

Oral History Interview of Dr. Ronald Godwin

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Name of Interviewee: Dr. Ronald Godwin

Name of Interviewers: Randy Miller and Dr. Cline Hall

Transcriber: Jesse Ronda

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Miller: (0:01) Welcome to this second part of an interview in the oral history project of the Liberty University archives. This interview is being conducted on June 30, 2010. And today we're interviewing Dr. Ron Godwin. My name is Randy Miller and I'll be conducting the interview today along with Dr. Cline Hall. Good Morning Dr. Hall.

Hall: (0:20) Good morning this mor...

Miller: (0:22) And good morning Dr. Godwin.

Godwin: (0:23) Good morning gentlemen.

Miller: (0:24) Well let's pick it up with the Moral Majority then. You mentioned on our interview yesterday that you were up with Dr. Falwell. He told you about this new organization that was going to start. So, you were on the campus of Liberty working for Dr. Guillermin and then you're going to...did you actually eventually move to Washington D.C. so that you were living there full time or did you always do the commuting?

Godwin: (0:52) No we always commuted. I remained domiciled in, in Lynchburg but found myself spending most of my uh...most of my days, my work days, traveling to Washington, to other state capitals, dealing with the organizational growth of, of the Moral Majority.

Miller: (1:16) Now, one name that...I was doing some reading last night...Dr. Robert Billings. Was he the president or director before you were?

Godwin: (1:25) He was. As President Reagan was winning his first election campaign and moving into his first term as president. Dr. Falwell was seen as a significant helper by the president and one of the awards that was handed out quietly was a, a position in the government. And, and so Dr. Falwell had asked Robert Billings to serve as the founding director of the Moral Majority. And he, as the organization was just being organized and set up in Washington, Dan Reber was handling the budget and setting up the, leasing the offices and that sort of thing, and, and Robert Billings was serving as national director. And this government appointment came along and Dr. Falwell gave it to Billings who became assistant to the Secretary of Education. And so he moved out of the Moral Majority and into a government role and, and Dr. Falwell asked me then to become the acting director.

Miller: (2:56) But you remained headquartered here then in Lynch...or living here in Lynchburg...

Godwin: (2:59) Well I yeah, living...

Miller: (3:01) and, and but you spent your days and weeks up there in Washington D.C.

Godwin: (3:04) Either, either there or traveling with Dr. Falwell or, organizing state branches of the Moral Majority. There was a...it was a peripatetic time uh...Dr. Falwell traveled constantly. He wanted me to travel with him. We operated the office, had staff there. We attended all these meetings that I mentioned in my interview yesterday, held our own meetings. And so between Dr. Falwell's travel, organizing state capitals, running the office in, in Washington D.C., it was a very, very active time and we spent about a third of each day in a private airplane to be frank.

Miller: (3:56) Now, one thing that interested me last night as I was reading, ok, uh...Weyrich and Viguerie were both Catholics, Howard Phillips was Jewish, and you had mentioned yesterday that Dr. Falwell...they felt as though he could kind of bring along the evangelical vote. He had the television audience and all. Of those three groups that you mentioned yesterday, there was the, you know, the religious and very much on the social issues, republicans. There were the economic or the fiscal ones. Today we would have, in 2010 we would have the "Tea Partiers," so to speak, have a lot of interest in lower taxes. And then there were the old guard republican "we're just against the left" type of a thing. How would you say that when you were in the Moral Majority how would those percentages go? You know, were you mainly representing the religious folks or were you mainly representing those equally for all of those groups? Could you talk about that for a moment?

Godwin: (4:56) Well as I mentioned yesterday, Dr. Falwell was such a strong personality, such a visionary in his own right, and such a powerful figure, he didn't become anybody's champion. He had his own agenda and own goals and own mission. And so he reached out to all of these branches in order to achieve a coalition that would further the agenda God had called him to. And the issues that were paramount in Dr. Falwell's mind tended to be social or religious issues;

right to pray, right to life, issues like that and...the protection of Israel. So if I had to say that he focused on one branch more than others I would say clearly that would be the social or religious branch. The political conservatives and, and fiscal conservatives were generals without armies really. And they ate the fish and spit out the bones when they formed this coalition. They were glad to have Dr. Falwell come aboard. They would have like him to be much more...to emphasize much more their agendas, but he never did.

Miller: (6:31) So, so...

Godwin: (6:32) Dr. Falwell emphasized his agenda.

Miller: (6:33) So on a Sunday morning, if they had their way, his entire message would have been political...

Godwin: (6:39) Or, or fiscal or whatever, yeah.

Miller: (6:41) or fiscal or whatever, whereas he would get up and say "folks, we need to be fighting abortion and, and here's something that coming up on the horizon" or something like that. He would deal with some of those moral issues but he didn't quite, you know, get as involved in some of those other merely political issues.

Godwin: (6:57) No he, he did not. He, he was always gracious and kind and encouraging and enveloping in his attitude toward all branches of the conservative movement. I would put this out; most of these leaders that we've been discussing, before they considered themselves republicans, they considered themselves conservatives. And when I talk about the three branches, I'm talking about the three branches of the conservative movement rather than the Republican Party. The Republican Party is another entity that sometimes overlapped and over...and, and had common agendas but often did not and to this day often does not. Instead of the, the conservative movement as an umbrella term today we suddenly hear this term Tea Party. But it's a branch of the conservative movement and these people do not think of themselves first as republicans at all but first as Tea Party conservatives and that's another whole discussion for another day.

Miller: (8:05) Well but let's talk about it as it relates to Dr. Falwell then. When it come, came to Dr. Falwell he, while the people that represented his conservative viewpoints were often republicans, he would make it clear "I," you know "I'm not solely a republican. I'm an independent. I vote Christian. I don't necessarily vote with one party." He would often stress that.

Godwin: (8:29) That's, that's correct, he certainly would.

Miller: (8:31) Alright, um...

Hall: (8:34) Let me ask a question here. Do you know of any studies that's been made about who really supported the Moral Majority? Conservatives? Christians? Jews? Is there any statistics along that line about support or even financial support?

Godwin: (8:52) These are, are becoming a bit rusty at this point in time; history's passed us by. But I can give you general numbers. By, by far and away, most heavily supported by evangelical Christians. Next there would be a lot of Catholics who resonated Dr. Falwell's battle for right to life. A surprising number of Jews appreciated his friendship of...and, and defense of the right of Israel to have a homeland and, and Jewish people to have a homeland. And, and fiscal conservatives were just glad to have a champion who would bring troops and energy and, and great articulation abilities to the movement. Likewise, the political branch were happy to benefit from those assets and talents. But they also ate the fish and spit out the bones because their agendas never reached a level of um...

Miller: (10:13) There wasn't 100 percent overlap.

Godwin: (10:15) Oh no. Not by any stretch of the imagination.

Hall: (10:19) So there's no way to tell basically who supported financially? I mean...

Godwin: (10:23) Yes there is. You can...and I'll say again that the vast majority of the support came from evangelical Protestants and Catholics.

Miller: (10:35) Now, another interviewer that we...interview that we conducted, the person that we were interviewing kind of eluded to the fact that in Washington, you go into a typical senator's office or congressman's office, and Dr. Falwell was, in his mind, kind of erroneously believed to be able to deliver this group, you know, if, if you with the Nation Gun Associa...NRA, you could, you know, you could promise your senator "hey, if you support this bill, you know, we'll vote for you in that" um...did Dr. Falwell, did he really command a group of the population or did they go with him because he agreed with them, so to speak?

