

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **William M. Miller (CN 387, T1)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words that were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as “ah” or “um” are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

() Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcript was made by Wayne D. Weber and Hannah Parish and was completed in January 2011.

Please note: This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.



Collection 387, Tape 1. Oral history interview with William M. Miller by Robert Shuster on February 23, 1988.

SHUSTER: This is an interview with Dr. William E. Miller...

MILLER: McElwee Miller.

SHUSTER: William McElwee Miller...

MILLER: Yes.

SHUSTER: ...which took place at Dr. Miller's room in the Germantown Home in Philadelphia. This interview took place at 10:30am on February the 23rd, 1988. And it was done for the Billy Graham Center Archives. Dr. Miller, thank you very much for being willing to be interviewed. I appreciate it. Most of this interview is going to be based on the very thorough interview that was done of you by the Presbyterian Historical Society in 1979. I just had a few additional points I wanted to go over with you.

MILLER: Thank you.

SHUSTER: You mentioned in there a number of people that you had known that I thought it would be interesting to get some more personal description of, starting with.... You mentioned that you were in school with L. Nelson Bell.

MILLER: Yes, when I was a student at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, Nelson Bell was a student and he was a member of the Student Volunteer group in the college. I did not join the Student Volunteer Movement at that time, but I was deeply interested in missionary work and Nelson was dear friend of mine. And he went to China, had, of course, an outstanding career there in China. I have his book, which I read with great interest. After his return from China he kept in close contact with me until the time of his death, so I counted him a very dear and cherished Christian friend.

SHUSTER: From your days when you were in school together, how would you describe him physically? What did he look like?

MILLER: I don't remember distinctly. I know he was a baseball player. But I don't remember distinctly just what he looked like.

SHUSTER: What about his personality? What stands out in your mind about his characteristics?

MILLER: You know, that was a long time ago. All I can say is that he was a fine Christian brother.

SHUSTER: You mention that he used to correct your French papers?

MILLER: No.

SHUSTER: Grade your French...?

MILLER: No, no.

SHUSTER: Oh.

MILLER: I had the...the responsibility of correcting some of the freshman compositions. I was the assistant to the professor of English and some of the papers that came...come of the compositions that came needed correction. Some of them were papers from Nelson Bell and later when he became a well-known writer I chuckled to myself that maybe I had a little part in correcting his English at one time [laughs].

SHUSTER: While you were in Iran and he was in China, were you ever in contact with one another?

MILLER: No, not at all.

SHUSTER: You mentioned that he was very active in the Student Volunteer movement at the University. Did you ever hear him speak?

MILLER: I don't recall that I did.

SHUSTER: Are there any memories of him or anecdotes that come to mind?

MILLER: I'm afraid not.

SHUSTER: Okay. Well, let's go on to someone else. You mentioned that perhaps one of the main factors the Lord used to move you to Iran was hearing Dr. Samuel Zwemer speak.

MILLER: Yes it was.

SHUSTER: Can you tell us a little bit more about the occasion?

MILLER: I heard Dr. Zwemer speak first at the Student Volunteer Convention...Quadrennial Convention in Kansas City in 1913. He made an appeal there for someone to go to China and take the place of Bill Borden who was going as a missionary to China but who, while learning Arabic in Egypt, died. Dr. Zwemer was calling on someone to go to China. Later Mr. Harris did go and tried to take Bill Borden's place. Later, while I was in Princeton Seminary, Dr. Zwemer came there and gave a series of lectures on Islam and told us that the people of Islam were at that time, he said, one seventh of the world's population. They had been more neglected by Christians than any other people. There had been hardly any converts, and perhaps the difficulties were greater than from other groups and he called on us to volunteer and go as missionaries to the Moslems. As a result several of us at Princeton Seminary felt this was God's call and we did go as missionaries to different parts of the Moslem world. And from that time on I felt that I was close to Dr. Zwemer. I

was indebted to him for being the messenger to call me to Iran and I later saw him a number of times when he was professor of missions at Princeton Seminary. He gave me copies of his books and was in fairly close touch with me until the time of his death.

SHUSTER: How would you describe him as a person?

MILLER: He was tremendously enthusiastic. He was very outspoken in his [pauses] witness to Christ and his condemnation of Islam as a religion that was inadequate to the needs of men. Some people would say he was too antagonistic but he certainly did speak the truth with boldness [Acts 4:31] and he was an indefatigable speaker and writer from the time that he had become a Student Volunteer in 1887. He was really, as his biography calls him, apostle to Islam. The...this biography, by the way, was written by [J.] Christy Wilson Sr., who was a classmate of mine in Princeton and went as a missionary to Iran. So through this biography I got better acquainted with some of the events of Dr. Zwemer's life.

SHUSTER: You mentioned that he was tremendously enthusiastic. What do you mean by that?

MILLER: Well, he was almost jumping up and down when he was talking about the needs of the world and the needs of the Moslems. His enthusiasm expressed itself in his...not only in his message, but in his manner. He just [pauses] praising Christ and glorifying Christ and singing hymns of praise. He was tremendously enthusiastic person.

SHUSTER: You said that he was not afraid to say how Islam was not adequate for the needs of men.

MILLER: Yes.

SHUSTER: How do you mean that?

MILLER: Well, in his...in his books and in his writings he called on people. He felt that Islam had...had really denied the centrality and finality of Christ and that we Christians must realize that and must present to Moslems the true picture of Jesus Christ. It is not enough to say that Christ is a great prophet. Christ is the Son of God, Christ is the unique savior of the world. After his retirement, he wrote three books: *The Glory of the...Glory of the Manger, the Glory of the Cross, the Glory of the Empty Tomb*. Three very fine books about these great events in the life of Christ: His birth, His death, and His resurrection.

