in making that kind of decision, so we got connected with the scholarship service.

STRAUCH: It was a kind of passing the buck.

WALVOORD: Sure, Classis passed it to us, and so we passed it to the scholarship

folks who said "We'll make the decision for you." We were inexperienced with that. I think by and large we made a pretty good decision.

STRAUCH: Dr. Mulder mentioned going around the country interviewing both college and seminary students. You no longer did this.

WALVOORD: Yes, Dr. Mulder usually went to each of these institutions once a year and he would go maybe to Hope College and Western Seminary in March and interview all of the men. There was no Scholarship Service then and he wanted to keep a personal touch with those boys. It was a good thing and the only thing I could say is that times are changing, and I went once to each of the, well maybe twice, to each of the institutions, but I did not go every year.

STRAUCH: Did you also sit on the Board of Trustees?

WALVOORD: Yes. I think that I had an honorable place in the Seminary Board, on the Central College Board. I think on the Hope College Board that they thought it an imposition that some guy from New York was sitting, would come and sit on their Board of Trustees. They didn't like it very much, and they didn't pay much attention to me. A few years, they didn't even send me a notice of their meetings. (laughing) It didn't bother me any. Because we had no control over them, for instance, Hope College. They would tell us what their decisions were and if they were going on a fund drive, they went out on a fund drive. It didn't make a difference what we did or said.

STRAUCH: Hope College was pretty independent from the Board?

WALVOORD: They all were. Central College was independent too. I can remember hearing Mert de Velder complaining in the car, I was in the car pool and this was a little later when the General Secretary had something to do with Higher Education. He was fussing and complaining because Central College was going to go out and try to raise \$2,000,000 and hadn't even told him. And he was the General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America and they didn't tell him. He didn't like that at all. The colleges were independent as hogs on ice. We supplied so little

of this money that they weren't beholden to us, and they went about their own business.

STRAUCH: Was that why the "Covenant of Mutual Obligations and Privileges" came about?

WALVOORD: Yes, we fussed over that for a number of years. I can remember sitting in a motel in Chicago, and all the college presidents fussing over that and the language and the wording and all that. We all paid lip service to it, and then we went home.

STRAUCH: Then it was just on paper, not in practice?

WALVOORD: Yes, I think so. There is a real connection between the colleges and the Church and the Church and the colleges. The Church needs the colleges and the colleges need the Church. Otherwise it would change their whole character without them. They want freedom to go to anybody and ask for money. But don't tie us down.

STRAUCH: Did you have any contact with President Wander Werf?

WALVOORD: Calvin Vander Werf was a member of the Board of Education by law, as he was president of the college. And I'd known Cal for years. In college, I encountered him as a freshman when I was a senior. I was the leader of the debate team and he came on. A very strong individual and he had a good mind, but I think that Cal might have had a mind set that feared the relation with the Church. And he shied away from that as much as possible. I embodied that relationship, so Cal didn't have too much time for me and I never got close to him.

STRAUCH: You said he didn't like the relationship of the Church and the college, how did he try to avoid it?

WALVOORD: You know usually when somebody comes in from the outside they are very glad to rope the guy into leading Chapel. They are glad to get rid of the responsibility. The faculty doesn't like to do it, and the students don't like

to do it, and if there would only be somebody from the outside to lead Chapel. And so it was more by neglect. Cal didn't try to cultivate that relationship at all and I came to campus and wanted to meet the students who were going into the ministry, and there was no give on the part of the college at all. It was all my own work to get the students together. So there wasn't a very easy relationship. We never got along very well.

STRAUCH: Probably the highlight of your career at the Board of Education was the Covenant Life Curriculum. It came out when you were there. What preparations were made for the CLC?

