

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **John Fawcett by Paul Ericksen (CN 514, T72)** 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 Bob Shuster and Emily Banas and was completed in April 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 72. Oral history interview with John Fawcett by Paul Ericksen on May 15, 1997 Paul Ericksen.

ERICKSEN: This is an oral history interview of John Fawcett by Paul Ericksen for the Archives of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. This interview took place at 3:05 pm on May 15, 1997 at the Archives' office. Okay. Well, thanks for coming over.

FAWCETT: You're welcome.

ERICKSEN: It's been two years since we did...since Bob did the interview with you. Could you....to begin, could you describe what happened during that third week in March?

FAWCETT: Well, I guess the...briefly, the campus experienced a deep time of repentance, in which students confessed sin and were...received prayer. People prayed for one another. There was a lifting of shame and of secrecy about life-dominating sin in people's lives and of a resistance to the Lord. And at the end of the week there was a great celebration of the joy that comes with repentance and of the freedom then to live in the Lord's love and light. And I think then a response to the work of the [Holy] Spirit in...in offering of lives to...to the service of the Lord. So, that's what I saw happen that week.

ERICKSEN: Okay. Has the revival had an impact on the Wheaton campus community over the last two years?

FAWCETT: I believe it has. I believe from both personal, first hand interaction with students and from my general perceptions of the climate at the college. Obviously, the first ones, the personal perceptions...I mean personal contacts, are more concrete, because I know of people whom I have had the opportunity of praying with or ministering to or ministering with whose lives took a real turn at that time towards some area of personal healing that they needed or towards some area of sin that they needed to confess. And those things often go hand in hand.

ERICKSEN: You referred to climate.

FAWCETT: What do I mean by that? I think that we don't always see the effects of what we are being protected from. But I think that the Spirit's blessing has been on us in...in prosperity. There's some ways that are campus has flourished – in the quality of students, in numbers of applicants, and in desire of students to worship and....There was, I guess, a slight drop in the numbers of students involved in campus ministry for a year, but I understand that that rebounded afterwards, I think, so I won't say that is directly related one way or another to the revival. But a continued desire on the part of students to...to be involved in giving of themselves. I think also, a vital and active support network among students. Whenever I speak with students, I hear about their prayer partners, their accountability groups, and their discipleship small groups and their close friends whom they have shared with. And I think that kind of prayer and openness contributes to the climate I was thinking...speaking of.

ERICKSEN: So, there...you wouldn't have necessarily heard that sort of thing or as much of

that kind of thing before.

FAWCETT: Well, you might have heard some of it before, because I don't think we were in dire straits. But I think that there was a....What I guess I am trying to articulate is that I think sometimes the effects of the presence of the Lord are present in blessing, but also, in restraint, and that we can't always imagine what might have happened...

ERICKSEN: Right.

FAWCETT: ...but we are more protected I think than we know. That's what I feel.

ERICKSEN: Uh-huh.

FAWCETT: I feel that we're more shielded, blessed, hidden in a sense from controversy and from the attacks of the enemy. Not that they don't come, but I think that we are increasingly in a more hostile cultural environment and the Lord's blessing has been on us. And we also, think back to days that I have heard about, not experienced firsthand, but when there was a lot of campus rebellion and campus cynicism, I think cynicism has...I think cynicism was broken in the minds...in the lives of many people. But it's...it's sometimes difficult to point to the absence of something. But I think there's...I think there's a marked absence of cynicism among students. And I felt that that was what happened even at the time that the revival went on. I think I may have said that in the other interview. I see.... Do you want to know some other specifics about ways that I have seen things happen?

ERICKSEN: That's up to you. [Fawcett laughs] I don't want too many.

FAWCETT: I'll just say a few things. One, I know that in the Christian Education department, there has been an ongoing growth of students interested in Christian ministry and spiritual development and discipleship and growing in their personal understanding of the...of the spiritual disciplines, of the virtues. This kind of thing. I know that Carla Waterman is an example of a professor who has incorporated I would say much of the emphasis of repentance and prayer into her classwork. And I have had the privilege of going to a couple of her classes and praying with students in the years since the revival in a way that was very similar to the kind of ministry that was going on at the revival. And the life changes and the joy in the lives of those students has been tremendous. I have been involved with the ministry in the area called the Redeemed Lives, which is to the sexually broken and to people struggling with divorce or food addictions, all kinds of life controlling issues. And we have had several Wheaton students involved in that, most of whom came directly as a result of the revival and whose lives have been really deeply changed as a result of that. I've...there's been...our church has had continued extended...there's been a large number of students attending our church. I go to the Church of the Resurrection of Illinois which is meeting at Glenbard West High School now. And we've had a group for students on Friday nights that's been basically a time of personal healing and growth, spiritual teaching about matters of the heart. And people have followed up in that, quite a few. Once a month, every Friday night. There was also, a follow-up time that some people from our church offered to students on campus. We met in Barrows auditorium for especially issues of sexuality,

in following up with people after the revival. That was fairly well attended. Some opportunities came out of that.