SHUSTER: How would you describe him as a speaker? You said how his speaking a great influence on you.

MILLER: Oh, he was tremendously effective as a speaker.

SHUSTER: Why do you think that was?

MILLER: Because of the message, because of his enthusiasm. He was eloquent and he was, of course, thoughtful in what he said. He wasn't just speaking words, he was speaking a message of...of truth, power.

SHUSTER: When...if you were to close your eyes for a minute and picture him at the podium, was he the kind of speaker who made many gestures or stayed in one place? Was there anything particular about the way that he preached or lectured?

MILLER: I really don't recall that. I don't think he stroll...walked around the platform very much. He probably gesticulated, but I don't recall definitely how he...how he lectured.

SHUSTER: Was he a person who had many hobbies or interests?

MILLER: His interests were in Moslem things, pictures and trinkets and anything like that that was connected with Islam interested him deeply. He wrote on all aspects of Islam – animism in Islam, the law of apostasy [law cited in the Koran that Muslims are not free to convert from Islam and are punishable under the law if they do] in Islam. He wrote on all these things. He was a man of varied interests but those interests were all devoted to the Kingdom of God.

SHUSTER: You...did you ever have him as a teacher?

MILLER: At the time he came to Princeton and lectured there, I was in the student body. He was not...he was a...he was a lecturer, not a teacher, not on the faculty. When he came there on the faculty, I was not a student and I did not sit in any of his classes then. I visited him but was not a student of his.

SHUSTER: So this might not be something you could talk about firsthand but do you have some impressions of what he was like as a teacher, what his relationship with his students was?

MILLER: Well, I think it was a very close, friendly relationship. I'm sure he was personally interested in his students. He was a great joker. I remember once he was to go from Princeton to New Jersey to lecture there. And I went along with him. And the car broke down. So he told us jokes to amuse us while we were waiting for the car to get fixed. I remember one of his jokes. I don't remember jokes, but I do remember that one joke that he told us at that time. Something that may be of interest was that when he was lecturing at Princeton, I was...he was getting a room in the dormitory where I was, Alexander Hall. And I was appointed to see that he got to his meals. So one morning for breakfast he came down and I said, "All right, I will take you across to the Friar Club," where he was to eat that morning. And he started to run across campus at top speed and I had to run to catch up with him. So we arrived and he had worked up an appetite for breakfast. When he was leaving on the train from Princeton, I helped him to get down to the station and took his bag in and to my amazement, he opened up his pocket book and showed me a picture and said, "There's a girl you can have." He was about to give me his daughter. I was overwhelmed. I was grateful for his generosity, but at the moment I was not prepared to accept this gift.

SHUSTER: You must have made a good impression.

MILLER: That was the kind of person Samuel Zwemer was.

SHUSTER: You mentioned that he occasionally told you some jokes to while away the time. Do you remember any of those?

MILLER: Well, the one that I remember was that there was a person who said that he could... [Pauses] Oh, how was it? He [pauses] could tell jokes that could split any piece of wood. And so she began telling these jokes and one after another these jokes resulted in the splitting open of a log out there. A log just split open. And then another log split open as these jokes were told. And then there was a joke that was told and nothing happened. And they wonders what the trouble was. And when they examined, they found it was English walnut. It was a joke that the English could not understand.

SHUSTER: It takes a little while longer with the English to get a good response.

MILLER: [Laughs]

SHUSTER: Is there anything else you would like to add about Dr. Zwemer?

MILLER: I don't think so, except that he has inspired many of us to go on with the task of evangelizing Moslems.

SHUSTER: What do you think it was about him that inspired?

MILLER: It was his devotion to Christ, his devotion to this task, which he believed was the task of the church. And the belief that God was in it. If God be for us, who was against us. [Romans 8:31] And whether we see results or whether we don't, we must continue. I think one of his sermons was, "We have toiled all night and taken nothing." [John 21:3] All right. Still, we must lay down the nets. We must still keep on fishing [for souls]." And he believed that all these changes that were taking place.... He had a great desire, I think, to get in a plane and fly over Mecca and distribute Christian literature freely from the plane over Mecca. Well, I don't think he ever did that, but he would have been amazed how many people have gone into Saudi Arabia – Koreans, Pakistanis, and others who are working there. They 're not there as missionaries, but some of them are Christians and some of them are praying. I'm sure that Dr. Zwemer's heart in heaven is glad what he sees as going on.

SHUSTER: Of course, there is the Samuel Zwemer Institute in California...

MILLER: Yes.

SHUSTER: ...which carries on his work.

MILLER: Yes, I rejoice that this institute, which is doing good work bears his name.

SHUSTER: Another person you mentioned in the interview was Dr. Kenneth Scott Latourette. Could you tell me a little bit about how you met him?

