

10-25-1996

# Oudersluys, Richard Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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## Recommended Citation

**Repository citation:** Maassen, John, "Oudersluys, Richard Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"" (1996). *Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"*. Paper 91.

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**Published in:** 1996 - 1998 - *Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"* (H88-0234) - *Hope College Living Heritage Oral History Project*, October 25, 1996. Copyright © 1996 Hope College, Holland, MI.

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Oral History Interview with  
Richard Oudersluys

Conducted October 25, 1996  
by John Maassen

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project  
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Interview with  
Richard C. Oudersluys  
Retired RCA Pastor and  
Emeritus Professor of New Testament  
Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan

Conducted October 25, 1996

by John H. Maassen  
Retired RCA Pastor and  
Student of Dr. Oudersluys at Western Seminary 1946-1949

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project  
of the Joint Archives of Holland  
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project  
Interview with Richard Oudersluys  
Interviewer: John Maassen  
October 25, 1996

JHM: The date is October 25, 1996. We are in the home of Richard C. Oudersluys for the 1997 Sesquicentennial Oral History Project. Give me your name.

RCO: Richard Oudersluys, Richard C. Oudersluys.

JHM: And you were born where?

RCO: I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan on [date removed], 1906.

JHM: So you're coming up on your 90th birthday, aren't you! Tell me a little bit about your family. Were your parents immigrants?

RCO: My grandfather was the immigrant. And my father was born in the States and married my mother. She was also, no, my mother was an immigrant! She was born in the Netherlands so we have a combination there - my mother born in the Netherlands and my father in the United States.

JHM: Did you have a large family?

RCO: No, not very large. My dad had just the five children. A baby was born and died shortly thereafter and then we had three other sisters and myself. I'm the oldest in the family and my sisters, three of them, Angeline, Wilma and Betty, all followed me.

JHM: Are you the only one with a college education?

RCO: Yes, I was the only one in the family that went on to school.

JHM: And the only boy.

RCO: The only boy.

JHM: Now, what church affiliation did you have in Grand Rapids?

RCO: The family originally came out of the what they called the Turner Street Nederduits Church. Netherlands Reformed Church is the name it goes by now but it's an ultra-Calvinistic group. Loves the Dutch language, resisted English and both my mother and father's family came out of that. And it was actually the resistance to the English language that prompted by mother to take us all to the Reformed Church in order that we might understand a little bit of what was going on (laughs).

JHM: I see. In other words you mean to say that the Nederduits Church was more Dutch than the Reformed Church.

RCO: O yes. All the services were in Dutch. Completely Dutch service. Singing psalms in Dutch as well as preaching and the lessons.

JHM: Where did you go to school?

RCO: My elementary schooling was at Palmer School in Grand Rapids, a north end public school. And my high school education was at Union High on the west side necessitating a nice walk of a mile or so every morning. And then following high school I spent some years at Grand Rapids Junior College and then I transferred and finished up at Calvin College in Grand Rapids.

JHM: Coming out of a Nederduits background it is rather interesting that you did not go to a Christian school.

RCO: No, I think that was because we were transferred (to the Reformed Church) at a

fairly early age. I must have been ten or twelve years old. And my sisters were much younger than I then.

JHM: Was there quite a strong thrust on your mother's part to be Americanized?

RCO: I think that she was much more alert to that than my dad. My dad was a sort of quiet person. Mother was the more energetic and more attuned to what was going on and the need for the children to be related to the growing English community. So she was sort of the sponsor of that.

JHM: What was your father's occupation?

RCO: He was a cabinet maker, a very fine one. He worked with the Berkey and Gay Furniture Company, one of the great names in the furniture industry and he was one of their top craftsmen. And so...that was mostly what he did.

JHM: Now, you went to Calvin College, of course, but you eventually wound up here in Holland so tell me about your coming to Holland?

RCO: Well, we were...that was due quite largely I think to the fact that we had transferred at an early age to the Reformed Church, Bethel Reformed Church, and the ministers there were all men who were Western Seminary grads. John C. Van Wyk and Bernie Mulder were the men who were really influential in my life. They came along in my teen years and I think that there never was very much of a problem as to where I would go once I had decided on the ministry. I had no problem in deciding between Calvin or Western. It was just taken for granted that if I went into the ministry it would be in the Reformed Church.

JHM: And when did you make that decision to go into the ministry?

RCO: Well, that had to do when I was going to Junior College. My dad wanted me to be a \_\_\_\_\_. He was tired of working with his hands, he said, and he wanted me to work with my head. And he said (laughing) the only way I could do that was by getting an education and then go into business. So I got started in a business and economics degree there but I didn't like it. So I think it was about the second year I just told him one night - I said, "This is not for me." I don't know what it was that cured me of it but I think probably it was trial balances and bookkeeping that really threw me. And then I made my decision to stay on another year at the Grand Rapids Community College there and work up the rest of my arts degree so that I had an Associate in Arts and an Associate in Economics when I left there. I spent the next two years at Calvin which was chosen there largely because of finances. It was right in the city...I didn't have to...I didn't have the money to invest into going to Hope and it was an opportunity for me to get an education and get it conveniently.

JHM: Tell me something about your experience when you came to the Seminary. Tell me about the Seminary itself. I mean as a student.

RCO: Well, when I came to the Seminary it was in '29, the fall of '29. And those were the days when the old faculty of Nettinga in the Church History, Hospers in Hebrew, Vander Meulen in Greek and John R. was the youngest man on the faculty, John R. Mulder, the Homiletics Professor and Albertus Pieters was in the Chair of Bible. We had a class of I think about a dozen, Lester Kuyper who later was my colleague at the Seminary in Hebrew. He was my classmate and it was a

nice group. I think Leonard Greenway came in the second year. He had taken one year at Calvin and both Leonard Greenway and I had grown up in the same Bethel Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. I gather that he was attracted to the Christian Reformed Church much more than I was because after a brief ministry in our church he did go back to the Christian Reformed Church. Most of the class I think hailed from Iowa. A few from Hope but mostly from Central College and Northwestern College.

JHM: I suppose that your experience at Western was somewhat of an extension of your Calvin College experience. Where you taking pre-seminary at Calvin?

RCO: Yes, I had taken pre-sem at the school so I was well prepared in languages. I took my major in classical languages - Latin and Greek and minors in Sociology and History so that I had no problems getting into the Seminary. I think they were glad to have me. And the school, of course, in those days was still on what we call the old campus, the old three buildings which were of "the colonial period" and very, very sparse.

JHM: What do you mean by "the colonial period"?

RCO: Well, they were the buildings I think of when the school began. There was the old Semelink Hall which was the classroom building and a dormitory next door, Zwemer Hall. And then a very small little building called the library. So there were three buildings on the campus and all very, very sparse. The library was about 20,000 or less volumes. The classroom building had nothing but classrooms and a little chapel upstairs which had been named the Nettinga Chapel. John R. I



think, uh...It was only when I came to the school later that they got rid of all those buildings. I do recall one change, that is when I was student there John R. was made President of the Seminary and he took one of those classrooms and changed it into an office so that for the first time in the history of the school the Seminary had an office.

JHM: Now you came to Seminary - that was in 1929.

RCO: I came in 1942.

JHM: No, I'm talking about as a student.

RCO: As a student I came in 1929 and graduated in '32.

JHM: That was just a month before the crash, right?

