

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **Gleason Leonard Archer (CN 412, 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, created by Grace Gardziella and Paul Ericksen, was completed in July 2019.

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 412, Tape 1. Oral history interview with Dr. Gleason Archer by Robert Shuster on April 7, 1989.

SHUSTER: This is an interview with Dr. Gleason Archer of...by Robert Shuster for the archives of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. This interview took place on...

ARCHER: 7th.

SHUSTER: ...April 6th.

ARCHER: 7th.

SHUSTER: April 7th, 1989, at Trinity Evangelical Divinity Seminary at 10:00...10:00 A.M. Dr. Archer, why don't we start with your work with the Fellowship of Faith in Chicago? How did you initially become involved with that organization?

ARCHER: Well, actually this is the...if...if you're talking about the same thing I think you're talking about, [rustling of papers] this is Bob Schneider's responsibility as a member of the Gospel Missionary Union. Bob Schneider served for many years as a missionary in Morocco.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh. I've taped several hours with him and Mrs. Schneider.

ARCHER: And so I used to meet him at the display booth that we would have at our missions conference at the North...at the North Suburban Evangelical Free Church. I would represent a display of the work of the United Arab Evangelical Mission and he would, of course, be representing the areas that his organization covers, but [clears throat] with particular interest in the Muslims. And so we got to be friends, and we would talk with each other in missions week, which takes place generally the first week of March every year. And so we decided to have a series of three prayer meetings a year, three or four, and it so happens that every spring they meet on the Trinity campus. In the winter, they generally meet in...in Wheaton, and in the fall they meet at Moody. So we have a kind of a circuit there, and a program that is very much encouraging to candidates and informative as to what the Lord is already doing and what the prospects are for openings in various parts of the Muslim world.

SHUSTER: So what is the primary purpose of the Fellowship?

ARCHER: Well, I suppose you could say it's principally for prayer, because we believe that that is what the Lord uses to accomplish his best results. But it also serves to inform the young people who are now finishing their Christian training as to what is involved in reaching these various fields, and they cover a pretty wide spectrum, but particularly I suppose you would say North Africa, the Near East, and the Middle East.

SHUSTER: Is it mainly concerned with Muslim...with missions to Muslims?

ARCHER: Yes. Yes, exclusively, but not necessarily to Arabic-speaking Muslims, Urdu-speaking, and so on. And I guess we have even had some representation from Indonesia, but that has been minimal.

SHUSTER: What is a typical program like for one of the sessions?

ARCHER: Well, you...you'll have somebody strumming on a guitar and we will sing choruses and kind of get in the mood for...for worship and praise. And then generally there are two or three speakers who represent something that is of importance that's taking place in the...on the mission field or even perhaps in an outreach here at home in America. For example, I will be speaking on the apologetic interface we've been having with the Islamic community in Chicago where we actually have engaged in debates upon the authority of the Bible and the deity of Christ and matters of that sort. And interestingly enough, I have developed a personal friendship with the protagonist of the other side, Dr. Hussein Morsi, who is an Egyptian, and actually is a veterinarian by profession and has never taken formal theological study, but he's read up a lot on the apologetics of...of Ahmed Didat and the Ahmadiyya movement in Pakistan, although he insists that he is a Sunni. Some of the positions...some of the interpretations he takes are really more congenial to the Ahmadiyya approach. He, for example, does not believe that Jesus was wafted up to heaven before the crucifixion took place. He thinks that Jesus did undergo the crucifixion but survived it by swoon rather than actually dying, and that, of course, is an Ahmadiyya interpretation.

SHUSTER: You say that you've been involved with some activities with the Muslim community in Chicago. Is that through the Fellowship of Faith?

ARCHER: No. no, this antedates it quite a bit. That originated when Faraq Fakhoury [?], a minister from Jordan, moved over here along with a lot of...the rest of his clan, and he started to work amongst the Arabic-speaking people [clears throat] in the North Side of Chicago.

SHUSTER: About when was that?

