

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **Robert C. Urquhart by Daniel Olson (CN 514, T55)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words which were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case “[unclear]” was inserted. If the transcribers were not completely sure that they had the words correctly, a “[?]” 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 on the part of the speaker.

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

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

[ ] Words in brackets are comments by the transcriber.

This transcript was created by Emily Banas in March 2020.

**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 514, Tape 55. Oral history interview with Robert C. Urquhart by Daniel Olson on February 11, 1995.**

**OLSON:** [Unclear]... So Rev. Robert Urquhart by Dan Olson for the inter... for the archives of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. This interview took place on February 11, 1995 at 9 a.m. at 1115 Underwood Terrace in Wheaton.

**OLSON:** Rev. Urquhart. Pastor Bob. Welcome. And...the purpose of this is to basically just to understand your perceptions and your thoughts of that time in 1943 when God seemed to visit Wheaton College in a...in a special way and therefore called the Revival of 1943. To begin with could you give me a little of your background before that time, your birth date, where you were born, perhaps a short statement of your family life before that time or any...what influence on your growing up.

**URQUHART:** Yes, I'd be glad to, Dan. I was born in St. Francis Hospital in Evanston, Illinois, so residing in the south side of Chicago at that time. My Dad was a retail grocer, an independent grocer, in Inglewood section of Chicago and went... I went to the same high school as Mom and Dad had as they had grown up in the same neighborhood. I was born July 5, 1921, and came to Wheaton as a sophomore having my first year at the University of Chicago after finishing high school in thirty-nine. So, I had three years at Wheaton and finished in June of '43.

**OLSON:** Okay. What was the state of your Christian walk? What perhaps...perhaps what made you decide to change from the University of Chicago to Wheaton, if that was a factor?

**URQUHART:** I had gone to Wheaton...I had gone to the university on a scholarship which I wasn't able to retain for lack of academic credits and went to Wheaton, grateful for the contrast in the two environments. My parents were very strong Christians, practicing Christian lay people. Dad was Sun...Sunday school superintendent and elder in the church, and I had been brought up (even before they joined the Presbyterian Church in the thirties) in a Congregational background in 59<sup>th</sup> and LaSalle Street in Chicago. Presbyterian Church was perhaps a little over half a mile from our house. I was active in the young peoples and the thing that got us started as Presbyterians was the youth choir in which my sister started and I was still singing soprano at age twelve when I joined the church in '33.

**OLSON:** Thank...Thank you. Can you explain to me what your goals were? You were [?] first at the University of Chicago and then even into Wheaton for...for your life and for career. Things like that.

**URQUHART:** In high school I was pegged as a preacher. The yearbook shows me as a black-coated, black-hatted doomsday fella I guess [laughs], but had dreamed somewhere along the way of going to Africa as a missionary, so was grateful for the opportunity to get to Wheaton and be in a Christian atmosphere. [unclear] I commuted on weekends back to Chicago using the Chicago Aurora and Elgin railroad in order to work in my Dad's grocery store on Saturdays as truck driver and clerk behind the counter. I...the...I...At Wheaton I majored in math and physics not feeling any call at that time to the ministry but I finished Wheaton in....The commencement

was on Monday in June '43 and the following Thursday I started summer school at MIT as a grad student, mainly to keep out of the draft. I was listed as...as a scientific major and...and we were given preferential draft deferment at that time. So, rather than get involved with secret...selective service I needed to get...keep the summer busy in school and went to MIT. But then again I lost my fellowship and picked up a job in a research lab for three years and then went to seminary and it was a gradual call. I thought I would go into Christian education at first when I decided to go to seminary in '46 and it was there that they persuaded me to take a pre-theological course and get ordained and having met a girl there that was bound for China as a missionary I wrestled with that and eventually we did go to Korea under the Presbyterian board.

**OLSON:** Now back to, back to forty-three. Could you describe for me what you remember of the atmosphere there on campus perhaps during the fall there, beginning, and perhaps your involvement? You mentioned...you mentioned to me the Men's Glee Club. I understood you were in the Honors Society for math and physics. Some things like that. What...what were your involvements on the campus and perhaps specifically any prayer involvements and things like that?