ERICKSEN: Okay. Now, you've talked about impact on students. What about impact on your colleagues? You mentioned....

FAWCETT: Faculty?

ERICKSEN: ...You mentioned Carla. Yeah, I'm thinking faculty, other staff in the Library. I'm not thinking of anyone in particular.

FAWCETT: No, no. I'd say that during the revival, the faculty was either supportive but relatively uninvolved or somewhat detached. And there were a few faculty who were quite involved. There were many, I think, who were very supportive but who weren't in...in attendance but who may have helped through their class prayers and...and interactions and talks with students. I will say...I heard...I had a discussion and talked with my students about the revival in a class I teach for the History department on Introduction to Historical Inquiry. And it fit well into our class discussion, because we were dealing with how one approaches the work of God in history. And can a historian write about the supernatural and how does that affect...work? And then we talked about the revival. And some students commented to me that mine was the only class in which the professor had even mentioned the revival. So, I think a lot of it happened without faculty notice. I heard some skepticism. But I haven't heard any....I've heard some positive things too. I wouldn't say I've talked a lot about it with my colleagues. There was one colleague who...who was very impressed that a student had come to confess having cheated and that was very impressive to him, that the revival led to a concrete repentance in a...a particular student's life. But I haven't sensed any great hostility. I think there's a...a tendency among certain groups to define revival according to a particular set of events and some of them might come from a more Reformed perspective where there's to be relatively little emotion. Some might come from a more Pentecostal/Charismatic perspective, where there I an expectation that there will be a lot of manifestations. And I found [chuckles], curiously, both of those groups at their extremes frustrated with what went on at Wheaton [both laugh]. But I think really there aren't too many people who couldn't see that the work of God in repentance was genuine. And part of it just depends on how you define revival. Is this part of the normal flow of what a Christian community should experience? Is this something exceptional? This was not a revival of the kind that is happening, say, down at Brownsville [also, known at the Pensacola Outpouring, starting on June 18, 1995 in the Brownsville Assembly in Pensacola, Florida]. I've heard a little bit about that one, down in Pensacola at the Assembly of God church, where they have had conversions of unbelievers by the score, prayer meetings in the local public high schools, you know, this kind of thing. People lining up early in the morning to get into the services and services going every night for months. Well, this wasn't like that. But that's not what God was doing here either. So, I don't think we can recreate something or...or force it.

ERICKSEN: What about student attitudes?

FAWCETT: Well, I think I've said just that...the absence of cynicism...

ERICKSEN: Yes.

FAWCETT: ...the generally...I think students who experienced it were by and large very positive toward it. I know I spoke with some students who were reserved, somewhat skeptical. But I think they...they...some of them came to see it as not having resulted perhaps in extremes of emotionalism.

ERICKSEN: Uh-huh

FAWCETT: And that it was well handled. Even the skeptics, I think, felt it was well handled. But most of the students thought it was great. Now the thing is we are coming to the year I think when those who were juniors...those who were freshmen in '95 will be seniors in the coming academic year, I believe [1997-1998]. So, we'll see. The last group of students that have any reco...recollection of that revival.

ERICKSEN: Now do you ever find yourself explaining, let's say, to freshman or to maybe to a new faculty...

FAWCETT: What went on?

ERICKSEN: ...what happened?

FAWCETT: I actually haven't had that. I've had the opportunity to speak to people outside of the campus community, but not to local...people here. I think for the...up until this year I think quite a few of the underclassmen heard about it from talk from others.

ERICKSEN: I think you talked a little...a little bit about follow-up. You talked the discipleship groups.

FAWCETT: Uh-huh.

ERICKSEN: What your church did. Anything else you want to say about that? More formal kinds of things or just spontaneous....?

FAWCETT: Yeah, the only formal things that I know of I think I've already mentioned.

ERICKSEN: Okay. What impact, if any, did the revival have on you personally?