MILLER: Before I went to Iran [coughs]...before I went to Iran I was for one year the traveling secretary of the YMCA [Young men's Christian Association]. And I went to Dennison College and was meeting with the cabinet of the YMCA there. And after the meeting I asked who was that little man with the bald head sitting back there, saying nothing. And a student said, "That was Mr. Latourette. He went as a missionary to China, but his health failed, so he had come back and he is teaching here in Dennison." Well, later this little man whose [laughs] health had failed in China began writing books. And he has written more books that I've ever been able to read. And he had been on the faculty, of course, of Yale Divinity School and once when I was on furlough he kindly asked me to come and speak to the students there in chapel. And I was his guest one night. And he had the habit when I ever sent him a copy of one of my report letters [sent regularly to his supporters to let them know about his work in Iran], he would type me a little short note thanking me for it. I don't know how many missionary letters were answered by him in this way. And I said to him, "How on earth do you get all the time to write all these books and write all these letters that you write." He said, "Other people have family responsibilities. I do not." He was unmarried. He said, "I devote to my writing what other people devote give to their...the time that they give to their families." I said, "Well, how do you write? How do you compose these books?" He said, "I...I compose them on the typewriter. I don't have to write them out long hand and then copy them. I write them directly on the typewriter." And I was in touch with him until the time of his death. And I felt that he was certainly a very dear friend and a person to be highly respected for his understanding of the Christian message and his ability to tell the story of the history of Christianity so effectively.

SHUSTER: You mentioned that he was a close friend. What are some of the words you think that would describe him as a person, his personality?

MILLER: Well, the things that come to me was that he was so very humble, very simple, a very sincere Christian scholar. If you had been talking with him you would never have got the impression that he was such a great scholar and had done such an outstanding work. He was just doing what God had given him the ability to do with great humility and devotion.

SHUSTER: Did he ever discuss his own conversion or his own testimony with you?

MILLER: I don't recall. He was, of course, in Yale. I think he was influenced by Henry Wright and some of the other great Christian people who were in Yale at that time. As a result, he went out to China and certainly as far as I know was a devoted Christian to the end of his life.

SHUSTER: Did you ever hear him lecture or preach?

MILLER: No, I did not.

SHUSTER: Did he have a particular...? Of course, he was interested in the church worldwide. Did he have a particular interest in missions to Islam?

MILLER: I think not. I think his interest was worldwide.

SHUSTER: I remember when I was in college in the 1970s, his book on China and the Far East, was still a standard text...

MILLER: Yes.

SHUSTER: ...for Chinese studies. Is there anything else that you would like to add about Dr. Latourette?

MILLER: No, I just want to praise God for raising up a man like this who did such a effective work in the various strategic positions - in Yale Divinity School and also his interest in other boards, organizations. He was always attending meetings. He...I don't know how many organizations he was a part of and was a helpful member of the work of Christ wherever he was.

SHUSTER: You also mentioned earlier, before we began the interview, that you had known Mrs. Belle Sherwood Hawkes, miss...Persian miss...Presbyterian missionary to Iran. [The BGC Archives has a few of her papers in Collection 39. Most of her papers are at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.]

MILLER: To be accurate, I think I did not know her personally. She was in the city Hamadan and I was in another part of Iran and she died. But I did know her husband. Dr. [James W.] Hawkes continued in Iran after the death of his wife and after the time of retirement came to him and he did a magnificent work in preparing a Bible dictionary in Persian. It was a tremendous task and he got it completed before his death. And so I just remember seeing this old gentleman sitting quietly at his desk doing his work once or twice when I went there. In those days, we didn't get around Iran very much. Travel was very slow. And so I did not see much of Dr. Hawkes, but I have...thank God for his devotion to the work of Christ. I know that at...I think it was at the 1926 interchurch conference in Iran when there were Moslem converts there present. He made the remark that, "What we have been hoping and praying for is now coming to pass, the seed that has been sown is now bearing fruit," meaning that there's a work of Christ...a church is being built up in Iran in which Moslem and Jewish converts are taking an active part. I believe he made some remark like that at that time.

SHUSTER: Did you...so you did not really know him very well?

MILLER: No, I did not.

SHUSTER: Hmmm.

MILLER: Have you...do you...? There's a picture of Mrs. Hawkes in one of the...the books of missions of the Presbyterian Church riding on a donkey. Do you [the Billy Graham Center Archives] have that picture?

SHUSTER: We have some pictures of her. I don't think we have that one. I'll have to look that one up.

MILLER: Maybe I can find it for you. Picture of her. She used to get on a donkey and ride out to the villages.

SHUSTER: Yes, we have reports of hers when she's describing her work among girls...

MILLER: Yes.

SHUSTER: ...and also some letters to her family in which she talks about riding in the mountains on donkeys and some of her adventures. But she had died by the time you came to Iran for the first time?

MILLER: I cannot remember just when she died. I think it was after I went to Iran.

SHUSTER: Another friend you have mentioned a couple of times is J. Christy Wilson, Sr.

MILLER: Yes.

SHUSTER: Can you describe him a little bit and your first meeting with him?

