INTERVIEW WITH DR. JOHN PHILLIPS
JUNE 11, 1979

Dr. T: John, you were born and reared in Kansas, is that right?
Dr. P: That's right. Born there and reared for part of the time, then in South Texas near the Mexican Border.

Dr. T: Did you go to Baker University?
Dr. P: Yes. I went to junior college in South Texas then my last two years at Baker University.

Dr. T: Baker is a Sister Methodist school. How big was it?
Dr. P: About 400 students when I was there. Really a small school.

Dr. T: That's like Nebraska Wesleyan when I went there, in Lincoln. And then you went to Boston for your theological training?
Dr. P: Yes, and the doctoral work there too.

Dr. T: Who did you study under in Boston?
Dr. P: Dr. Edmund T. Booth was my major professor in New Testament literature.

Dr. T: That was when Dan Marsh was president.
Dr. P: Yes, Dan Marsh was president. Earl Marlatt was dean of the Theological School.

Dr. T: Marlatt has written some hymns that are, "Are Ye Able."
Dr. P: Yes, "Are Ye Able" and "Spirit of Boston?
Dr. P: I met him just casually several times, but got to know him quite well. When my bishop down in South Texas wouldn't let me stay for the summer to finish writing the first draft of my dissertation, he said, "John, how about coming out to the Northwest?" "We'll save the church for you until September" is what he said.

Dr. T: I remember meeting with you and Kletia in Boston - we had dinner.

Dr. P: Kletia was quite pregnant.

Dr. T: That's right. Your first child was very evident. We discussed about the possibility of you coming out to Puget Sound. I think I told you that somewhere along in the Midwest, Bishop Baxter got off the train and sent me a telegram, "If you're thinking about taking John Phillips on your faculty I vote yes." That was one of the clinchers that brought you. What year did you come here?

Dr. P: We came in 1947. If you will recall, when you went back on the way you stopped at Morningside and talked to John Magee whom you had talked with before and you thought you had room for just one faculty so you hired him. Then you found out later that you had room for another and you wired me to come in Philosophy and Religion. I debated that long and hard because I am not a philosopher and I wired back and said that I'd love to come but I wouldn't be happy teaching philosophy and history. You opened that letter having lunch over in Kittredge Hall with Jim Chubb who was a religious Emphasis Week speaker and who had been my professor at Baker. He said to you, "Oh, Franklin, wire and tell him to come anyway." And you did. And I came anyway. (Laughter).
Dr. T: That is interesting because I don't remember that part of it. John Magee and I had a rather unusual relationship for many years. He wanted to come out and when he was at the University of Washington he said he'd like to teach for me and I said, "Well, honestly, I don't have a place for you yet." He was teaching then at Morningside and so he said, "I want to come and live in the Pacific Northwest very much." I said, "Why don't you spend a year or two more at Morningside and the earliest moment I can do it I'll create a spot for you." We had worked it out and had the spot and I said, "Do you want me to talk to President Roadman of Morningside or do you?" He said, "I think I had better do it." When I went back to the National Association of Methodist Schools' meeting, who should get on the train in Omaha but Roadman. Roadman and I rode for at least a day, I knowing I was stealing one of his best men and I couldn't tell him! (Laughter). You and John Magee have made a wonderful team through the years. He's been a philosopher and you've been on the religion side of it and it has worked out very, very well. Your training has been more on the sociological side, and marriage counseling.

Dr. P: That is part of my training. The other is Biblical literature, the New Testament and Old Testament, now I'm just down to teaching New Testament. If you remember here, we've had trouble getting decent people to head the Sociology Department and got rid of them one after another. John Magee and I carried the Sociology Department together one year.

Dr. T: There was a time when people were trained with a very strange kind of sociological philosophy.

Dr. P: Very anti-religious.
Dr. T: That's right. I remember I interviewed one man in California and I said, "What is your church relationship?" And he said, "You have no right to ask me that." He was in sociology and I said, "I don't think you would be happy at the University of Puget Sound." I couldn't ask him those questions now. Through the years you have been teaching religion, I think this is a strange question to ask you, but how do you compare the philosophy, for instance, at the University of Puget Sound and the University of Washington as it relates to religion?

