

Transcription of Oral Interview for the HIST 310 Oral History Project

Abstract

On October 10, 2001, Public History student Brad Beebe interviewed Dr. Harro Van Brummelen, Assistant Dean of Social Sciences and Education at Trinity Western University. During this interview, Dr. Van Brummelen provides insight into the TWU/BCCT Legal Challenge Case, drawing upon his fifteen years of service at TWU and his personal knowledge of – and involvement with – efforts to establish a 5-year program for teachers at TWU. Dr. Van Brummelen reflects candidly on the highs and lows of this lengthy process, and concludes with some thoughts on how God used it to work out His own purposes.

[S. Stopforth]

TWU Archives

BRAD BEEBE: This is Brad Beebe in Dr. Van Brummelen's office on October 10th, 2001, doing an oral interview regarding the TWU Legal Challenge for the HIST 310 Oral History Project. Um, I just want to ask you of course some questions regarding your involvement in the TWU Legal Challenge.

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Um hmm.

BRAD BEEBE: Uhh, first of all, how long have you served at Trinity?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: I've been here 15 years-

BRAD BEEBE: Fifteen years!

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: -this is my 16th year, yup.

BRAD BEEBE: Ok. Uhh, I've always been kind of curious about why people choose their career paths. What was is, if you can remember, that inspired you to choose teaching?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Originally you mean?

BRAD BEEBE: Yeah, like way back then if you can remember.

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Well like I uhh, I was actually taking a master's degree in computer science which is of course ancient history, uhh, in computers as far as computer science is concerned and enjoyed it, but ahh teaching had always been in the back of my mind and actually during that year, I was one of the few people who knew something about programming and uhh (outside office conversation) I was asked to teach a course to professors in in, in programming. And I enjoyed that teaching aspect and developing personal relationships so much that I uhh did a lot of thinking and praying at the time but uhh decided that teaching was for me and uhh then went into the teacher education program at the University of Toronto.

* Due to the excessive presence of irrelevant words such as: "uhh", "umm", "you know", and stuttering, the rest of the transcript from here on will omit these words, and those like it, to provide a more clear and comprehensible record of the interview.

BRAD BEEBE: Oh, ok. Um, what is the most rewarding part of your job if you can like sum it up? I know it's kind of broad question, but.

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: I I, the most rewarding part of my job is uhh you know to see students uhh who who, grow over the years. You know between, I usually have them first and second year. But to grow through the years and then take on teaching and particular what is particular rewarding is to see student who uhh have gifts that you don't have yourself and they grow behind yourself (Brad Beebe laughs) so they transcend what you've, what you've thought of themself (??).

BRAD BEEBE: Ok, umm, what would you say is the main emphasis that the education department tries to pass along to its students?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: I'm not sure if there's one main emphasis there is several I think. First of all teaching is a calling, it's not just a job, it's a vocation. God calls people to be teachers. It really is a responsible position to nurture children so that they can function well in society. And as a Christian teacher what you're interested in particularly, and that's the second emphasis is that students uphold and model Biblical values but also impact students so that they see the importance of accepting a defensible worldview and implanting other in their lives.

BRAD BEEBE: How does the education department address the issue of homosexuality in the classroom?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: We have-in my philosophy of education I often have some case studies that deal with homosexual student coming to a teacher and how do you handle this and how do you defend that. Also, how do justify what you do from a sound philosophical perspective the worldview again that you're coming from. Where we really deal with it in some depth is in our social issues course, which is EDUC 365, and there we often do bring in a guest speaker from, in fact a teacher from a public school, who is one of our graduates, and they explain how they deal with that particular situation. What we really emphasize is that all human beings are images of God and all must be treated as such. Whether someone has homosexual or heterosexual orientation makes no difference in how they are treated from a student-teacher point of view. Your role as a teacher is to help the student learn in as meaningful a way as much as possible (Brad Beebe moves around in chair) so that function well in our society, in a responsible way. In that sense the teacher has the same responsibility. Now having said that, it's also true that many of our graduates will agree with our position that it is not Biblical to have homosexual relationships or exercise those at least. If you teach in a public school particularly, you're not there to impose your own morals on students. Your are there, I think though, to make students think through where they're heading in their life and make responsible decisions and keep on calling on their principles that make them govern their life. You have to able to justify how you live in a responsible way.