RCO: Yes! Well, the crash was on at that time. That fall, that winter, those were very dreary times financially...

JHM: And that increased, the dreariness increased because there was no solution.

RCO: It was a severe time. I recall the bank failures, the employment dropped, people were out of work. It was difficult sledding for families and a lot of people went on the public dole.

JHM: Did it affect seminary enrollment?

RCO: Oh, I think it did to some extent. However, in those days the seminary was not a very costly institution to attend. The church practically underwrote the education of its ministry. I think the most that you paid for was a minimal registration fee - ten dollars or something like that and you had to pay your room rent and the board at the dormitory and even for that you could get a stipend from the Board of

Education so that actually the denomination completely underwrote the education of its ministry.

JHM: What was your goal in seminary? Were you thinking about a parish ministry or did you have something else in mind?

RCO: Yes, I had nothing else in mind than to become a parish minister. I had no idea of anything other than that. I had a very fine background in Greek when I came. I had no trouble outdistancing most of my classmates because evidently there instruction had not been of the caliber I had received at Calvin. So I did well in Greek. But I had no idea of doing more with it than using it in the pastorate.

JHM: What was your first charge?

RCO: My first charge was in Milwaukee. I never dreamed of going there. I wanted to go to Fremont, Michigan, but Len Greenway beat me out of it. He candidated after I had been there and he got the call and then turned it down! Didn't want it! But in the meantime I had been sent to Milwaukee to preach on what was obviously just a fill-in situation and so lo and behold a few weeks later on I get a call from the church. I was quite taken back by it. It was a city church, downtown church, upper middle class, quite affluent and I was a little non-plussed by it, but John R. Mulder felt that I should go, that I could handle it and it was a church that had a history of calling young men directly out of the seminary. Henry Ter Keurst and also Winfield Burgraaff had preceded me and both men had come there directly from school.

JHM: Now it appears that your focus began to change toward a more academic degree...

RCO: That was in part due to Milwaukee. It was a city of tremendous culture and moreover it had a university there, Marquette University, as well as branches of Madison, Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin. And so I was thrown into a lot of contact with institutions there, and also my church. As I say, it was an upper middle class, it contained a lot of educated people - architects, doctors, people of the professions and so I began to check out the University of Wisconsin and also Marquette. To my great surprise at Marquette they were offering nothing yet by way of graduate work in Greek. That is what I chose to major in and so I not wishing not to go further into Latin which was their great forte I began to take a summer at the University of Chicago where I built up two or three summers in a row of work in the New Testament Greek department there under Goodspeed and Ernest Cadmon Calwell, Willoughby - all the older generation of scholars.

JHM: How did the opportunity to come to the Seminary occur?

RCO: That was still while I was doing graduate work. After nine and a half years at Milwaukee I had a chance to...we were talking about taking some time off to go to school and Marian knew that I had that in my mind after having gotten started on this summer work at the University so I was about ready to say after nine and a half years this might be a good chance to do it. Didn't want to wait too long. And just then I got an invitation to go and candidate in a church in Washington, D.C. I later found it was one of those Presbyterian Churches of the nation's capitol and they wanted to know if I didn't want to submit a resume and if I did they would get me a preaching appointment out there. And it faced me with a

dilemma - whether I wanted to give myself totally then to a preaching ministry or whether I was going to make my break now and go to school. I finally decided that I better turn down the invitation to candidate and go to school. So in '41, June, we went to Chicago and I had put in a year and just about ready to finish up when I got this call to Western and they said we would like to have you come over and teach New Testament at Western. I think I had some strong advocates there. Rich Vanden Berg and a few other people who felt that I ought to come to Western. So, in the fall of '42 was when I came in.

JHM: So you returned to Holland twice. You came to Holland as a student and then as a professor. Now that was about a ten year interval between those two arrivals. Did you see any differences of any consequence between the Holland of 1930 and the Holland of 1940-41?

RCO: I don't think I noticed too many differences and I suspect that was because the three years I was in the Seminary I was so absorbed in study and student life you don't get too much into the community. You're not aware really or even interested in what is going on in the in the community so I was not too much impressed by the variance, the difference in the ten years because I did not have any good recollections of the city and the community as such during my seminary years.

JHM: Where did you worship in your Seminary years?

RCO: Whenever I had a Sunday off I was at Third Church. I worshiped there and while I was in Milwaukee I had a call from Third Church. They wanted to call me

there. It was due I think largely to Wynand Wichers. He took a shine to me and he was the vice president of the consistory at that time and he was very anxious that I should come. But I had only been in Milwaukee about three or four years and I was under no...and I was not in a situation where I could very conveniently leave so I had to say no to them. And they didn't like that too well but (laughs)...they were a little more happy when I returned to Holland in '42 when I began attending Third Church (laughs)

JHM: That gives me an opportunity to ask the question I was going to ask later. Did you think in terms of any other congregation. Or did you think only in terms of Third as being your home?

RCO: No. Really. When we came to Holland it happened that the War had broken out. Housing situations were very, very tight. And knowing that I was going to be way Sundays a lot preaching it was important that we locate in a place where we would be near to the schools where the children would attend and to a church where Marian could take the children on Sunday and not have to walk too far. Well, it happened that we found a house to rent right across the street from Third Church at 121 West 12th Street. It was known in those days as the little Zuidema house. It was one of these one-story colonial homes, very old and they had a tendency in those days to give a home the name of the person who had resided there for a good long time and the city engineer at that time, Jake Zuidema, his parents had lived there for years and years so it was well known that Dick Oudersluys and his family had moved into the "little old Zuidema House." Well...being right across the

street from Third Church it was obvious that we would go to Third Church.

JHM: What was your family like at that time?

RCO: My own family was composed only of the two children, my older son and daughter and while we were there on 12th street my second son, Mark, was born, joined us in '44 there. So we had a family of three children and it was a very, very nice place to be. I could walk to the campus every day and it was convenient to get to downtown to do the shopping, whatever it was. It was just a very, very fortunate location.

JHM: Some of the children were school age when they came here?

RCO: Yes, they went to Washington School which was in our city block. And at that time Washington School was known as one of the more progressive, better schools of the community which pleased us and was one of the reasons why we were happy to locate there. Washington School has undergone great changes now with a heavy black and Spanish population...but in those days this being what is now being called the Historic section of Holland it attracted a fine student body and they had a very progressive principal and faculty. And so we were happy. The children got a good education there.

JHM: How did you compare your experience in Holland initially with the experience you had in Milwaukee?

RCO: Well it was quite a change. You have come from a large city with a population of 700-800,000 to a little town of 15,000 and we were immediately impressed by the fact that relationships were much more face to face here. Your community was

smaller. You knew more people and the one thing that did impress us favorably was of course with the college being here you had a cultural atmosphere that made up for the lack of bigness that we had experienced in Milwaukee. Also the culture was completely different. In Milwaukee the culture was German, either Catholic or heavily Lutheran and here of course the culture was Dutch and I would say unanimously Dutch when I returned in '42. Still very definitely a Dutch city.

JHM: Would you have called it a stratified culture at all? Were there strata of class...that sort of thing?

RCO: Well, I think that if there were any strata here at all it was probably that old distinction between the Christian Reformed and the Reformed in which they both vied with one another both claiming to be the more authentic, the one being more authentic in orthodoxy it was claimed and the other being more authentic in history and in origin. Holland always did have a business class, an upper class group, the society group, and then the laboring class. There was always that which is common to every culture and to every place but outside of that it was not striking.