**URQUHART:** I don't remember being a...a member of any of the mission groups, not being active for credentials in that sense at that time. I did enjoy getting the Glee Club [clears throat]...was there for the three full years I was at Wheaton and participated in most all of the trips and tours with great delight. Physics were...under Dr. Taylor and Dr. Stanley and a double major in math. Math came easy for me and I enjoyed the absoluteness of knowing I had the right answer when I did, rather than the nebulous field of philosophy and that sort of stuff [chuckles].

**OLSON:** Perhaps more specifically, was there anything that strikes you of the atmosphere during that fall?

**URQUHART:** I don't remember the sequence of religious emphasis weeks at the beginning of each semester or who the speakers were. Dr. Paul Reese was one of them. Somebody from Detroit area that I can't...Dr. Ward I believe it was, was another one, all of whom influenced us and had a bearing on giving us a spiritual growth, gradual, nothing spectacular. Prexy Edman was installed in '41, a great man of God who...who in his quiet humble way was a tremendous role model for...for all of us.

**OLSON:** Now, over the Christmas holidays before you came back I suppose that would be just before the time that was called the revival. Could you describe perhaps your chain of events during that time? Anything spectacular? Anything special?

**URQUHART:** I really don't remember distinctively. As I say I went into Chicago weekends so I never did participate in the life on campus, the social life, and was never involved in sports or music, went home and we had the usual family gathering at our house, Christmas was my Dad's birthday coincidentally, so we planned 20-25 people would be at our house for the Christmas dinner and I guess I worked at the store during that time to earn some bucks and came back to campus with nothing expected or out of the ordinary.

**OLSON:** [Clears throat] Now, it was Reverend Warren from Michigan that...that spoke during that...that week of spiritual emphasis. Do you remember anything specific from the messages or anything that...that touched you or...or still stays with you today?

**URQUHART:** I really don't. I have no record or remembrance of the sequence of this talk or the theme of this week but again he was certainly used of God and a great one to listen to. I was impacted myself. I don't know if this jumps your questions or not but somewhere in the course of the time I was convicted of some sin and confessed that and remember distinctly of going down and correcting it. To be specific, I'd gotten a free ride commuting on the Chicago Aurora and Elgin train. The conductor had slipped by me without punching my ticket, my monthly ticket, and I didn't call it to his attention but it weighed on my conscience and I, after the revival or during it, I went down to the ticket station and got it punched so that they were getting their money worth...money's worth [chuckles].

**OLSON:** What did you see among other people there I guess during that week and perhaps the...the semester after your final semester there that...that you remember? Or other people that maybe have remained friends for years that you felt also may have been touched by the revival?

**URQUHART:** I guess I wasn't spiritually sharp enough to perceive growth in any of the individual fellows. One of the fellow Glee Club members, Leonard Osbring was my roommate as well as about the best of my first year (who became a Spanish teacher at the college subsequently), but they were Christians to begin with. We didn't have prayers at...in the house or at bedtime as a group that I recall, each having our private devotions and those continued and predated the revival as I recall.

**OLSON:** [Clears throat] You have.... In your recollection of what the room looked like or the atmosphere physically there, you know you said you used to [?] pray from Pierce Chapel...

**URQUHART:** It was Pierce Chapel. I...we had assigned seats. It was a horseshoe balcony. I guess as seniors we were given seats on the first floor on the right hand section as I recall, somewhere toward the front but what pew or whether that was a free-choice after the initial chapel service where the Holy Spirit descended, I...I don't know.

**OLSON:** Where's the initial service then that...that you...you felt that the Holy Spirit descended as you put it?

**URQUHART:** Well, again [Olson coughs] [unclear] wherever...whichever part of the week it was and the protracted service continued where we broke for lunch or meals and even came back the next day....Whether we came back to assigned seats or whether that was free seating I don't know.

**OLSON:** Okay. Did you feel that the...the revival services....Did...Did it disrupt the routine at the college at all? Did...Did it change how, I guess, the normal flow of things from your perspective?

**URQUHART:** From the time that it lasted in terms of suspension of classes for that first day or so...that was the only thing, [clears throat] although a lot of prayer groups spawned from it, I believe. I don't remember participating in one particularly. And again being away from campus on the weekend I never was fully aware of...of what took place in the flow of student life.

**OLSON:** Okay. I...I noted in looking through some of the records there...that in the...the archives that you led a prayer meeting the sixteenth of February...I believe that's what your time frame.... Was there, understanding that that was probably scheduled beforehand...w...was there anything special? Had you led these prayer meetings before? Was this one of particular import?