Godwin: (11:26) Well if you're, if you're asking me was the perception of the Moral Majority's influence and Dr. Falwells's influence greater than perhaps was the reality I'd certainly say it was and Dr. Falwell was highly skilled at creating that perception. And Dr. Falwell's powers of articulation and, and presentation were, you know, unsurpassed. And um...but to say was it actually a toothless movement that was all perception? Absolutely not, Dr. Falwell calls literally millions of Protestant and Catholic people of faith to register and vote and he did so in perceptible, measurable new numbers and it changed the political landscape of America and the enemies, the adversaries, the pendants, all recognized this influx of new voters and their impact on regional, state, and national campaigns.

Hall: (12:48) Any idea or estimate on how many voters actually registered, new voters?

Godwin: (12:53) Well there are wildly varying number but it's safe to say that on a national basis there were millions.

Miller: (13:01) I read one story where Dr. Falwell said "alright, everybody stand up. Now the registered voters sit down. The rest of you, we've got an election coming up and I'm going to keep doing this until Election Day."

Godwin: (13:11) He did that literally hundreds of times in hundreds of venues across the country and he did it to pastors and demonstrated to them how they should go home to their churches and, and they should do it. And he was a tireless activator of, of previously politically passive people of faith. And as time passed, he saw his ability to influence Jewish constituents become more active and Catholic constituents and, and even Mormon constituents and we met with the leaders of the Mormon Church. We met with Rabbis. I personally spoke in over 50 synagogues that he could not get to. Endless meetings with Catholic leaders in the country. And Dr. Falwell main theme was activate your people; cause them to understand that they have both a light and a salt responsibility as people of faith. And he broadened his reach to, to that more general term of reaching people of faith regardless of their particular religion.

Hall: (14:38) Normally we think of the Moral Majority as, of course, a domestic institution influencing American voters and culture. But you said you traveled many times to other countries. What was the issue here?

Godwin: (14:48) We did. We went there, because of demand. There was just huge fascination on the part of people in Australia and England and New Zealand and in Europe with this movement that was sweeping America. And the newspapers were full of it day after day. We subscribed to a news service that on a, on a given day we would often have two to three hundred newspapers a day carrying articles on the Moral Majority and Dr. Falwell. And this, of course, this carried around the world and request for Dr. Falwell to come and speak came from every corner of the earth [*laughter*] and um...we skimmed through them and, and he would...he debated the Prime Minister of New Zealand on one occasion in England, he went to Oxford, he was in Edinburgh, he, he personally carried out a lot of these assignments. But there were so many that he sent me and Cal Thomas and others to many other venues to act as what I would call pale shadows, surrogates of Dr. Falwell himself.

Miller: (16:10) Talk about the support for Israel and how he exhibited that.

Godwin: (16:19) He exhibited that by traveling to Israel many times. Meeting with the heads of state there from Menachem Begin later Menachem Begin's son to other national defense leaders, heads of the Knesset. I myself bespoke for the Knesset several times representing Dr. Falwell and the Moral Majority. There was a, a continual communication with leaders of Israel. And, well, then, of course, when he returned to America, or came away from one of those communications or meetings, he told this nation over and over again that people of faith had a

responsibility to support the right of Jews to have a homeland and so his defense of, of Israel as a proper and right homeland for Jews was without equivocation and was consistent um...never changed or, or deviated.

Hall: (17:41) Let's talk about, a little bit about organization of the Moral Majority. The organizational office but you have also state offices. How were these state directors selected? Were they people just volunteered or do that come from the national office?

Godwin: (17:57) We vetted those leaders and, and those offices, those state officers as, as best we could. I and I'm equivocating a bit because this was a much rooming movement and we were trying to set up fifty different state organizations at one time and normally, usually the state leader ended up being some pastor of a significant church in, in a particular state. And many times that worked out well, other times it was not so well. We had a leader in one state that, whose name will...I'll not share and I'll not even share the state, but who immediately upon becoming state leader went to, to the media, television and newspapers and what have you, and declared war on a local bakery because they were baking cookies that he said were too anatomically graphic and he managed to get off on so many extreme sidetracks that he, he attracted huge national negative attention and we had others who, who didn't work with the media so well. These were often pastors who had never before even given a newspaper interview [*laughter*] and, and suddenly they have a television camera or a microphone thrust in their face and they're being asked and they're being seen on or heard on national television and it worked sometimes and sometimes it didn't. And it was a thing that we literally could not control.

Hall: (19:50) Were these, at any time, were these 50 state chairmen met at one spot?

Godwin: (19:54) Oh yeah, we had annual and sometimes twice a year meetings with the state leadership and, you know, there were budgetary issues, there were organizational issues, there were our attempts to train these leaders to, to better deal with the media and better articulate our national agendas and, and try to get them to emphasize what Dr. Falwell was emphasizing at a national level rather than to, to get preoccupied with their own local issues...

Hall: (20:33) You mentioned, of course, the word budgets was mentioned there. Was it...were there state budgets or was this all from the central office? Finances...

Godwin: (20:40) There were both and, and that created organizational tensions that I had to deal with because many of these people saw what we were doing at a national level and saw the success we were experiencing at raising funds at a national level and said "oh we can do that" and then began to raise significant amounts of money and there was a arrangement by which they were supposed to, basically, pay state dues to the national organization and many of them decided not to do that. But I'm lapsing into some of the administrative details that I had to live with but uh...

Miller: (21:24) Yeah, those are very fascinating to us and, and if you don't mention them, it's not part of history.

Godwin: (21:28) It probably never will be mentioned but yeah, you know, there was the fact that we had a national organization made up of 50 chapters lead by strong, articulate personalities, most of them ministers, and who soon, monkey see, monkey do, began to copy what they saw Dr. Falwell doing on the national level for themselves and began to sort of stake out their own territories and their own agendas and we had to deal with all of those competing priorities and, and agendas.

Miller: (22:04) And lots of personalities [*laughter*].

Godwin: (22:07) Oh, very strong personalities. You know, these were pastors of, many times, of mega-churches and, in these states, and we often traveled around the country visiting...they all wanted Dr. Falwell to come and speak. So we very often would climb on our Westwind jet here in, in Lynchburg and stop in as many as eight or ten FBOs and airports around the country and hold press conferences without ever leaving the airport that...we soon learned that if we arranged for a press conference downtown or in a hotel, you know, you had land the jet, you had to get to the, through the FBO, you had to ride in a car through traffic and go to a press conference somewhere and you had all that to deal with. And the logistics of that and the expense of that, all of which I had to coordinate and organize [*laughter*]. And then you had...we hold that and I had to get this man, who was under such pressure to keep talking, back into a vehicle and back to the airport and so cut that all out. We started holding the press conferences in the lobby of the, of the FBOs at the airport and many times Dr. Falwell would climb out of the jet and the cameras would be on the tarmac facing him as he left. We often planned our next press conference between locations when we were flying and uh...we, I would give Dr. Falwell a series of notes on the back of an envelope or a piece of paper and I always used to marvel at how unbelievably eloquent I was cause I could give Dr. Falwell ten bullets and what I then heard from him was this beautifully articulated statement. And uh...I would say "really, I'm quite good at this."

Miller: (24:14) [*laughter*]

Hall: (24:15) [*laughter*]

Godwin: (24:16) It was amazing what he could do with a few...a small outline or a few salient points.

Hall: (24:22) Did the Moral Majority own the plane? Who owned the plane?

Godwin: (24:26) Old Time Gospel Hour probably owned it at the time. I, I honestly don't remember the actual registration. We paid for, you know, all the costs in operating.

Miller: (24:39) You mentioned the bullet points there and that just brought to mind here, was there a written platform so to speak or a statement of principles of the Moral Majority? Did you guys have your talking points? This is what we are for.