BRAD BEEBE: Why did Trinity Western originally pursue teaching its education students a fifth year even though it spent the last ten years with the old system of students just going to another public university in Canada?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: When I came here, it was really the start of the program. The person who was Executive Vice President, Dr. Vern Story, he had made an arrangement with the government and SFU that our students would go into SFU's fifth year. The main reason being we were too small to offer our own fifth year. When I came there were only four or five students (door closing) each year going into the fifth year education program. Simon Frasier always said from the start that they'd only do this until you'll large enough to have your own program. The most cooperative arrangement: they gave us credit for some of our education courses. But SFU has always felt that once we reach a certain size we should be on our own. The present Dean, Robin Barrow, has always been very supportive of making things possible for us. At the same time, he always said that we hope that the court case ruling goes in your favour so you can get on with life and do your own thing. We have an integrated program and it's always awkward for people to take half of a program at one university and then take the other half at another one because the two sometimes don't match in their whole sense of direction even though, having said that, we've had a really good relationship with SFU and they've particularly in the last seven or eight years they've really accommodated our students. But they at the same time they have told us that the cooperative arrangement we had was going to finish no matter which way the court decision would go, they were not going to continue the present arrangement. They told us that after a couple of months before the decision came down because they just felt that Simon Frasier has its own program and can't be responsible for other programs and that universities should have its own program.

BRAD BEEBE: Can I assume that UBC and University of Victoria are somewhat the same stance as SFU?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Well, their programs are somewhat different and therefore we've never had the same relationships with them. U Vic, as opposed to a year program, has a two-year program. Their program is basically a concurrent one, the main program, so you start taking education courses during your second year just like you do at Trinity Western. UBC has always felt that its program is a stand-alone program that they do not want people taking education courses elsewhere and they will give very little credit for that. They want their student to take their education courses during the twelve-month program that they have.

BRAD BEEBE: What is your understanding of the exact legal reasoning that made eight out of nine judges of the Supreme Court of Canada vote in Trinity's favour?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Well, from my point of view it's a question of religious freedom. The judges saw quite clearly that if they went along with the College of Teachers then that the next step as one of the judges in fact said, during the court case, was to ask Tom Berger, the opposing lawyer, if we would be on your side then the next step to the College could take is then say just because of certain religious beliefs that you have then you would not get teacher certification. If you don't approve a program of certain religious beliefs the next logical step would be deny that right to anyone with particular religious beliefs, and that would be just totally against the Charter of Rights. An interesting comment was made by the editor of the *Extra West* magazine, the main gay paper in Vancouver; he was interviewed during an earlier court case.

His response to the journalist was that he was, “On Trinity Western’s side in this case, because I don’t want the persecution of gays to be replaced now by the persecution of Christians.” He saw the issue, I think clearly, that this is really denying a right to be part of the public square, to play a legitimate role which is authorized by a semi-government agency, and that’s what this case was all about so that a school whether it be Christian or Catholic, or in fact of any other persuasion, religious or otherwise, that they cannot be denied the right to operate their program just because they have certain beliefs, as long of, as course, that they do uphold the Charter of Rights in society in general.