**URQUHART:** Boy, I'm glad that you have better records than I do. All of this is faded from my memory so I can't really say whether that was a preassigned routine senior assignment of some sort or whether it corroborated [?] the revival. I don't know what group that would be or why I would have been had chosen to lead it as a particular testimony or anything as to the proof of the revival.

**OLSON:** Yes, the...the text of that from the records the 16<sup>th</sup> of February: "Bob Urquhart will take charge of student prayer meeting tonight at seven in upper chapel...[unclear] piano by Emily Beckman..." and so forth. Student prayer meeting. It...it...The way it was printed it was an advertisement of some sort in the record. Does that help jog your memory at all on that?

**URQUHART:** I think those were ongoing things. I won't want to be dogmatic one way or another whether they sprung out of the...the week before or whenever those dates of the revival were or whether as I say it had been an ongoing pattern. I think it was an ongoing pattern voluntary for anybody on campus, probably on a Thursday night, was it?

**OLSON:** I...

**URQUHART:** ...I'm not sure...

[talking over each other]

**OLSON:** ...It was a Tuesday according to the records...

**URQUHART:** ...Tuesday, all right [?]

**URQUHART:** Well, if it says so I guess I was there [chuckles].

**OLSON:** We have a...there is a quote here from Larry Ward. (Excuse me, sorry [unclear] ...wrong, wrong pages...yes, yes it is from Larry Ward). He spoke of, during the last week of January, he spoke of a special position of prayer in...amongst several people that was not necessarily something for show, or something like that. Did you sense a heightened sense of prayer shortly before or...?

**URQUHART:** I guess it was sort of wide spread. It was not universal, of course. There were always those that did not want to participate or...or stayed away from it when they could that I didn't...wasn't conscious of any particular friends or individuals that stood out. There were the regular campus leaders. Al Smith was one of them. Music man. Famous Singspiration time connections but they along with the rest of us were all touched and sharing our experiences of growth and appreciation, I'm sure.

**OLSON:** Did you know of anyone that...that was actually converted through those meetings, that...that came to Christ?

**URQUHART:** I may have but I don't have it in my memory.

**OLSON:** Okay. Now presumably (Well, I shouldn't presume anything) did you go home that weekend between there? Do you remember if you went home with your family?

**URQUHART:** [Talks over Olson] I...I imagine I was home every weekend. I was paying five day rent at the Christianson's home as I recall. Or at any rate, went in Friday afternoon after classes and came back Sunday nights but I don't recall anything particular that I did or that was different. That's...that's really a blur to me and I don't want to deny anything. It's not...it just didn't strike me other than this one experience of my own confession that has always stayed with me.

**OLSON:** What I...I suppose I'm asking is, do you remember sharing any of this with your family. Did this in anyway impact your family as well? Or others around you?

**URQUHART:** I...Yes and no, I suppose. It didn't move me in any particular life-shaking decision in terms of a call or change in vocation or majors or anything like that. I imagine I shared it with my folks. Probably the more personal things I never did share, not because they weren't sympathetic but just a generation gap be...between parent and kid. A girlfriend was confided in more than the parents and we shared prayer together and things like that no doubt. But that was done at my home church as well as on campus and I...I didn't have a real steady at Wheaton because my steady girlfriend was back at the home church that I saw every weekend. [Chuckles].

**OLSON:** Do...do you have any idea of the cause of the revival or the....perhaps some of the reasons of the things that led up to it?

**URQUHART:** Just the...I...I would imagine the intercessory prayer by faculty and students as well that the Lord would use Dr. Warren as an instrument of His grace and....but nobody expecting or predicting that there would be such.

**OLSON:** Did you see any...any negative effects from the revival, of...of any sort?

**URQUHART:** I again can't pinpoint anything but there were those few that weren't con...touched or convicted or...and didn't fully participate perhaps after that and that may have

caused friction in individual cases or alienations but I wasn't aware of it and don't remember being affected by any of it.

**OLSON:** Okay. Now you mentioned that it didn't have a major effect on your call or on your changing major but do you believe that...that your life was changed in that time in...in any way that it affected you, that it stayed with you today?

