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**Making Room for Women Project**

**Interview with Donna Runnalls**

**Part Two – Academics**

**June 9, 2015**

## **Oral History Recording Summary**

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Interviewee: Donna Runnalls (DR)  
Date of Interview: June 9, 2015  
Transcribed by: Katherine Chambers

Interviewed by: Kaz Amaranth (KA)  
Auditor of Transcription: Donna Runnalls

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KA: So, Donna, I'm here again as part of the Making Room for Women project, and I wondered if I have your permission to continue in our interview today. 00:03

DR: Yes, you do.

KA: My name is Kaz Amaranth, and today is June 9<sup>th</sup>, I believe. Great. One of the things—I was looking over what we talked about last time, and I wondered if you could start—wanted to talk specifically to your time being Dean at McGill and Theological Education, but I wondered if you could just say where you were born and who your parents were, to begin with.

DR: Alright. My name is Donna Runnalls and I was born in Vancouver. My parents were Francis Runnalls and Sarah Oliver.

KA: Where did you live when you were growing up?

DR: Well, we lived first in Cedar Cottage in Vancouver, then moved to Prince George in 1941, and then in '46 moved to Armstrong, and from Armstrong back to Steveston and Richmond.

KA: And it was from there that you went to Korea.

DR: Yes, yes.

KA: In ... '56

DR: '56, yes.

KA: So we covered that a little bit last time, but I'm wondering if ... 'cause you ... there were couple of things that came to mind, thinking about the times you lived in and what you've done so far, and one of the things was—I was wondering, when you into, basically, Near Eastern Studies, as opposed to, initially, theology, I was thinking about what an exciting time that must have been in that era, just the late sixties, after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Scrolls, and just the scholarship that was happening with all the new sources—could you speak a little bit to that? 01:38

DR: Yes. One of the things I was involved in ... I went to Israel in 1966. I was there during the Six Day War, and I had applied, during that year, to go on a summer dig in—it was actually in Gezer, which isn't an especially important archeological dig for what I wanted to study—but nonetheless, I wanted to learn about how archeology was done in order to be able to read reports and understand them. So anyway, I was worried that after the war they weren't going to carry on a dig. But they did, that summer, so I spent three weeks on an archeological dig, and I learned what I wanted to learn. And then I was able to use some of that material in the work that I was doing to complete my PhD

degree. But, although I studied ancient religion, I ended up doing my PhD on the writings of Flavius Josephus, which is really Biblical studies. When I came back to Canada in 1971, the spring of 1971, I had my—Oh, I should mention that I was at the University of Toronto, but a year before, just as I was beginning my research, I had a letter—and I had gone to Jerusalem for a summer of research on my thesis—and I had gotten a letter there to tell me that my thesis advisor had died, and there was no one else in the department willing to supervise me because it wasn't subject matter of anybody else. So I was given three options—the only one I remember is the one I took, which was to find a professor at the Hebrew university and ask him to become my supervisor. So I did and I got a man by the name of Abraham Shalit as my supervisor. He was an expert on Judaism in that early period—the period of, say, 300 BC to 200 AD. We worked together very well, because he was a person who had left—he was Czechoslovakian, but he had left Europe in 1933, I think, before the beginning of the war. He was very conscious of that, so the first few meetings that we had, he always talked about me as his Anglo-Saxon student.

(Laughter)

DR: He never got over that. But he would give me bibliographical suggestions from the German side, and then I would tell him what was happening on the English and French side. So we were exchanging writings and so on. It was very, very interesting to work with him, because he was very meticulous and very demanding. But I did complete my thesis with him and went home in the summer of '71 to present it to the University of Toronto. And I stopped over in Montreal to visit friends there and I went to see George Johnston, who was, at that point, Dean of Faculty of Religious Studies. And I walked in his office, and he looked at me and he said, "Where have you been? I have a job for you."

(Laughter)

KA: Why, nice to see you, too.

DR: Yes! So I started teaching at McGill in the fall of 1971. When I arrived back, I still had the finishing things to do on my thesis, and of course these were days long before there was such a thing like a computer. And I typed my own thesis. And, not only that, I had to—the department, luckily, had a Hebrew typewriter and a Greek type writer, [and I had to fit these languages into the text of my] thesis.

KA: And insert them. It sounds like a labour. Oh, my goodness.

DR: Oh, it was. It took hours and hours and hours. Anyway, finally I defended my thesis, before Christmas, and received my PhD at the winter convocation.

KA: From Toronto.

DR: From the University of Toronto, yes.