Godwin: (24:52) Oh yes we did. We, we had a, a national newspaper; the *Moral Majority Report*. And those principles and our agenda and our talking points were constantly being articulated through that organ. And then we, oh yes, we had all of our policy statements and outlines and we, we were doing direct mail that articulated that as well. Most of those documents from that day are stored somewhere here. Darryl Edwards, who is still an employee at Liberty University and was editor of...one of the editors of the *Moral Majority Report* and handled the production of our direct mail during that time, Darryl Edwards has collected and kept a great deal of that, of the materials and the documents from that era, and he either has stored it somewhere, knows where it is, or has it himself to this day. So Darryl Edwards is someone who could provide access to that kind of documentation.

Hall: (26:15) Ok, he was the editor of the paper? Who were the other writers?

Godwin: (26:17) He was one of the editors.

Hall: (26:18) One of the editors, ok.

Godwin: (26:19) There was Harry Covert...

Hall: (26:21) Yep.

Godwin: (26:22) who was sort of the senior editor at the time. Darryl was a very young man at that point. Uh...there were several other, other fellows who worked with him there. A fellow by the name of Jerry and I can't think of his last name now. He lives in Jacksonville now. But he...this person has, has...personal friend of Darryl Edwards and he's remained a contract employee of the University all these many years. He was an assistant to Darryl Edwards and Harry Covert at the Moral Majority during those days.

Hall: (27:00) What about the *Circulation*?

Godwin: (27:02) Well, the *Circulation*, that was a free newspaper but you had to sign a card and fill it out and request that it be sent to you and so it was a...we made people ask for it. And we made people provide the information necessary to send it to them. But our circulation reached over one million at one time.

Miller: (27:31) Wasn't there a story about Ted Kennedy receiving a Moral Majority card?

Godwin: (27:35) Yes. Ted Kennedy actually came to Liberty University and debated Dr. Falwell on the platform here at, at Liberty University and prior to the debate had dinner in Dr.

Falwell's home before doing the debate. Then the next day, the *Washington Post* carried two full pages of the debate between Teddy Kennedy and Dr. Falwell. And, and several hundred other newspapers carried excerpts of that debate. And from that time until his death, Dr. Falwell and, and Teddy Kennedy remained good friends and, and Senator Kennedy actually asked Dr. Falwell to visit his mother in south Florida and to pray with her on her sick bed several times. And so this extremely liberal senator and Dr. Falwell, behind the scenes, remained very good friends over a lot of years as was the case in Dr. Falwell and a number of controversial figures. Larry Flynt, Jesse Jackson, um...just a large number of people with whom he debated on the air or on television had warm relations with Dr. Falwell off camera or off mic.

Miller: (29:11) So now you've got this national organization, you've got Dr. Falwell as kind of their major spokesman there who has the pulpit of the Thomas Road Baptist Church. But on a week by week, day by day basis, in the hay-day of the Moral Majority, it sounds like you were involved in voter registration; get out to vote before campaigns. It sounds like you were setting up state organizations and trying to promote these principles in various states here [*clears throat*]. What kind of direct relation did you have with the Congress and the Senate? Were you proposing legislation? Were you supporting legislation that was going through the process? Or was this mainly just an advocating principles and how that worked out was left to chance a bit?

Godwin: (30:03) Well there was the annual attempt to promote legislation that would affect right to life. And those battles were fought year after year and they were usually attached to certain bills. But...and there were bills concerning prayer and school and there were bills on other issues that were specific. Many of them were generated by other branches of the conservative movement and we joined in supporting them. Um...the um...so it was a mixture of all of the above that we found ourselves engaged in.

Miller: (30:39) Was there any key legisla...legislation that you were the primary sponsor and supporter and were really pushing with?

Godwin: (30:48) Well I would say that, that we lead the right to life battle year after year. Now as to who actually was the author of, of a particular version of that on a given year, I, I couldn't go back and reconstruct that. We, we worked in close concert with...and we took full advantage of the skills and the technical abilities of say the political operatives of the conservative movement. They were based in Washington, they had office staffs, they worked everyday with the legislature. We, we didn't have to be all things to all men with the...

Miller: (31:34) So you were delivering the votes and, and the people and, and they were doing some of the grunt work behind the scenes...the lobbying and that to a greater extent.

Godwin: (31:44) And, and they were very good at crafting the, you know, the technical uh...mechanical process.

Hall: (31:54) Is there any particular senator or congressman that stands out in your mind that would be strong supporters of Moral Majority?

Godwin: (32:01) Oh, Helms was a...Jesse Helms was a great champion; great friend of Dr. Falwell and of myself. He and his wife and his children are people that I've all...I've known for over 30 years and Dr. Falwell and Jesse Helms were great friends and...but there were many, many. Dr. Falwell had this wonderful, winsome personality, as you well know, that he, he made so many people feel like they were his particular special friend and he didn't sort of fake that. He actually had an ability to, when he was with you, to make you feel like you were his best friend and I think he genuinely felt that way. He, he was a wonderfully piper personality.

Hall: (33:01) Now in the Washington office was Roy Jones. Was he what...would you call him office manager? Or what his duties day to day?

Godwin: (33:08) Well, Roy was there for a time. There were people well before Roy and, and after Roy. At a certain point he served more as a coordinator and, and an office manager, yes. Very young at that time and...but he had an appetite for politics and, and he believed very much in, in what Dr. Falwell was trying to accomplish and, and Roy was one of the numbers of people who served on our staff in Washington one time or another.

Hall: (33:45) How many people would normally be in the office staff at one time?

Godwin: (33:51) Two to six people depending on the time of year and particular events we had planned and what we had working. But we moved people back and forth from Lynchburg up there as events required and priorities required um...but we maintained an office and secretarial support there and lobbying staff there for several years.

Miller: (34:18) The...there was the *Moral Majority Report* newspaper that went out to anybody who requested it by signing up and saying "I'm going to sign, I'm going to sign the card and get my Moral Majority card." There was...wasn't there a fax service that...was it the *Falwell Confidential* and who was that geared toward?

Godwin: (34:37) That was usually sent to those lar...to a large number of, of ministerial and, and...there were a number of secular leaders who also requested to receive that but probably the majority of those recipients were pastors and, and religious leaders around the country. And Dr. Falwell sent them that *Confidential Report* so that they and their pulpits would be better currently informed about the issues that we were engaged in and confronting at any particular time.

Miller: (35:21) So was it more issue oriented? Would somebody who read the *Falwell Confidential*, would they maybe read the same thing in the *Moral Majority Report* later? Was it more in depth or was it more issue oriented?

Godwin: (35:34) It was written in a different style and a different manner and it was meant to make the pastor in the pulpit sound and actually be more knowledgeable about issues of national and international importance.

Miller: (35:53) What were the *Pastors' Policy Briefings*?

Godwin: (35:56) Similar; another version of the *Confidential Report*. But they were often face to face in meetings around the country and we could either communicate with them or we could meet with them and we held literally, if not hundreds, dozens and dozens of such briefing meetings. And many a Holiday Inn or many a restaurant and these briefings were basically Dr. Falwell making sure ministers in a given area or region were informed about these issues and not saying hurtful things in the pulpit basically. It was trying to keep the pastor, the local pastor informed and advised enough so that when he tried to help us, he actually helped [*laughter*].

Miller: (36:55) He was really helping you [*laughter*].

Godwin: (36:57) And didn't do something that hurt us.

Miller: (37:00) Now several of the other groups that we mentioned, yes this is a fiscal conservative group. This is a political group. But one group that seems to be very similar to what the Moral Majority was doing is the Christian Coalition and Pat Robertson is kind of their spokesman and individual. How did Dr. Falwell get along with Pat Robertson? What were the differences in how they handled things? And so was there cooperation there or were, you know, were you complimentary or cooperative or kind of at a clash or could you discuss that?