WALVOORD: As far as writing of the curriculum was concerned, that was all finished when I got with the Board. I was president of the Board, but Dr. Mulder took care of all the contacts with the Southern Presbyterian Church. That was all underway when I got around. Our staff did some writing and consulting, so we weren't left out. That was all on track and a lot of the stuff was already off the press when I became involved with the Board. When I came, I spent the first year as the Executive Secretary, not the General Secretary because Dr. Mulder kept that under control under his hand. That was a key year. In the fall of the year that I took over, after I had been there one year, the basic book was introduced throughout the denomination. We were having conferences throughout the entire denomination. Everybody on the Board staff got out - we had a regular team. It was a great experience. I met a lot of fine people. We had really high enthusiasm. But it was a time of transition for us and nobody really took the bull by the horns, so here and there in the denomination men rose who objected to this, men who were fundamentalists by their nature, and they were afraid that the youth of the Church were being led into a liberalism, which really wasn't true as far as I could see. My contact with the men of the Southern Presbyterian Church, they were not liberal at all, they were just as conservative as we were.

It was partly because we just didn't blanket the Church quite well enough. If we just blanketed it, and suffocated those fellows and didn't give them a chance to breathe, well, we would have got by with it all right. They got hollering around in the newspaper, and Louis Benes, who was editor of the newspaper the Church Herald, just didn't know where he stood on that, so we didn't have the support and cooperation of the denominational newspaper. Then we would get the Synod and somebody would be hollering about it there also. I was putting out fires all the while. I just couldn't get on top of it.

STRAUCH: Is that the reason why only 30% of the RCA accepted the curriculum?

WALVOORD: Yes.

STRAUCH: While you were the Secretary of the Board of Education, you went to Nairobi, Kenya. Could you give a little information on this trip?

WALVOORD: Not much happened, the World Council of Christian Education had had its day, I think. But it was still an organization. They had these conferences every few years, and each denomination appointed representatives to carry on the business of organization. The Reformed Church had to be represented and I had never been overseas for the Board or gone anywhere, and it is natural, I think, that they chose me to go. So I simply boarded the plane and went over there. I can remember sleeping under a mosquito net in Dakhar, on the tip of Africa, and the warm breezes were blowing. It was a kind of hard trip, because when I got there I jumped a ditch one day and pulled a ligiment and was in bed for two days. So I missed a few sessions. It was a good trip, I made good contacts over there and I got some sense of the worldwide nature of the Church. I made contact with the Board of Foreign Missions before I left, and I got the names of people to contact in Nairobi and around. These were good contacts, strong contacts. When I flew back, I returned through Italy and back home that way. A couple extra days to sight see.

STRAUCH: Was there anything that helped the Reformed Church in America as a whole and the Board of Education as a part of that?

WALVOORD: I can't say that it did, it really didn't. It was a broadening experience for myself, and we had good, warm contacts with people all over the world. There were people from Africa and they were interesting and helpful from a personal point of view, but as far as having an agenda for the meeting and arriving at conclusions, and saying this we must do in Christian Education, a world vision, no, we didn't have that. The ideas in those days about the things that should expire at a conference like that were a little different in those days. If we could only get together good will would come out of it. Quite often nothing good does come out of it, except you sit there like a bump on the log.

STRAUCH: You said that Sunday School was not enough to carry on the responsibility of Christian Education of the youth. What else do you see as necessary then and now?

WALVOORD: I think that when I said that, I was worried about the fact that so many people thought that Sunday School could take over for the home. Certainly the home is the first importance. When I was a kid, I listened to my Dad read the Bible at the table, and that probably had more influence on me than anything; that is, I picked up more information about the Bible and so forth than I ever did in any Sunday School, or Christian Education. You can't learn much once a week. If people are going to depend on Sunday Schools it just isn't going to work. I don't know if day school, Christian Schools, are the answer. I think that the Christian Church has a responsibility to the public schools to send their children there and so that the public schools are leavened by the influence of children coming out of good homes. But I also know that Sunday School isn't enough. I think early in the 60's we had talked about maybe a Saturday School, and that there might be mid-week opportunities for the kids to get together.

You want to remember that the Church was really going, it was tremendous. Sunday Schools were increasing and new Churches were being built and we thought that the world was our dish. So we were laying plans for the "Christianization of Civilization." Every once in a while the world comes to that thought. And so, of course, Sunday School just wasn't enough anymore.

STRAUCH: During the late sixties, you stated that there would be more united churches by 1977. What do you think happened as we just passed 1977?

