

Dr. Hardy Clemons

Interviewer: Dr. Courtney L. Tollison

Interviewee: Dr. Hardy Clemons

Date: August 11, 2004; 8 PM

Location: Greenville, SC (Hardy Clemons' home)

Primary Subject: Breaking with the Southern Baptist Convention

Editor: Anna McDanal, June 18, 2010

Editor: Dr. Courtney L. Tollison, June 29, 2010

Time code

Minutes 0 - 1

Introduction: Overview of Dr. Clemons' life that will be discussed in the rest of the interview, including his involvement with the civil rights movement in Texas, his position as pastor at First Baptist Greenville, and his perspective on Furman's split with the Southern Baptist Convention

Minutes 1- 7

Civil rights in Texas in the 50s and early 60s: Discussions of contact with black students as Baptist campus minister at the University of Texas at Austin, story of dealing with integration as the pastor at Georgetown Baptist Church, and issues with Georgetown's school board and their views on segregation

Minutes 7- 14

Civil rights march in Lubbock, TX: Story of the march with fellow ministers in Lubbock about incorporation of a demographically representative city council; incorporation of women into the ministry and politics

Minutes 14-19

Coming to First Baptist Greenville: Reason for deciding to become the pastor of FBC Greenville and the specific issues the church was dealing with during a significant period in the Southern Baptist Convention; Schaefer Kendrick; Southeastern Seminary; David Matthews; Bruce Morgan

Minutes 19-26

First impression on Furman: Process of being introduced and building relationships with several presidents at Furman

Minutes 0- 4

Introduction to the split between Furman and the Southern Baptist Convention: Discussions of the changing atmosphere in South Carolina among the Baptists at that time.

Minutes 4-9

Faith and Knowledge: Discussion of how Richard Furman wanted to integrate faith and knowledge together in the university.

Minutes 9-14

First conversations Furman splitting with the South Carolina Baptist Convention: Dr. Clemons' conversations with Dr. Johns

Minutes 14-20

The Fundamentalist involvement in the changing atmosphere of the Southern Baptist Convention

Minutes 20-24

The ideals of Richard Furman: Discussions of what Richard Furman intended for the university and how he saw faith playing an important role in the learning process.

Minutes 24-33

Greenville First Baptist's decision to leave the Southern Baptist Convention and the issues that came with that decision

Minutes 33-38

The aftermath and implications of FBC Greenville's decision to break ties with the Southern Baptist Convention

Minutes 0-2

Overview of the organization of the Baptist church in comparison to other protestant churches

Minutes 2-5

Furman's involvement with the Alliance of Baptists

Minutes 5-11

Organization of the Cooperative Baptists Fellowship in Atlanta in 1991

Minutes 11-14

Changing atmosphere of the Christian church and its movement away from an emphasis on denominations

Minutes 14-19

Role of faith on campus: Faith identity with students, the formation of the Heritage and Values statements, and the appearance of Furman as a Christian school after it had disaffiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention; Max Heller; Vaughn Crowe Tipton

Minutes 19-26

Furman's role in handling various social issues: Discussions on integrating various ethnicities on the Board of Trustees and policies on homosexuality

Minutes 0-6

The values of Richard Furman, the values Furman held at the turn of the century, and the issuing of Furman's Heritage and Values Statement

Minutes 6-8

Conclusion of the role Furman plays in the 21st century and how it has been able to stay in line with Richard Furman's values

Minutes 8-21

Conclusion of interview and discussion about the Furman Oral History Project; Ted Ellett; John Cothran; Larry Estridge; Gordon Blackwell; Randy Eaddy; Gordon Herring

Transcript

Dr. Tollison: Dr. Clemons, you grew up in Texas and lived several decades there, were active in certain civil rights activities and various, unquestionable other things as well, but for purposes of what we're talking about today, you became pastor, senior pastor, of First Baptist Church of Greenville in 1988. That is what brought you to South Carolina.

[Editor's Note: The official name of the church is First Baptist Greenville, not First Baptist Church of Greenville.]

Dr. Clemons: That is true.

Dr. Tollison: And you served in that position from 1988 to 2000?

Dr. Clemons: Right.

Dr. Tollison: [You] became a trustee at Furman in 1998, and just finished your second term, your second three-year term?

Dr. Clemons: Right, yeah, two three-year terms.

Dr. Tollison: ...out of order terms?

Dr. Clemons: Yeah, I rotated off, I think, at the beginning of last month.

Dr. Tollison: Okay, great. Well, let's start off talking about... I'm personally interest in your civil rights activities in Texas.

Dr. Clemons: Okay, well, my first job as a minister was to be campus minister at the University of Texas in Austin for Baptist students. We laughingly said that the University of Texas was the largest Baptist school in the world, because there were more Baptist students at the University of Texas—that was the mid-fifties—than there were...other denominations of students, and there were more Baptist students at Texas University than there were at any of the Baptist universities (because Texas University was so big, and most Baptist schools are not that big). At the time I was campus minister at the University of Texas, we probably had a dozen black students.

Dr. Tollison: In the fifties?