Dr. P: I think it has changed in the last few years slightly, in that the University of Washington has gradually broadened and begun to realize that there was an area of study called religion. For the first twenty-five years of my time here they were very close-minded on that and it was not a part of the total learning process, where we saw it as part of the total learning process. Not in a narrow, bigoted sense, but you couldn't be a well-educated man without considering religion because men all over the world have been religious.

Dr. T: I remember many years ago when the University of Washington wanted to bring E. Stanley Jones on campus and they could not because the state Attorney General ruled that it was against their Charter. We did take him to the University Temple, our church right next to the campus. I think we have tried to maintain a very strong liberal attitude toward religion as an intellectual discipline. Who are some of the other colleagues whom you have enjoyed during these years?

Dr. P: Well, I remember Bob Sprenger with very deep affection as
a man who did some significant things on campus. You remember Deep Creek and how he spent so many hours - I'm sure you had some good times with students up there too - in conferences and retreats. I know I did and a lot of my other colleagues. It was a very meaningful kind of experience. Bob put a lot of himself into that. I remember how in his last years, with his eyesight practically gone, he was still chairing committees and being a very significant factor in academic life.

Dr. T: Bob was a great man in every way. He and May, of course, she would brief him on the material the night before, and he would do it by memory. I always enjoyed him because he was a man who would come in and say, "Dr. Thompson, I think you ought to know this..." and he would give you a very careful analysis, an impartial analysis, of faculty attitudes and also attitudes towards development and so on. I never shall forget when we were working on the science building the federal government came in and said, "If you'll make a bomb shelter out of it and put it between Howarth and (what is now McIntyre) and put it underground we can allocate a certain amount of money." I called Bob in and I said, (he was chairman of the committee), "I wish you'd work this over with the faculty and see what they think." I spent a whole weekend on it and said to myself, "This is terrible. It just isn't feasible at all." For instance, we had to raise all the liquids forty-two feet to get them in the sewer. I shall never forget on the Monday morning after, we had finished plans in hand, and I took the plans under my arm and at a quarter after seven I walked over to the office and here was Bob with plans
under his hand. I called him in and said, "Have you come to the same conclusion I have?" He said, "What's that?" I said, "That this is impractical, unworkable and unfeasible?" He said, "Thank God." (Laughter). "That's exactly the result we came to!" Then it was, "What do we do?" We said, "Why don't we move the science over here and put the business here," and it all came out under Bob's very able leadership. In all the tapes we've made so far, very little has been said about Bob. I'm glad to have your evaluation of him because he was a dedicated person, a scholar. I never shall forget that when he was working on his Ph.D. at Syracuse, I went to see him and found him in a lab. The snow was falling in one of the most beautiful snowfalls I have ever seen, coming down in flakes the size of golfballs. We sat down and talked in the lab about his coming to C.P.S. and how we needed him. He and May were happy to come. He was a great leader. Who were some of the others?

Dr. P: Of course Arthur Frederick was the man who was chairman of my department when I came until he retired. He was quite a man.

Dr. T: I have great love and affection for Arthur Frederick. He was a kind of a paradox in many ways. He was brought in at the time when religious education would be the panacea of all religion. He was one of the best men I knew on the surveys and analyses of who were the church ideas and peoples. I always thought that maybe he was a little prejudiced against Youth for Christ and some of this youth movement. On the other hand, he was very interested in steering a middle course.
Dr. P: He knew how some of these movements would narrow people in. They wouldn't allow students the freedom to think that he felt was so important.

Dr. T: He was a wonderful person. He was in my office a great deal.

Dr. P: I knew he was.

Dr. T: I had great regard and affection for him. I probably shouldn't tell this incident, but after he died his son said to me, "Well, you won't be bothered by him anymore." I said, "I wasn't bothered by him! I loved him. I really did." I actually had tears in my eyes because I didn't want people to think he was a bother to me. He was good for the University.

Dr. P: He told you things he felt you should know. Like Bob did, only in another way.

Dr. T: I shall never forget. We had a strong discussion in a faculty meeting. Dr. Chapman made a motion which was impractical. He could not get a second for it. I had to rule, as the chair, that his motion lost for want of a second. Arthur came in the next day and said, "Well, boss. You were a little less than your best yesterday." I appreciated that because he was telling me what the facts were. Arthur Frederick was really a very much beloved person. He was not so much beloved by students because they never got to know him. Yet he was respected by all.

Dr. P: As a man to work under, for the young prof coming in, you couldn't have asked for a kinder, more gentle, and yet supportive person.