ARCHER: I would say ten or twelve years ago at least. And at first he used to have a meeting place right across the street from the Salem Evangelical Free Church and he invited me—this was the first contact I had really—he invited me to preach to that group. And so I dutifully prepared a message in Arabic and proceeded to deliver it. But then quite a lot of other people came in from the English-speaking part of the Salem Church and the Spanish-speaking part, and so it became necessary for us to change roles a bit and I continued in English while Faraq translated into Arabic. But then he conceived the idea of our establishing a mission for the encouragement of new congregations not only in the Chicago area but across the country, and so we formed an in...a rather loosely-knit board called the United Evangelical Arab Mission—UEAM. And we used to meet in various places. I think our organization meeting was held at Moody Bible Institute under the kind sponsorship of President [George] Sweeting. And then we had an opportunity to move into an area on...on the North Side, Lawr...West Lawrence Avenue. And it so happened that there was a laundromat which was folding up, and so an agency of the Christian Reformed Church decided to buy it and use it as a mission place. And so this went on

for several years. They did renovate and they had an opportunity to...they had a fairly large room for public meetings, for the display of literature and Bibles and so on, and then they had some smaller rooms in back for conferences and Christian education. And then there was a basement that we had hoped could be completely cleaned out and renovated. But the work encountered a problem from the standpoint of the purpose of the Christian Reformed Church, which naturally was to bring in new converts to the Christian faith. And practically the whole constituency that would come to these meetings were people who were of Christian background, Arabs of Christian background.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

ARCHER: And, of course, that served a useful purpose, but it was not exactly missionary in the sense that the denomination had hoped.

SHUSTER: They weren't new converts.

ARCHER: They wanted new converts, right. And furthermore, the group was not...was very slow to organize into an independent congregation. They were mostly people who attended other churches that didn't speak Arabic and they would come together and they enjoyed the fellowship in Arabic. But now that has changed. And it was really a sponsorship or a linking up with the local presbytery of the Presbyterian Church that precipitated the forming a...an actual corporation, a charitable corporation, and they proceeded to ordain the elders and the deacons. And, of course, the one who was in charge, Dr. Swalem Hamin [?], was already a Presbyterian pastor from Egypt, and so he had simply been received, I guess, into membership of Chicago presbytery, so there was no problem at that stage. They had hoped that the presbytery would help them to obtain a permanent place of worship, but it doesn't...it didn't turn out that way. And so they more or less have gotten together and made very sacrificial pledges amongst themselves. And I think they have pretty well met the conditions, met escrow, for the acquisition of a funeral parlor that had previously been a church and could easily...

SHUSTER: Converted.

ARCHER: ...be reconverted to a church. And I've been waiting for them to give me the invitation to come to the dedication as they intended to.

SHUSTER: Is the mission still primarily concerned with Arab and Arab-Americans?

ARCHER: Well, actually the mission fell into desuetude. We finally came to a point where they were so discouraged about the future of the mission that...

SHUSTER: They being the...?

ARCHER: ...the Arab side, the Arab members of the board, that only the non-Arabs attended the last meeting and then one Arab, and we finally decided, "Well, let's close it down for the time being," and so we have.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh. So the group has become a Presbyterian church or is becoming....

ARCHER: Yes, but it's not happy with that relationship, and I...I think eventually in a year or two they'll probably pull out.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

ARCHER: And, of course, the presbytery will have really no claim to the building because they did not help them buy it. And I think there was an understanding at the time of negotiations that although the general Presbyterian system is that once a building does belong to a Presbyterian congregation it belongs to the denomination, they were safeguarded against that.

SHUSTER: Have you had experience with some of the non-Arab Muslim populations in Chicago?

ARCHER: Well, not as such. There are some Pakistanis who show up in restaurants and so on as part of the service personnel and one makes friends with them, but principally the people that I relate to are those who are Arabic-speaking...

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

ARCHER: ...whether Egyptian, or Iraqi, or...or Lebanese, or whatever.

SHUSTER: You learned Arabic when you were in Beirut or...?

ARCHER: Actually, I learned Arabic at Princeton University when I was finishing my theological training at Princeton Seminary. I took a year of Arabic under Dr. Philip K. Hitti. And then I was able to do literary Arabic, no conversational level, but literary Arabic, and I have been teaching Arabic off and on ever since the early 1950s. But when I had a sabbatical coming up in 1963, I decided the most useful thing I could do would be to go to Beirut and study for three months intensively the Arabic, the literary...or I guess you could call it...

SHUSTER: Classical?