KA: So that—sorry—what were the first courses that you were teaching at McGill? 08:53

DR: Well, interestingly enough, the first course—the undergraduate course—at that point the Faculty of Divinity had become the Faculty of Religious Studies, and we had not only a theological program, but we had an undergraduate religious studies program. And so one of my first courses was to teach Judaism—but from the first centuries of Judaism. And that was fun. I liked that, because I was getting students that were both Jewish and non-Jewish, and it was a really interesting course to do. And then I was teaching introductory Old Testament, and [biblical] Hebrew language. I think that pretty well covers it. I didn't start to teach graduate students until a few years later, until I was appointed to the assistant professor category, which—I can't remember when that was.

KA: Would—the Hebrew language that you taught—could you speak to the differences? I know that there is modern Hebrew, which is spoken, and then there's Biblical Hebrew—is there a third? 10:22

DR: I don't know if you would categorize Medieval Hebrew as a different language. I haven't read Medieval Hebrew. The thing is that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that's when the Zionist movement started and they wanted to recover the use of Hebrew, so that the modern use of Hebrew has had all kinds of adaptations in order to indicate modern life. And there's a variety of ways in which people, in the contemporary period, read the Biblical Hebrew—with different accents and so on, depending where they're from, but it has been—the reading of it has been influenced by modern Hebrew and vice versa, I guess. I had to learn modern Hebrew to study in Israel, but one of the—I took a course once in Syriac, and what I-

KA: Which is one of the languages that-

DR: One of the—what would you call it?—the classical Arabic, like the family. What was fascinating was that the teacher showed us—taught us—the script, and then after one session, he said, "Now, for next week I want you to go home and read the first four chapters of Genesis in Syriac." That's how close they were to each other.

KA: Really?

DR: Yes. And you were using a different script, but basically you could read it. It was a most amazing experience of language learning.

KA: Wow. And so the Hebrew you were teaching at McGill would have been Biblical Hebrew.

DR: I was teaching Biblical Hebrew, but at the point—like, when I learned Biblical Hebrew, you had to learn all the structure of the language and so on, before 12:54

you could even start reading anything. Well, modern linguists had rewritten how to teach Biblical Hebrew, and you taught how to create simple sentences and within usually a month, I had identified—somebody had identified and I followed them—passages in the Bible which were extremely easy Hebrew, and so I had them reading Hebrew texts within a month, because we were doing it in the kind of modern linguistic teaching mode. And—I always remember this, because every class it was the same—one of the simple passages was the sacrifice of Isaac. And we would go through that, and the language is so blunt that the students would just sit there kind of stunned, and you could see how much of an encouragement that was to them, that they were actually reading the Bible already in Hebrew—in order to keep them enthusiastic about going on reading.

KA: Well, what you said in there—it was fascinating to me—that the way you learned Hebrew was radically different than how you seemed to have been teaching Biblical Hebrew, and wondering whether it was both your teaching experience and also then learning Syriac, you say ...

DR: ... and learning modern Hebrew ...

KA: ... that informed how you decided to teach.

DR: Yeah. I think that's what it was. Because when I started learning modern Hebrew, I realized that yes, I had all this grammatical structure in my head, but I didn't have the common—how you put together a common, everyday sentence. And that, I think, showed me that to put together the everyday language was extremely important, because the everyday language, I learned, is the most irregular part of the language.

KA: Really?

DR: Yeah. Everything that is not daily speech, patterns into similar patterns, but the daily language does not do that. Because if you think of saying, "I am, you are, he is," it's totally irregular and it [remains this way], because that's the way we learned to speak when we were children. We don't [change] it, or we don't regularize it in a pattern. And I came to the conclusion that that was really important to show the students in order to get them to see that they had to memorize that core language, because it wasn't going to be up there in a pattern. And then, once you've done that and you can learn to pattern the Hebrew, because Hebrew or Semitic languages are really interesting in the way that they have—they have a three consonant root that, with different vowels, means different parts of speech, but that three consonant root always has a basic meaning that you can translate into all kinds of forms.

KA: Wow.

(Chuckling)

KA: I'm having a little trouble grasping that.

DR: I did, too.

KA: Yeah. I'm thinking of Yahweh—like Y-H-W- H, and the tiny, tiny smidgen I know of Hebrew is that the vowels are then either dots or some form of ... to indicate that there's something else, and then you say the consonants are kind of basic, fundamental form, and then those vowel markings are also telling you what kind of language it is—whether its literary or more grammatical ...

DR: No, it's more like, "Is this a subject or an object or ..." in other words, it gives you the grammar.

KA: Okay

DR: Okay? Depending on what it is.

KA: Okay. Alright.

