INTERVIEW WITH DR. WALTER H. ADAMS

Date, place, and circumstances of interview: October 22, 1975 in the office of Dr. Adams at the College Church of Christ building in Abilene, Texas.

Date of birth: November 29, 1903.

Position: Dean Emeritus, Abilene Christian College

Former positions: Dean of Abilene Christian College, 1932-1968; Academic Vice President of Abilene Christian College, 1969; Dean Emeritus, 1970-present.

Honors, offices, memberships, etc. President, Association of Texas Colleges, 1948; President, Texas Association of Graduate Schools, 1956; Member, State Board of Examiners for Teacher Education, 1950-1958; Chairman of State Board of Examiners for Teacher Education, 1955; President, Abilene Rotary Club, 1942-1943; Who's Who in America, 1960-1961; Phi Delta Kappa; Alpha Chi.

Education: B.A., Abilene Christian College, 1925; M.A., Stanford University, 1927; Ph. D., Columbia, 1930.

Legal restrictions on interview: None

Reason for choosing interviewee: Dr. Adams was Dean of Abilene Christian College during the years that Don H. Morris served as Vice President and President of the school.
COSGROVE: The date is October 22, 1975. This is Owen Cosgrove in the office of Dr. Walter H. Adams in the College Church of Christ building in Abilene, Texas. Dr. Adams has consented to an interview on the subject of the administration of Don H. Morris at Abilene Christian College. This interview is being done in preparation for my work in writing a dissertation on the life and the administration of Don H. Morris. Dr. Adams, may I express to you my appreciation for the opportunity to talk to you about the life and the work of Don H. Morris. Can you tell me just briefly of your relationship with Don H. Morris at Abilene Christian College?

ADAMS: I was a member of the faculty in Abilene Christian College beginning in 1925 and I believe that Brother Morris joined the faculty (he had been teaching in Abilene High School), I believe it was in 1928, as I remember, when he became a member of the faculty, and so, of course, I knew him during all of the years that he and I were connected with the college. I had known him from college days as students (he came to Abilene Christian College from Thorp Springs), and I was a sophomore and he was a junior, one year ahead of me, and we were members of the same debate team, the same social club, and of course I knew him quite well as a
student and then since 1928, as a member of the faculty or an administrator. When I became dean in 1932, when President Cox became president, he became vice president of the college, and of course we were closely associated in that respect, and then when he became president in 1940 until 1969 when he became chancellor and I became academic vice president for one year and then dean emeritus until his death, we were, I would say, very closely associated.

COSGROVE: I would like to ask you several questions, Dr. Adams, about your relationship with Don Morris in some of the momentous things that happened to the school during those years. Of course, one of the great things that happened to Abilene Christian College during your administration, and that of Don H. Morris, was the gaining of membership in the Southern Association. I know that you worked a great deal and of course the faculty members did on this. How did Don Morris encourage you and the department heads and the faculty members to work toward this accreditation?

ADAMS: In order to answer that question correctly, I think we need to go back a number of years before he became active in that relationship. And that is that during the administration of President Cox, we attended.
he and I together, the meetings of the Southern Association, oh, I would say from 1934 until 1940, we probably didn't miss a meeting, because, at that time, and later for a number of years, Abilene Christian College was on what was known as the accredited, non-member list of the Southern Association. That list of colleges and universities consisted of those institutions that were almost ready for accreditation but not quite for certain reasons. And it just simply meant, for example, that those who attended A.C.C. at that time and graduated were eligible for certification and the transfer of credits without the loss of credit from one institution to another, from Abilene Christian College to other institutions, but were not full members, and certainly of course without the privilege of voting and that sort of thing. But now that was in existence at the time that Don Morris became president, and so after that, he and I together attended these meetings of the Southern Association, at which time they had what was known as the official non-member committee, to which we reported regularly. We would meet with them for several minutes, sometimes as I recall fifteen minutes, sometimes longer; they would ask us questions as to how we were getting along and so on, and the primary thing that came up for discussion
at all of those meetings was our financial status. We met the standards in almost every respect a number of years prior to full accreditation except for the matter of finance, and we didn't have very much endowment—very, very little endowment—our financial standing was not sound from their point of view, and so it was not until, as I recall, I would say about 1950, '49 and '50, somewhere along there, that we were able to get our house in order so far as finance was concerned, and that was made possible by two or three things, one of which was a gift of some property in Big Springs that gave us a little better standing. Also made possible by a great many of us going all over the country getting pledges from members of churches to pay in a certain amount each year, and which finally was accepted as a part of our financial structure until in the meeting in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1951, I believe is the exact date that all of these things came together and jelled, as it were, and we were elected to membership. Now, during that time, of course, President Morris and incidentally B Sherrod (I believe was president of the board at least a part of that time), Brother Morris was looking primarily at the financial structure, because that is where we were short. And there were
other matters which we were working on at the time and which he encouraged in every way possible. That was the building up of the faculty, encouraging those that we would recommend to take leave of absence to work on a doctors degree and encouraging in every way he could the employing of people who were qualified academically, and just generally encouraging as the president of any institution might the development of all areas in the academic structure.