ARCHER: ...literary Arabic, classical Arabic, as it is used in the media, that is, journalistic Arabic. And there I came under the tutelage of a retired professor, Dr. Halia Huri [?], who had been on the staff of the Middle East Centre of Arab Studies run by the British government at Shemlan. And he used to give me two hours a day and give me enough homework so that I would seldom be able to retire before midnight. And this would go on for five days of the week. Then I'd have the Saturday and Sunday free. But I don't think I ever in my career as a student ever worked harder than I did with this. And I covered the...more or less the course that they give the first year where they have a very carefully graduated set of high-frequency words going from section one through section ten. And there are many reading selections that go along with it and that are supposed to use these words with the graduating difficulty. And so I used to recite the Arabic and translate. And he also gave me a good deal of Arabic composition. And so I got a

good training under him. And then I went down to Jerusalem before the Six-Day War when it was under the Jordanians, and I was quartered at the American Institute...or at the American School of Oriental Research on Suleiman Street, and there I had an opportunity to visit the Qumran area, Jericho, and all of those biblical sites that were under the Jordanians at the time. Of course, Masada had not yet been opened up, but I had a very fine three weeks there. In fact, one of the highlights was when Roland de Vaux, the great excavator of Cave number 4 happened to come by with the Swedish ambassador to Britain in his Land Rover. And he waved [Shuster laughs] to a group of us who were there with Professor Bernard Anderson, who later went to Princeton to teach, and said, "If you want to come join us, you may." Well, they looked at each other and decided to be loyal to Anderson. I looked at de Vaux and I deserted. [Both laugh] So I went over and I joined them, and there was a Mrs. Bennett [?] who was a wealthy benefactor of the American colony and of excavations and she was there. And so de Vaux was there to show them Cave 4. Well, it was a very tricky goat pass down to the entrance of Cave 4, and de Vaux at that time was quite slim and trim. He later became very heavy before he died, but at that time he was slim and trim, and he invited us to go down. Well, the older folks wouldn't do it, but the ambassador's son, who was in his twenties, and I accompanied him down there. And so he took us inside and he showed us the main features. And he said, "I've spent...I've spent a solid year of my life in this...in this cave." As they sifted through all of the tiny fragments of...into which the Roman legionaries had...had cut up the manuscripts and stamped them in the sand. And it was a...it was a fascinating experience. Now the thing, Bob, is that later on, not many years afterward, after the Six-Day War, a lady tourist who was trying to go down to the Qum...that particular cave fell, lost her footing and she fell to her death in the canyon below. It's very tricky there. It...that canyon divides the cave area from the Khirbet, which was the headquarters of the denom...of the sect. And so the Israeli government forbade anybody to visit it any longer. So I've been...I have pictures where nobody can get.

SHUSTER: What do you remember best about the cave?

ARCHER: Well, it was...the...the sandstone of which these caves is composed...are composed is rather loose. And once you open up and you allow the elements to come in, what was at first a niche in the wall enlarges until there's another opening. So now all of the closets have become open doors around there. And so...and then you have a kind of a vaulted roof that was carved out and then these various closets in which the scrolls were kept for...this seems to have been the main library of the community. This is where they kept it. And so when the Romans, the tenth legion, came up in 69 AD, they decided to destroy all of the scriptures of these revolutionaries because they felt that they were so identified with their scriptures that if they killed the scriptures, they'd kill the movement.

SHUSTER: How did you feel being there?

ARCHER: Oh, very...very highly privileged and awestruck, because here we have the manuscript evidence for the Scripture that goes back to second or even third century BC. And also one thing that I found fascinating, this was not in the cave but it was in the...one of the storerooms of the Khirbet itself, de Vaux led us to the very place where the one treasure trove that ever has turned up was discovered. That is, it was a large jar full of shekels of the Tyrian



mintage with Baal Melqart on the obverse and the...the Seleucid-type eagle on the reverse. And I was very delighted to see when I visited the Rockefeller Museum a bit later that this jar was on display. It isn't there anymore since the Israeli takeover, [minor audio interference] but it was then on display and you could see the coins kind of pouring out [Shuster laughs] of the top and...and there were a few of them on the shelf on which it was seated. And it was just exactly the same as the coin I have in my collection of...of that Judas money that is...this is undoubtedly the type of money in which Judas was paid to betray the Lord.