DR: And, in fact, once I was starting—when I was there, we had a class—I was in a class where we were reading the temple scroll, which was part of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and those scrolls have no pointing in them at all. They are just the consonants, because that's the early way the language was written. And so I had to—that was a really interesting experience, to learn to read unpointed text.

KA: Wow. Do you think that—and I don't know a lot—would that have been maybe because ... that text was so well-known because it was oral and so it was unnecessary to put down?

DR: I doubt that. I doubt that.

KA: So why would they have ...

DR: They simply hadn't invented ... and the thing is that as long as it was Hebrew, they—there are three consonants in Hebrew that can also function as vowel indicators: the aleph, the yod, and the hey. And you can—the word might have been written with the three basic consonants, but sometimes one of those would appear in the writing form, so that would indicate to you what form of a word was in that position in the sentence. So—but it's quite complicated.

KA: Yeah. Indeed.

DR: (Laughs)

KA: And I will stop feeding my curiosity and ... it just really shows me how you must have been thinking a lot pedagogically to be able to develop how you were going to teach based on what was needed to be understood, what would keep

people passionate about being able to continue in that vein.

DR: Well, I was, because ... I guess it wasn't the first year I was there, but the second year at McGill there was a movement in the education faculty to introduce new teaching techniques for university teaching. And using more computer kind of... it wasn't really computers, in that day, but they were teaching tools on electronics. And how to create teaching units for these—this kind of ... for different courses. And also using little groups. So I kind of convinced the faculty that we needed to start thinking about this. Most of the faculty had been teaching for so long that they weren't really very interested in it, but I did manage to get some money to hire a couple of the doctoral students to help me and we created a course on the introductory Old Testament to use this kind of method. And the students would go—we had a setup of the kind of lab where they could go and work through the recorded material that we had developed. I was using this small group technique where you had—it had to remain a group of three people because if you get a bigger group than that, there's always one student who won't talk and another student who will talk too much. But a group of three is sort of caught! And everybody has to talk. (Laughter.) But it was an interesting experience and I actually—a group of us, the ones that had worked on this—we actually did a presentation at the American Society of Biblical Studies (whatever it was called). We did a teaching presentation at that conference, just to try to show some of the things that were happening on the teaching front. 20:18

KA: Do you think you were drawing on your experience teaching English to Korean students? English as a second language, to be able to ... 23:24

DR: I don't think I was conscious of it, but I suspect that probably was in the background, because I ... I mean, in the reverse, I'm not particularly talented at learning new languages. It was always a struggle for me, because I can pick up the grammar right away, I can see the structures and so on, but I can't remember the words. (Laughs.) And I recognized, also, in my classes that there were two ways students learn language: some people learn visually and some people learn it orally. I'm a visual learner, not an oral learner, and so the ear was always a problem. I think that that kind of conscious sensitivity helped a great deal in the kinds of ways I thought about teaching. Because when I walked into my Introductory Hebrew class, for example, that's one of the first things I tried to identify: was who learns what way. And then you gear your questions to them specific to that.

KA: You maybe struggle with language learning, but you've had to learn quite a few languages for your PhD, in your travels ... and so how many languages did you learn? 24:49

DR: (Chuckles) No, it's more how many languages have I learned and forgotten?  
(Laughter)

DR: Because I ... I think I told you last time that I had hired a language teacher in



Korea. I've forgotten all that. Then, when I was doing my doctoral program, I had to learn Greek, Hebrew, and then I learned Arabic and Syriac. I guess that's it.

KA: And then French and German for scholarly ...

DR: Yeah, French and German. I think that's all. When I went to ... as an old lady, when I went to Indonesia to teach, I took three month of Indonesian language training, and that was really helpful.

KA: Was that Javanese, or ... there's many different languages.

DR: Yeah, there are. The common language of the whole archipelago is what they call Bahasa Indonesia. In other words, it's Indonesian, it's the creation of a pigeon language. Between all the dialects. And there are a lot of words in it that are actually Western ... it comes from Sanskrit, it comes from English, it comes from a whole group of languages. And the grammar is very simple, because being a pigeon language, it's really quite simple.

KA: Yeah. So more present tenses and simple past but not conditional ...

DR: No. No, no.

(Laughter)

KA: So ... when you began, you speak of kind of the innovation of what you were doing in the teaching methods. So that was in '72 ...? 26:56

DR: '71/ '72.

KA: '72. And then you became an associate professor—an assistant professor, I can't remember which one goes first.

DR: Assistant, associate.

KA: Okay. And then you got tenure?

DR: Yeah, that came along with the assistant professorship. It was easier to get tenure in that period, because there was no surplus of PhDs on the market. I was the first woman who was teaching Old Testament in Canada. I mean, at the ...