MILLER: Yes. We were classmates in Iran [probably a slip of the tongue; they were classmates at Princeton Seminary]; he was married. And...very few of students at that time were married, so he was rather an unusual person. He had a lovely wife. And when the...a number of us who were planning to be missionaries had been praying very earnestly that God would call other students to volunteer and we would talk to them one by one and pray with them and seek God's guidance for them. And we talked to my friend Christy Wilson and he was quite sure God had called him to service in America. And then the...the First World War came and the United States government asked some seminary students to become chaplains and some of my friends volunteered to go as chaplains. And then the war ended and they were not called up. And then my friend Christy began to think, "Well, I was willing to go overseas for my country, but I was not willing to go overseas for my Lord. Near the end of the year, we invited a representative of the Board of Foreign Missions to come and talk to the senior class, soon to graduate, and to appeal to them to go as missionaries. He did so and I remember well. I was sitting in the room and Christy Wilson was sitting ahead of me. And when the appeal was made, to my amazement, Christy Wilson got up. I remember seeing his hand behind. His hands were twitching behind his back. And he said he had been willing to go overseas for his country, not for his Lord. But he was now willing to volunteer. If he was needed, he would go. And I was thrilled. So it was the end of the year. He had not thought of a special field. Perhaps it was because that I had already been appointed to Iran that when he applied to the Board of Foreign Missions he said that he would like to go to Iran. And so he was appointed and we went on the same ship. He and his wife [Fern Wilson] and his little son Jack traveled by ship. And they went to Tabriz in western Iran and I went to Meshed in the eastern part. That's a thousand miles apart, so I saw very little of them at that time in Iran. But he became an outstanding evangelist and wrote interesting materials about the conversion of Moslems. And his...there in Tabriz, another son was born to him who named Christy, Jr. And when Christy, Jr. was a boy twelve or fourteen years of age, he came to Tehran to go to school and he was a close friend of my son, William Miller Jr.,



there. And I got to know him fairly well at that time and he's been a dear friend of mine all the rest of his life.

SHUSTER: You mentioned that you were surprised when you saw Christy Wilson going forward? Was that because...? Why were you surprised? Because you thought he was going to minister in America?

MILLER: He had said definitely that he was called to serve in America. And this was a decision that he was willing to volunteer to go overseas if he was wanted. And so this was a big change in his attitude which resulted in his going overseas. Probably partly as a result of that, his son born in Tabriz had this deep interest in missions, and his great desire to go to Afghanistan, serve in Afghanistan, came out of this. Later when Christy sen...Jr....excuse me, Christy Sr., left Iran and was on the faculty in Princeton Seminary, he was acquainted with Dr. Frank Laubach, the great evangelist of literacy and Dr. Laubach wanted to go to Afghanistan and he wanted to have somebody to interpret for him. So he got Christy, who knew the Persian language, which is also understood in Afghanistan, to go with him. And when he was there in Afghanistan, some of the officials said to him, "Do you know anyone who can teach in our government schools, teach English?" And he said, "Well yes, I know someone. In fact my own...my own son would like to go. And as a result, Christy Jr. went to Afghanistan at the institute there. So the father was deeply, deeply interested in his son going overseas, serving in Afghanistan. And I am sure he is rejoicing in heaven at the great influence that Christy Jr. has.

SHUSTER: How would you describe Christy Wilson Sr. as a person? What do you think were the main...main aspects of his personality?

MILLER: Christy Wilson Sr.?

SHUSTER: Sr.

MILLER: Well, he was a very dear, devoted, sincere Christian. A friendly person. He'd been interested in the conversion of Moslems, able scholar.

SHUSTER: You mentioned "very friendly." Can you think of some examples of that?

MILLER: No.

SHUSTER: Is there anything else you would like to say about him?

MILLER: No. I just praise God for the influence he and his wife had, not only in Iran but when they came to Princeton. Their home was an outstanding center for the entertaining of people from other countries and he had a great deal of influence on the students of Princeton to go as missionaries during the time he was on the faculty there. And his wife died just a few months ago in California.

SHUSTER: You say he had a great influence on students to go to Iran....

MILLER: And other countries.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh. How do you mean that?

MILLER: Well, what influences people? If someone is concerned about some particular work and someone is seeking God's will in his life, this one who has a deep concern can influence other people. And quietly there in Princeton, he and...and his wife influenced many people. You ask any of the students who were there while he was on the faculty. Many of them will tell you what a deep influence the Wilsons had on their live.

SHUSTER: Can you think of some particular people?

MILLER: No, I cannot.

SHUSTER: Another question I had wanted to ask you about. When you were in Iran and were presenting...talking about Christ to Iranians, particularly those perhaps who you were talking to for the first time, what did you find was the most effective of beginning, of presenting the Christian message.

MILLER: Every Moslem is different from every other Moslem. You can't say this is the way to do and start in and follow any preconceived program. You have to find what it is that causes this person concern. Somebody is sick. I would tell them of Christ's healing. Somebody is in trouble. I will tell of the comfort Christ gives. I had a card printed in Persian and I kept copies of this card in my pocket, traveling on buses, anywhere. On the back, printed on one side, was my name and address, on the other side were the words of Christ, "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy burdened and I will give you rest." [Matthew 11:28] And I gave out many of these cards, hoping that somebody that was weary and discouraged would want to turn to Christ. How many did, I do not know. Then if some person would come and want to talk with me about Christianity, about the Christian beliefs, usually he would state his own opinion, his own prejudices, his own misunderstandings, I would try to clear up those things without getting into a controversy. I always tried to avoid controversy if possible. But when the Moslem says, "Jesus did not die on the cross," or the Moslem says, "Jesus foretold the coming of Mohammed," or the Moslem said, "Jesus was not the Son of God, he was only God's prophet," all that one can do is to state clearly the truth. And the Moslem says, "This book that you have is not authentic. The Christians changed their book, therefore it is not trustworthy any longer," we have to defend the authenticity, accuracy of our Christian records. And so different matters would come up for discussion. But if there was no need for this sort of discussion, I would often ask different people who came to see me to read parts of the Sermon on the Mount. Many Moslems found this high ethical and spiritual teaching in Jesus to be new and very interesting to them. And then we also had evangelistic meetings in our churches when the gospel was preached in the churches. In missions like this, I never mentioned Islam. I never mentioned Mohammed or the Koran. I tried to give the Christian message, emphasizing the aspects of it that Islam does not have. The fact of a savior, the fact of a resurrection from the dead. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. The assurance of the presence of Christ with us today. I tried to emphasize these things and I think some of those things were attractive to people who were looking for something that was deeper than what Islam could give them. And so I tried to adapt

what I said, my presentation of the Gospel, to the needs of the people or the group of people with whom I was speaking.