JHM: What about the non-Dutch congregations here in town. Were you aware of them?

RCO: I think that most of the congregations here in town were Dutch in origin. The constituency, however, was not Dutch. I think that by the time we returned here in '42 there very few any more who could handle the Dutch. A few were able to read and to speak it yet but they were certainly of the older generation. The language was no longer talked or used. You heard it infrequently already back then and some of these churches if they had any Dutch to them it was mainly by

reason of heritage.

JHM: How aware were you of the Roman Catholic Church?

RCO: The Roman Catholic Church? There was only one here at the time. It was very very small. In fact, the St. Francis Church came in after the Lutherans had left the little frame building on 12th Street there. They had taken it over so it was very, very small at that time. It had a small attendance.

JHM: Was there a difference between those who were living in the colonies like Overisel, North Holland, and so on and those in Holland? They were outside of the cultural sphere to a degree?

RCO: I think that the people when they came this way, the Dutch, they tended to gather together in communities that represented their origin in the Netherlands and people who live in Overisel are probably all of them - their forbearers at least all came from that place in the Netherlands, and the same is true of most of these outlying sections of Holland, Borculo, Drenthe, Beaverdam - these all represented little language differences in the Netherlands which were perpetuated here in this country sometimes because the minister of those Netherlands communities came over here with their congregation and they just adopted the old country's titles.

JHM: We haven't talked about how the seminary was when you came back as a professor. You said you came back in '42. Did you begin in the fall of the year of '42 as a professor?

RCO: Yes, well, as a lector. They give you a two-year training period as a rule. There is a two-year lectorship with these seminary jobs and during that time they sort of



check you out to see if you are going to measure up and after that, why, you are amenable or open to installation as a full professor.

JHM: Now when did your negotiations with the seminary begin? Was it before Pearl Harbor?

RCO: Yes. Well, I don't know...

JHM: Pearl Harbor was December 7, 1941.

RCO: Oh yes. Well then it was after, see? The War was on as I recall.

JHM: The reason I asked the question was because I was wondering whether you were initially working under different assumptions than you might have when you finally got here.

RCO: Well, I don't think it had affected us at the school that much yet. In fact, I don't think it had affected the enrollment at the seminary in '42 yet. Things went on pretty well at the seminary. As I recall it was in 1949 that we hit bottom in seminary enrollment. I think that was the year that we had four or five graduates - Poppen, De Roo, Ralph Ten Clay, Paul Miller. I think there were four or five.

JHM: That was the class of '48 because that was the Junior Class when I came in - mid school year in 1945-46.

RCO: Well, then that would be about right. Because they graduated in '49, wasn't it? That the was the War - the effect of the War.

JHM: Tell me about your colleagues, the condition of the Seminary and the student body when you arrived.

RCO: During the war years?...O, when I arrived. Well, when I arrived my colleague,

Lester Kuyper, had preceded me by two years. And there had been quite a change over in the faculty. The year when Lester came, two or three years previous to me, he had come into the faculty along with George Mennenga and with Bill Goulouze so that there were three new people on the faculty when I joined it. They had been there only two or three years previous to my coming. And the oldest person on the faculty was John R. Mulder. He was the holdover from the previous faculty. And it was a congenial group. I enjoyed it a great deal. Of course, I immediately found most congenial of all my classmate, Les Kuyper since we had been to school together and the rest of the men were good men to work with. We had a very pleasant faculty relationship.

JHM: I think that we should clarify something. It seems to me that you gave the impression that when you were in seminary as a student John R. Mulder was already the president. That was not true, was it.

RCO: No, no, if I gave that impression it was wrong. In my days when I was a student I think Nettinga was still president.

JHM: Siebe Nettinga.

RCO: John R. Mulder was a younger member of the faculty.

JHM: I have read the minutes of the Board and other Board of Education materials about that era. It seemed that Nettinga was a very successful president in the midst of the tremendous pressures that he had. And his big accomplishment was the retirement of the \$24,000 debt on the dormitory. Those figures seem very small today, but...Nettinga was gone by the time you arrived.

RCO: Well, those were rough years for the Seminary when John R. took over. You can imagine that due to the war income of churches was shrinking and the income to the seminary which really in those days had no endowment whatsoever. It had a couple of chairs that had been founded and named after their donors but their donors had probably established those chairs with gifts of about \$30,000 or something like that and way, way back in those days when salaries were two and three thousand dollars, why I suppose the income was adequate to pay a professor but even the gathering in of sufficient monies in those years was a difficult and there were some years when the faculty was not paid.

JHM: Some of them took drastic cuts.

RCO: Yes, they took drastic cuts! About the only thing that helped a little bit was that due the movement of some of our clergy into the chaplaincy ranks and the fact that we were not graduating very large classes there was a dearth in the ministry. And so the faculty was kept busy on Sundays preaching and we usually got ten dollars a Sunday for preaching. And that despite the fact that we were not being paid at the Seminary (laughs) went for the grocery bill.

JHM: If I had gone into the ministry right after college I would have been in your first class because I had graduated from college in '42. Now that class, as I recall, the class of my classmates was one of the larger classes at Western Seminary. Would you like to comment on that? That would be the class of Charles Stoppels, and John Muller...

RCO: Oh yes.

JHM: It is my impression that was a large class.

RCO: In fact, the classes during those years when I came back for some reason or other were large classes as far as the history of the school is concerned. They were running all the way into the twenties to the thirties. In fact, my middle class the first year I was there in '42 that was the class of Gordon Van Wyk, Ted Zandstra, Cy Voogd and all that group they numbered in the thirties. And it was an amazingly big group but following that there were others that were twenty, twenty-five and it surprised me.

JHM: Until the real war experience hit.

RCO: Yeah, that's following the war a little bit.

JHM: Some cynics would say, of course, that these people, rightly or wrongly, were taking advantage of their deferments.

RCO: In fact, I think that probably in the fifties we got our first veterans coming back from the war.

JHM: Was the seminary still suffering from the financial shortfall when you came?

RCO: Well, when I came to the seminary the first year or so it was all right but then it became difficult financially and it affected the whole of the school. There was nothing that could be done by way of equipment. The library was neglected. The war periods were very difficult. I think that they were just fortunate to keep the school in operation.

JHM: Fact is, as I read some of the materials there is almost a hysteria mentioned by some of the leaders in the denomination about "where are we going to get

students?" Then there was the issue about deferment for pre-seminary students. I don't know if you ever got into that debate but there was a heavy pressure to keep that in force and not have it put aside as a draft rule.

RCO: Well, you see in those days they depended entirely, John, on the Holy Spirit. There was no recruiting. There was no attempt to go out and attract students. The school depended entirely upon the ministry itself to recommend to its young people, interest them in ministry and speak to them about it and the student body was drawn totally from our own colleges, Hope, Central, and then a little bit later when Northwestern became a four-year college so that it was more or less...the school took whoever came.

JHM: Then in the late thirties there was pressure brought by the board to the Board of Direction pleading for money, for as little as \$1,500! Please, give us \$1500 so we can so we can function! That was before your time.

RCO: Yes. Well, you know when I look at my graduating class the majority of them went out on salaries of 16 to 18 hundred dollars a year. One of the things that floored me was that when I went to Milwaukee I was paid the highest salary of any man in the class. I was given 2,400 dollars a year. They never raised my salary but at least they paid it during those depression years. But you think of that. Most of my classmates were operating on 16-1800 dollars a year. Course, I suppose my expenses were greater living in the city and everything we got we had to buy, pay for whereas rural parishes were a little better off.