FAWCETT: Well, it was I think at the time a humbling experience for me as I saw the Lord work in ways that called me to be still and let Him do what he was doing. I wasn't...I didn't see myself at the center of it. I wasn't in control of it. I initially thought it was perhaps getting out of hand because of some other perceptions that I had heard. And when I went, I was aware that I needed to first repent myself and be touched by the Spirit's work. And so, that's what happened to me there. I felt personally a growing confidence and freedom in ministry to students, although that was happening somewhat as the Lord brought individuals to my...into my life, at the

[Buswell] Library or through church, students would be there, Redeemed Lives. So, it's not been a...there wasn't a radical change at the revival for me. But there was a definite touch of the Spirit. It was part of a...of...of the ongoing work of the Lord and I was blessed to be a part of it. And to see that joy released on campus was [pauses] I think it...it sustained...I was in joy for several months after that [laughs], with Thursday night celebration at College Church. And those kinds of experiences I think are not intended for daily living. Those are times of mountain tops or particular anointings of God's grace. And they...I often find that those blessing come in...in advance of some...some trials or some times of perseverance that we're called into. And not to be destroying the joy of the moment, but sometimes in the joy, I think, "Lord thank you for what...for this and thank you for feeding me with this now...this now. You must know that I need it, you know, that I'll need it perhaps in the future to recall the wonderful works of God."

ERICKSEN: Have you found that to be the case?

FAWCETT: In some ways, yes. There's...not necessarily in specific, horrific battles or anything like that, but just that I needed strength I think for the greater maturing of the Lord's work in my life and ministry. That's not been anything radically different, but simply a greater amount of responsibility. My...my responsibilities at church and in ministry, with Redeemed Lives and with pastoral care ministries and with the college have grown. And I can remember feeling at one point as though my legs were standing on two continents. And I said, "Lord, I'm going to be split in the middle between work and everyday responsibilities and ministry, unless you either set my foot on one continent or the other or help me grow bigger [chuckles] and that way the stretch won't be quite so much." And I...I felt the Lord say, "No, you're supposed to be involved in both things, so grow bigger [both laugh] and learn how to organize your days and your time better and take on responsibilities." So, that's what personally...

ERICKSEN: Uh-huh.

FAWCETT: ...been happening for me.

ERICKSEN: You mentioned earlier some of the ways that your church was able to help out and contribute. Are there ways that the church was impacted by the revival or changed by it?

FAWCETT: I'm not sure. I don't...we didn't have in our church a time of confessions, like some local churches did, in which they emulated either intentionally or just by the Spirit's call the similar kinds of thing that were going on here, emulated...emulated what was going on...on campus. But [pauses] I think we were affected by being able to celebrate with the students that were touched by it. We had a time of sharing about what had happened in the service, in the services at Wheaton, at our morning service in which some students shared what was going on and the church joined in prayer for them. And then we had the follow-up that many people from our church were involved in, being available to pray. And then the...the Friday evening group that's been going on was made available to the students. So, I don't know that it touched the church as much as the church was just able to be there for students who wanted to process or work further in...in the issues that God had raised in their lives.

ERICKSEN: Okay

FAWCETT: But a....Wow. It was...it was a blessing for the church to see that happening at Wheaton. I...there was a great sense if thankfulness, just very thankful to God.

ERICKSEN: Any...anything else you would like to say about the revival or what's happened since?

FAWCETT: Right now, I'm sort of wondering what the Lord would do next or how...what our call is. I know that we're just to continue to be faithful. But I am wondering whether something like this is something to pray for. I haven't been praying for revival at Wheaton. And I know that there were many people praying for revival at Wheaton prior to the time of Mar... of 1995, March 1995. So, maybe the time will come when we should pray again. But our pastor preached a sermon. William Beasley preached a sermon just this last year or maybe...maybe it was over a year ago. But he made a comment in the sermon. He said it had been on his heart since the revival at Wheaton, to the effect that what went on at Wheaton and the confession there can be the part of the everyday rhythm of the saints' life. We can live with a clean conscience. We can confess our sins to one another without allowing secret sin to fester for months until there is a quote "revival." We...it was a beautiful thing that happened, but it...we don't need to think of it as though we...we simply have to wait for another one of those experiences to be filled with the presence of the Lord and with His joy as well. That's something that should be woven into the fabric of our lives. And perhaps what we had here was more of an awakening or refreshing. Perhaps a real revival involves the conversion of unbelievers. I'm not sure. I don't know about those definitions but that's something we haven't seen. And that would be my prayer, for the harvest that the Lord has to bring in...into the churches, that we would have the voice and the power of the Spirit to speak the words to our generation that would turn their hearts to the Lord. I think we are facing a generation that...for...upon which old evangelistic methods are not effective. And that the power of the Spirit is needed for evangelism in our day. And the appeal to truth and to authority no longer seems to convince because people's worldviews are so relativized that truth for you is not truth for anyone else, unless it happens to fit their particular inclination. And so, we need a kind of evangelism that moves in the power of the Spirit. That's...that's my prayer, that the Lord will show us that. And we also, face opportunities. We face opportunities and challenges with post-modernism and where our culture is. These are somewhat random thoughts. So, that's pretty much all I have to say, I think [chuckles].

ERICKSEN: Okay. Well, thanks, John.

FAWCETT: You're very welcome.

END OF TAPE