**URQUHART:** It was certainly a great contributing factor. I was a Christian before coming to Wheaton and tried to practice it. My home minister had challenged us way back in high school days to read the gospel of John through daily and I took him seriously. I couldn't hold myself to it on a daily basis but I did cover the 21 chapters every two days while I was at the University of Chicago. So, I was having my quiet time, falling asleep often in the process, but making a stab at it at least and trying to walk a...a practicing Christian life. What difference it made in my day to day behavior? I don't remember anybody commenting on or saying, "My how changed you are," but when we came to our 50th anniversary at class reunion in '93 I certainly cited that revival as one of the great things to be grateful for in our Wheaton experience.

**OLSON:** Okay. Thank-you. [Clears throat] Do you remember any of the music? Do you remember if the music was influential or a significant part or...?

**URQUHART:** We had a lot of choruses back in those days that were Biblical and spirit...just worshipful things, "Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me." Oh...I'm not that much of a musician but just a lot of prayer things. Prayer has always been important in my life and the Lord has been a great answerer of prayer so it's...it's a growing, on-going experience; the joy and thrill to see His answer to the little pleas as well as the big ones in life. But a... "Wonderful Grace of Jesus" was always a favorite in chapel services, speaking of music. I have been influenced at my own church where we had a Moody graduate as choir director and was singing that....I was in the youth choirs there singing Stainer's "Crucifixion" and some of the choruses from the *Messiah*, so I have been schooled and exposed to church music for a long time to that extent.

**OLSON:** Dur...During the time of the revival, that week or so, did you feel connected, disconnected with the...the others in the process of this? You mentioned that it was a very personal confession and that you...you dealt with some things like that. Did you feel connected or disconnected from others as this was or did you feel very much one?

**URQUHART:** Yes and no. We.... [clears throat] I guess in the ongoing flow of life [clears throat] we didn't take time to share every experience or every new discovery with roommates or classmates because it was both universa.... everybody had their own story to tell no doubt and time just didn't permit. We took it to be universal and widespread among the student body and being just one of the crowd I didn't take note of any overall perspective or wasn't in any position particularly to see an overview of campus life in a spiritual change. I'm sure there was but I...I wasn't aware of it or...or seeking it at the time in any way to measure it...or...evaluate.

**OLSON:** Did you see any change in faculty or any....Did this revival affect the faculty as well or was it limited to students?

**URQUHART:** Faculty participated in those days. They sat on the platform most every chapel, they too having assigned seats maybe, I don't know. At any rate, I had acquaintance with only those in the physics-math department basically and a few Bible courses required to take and I wasn't...I was pleased in knowing that those acquaintances stayed through it and participated in a reasonable way along with everybody else. I don't remember being jarred by the absence or boycotting of it in any way. We respected them all. Classes began with prayer routinely. And so there wasn't too much difference except thanksgiving for what had happened.

**OLSON:** Okay. How did the....Did you see any effects of the revival upon the larger community of Wheaton or perhaps in your home church in Chicago or in the media for that matter?

**URQUHART:** Again it no doubt hit the media but I didn't take note of it but....or clip it or anything like that, trying to make a survey of it. I don't think it particularly hit my home church except as I may have reported it to friends or family and I wasn't acquainted with the Wheaton community, the city, neighbors, the neighborhoods in anyway...as a commuting student I never felt I belonged in Wheaton particularly as a resident. The churches and those who attended no doubt could see some changes in the individual student lives or whoever, but again I wasn't participating in that aspect of community life.

**OLSON:** Do you believe that your life would be different in perhaps a directional sort of way.... would your course have been different throughout your entire life, even slightly, but for this revival?

**URQUHART:** Yes, I'm sure...it had its part along the way. It's helped me to pray for revival with the assurance that it is a real thing and that it is a consequential thing that counts for eternity. Not something just a figment of the imagination, or...or extremism of some fanatics. We were normal kids. We were....the faculty was just homegrown human beings but by the grace of the mighty power of the Lord, He touched us and it was great. It was just....there was a lot of tears and rejoicing, tears of joy and blessing as well as, I suppose, tears of guilt and confession. But again athletes and campus heroes were part of it and were not ashamed of it in any sense and we were just grateful and each testimony strengthened us and we did build each other up I think in the faith by sharing and a...a number of...of people. That's what protracted the meetings. They went on and on because everybody wanted to speak. Everybody had been touched in some way and each one was a thrill to hear.

**OLSON:** Did you wait in line? Did you wait in line to confess? Did you confess that publicly?

**URQUHART:** I think there were at certain sessions at least and I forget when my turn came or when I went up to do so but I won't be surprised but what there was a line. I don't remember consciously but that didn't deter us in any sense.