Godwin: (37:35) No, there was never a, [*coughs*] excuse me [*coughs*], there was never a clash. There was never a feud or confrontation. There was always a friendship but it was a somewhat, I think it's fair to say, it was not a close cooperative friendship. Dr. Robertson had his agenda and he had his constituency which was more charismatic branch of the evangelical world and he reached a constituency that was perhaps predominantly in that direction. And he had his, his own agenda and...but he and Dr. Falwell attended each other's conferences, spoke for each other, made sure that publically they, they presented a united front but we didn't in functional fact try to blend our organizations or, or do things in unison or in lockstep.

Miller: (38:54) Was there ever any talk of hey, we're both doing the same thing, why don't we get together?

Godwin: (39:02) Not that I remember, no. These are two men who each are...

Miller: (39:05) Are strong leaders of their own...

Godwin: (39:06) Yeah, who, who would support one another when, where they could and, and made sure that they national media did not try to create tensions and confrontations that were nonexistent. But each had their own, their own agendas.

Miller: (39:24) On a personal level, what did Dr. Falwell think when Pat Robertson decided to run for president?

Godwin: (39:31) Well, [laughter] I, I don't think Dr. Falwell was very impressed with that and thought probably that Pat should have preoccupied himself with other priorities.

Miller: (39:48) And did Dr. Falwell uh...was he ever approached to run for political office? Did he ever consider that for himself?

Godwin: (39:55) Well, many of the state leaders of the Moral Majority and, and other national figures occasionally suggested such a possible role but Dr. Falwell never once even flirted with that possibility. He said it would be a demotion and he was quick to say that and felt like his calling was first and last to be a pastor of a Bible believing church and to build this educational system he had, he had set up here in, in Lynchburg. I call it a system because he, you know, Dr. Falwell thought of it as kindergarten through PhD programs and so it wasn't, it wasn't just the University, it included the academy and it included kindergarten. So Dr. Falwell...that was his top priority.

Miller: (40:48) Well that was one thing that I noticed is that back in those days, that was really the start of the burgeoning Christian school movement. You mentioned Pensacola Christian College in yesterday's interview and they were really one of the forerunners there as far as that goes but so many Christian schools started in the '70s and it seemed as though a lot of the state leaders were leaders in the Christian school movement. Was that one of the major issues of the Moral Majority is advocating school choice, rights for homeschooling in...was that a major issue in those days?

Godwin: (41:25) It actually wasn't. The Christian school movement...you're right, many of those pastors were not only pastors of significantly sized churches but they also headed up Christian schools. But they were already heading up those schools when they joined the Moral Majority. They didn't start those schools because of Dr. Falwell. These...this Christian school movement had its own genesis and its own momentum and its own cycle of growth and, and it was occurring concurrently. And it was doing so well that, you know, we often supported Christian schools and Dr. Falwell championed them and he championed homeschooling. But no, the issues that we primarily focused on were not the defense of or support of the Christian school.

Hall: (42:33) How would you evaluate the success of the Moral Majority, for instance, in 1980 election, '84, '88? Was there a difference?

Godwin: (42:44) Well I, you know, I subscribe to a, a theory about people and organizations and, and that theory has to do with almost every organization, even people, are prey to cycles. And you have a beginning and then a period of growth and then you have a, a period of, of when you're at the zenith of your power and then, for a multitude of reasons, there tends to be a downward curve. Well, first election of Ronald Reagan, Moral Majority was embryonic. Galvanized a lot of people but very disorganized. It did not have the 50 state organization...

Miller: (43:34) It didn't begin until June of '79, is that right?

Godwin: (43:37) Not officially. But Dr. Falwell was active out there and he was meeting in the backseat of limousines at airports with Ronald Reagan and he was...and I was strategizing with Reagan's campaign people and we were initiating rallies and campaigns in various states uh...

Miller: (43:59) This is for the 1980 election?

Godwin: (44:01) Yes. But it was basically sort of a guerrilla movement that was not really that organized at that point but that was surprisingly [*laughter*] effective because we really came in under the radar and the opposition did not expect it, did not even know we existed really and took us totally for granted. And then you move on and by the next election cycle it was a, a known, powerful influence and by the next cycle it was a highly controversial and very powerful influence and after that cycle it began to wane and uh...slightly at first but then more so as, as we moved on into the '90s.

Hall: (45:00) Something ten...of course Reagan would not have been elected without the Moral Majority vote. Would you go that far or?

Godwin: (45:06) Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Well, you know, or the people that the Moral Majority galvanized into registering and voting. They might not be members of the Moral Majority at all but they were people that we influenced to become active as, as faith based voters.

Miller: (45:27) Did the Moral Majority ever consider supporting Carter because he claimed to be born again?

Godwin: (45:33) We did our best to not be a...uh needless thorn in his...you know, we sort of took a deep breath and stepped back rather than supporting or not supporting Carter.

Miller: (45:56) And now the whole issue with Oliver North. It seemed as though Dr. Falwell was a great supporter of his and everything. Can you discuss that issue for a moment?

Godwin: (46:05) Well, Oliver North was a charismatic sudden appear...suddenly appearing figure on the national stage. And as he was experiencing the investigation and, and the Senate investigation, Dr. Falwell met with and came to know Oliver very well and decided to be a supporter and a friend. And so he spoke out rather constantly, invited Oliver here to speak. We

all belonged to something called the Council of National Policy that Tim LaHaye founded a few years earlier and we invited Ollie to speak to the Council of National Policy, made up of all three branches of the conservative movement, and showed...demonstrated public and private support for Oliver North. I myself worked with Ollie on a regular basis in Washington D.C. and I had founded a 501(c)(3) organization that I donated to Ollie and allowed Ollie to change the name of it and, and to build a, a literal legal organization to, to build support and I worked with Ollie very closely for a number of years personally so he was a good friend of Dr. Falwell's and Dr. Falwell was a great friend to him.

Hall: (47:54) How much support did he get, for instance Oliver North ran for public office here in Virginia.

Godwin: (48:00) Yeah.

Hall: (48:01) Was there any attempts to...

Godwin: (48:02) Yeah, you know, that was later but Dr. Falwell did support him and, and went out of his way to try to help and, you know, it, it came to a unsuccessful end but nevertheless if you question is...no, there was never any change in, in that relationship. There was never any equivocation as is, was the case with many people in many issues, once Dr. Falwell set it in his mind what his position was he never varied.

Miller: (48:39) You mentioned yesterday Dr. Cal Thomas, he worked for the Moral Majority there. Could you give any thoughts or impressions there and was Dr. Falwell personally hurt when his book came out?

Godwin: (48:53) Yeah. Yes to the book. Yes to the fact that he worked for the Moral Majority and lived here and his family lived here and his children enjoyed free education and Dr. Falwell was very, very generous and kind to Cal Thomas in endless ways. And there's an old saying that no good deed ever goes unpunished and, and I think Cal Thomas is a great example of that. His book was indefensible. Dr. Eddie Dobson got involved with the production of that book and got drawn into it and later came back to Lynchburg and in church, personally apologized to Dr. Falwell for being involved in producing that book. Apologized for having any part in it. Cried in front of the audience and reestablished a relationship with Dr. Falwell that Cal Thomas never did. Although Cal Thomas again and again asked Dr. Falwell could he come back to Liberty and could he speak at Liberty and, and has several times asked Jerry Falwell Jr. could he do that since Dr. Falwell's death. In fact I think Cal Thomas may be the one person that I know of that Dr. Falwell had no interest in healing or rebuilding a relationship with. I don't know of any other person that Dr. Falwell had no interest in um...

Miller: (50:44) You know it's interesting somebody like Larry Flynt who really...it was over the top with his thing with the mother and the magazine and all that Falwell really forgave him and all but it seemed like uh...that uh...