BRAD BEEBE: Of the nine judges, of course one did not vote for Trinity. Do you have any idea what reasoning could have been behind that judge’s decision?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: It was very clear right from the start, when we started asking questions that she was going to be opposed. She was trying to find arguments on the other side. I don’t know her personally obviously, I’m not sure if I’m hypothesizing a little bit, but at the same time if you read her ruling, her argument was basically, “Look, homosexuals have been oppressed in society, they haven’t had the opportunity to exercise their rights and therefore, in this particular case, when an institution says that homosexuals, even though institution does admit that people have homosexual orientation but actually you can’t act on that, then you’re really discriminating against homosexuals.” That’s her feeling, and therefore as an institution you’re discriminating and therefore the program will be viewed as discriminatory and therefore we can’t have this kind of a program approved by a government agency, at least a government agency has a right to deny it because there is a perception of discrimination even though there had been no proven case of discrimination, she could not see the difference between having a strong belief about something at the same time giving those people complete civil rights and not oppressing them because our point of view has always been that we uphold the dignity of all people therefore even though we ourselves say, It is not right to engage in homosexual relations nevertheless, we’ve always said, Homosexuals should have the same civil rights as everyone else and they should not be denied the right, for instance, if we wanted to have a teacher education program to prepare gays, they should have that right in a democratic society as well.

BRAD BEEBE: Now that the BCCT has been instructed to proceed with accreditation of TWU’s education program, what do you see as the next possible hurdle Trinity Western will have to face?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Well, I appreciate the fact that the registrar of the College of Teachers phones us on the day of the court decision and said, “Let’s get together as soon as we can because the program has been approved now by the court and we got to move ahead.” And that has been their approach: the Supreme Court has spoken so we have no choice but to go along with that. In that sense, I don’t see any major hurdles. Now, there were seven conditions attached that the original committee, the original committee had approved our program subject to seven conditions. Some of which were very obvious conditions such as: the program should be closely monitored the first five years. Well, that’s obvious for any new program that should be done. The College has the right to check the quality, but there are some conditions that they will likely check pretty carefully for instance: have we upgraded the library sufficiently? Again, the

condition was that we have to upgrade our curriculum library practically it's an obvious condition because if you don't have a program you don't have a very good library either. So if they were really working on that this year, and they may come back and say, Well you haven't done enough. That's certainly a possibility, but that's a major hurdle, we'll have to do some negotiation. So I don't see any major hurdles that we have to meet yet with public school boards to place our teachers for their practica (??), but again we've had the indication from the Abbotsford school board they're very interested in having our teachers come to Abbotsford, and we'll contact Langley within in a couple weeks as well and we've already placed more than a hundred students every semester in Langley public schools for initial classroom experience and so again I don't anticipate any difficulty. When the King's College started its program about five years ago, it's in Edmonton, in Alberta, they had some backlash from the teacher's federation, the Alberta Teachers Association, which informed-instructed it's members not to accept pre-serviced teachers for practica (??) in the schools. They weren't able to make that stick particularly since the Alberta government, the School Act apparently has a regulations saying that any approved program the teachers must cooperate with it. I don't at this point I don't expect the BCTF to give us that same problem because in a sense what they would be doing is fighting the Supreme Court. Here the Supreme Court has approved a program and then they're saying don't accept people from this program so it's politically, I don't think it would be wise for them, let's put it that way. It doesn't mean they won't do it, but I don't think it would be wise for them to do so.

BRAD BEEBE: Do you feel that TWU graduates will receive increased scrutiny from their teaching colleagues as a result of this legal challenge?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: That depends clearly on the school, and on the system. I think that may have true in the past as well although I've only had one case in the past where a student had felt as if she had been discriminated against because she was a Trinity Western graduate and I phoned that superintendent, at the time, I said, "Look, this is what the student is saying and she was saying it because the first question in the interview had been: what are your values and how do you plan to implement them in your classroom?" Well the superintendent kind of laughed, he said, "No that's the last thing in our mind, is that we would discriminate against Trinity Western grads." He said, "That's been a board policy for the last few years and that's always our first question that we ask all our teachers because we do have certain basic democratic values we want upheld in the classroom. We've in fact incorporated those into our mission statement for our district. So that's the first we ask to see whether the person is going to fit in with those particular values," so it was a misinterpretation on the part of our graduate. (Brad Beebe laughs) Now, having said that, yes there may be some persons who hire teachers who would frown at Trinity Western grads, but I don't think it would be any different whether they've taken four years or five years at Trinity Western. At the same time, there are many, we've talked to many people in charge of hiring in the school districts whom like our graduates very much and in fact, one associate superintendent said to me last Spring he said: we want all of them- (Dr. Harro Van Brummelen and Brad Beebe laughing) which is quite encouraging.