WALVOORD: The time is just past for mergers. That isn't the thing anymore. We thought and hoped, I think, that we could organizationally get ourselves united and that would facilitate the Gospel, and save a lot of time and energy. Now we've come to a little different conclusion, that there is unity in diversity. There, our divisions are a means, in the very diversity itself, of praising God. Now maybe that is just an excuse, but I think that sometimes.

STRAUCH: Do you have any idea why this movement stopped?

WALVOORD: I'm not sure that it has stopped, it is certainly that in the Reformed Church. We have stopped talking to other people, but COCU is still alive. You don't hear much about it these days. And it was a great idea and some men did some really fine thinking about the nature of the Church and the nature of the Sacraments and the nature of ministry and of Church Order. On all those things they had developed very, very fine principles. But the Church isn't ready for them. All the time each man has his own "thiefdom" here and there and everywhere, and how in the world to get people to give up the authority and the position and honors that they have. And you had to do that. It's all fine as long as you can be the head of the new organization.

STRAUCH: As vice-president of General Synod, you were head of the committee on regionalization. What were the reasons for this movement?

WALVOORD: It was almost impossible to administer the work of the Church from 475.

There was the East Coast and the West Coast which made us very spread out. Could a person from the eastern part of the country say what the needs of a person farther west were? There were differences of outlook and it seemed to us that it might be that we might be trying to provide services that weren't needed and why do that? Why not let people raise their own money, run their own areas, and hire their own staff and meet the needs of the Church. The idea was to service the Church and that was better done on a regional basis.

STRAUCH: Was it then that it was decided that the Particular Synods would carry out this work?

WALVOORD: Yes, and in some respects already the Particular Synods were doing their own thing. For example, in summer camps, they were all run by the Particular Synods. When I first started in the ministry, some 40 years ago. A Particular Synod was practically a nonentity. They met once a year and the group would get together and set a date to play golf (laughing) that same afternoon. But that is entirely different now. The two things it started with was the summer camps. Each Particular Synod got its own camp, and then the Church Extension man for each Particular Synod, and they became an entity as a Synod. So, little by little, their authority grew and New Jersey, of course, always had an old people's home. And that added more responsibility. Little by little that grew, and my idea was that regionalization had to be done through the Particular Synods. I never got that through. The powers in New York got their own apparatus set up and they never really worked out how, or worked with the Particular Synods, and that is the trouble now. A lot of our programs on our GPC are carried out through the Particular Synods. But that's always an uneasy relation because the Particular Synods do not send representatives to the Program Council. The Classes do. It still isn't right!

STRAUCH: So there wasn't much opposition to it then?

WALVOORD: (laughing) No, I don't think so. No, everybody was in favor of it. They saw it as a good thing. They objected to having to raise the extra money, but there were always guys who were eager to accept the authority and the responsibility, and so there wasn't too much opposition.

STRAUCH: From what I've read through in this project, that's probably the first thing to go through so smoothly.

WALVOORD: Yes!

STRAUCH: As president of the General Synod, you gave your Report to the General Synod, and it contained some ideas for the Synod itself. One was the biennial Synod meeting. Do you still favor this proposal?

WALVOORD: Sure, I think it is possible and I think it would be a good idea. If you are in the Board rooms, you realize that you are always working towards Synod. You have to get a report and it has to look good, and it has to look good every year. It's like the House of Representatives, in making out those reports, a lot of time and energy goes into getting ready for Synod. The time of the General Secretary is by and large taken up. And if they would have a biennial or even a triennial General Synod, I think it would strengthen the Church. Once every two years is often enough to set the course of the Church. I know there is some advantage in being able to get together at that time. I could see the real advantage, but you do that in other ways than a meeting in big formal session every time. So I was all in favor of the General Synod meeting every other year, and on the off year, meeting by Classis or Particular Synod would be better.

STRAUCH: You also wanted to down-play the Robert's Rules of Order to allow a more "pentecostal" movement in the General Synod.

WALVOORD: Well, I know I got rid of parliamentarians. I was my own parliamentarian. By golly, I ran a pretty good Synod too. A man who becomes President of Synod ought to study up the rules and know them well enough to move items quickly so the objectors don't have much time to get on their feet. You've got to be one

step ahead all the while.

STRAUCH: I've read also in a letter of yours, written while you were the General Synod Vice-president, talking about the Particular Synod of New Jersey. What were the problems involved with that?