KA: At that level. University level.

DR: University level, yeah.

KA: Were there other women in the Faculty of Religious Studies?

DR: At that point, there were not. Within a year or two, I was joined by a colleague who was teaching Hindu studies.

KA: I seem to recall, maybe I'm wrong—that was on your urging? That when you were hired ...

DR: Yeah. Well, the thing was, George Johnston was extremely incredible because he was really wanting to bring women into the teaching of—in the theological program. And so he brought in me and then my colleague, and he attracted a lot of graduate, women students. Or, we were beginning to attract a lot of women, graduate students. So, we never had ... I think, but the present faculty has a much broader range of women in the faculty. But it was when I became a member of the faculty at that point, in 1971, only two percent of the faculty positions in Canada were filled by women. So it was an experience.

KA: What ... that just begs the question: how was it ... how were you received by other members of faculty?

DR: I actually didn't have much trouble with other members. I guess one of the things is that as you go through, depending on the attitudes—the period that you're living in, you adjust. And one of the things that I had—when I was doing my PhD, there was a member of our faculty that absolutely abhorred having women students. And so I did a course with him, which was absolute hell. And my attitude was, "He's not gonna win." And he didn't.

(Laughter)

DR: And every other member of the faculty—that was at Toronto—every other member of the faculty was conscious of what was going on, and they sort of tried to protect me. But, he was a very well-known scholar and was very hard to deal with. I think that that's an attitude I took with me and I never had any real problems. I just was myself to people and my colleagues and I didn't really have that many problems. I always made myself—my attitude or my opinion—known. I never backed off doing that and ... and I kept being promoted so there must have been something okay. (Laughter)

KR: Yeah. So was it 1986 that you became Dean?

DR: Yes.

KA: How did that come about?

DR; Well, the previous Dean may have been ... no, it was Joe McLellan, he ... at McGill, a Deanship is five years, renewable once. And then that's it. The end of his term came and I was the only one nominated from the faculty. But there were members in the University who—I assume—didn't want to see a woman

Dean or whatever, and they searched widely for a Dean. They had actually—were ready to appoint another person who was from Ottawa. And he was offered the job and at the last minute he turned it down to go somewhere else that obviously he preferred. And so they came back to me, which was somewhat embarrassing in a way, for them. Talking to my colleagues, I agreed to do the job. Despite all of that, it was really from the University side that it was a problem, not from the faculty side. At that point, I was the first woman Dean at McGill. I think that was the issue, and within two or three years, we had another woman Dean. It was like the beginning of a water shed, but it was difficult, in a way, because when I first became a Dean I would go to the meetings—we had monthly Dean meetings, usually over lunch—and I found it very difficult to say anything. But at the same time, at the same period of time, there was an organization within the universities: Women Academic Administrators. And I went to some of these meetings and I learned all kinds of tactics from other women that were in these kinds of situations. That was very helpful.

KA: Yeah, because you were the only one, so how could you ... I don't imagine there were a lot of Deans even across Canada—woman Deans—at that time.

DR: No, there weren't. 'Cause this organization was really quite small, but we did have an annual meeting together, across the country, but it was usually ... the universities paid for our going to it, but it was smaller groups. But that whole movement was just beginning, and I guess, in a way, you could see it, because post-war, it took a period of time for women now to be educated to that kind of level, and by the late sixties, we were still into a period where the universities had been expanding and they were looking for staff, and so women got a better chance at being appointed. I think that was the beginning.

KA: Yeah. Wow! Just trying to take that in ... but I guess what I'd like to wonder about with you, given that the time here looks like it's going to get busy ...

DR: Yeah, I think it's the early lunches, so do we want to go down to my room or find another place we can sit?

KA: Yeah ... alright let's just put this on pause for the time being ...

(Recorder on pause.)

(Recording resumes.)

KA: So, we're just going to take up again. Donna, to continue where we left off: I was thinking a lot, in what you've seen in theological education, I wondered if you could speak to how it's changed in what you saw from how you started to when you left, or retired from McGill. 36:36

DR: Well, the first thing ... when I was myself in theological education, as a student, we had a Bachelor of Divinity program in which the—what would I call it?—the

academic subjects and the practical subjects were mixed together. And the students who were in ministry—candidates for ministry—were doing both the academic study and the practical experience in a sense—in an integrated manner. I was not in the ministry stream; I was just doing the BD because I wanted to study theology.