JHM: What was the involvement of the seminary in the war experience...I suppose it was

similar to the community experience as well?

RCO: We were not as heavily involved in the war experience as was the college. The college had barracks and was having a big influx of students, soldiers on the campus there, I think they called it the V-12 program. For us...I think it affected us mostly by way of interpreting the war, trying to meet the demands of the church which was short on ministry and making ourselves available. The...I think that the war may have siphoned off a lot of candidates that might otherwise have come to us. And sometimes it was a case of postponing until the war was over and some of them never came back and some had a change of mind. The war changed their thinking about ministry and so that I think the seminary's role was quite largely that of interpretation, writing articles for the Leader, the church paper and things of that nature.

JHM: Was there a sense on the part of the student body that they were a different group in that they were primarily deferred? Was there a sense of guilt perhaps...

RCO: Yes, I think there was a little of that. It could not help to be that way when so many of their peers were enlisted and fighting. They were there so that it did not make it too comfortable for those that were here. I think they labored under some difficulties.

JHM: Were they more serious in their studies, perhaps, then they might have been? Course, you didn't have anything to compare it with...

RCO: I think...It gave a certain sense of urgency to their work...that they were being spared, you know, for a purpose and so I think it weighed a little more heavily on

them than it might have otherwise. They didn't speak too much about it.

JHM: The war in Europe ended in 1945 and then GIs started coming home at that time. I came home myself in November and as I said earlier I was one of the first two veterans except for Ralph Ten Clay who had broken his neck in an training experience as a two week rookie. Now, that will put it into perspective for you so suddenly there's a group of veterans coming in so that with Cornelius Muyskens and myself there were only two joining this class of five in terms of our experience. How did the seminary gear up as the war was over to deal with what might have been an expected influx of students?

RCO: I think that the seminary was confronted with a different kind of mentality, a different kind of student. Whereas previously they had been getting people right out of college here we had people of considerable maturity. They had gone through a war experience. They had come back having seen a lot of very seamy, a rough, brutal side of life. I think they were a student body that represented much more of a challenge to the faculty and they gave us the realization that we needed to address in our course of study problems that we would style as being a little more existential, that is, which had to deal with life situations. And I think many of them were in a stage where they were reflecting back on their war experience. Most of them, as I recall, were filled with thanksgiving and gratitude that they could be back. We were not dealing with young people who had very little experience in life at all but people who had come out of the war and with a certain realism about ministry that sort of put pressure on the faculty to be a little light on

theory and (laughs) a little more on practice.

JHM: What about their educational backgrounds in preparation for ministry?

RCO: I think that they all had the same academic background. A good many of them had come out of our colleges but in the meantime of course they had been out of touch with study for a while and I think that for all of them it was a task to get back into the student grind and...because the ministry is such a demanding profession especially when it comes to the mastery of knowledge...it's so strong in its demands on reading that it hit these returning men very hard. They were burning the midnight oil trying to absorb...going through the whole mental process of reflection and digestion what they were reading. I give them great credit. It must have been something that I only could have imagined.

JHM: If I could refresh a little bit here. There were several who had absolutely no pre-seminary preparation. In fact Jim Bos gained a year in his college experience by getting his education as a trainee in preparation to be an ensign in the Navy at Dartmouth. He gained a year in the process while being in the service.

RCO: Is that right!

JHM: Some of them had almost no liberal arts experience.

RCO: Yes, that's true!

JHM: Harry Buis, for example, got his bachelor's degree at Hope College at the same time he got his professorial certificate from the seminary.

RCO: Yes, now that you mention it. We began to get a variance.

JHM: Yes, and I had no pre-seminary experience either so there was a variation in that



record.

RCO: Yes, that's right.

JHM: And the remarkable thing was that they did so remarkably well in the midst of it. Would you not confess that perhaps you were a little easy on some of us in the area of Greek if we did not have that preparation?

RCO: (Sigh) Well. It would be easy to say yes to that but I don't know. I never really have reflected on that very much. I suspect that there was a degree of just gratitude to have them all back again in such large numbers.

JHM: They were so badly needed!

RCO: Yes, and they were so needed that perhaps we did...I don't know. But I don't think it was all that perceptible.

JHM: There was a social change, however, when they came, wasn't there?

RCO: Oh yes! In the first place, for the first time we were faced with the innovation of married men on the campus. Previous to that time why it was a kind of bachelor's institution. Our men usually came single and anyone who was married during his seminary career was viewed with a little suspicion actually! But now this all changed because the veterans all came back either recently or married previously and so the seminary's whole family was suddenly an enlarged family and the life of the school began to take on a new proportion. They began slowly to arrange for classes for the ministers' wives, a student wives organization was formed. We've always had in the seminary since the time of Noah and his ark the Adelpic Society. It was a discussion and debate society and then a comparable one was

formed for the women, the Adelpia Society, so that the women were made to feel a part of the community and even later than that courses were made available to them. So the whole social fabric of the school underwent a very significant change.

JHM: And that process of change never ceased, did it.

RCO: No, that has just multiplied and amplified itself through the years. That has never changed. It's unusual nowadays to have a big segment of single men in a class.

JHM: That's one of the notable things about the new class that is coming in, I understand. More traditional career type individuals coming in.

RCO: Yeah. It's one of those changes I suppose you would call a cultural change.

JHM: Now, we had talked about finances in the seminary. With the return of the veterans what happened in that regard?

RCO: Well, first of all we were faced with the return of numbers. But I will say that in connection with the return of numbers to the school finances began to pick up a little bit, that is, the churches too. Many of them began to resume previous levels of giving. It became a matter of intention on the part of John R. to get himself out and try to enlist funds. He began the practice of especially seeking out people who were known to be people of some wealth and to encourage their gifts and there came in at that time following the war period some rather significant gifts that helped the school. The rest of it was a case of sending the faculty out in the summertime to do a little work and that encouraged the churches to look a little more favorably on the school.

JHM: A large factor, of course, was the GI Bill because the students who came in as veterans were entitled to educational benefits through the GI Bill which the school in fact benefitted from in turn. In fact, we were given a book allowance each year as part of that GI Bill. The GI Bill was a large factor I would think in the financial resuscitation of the school.

RCO: Yes, I think that helped. It helped them get through school and it helped the school too.

JHM: Talking about that. When were you aware that the seminary had to start charging tuition. Do you know anything about that process?

RCO: I'm afraid not, John. No doubt I was in on a part of it but the data has eventually escaped my mind. You would be better off checking minutes of the board and so forth.

JHM: We talked about the change in the social aspect of the seminary in terms of married students, children around and so forth. Was there also a change in types of students, minority students and so on.

RCO: Yes. It was about that time that we began to notice a variance in the kind of students that were coming to us. For example, we began to get the first in a very small number of blacks who were coming in. Also our students began to come in from various other schools slowly at first but nevertheless it was a departure for Western Seminary.

JHM: Why do you think that happened?

RCO: Well, I don't know. I suppose there were a number of factors there. I think it

was a part of a cultural pattern in which denominationalism was not quite as strong as previously and that people came mostly for reasons of education. If they had heard that Western Seminary had a good faculty and they were attracted by recommendation or invitation regardless of whose denominational auspices the school went under.