Godwin: (50:58) Well, you know, this, even for an archive, I, there are limits to what I would be willing to get into but I'll just say this, Larry Flynt never would...had a home for him. He never had an education provided for his children. He never had numerous situations with the law involving his children rectified by Dr. Falwell and I could go on and on and on. Years of generosity and kindness he don...the Cal Thomas family and the return for that was this very, very unkind and unsupportable book. And, you know, it...the basic theme behind all the triteness in that book was that Christians should askew politics and should stick strictly to speaking the Gospel. And Dr. Falwell's position was the opposite of that. He believed Christians had two roles biblically based. The role of spreading light and the role of acting as a, a, you know, it, there was active citizenship responsibilities as well as Christians spreading the Gospel responsibilities.

Miller: (52:37) Good. So what came about to have you leave the Moral Majority then in 1984 and you went to work where?

Godwin: (52:47) Yeah, I was in uh...had been working daily in Washington D.C. for a number of years though still living in...so my, my contacts, my business relationships, my, my career relationships were largely based in Washington D.C. And, and I was offered a position as head of all the business operations at the *Washington Times* which was the conservative opposition paper to the, to the *Washington Post* and, and at a certain point in time I, I agreed to those solicitations and, and resigned here and, and went to work as the head of business operations at the *Washington Times* and worked there for almost 12 years.

Miller: (53:57) Now did Dr. Fal...did you go with his blessing or was that a little bit tense?

Godwin: (54:04) Oh, it was, it was uh...no it was a very difficult time for me. I, I was personally going through a real problems in my marriage. I, I was...which ended in a divorce. I was not, during this period of time, I was not particularly interested in living for the Lord. I was, say I was...I had caught the Washington fever and had become more career oriented is fair to say. And I was influenced by the fact that I had met with over thirty heads of state, endless senators, congressmen, lived in Washington, traveled around the world and all that went to head of a young southern country boy is all fair to say. And, but for...so I made some personal decisions, family decisions, that were...turned out to be horrific failures and...but career wise I enjoyed a very exciting life in Washington D.C. and became a corporate troubleshooter and, and fixer for the company I worked for and ended up traveling all over the world repairing corporate problems for the *Washington Times*; France, England, Uruguay, Venezuela, China, Europe, France. I was working internationally as much as I was working for the newspaper in Washington D.C. So experienced, career wise, phenomenal career change.

Miller: (56:00) So there was the *Washington Times* paper, there was also, wasn't there *Insight* magazine?

Godwin: (56:05) Yes. We had a equivalent to *Newsweek* or, or other magazines of that ilk. Also founded a regional golfing magazine that to this day operates a weekly version of the newspaper that was basically made up of op-ed and editorial pieces that went out once a week and still to this day does and um...

Miller: (56:31) I seem to remember a really thick magazine. Was it *The World and I*?

Godwin: (56:35) That's was a branch, a sub-branch of the publishing company that was more run by the owners of, of the *Washington Times* which was the Unification church group that um...and so that, that group was a very scholarly, academic type of organ but it really had...was another whole subdivision; had its own people and I had nothing to do with that particular organ.

Hall: (57:08) That was uh...the Moon organization or whatever his name is.

Godwin: (57:13) Yeah, yeah Sun Myung Moon was the founder of the Unification church and...

Hall: (57:17) Was there any relationship between him and Dr. Falwell? Were they friends or?

Godwin: (57:20) Yeah...

Hall: (57:22) Before this or?

Godwin: (57:23) Well, I would say that they met on various occasions always at the request of Moon who had huge admiration for Dr. Falwell and thought he was a courageous leader and...I met with Moon three or four times a year as business director of the newspaper because the newspaper always operated at a loss and we always had to go back to the old man to get money to keep the operation going. So I would have these pilgrimages that I had to make to, to get the next trunch of funds and often Moon wanted to talk about Dr. Falwell. And he had great admiration for him and, and they met several times over the years but been a lot written about that and so called donations and what have you that were made and they didn't happen.

Hall: (58:18) I was going to ask you, is there any truth to the rumor that the Moon money bailed out the University, I mean the minister?

Godwin: (58:25) No, no there's no truth to that. The, you know, there, there was some money that, that Moon provided a company that or foundation that Dan Reber and Jimmy Thomas were associated with and then Dan Reber and Jimmy Thomas, of course, have been major donors to the University and conspiratorial types tried to draw the link and, and the link just isn't there. But, you know, the devotees of conspiracies never give up.

Miller: (59:09) So, then we're going to skip ahead to 1998 when you come back but before we do that um...since you work closely there in Washington and all, did you have a personal perspective on the PTL scandal that was in '87?

Godwin: (59:25) Not particularly. I, I probably don't want to go there. I um...I, no, I don't want to talk about that.

Miller: (59:34) Ok. Um...

Hall: (59:36) What about, excuse me,...

Miller: (59:37) Sure.

Hall: (59:38) the Baptist Fundamentalist of '84. Did you help to organize that? The conferences in Washington?

Godwin: (59:45) Yeah, I did, I was involved in that.

Hall: (59:47) What was really, what was really the purpose of that and?

Godwin: (59:51) Well it was an, it was an attempt to regain national visibility and influence for that subculture of the evangelical movement and it was an attempt to promote national visibility and recognition and to create an organization that might be a replacement or a surrogate or a substitute for a tiring and declining Moral Majority movement. And it was not successful but it was an attempt.

Miller: (1:00:34) Well I know they, they brought all of the faculty up at the time from what we here and everything so that must have been quite an expense for the University.

Godwin: (1:00:42) Yeah it was a very significant operation and a very logistically tiring one. And of course I had to deal with all of that and...but that was what I did and even today what I do...

Miller: (1:00:57) [*laughter*]

Godwin: (1:00:58) so we got it all done. But the purpose behind it...it didn't have legs; it didn't last. It was a good faith effort that, you know, you sometimes throw eagles...excuse me...you sometimes throw chickens to the air and say "fly eagle fly" and occasionally one does and often they fall back to earth and this was a chicken that did not turn into an eagle, let me put it that way.

Miller: (1:01:29) So you kind of had left the Moral Majority scene in 1984 and tell us then about 1998. What was it that precipitated you coming back to be president of Jerry Falwell Ministries?

Godwin: (1:01:40) Well I'd had a number of years absence from here. Gone through a couple of divorces, had experienced a burnout with working at the, the *Washington Times*, had spent a couple of years doing corporate startups and running companies in Canada. It seems that I always have to live one place and work another. I, I...for all those years that I lived in Lynchburg and worked in Washington and then I spent nearly three years living in Washington and working in Canada.

Hall: (1:02:21) [*chuckle*]

Godwin: (1:02:22) And uh...but you can fly between Washington and Toronto and easily as Washington and Chicago so I made 52 trips one year to Canada and was involved in some business investments and startups there. But during the all these years that I was in Washington and even in this period of time between Washington and, and returning to Lynchburg, Dr. Falwell and I remained friends. And it's fair to say he continued to pursue me [*chuckle*] and to tell me I needed to get my life in order and my relationship to God back in, in place and that I needed to uh...come back and [*chuckle*] work with him. And here I was a, a divorced person, I had been working for an international cult figure, and for the fact that Dr. Falwell never turned his back, never gave up on Ron Godwin, never, never once ever said "you're not welcome and you're persona non grata uh...you're my friend, you will be till the day you die." You know, when I think back on it, it's an incredible miracle that this great man and this great leader and this great visionary, for what strange reason I never to this day can discern, loved Ron Godwin and wanted my company and wanted my friendship and, and asked me a thousand times to come back. And, you know, that, that boggles the mind. It stops the...I have no explanation for it to this day. But he never stopped that and after so many years and when I was in, really in great personal despair, he said "you need to come back. You need to come back where people love you. You need to be in...a member at Thomas Road. You need to be back here working for me. And come spend the weekend with Macel and me at the lake." "Uh...no you're not getting me out there for a whole weekend in one house with you. I won't go" I would say. And he'd say "well meet me in Charlottesville." And so we would...he would drive up to Charlottesville and I would come down from Washington and finally on one of those clandestine meetings at a, at a buffet place in, in Charlotte, Charlottesville, he, he talked me into coming back and in '98 I did.