SHUSTER: His pieces of silver.

ARCHER: Yeah.

SHUSTER: From your studies, how would you characterize the Arabic languages...Arabic language?

ARCHER: Well, I would say that Arabic is to the Semitic family what Latin is to the romance family of languages. In other words, it preserves the original Semitic tongue in its purest form with all of the inflectional system. So that in literary Arabic you've got not only an indicative, you've got a subjunctive, you've got a jussive with all of its persons and numbers, and it has all the duals, the dual number preserved both in the verbs and for the nouns, which, of course, fell into desuetude with the other Semitic languages. But Arabic, I think, is very, very important to understand...for the understanding of comparative Semitics, and it has the richest vocabulary of any Semitic language.

SHUSTER: Are there particular advantages for Arabic as an apologetics...

ARCHER: Oh, yes.

SHUSTER: ...tool? What are they?

ARCHER: Well, [clears throat] you see, the Muslim believes that the Quran cannot be properly understood except in Arabic. So if you're going to discuss theology with him, you have to quote the Quran and you have to know what it says. And you have to become familiar with the precise content of the key terms that carry the theological cargo. And they will listen to you with respect if you can recite from the Quran in the original Arabic. They'll listen to you as somebody who is well-enough informed to discuss theology. Otherwise they won't give you the time of day.

SHUSTER: In discussing theology with a Muslim, what do you think is the...are the most important points to make, at least...?

ARCHER: Well, in part...there are several important points. First of all, Islam does not have a savior. Islam does not have any atonement. Islam is simply a variation on the hopeless effort to obtain salvation through good works without making any compensation for the bad works, which ends up presenting Allah as basically an unrighteous God. Because if any earthly judge were to excuse murderers, and thieves, and rapists, and men of violence simply because they said they

were sorry and they're going to try and do better, such a judge would be the most valuable ally to the Cosa Nostra or any organized crimi...crime cause that could possibly be invented. So they proclaim the righteousness of Allah, but they pre...represent him in effect as being basically unrighteous because there is no compensation. There is no penalty for sin except the...the implication is what God will do is weigh your good deeds against your bad deeds and he thinks...and he'll think that if your good deeds outweigh, maybe he'll let you go to heaven. Otherwise he'll let you go to he...to hell. But there's no assurance of salvation in Islam, and therefore we can say that there's no sure hope for the Muslim. He is told that if he will die in battle fighting for the cause of Islam, he would go straight to heaven, but you can't really prove it from the Quran. And then also, I think that we need to recognize that while Islam means surrender, the Muslims never are capable of really surrendering to God on God's terms. And from this standpoint only the...the sincere Christian can be a Muslim on the basis of Romans 12: 1 and 2.

SHUSTER: How do you mean Muslims cannot surrender to God?

ARCHER: Because they do not recognize that the only basis for their forgiveness is the grace of God, the unmerited grace of God. So they have in that sense not surrendered their personal pride. They hope to get by by their s...their good works. That is the opposite of surrender. And secondly, they do not have the concept of presenting themselves as a living sacrifice to the Lord, living for the Lord's sake. They wish to glorify Allah because it would be better for them personally, but so far as making him the number one person in their life, loving him with all the heart is concerned, they don't have a...any idea of that which is taught as absolutely central in Scripture. Also, there's another very important area that I think is of extreme helpfulness in dialogue and that is that in the Quran itself, the text says consult the Bible—that is the Torah, the Nevi'im, the Zabur, the Injil, which, of course, covers all of the important sections of the Old Testament and the New Testament except the Pauline epistles—and they will confirm the truth of what we are saying. Now you see this puts Dr. Morsi and those who attack the Bible in a very uncomfortable position because in effect the Quran is saying the Bible is trustworthy. You go to the people of the Book, that is the Jews and the Christians, and they can tell you a lot about the truth of God. But those who attack the Bible say, in effect, the Quran is wrong here. You cannot trust the Bible, and I put that...

SHUSTER: And therefore you can't trust the Quran.