JHM: There were three students from the Netherlands who were in school soon after I arrived. One was Willem Ietsvaart. Another was Karel Hanhart and the third was Arjo Nijk. And I understand that Ietsvaart was funded by the Emergency Fund which I understand was established by the RCA to bail out the colleges during the war. Where the other two came from I don't remember. Do you have any memory of any of these people?

RCO: I remember Arjo because he was a very bright student and also one of the few who never stayed here and went back immediately to the Netherlands and got himself involved in various offices and jobs in the Netherlands.

JHM: He did not stay in the church?

RCO: He never served in the church. He never stayed in this country at all. He never served in a church at all.

JHM: A very handsome young man as I recall.

RCO: Yes. And a fine person scholarlywise. He did quite a bit of writing and book publishing in the Netherlands. And then we had a few students, of course, from the Netherlands who came in connection with our work up in Canada. These people did go up to Canada. We had several of those boys who following the war

went up to Canada.

JHM: My classmates have tended to feel that the three Dutch students I have mentioned took a little different approach to theology than they did. In other words, a more intellectual, classical approach than they were taking. They were extremely pragmatic, they felt, and these people were quite secure in their classical background. Would you agree with that?

RCO: Yes. I think that's due to the difference in education in the Netherlands and here. Over there they are very bookish, the minister is a scholar, a theologian to begin with. What we call "practical ministry" was at least in those days something unknown to them. So I think that for us they were a challenging group.

JHM: So they challenged you in a different way than the GIs did.

RCO: That's right. They were always interested in the theological, dogmatic approach to things.

JHM: I gathered that some of my classmates resented them just a little.

RCO: Yes. There was a little case of adjustment there. They were always interested in pursuing something by the way of the mind whereas our students had a lot of other interests. They tended to stay by themselves a little bit.

JHM: Now, when I called my generation "pragmatic" they I think in some cases seminary training to be necessary in order for them to achieve their goals but not really necessary in terms of shaping their concepts. Tract distribution is one thing that a couple of my classmates have talked rather laughingly a bit...that was a big thing for them. They were a little bit more fundamentalist perhaps than some may

have been in the past. Would you agree with that?

RCO: Yes, although I think there's a variance. I think that our Reformed Churches here in America are all affected to some degree or other by fundamentalism. Our rampant American fundamentalism is contagious and for a long while, especially here in Michigan with the Moody Bible Institute radio program which was beamed into almost every Reformed Church home in the whole state. A great deal of that fundamentalism was absorbed almost naturally we would say. In fact when I came to teach in the seminary I found it was necessary for me to pick up immediately a Scofield Bible because questions were emerging in classroom discussion and a course of study that you could see were definitely prompted by the Scofieldism that was at that time being broadcast by WMBI and was rampant in fundamentalist circles. So I think the seminary in those days did have to keep its mind alert to the fact that a great many of our students were more or less affected by it.

JHM: Many of my generation feel that we had the best years in this century to serve in ministry. How do you reflect on that?

RCO: Yes, I think so. I think that the task and the dimensions of ministry today are really frightening in number and complexity. And difficulty. You are expected to be pastoral counselor, psychologist, church administrator. Your expertise is demanded in so many ways and then in addition to all of this to try to be a spellbinder on Sunday! Also today the ministry is not regarded with the kind of approval and given the regard it used to be given. People used to get off the sidewalk when the preacher walked by you know. But today you'd be lucky if

they left you some room on the sidewalk.

JHM: The immediate post world war years were years of expansion of the church...growth and that's why you could get a good response from the congregations. They felt good about themselves. They felt good about the church at large.

RCO: Yes. And I think that's one of the things that has changed the church for good - that is all of our churches are becoming much more representative of our American democracy. They are not so tightly ethnic anymore. For a long while the only reason to join the Dutch Reformed Church was either you were Dutch or you were married into a Dutch family. Today very few of our churches are that ethnically tight any more.

JHM: We talked about "spellbinders." You used that term. You had Dr. Schuller, Robert Schuller, as one of your students. Would you like to comment on that?

RCO: Oh. Bob was an excellent student! He had a fine bass voice. He sang in a quartet and he did a lot of evangelistic work while he was in seminary. I must say that I never dreamed that he would be able to accomplish what he has but I have very pleasant recollections of him as a student. He was a bright, enterprising, good student and I have followed his career with a great deal of interest. He has also been fortunate that he came along at a time when the man and the needs and the technology all coincided and being a very alert...he's a people-minded man. Some students are book-minded, idea-oriented. Others again are people-oriented and Bob has a nice combination of both. But I think it has been a very fine

combination of events that have attended his ministry - the right man at the right place at the right time, was much of the secret of his career.

JHM: Would you agree that his ministry has had quite an impact on the seminary and especially the RCA in some areas?

RCO: I think that his ministry has had a bigger impact on people, community, than it has had on the denomination or on the seminary. We're proud to number him among our alumni. He's probably the most widely known alumnus of the school. But as far as...I don't think that outside of that he has a lot of influence on the RCA and its institutions.

JHM: I have wondered whether the virtual megachurches that we have in our denomination like Christ Memorial here in Holland and Christ Community in Spring Lake may not have taken some of the leaves from his...

RCO: Well, that would be interesting to explore because I don't know. It seems to me that megachurches are usually the result of some strong personality and in that respect they have something in common. Outside of that I think it is something that would bear some study and research but I think of De Kruyter's church built of De Kruyter, Christ Memorial built on Tim Brown and as you move around to these churches you find that they build so strongly on a personal identity, personal leadership.

JHM: My question would be this. Might not Dr. Schuller with his emphasis on accessibility of all to the church...I think his concepts regarding divorce and the acceptability of people into the church regardless of what may have happened in



their lives and so on...I think that this has affected the Reformed Church. I'm not using the right terminology here. I don't want to use the word "tolerance" but...we're not nearly as legalistic as we used to be. It's part of the culture. I wonder if he hasn't taught us that it important to go beyond the individual too reach the mass.

RCO: Well, whether he has had an influence in that direction on the rest of us I don't know. I would think that it is more or less of a general realization on the part of churches everywhere that perhaps in some respects our concept of the Christian life was a little bit legalistic. We tended to think of people living the Christian life according to certain set patterns and when they deviated from these accepted patterns we judged them not to be normative. And I think we have changed our minds on that. We have come to see that people are really individuals and you just can't stamp people and put them all in a basket like that so easily. So I think that it has been a general realization on the part of the church...an awakening to the fact that perhaps that some places our categories of what is acceptable and not acceptable have expanded a bit. We're not quite so legalistic.

JHM: I want to go back to the Seminary again in a little bit. But going back again to the past you have been back here in Holland for maybe six or seven years. The fifties are upon us. Your children are growing up and probably in the grade schools and I suppose moved on into the high school - went to Holland High School. What about their college experiences?

RCO: All three went to Hope. Judy left after two or three years to go to Butterworth

where she wanted to do hospital nursing but the other two, no not both...Mark got an A.B. in economics and sociology and went down to Western to get his MBA. Rich was in chemistry and he did well, practical chemistry and he made that his life career in a very practical way. I remember Kleinheksel say to me that he was one of the best practical chemists who had gone through the college since he had been there. He was a little weak on theory and he is now the head of Ferro (?) Corporations pigment plastics division and he sort of stayed in that area all that life so he had a good grounding at Hope.