Most of the students lived in residence at that point. I had in my class, for the BD '64, there were four women out of twenty-two students, and one of them, Phyllis Smyth, became a well-known United Church minister. And I can't remember ... there was a francophone woman who also became well-known in Quebec and I can't remember her name. And then there was an Anglican woman who was studying like I was, because Anglicans were not ordaining women. She did the BD as well. And I think it made a difference in terms of the way the program was put together, to have these two things integrated through the three-year program. One of the reasons that it changed—and it changed specifically in the Province of Quebec, because after the Quiet Revolution and the downgrading, in a sense, of the Catholic Church ...

KA: ... So it would have been '68 ... '64/'68?

DR: Mm hmm. They had—there was a big commission on education in which they came to the conclusion that the whole structure of education was going to change, and therefore they introduced the idea that a first degree program was a professional program. In other words, you could take a medical degree as a first degree program. That's only in Quebec that you can do that. You can take a law degree as a first degree. And theology had to go along with it, because even though it was called a Bachelor of Divinity, it was structured to be a post-graduate degree. And so now, at McGill, we had to restructure so that the Bachelor of Theology was a first degree. And that meant that the students didn't have the same educational background that the BD did. And that's one of the reasons they changed the nomenclature. So now, when I was teaching there, we were teaching in the different kind of structure. The theological colleges had all provided the integrative, practical courses and so they were part of the whole educational design of the BD. They found themselves in a different kind of position and so they structured themselves into ... what was the name of it? ... the Montreal Institute of Theology or something like that—I can't remember. The three colleges that were working together in the faculty. And they then had—it was like an additional year. The Bachelor of Theology became the academic part of the program, and they would do an in-ministry year of study for their certification. I think that, educationally, this was really a backward move because the students who did the integrated program had a much more realistic sense of the role of theology in the church. In other words, I think it downgraded—what would I call it?—the knowledge base of the students going out in ministry.

KA: Can you say more about that? Like an example?

DR: Well, I don't think that they had the same level of theological discourse. Certainly, I had that ... I don't know how to articulate it more clearly, but

certainly in Old Testament, I think the students did old Testament, but I don't know how much it facilitated them to then, in preaching their sermons, in understanding the relationship of the text to the present. My own experience of students that have graduated from the two different programs has been that the theological thinking of the present generation has not been as deep as what was there before. Now, maybe that's just my personal opinion, but I've listened to a lot of very poor sermons.

KA: Well, as a theological educator, you have some basis for that, for your opinion.

DR: Yeah, I think so.

(Chuckling)

DR: But, I think ... I mean, you will always get the really bright students that will shine and be outstanding, but the level of some of the students wasn't as good as one would hope.

KA: What were the most favourite courses you ever taught? 42:02

DR: Well, I taught this course, it was another graduate program and it was about apocalyptic literature. When I was sort of looking at the Bible, the part of the Bible that I found really interesting—and I think one of the reasons for this was my course in the Temple Scroll—I got really interested in the development of Judaism from the return from the Exile to the first century. And that's the period in which apocalyptic literature was forming. And I really loved this course and it was, you know, we were doing Daniel, we were doing ... we never got into Book of Revelation, because it was Old Testament, but it was such fun to have my graduate students writing papers and so on, giving papers in class, on what all this ... what's seen on the surface as really crazy literature. And so I really liked that course. And we were reading some of the apocryphal literature along the way with it, because that's where a lot of it is located.

KA: So, it's just ... I'm trying to get a handle on—I'd forgotten about the whole educational reform in Quebec, of course, because after the Duplessis era, the thirty years La Grande Noirceur, the great darkness as they call it in Quebec, and then when the PQ finally came to power and the church and state ostensibly was cut off, then ... yeah, the Education Reform, because all the theological training must have been at the Jesuit School, or the Catholic universities ... 46:54

DR: That's right. That's right. You know, UTC, with which I not only was affiliated, but was a member of the College, they had quite a number of francophone students coming, and because Quebec had introduced a policy that allowed the transfer of credits from one institution to another, we had a lot of UTC students, francophone students, that were doing their program in combination: some courses at McGill and some courses at U of M. And that worked out very well, I think. It encouraged, at least, United Church francophone students to

pursue their program in Canada rather than going abroad.

KA: And UTC is the Union Theological College that is the United Church college, is affiliated with McGill and the religious studies department.

DR: Yes. Yeah, it [was the United Theological College and had been a founding member of the Faculty of Divinity (now Religious Studies)] since it began at McGill in [1948].

KA: Well, I went to McGill, and took a few courses at the religious studies department, and there was always the sense that the religious studies department and Birks was a separate entity of McGill, a little bit more than some of the other departments and faculties. I guess I'm not really ... I don't know if this is a question, but is that due, in part, do you think you were talking about that transformation of separating more the theological studies into academic and then practical? In the religious studies department you would have been at the heart of that, so was that part of that maybe uneasiness, or what was the relationship with the University?