I hope you'll be able to get Tommy on tape. He was another
person who was really great.

Dr. T: I already have him on tape and all about his trips to China...

Dr. P: He was an exciting person, controversial. The thing I remember, is when the MacCarthy era was on, he and I were speaking at the Washington School P.T.A. and we were on the program. The chairman cancelled it because we were questionable because we belonged to a United World Federalist Organization. She thought that because we belonged to this organization which talked about world government that we were Communists. You said, "I'll stand behind these men." Boy, I'll appreciate you until my dying day for that. It was not only us two, it meant we had academic freedom at this university and you did that.

Dr. T: Tommy was president of the American-Soviet Friendship Society during the time when Russia and the United States were allies against Germany. He collected clothing and everything else and was on many occasions the man about whom they would say, "What have you got that blankety-blank communist up there for?" I would say, "Wait a minute - let's analyze what you're talking about. The FBI has him out at Fort Lewis teaching soldiers what we're fighting for. Do you know what you're talking about?" When you push them to the wall like that, they soon shut up. It was a tenuous time. Tommy, of course, seems to get younger every year. I talked to him about a month ago and he told about going to China. Were you here when Senator Davis was here?
Dr. P: No, but I've heard about him.

Dr. T: He was the Mr. Chips of the campus.

Dr. P: Bob Albertson was here. He is one of my very closest and favorite colleagues.

Dr. T: Bob is one of the most beloved professors we have ever had.

Dr. P: He is a great person in the sense that he had a way with words and a way with people.

Dr. T: And also an endearing spirit.

Dr. P: Bob and I have sort of picked up this thing from Tommy. We thoroughly enjoyed our overseas teaching. You got that started.

Dr. T: Well, when I was in Oxford we had what we called "dinner in hall" every night. One night you'd see a man from Germany, or Italy, or Greece or China. I thought, "What a wonderful educational experience." Then I had no idea I was going to be in education and when I did, I kept thinking, "How can we do this for our students?" That was when we kept bringing students from other countries.

Dr. P: Chris Miller and Tommy and I took that overseas summer school one summer.

Dr. T: Then of course when you could take a group - where all have you gone?

Dr. P: We went to Europe and Gothenburg where we did the summer school study. Then things got kind of slow. We had children. We had two at that time and then we had four. Our next trip was a semester in Rome. Then the next trip was a
semester called Mediterranean study. We went to Israel for ten days, to Turkey for a month, to Greece for a month, and to Florence for ten days, and a month in Rome. Then we took a semester in the Pacific Rim, down to Australia.

Dr. T: Nowhere in all of our ninety people have we talked about this. Give us the mechanics of it - how was it done?

Dr. P: It varied with different situations. I set up the first semester in Rome. I just made those contacts, writing to people, and getting in with the Dante Allagere school, the Italian school there and hired some of their instructors. I taught the course in the early church of Rome using some Dutch nuns who were there. Then we got other lecturers. Then in Austria they worked through an Austrian-American institute.

Dr. T: You announced here on campus that you would have this next September. Then students sign up for it. Then you figure how much it is going to cost. Then the students subsidize it. You went over there and stayed in a pension's shop?

Dr. P: Yes, in Rome we stayed in a pension. They stayed in a hotel, and a pension in Austria. Down in Australia we stayed in the dormitories.

Dr. T: This meant board and room. Then you arranged the trips out from it?

Dr. P: We would only take part of our meals at the pension in order to give the students the other money and let them get out and eat around the town. It encouraged them to go out weekends.
Dr. T: You would go to the Roman Forum, the Vatican, and didn't you once meet the Pope?

Dr. P: Yes, we had a group there in '67 that met the Pope.

Dr. T: Was that an interesting experience?

Dr. P: It was a very interesting experience. Particularly because we had to draw straws to see which two students would get to go. The one who wanted to see him most was a Jewish student.

Dr. T: Did he get to go?

Dr. P: He got to go! (Laughter). He got the lucky number.

Dr. T: Did you visit the Sistine Chapel?

Dr. P: Oh yes. Many times.

Dr. T: I did an honors paper on the Sistine Chapel. It is overwhelming.

Dr. P: All of his work is so powerful.