BRAD BEEBE: Well that's really encouraging obviously, yeah. You mentioned earlier that part if the conditions the BCTF has to follow is Trinity graduates will be closely monitored for the first five years? Is that what you...?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: No, the program will be monitored-

BRAD BEEBE: Oh the program will be monitored

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: -not the graduates.

BRAD BEEBE: Ok. What exactly are they-like what criteria are they going to be looking for? Like, is it just the obvious that they want to make sure that it doesn't teach its students to shove the Bible at any student in its class?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Well, there are number of things they would want to do. First of all, they will probably check your course syllabi and are we covering everything that needs to be covered in a teacher education program. You know, in our social issues course, do we cover topics like bullying, First Nations, special needs of First Nations children, all those kinds of things. You know, is everything included? Do we teach classroom management? Do you we teach how to-or how our pre-serviced teachers should assess students of a classroom. I think they will also look at, how we organize our fifth year and whether, and they will look pretty carefully at who we hire. For instance, we have in the fifth year we have two master teachers coming in, on a two-year cycle, who are called faculty associates and they want to be involved with the process of choosing those. Now what we will do is probably come up with a short list and say these people are acceptable to us, do you have any advice on these people? There are fairly insistent on that. They also want to make sure that the major practicum, the longer one, will take place in a public school, not in a Christian school setting because they say our certificates are valid for public schools. You know, it's not that we are completely happy with all the conditions. For insistence, one of the conditions is that we restricted from K-7 and we wanted to have a program from K-10. However, those conditions were put on us by the initial-original committee and our lawyers strongly advised us, Don't fight any of those conditions. Because if you do, then the court is likely to send back the whole issue to the College for reconsideration. If you don't fight the conditions and live with them for at least for the first few years, then you know there is a possibility, at least, that the court will just approve your program, which is exactly what happened.

BRAD BEEBE: Just in case you don't know, in February of 2000, Scott Brockie, a Christian newspaper editor in Ontario, was fined \$5000 for refusing to print an ad for the Lesbian and Gay Archives back in 1996. Mr. Brockie, he is currently appealing the Ontario Human Rights Commission's ruling, that is to take place this December. What relevance do you see the outcome of that case having on Trinity's future situation?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: I don't think there is any direct relevance in the sense that, we are a charitable organization, a non-profit organization with a religious basis and purpose, which is embedded in law in fact. According to our charter, we have to teach a program within a Christian framework, that's a legislative act. Which means under the Human Rights legislation we are protected by the clause that says that, non-religious non-profit organizations may have certain, or demand certain faith commitments or certain behaviour responsibilities that are part of the ethos that the organization is trying to create. For instance, at

the Abbey at the-the Westminster Abbey in Mission, they are allowed to restrict membership of their order to men only, not women. So those things are allowed. Those things are not allowed in commercial operations that exist to make a profit. Now having said that, I do think the case is an importance one from the point of view-these cases set a certain climate within which society operates and if this decisions would go against the person-Sam Brockie was it?

BRAD BEEBE: Scott Brockie.

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Scott Brockie. Would go against him, in a sense, it would in my view at least, it would take away some freedoms that people in businesses should have. And if freedoms are limited, there's more of a chance of other freedoms being limited in the future so indirectly, in the long run, there may be some implications, but in the short run and directly, I don't think there are any.

BRAD BEEBE: I'm sure you've that you've been asked this question lots of times, it's just one of the questions I just want to get from your personal view. Explain the BCTF's-their main grievance, their main problem with Trinity. In other words, how this whole situation started. Why were they so upset that Trinity might be able to teach its fifth year, like a PDP program?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Yeah its not the BCTF by the way, it's the BCCT, the B.C. College of Teachers.

BRAD BEEBE: Oh, ok. I'm sorry.