JHM: Where does he live?

RCO: He lives in Cleveland.

JHM: It's interesting that all of your children seemed satisfied to stay in Holland where they had time for college. Was there a reason for that?

RCO: Well, I think it was somewhat financial. They could go to school here and it was convenient and it was the denominational school. We would prefer that they would go there rather than a big university campus. I suspect adjacency (sic) and financing had something to do with it.

JHM: Obviously they were happy there.

RCO: O yes, they enjoyed it here they didn't mind it at all. And I think all of them appreciated their education.

JHM: You indicated that you'd been a member of the Exchange Club for some years. Was your wife living when you first became involved in that?

RCO: Yes, I had to...I was invited to that group...Oh you're thinking about the Exchange

Club. No, that came afterward...after my wife died I began to find ways in order to cope with that so I did it by immediately giving myself an agenda that would be big enough to command just about all of my waking hours.

JHM: You were retired at that time?

RCO: No...I had about five years to go yet. The automobile accident that claimed her life happened in '73 and I didn't retire until I was 70. Well, '76 was the year of my retirement. I was kept on for another year so I actually retired in '77. But you see I had four or five years yet to complete at the seminary.

JHM: Did you take a leadership role in that organization?

RCO: No. I joined it mostly for fellowship and it gave me an opportunity for another round of folk to meet.

JHM: Now the Century Club was also one of your involvements.

RCO: Yes, I was a member of that. Marian and I belonged to it. I think John R. (Mulder) introduced us to it very shortly after we came to Holland, so we have been members there a good many years.

JHM: What were your wife's interests?

RCO: Marian kept herself busy here in ten year spates. The first ten years she gave herself pretty much to the Women's Literary Club and was member of the board and they wanted to make her a vice-president but when she got to that point why she said no she didn't care to be an officer in the organization. Then I noticed that she gave about ten years to Third Church teaching in the Sunday School, taking over the kindergarten class and she gave ten years to the education department

teaching in the summer school, Bible school, during the vacation period. Then the last ten years she gave herself to hospital work. She was a member of the Holland Hospital Board and became instrumental in working with Glen Peterman I believe at that time to place in Holland Hospital a chapel. The hospital had never had a chapel before. They thought it would be a good idea. She got Glen to get the Holland Classis I think it was to give \$1,000 to furnish a chapel and on our sabbatical year in England she spent most of her time at Moberry's (?) trying to get them to design and to prepare for her a three step cross. We picked a brass menorah up at Antwerp, Belgium, and then she purchased a whole series of 18th century etchings of the miracles of Christ for framing. So she was very active on the Hospital Board and retired the year she was going to be abroad on our sabbatical. She felt she wanted to go back into it again.

JHM: Was she memorialized at the Hospital after she died?

RCO: I think so. There are some pictures in the halls that have been dedicated to her memory.

JHM: Have you been active in any political life? Board procedures? The government of the community?

RCO: No, I have not been involved in city council work. I have stayed out of that. I consulted every now and then with Bill Wichers on a number of things. But I have not. The most I have done in the community has been to give a few speeches now and then. I can remember giving an address to the Rotary Club that was later reproduced in the Holland Sentinel about the future that Holland faced. I felt that

the community was not being very realistic about facing up to its opportunities here and so I gave a little speech on that.

JHM: When was that?

RCO: Oh. I think that was about five years ago.

JHM: I suppose you were thinking about the industrial and ethnic changes. What were some of your concepts?

RCO: The changes that were coming to Holland. It had to do with the growth of Holland. Everybody was jumping on board the "growth wagon" and I warned that the heavy expansion and growth of Holland was going to be accompanied by a lot of obligation, responsibility, and even possible taxation. I pointed out what would be happening in the schools and so on. I went down the list...and I thought that Holland ought to slow its growth so that it could have a managed growth rather than just let the horse run away with the wagon.

JHM: That was a very prophetic statement. Where did you get the inspiration for that?

RCO: Well, it was just something that was borne in on me. And since I had the chance to talk to the Rotary Club which I do not have very often - I think I have spoken there only twice in my lifetime, I thought that would be a good place to unload.

JHM: Coming in from the outside and having lived in changing communities for much of my professional life in Los Angeles and Chicago and so on I see Holland trying hard to deal with change at this point. Would you agree with me?

RCO: Yes. I think it represents one of the great problematics of Holland. The growth that we face industrial, population growth, what direction should it take, to what

extent should we give ourselves to it. I think it is a problem to which the answers are rather slow in coming.

JHM: But I think our leadership is trying to address it.

RCO: Oh yes. I think they're conscious of it now.

JHM: And it may well be that your address had something to do with that.

RCO: Yes, I may have poked them up a bit and contributed something to getting them started thinking about it. Not much had been done up to that point. Everyone was heralding the growth and being so happy about it and praising it and I just felt that there was another side which needed to be recognized.

JHM: Going back now to the seminary we haven't talked about the sixties and that must have been an interesting period at the seminary. Could you tell us about it?

RCO: Well, those were quite some times. I don't know just what aspect you may mean.

JHM: I am thinking about the rebellious nature, the protest movements, and so forth.

RCO: The sixties were difficult for us because one did not want to meet what was happening in the sixties with only sheer negativity. But how to be positive about it and how to select from what was rampant in the sixties, that was a more difficult thing to do. I think the sixties represented something almost inevitable. The breaking out and the breaking into cultural modes, new expressive activity. It had an unhappy down side through it especially when it began to involve drugs, marijuana and then following it with certain helter skelter activity none of which was very constructive. The miserable sixties, they produced more grey hair than anything else.

JHM: It's difficult for me to think of a discipline problem in the seminary, but were there disruptions? Protests? I know there were across the street (Hope College).

RCO: I think the most they did for us was something constructive. That is, that they forced us to think through the social applications of Christianity. Made us realize that you are always working with two extremes in seminary education. Too much individualism or too much social concentration. And to realize that people are both individuals and social beings. I think it's important and the sixties brought that to our attention in ways that you couldn't escape it. It just forced it on you. Previously Christianity had been too much of an individualistic affair. Your relationship to Christ, my relationship to you and so on. The corporate, larger aspects have been neglected.

JHM: And the culture was challenged, wasn't it. I remember the kind of dress we were expected to wear in seminary. I would think that in the sixties that began to break down.

RCO: Yeah. That was a rather strange combination. In some ways the so-called social emphasis was very rampant - individualism. People no longer comported themselves publicly the way they used to. Their dress, their language, their activity. It was just a period in which the word freedom broke out as in the 18th century the word reason broke out. It seemed to be characteristic of the culture of the time.

JHM: The governance of the school became more of a consensual thing than a hierarchy, did it not as far as the students were concerned? Would you comment on that?

You weren't able to just say, "Thus saith the prof," or "Thus saith the Lord."

You had to take the feelings and the concepts of the students into account.

RCO: That perhaps was a helpful thing to some extent. Previously the distance between student and teacher was too great. I can recall that I was resented because when I came on the faculty I was the youngest man on the faculty. I was 35 years old. And the older men just didn't like it that I was too close to the students. So that I think the high regard in which the professor was held represented distance at times from the students. And this began to erode with the sixties. I think now days it's probably gone too far. I don't know, but what troubled me...If I had gone down the hall and one of my students had said, "Hi Dick!" (laughs) It was always "prof" or "doctor," but that's a commonplace today. So that...and we noticed as you indicated a departure in dress too. I've had students sitting before me with their shoes off and they come to class looking as if they might have been working in the yard rather than any other way whereas in my day if you appeared in class without a jacket it elicited a comment, at least from John R. Mulder.