Dr. T: I remember in the Cathedral there is a statue of the Pieta. One time Michelangelo, who created it, was looking at it when two people came by and one of them said, "Who did it?" and the other one said, "Leonardo." So that night Michelangelo put his name on the front of it. (Laughter). I also remember the brass lines in the Vatican showing how much bigger it is than all the other cathedrals in the world. It is a great experience for a youngsters to go to a place like Rome or Florence where you can see Michelangelo's work and famous brass doors and the bridge over the river.

Dr. P: You read about it in books all you want but when you see it the impact is just blasting.
Dr. T: You are never the same. This is one of the reasons why I was so enthusiastic about our Study Abroad because I think that if you've been there it makes a huge difference. As you said, Bob Albertson was particularly good at this. Not too long ago, a man sent me a check for a thousand dollars and said, "This is in appreciation for what Bob did for my son. He went a boy and came back a man." He said he'd like to have Bob use it for whatever he wanted to.

You have taught the Bible most of the time? You have also had Rabbi Rosenthal on the Old Testament?

Dr. P: Yes. He and Bob have alternated Old Testament. When Bob has been gone on leave, he taught Old Testament. Otherwise he taught some introduction to religion courses. I am into a living-dying area now, which is very important. Students are really responsive to that.

Dr. T: Hasn't there been a popular course in the newspapers on this?

Dr. P: Yes. It has become very popular all around since Elizabeth Ross wrote her book on death and dying and opened up the whole field so that people are honestly looking at death and seeing it as not something terrible out there but as a part of life.

Dr. T: Is Edgar Jackson an authority in this field?

Dr. P: Yes.

Dr. T: Edgar Jackson was a friend of mine when I had a student church. He and his wife lived the second student church down, and she drew a bath for the little boy and turned
her back and he burned to death. That is the reason why
Edgar Jackson has been interested in this all his life.
I had a part of the funeral. The child was sixteen months
and it is just one of those things you can never forget.
Again, what year did you say you came?
Dr. P: '47.
Dr. T: You saw a lot of changes.
Dr. P: A lot of changes. I have seen the campus from
where you took it. Todd Hall was being built. That was the
first building. They dedicated that right after I got here.
I have seen all that building that you've done. It has
been an exciting thing.
Dr. T: It really has. You know, I wanted to do something
special honoring Dr. Todd while he was still able. Three
months after I came I called him in and said, "Doctor, you
gave them your life here and what you've done is amazing.
You have given a tremendous foundation. I'd like to have you
write a history of it." Of course he loved the idea. He
spent a long time on it. When he finally finished he came in
and said, "It's done, Doctor, it's done." I said, "Well, now
your memoirs." He did quite a bit on his memoirs. But I
said to him, "I'd like to have something unusual at the
University in your honor. The first building we're going
to build is a dormitory for men and we'd like to have it named
for you." He was a wonderful person, and he said, "Well,
Doctor, that's nice. Are you going to build an academic
building before long?" And I said, "Well, we don't know.
But we will build this and have it named after you."

He said, "That would be very nice. Really, I'd rather have an academic building named for me, but this would be nice."

Dr. P: We didn't need an academic building at that point.

Dr. T: No, we didn't. We needed it later on, which was, of course, the music building. Two weeks after Todd Hall was built and dedicated, Bishop Baxter, who was part of the ceremony, died suddenly. He was a great man.

Dr. P: I am so glad that I got to know him. I went over to see Dr. Todd and talk with him and he gave me some of these books which I just so treasure.

Dr. T: His whole life was in the University of Puget Sound and his family. The day before he died he asked to sit up, and so they sat him up and put his feet on the floor, and he said to his son E. Paul Todd, "Now go over and tell that young man that library must be big enough!" That was the day before he died.

Dr. P: Were you planning the library then?

Dr. T: Oh, yes. I had talked with him about the plans. It was interesting because the architect had said, "This library will do you until the year 2000." When we located the chapel, Mr. Kilworth walked over to the campus on many occasions and he wanted the chapel set back so that there could be a circular drive. It would have taken the whole block. I kept saying to him, "Every square foot is a treasure. And we probably can't afford a circular drive." When he died we moved it close enough so we could get the second library in there. Even on seventy-five acres you have to be careful.
Dr. Todd was a little unhappy because he had a philosophy that every street should look into a building. Fifteenth St. does. So when locating the president's residence he wanted it to look down a street. I said it has to be far enough over so it won't take the area for another building.

You probably made some notes there. What do you have?