DR: No. No, I think the relationship between what was the original Faculty of Divinity and the University was always fraught, because what had happened was the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational College in 1912 had—I think those were all the colleges—had created a unified theological program. It was the first interdenominational theological program in North America and it was modeled on the structure of the church of North India. And it was some missionary that came into Montreal in that period of time that was talking about this new formation of theological education, and it was the business community in Montreal that thought that this was a very wise idea because it would be less costly for the different denominations to educate their students together. And so they formed the Montreal Institute of Theology. They tried to associate with McGill, but McGill's origins are not in the religious establishment, as so many other universities were. And so the University wasn't interested. And I don't know why they were interested in the '40s, but I suspect it was all financial. And it was big money and families in Montreal—like the Birks Building was Birks—and that was built in the '30s as a way to keep these skilled craftsmen employed in the Depression. There was a lot of public involvement among these big English families in Montreal at that period. So they were the ones that pushed for the theological program to become part of the University. But there was always this skepticism on the part of other faculties about the reality of having theology in the University at all. So it was separate, in an intellectual kind of way. It wasn't seen as having the same legitimacy as other institutions in Canada that were basically formed by the church! The first faculty of McGill was the Medical Faculty. And so it's a very different University. And at the same time, in North America, even coming into the University as an interdenominational faculty, it was one of the earliest in the North American universities.

KA: Well, I was trying to say: was that one of the seeds of basically Union in 1925—to have the three denominations training their ministers together?

DR: Absolutely! Yeah, yeah, I'm sure it was. I'm sure it was a big drive for that. And it has become common now, it's very—there aren't that many denominations that can afford to have their theological education done separately. And especially because of the cost of it. So the relationship of the University to the faculty has—it came to a head while I was Dean. When a new principal decided that it should be done away with, but—I've become very skeptical about universities as a whole. That's probably not part of what I should be talking about here, but I've become very skeptical about the fact that—I think—that ... what would you call it? ... the neoliberal idea of reality has taken over the universities, as it has so many parts of our culture. And I think it's leading to the weakening of the universities as teaching institutions—as critical thinking institutions. And I find it very discouraging.

KA: So was that part of the—kind of when it came to a head? Was more of a market-driven “what is the financial gain to having theological education in a university?”

DR: Right.

KA: So how did that come about?

DR: Well, it was basically—we got a new principal—as far as I can see—his priority was to reorganize all the University and, somehow or another, theology didn't fit into his reorganization. He designated two units to disappear, and one was Theology and one was Continuing Education! Because of the fact that, at least at McGill, we had been created by an act of the Quebec legislature, it wasn't easy, or it wouldn't have been easy to get rid of us, and when I got—I managed to get, as I call it—a support organization: the three theological colleges with all their connections into the Montreal establishment. And we managed to survive that.

KA: So what did you do to organize for that?

DR: Well, I had the bishop and the United Church—well, it was the Conference person and from the Presbyterians, the equivalent person, and they called together what was called the Joint Board of Theological Education, which represented them, and there was a big discussion and a decision to go to the lawyers—the Anglicans had the best lawyers. (Laughter). And so it was going to be a law suit if the University pursued it. Because the other thing was that when the Faculty had become part of the University in the '40s, we brought property. We brought an endowment.

KA: The Birks Building.

DR: Yeah. And those were turned over to the University, but there was an obligation that went with that. And it's not—when the gifts are given to public institutions and then not used for the purpose they were given for, that can create huge problems for an institution. So we used all that moral pressure. (Laughs). But it

took a little organizing to get there. I found it kind of nerve-wracking while it was going on. But there's a kind of contradiction that goes with that. You're part of the church, and you think to yourself, you live in a moral world. And that's the way you want to live. Whereas over here, things are happening that don't fit your moral world, and they look like they're not moral, and then it's a question of how do you get through all this without it being totally destructive of yourself. Or of your institution. And that was a really difficult thing to go through.

KA: How successful do you think it was?

DR: It's not been.

KA: No?

DR: No. I think they're undoing the Faculty right now.

KA: Are they?

DR: Yeah. I speculate about this, and think to myself, "I think we're going through one of the times—there have been many in the history of Christianity—one of those times of a real—it's a question of: is it decline or is it the growth of something new? And which way are we going?" And I can't believe that this is the end. I just—that makes no sense to me, because [as the church has lasted for 2000 years given all the areas of conflict it's been involved in, why would this be the time it would come to an end?] So I think people who have Christian faith somehow will see it through. 1:00:20

KA: Maybe not in the manner which we've seen, for sure.