ARCHER: [Laughs] Well, of course, actually Mohammed said this because he didn't know really what was in the Bible. And there...when they replied, "Well, okay. The Bible has been changed since then and now it doesn't teach what Islam teaches in some very important areas." And that...it can be immediately disproved in five minutes by showing the manuscripts that go back six or seven hundred years before the Quran was revealed and which indicate very clearly it is identical text to that which appears in the Leningrad manuscript of around 1000 A.D. And the...the great...of course, all the great Greek uncials are going back not only to the time of Constantine the Great but all the way back in the case of the Bodmer Papyri and the Chester Beatty Papyri to 200. So here you have something that goes back to more than four centuries



before the Quran was revealed and it's the same text. You can prove there's been no change, and so this is a...a charge that can be very completely and devastatingly refuted.

SHUSTER: From your own experience with dialogues with Muslims or witnessing to Muslims, what Christianity has the most impact on them?

ARCHER: Well, of course it would be a consistent Evangelical Christianity where people have a lifestyle to correspond with their theology. Of course, they're very quick to...to criticize and condemn anything in the lifestyle. I remember one young man saying to me in Beirut who was a Muslim, he said, "Sometimes I wish I could be a Christian." I said, "Well, why not?" He said, "Yeah, I know. I'd love to be a Christian so I could drink liquor." And so, you know, they...this is an exterior thing, but it shows that the Muslims associate Christians with worldliness and self-indulgence. Now that kind of witness is not going to make any progress in conversion.

SHUSTER: Have you seen a difference in the practice of Islam from Palestine and United States?

ARCHER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. There are a lot of differences that emerge because they live in a free country. They are allowed to listen to what they please, and watch what they please on television, and there's no one to check up on them as to whether they're going to be doing their *Salat* five times a day right during business hours. I've...I don't think I've ever seen a Muslim do that in America. But over there, right during business hours when the...when the...when the muezzin comes out with his *azaan* and "[recites in Arabic]" and so on and that comes booming out across the PA system as it does now in...in Egypt certainly and all regular Muslim countries. I don't know whether they do it in Jerusalem now, but.... And even in Beirut you...you wouldn't hear it. Beirut had more churches than they'd had mosques, and yet where you do not have that reminder it's very easy for the American Muslim to fall into a much more easy-going practice of *Salat*. They do it when convenient, when they're in private situation, but they don't follow it with the rigidity that they had to back in the old country. Well, you see *Salat* is a very important element for maintaining a Muslim consciousness. And where...where the...and I'm sure the same thing is true in Europe and in England where they live in countries where you have much more permissiveness, they tend to take a less strict view all along the line except in their basic theology. Their soteriology is still salvation by good works and doing what were prescribed in the way of giving alms and making your pilgrimage and fasting during the daytime in the month of Ramadan and then gorging yourself all you want in the evening every night during Ramadan. You know, this is so irrational [both laugh] from the standpoint of any outside observer, but they...they feel that this is absolutely binding upon them.

SHUSTER: Do you feel that the Muslim population in the United States is increasing?

ARCHER: Oh, yes. No question about it.

SHUSTER: Why do you think that is?

ARCHER: I think God is good. He is bringing over more and more of them where they can really hear the gospel and get saved. And I look for some...some very definite fruitage that will come from this. We no longer...I mean from that standpoint, we don't have to send missionaries over to their country. They're coming to us. It's like the fish swimming into the net. I rejoice in it, and I do feel that they do add something that we need in America. They add a population that takes morality seriously. They are completely down on...on sexual immorality and they have very high standards for a lot of important things that our humanistic culture in America and in Western Europe have been letting slide. They abominate abortion. And, you know, a lot of things where we could work together and vote together. And I...I do feel that the proper policy for us to pursue as a Christian population is to make friends with them, understand what they really believe, and not be content with secondhand reports, and let them know what we really believe, because they also get distortions about us.

SHUSTER: So you feel the increase is by immigration rather than Christians in the United States or Americans converting to Islam.

ARCHER: Well, that's a minor element. Of course, you have a lot of Americans who are spiritually vacuous and they're really looking for some authority. They've had so much freedom. They have no certainty. And to get a se...a feeling of existential security they've got to go to something that's authoritarian, whether that's going to mean Mormonism or...or Jehovah's Witness or whatever. So the Muslims can cut a piece of that pie because they're authoritarian.

SHUSTER: Anything else you'd like to add about your work with Arab Muslims in the United States or...?