SHUSTER: A while ago I did an interview with a man named Robert Ekvall, [BGC Archives collection 92] who was a missionary to Tibet, and he mentioned that he found that almost every Tibetan that he came in contact with, whether it was a shepherd or the head of a lamasery was...enjoyed or was fascinated by theological discussion and he often found that the best way to begin was with the Gospel of John, "And in the beginning was the word,"[John 1:1] because the part of the spoken and of...the idea of communication played a very important part in Tibetan Buddhism. Did you find a somewhat parallel interest in theological discussion?

MILLER: Oh yes, the people of Iran love to talk. They talk about religion. They talk freely about religion. It is, I think, much easier to get into a discussion of religion or spiritual matters with Moslems than it is with the average American. It is not something.... For instance, I was traveling along the road one day in a wagon, a horse drawn wagon, and I saw all the way over in the field a man who was threshing his wheat. He was driving the cart round and round over the pile of straw and the wheat was being broke up so that they could the wheat from the chaff. So I went over to take a picture of him and when I approached, this farmer said to me, "What do you think of God?" That was his first question. "What do you think of God?" I said, "God is...we Christians call God, 'Father.'" He saw from my dress that I was a foreigner. He thought that I was a Christian. (I was.) And he said, "No, you can't call God "Father," because anything that you can think of, God is different from that." And so there, this farmer there, who I did not know, started a theological discussion right here while he was sitting on this [pauses] strange kind of thing. It was breaking the wheat up, the wheat from the straw.

SHUSTER: You mentioned too in your interview that although most of the Iran population was not literate, could not read or write, most of those that became Christian or attended Christian services were literate or at least a good portion of them.

MILLER: That is true, yes. Most of those with whom we were in contact were literate. That does not mean that we did not have contact with others. Our hospital for instance treated thousands of patients every year. Many of them were illiterate people. And some of our missionaries had a special work with the poor in the lower part of Tehran. They were mostly illiterate people. We tried to reach them. However, while there were some illiterate people who seemed to be drawn to Christ and wanted to become Christians, most of those who did were people who could read, who could study the New Testament and see what the Christian teaching is.

SHUSTER: Were they also of a more middle class or upper class...?

MILLER: Yes. They were mostly people who had a living of their own.

SHUSTER: Why do you think that was? Why was the middle or upper class was more attracted than the lower class?

MILLER: Well, they had more intellectual interest. And also they were able to [pauses]...to study and think and find out what about this Christian religion. Is it really different from Islam? Is it

something better than Islam? I think they were people who were able to consider the claims of Christ.

SHUSTER: Of course, a comment that is often made about Western missionaries to various parts of the world is that people accept Christianity because they see it as part and parcel...they saw it as part and parcel of Westernization, of access to the wealth, resources, abilities of the West. How valid or invalid do you think that idea is?

MILLER: There were perhaps some people who felt that this was the case. I get the impression that there were not many Iranians who became Christians for this reason. We tried explaining what Christianity was. Now, there were students in our schools who professed the Christian faith and they...some of them may felt that, "Well, our teachers...our missionary teachers are good people. They're educated people. And they have something that we have not had." Perhaps by that...for that reason, they said they would like to become Christians. Most of those who said that for this reason, of course, fell away. You won't stick to the Christian faith unless you know Christ, unless you are rooted in him. Many people did profess faith for one reason or another and did not stick, did not remain.

SHUSTER: Are there any other comments you would like to add about presenting the gospel in Iran?

MILLER: My own feeling is that the important thing is to present the person of Jesus Christ. There were two young women who came from Iran a few years ago to study in America. They studied petroleum engineering. These girls were sisters and while they were here, Christian friends—Campus Crusade people and others—invited them to come to church. They said, "All right. We have our religion. We're Moslems. You have yours. That's all right. We don't need to change our religion." And then these girls said, "We began to realize that Christianity is not a religion. It is a relationship to a person. When we realized that and began to study the person of Jesus Christ – His teachings, what He can do for us now, we put our trust in Him." They became very devout Christians. They went back to Iran several years with the assist...with the assistance and encouragement of Campus Crusade [for Christ] and they are there right now. And these girls are trying there quietly to witness to Christ. I get news of them from time to time. A couple of years ago they came to America and were here in this room telling me of the religious situation in Iran. And I feel that that is...what they discovered is the important thing. Some of the people in Iran would say, "Religion? I don't have time relig...for religion." Well, that means saying the prayers, keeping the fasts. They were busy. "We do not have...we don't have time for it." I would say, "I also am not interested in religion. I want you to know the best person who ever lived

[Recording is stopped and restarted]

MILLER: ...him. As far as I know, this man, Mr. Jan E. Lee, continued to pray for him as long as he lived. It is just another instance of how around the world have supported the wonderful ministry of Billy Graham.

SHUSTER: When your interview was conducted with Mr. Thompson from the Presbyterian Historical Society in 1979 that was just when the radical changes occurred in Iran.



MILLER: Yes.

SHUSTER: When the Shah's government was overthrown and the Islamic Republic was inaugurated [1979].

MILLER: Yes.