COSGROVE: Don Morris took quite a bit of pride in the educational part of the school, and particularly Abilene Christian College's producing so many teachers. Do you remember anything in particular about his feeling about the great amount of teachers that were produced by the school?

ADAMS: Not particularly, because I am sure that he did take pride in that as you have suggested. I am sure that from time to time he would make statements and in speaking on Christian education at different places, one of the major contributions that Abilene Christian College was making was teachers with the right kind of background, with the right kind of preparation, with the right kind of philosophy, and so on that would go to make a good teacher in the public schools and in
other colleges and so on of the country. However, I would say that this was incidental, that while it was an encouragement, yet the primary thing so far as the development of that area is concerned would go to the head of the education department for so many years, and that was G. C. Morlan, and that more, if you are talking about credit or what have you, more credit would be due to G. C. Morlan and the teachers in the education department and to the fact that we became to be recognized over the state as an institution that did turn out good teachers and the fact that some held important offices in state organizations. G. C. Morlan himself filling some important offices in the state; others in the department filling professional positions, and things of that kind had far more to do with the development of Abilene Christian College, with the reputation of the college from the standpoint of teacher preparation.

COSGROVE: Were quite a few Abilene Christian College ex-students on the staffs and faculties of the other Christian colleges?

ADAMS: Oh, without any question, of course. I don't know just how many; that information could probably be secured, but all of us from time to time make statements
to the effect that a number of Abilene Christian College graduates are on other Christian college faculties as well as state institutions.

COSGROVE: What about the students of Abilene Christian College through the years. Wasn't there a rather high percentage of them members of the Church of Christ?

ADAMS: Oh, back during the early days of President Morris' administration, and I presume that is what you are speaking about, it seems to me, if I remember correctly, that it was about ninety-five per cent of our students who were members of the Church of Christ, and that gradually has decreased through the years until at the present time, as I understand it, it is around ninety per cent, not a great change, but some change in that respect, and that's due in part, possibly in large part, to the graduate school. We have many graduates who are not members of the Church of Christ. It is also due in part possibly to athletics; some of the athletes are not members.

COSGROVE: Dr. Adams, it is not stated explicitly in the charter of the school that every teacher on the faculty should be a faithful member of the Church of Christ, however through the years nearly every teacher involved at A.C.C., I think with the exception of a few at the
satellite campuses, has been a faithful member of the Church of Christ. When this was challenged by a few in the late '60's that it wasn't a part of the charter requirement of the school, how did Don H. Morris react to defending this board policy that every member of the faculty should be a faithful member of the Church of Christ?

ADAMS: Well, possibly in two or three ways, but one in particular, knowing that Abilene Christian College was supported primarily by members of the Church of Christ, by Christian people, and who expected that their children would come to Abilene Christian College would be taught the Bible as they ought to be taught the Bible, then he felt along with others that the best way to do that was simply just to see that they were taught by members of the church.

COSGROVE: Did some of the constituency of the school, when Abilene Christian College was trying to get admission to membership in the Southern Association--was there any part of the constituency that felt this was a threat to the school's holding to its original purposes?

ADAMS: Oh, there may have been some small element that felt that that might have something to do with it. It
was so minor that really I don't think it was an important question. It didn't come in for a great deal of discussion. I remember that there was some thought on the part even maybe on some of the board members, and even some friends of the school that accreditation might lead to some lowering of standards in that respect, but throughout the years that I attended personally and along with Brother Cox, Brother Morris, attended the meetings of the Southern Association, that was not challenged. Particularly, the question came up a time or two, and every time in the meetings of the committees that dealt with accreditation, it would be mentioned by some one, a member of the committee would say, "Well, they're not the only ones that have that requirement." In those days, to be specific, while they no longer hold to it as I understand it, the Catholic schools, many of them required that their teachers be Catholics, and so mention would be made of that. And of course when that was mentioned, then there was no further discussion.