ARCHER: Well, I'll say this. I haven't had a great deal of contact with Arab Muslims over here. Christian Arabs, yes. But I think...as I think back upon my days in Beirut where I was on the grounds of the Near East School of Theology and virtually all of the students were Syrian, one or two Pal...Palestinian, one or two Lebanese, but mostly Syrian Arabs, I never had a warmer, more cordial friendship with younger men, with students, than I had with those Arabs. I used to sit at their table. See, they would have an Arabic-speaking table, they'd have an English-speaking table, and they'd have an Armenian...Armenian-speaking table. And I was with the Arabs all the time. And of course, I was a...a source of information, but I had no authority over them so they could come to me with problems in...in Greek or Bible interpretation or theology and I could help them, but I was no threat to them. I was only a help to them. So I suppose that...and they'd come in and they'd pray with me before they'd go to bed, and in some cases they would share their personal struggles with sin or uncertainty as to the future. And so I had a kind of informal pastoral ministry among them, and I found them very warm-hearted. But I came to the conclusion that the Arabs are number one when it comes to loving and number one when it comes to hating. And they cannot understand how you can be on their side and be on the side of those to whom they're opposed at the same time. In other words, taking a Christian view of...

SHUSTER: Love one and hate the other.

ARCHER: Yeah, that's right. It's got to be either or, boy, and [laughs] so....

SHUSTER: Well, why don't we go now to the beginning of your life?

ARCHER: Okay.

SHUSTER: Can you tell me a little bit about your family background?

ARCHER: Yes, my father was raised in a rural community in the heart of the state of Maine. His father was a lumberman by...in the summer and a blacksmith in the winter. They were very poor and they could not afford to send their children—and he had quite a few siblings—to any school and pay expenses. So he was able to go to Sabattus, Maine, and work for a medical doctor as his assistant and that gave him enough tuition to go through Sabattus high school. After which—and he didn't get into this until he was eighteen because he had to work as a cook in the lumber camp and, you know, didn't get a great deal of education doing that. But he...he turned out to be very...very competent for a scholarship and he did the four years of high school in two. Then he came down to Boston and attended Boston University [clears throat] where he met my mother who came from a minister's family that...and her father was a Congregational minister in Weymouth, Massachusetts. And [clears throat] so they fell in love and eventually got married. And the year he passed the bar, became an attorney—he went to Boston University Law School—he was asked by some friends of his who were also working men, didn't...didn't have any kind of opportunity to go to school by day, if he wouldn't teach them some law at night, contract law. So a group of thirteen showed up in 1906 in his living room and from that there grew a movement into a very large evening school...evening law school, which became known as Suffolk Law School and eventually burgeoned into a university which is a thriving, flourishing institution right on Beacon Hill, Boston, today. And so I grew up as.... Well, I had an older brother, eight...eight years older than I, who turned out to be a scientist, but I went....

SHUSTER: His name was...?

ARCHER: Allan.

SHUSTER: Allan.

ARCHER: Uh-huh. I attended Boston Public Latin School, which is the finest of the kind and the oldest of the kind in the country. And I had six years of Latin at the junior high and senior high level before I got to Harvard. And I took three years of French—that was required—and then I....

SHUSTER: At the high school?

ARCHER: At the high school. And then you were also required to take either Greek or German, and I elected to take Greek. And so I had three years of Greek before I graduated from high school. Then my first experience abroad was a trip over to Athens that my father gave me as a graduation present and there I studied for five weeks intensively in Modern Greek, became fluent in it. Then I went to Harvard and majored in Greek and Latin Classics and became very much

involved in German because when I was studying Egyptian hieroglyphics and...and trying to use this dictionary, [retrieves dictionary] I discovered....

SHUSTER: Which would be the dictionary of...for the tape, it's the dictionary of...?

ARCHER: Well, it is the *Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache* by Erman und Grapow. It's known as the Berlin Dictionary.

SHUSTER: ...of Egyptian hieroglyphics?

ARCHER: Yes. See it's all...it's all in this form. The hieroglyphics are here and then all the definitions are in German.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

ARCHER: Well, naturally if I was going to pursue my interest in hieroglyphics, which I picked up from reading a...a article on Egyptology in 1896 Britannica, [Shuster laughs], the only way I could do it was to learn German.