SHUSTER: I wonder if you could give me your impressions of how this has affected both the church in Iran and the work of foreign missionaries in Iran.

MILLER: Of course this revolution has completely changed the situation in Iran. America was considered up to that time as the friendliest of the foreign nations because of the outreach of our missionary work, our hospitals, our schools in which thousands and thousands of people have been taught or treated or shown kindness. There were people all over the country who felt friendly to America and the Americans, whether they were Christians or not. When I was riding a train or I was riding a bus, almost always somebody would say, "You are an American, aren't you?" "Yes." "Well, my mother was treated in your hospital in Meshed" or "My nephew went to your college in Tehran." And people were friendly. This unfortunate political event has poisoned the minds of many of the people. They have been told that America is their worst enemy and I am told that there is still a lot of anti-American feeling in the country. Now what has...what effect has this had on the missionary work? Well, first of all, all Americans were expelled from Iran and all Protestant missionaries, as far as I know, have been forced to leave, not only the American Protestants, but the English and others. I do not know of any...any Protestant missionary who is now working in Iran. Some Catholics, by one way or another, have been able to remain, a few. But their work has been limited. Now a number of Iranian Christians have left the country. They felt that they were under pressure. Those who had the means and were able to get to France or get to Canada or get to the United States have done so. Probably there are thousands of Christians who left the country or they did not know what the future had for them. While the government has not apparently taken active measures in trying to exterminate the Armenian churches and the Syriac-speaking churches, certainly those churches have been affected by the present situation and many of their members have left. They feel afraid for the future. "When is the government going to turn against us?" As for all the Protestant churches...and remember the number of Protestants in Iran has been very small, perhaps three or four thousand Protestant church members in a country of, I don't know, thirty or forty million people. The effect on the Protestant churches has differed. The English church in the south is Esfahan and Shiraz was especially attacked by these active [pauses] Islamic fundamentalists and the...the pastor of the Shiite church which was murdered and the bishop was threatened and he was told by his church that he had better leave the country. And he did go to England..

SHUSTER: Was he...?

MILLER: ...and....

SHUSTER: Excuse me. Was the pastor murdered by a mob or was he tried.

MILLER: No, two...two men came in...he was a Moslem convert. Two men came to talk to him about religion and when his family...he didn't come for lunch and when they went to find him, they found he had been brutally murdered. The men had fled and, of course, nothing was done to find who they were. And then the son of the bishop was riding in his car in Tehran and he was held up and murdered. [Tape recorder turned off and on] It seems there was a fund in the Episcopal Church that some of these people wanted to get rid of and apparently, in trying to do this, they were intimidating the bishop and the leaders of the Episcopal Church. Of course, the money was never turned over to them, but they did take over the hospitals and everything. And so while this happened in our sister church, the Episcopal Church in Iran, in which there are a good many Moslem converts, it did not happen in the Presbyterian churches, which is called the Evangelical church of Iran. And that church has continued. However, some of the leaders of the church felt that it was unwise for them to stay in the country and they came out of the country. One man is in New York today and some are in other places. And so the churches have continued there without the trained leadership that they need. However, young people have been coming along and I have been told that Moslems have been coming to our churches in large numbers and I have been told that some have been publicly baptized in the Presbyterian church in Tehran and there is an Assembly of God church, most of whom are Armenians, and they are very eager to reach Moslems. And they are selling large quantities of Christian literature. More Bibles and Testaments and Christian books have been sold in the last two or three years than were sold in the previous ten years. And so we are told also that many of the people in Iran have become quite disillusioned with Islam. There's an Armenian pastor there and he's a very aggressive evangelist. And he has made the statement that he believes God has raised up Khomeini to show the people of Iran what Islam is and to turn them from Islam. And there are many people in Iran who say, "If this is Islam, we do not want it." And some are turning are turning toward Marxism and some are turning to Christianity. And these two girls to whom I referred, when they were here said that they believed that there were...there's a greater opportunity to present Christ today in Iran than ever before. Unfortunately, the number of people who are qualified to do it is very small. But God is using various means. He is using the radio, He is using Scripture distribution, and His own ways of leading some people to Himself. And I believe that the day is coming when there will be freedom once more and Christians from other countries can come and help the tiny little churches in Iran find the people who have become interested. I believe the day is coming when there will be many other people in Iran turning to Christ.

SHUSTER: From your sources of information, has the policy of the government moderated toward Christians?

MILLER: No, I don't think so. I think the policy of the government is just the same. But "the government" so often is just a group of Moslem mullahs in Shiraz or in Tehran. Or in some other place. And they do what they want. And the central government does not try to control them or is unable to control them. And so I think the attitude of the government...if they were...they were logical, they would say, "The people who were Moslems and have become Christians, they are worthy of death. That's the Mos...Islamic law." But I think that they realize that of they began doing this, they would get such bad publicity abroad, they would suffer for it. So they seem to be...when Christians aren't causing trouble, when they are not too outspoken in their Christian witness, especially not in condemning Iran, they will tolerate them. I think that is the situation today. They tolerate Christianity, while they are not happy that there are Moslems who have



become Christians. [Some unintelligible words followed by the tape recorder being turned off and on. Apparently, the interviewer did something that caused the tape recorder not to record the next ten minutes.]

SHUSTER: Dr. Miller, through my mistake, we missed about ten minutes of your comments. I wonder if we could pick them up.

MILLER: Yes. I will just mention some of the things we were talking about and then you can remind me if I missed something.

SHUSTER: Okay.