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Although, what happens is that the council consists of twenty people and fifteen are elected. And usually candidates promoted by the BCTF are elected to membership on the council of the BCCT. So there is that link, indirect link. I personally think there are-were three reasons and different people had different reason for opposing Trinity Western. There was a group that just does not like private education, feels that public education had different reasons for opposing Trinity Western. Whether it be at the school level or the university level is really the only thing that should exist, and therefore they will oppose any private efforts in education. And the BCTF has had a long standing policy of certainly opposing say government funding for independent schools, but there a number of people within the BCTF who really believe that, it's a genuine belief even though I disagree with it but it's a genuine belief that public schools are-and public universities too are needed in a democratic society and should only be allowed in a democratic society, no independent or private education, because that's where students learn how to live together of people of other faiths and other backgrounds and other views of life. So you have those people. Secondly, you have people who oppose anything that's Christian. At the university level, often there's just a-yeah because Canada's been a Christian country now-Christianity comes under attack in a pluralistic society, but at the same time they feel that Christians have been too one-sided and therefore they're against anything that has the name Christian attached to it. And thirdly, you have the people who really felt that this squab with homosexuality was discriminatory and did not reflect where Canadian society was at. They could not make the distinction, again, between homosexual orientation and homosexual behaviour. Therefore, they felt that our Community Standards were discriminatory. And I think because that is such a hot issue homosexuality, the three groups coellist (??) around

that. You know, they-when we appealed the ruling, they said-they had originally ruled that-they didn't feel that we met all of the conditions, even though we had shown that we did, and we were somewhat discriminatory. When we appealed, I answered all the issues in a lot of detail why we could have our own program and why we did have all these things in place. In fact, one person on the council said to me afterwards, "It was a brilliant defense." Nevertheless, he voted against it afterwards, our program, and the reason he voted against it was they all coellist (??) on that homosexuality issue because they felt that that was a winner, that was a way to deny permission and many of them felt, truly, that we were being discriminatory because they couldn't see that distinction that we've always made. There are many people in society who interpret pluralism, and that's the key issue, they interpret pluralism to mean, not only that there may be all kinds of points of view in society, but they must all be treated equally and you may not-so you're not allowed to say that you're really, truly hold on to something you believe to be the truth. Whereas true tolerance, from my point of view, is that you disagree with other points of view, but still gives them the right function in society like all other citizens. But many people who say they're tolerant become very intolerant of that position. You know, they'll accuse me of being intolerant just because I say, "I do believe that the Bible is the truth, it's the authoritative word of God, and Jesus Christ is my Lord and Saviour and other religious do not lead to the truth." That they'll say therefore that I'm intolerant and I say that's a misinterpretation of what tolerance really means. I have to give the Muslim, and the Sikh, and the Atheist the same rights in society and I disagree with them but I must still uphold their right to hold those beliefs. That's true tolerance.

BRAD BEEBE: This past May, when the decision was made public that Trinity had won this court case, and I'm not sure when exactly you found out but, what was, if you can describe it, the pure feeling that you felt? Like because it has been a long process. What was that feeling? What ran through your mind?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Well, we were in the Reimer Center, in the Alumni Hall actually, and there were some of our students were there, we had a group of about ten people. We knew the decision was coming down so were gathered, we gathered for prayer. Actually, my first reaction was relief, rather than excitement. (Dr. Harro Van Brummelen and Brad Beebe laughing) After so many years. Just relief that it was finished and that it was a positive decision. The excitement came later I think for me in the next couple of days. But initial, just the sense of relief that a burden had been lifted from our shoulders by God.

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BRAD BEEBE: Just one last question. During this whole process, the years it took for Trinity from start to finish to get this case, there must have been some times when it appeared that you know, maybe you might not get this ruling. What were some inspirational quotes or Bible verses that you may have come across or looked to, when things were getting rough and it appeared that maybe Trinity might not win this case after all?