SHUSTER: Learn German, yeah.

ARCHER: So I started to teach myself German enough so I could read the dictionary. And after I got into it, I fell in love with the language for its own sake and studied it quite extensively in the summer, especially before I got into...into Harvard. And then finally in my sophomore year, I presented myself for a second-year course, follow-up course in German, and found that I was quite competently equipped to take an A all through the course. And from there I took a survey course in German literature my...in my junior year and finally decided after I'd graduated with a summa cum laude in classics that I would go into comparative literature and the fields of comparison would be German and Greek. And so that I pursued at the Master's level and then at the PhD level and received my PhD in 1944 a year before I graduated from Princeton Seminary, to which I transferred after I knew the Lord had called me into the ministry. I was originally going to be a lawyer. I went to Suffolk Law School in the evenings all the time I was attending Harvard College. And that meant I had only one semester more to do to finish my law degree after I got my Bachelor of Arts, and I passed the bar and was admitted to the Masse...Boston Bar Association in 1939, which was the year I got married to my deceased wife, Virginia. And then the Lord gave me a very definite call to go into full-time Christian work, so after I had finished my residence work for the PhD and completed the nucleus of my dissertation, I left to go to Princeton. And I finished the dissertation summers by using the facilities of the Princeton University library, was called up for my...for my oral exam at Harvard, and received my degree in 1944. [Clears throat] This was during the...no, this was...yeah, this was during World War II. Yeah.

SHUSTER: World War II. If we could backtrack a second. What was the atmosphere...the religious atmosphere like in your...like in your home when you were growing up?

ARCHER: Well, my father had had a temporary salvation experience. He...his mother was a true believer. His father was nothing religiously. And then he got away from the Lord and he became quite Unitarian in his outlook and he...he bought up Robert Ingersoll and his skepticism about Jesus. He never acknowledged that Jesus was...was God after he fell away. My mother having been brought up by...in a...in a pastor's home never wavered in her faith in the historic Christian gospel, and she had, therefore, the decisive influence on me from childhood. [Clears throat] My father was easygoing. He didn't care. If we wanted to go to church and be religious, that was alright with him. And in many ways he was very clean living. He never smoked, he never took a drop of liquor, but he wasn't faithful to...to my mother. And so [laughs], you know, virtue in smaller things but not in the main thing. And so at the age of ten my mother got fed up with what was going on at the nearby Methodist church, which had gone kind of liberal and flabby, and she....

SHUSTER: This was the church you were attending then?

ARCHER: I was, yeah. As a kid I went to a Methodist church and sat through with a certain amount of boredom and resignation. And then she took me across the hill to Park Street Church and there I was turned on. I would sit in the front pew and I had my eyes glued on Pastor Conrad and take in that message. And within a year I was completely convinced of the inerrancy of Scripture, which I had doubted before on the basis of my reading about evolution and so on in the book of knowledge. But I became committed to the inerrancy of Scripture and I was intellectually converted I'd say by the time I was eleven.

SHUSTER: What was it about Park Street Church that so caught your attention?

ARCHER: Well, the Spirit of the Lord is there and that for a very good historical reason. At the time which followed the conclusion of the Revolutionary War and the beginning of our country under the new Constitution, there was a great deal of deism that had swept over especially the Northeast. And of the thirteen ch...Congregational churches in the city of Boston and its environs, only one remained Trinitarian. The others went Unitarian. And that was the...the one that remained was the Old South Church. Well, there was a group of people attending the Old South Church who felt that unwholesome influences were going on even there. And so they began a separate weekly Bible study and prayer time. And out of that emerged enough of a constituency to start a brand new church building and that was the Park Street Church, which occupied the site of a...a... [clears throat] well, an arsenal where they...they had stored gun powder and so on. But they erected a new building and so they called it Brimstone Corner [laughs]. Not only with allusion to the arsenal but with allusion to the strong Calvinistic theology that thundered for us from the pulpit. So that was founded in 1810. And believe it or not Bob, from that time on until the 1980s you...you have a steady undeviating adherence to the historic Reformation faith. Perhaps not quite as strongly Calvinistic as it was at the beginning but still basically moderate Calvinistic. And there's something I...the quality of the men whom they have had come to the pulpit has been such as to command the interest of the young intellectuals of that whole area, so that especially in Sunday evening services you find the place nearly packed. And many of them come from Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston University, and all the surrounding universities there. The message goes out...did go out morning and



evening over the radio all the way up to Br...New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and all around. And so it became widely known throughout the whole New England area and assumed a position of leadership which...with which the conservative Baptist churches were very happy. I mean, we...we mostly had fellowship with the Baptists even though we were not baptistic.