MILLER: I was just saying that I have always tried to point people to the person of Jesus Christ. What we want is for Him...people to know Him and love Him and submit to Him. In Iran, Christ is highly thought of. He is thought of the greatest of the prophets and people would say, "He is the greatest of the prophets, except for Mohammed himself." In the Koran, Jesus is called the Word of God. And that, of course, plays very directly into the first chapter of John, the Word of God, and they recognize that. They object to we calling Him the Son of God because there is a general misunderstanding. When we say Jesus is Son of God, the general understanding is that...of people is that we think God took a woman, Mary, and that they had offspring. Of course, we don't meant that. And if we use the term "Son of God", we have to explain that this does not mean physical sonship, it means a spiritual sonship. And so Jesus is thought of as one who performed great miracles. God gave Him the ability to heal the sick. This is mentioned in the Koran. And it's interested to me, if you want to praise a physician in Iran, someone who has cured your mother, who has died [sic], you can say, "Doctor, you have the breath of Jesus. You can make the dead people alive." So Jesus is highly thought of and that is a great advantage to us in talking to Moslems. However, the Moslem would say, "Yes. But he is not one with God." And that is the difficult thing to them...for them to accept. They misunderstand the Trinity. They think that Christians have taken two human beings, Jesus and His mother Mary, and have made Gods of them, along with God. And, of course, we haven't. And so it is only when the Holy Spirit can enlighten the mind of a Moslem that he can say, "Yes, Jesus is Lord. He is one with God."

SHUSTER: You...you mentioned too that you had thought that some devout Moslems even had more affection or love for Christ than for Mohammed, not...not because they have a Christian understanding of Christ, but because of why...of how he is presented in the Koran.

MILLER: Some of the great poets of the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth century have praised Christ in the highest terms. It looks that they have read Christian books or knew something about Him. They spoke beautifully of Him. Indeed, these verses are known by Iranians, often quoted by Iranians. So there is much that God has done that helps us in our presenting Christ. And so...but the question comes up, did people in Iran become Christians just because Christianity is the religion of the great world powers and they thought it would strengthen their country if they became Christians. Maybe so, but I don't think that this happened in many cases. Most of those in Iran who became Christians did so because they had studied the Bible with us or with other Iranians. Sometimes they had visions of Jesus, or dreams of Jesus and led them to seek to know more about Him. Or because they had seen a Christian friend, somebody who had come to know Christ. If you

look across the hall or across the room here, you see a beautiful Persian rug that was woven by the best living artist in Iran, Husayn Behzad. He had been an opium addict, alcoholic. And a Christian friend, Iranian friend, brought him to the Church. He became a Christian. And his life was changed. His wife became a Christian. And when I wanted to have a rug woven to present to Christian Sem...to Princeton Seminary, he designed this beautiful rug. And now the Moslem convert who is a rug weaver wove the rug. Also, it appears on the cover of a book I was asked to write, *A Christian's Response to Islam*. These were people who needed Christ. They studied the Bible, they put their trust in Christ. And I think most of the Iranian converts had come in that way. Now....

SHUSTER: Let me...let me...

MILLER: Yes.

SHUSTER: ...say that the rug is very beautiful, very colorful, and it is a scene of the Good Shepherd finding the lost sheep [Luke 15:1-7]

MILLER: Yes. Yes, I have often thought that the lamb in the arms of the Good Shepherd is the artist himself who designed this. He was a lost sheep, and Christ had saved him and he designed the rug really to tell his own story.

SHUSTER: Going on to another subject, the formation of the Independent Board of...of Foreign Missions, can you tell me a little about what you heard in Iran about why this...about how this came about, how this split came about?

MILLER: I am glad to say that this formation of the Independent Board of Foreign Missions did not seem to affect us in Iran. We were all missionaries of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church. We were loyal to our board and to our leaders. And as far as I know, no member of the Iran mission or missionary of the Iran mission left the mission because of this split in the church. However, as we learned what had happened (what I learned, secondhand) was that Dr. [J. Gresham] Machen, who had been my Greek teacher, a very wonderful teacher and a friend of mind, felt that the Board of Foreign Mission was too liberal to support. It was sending out missionaries who were not perhaps Evangelical Christians and the only thing to do was to establish another board that would send out only evangelical Christians. And this led to the formation of the Independent Board. And when this was done, Dr. Machen was asked to leave the Presbyterian Church because he was done...had done something contrary to the rules of the church, which in did. And he also formed the Westminster Seminary [near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania]. So Westminster Seminary had done beautiful work, training many ministers and we can be thankful for that. But while several members of the faculty at Princeton (Dr. Robert "Dick" Wilson and Dr. Machen and perhaps several others) left Princeton because of this, others who were certainly as devoted to Christ as were these brothers (Dr. Charles Erdman and Dr. J. Ross Stevenson, the president [from 1914-1936]) they did not leave and did not feel they ought to leave and.... So I was sorry about this split. But God uses even our mistakes and failures and he has given His blessing both to those who remained and to those who left.

SHUSTER: Why was it heard...that you heard, you think...that Dr. Machen heard that some of the missionary appointments were not Evangelical, just...

MILLER: I do not know. Maybe he knew of these appointments, maybe he had examined the records of these people. I don't know. But I believe that that was the reason for the founding of the Independent Board.

SHUSTER: You had mentioned too that you thought that some of Dr. Machen's followers thought there had been too much emphasis on social work and...