DR: No, I think it's something totally new. Well, not totally new, because it never is *totally* new.

(Chuckling)

DR: But new enough that it will be hard to recognize, in a sense. I mean, it's hard to recognize what is coming.

KA: Yeah, that's true.

DR: So.

KA: Mm hm. We were talking about—just before—about language, and the First Nations language is disappearing, and I'm just making the link to what you're saying about the church, that maybe ... it's not only a new language that needs to appear, or that we won't see what it's going to look like, but do you have any ... do you imagine or do you have a vision for the church, for what it could look like?



DR: Oh ... Yeah, I will watch, for example, what's happening at the level of—what should I call it?—the impersonality of the digital world where people have friends on the net, or the whatever, and yet they're never in contact with those people and that, to me, is not real community. And I think the church may be one of the few places where people are actually going to experience real community. That, to me, is going to be really important, because who knows where the digital world will take us? It could be tragic as much as it could be positive. And I think that it is already showing some of the tragedy—there was a report this morning that less than 10 percent of children are getting enough physical exercise—that means they're going to be fat and unhealthy. And where does that leave the world? So I think the church is going to be really important in terms of creating live community. That's one of the things that I see—in a sense, I see that even in our congregational life now—so, I don't know where else we'd be going.

KA: You were speaking about travelling to Indonesia. And at some point in your teaching career you decided to travel, or was that after you retired? 1:04:53

DR: No, I had always—through my working life—because I'd been in Korea before I really had a clear idea of what I was going to do with myself—I decided that I—that that had been significant enough for me that when I retired, I was going to go and teach somewhere else in the developing world. And I thought it would have to be in an English speaking area, because I could only teach in English. But then, at McGill, we became part—our faculty became part of a CIDA project in Indonesia, having to do with the Islamic university there. So I went for a three months' period to teach in an Islamic university. I was teaching methodology of the study of religion. And I really had to teach myself that first.

(Laughter)

DR: Anyway, I was supposed to go for three months, and I liked it so much that I contacted the Christian university and asked if they wanted a free teacher. And I actually went and talked with whoever it was in the World Mission Board about the United Church sponsoring me, but I was told that because I hadn't been through a discernment project, that I couldn't do that.

KA: Hadn't jumped through the right hoops before you decided to do that.

DR: Yeah, yeah. And so I decided well, too bad, I'll just go anyway.

(Laughter)

DR: So I went for three and a half years and I taught at Duta Wacana Christian University [(in Yogyakarta)].

KA: In English?

DR: Yeah. I was teaching masters level students, and in English. I had a really good

time there. And there's been a couple of Indonesian students that came here to VST—I mean, they weren't from where I was; Indonesia is a huge country—but they were ... I didn't get to know them well, but I got to meet them and so on. It was quite interesting that they had an Indonesian program here.

KA: You've been involved in so many different things even just in the interview, thinking about your education reform and your methodology teaching, and scanning over your publications, there's inclusive language—I was looking at bees, agriculture in the Old Testament and the Bible ... 1:07:55

DR: Oh yeah, all kinds of weird things.

KA: All kinds of crazy, really interesting things.

DR: Yeah.

KA: Is there one or two things that you're really, really proud of? What you've done in your career, and your teaching?

DR: What would I be really proud of? ... I'm proud of the students. Some of the things that students have told me when I have met them after they graduated. I met a girl in the garden of the American Schools of Oriental Studies in Jerusalem one day—was back there, I guess in 1980 or so, and she came up to me, and she said—she introduced herself, I didn't remember her name, but she was at McGill, and she was just finishing a PhD in Egyptian studies—that is, Ancient Egyptian Studies—and she said, "I got really turned on by your undergraduate class on Near Eastern Religion." And I thought, "Wow, that's kind of neat." I think it's more the students that I've taught and the things that they've told me after I've met them years later that are among the things I'm most proud of. You know, there are some publications. I don't have a lot of publications. But what I've done, I think, are good. They wouldn't get me an academic post now, they aren't numerous enough, and I kept thinking to myself, "My problem was that I wanted to write things that were original. And so much of what's published these days is just regurgitating the same topic over and over and over, and people don't pay attention to that." So many publications are not worth the paper they're published on.

KA: Does that speak a little bit to what you're talking about, about the lack of—or, at least this is what I heard, I'm not sure if this is agreed—that if you do a Bachelor of Theology as a first degree, that your basic knowledge isn't as rigorous, and then to go—you're talking about a publication that isn't original. You don't have that depth of theological knowledge and scholarship that's backing it up, and then to be able to do something original, like that which you speak about. 1:10:48

DR: I think that's it. I once had a student—woman—come and tell me that she wanted to get into the PhD program in Old Testament at McGill, and I talked to her and I told her what some of the things that she would have to do were. And

she astounded me, because she said that she wasn't prepared to learn Hebrew.