SHUSTER: You mentioned that by eleven that you were intellectually convinced of the inerrancy of Scripture and intellectually converted to Christianity. When did you give your heart to Christ?

ARCHER: I can't tell you the day or the hour. All I know is that at the age of twelve I was received into membership of the church, and by the age of sixteen I was...my heart was captured by the Lord. But it was a gradual growth, and it came as a result of the impact of the teaching from the pulpit and to a certain extent also in the Sunday school level, but also I became a Bible student. At the age of sixteen, I started to read my New Testament in Greek only, and I've continued that. Well, no, that's not true now. Now I study it in eighteen other languages. But my...my base for understanding the Bible in the New Testament is Greek and my Old Testament in Hebrew, and I think that that daily commitment to the Scripture itself has been the dynamic that has brought out of me all that I've been able to achieve.

SHUSTER: Of course, you're one of the most distinguished of the Bible scholars. What does Bible scholarship mean to you?

ARCHER: Well, [clears throat] when you open the Bible, you enter into the audience chamber of the king. And I find the Bible...I find God speaking to me through the pages of that book. And all of it is...has within it not only doctrine but "reproof and correction and instruction in righteousness that I may be thoroughly furnished to every good work in the master's service." [2 Timothy 3:16] So the Bible to me is communication with God. And I spend normally a solid hour every morning before I do anything else, thirty-five minutes usually in the Scripture itself. This morning I was studying the 38th chapter of Jeremiah in the Septuagint which in the Septuagint is chapter 45. And what I do there is I compare the Greek translation with the Hebrew text and...and I note down all the differences—omissions, and insertions, and so on—because I... Of course, this is meant for my spiritual nurture but also I will be able to do some studies. I'm going to bring out a series of studies eventually on the nature of the Septuagint, its characteristics. I've done this already for Isaiah, all sixty-six chapters, and I have all of the information amassed but I need to get together with a computer specialist to classify all of these things and come up with some statistics. But then I'll be moving on. You see, I go in alphabetical order. I start with Anglo-Saxon, then I go to Arabic, then I go to Coptic, and to Danish, and to Dutch, and to French, and German, and Gothic, and Greek. Next would be...I'm rereading the Hebrew Bible itself and I...I'll read a section of maybe three or four chapters in Hebrew. I have the vocabulary that I need for the entire thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, but I...it's nice to go through them again for their own sake. And then I'll be going to Icelandic, and Italian, and Latin, and Norwegian, and....

SHUSTER: Arabic?



ARCHER: Well, I said Arabic at the start. Anglo-Saxon, Arabic, you know. And then I'll be going to...to Spanish...Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, and Syriac.

SHUSTER: Do you find apart from Greek and apart from Hebrew and Greek that there is one language that's your favorite for studying the Bible?

ARCHER: Well, I suppose Greek has the...has the greatest power and beauty for me, not only because it is the language of the New Testament but because I fell in love with Greek literature and its rich expressive character and the beauty of the sound and the...the marvelous way of expressing thought that you have in that highly inflected language, which is perhaps not more highly inflective than Latin but it has the gift of the definite article. While I love Latin, Greek, I think, has a stronger hold upon me from the standpoint of admiration as a linguistic medium, but Hebrew is...is that which stirs my soul the most.

SHUSTER: Why is that?

ARCHER: Well, there's a power of utterance that comes from that Semitic tongue which enables you to say so much more and say it deeply in fewer syllables than is possible with a polysyllabic Indo-European language.

SHUSTER: Well, this might be a good point to stop. You mentioned...

ARCHER: Yeah.

SHUSTER: ...that we need [unclear].

ARCHER: I do have to go.

SHUSTER: I want to thank you again for your willingness to be interviewed today.

ARCHER: Fine.

END OF TAPE