COSGROVE: I can imagine that through the many years you worked together with Dr. Morris, it would be almost inconceivable that in a school the size of Abilene Christian College, that you wouldn't at times have
some problems with faculty members. And perhaps the threat of their teaching something that wasn't sound or wouldn't be approved by the administration or the constituency, is this a valid supposition that through the years you had some of these?

ADAMS: That's right.

COSGROVE: How would Dr. Morris and you work together on problems of this nature?

ADAMS: Well, whenever we would get any kind of notice that something of that kind may have been taking place, he or I one, or both of us together would call the individual and have a conversation with him and find out from his viewpoint just precisely how he felt about it, and what he was teaching, and in most instances, in fact, I would say that then and now, in ninety percent at least of the cases, it would be a matter of misinterpretation, a matter of where the teacher failed to say something by way of explanation as to what was meant by a statement; what I'm trying to say is that more often than not what he didn't say that led to the difficulty rather than what was said, and that in so many, many cases, it was a teaching device where the individual was raising questions that would challenge the students to think, which is a good teaching device,
and most of the cases were of that type, not really questions of doctrine. In only one or two cases that I now recall was it really a serious question of doctrine, and in those cases, we would handle it exactly as I have indicated, and if it came to the place that it did seem to be a matter that needed to be acted upon through just private conversation with the individual, he would agree to submit his resignation, and that's just about all there was to it.

COSGROVE: Could Morris be very decisive in matters of this kind?

ADAMS: Oh, yes, as in everything, I think he was a person who was decisive; he would not talk in circles, but would talk in such a way that he could be understood.

COSGROVE: Do you think in all of these cases he held his composure well and maintained the proper attitude?

ADAMS: Oh, yes.

COSGROVE: Do you think ever in your work with Dr. Morris through the many years that there was ever any problem of his infringing on your territory, or were you able to work together?

ADAMS: No, I would say that at no time did he infringe on my territory. He seemed to have full confidence in my ability to administer the program and left it very
largely to me.

COSGROVE: Did any of these teachers through the years with whom you had to deal, do you think that they ever resented Morris' method or his firmness in dealing with them, or was he able to soothe their feelings pretty well?

ADAMS: No, I would say that in general he, one of his strong points was that he got along well with the faculty and did not rub them the wrong way; in fact, I think that possibly he tended to agree with them and say yes instead of no sometimes when a no would have been a better answer.

COSGROVE: Dr. Adams, there is one question that arose during the '40's of which I know you are very aware, the problem of putting the college in the church budget, and especially when a campaign was begun in the mid '40's and a certain man representing the school went out and urged churches to contribute to the school, and there was some problem that came up about it, some reaction, and the school reaffirmed its policy not to take contributions from the church treasuries. You remember all of this of course. Did Don Morris ever make a public statement or a statement to the Brotherhood about this to clarify the position of the school?

ADAMS: I would have to say that I do not know the specific answer to that question. I think he did, but to say
specifically, I do not recall a statement in print or a statement to the public through any other means of communication. I think he did. I couldn't answer that positively.

COSGROVE: There is some indication in the last few years of his presidency that Don Morris was concerned about the problem of liberalism not only, of course, in the school but in our whole society. Our society went through a period; maybe we are still in it. Did he ever express his concern to you, or are you aware of the feelings that he had about the dangers of liberalism in Abilene Christian College and especially in the Bible Department of the school?

ADAMS: Oh, I'm sure that a number of times we would discuss this problem either in his office or in mine in which he did express concern, and as I recall he spoke about it even in chapel on more than one occasion, and he certainly did feel that there was a problem and that we needed to work on it just as much as we could, of necessity.

COSGROVE: What did he do beside just speaking about the problem? Do you remember anything else he did especially?

ADAMS: I don't recall that he did. You know, he didn't write for publication a great deal. In fact, I would
say, I don't remember any publication that he may have had some articles in some of the religious papers along that line. I don't recall that he did, and so, except for statements in pulpits that he would fill and in chapel, I don't recall anything else.

COSGROVE: In 1966, there arose a problem when a speaker or two in the Lectureship made some unfortunate statements, may we say, about the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in matters of our lives, and Don Morris made more than one statement of a general nature about this to the board of trustees. Did he ever talk to you about this particular issue?