Dr. Clemons: Yeah. This was 1956 and 1957. We did not have a single black athlete on any sport in the university. The black students had not been there very long, but in Texas, if you're black and you grow up in Texas, you tend to be Baptist, so most of these students were Baptists, and they came to the Baptist Student Union---some of them did. [They] said, you know, "Are we welcome here?" and I said, "Of course;" and the students said, "Of course." It was not an issue at all about whether they would be accepted, although most of white Baptist churches in Austin, Texas at that time certainly did not encourage black participation, and some of them didn't allow it. There was some controversy over that. There were people that thought that the black students should not be included in our activities, and I was put on a spot a few times where I just had to say, "This is just not something we're discussing and putting to a vote. This is something that we do because it's right, and our students want to do it, and our constituency wanted to do it, so we're going to do it." So that was really my first encounter with something that would involve the issue of civil rights. I was there for a little more than a year and then went back and finished my doctorate; then I came back to Georgetown, Texas (which is

only twenty miles from Austin, Texas) [to serve as] pastor of the First Baptist Church in Georgetown, and when I got there in 1967, no '61, (this is now about four or five years later), there was a black school and a bunch of white schools in a town of about 6,000 people. There was nothing that resembled integration at all, but the civil rights issue was really coming alive in the early sixties, and it began to come alive in Georgetown, Texas. I had a group of people come to me and say, "We need some people to run for school board." [At the time], I was 28 years old.; I was fresh out of the seminary. This church was a very traumatized Baptist church that had had a split over kind of some inconsequential issues, and I just didn't feel like I could run for school board. I felt like that [decision] would really polarize my congregation, so I said, "I'll tell you what I will do. I will help organize an effort to elect some people who don't have a racist perspective" (because the board was very solid: we will not integrate). It was kind of a George Wallace mentality ("over my dead body" kind of a thing is how everybody on the board felt about this); so, to make a very long, involved story short, over a period of three years, as people rotated off, we were able to replace the people who rotated off with more moderate (you know, [there were] certainly not liberal people in Georgetown, Texas in 1962, 1963, and 1964)... but we were able to get fair-minded, moderate people that would look at an issue and try to really decide what's best for the school rather than just saying, "Well, we're not going to have any blacks here and that's it." So, in that sense, I was pretty involved in that; and, of course, that was a pretty unpopular stand in those days, with some people, and [it] made me a hero to other people because I was a Baptist minister who had a different viewpoint. Then I moved to Lubbock, Texas, where Texas Tech is, and by now it is 1967. By then, well, let's see, Dr. King was killed in '69...

Dr. Tollison: '68.

Dr. Clemons: '68? Okay, so you know, by then things had really heated up. But, the church I went to had taken a stand back in the late fifties that [they were] not a church that defines itself by racial profile of any kind (you know, if people other than white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Baptists want to come to our church they're certainly welcome to—and they did come to visit and that was not an issue in my church). The issue of single member districts for the city council came up in the late seventies, and this was the only time I really got involved in a serious effort to do something that I thought was just unfair in the civil rights venue. The black ministers in town organized a march where we would meet at the civic center and then march down (and, of course, we had it all setup with the city where it was okay to do that), the main street of the city to city hall, and then had a brief kind of a rally there ([which] was a very popular thing to do in those days), supporting the idea that we didn't think it was good for all the city council members in a town of 200,000 people to live within about a quarter of a mile of each other. [Editor's Note: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Lubbock TX, did not have a population of 200,000 until after the year 2000; in 1970 it's population was close to 150,000.] We felt that Lubbock was ready to spread out and have representatives from the various parts of the city (which were kind of ethnically divided at that time); we probably had eight percent African-American and probably twenty percent Latin American. And so, we were able to get that established, and that meant that very quickly we had both black and Latin American city council members. A funny thing happened that you would be... well, it wasn't funny, it was sad, but it was funny to me. We were marching down the

street of Lubbock arm in arm. They had, at that time... John Claypool was my colleague, who was on our staff at Second Baptist Church in Lubbock, and John was probably the best-known Baptist minister in that part of the world, and he had come to be on our staff. So they put John and me right in the middle of the parade with a black guy [...] between us, a Latin American woman [...] to John's right, and a Latin American man [...] to my left, and we were linking arms, walking down [...] and] singing "We Shall Overcome." We got to the place that we were all kind of tired of singing, so everybody just kind of quit, and we [...] kept marching and started talking, and the Latin American gentleman to my left looked up (he was a little bitty short guy) [...] at me and he said, "I grew up here in Lubbock, and when I was a child I never came across Avenue A. It was an unwritten rule that people like me did not come into the real town of Lubbock, and I always felt so deprived (and he had a big speech about that); [then] he said, "Now look at me. I am marching down the main street of the city of Lubbock with other ministers. You know, white ministers are here and I'm accepted, and I'm a part of this, and isn't that great!" And I said, "Oh, yeah, it is great. [...] I really think, you know, the time has come for us to take some stands for racial inclusion, and isn't it wonderful that these women (it's not just us guys), the women are being included." At that point, he pulled his arm out from mine, and said, "Humph!" And he didn't say another word to me the rest of the day.