WALVOORD: I don't exactly remember, was there any indication?

MRS. WALVOORD: That's right, Chris, the Particular Synod of New Jersey wanted to unite with the Presbyterian and make a united Synod.

WALVOORD: Yes, we were not for getting united with the Presbyterians. They were the cause of all kinds of complications. Dual authority, and dual allegiance down in Jersey and men in Jersey are kind of very capable but an independent lot. And they don't have a particularly strong internal leadership, just a lot of guys trying to jump over the traces. So of course, you simply can't say no to that because cooperation with any Church was all the thing to do. So we had to temperize it.

STRAUCH: Dr. Bruins has mentioned to me that there were some problems with your Congregation while you were the President of Synod. I was wondering if you would be willing to share that at this time?

WALVOORD: You know, when there is trouble between a church and a minister, usually there is two sides to the trouble. And undoubtedly there was in my case. But there were some times that might have caused trouble too. The former minister had been there some forty years, thirty-eight to be exact. He was well loved. The Church itself was an historic Church that had great pride in what it had done in the past, and the former minister was anti-denominational, he didn't want anything to do with the denomination. In fact, they had to discipline him to get him to go to Classis meetings, and he never went to Synod and things like that. To make it more difficult he remained in the community and was in Church every Sunday. But when I came he told me that he wanted to stay clear of all politics. But you can't do that if you're in the community and you had a place of leadership.

People won't let you alone. He tried but it was pretty hard for him. On the basis of that, things went fairly well for awhile and I was elected President of the General Synod. I simply misjudged the temper of the Congregation. I thought that they would be honored to have the Vice-president of the General Synod as their minister. That wasn't true. In the spring of the year, they questioned me a little bit, was I going to accept the Presidency of the Synod if I got it? I said "Yes." When I was elected President of the General Synod, it was announced in the Church on Sunday morning, and there was absolute silence. When I came back to town, nobody said anything to me about it. And then they had a meeting, a secret meeting of the Consistory, and I didn't know anything about it. And then the committee came and said that we have decided that they want me to resign. Well, if you're going to have a secret meeting, and they are going to ask you to resign, the jig is up. I decided that I couldn't fight that battle in the congregation, and also being president would break my health. So I simply, I immediately, wrote a letter of resignation and that was the end of December. I asked one privilege, and that was to live in the parsonage till the end of Synod. That way I didn't have all that moving. And they agreed to that and they agreed to also pay my salary through March. I thought that that's pretty odd, they sure don't want to have a President of Synod as their minister, but here they find themselves paying the President of Synod who isn't doing any work for them at all (laughing). So they got theirs. In a sense, maybe they got what they deserved, I don't know. That's about all I can say about it, that's from my point of view.

STRAUCH: In closing, in a speech that you gave, you said that "Protestantism, through its lack of attention, had reached the age of ignorance. Unless some vast effort is put forth, it cannot live in this educated world." That was in 1963. Do you think that has changed?

WALVOORD: No, I don't think so. I think we were just as ignorant then as we are now. And we are so distracted by 101 different things and we haven't the knowledge that we should have. I went out to the Ottawa Beach the other night. And we rode along with the windows down and, you know, that's the congregating place for all the young people, and there they were sitting in their cars like chipmunks or squirrels coming out of their holes, and in the trees. About every fourth car they had this beat of the music, loud, loud, music and that's the security blanket. It keeps them from accepting or receiving anything else. There are not any new ideas, the music keeps shunning it out. That's not true of everybody but for a lot of people. Their senses are not alert, and they are numbed by the modern music. So they just don't take anything in and remain ignorant.

STRAUCH: What do you suggest that will help us return from our ignorance?

WALVOORD: I don't know. It's pretty hard to know. Take over the media--I can't see that because that's a very mechanical thing. I don't know anything except word of mouth. Personal Evangelism.

STRAUCH: Would that include taking an active role in the community?

WALVOORD: Yes, that's it.

STRAUCH: So you have any closing statements before we close the interview?

WALVOORD: No, I've talked enough.

STRAUCH: It looks as if we've covered everything.

WALVOORD: Yes.

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