Hall: (1:05:15) Now, you was, well, president of the Jerry Falwell's Ministries. Is that the title? What...

Godwin: (1:05:20) That's right and...

Hall: (1:05:21) What is the Jerry Falwell Ministries?

Godwin: (1:05:22) I, I didn't come back to the University.

Hall: (1:05:24) Yeah.

Godwin: (1:05:25) I came back to work directly for Dr. Falwell. And Dr. Falwell was...it was a strange situation at the time. He had been...Liberty had gone through this very difficult financial time, had gone into...gotten in to probationary status with S.A.C.S., and they had brought in uh...I can't...Borek, John Borek. And, and John was trying to lead them out of probation and, and he did at first as a consultant and perhaps did such a good job that Dr. Falwell hired him as president. And so as I came back in '98, Dr. Falwell was actually up in the Mansion limited, primarily, to running another organization; Jerry Falwell Ministries, a nonprofit corporation. Uh...and Liberty Broadcasting Network and raising funds through the faith partners and other entities and having only titular involvement in the University. In fact, as I just came back, there was an effort made, serious effort made, to move Dr. Falwell out of the Mansion and across the highway into some double wide trailer, off the main campus at the time. And one of the first, my first acts as, when I returned in '98, was to sit down and call all the board members and say "I'm back. And did you know that there's a movement affront to move Dr. Falwell out of the Mansion and across the highway into a double wide trailer and to make him, basically, kick him upstairs and make him almost persona non grata on the university campus that he founded?"

Miller: (1:07:18) Was, was that done because there was a concern about his effect on accreditation and that it was too tight?

Godwin: (1:07:23) That's right.

Miller: (1:07:24) Ok.

Godwin: (1:07:25) Their justification was that he had spent too much money, that he had gotten the school in financial difficulty, there was too much family involvement, and, and there were all these argumentations given, which I had no patience for what so ever. This is Dr. Jerry Falwell who founded this ministry and who is the spiritual head of this ministry and besides all of that, he was my friend. And there was not going to be anybody doing anything to him from now on because I was back. You know, I'm speaking, of course, from my point of view but Rod Godwin never had any agenda except to be, try to be one tenth the friend to Dr. Falwell that he had been to me. So my loyalties were...I didn't get up any morning of my life and agonize over whether I was going to be loyal to Dr. Falwell or not. That was a settled matter and will be till the day that I stop breathing. But when I heard about this, I mounted a campaign to put all that to a stop and it stopped very, very quickly after that. And uh...but I worked for nearly five years here for the Jerry Falwell Ministries and for...helped with the television and whatever Dr. Falwell needed me personally to work on.

Hall: (1:08:46) So it really was uh...Old Time Gospel Hour. What else was included under that Jerry Falwell Ministries umbrella?

Godwin: (1:08:52) Well, each of those is actually legally separate corporations and uh...but we won't go into that. There was a...we put the Old Time Gospel Hour into, into dormancy soon

after I came back and, and made a number of corporate changes. Basically, the biggest challenge, corporate entities aside, was the fact that Art Williams and others had stepped in to help with a massive debt problem and had helped remove most of that and that was necessary to maintain accreditation and what have you. But they left Dr. Falwell with about 17 million dollars in debts that he personally was responsible for and that's kind of the way Art works. He says "I'll do 90 percent but you got to do 10 percent" or something. So my first assignment when I came back was..."Ron, we got to get rid of this 17 million dollar debt." So we fought with that for the first five years I was back and got rid of it and we finally took care of it. But it took us about five years to do that. But there was always an estrangement about...people here were very uncomfortable with the fact that I was back and I was a divorced, cracked vessel and less than a pure saint of God and the fact also that I possessed this wonderful personality that tends to suck all the oxygen out of rooms I go into and, and that I make things happen and I make things change and that makes people nervous. So, Dr. Falwell used me and then clucked and said, you know, "did Ron do that? Oh my goodness, it's hard to get good help."

Miller: (10:44) [*chuckle*]

Godwin: (10:45) Then he would send me to my next assignment and once again cluck and say that and so I was brought in to create change and to get rid of that debt and to deal with a number of challenges. And um...eventually though I, I...university enrollment was crabbing sideways and, in fact, in slight decline. And a number of things were just not happening. And Dr. Falwell's becoming increasingly impatient with that. And Dr. Borek is attempting to do various things that cost significant amounts of money that weren't working at all. There was a highway billboard campaign that cost well over a million dollars that, that produces zero enrollment and then a radio...

Miller: (1:11:38) Was this national highway billboards?

Godwin: (1:11:40) Yeah, it was a very expensive campaign. It was a, you know, it was Dr. Borek trying to do something about the enrollment decl...decline. And Dr. Falwell was chafing about this and, you know, finally Dr. Falwell said, you know, "enough. We got to do something about it. So Ron, I'm going to put you in charge of enrollment." And made that decision and I was sort of imposed on the University at that point and my primary responsibility was to deal with resident enrollment.

Miller: (1:12:20) About what year would that have been?

Godwin: (1:12:22) About '92. Excuse me not '92, about...

Miller: (1:12:25) Two thousand...

Godwin: (1:12:26) 2002.

Miller: (1:12:27) Two thousand.

Godwin: (1:12:28) Yeah and um...you know, I um...I asked Chris Johnson...you know, I had a note or two here that I remembered. Uh...I hired Chris Johnson in 2000 I think it was. And we began to plot and plan and look at what we might could do about enrollment even, even then. The first six months Chris worked for me he was basically secretary to a, secretary; [*chuckle*] Karen [Tweedy]. He...Chris was leaving. He had resigned. He was frustrated with the enrollment situation and recruiting at the University and resigned and I heard about it and I knew he was a sharp young man and so I asked Dr. Falwell "can I grab this kid and not let him leave?" And he said "yeah."

Hall: (1:13:16) Was he, was he uh...trying to attract students? Is that his previous job?

Godwin: (1:13:22) Yeah he was working in recruiting...

Hall: (1:13:24) Oh, recruiting, ok. Alright.

Godwin: (1:13:25) down for the University and resigned and he was leaving. And so I called him up and said "come see me." So I, I said "don't leave. I, I'll give you a job." "Well what am I going to do?" I said "I have no idea. So go over there and sit at this desk and, and you'll report to Karen [Tweedy] and we'll figure that out." And we began to figure it out and in '02, we started a complete overhaul of resident recruiting. And I placed Chris in charge of heading that up for me. And between 2002 and 2006 we were able to grow resident enrollment dramatically and I...in...for example, I have some notes here that in 2002...in the school year 2...02-03, we had about 4,625 students. And the next year we went to 5,264, the next year 6,234, the next year 6 10...6 6...6,610, the next year 9,800, almost 10,000 we jumped to. The next year almost 15,000 and the next year 18,011 and then 25,000. Of course that's a combination of both resident and online enrollment. But uh...we got enrollment off the bubble.

Hall: (1:14:59) Now how...what were the methods to do this? The process.