MILLER: Well, as I said, in the Presbyterian Church there are people who love Christ but they have different understandings of what their Christian duty is. There are some people who emphasize evangelism, there are some people who emphasize the effect of Christ on society and they are trying to see that through the influence of Christ the condition of people are changed. And some missionaries with the emphasis were sent to China and other countries. And as I say, I was not here in America. I only learned secondhand what was going on and I would prefer not to comment further, except to say that there was considerable misunderstanding at that time. Dr. Robert E. Speer, a great Christian leader, was accused of not being true to the gospel. This is false. He was true to the gospel of Christ. He wrote a very fine book at that time, *The Finality of Jesus Christ*. He did not his crit...his critics, but went along carrying on his work to the end of his service to the church. And fortunately the years have passed and I think a great deal of this bitterness has passed and we are able to work together in harmony, promoting the service of Christ.

SHUSTER: You had mentioned that a one time you would not really have been welcome to teach at Westminster or to preach at Westminster. Is that no longer so?

MILLER: I was not asked, but I would not say that the reason was that they distrusted me. Perhaps I shouldn't have given that impression. I didn't have the privilege of speaking there for some time. I now have that privilege. I am grateful for it.

SHUSTER: You had mentioned about Dr. Speer...Speer, that he was perhaps the finest Christian that you have known. What did you mean by that?

MILLER: He was devoted to the gospel of Christ. He was a brilliant scholar. He was fearless in his statement of the Christian faith. He was a man of great humility and love. The fruit of the Spirit was seen in him abundantly. And as I have mentioned, I have never seen a Christian who was greater in spiritual life or personal devotion to Christ than Robert E. Speer.

SHUSTER: How would you describe his personality? If you were meeting him for the first time, what things do you...what things would impress you about him as a man?

MILLER: Well, he was a very tall man. He had been a football star at Princeton. I...he had a very powerful voice. He had an amazing memory. He had the ability to speak again and again without repeating himself. He presented the work of Christ very powerfully whenever he spoke and when I would hear his voice speaking, it seemed to touch the very depths of my heart and my mind.



SHUSTER: I know in your [1979] interview you mentioned that at the time you had been appointed moderator of the church [in Iran], he had visited Iran and, of course, went through great difficulties and suffering traveling to the mission stations and how this impressed you, his desire to meet the missionaries and talk with them and learn about their needs and also his Christian humility. Are there perhaps other stories and anecdotes that you...that come to mind that reflect his character?

MILLER: Perhaps I mentioned in that interview that he traveled more than six hundred miles in a horse drawn vehicle in wintertime, spending days and days on this long journey to spend a few days with a little group of young missionaries in one of the frontier stations. And when he spoke to us the first time, he said he found it very difficult as he rode along day after day, night after night, in this horse drawn vehicle on very rough roads to think about anything constructive. But that he had remembered what Jesus Christ...what the Apostle Paul had said in his epistle to Timothy, "Remember Jesus Christ." [II Timothy 2:8] And he had been thinking about Jesus Christ on this long journey and he had wanted to share with us some of the beautiful things that had come to his mind about Jesus Christ. And that has stayed with me ever since. In all circumstances, the important thing for us to do is to remember Jesus Christ.

SHUSTER: What...what kind of speaker was he? What impression...?

MILLER: A tremendously powerful speaker. I just hope that maybe you can get some tapes of one of his addresses to record. His voice was deep and powerful and he made a deep impression. I remember distinctly an address that he made to the Northfield Student Conference in 1912, the first time that I saw him. And the text was the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And as he spoke about that – the glory of Christ, the knowledge of God in the face of Christ – it just seemed that that very light was shining in his face. That was my impression. And years later I read in one of the books of the famous preacher and evangelist Sam Shoemaker that he had been in that audience and that same impression had been made on him. He had carried it through the years. I am sure that there were many of us there who saw the light of God in the face of Robert Speer that morning.

SHUSTER: If I could just ask you one more thing.

MILLER: Yes.

SHUSTER: The story about the Iranian Christian who was praying for Billy Graham and his ministry.

MILLER: Yes. In about 1947 or '48, I was conducting in a beautiful garden near the foot of the mountains in Tehran what we called the summer school of evangelism. And there were eight or ten men, a few women, in the class. And I read in some newspaper, a Christian paper that came to me from America the account of what a young evangelist in California had been doing. This man had been greatly used of God and there were hundreds of people were turning to Christ. What was the name of this young evangelist? Billy Graham. And so I told our students about this young man and one of these was a man named Mahmud Jalily, a convert from Islam in later life, at the age of seventy had given up his profession and was preparing to be an evangelist. And this story made a



deep impression of Jalily's mind and he began to pray for Billy Graham. He told me later that he prayed for him every day. And several years later when Billy Graham was in Beirut, I wrote him and asked him if possible to come to Tehran and visit us because this Iran brother was very anxious to see him. He was unable to come, but he sent us a special message greeting Billy...Jalily...and I am quite sure that Jalily continued to pray for Billy Graham as long as he lived. The story of Jalily is the last story in the book, *Ten Muslims Meet Christ*. It was out of print for several and has recently been reprinted.

SHUSTER: Well, Dr. Miller, I want to thank you again for your kindness and patience and willingness to tape this interview and to share your tremendous knowledge with us. And I am sure it will be very useful to students who come to use the Archives.

MILLER: I am very grateful for this privilege. If anything I said would be of any interest or inspiration to anyone else, I will praise the Lord. Thank you so much, sir, for coming, taking the trouble to spend these moments with me this morning.

SHUSTER: Amen. Thank you again.

END OF TAPE