JHM: Yes, he commented on my haircut.

RCO: That's right. But in some ways this was a good thing because the previous relationship reflected more of a European carry over, an inherited background that came with the Dutch tradition in which the hoogelaar (?) and the preacher and the teacher were all up on a pedestal.

JHM: I suppose that despite the protests in the area Holland, Michigan, was no Berkeley at that time.



RCO: No, there were protests but they were minor compared to other places. And I don't recall any of them in the seminary. Fortunately, we kept them busy so they didn't have too much time. If there were protests why they were usually with a committee waiting on the president or the faculty.

JHM: There were protests at General Synod in that era you will remember.

RCO: Yeah! (chuckles)

JHM: There was one era when there were a few students who were quite critical of the faculty and we won't go into detail on that but that was an interesting era. And this little group of people have moved in various directions, have they not. I think you know who I mean.

RCO: Well, there have always been a little of that, but it seems to me that I do not know why...Yes, I do know why. I was a lightning rod for some of that. Particularly with one class. We might as well just say it. I had difficulties with Ron Brown, Dick Rhem, Arie Brouwer, and there was one more there, - Dickie De Witt! I think it was led mostly by Dickie De Witt and I can see where they had some occasion for that. It was particularly in connection with the teaching of Romans. I was concerned to get away from the heavy Hodge, Shedd doctrine of justification and see if I could make that more in terms of Augustinian realism. Get some relationship in there rather than so much legalism and lawyer language and perhaps I didn't succeed too well. At any rate they felt that I was weakening the doctrine of justification and so they began to be very, very critical and suspicious. About that time also I had produced by first content syllabus. I had never produced

content syllabi for my classes during all my forty years of teaching. I've always put out study guides which give students some directions as to how to go about mastering a book, tools with which to do it, directions, a road map on the way but that's it. No more than that, but when it came to New Testament theology the discipline was just emerging again, coming back into popularity and so I produced my first and only content syllabus - some hundred pages or so. And they tried to pick that to pieces without too much success. They brought me before the Board. The Board dismissed them and told them to get out and so we had some problems there. I regarded it as being more or less...All of these boys were men with strong personalities, strong egos and unfortunately all of them have found it very difficult to work with others.

JHM: I was quite close to most of them and I would just say that they went and played their own instruments after they had been part of the orchestra for a bit. They went out and they all played different instruments and in different directions.

RCO: Yes, that's right. And they each had to be the conductor of their own orchestra. But I got along all right with them and in fact I think that their place in the ministry they owe a little bit to me because the faculty wanted to take a vote to expel them and I said, "No, let's not do that at all." After all they had been working mostly on me and I think we ought to let them go into the ministry and let them sink or swim on their own abilities and let's not preclude their fortune. And I'm glad we did because they all have had varying fortunes in the ministry but...Yes, I attracted some of that and it was because I had a desire to rephrase

traditional language, traditional concepts. It's a hazardous thing for a teacher to do...when people don't hear the old phraseology, the old terms.

JHM: Should a group of people like that come to the seminary today would they be similar in their outlook and approach and would they find something quite different in the faculty today?

RCO: Perhaps. I think deviation from old thought norms and old thought patterns is much more frequent today now.

JHM: It would make me more prepared for that too.

RCO: Yes. I think that in my day I was being too early for my time. I think that they were not prepared for it. And all of them were brought up, reared with very set patterns and they were wanting to hear again what they had heard in catechism class and they wanted to hear the precise language and of course I was busy trying to translate it into new language and new metaphors.

JHM: One more subject before we go to a more general discussion. You're getting tired, I'm sure but you also were on the faculty in the seminary when the role of women changed at least in the life of the church. Would you like to comment on that? And also on students that may not have had the same motivation that they traditionally would have. Reflect on the students of the seventies and eighties as you have experienced them, especially the female presence.

RCO: When the subject came up it focused on what was the biblical background for this and naturally it fell to the New Testament department to enter this fray and as I looked at it I thought that the ordination of women deserved support. So I became

the one faculty member that came to their rescue. I wrote articles, I was on the Theological Committee and helped write the (gap because of need to change tape).

RCO: Oh yes, I thought that I needed to insist that if we were to discuss the matter biblically we would take in the total biblical witness. That we would get nowhere if we would just argue about one or two texts because you can have one or two texts that favor it and you can have one or two texts that give you problems with it. But I said I thought that if we adopted a canonical criticism there would be nothing at all in the way of women's ordination and so I wrote up a report for the Theological Committee and I also published an article or two in the Church Herald. And so I became known as an advocate. I didn't do a great deal to publicize it beyond that. I did give addresses here and there. In fact, I think I debated with Elton Eenigenberg a couple of times. He would take the anti position and I would take the pro. And I remember at least one or two occasions when we did this together. I think it was in Elton's salad days when he was more opposed to it that he was in his later years.

JHM: About what era was that? Was that the early sixties? Late sixties?

RCO: Probably in the sixties sometime. Just a little previous to our accepting it as a denomination.

JHM: The first women students were not geared for ministry, they were geared for Christian education.

RCO: They were geared for other things. Yes. Bill Bennett's wife and a few others that I can recall were here. They were here mainly to pick up what they could in

teacher's ed. At any rate the women's ordination project got my support and I think it is a good thing for the church by and large. I'm glad that we could settle it as quickly as we could. I was not all together happy with the mode of the settlement but it probably spared us going through what the Christian Reformed Church is now going through with the whole issue.

JHM: How did it affect life in the seminary? I know that now perhaps there is a larger proportion of women than when you left the seminary but how did it impact the life of the seminary?

RCO: Well, it had a tendency to position faculty and students a bit. Either you came to be known as for or against women's ordination and it also gave Western Seminary a position in this matter. It became known that we were an institution that was favorable to it and so we attracted some women students who had ministry in mind. So since that time Western has slowly grown in its advocacy of it. I'm proud of the Seminary for the role it played in the whole affair because when this was in process of debate in the church Western Seminary sponsored a seminar or an institute on the ordination of women and it was held at the Seminary chapel and as I recall there were several people who were invited - Horton, McKnight and their addresses were printed in a little pamphlet which the seminary financed and published but they were all anti, against it. But we did grasp the nettle by its thorns. That is, we were not standoffish in regard to it. We took an active part in promoting an open discussion of and support of women's ordination, so Western Seminary I think can be happy that it fulfilled its role as an educator.

JHM: Do you think there were a few students who came to the seminary in the seventies who might be called dilettantes?

RCO: Oh yes. Yes, you'll always attract them.

JHM: Not so many however in the day when they came directly from the church.

RCO: Yes, but there are some who are trying to do it because they see a platform for something they want to sell...their ego. Some gifts or predilection...

JHM: Even for therapy.

RCO: Yes, that's right. It can even be that.

JHM: Now you of course left the faculty in '77 and then you served as a adjunct for a little while. Would you describe the Seminary as you viewed it in 1977-78. Who was the president? What was going on?