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Well, let-maybe I should answer it a bit more broadly that how you're asking it. You know, the whole process was a very long one because we actually applied in 1987, so that's almost fourteen years ago-we applied initially. We had heard that the College of Teachers was going to be established through the rumor mill. And we went

to the government directly and said look, You know, we're thinking of applying, would you approve our application? The Cabinet actually approved our application, but then the Minister of Education said at the same time that, "I am instituting this College of Teachers so you'll have to re-apply once it's established." So we applied at their very first meeting in January 1988. Had the proposal on the table. They took six-and-a-half years to come up with the criteria to approve programs. And in the meantime what the government did, Stan Hagen was strictly influential in that, he was Minister of Education at the time, because our students weren't getting...having a tough time much success getting into the program at SFU. Only, one year we only had three students let in because it was so competitive. So Stan Hagen gave money to SFU to, so that we could have some modules on the campus and that we would more of our students get into the SFU program until our program was approved. In '95, they came out-why actually December '94 they came out with criteria. We had our proposal back into them in a month. It took them almost another year to have a site visit team visit us. Then of course, there were two committees that gave favourable rulings, (Dr. Harro Van Brummelen clears throat) but then the Executive to the Council turned it down, turned the program down. At that point, we just had an incredible amount of prayer, the whole community was praying twenty-four hours a day in fact for my rebuttal that I was putting together for the-we had a delegation of about eight people going to the College Council that I was the spokesperson. Gave the whole presentation. They listened to it, they called another special meeting. They flew in everybody from the province; it was in June 30th, 1986. Twenty-ninth or thirtieth it was. So they had a full day meeting, also with their lawyers. Their first lawyer, interesting enough, their basic-their main lawyer had told them that they would never win this case. So they went then to Tom Berger's firm to find another legal opinion. (Brad Beebe breathes) And he met with them on the 30th, and then on the 30th they turned it down and just talked about discriminatory practices, that's all. They dropped everything else in part because I suppose I had answered all those other questions. At that point, that was one of the most difficult points in the whole, for myself personally, because here we had done all of this preparation, we had all this prayer from the whole community and it's, yeah I really asked-I was respondent for a couple of days. As soon as I said, "Where is God in all of this?" (Brad Beebe laughs)(Dr. Harro Van Brummelen laughs) Now looking back, you can see where God was. God wanted this case to establish a principle in Canadian society and that wasn't going to be established until it entered the Supreme Court eventually. I think though, the parts of Scripture that had meant a great deal to me are *Philippians* and *Colossians*, the first few chapters. *Colossians* 2 where Paul says do not be deceived by false philosophies and keep on holding to the truth that is Jesus Christ and everything coheres in Jesus Christ. I think that was very meaningful to me and *Philippians* where Paul, 2, where Paul tells us to have the same attitude of that of Christ: being humble, loving, and keep on being also loving and kind to (outside office laughter) the Council of College of Teachers, even though we have very different views. That's also our responsibility as Christians. And then the verses, work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works on in you for His purpose and that was very meaningful for me. We work out our salvation and fear and trembling also through this kind of dispute. Because we do know that God is working in us, and as you, and then Paul continues, as you, in verse fifteen I think it is, as you hold out the word of life to others. So we always have to word of life. And also in our court case we have to remember that. We're not just arguing about human law, but also about God's truth, and I think that meant a great deal to me that despite our, no matter what our circumstances are, we have to continue to show that attitude of Christ and to others, and also those who oppose us. And continue to just work out our salvation (outside

office conversation) with fear and trembling as we hold out God's word of life because we know God is working for His own purpose, even though we may not understand that purpose. And we said looking back now you see what God's purpose was. Although at that point, it was a valley. (Brad Beebe laughs) It was a couple of days, it was a difficult time.

BRAD BEEBE: Well, once again thank you for taking the time out for this interview.

DR. HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN: Yeah, you're welcome.

BRAD BEEBE: I really appreciate it.

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List of Significant References and Names Interview with Harro Van Brummelen

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B.C.T.F. (British Columbia Federation of Teachers)
Berger, Tom (lawyer)
Brockie, Scott
Charter of Rights
Community Standards (TWU)
Hagen, Stan (Minister of Education)
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