Godwin: (1:15:01) Well it, it's too complicated to go into in, you know, in discussion of this kind. We, we opened up initiatives on a number of fronts. We tested many different recruiting initiatives. We shamelessly plagiarized best practices that we investigated and saw being implemented in other institutions around the country. I sent young people to visit a number of other schools. We, we looked for best practices and we implemented them and with Dr. Falwell's support, we were able to spend money in large amounts that nobody had ever spent before. Dr. Falwell trusted us to try things that cost money. And we were very careful and very judicious in how we did that but nevertheless we committed large sums of money to new initiatives. We basically...I went through nearly 25 people that we let go, brought in all new people. When anybody told me "no, you can't do that and the reason you can't do that is because it's not what we've ever done," or something, I basically cleaned out their desk and put somebody there who

was willing to learn and do something new. And because we cleaned out the “can’t do” crowd and, and put new leadership in and new personnel who were willing to, to do what Dr. Falwell and I wanted to try, we enjoyed great success and dramatic success. Perhaps unprecedented success in the annals of American higher education. And to this day we’re enjoying a precipitous, dramatic, revolutionary success in, in recruiting and we’re very grateful to God for that.

Miller: (1:17:14) Now at one point with the accreditation, wasn’t there something that your distance population couldn’t exceed your residential population and so that was kind of limiting that they had to kind of move up in balance? Could you discuss that?

Godwin: (1:17:32) Not exactly that but something that influenced sort of a balance or checkmate like that. You couldn’t offer any program online that you didn’t offer residentially and it kind of had that same effect. So if I wanted to offer History 203 online I had to have a class and a live teacher in front of a classroom here on campus to do that. And then at a, a point in time, that restriction was removed by the federal government. It was not a regional accrediting requirement. It was a federal government requirement.

Miller: (1:18:17) Because you saw the rise of places like the University of Phoenix that didn’t have any residential component.

Godwin: (1:18:24) Because they didn’t, they were sort of immune to this requirement and they enjoyed phenomenal growth. In the first number of years that I, I got involved in recruiting, I was focusing entirely on residential recruiting and Dave Young was heading up and still leading the online recruiting. [*clears throat*] And so my focus was entirely residential. But once we got that rehired, restaffed, refocused, once we had tested a bunch of different recruiting initiatives and found that those were most productive and, and most effective, that sort of began to operate on its own. And it was an operation that was becoming quite efficient and quite successful. And then um...and uh...I forget when it is now, when you’re having fun, but um...something like four years ago, or so, Dave Young decided that he had had enough of, of university administration and wanted to return to the aviation and wanted to build an aviation division that was second to none. Which, by the way, he’s doing and has done and continues to do. Over...almost 75 percent of all takeoffs and landings at our local airport now are as a product of our aviation department and Dave’s plans for our aviation school are, are dramatic and very, very worthy of support. But back when he decided he wanted to move to the airport, so to speak, Dr. Falwell had begun to chafe again at what Dave and Dr. Borek risked and others were calling managed growth. And Dr. Falwell preferred train wrecks to managed growth and he was...I think Dr. Falwell had a sense of mortality at that time. Really began to have some health episodes and other signals that he might not be with us that long and he engaged in a number of personal conversations with me about the fact that he didn’t think he had very long to live and, and he said “and I just believe that the University is being held back because of our very

methodical growth on the online side.” And I believe back at that time we had 12,000 and change online students. And so he asked me to come over and then take responsibility for online recruiting as well. And I did and again we had to go through personnel changes and, and Godwin created his usual chaos and upheaval and people disappeared and new people appeared and...but as I studied the online enrollment at that time, the thing that leaped out to...at me...it was like an epiphany. It was like a vision that, that I had. And that was that I was standing in a store that had empty shelves. I actually had a vision of a room that was...say this room. And that the door would be at that end of the room. And there'd be shelves down this wall, this wall, and across there and there would only be two or three products on all of those shelves. And we were spending millions of dollars advertising very few products. And I became very clear to me that we needed to fill our shelves up with products. Now, we had, on those shelves, individual courses of this type, that type, unrelated, gaggles of unrelated individual little courses. A professor, like our friend here, might be interested in left handed Indian arrowheads or something and so he would create a course for whatever. And uh...that was an exaggeration, but the point is everybody was doing their own thing and, you know, there was no coherent degree programs being offered except one multidisciplinary program and the business school was trying to do something with a master's in business. And so two degree programs is all we had to sell. Well I also felt totally convinced that I didn't need to study what nonprofits were doing. I came to the early conclusion that I needed to go study online for-profit institutions because they were the biggest. They were the ones who were growing. They were the ones who were enjoying success and so I assigned a number of staff to, to enroll as students in all these schools and I sent others to visit these different for-profit schools. We went into a study mode and I quickly ascertained that what we needed to sell were degree programs and I assigned somebody to study that. And they came back to me and said “if we convert 82 of our current resident courses into online courses, we could go from two degree programs to 30 degree programs.” So created...I high jacked the café staff up here that were providing technical support and turned them into a, an assembly line and we cranked out, over the period of a spring and into a summer, 82 courses and converted them from traditional classroom courses to BlackBoard online courses. Suddenly, we had 30 degree programs to sell and the rest is history. Rollment, Enrollment jumped from nine or 10 percent to 52 percent and 47 percent, and whatever, and uh...so today we have 52,000 students and not that many...just several years ago we had 12,800 students or whatever and today we have the equivalent of what I call an alternate of endowment by way of the income that we experience online. And Dr. Falwell was able to see that happen and begin to really take off before the Lord took him home and he had great uh...he took great comfort and pride in that happening and I was so glad he was able to see. And let me make one thing clear here; when he appointed me to these positions and he gave me the support and the license to make these radical changes and he provided funds and all the rest, he also, on a daily, hourly basis, collaborated with and worked with me on this. This is not something Ron Godwin ran off and did on my own. To say...and Dr. Falwell was not some ethereal super-presence in the far background. Dr. Falwell and I had breakfast every day of our working lives on...during the week. We had lunch

most days of our lives together. We...my wife called it my other marriage. Dr. Falwell was intricately, minutely involved in all of these decisions and his creativity and leadership...I was sort of the expedite...or the implementer. Dr. Falwell was very much involved in these changes. He often backed up and if it became unpleasant and let me [*laughter*] take the blame for whatever had to happen but was his fingerprints all over it and was his creativity there? Absolutely; he was very active on an hourly basis everyday.

Miller: (1:27:24) Now at one point I remember seeing charts; 25,000 residential, 25,000 DLP. You know, this is our goal. We all want to get on the same page and all. Was there a time when you really had kind of planned to build all the dorms in order to do that or that id...was just one of the ideas in the, in the whole process of things and, and did that quickly go by the way side?

Godwin: (1:27:48) Well you know, Dr. Falwell was a caster of visions. He...and he really believed in doing that. And uh...it...25-25, it was so beautifully symmetrical [*laughter*].

Miller: (1:28:01) [*laughter*]

Hall: (1:28:02) [*laughter*]

Godwin: (1:28:03) And so he loved to say “we’re going to have 25,000 on campus and we’re going to have 25” and I was always telling him privately that “Doc, that’s not the way it’s going to happen. You know we’re going to grow the online like this and we...you can’t build but so many dorms and so much infrastructure and, and so many classrooms and cafeterias and at a time. And that costs astronomical amounts and here we can grow...” and he says “I don’t care. It sounds beautiful and it inspires people and so I’m going to keep talking about 25-25 until I kind of just doesn’t work anymore.” And, and he did and we often laughed about it privately because he’d come down from the platform and he would have done his 25-25 thing and I said, you know, I’d say “you did it again.” And he’s laugh at me and go on because it casts...people, you see, to this day you’re...you remember 25-25...

Miller: (1:28:53) [*laughter*] Right.

Godwin: (1:28:54) And, and...

Miller: (1:28:55) And I always kind of thought that it was “well, I don’t know that it’s going to work that way” but [*laughter*].