RCO: Well, when I left I turned my work over to my successor, Jim Cook. I couldn't have had a better successor had I picked him myself because Jim was once my student and then my associate and then my successor so I couldn't have been happier. The fact that Bill Schutter took over Jim's work and Jim took over mine was a happy situation. Change however has brought the Seminary to a new era, I think. They are going to make some far reaching changes in the near future. Jim Cook is retiring. He has stayed on another year now. And John Hesselink will be retiring. Donald Bruggink will be retiring. The Seminary just now under Denny Voskuil is a changed situation in which the faculty is changing, the student body is undergoing changes. For a long while we have had older men coming to the Seminary, second vocation people. With the change of the faculty there comes a

return again to younger students who are coming to us from a variety of schools, not all Reformed Church schools so that I would say that the dynamics at the Seminary are totally different.

JHM: A stronger recruitment program.

RCO: And a better group than when I left it in '77. I was sort of at the end of an era. I think that the coming in of second career people continued.

JHM: When was the onset of the TEA program, that is the Theological Education Agency. RCA students had their choice of seminaries other than Reformed Church in America institutions.

RCO: I suspect that probably goes back some fifteen years.

JHM: It's really after you left, isn't it.

RCO: Yes, it was coincident with my leaving. I think that Jim Cook was instrumental in representing Western in that.

JHM: That has had some real effect on the seminaries, hasn't it. We need not go into that right now.

RCO: Yes, I think TEA has drained away students from both Western and New Brunswick.

JHM: Created a different class of preachers too, didn't it.

RCO: Yes, a different group of ministers.

JHM: OK. I think perhaps we're coming to a close. Are there any other things you'd like to reflect on before we wind it up?

RCO: No, nothing that I can think of. I've lived through the rebuilding of the Seminary

structurally as far as buildings are concerned. The destruction of the old campus. The erection of the new. And that was when Western Seminary joined the human race (laughs) as far as institutions are concerned. Where we had some equipment with which to work and I've seen the erection of the big Cook research library building. And then under Marvin Hoff the expansion of the campus with its new residential block. The seminary is really one of the fine institutions of the country.

JHM: Who was the president when you left?

RCO: When I left? Hesselink.

JHM: Now we might very quickly say something about Third Church because you spent so much of your life in that church. Any changes that are of particular interest?

RCO: Well, for me personally the change has been less involvement. When I first came a series of changes in the ministry there - Bill Van't Hof left. There was a period of vacancy and then they called Jake Sessler and Jake Sessler stayed only three or four years when health reasons prompted him to leave and they were vacant again. During all that time I was heavily involved in the ministry of Third Church. I was just going through my records the other day and I think I must have conducted 68 funerals during that time and every summer I took a share of the midweek services. I don't know. I haven't counted up the times that I preached there but a good many during the year. So during those early years especially when Marian was with me we were very heavily involved with the work of Third Church. I have seen the church change. When we came in '42 it was a strongly middle class church. It still had a goodly number of blue collar workers in it. That was one of



the things that drew me to Third Church because I like to see blue collar workers sit along side of Ph.D's in the pew and on Sunday the Ph.D. was just Tom this and Dick that and I thought to myself that's a church, that's the church of Jesus Christ so I felt very, very at home there at the church and I liked it. During the ensuing years my preoccupation became denominational. I found myself being drafted for theological commissions and liturgy commissions, board of education and I became quite heavily involved in synodical work and denominational work. Third Church in turn got less and less of my time. Also the nature of the church changed. Today Third Church is very definitely a middle class church. There are no blue collar workers in it. You will find a greater proportion of Ph.D.'s there per pew than perhaps you will find in heaven.

JHM: Are they rather self conscious about that? I think about the building of their new building and so on.

RCO: I think so. It is a very forward moving group, a very intelligent group. They are probably one of the more...It probably is the outstanding church in the city that combines a high regard for heritage with an alertness to changes in contemporary society. It's never going to be a megachurch. It will never provide a smorgasbord in order to please everybody. In fact, it stays very closely to the Reformed liturgy and it has a strong pulpit and probably one of the finest music ministries in the city where the music is still good church music and so the church has changed a little bit that way and I think for the better. It now represents a cross section of many American denominationalism. It takes in people - Methodists, Baptists,

fundamentalists. It's a very rich fellowship. So my continued membership there is a pleasure. I worship there mostly and the tasks that I do there are mostly in the education line. I teach the Reformed Church Women's study book. I do a little teaching now and then.

JHM: Two more questions. First, have you written any books or writings? I know you have written articles and so on.

RCO: No, lately I have been working on a family genealogy trying to get my papers in order for Elton Bruins and trying to work into some semblance of orderliness and record things that I have gathered through the years, books and reports and things. I haven't done much writing. The only thing I have done in the way of writing is some lectures for HASP (Hope's Academy for Senior Professionals).

JHM: Isn't that a great organization!

RCO: Yes!

JHM: That's another story (laughs).

RCO: It's very stimulating. It's one of the finer things of recent years.

JHM: Are you one of the charter members?

RCO: Yes. We began with about 30 people.

JHM: And, I know you have several degrees. Just for the record you of course have your bachelor's from Calvin...

RCO: Yes, and a doctorate from Hope College, an honorary degree. And I got a pending degree from the University of Chicago (laughs). I never finished that. I was admitted to candidacy and had nothing to do but write the dissertation but I

never found time to do it because the war came on and with the dearth of ministry we were preaching every Sunday. And John R. was not minded to give me a year off. I needed a year off to finish really...to whip it into shape and he never would do that.

JHM: Well, in some ways I think we've only scratched the surface but it's been a great recital and I deeply appreciate it and I'm sure that the Archives and generations to come will also.

Transcribed by John Maassen, 2/5/97

Initial Contact Form

Name: Richard Cornelius Oudersluys

Date of birth: [date removed], 1906

Place of birth: Grand Rapids, Michigan

Mother's name (include maiden name): Clara Ver Veer

Father's name Richard (NMI) Oudersluys

Siblings' names (include birthdates if known): Marian, Angeline, Wilma, Beatrice (Betty)

Spouse's name (include wife's maiden name): Marian De Young

Date of Marriage: June 16, 1934

Place of marriage: Grand Rapids

Children's names (include dates and places of birth):

Judith Mary Brink

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Richard C. [dates removed]

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Mark Henry

Holland, Michigan

Date of death: NA

Place of burial: NA

Religion and church membership:

As a child Nederduits Church and then Bethel Reformed Church in Grand Rapids.

Since arrival in Holland Third Reformed Church, Holland.

Schooling and/or other training:

AB Calvin, 1929; Th.B Western Theological Seminary Holland, MI, 1932;

University of Chicago, 1940-1942; D.D. Hope 1945; University of Basel, 1960-

1961; Cambridge University, 1969-1970

Residential history (listing all residences chronologically, noting dates lived in each:

120 W. 12th St., Holland, 1944-c.1958

181 W. 11th St., Holland, c.1958-present

Occupational history (list all occupations chronologically, noting the place of work, the type of work done there, and the approximate salary):

Licensed to preach by RCA Classis Grand Rapids, 1932

Ordained to ministry by RCA Classis Wisconsin, 1932

Pastor, First Reformed Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1932-1941

Professor of New Testament Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan  
1942-1977 (Retirement)

Adjunct professor Western Seminary and Hope College 1978-1988

Membership in clubs and organizations (note dates of membership and offices held):

American Association of University Professors, c.1976-date

American Academy of Religion, c. 1960-date

Hope Academy for Senior Professionals (HASP) Charter member to date.

Membership on boards. Class lecturer.