ADAMS: As far as I recall he did not.

COSGROVE: Were you in the faculty meeting in 1968 when he made the, I suppose, the final speech that he made as president to the faculty about the strong stand on the original purposes. What was the reaction to that speech generally, do you remember?

ADAMS: Not specifically. I just have a vague recollection of it, but I am sure that it was nothing but favorable because our faculty being constituted as it is, the reaction on the part of the great majority would have been most favorable. There may have been some few who
would take exception to some of the strong statements that were made, but I don't recall any. There may not have been any at all.

COSGROVE: Did he attend faculty meetings quite a bit during the last few years of his presidency and during the time of his chancellorship?

ADAMS: I'm sure that he did. I again wouldn't be able to recall specifically, but generally throughout the years he attended faculty meetings.

COSGROVE: Did he speak up quite a bit at these meetings?

ADAMS: Not a great deal. The faculty meetings, I suppose for twenty-five years prior to my getting out of the dean's office, we would have a committee that would work very diligently during the summer to prepare programs for faculty meetings throughout the year, and the agenda would be pretty well fixed. Occasionally, of course, there would be called meetings of the faculty for specific purposes, and occasionally the president might be invited to speak at a faculty meeting because of some particular problem coming up or something of that kind, but generally faculty meetings were planned in advance and then the agenda would be followed pretty well.

COSGROVE: Dr. Adams, a last question I would like to ask
you may be too nebulous to deserve an answer. You might not even want to answer it, which would be fine; I would understand. I'd like to ask you, looking back over the years of your association with Don H. Morris, what do you consider to be his strongest point as a leader and an administrator, and maybe if you think there are any, what might have been his weakest point as an administrator?

ADAMS: Yes, I don't mind speaking to that at all because I do think that, just as every person has, he has his strong points and he had his weak points, and we might as well be perfectly frank and honest in answering such questions. I would say that his strong points were many in number, but two or three of his strongest; one, his ability to get along with people and to be loved generally by people. Connected with that, then, would be his weakest point, and that is from time to time there was a feeling not only on my part but on the part of others that he found it extremely difficult to say no to some requests, and really would leave that to others to say. And another strong point would be that without any question at all, he was loyal to the purposes for which Abilene Christian College was founded, and he let that be known in more ways than one, and
that was never, never questioned at all. His sincerity, his honesty was never questioned. And I suppose that, again speaking somewhat negatively, that at times maybe he didn't, well I hardly know how to say it, while he had implicit confidence in his subordinates and those that were working under him, and that means everyone of course in a college is working under the president either directly or indirectly, he may not have given the credit for certain areas of advancement to those who working diligently in those areas, that he might well have done. Now that may not be the case, but I think that there was a feeling on the part of some. Speaking for myself, I would say that that sometimes was the case.

COSGROVE: Would you elaborate just a little bit on his failure to say no. Would you care to particularize on this?

ADAMS: Well, in budget matters, if a question came up as to a certain department making requests that were clearly out-of-line, and there might be an appeal to the president, he would say that is the responsibility of the budget committee and you'll just have to take it back to the budget committee. In matters of discipline, while it was not his responsibility to
talk with the students or the parents, those things would be left, and as it should have been, but at times possibly, he could have softened the thing somewhat, but he would leave that to the dean of students to communicate with the parents and with the student involved. In other words, Brother Morris, more than any person I ever knew, I think, was an individual who wanted to get along with people. He didn't want to rub them the wrong way. He didn't want to, well, said positively, he wanted friends, and he was friendly by nature and training, and he wanted that, and I'm sure that part of it was motivated by feeling on his part that it was the best way to get the job done, and working for Abilene Christian College, was to make friends and to be friends, a friend to everybody. And just as a part of his, maybe of his rearing, his upbringing, his nature, whatever you want to call it, he just didn't like to say no. Now that's just it, he just didn't like to say no.

COSGROVE: Is there any further statement that you would like to make about his work and your relationship with him?

ADAMS: Well, I'll just say this, that I have said publicly many times and would say now as I look back over the
years that I worked with Brother Morris from 1932, well earlier than that, let's go back to the time that I worked with him as a student, and we debated together, and then as--after he became a member of the faculty in 1928, and then vice president and I became dean in 1932, and then as president until 1969, I have often said that two people could not have got along any better together than we did. It was tremendous.

COSGROVE: I'd like to express to you my appreciation for your time and your help in this interview.

ADAMS: I am very happy to talk with you.