**OLSON:** Do you remember your sense of time there? Did...did things seem to draw out? Did they seem to be very quick? Short? How do you remember those meetings in that sense, in a timing sense?



**URQUHART:** I tend to be emotional, I guess. Can shed a tear a lot quicker than a lot of fellows but I was grateful to be a part of it. I didn't want to leave. I don't know that I was the last one out in any sense at the end of the session but with reasonable breaks for me [unclear] or whatever I was certainly a part of it and it wasn't a drag or it wasn't something I was wishing would get over in any quick thing. I came back for the voluntary sessions instead of staying off and using the time to cram on the books or anything like that.

**OLSON:** Okay. Did the war...did the war have any causal affect? Did that cause a certain seriousness...or...?

**URQUHART:** Yes.

**OLSON:** Or do you think...

**URQUHART:** I would certainly say very definitely. Some of the fellows had already gone to the service. One of my classmates was an early casualty and that all had an impact on us and all of us [clears throat] couldn't [?]....Seniors were very concerned as to whether they would be drafted before graduation came and there was much intercession and prayer for at least deferment until graduation so their four years wouldn't be interrupted. But there was a great patriotism too with the war and that doesn't seem as apparent these days. We were united as a nation and ready to pay the price for whatever wa...we were called upon.

**OLSON:** [Coughs] Do you...[clears throat] (excuse me)...remember the effects of the revival through the grapevine afterwards from any of your friends perhaps that had gone with the military or graduated after graduation or something like that?

**URQUHART:** I had contact only with one fella while I was in grad school who had come from Wheaton. He also was in physics at that time and together we...we shared....I respected his deep quiet faith and then later when I got to seminary there were some classmates that....One of them was Eddie Berkholder, a Mennonite from Indiana, who really impacted me in my ultimate call to the mission field. Beautiful tenor voice, soloist in the Glee Club and when he could throw his life away by going to India with all the future he had in music in this country, I figured that what little I could offer the Lord wasn't too good to keep me home from going to the mission field.

**OLSON:** Have you...in perhaps 1950 or 1970....Do you remember hearing of any of the other revivals through alumni sources? Or do you remember praying that God might impact Wheaton again?

**URQUHART:** No, I guess I was on the mailing list [clears throat] for the alumni news but being out of town and I never got back to campus except for m...maybe an occasional concert but...or our homecoming...but the news reached us overseas late and probably was outdated by the time that we could effectively intercede for something that was going on currently on campus.



**OLSON:** Do you remember any...any other people that you saw were noticeably affected by the revival? Or who perhaps [unclear]...

**URQUHART:** Well, I think there's....I can't pin it and I certainly can't defend it, but I am proud of the generation that went through Wheaton at that time and I think the revival had a major impact on a lot of lives that have impacted society since. Joe Bailey of InterVarsity. Hudson Armerding, Leslie Flynn, lots and lots of these fellows, Jack Rosser, Chuck Snyder, all of whom went to the mission field and have made tremendous...or done their thing. Abe Van Der Puy in Ecuador and the rest of them. Maybe they didn't all go through the revival, but they all had that Wheaton experience that made them spiritual giants in due time.

**OLSON:** Other comments or things that you would like to say in relationship specifically to the revival or on the impact you felt perhaps....

**URQUHART:** I'm just sorry, Dan, that it...it's faded so much from my memory, dates, people, events, or comments. We all went through it and I guess we...we weren't conscious of any or I wasn't anyway of any outstanding people that changed. Once I was blind and now I can see. No doubt there were some of those testimonies given, first time conversions but who they were or what it amounted to I certainly can't document.

**OLSON:** Well, thank-you very much for the...the interview and is there anything...I suppose I would have a question on prayer, on perhaps the intensity of it.

**URQUHART:** I think I'm a better Christian for having been there. The power of prayer. The reality of a broken life, that is, a broken heart with contrition and repentance that's influenced me no doubt in my preaching and desire to see evidence in any conversion of real repentance. I guess perhaps I feel more than some rank and file ministers that repentance is a major part of conversion and I'm not sure how to define that theologically but we need to mend our ways and I've been ever grateful for being there in the revival and being there for some other great events, Prexy Edman's installation and later Hudson Armer...[Hudson Armerding].

**END OF TAPE**