Godwin: (1:28:58) No but, you know, my explanation was reality but it was also complicated and he knew how to cast a vision that inspired and encouraged people and, and he kept it, he kept it simple.

Miller: (1:29:13) When it comes to the LU online, it sounds as though you had some input in the um...going from the assorted programs uh...classes actually, just individual courses on the

shelf, to having the 30 degree programs and doing the transformation here. Were you involved in the early days of LUSLL and in the, in the video days and all or was that kind of behind you; by the time you got there it was fully involved in the...

Godwin: (1:29:41) No, I'm the, I'm the um...I'm guilty. I'm the culprit. I invited Dr. Falwell to breakfast one morning up at HoJo's at, at the top of Wards Road where it was located in those days and told him I had an idea and, and had written it out on paper and said "you're a creature of television and you're a, a pioneer and, and so we should be teaching education on television and we should use television to, to do this." And I pitched this entire thing to him at a breakfast meeting; Bill Paul was there. And he got excited about it, picked up the phone at breakfast, at HoJo's that morning, and called the then president of SACS. Told me to call the jet pilot and by one o'clock we were in, in Atlanta. Didn't bother to tell Pierre Guillermin at all. And...he was having a one P.M. lunch with the then president of SACS and gaining permission to have a probationary online program. We commandeered a couple of classrooms. I hired a young artist to, to paint the room and fix it up a bit and hang lights and, and we stuck cameras in classrooms and, and we began to record professors in uh...as they taught classes and LUSLL was begun...

Miller: (1:31:24) About what year would that have been?

Godwin: (1:31:26) I don't know. I can't remember.

Miller: (1:31:28) [*laughter*] Ok.

Godwin: (1:31:29) I can't remember. Somebody here will know when we started that.

Miller: (1:31:33) Ok.

Godwin: (1:31:34) Frank Garlock's son was the artist who, who redid the classrooms. We hired people to write syllabus, softcopy syllabuses for the classes. We put...Bruce Braun was here in those days. He's back now but I mean there was many years when he wasn't here and now he's back but he was involved with the television at that time.

Miller: (1:32:04) And was everything...

Godwin: (1:32:06) I got to go very soon.

Miller: (1:32:08) Ok. Was, was everything in the LUSLL prog...was it all video tapes or were there some that were audio only classes?

Godwin: (1:32:17) I can't remember if we had any audio. I know the overpowering majority of them were all video. We have, we have thousands of, miles of video tape.

Hall: (1:32:28) Now as I understand it, that was sort of uh...well the premiere way of doing things at that point.

Godwin: (1:32:34) Oh yeah, that was cutting...

Hall: (1:32:36) Cutting edge...

Godwin: (1:32:37) That was state of the art. Oh yeah, that was uh...we even used two cameras in some of the classrooms and that was technological breakthrough. Yeah, that was...so I was happened to be there at the first day of the, of the beginning of LUSLL. And I happened to be back when we decided to galvanize online education from sort of managed growth to a much more dramatic precipitous period of growth.

Miller: (1:33:12) In the few moments we have left, let's talk about the time after Dr. Falwell's death then. And then in 2009 you became the vice chancellor so can we kind of pick it up from there and give kind of a recap of these past few years since his passing?

Godwin: (1:33:26) Well, you know, I was first brought over to regalanize online enrollment. And then within a few months, Dave moved out to the, to the airport and Dr. Falwell said...you know Dr. Falwell didn't understand subtraction. He always just added. And so he said "in addition to doing this or this or this, you'll also do this, Ron." And so I continued with the enrollment and then he made me executive vice president in Dave's place and later they changed that title to vice chancellor. But we went through a couple of stages there. There's no real difference. There's certainly no pay difference and uh...one thing Dr. Falwell was good about was increasing my titles and not my pay but uh...the uh...you know, the...I assumed the administrative responsibilities as Dave moved to the airport.

Miller: (1:34:29) So, what does the future hold for Ron Godwin? Where do we uh...do you have a plan in mind for retirement or what are we thinking of?

Godwin: (1:34:36) No I don't have any...you know I took a year off, basically, before I agreed to come back and work with Dr. Falwell in '98 and during that year I had long planned all the things I would do during retirement and I had...I did them all in the first six months and found out that retirement is not what it turned out to be. And Dr. Falwell always said that the only people who retire are the people who didn't like what they were doing to start with and so I don't have any plans to retire. I'm going to work till as long as my health holds up and Jerry Jr. can put up with me and, and so I, I don't have any plans to retire.

Hall: (1:35:22) What do you see about in the future of Liberty University?

Miller: (1:35:26) Right now, what is it that um...why do you think that Liberty has such phenomenal growth compared to...there are colleges that are closing down right now. What makes the difference for Liberty?

Godwin: (1:35:40) Liberty is a distinctively Christian university as versus a distinctively Christian Bible school or small limited service college. We actually are a full service university that affords contemporary students a fully accredited contemporary education. We are able to give a student a quality university education that is also distinctively Christian. And I don't believe that there is another institution in the nation that actually gives such a combination. I'm very actively involved, and will be meeting for breakfast on Friday of this week, the founder of a medical college in Blacksburg, Virginia and we're very actively exploring adding a medical school to Liberty University. We already have an engineering school, we have a law school. This is truly becoming a full service university and offering students a quality contemporary university education that is also distinctively Christian. And I just believe that's a unique combination. Not to mention the fact that we have a highly skilled recruiting team and a brilliant recruiting strategy if I do say so. But uh...but the fact is, you can't keep selling what's not real. And one of the reasons we were able to sell so successfully enrolling in Liberty University is that there is a unique combination of, of educational assets available here.

Miller: (1:37:37) Do you have any concerns for the future of Liberty if there was one thing that boy, I know for Dr. Falwell, he seemed to always be concerned "I don't want it to be the Harvard or I don't want it to be the Yale. I don't want it to go liberal" was one of his concerns. What, what is your concern if, if any for?

Godwin: (1:39:53) I have those same concerns, I really do. And the older I get the more I resonate with those concerns. I understand how quickly a university can change and how quickly its mission and its direction and its purpose can be altered. And I'm concerned about those possibilities. I'm comforted by how alike his daddy Jerry Falwell Jr. is. People, because he's a lawyer and not a, a pulpiter, they may not be able to see as well as I can, on a daily basis, how alike his father Jerry Jr. is; how determined he is to keep us on the right course. And of course he's supported by his brother at the um...at the church. And so between these two boys, I'm very comforted about the near term future of this institution but I remain vigilant concerned about its long term prognosis.

Miller: (1:39:00) And any parting thoughts? A memory of Dr. Falwell, a final thought today.

Godwin: (1:39:08) Well, Dr. Falwell was a, a great friend to me. He was a true, genuine friend. He was a friend when hardly anybody else was. He was a friend to me when I went through personal failures and disasters and he never wavered. He never gave up. And it's a mystery to me why this man chose to be a friend to me. But he was a great man of faith. My parting thought about Dr. Falwell is of all his many attributes and assets, he was brilliant, he was a mathematician, he was a writer, he was an artist, he was an entrepreneur, he was an educator. All these things, primarily he was a man of immense, intense faith. I was often astounded by his faith. I can't tell you how many times he initiated something that would keep me awake at night and I would tell him at breakfast "man I couldn't sleep." He said "well that's good. It's good

you stayed up because I slept like a baby. No reason for both of us to stay awake.” And Dr. Falwell’s faith carried him through many, many trials that would have brought 99 percent of the rest of us to our knees. A man of faith, that was Dr. Jerry Falwell.

Miller: (1:40:46) Well thank you Dr. Godwin. And with that we’ll conclude today’s interview with Dr. Ronald Godwin. This interview has been conducted as part of the oral history project of the Liberty University archives.

[end of interview]