KA: Whoa! And she wants to do a PhD in ...

DR: In Old Testament.

KA: Yeah.

DR: Yes. And I was just stunned, and I said, "Well, you won't get in, then." The level of—I don't know what students would think was required in order to do graduate studies. I think they have so many misperceptions. I don't understand it.

KA: Yeah. And I think it's also—having come to university education at a very different time, at that [indistinguishable word]. Market-driven time, I mean I know people who do their PhDs and the amount of money that it will take to do that, and the university says, "You don't have two years to do and study language and go learn archeology and what that might mean, and go explore the kind of different facets, the broadened facets of it."

DR: Yeah. So many of the PhD programs now—I took seven years to complete my program, partly because I was having such a good time going along. (Laughter) But that wouldn't be permitted now. You couldn't finish a PhD—you couldn't take that long. And yet, I think, without taking that long, I would not have been the person I was. I can't understand—quite frankly, I think what's happened is the value of the PhD has declined. That's all I can say.

KA: Was it, when you left McGill, or when you stopped being the Dean, you were renewed for one time. 1:14:01

DR: Yeah, I had—it all had to do with the pension. (Laughs). Because when I had been appointed Dean in 1986, I knew that would take me to '96 and I taught for one more year. But that was because I wanted to build my pension. I should say, beyond that—because I retired in 2000.

KA: Yeah, I was going to say.

DR: Yeah. Those years were beyond 65, but I guess I would have retired in '97, because that would take me to 65. And I added—because Quebec had changed its mandatory retirement. And so I wanted to build my pension a bit more and finally retired in 2000, because they told me that if I didn't retire I'd start losing money on my pension. (Laughter) They were trying to get rid of people like me that were in their late sixties. But anyway, it was ...

KA: But you were renewed as a Dean, because you said the Deanship was originally five years, but you were ten years a Dean.

DR: Yes, I was renewed as Dean once, but then beyond that I was not. We couldn't be.

KA: Yeah, that's what you said, that you were only allowed to be renewed once. And by the time you left, what was the faculty make-up?

1:15:58

DR: The faculty make-up was growing on the World Religions side, because [it], I guess from '71, [had been renamed Religious Studies, and] we were growing. And in fact the originator of the World Religions program was Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who was a United Church minister and had been a missionary in—I don't know if it was Pakistan or India. Anyway, he saw the importance of doing Comparative Religion and he introduced Comparative Religion as a component of the theological program. We were among the first to begin Comparative Religion within the study of theology. Out of that had come the Islamic Institute. One of the Deans, previous to me, allowed the Institute to separate, and that was a real mistake. He should never have allowed that to happen. But it did. We were developing Buddhist Studies, you know, the other world religions, and so it made more sense to call it Religious Studies.

KA: So was that separate, when you became Dean, that Islamic Studies was already separate?

DR: Yeah, it was already separate. And the relationship between the two, it was reasonable on the personal level, but institutionally it was difficult. Because they wanted more—one of the reasons they separated is because they thought they weren't getting a fair share of the budget of the Faculty. That wasn't true, but that's what they thought. I mean, it was a particular member of the Institute that pushed all this, which is always an unfortunate way to redesign a program, is a one-person decision. But in any case, I think the—where was I, I'm not even sure what we were talking about ... (laughs)

KA: The relationship between the faculty of religious studies and then the Islamic institute. So then if you're doing comparative religions, and that's this ground breaking thing, then you're going to have to take—if you're going to learn about Islam—you end up taking it at the Islamic Institute ... or?

DR: Well, we always had. In our curriculum, we always had comparative religion. We didn't let them take that away from us. And in fact, the first person who was head of the Islamic Institute who had been—actually, he was not, at that point he was just a professor. He had been the head and he was very upset with this division. And he always continued to teach the comparative religion in our theological program. But as time goes on, these breaks—you don't see where they came from, and therefore what you might do to bring them back together. And so things that begin to—when that kind of a move happens, then the institution begins to regularize it to the point where you think that it's possible to do more and more, take this out of there and this out of there, and the whole thing just eventually cracks up. Maybe that's what's happened throughout history. Human beings are really strange. (Laughs)

KA: We are. We are very weird.

DR: I think maybe we should think about ending this.

KA: Okay. Well, it's been a real pleasure again to speak with you, Donna, and thank you so much for all your insight.

DR: Well, you're welcome. I'm not sure that I've got much, but anyway ...

(Laughter)

KA: Thank you so much.

DR: Okay.