Dr. P: When the campus was smaller, with fewer students, one of the things I really treasured was the work that I did with small groups, like the Methodist Student Movement, the Independent Students and some of my closest friends I still have are from those groups. That was a great experience. Also I remember Chapel, where we had a feeling of being one group.

Dr. T: We used to talk about "The Family."

Dr. P: Yes. That's a reality. That was a phrase that got kind of hackneyed. I'm sure people told you that many times. Nonetheless, it was a reality in terms of the students.

Dr. T: When we had Clay Loges, he came in and said, "Stop talking about "The Family." We've outgrown it. We're much bigger than that." It was very interesting when he did that - then twenty students came in together and said, "Don't stop. We love it."

Dr. P: The nostalgia and the warmth... For example, those Christmas vacation dinners we would have just before Christmas, and there would be the Christmas story and you'd make your talk to them about going home and telling your parents that you love them. Those were the things - they were real.
Dr. T: Did you ever work with Kappa Phi?
Dr. P: No, I didn't.
Dr. T: Kappa Phi was really a miniature Methodist women's society. I never could figure out why all of a sudden it just died. There were a lot of psychological movements in student bodies that simply withered away and died.
Dr. P: Yes. A lot of other organizations like Mortar Board and things like that, that I think girls got into.
Dr. T: There were certain student movements like Kappa Phi, which came and did their service and then phased out. You remember Teach Jones and her Spurs and the tremendous job that they did in serving the whole community. There was an inner spirit there. What did you think about some of the student movements in the latter part of the sixties and early part of the seventies? I think we can look back on those years as a time of emotional upheaval. Like the children's crusade in the Middle Ages. We had a lot of students who really were hiding out in college. They were not too much interested in education as they were in not serving in the Armed Forces. I think a lot of our problem generated from that. We set up the Student Council to meet such problems.
Dr. P: I think we did a very good job here on the campus keeping the doors open, so that during those times students could communicate and could work out what they had to say. I think it paid off for us.
Dr. T: I do too, while we had some tension. Strangely enough, John, when I try to analyze, it seems to me that many
of the people who really were bothered were young people who had a kind of an idealism, and then when they got into conflict with the real world they were torn. I used to feel for those youngsters.

Dr. P: We turned out some great leaders out of those kids.

Dr. T: Do you have some more notes?

Dr. P: I just wanted to mention the campus workdays. They were a very bonding type of thing, pulled students together, and made them feel like they had a part of the campus. I still remember putting stones around those trees in the inner quad and filling in there for the Music Building. The work together with the students was part of the whole "family" experience.

Dr. T: It was. We had a picnic. We worked in the morning and then picnicked. Then we had a ball-game. Those were very meaningful times.

Dr. P: Also, when the fraternities and sororities had chaperones we got to know students through that process. Now they don't need us or don't want us.

Dr. T: I told the Greek system that they had brought a lot of their own problems on themselves by virtue of the fact that they had done away with chaperones. I said, "you ignored the faculty and now the faculty ignores you because you've done that." They've been in three or four times asking how to grow and become stronger.

Dr. P: There are a lot of us on campus who invite in students to live even though we don't get the subsidy anymore.
One of those traditions of the school as I remember, the second or third year we were here we were sitting in our house over on South Third and Bob Rinker was there. Remember Bob? The basketball player. We had hid the hatchet in our sawdust bin. (Laughter). What a night that was! Some of the other class was standing outside and here is Bob sitting in our front room with that hatchet and we had to call the police! (Laughter). Those were fun times.

Dr. T: I wish I knew where the hatchet is. It just disappeared.

Dr. P: The thing I would want to remember are the colleagues whom I've worked with. Both administration and faculty. This has been - I can't imagine a man spending a lifetime any more happily. Working together, sharing. We've had our differences and all that, but we worked around them. We did a lot of team work. Of course, we had our heart in the same place - for the University.

Dr. T: For the University and the students and what you could do for them. John, you've been a great part of it and you've given your life to the University of Puget Sound and to the students. It must give you a deep sense of satisfaction. As I'm working on this history, it is amazing how wonderful it really is to see the dedication of people like yourself and the influence you've had. I've noticed that you have weddings and baptisms, and funerals because people have loved you and you've done a great service and they appreciate you very much. John, we'll transcribe this and then ask you to edit it. The tape will be kept and so will the manuscript so a hundred years from now, they'll still know who John Phillips is.