Dr. Tollison: Oh, goodness.

Dr. Clemons: And I thought, "How interesting that here a guy would tell me about [how he had] grown up with all of this exclusion and isn't it wonderful that now [he could] be included, but when I thought it was good for the women ministers to be included, I got outside his comfort zone."

Dr. Tollison: Right.

Dr. Clemons: That became a kind of a paradigm for me of how all of us as human beings tend to be. You know [the] "I don't want to be excluded, I don't want anybody I care about to be excluded, but when I become included, I may not be willing to pass that on and get out of my comfort zone and include a female clergy person." I thought that was just some interesting irony of history.

Dr. Tollison: Oh yes. So let's jump forward to... do you have anything else to add to that?

Dr. Clemons: No.

Dr. Tollison: Let's jump forward to how you came to First Baptist Church of Greenville in 1988.

Dr. Clemons: Okay, well I was pastor of Second Baptist Church in Lubbock, which was a church probably about a third of the size of First Greenville (and I've never been a person that thought a bigger church was a better church, anymore than I think a bigger university is a better university). I am much more into quality than size. I had the agreement with my church in Lubbock that I took sabbatical leaves periodically for refreshment and to kind of retool myself, and I had taken a sabbatical leave of four months to teach at Wake Forest, North Carolina (not Wake Forest Seminary [or] Wake

Forest [...] University in Winston-Salem). I was in Wake Forest, North Carolina (there by Raleigh) at Southeastern Seminary, and [the seminary] was beginning to be embroiled in this denominational conflict that split Baptists from each other so desperately. While I was there, [I met a] friend of mine named Catherine Persky (who I believe was a Furman grad [and] grew up here in Greenville), [whose] big brother was Schaefer Kendrick, whom you of course would know. [Editor's note: Schaefer Kendrick was also a Furman economics professor in the 1980s.] Schaeffer was chair of the search committee for First Baptist Greenville, who was looking for a new pastor, and Catherine was kind of feeling me out about, "Well, do you think you're married to Lubbock, Texas? Are you going to stay there forever?" At that time I was fifty-five, and I said, "Well, probably so. I'm not looking for anywhere to go." And, you know, we kind of passed it off. I learned later that when Ardelle and I left [Catherine's] home that evening and went back to the apartment, she called Schaeffer and said, "Schaeffer, I have found your preacher. You need to check this guy out. I've known him quite a while. He's the kind of guy you're looking for." So...and there are a lot of little side stories to that... [Editor's note: Ardelle is Hardy Clemons' wife.]

Dr. Tollison: What were they looking for?

Dr. Clemons: I think they were looking for somebody that, to put it crassly, had some mileage on him. I think they did not want a 35-year-old wunderkind as much as they needed somebody that had some stability, that had the open-minded stance that I have about Baptist life, that was on the moderate side of Baptist wars (not on the side that said, "Well, I'm not involved in this, it's not that important;" or on the fundamentalist side that was trying to take over the whole convention at large in general, and places like Furman and the seminaries and the boards in particular). I think, [...] in their words, when I asked them that question they said, "Well, you can preach, and we want somebody that the people don't go to sleep [on] while he's preaching, and you are a veteran churchman. You have excellent training [...] in pastoral care and in helping people with their problems, and our church has been seriously traumatized..."

Dr. Tollison: ...with Dr. David Matthews?

Dr. Clemons: Yes, there had been a person between David Matthews and me, a Dr. Bruce Morgan [who] came here from Griffin, Georgia, and was here about ten months, and then went back to Griffin, Georgia; so the church [was] just traumatized, and they felt like they needed somebody who could be a healer. I have a kind of a...sub-specialty in grief work and they knew about that. I had, subsequently, written a book (in fact today I got the revision of my book, and so I've got a new issue of that book out), and I think they wanted somebody who could help them work through their grief and work...and all of us knew that we were in for real rocky waters as far as southern Baptists and moderate Baptists were concerned.

Dr. Tollison: Ah, so you were familiar with Furman...

Dr. Clemons: Yeah

Dr. Tollison: ...from the get-go.

Dr. Clemons: Well, yes. The first time I ever heard about Furman I was either a sophomore or junior in college in Texas, and I picked up the newspaper and read that somebody named Frank Selby had scored 100 points in a basketball game, and I knew the name Furman because I was Baptist, but I didn't know that there was a Furman University, so that was my introduction. Through the years I came to be pretty well acquainted because I was in campus ministry with campuses like Stetson, Wake Forest, Mercer, Furman, William Jewel in Missouri, etc., and, at one time, kind of my life's ambition was to go to one of those places as the chaplain, but I kind of got diverted from that and went into the pastorate instead, and feel very good about that decision in retrospect. [Editor's Note: Interviewee knew the name Furman because he was familiar with Richard Furman, the man for whom Furman University is named.]

Dr. Tollison: Just a quick aside...was, I can't remember her maiden name...Sandra Cason, was she at Texas when you were there? The person that became Casey Hayden...Tom Hayden's wife? [Editor's note: Sandra Cason, a civil rights activist, graduated in 1960 from the University of Texas at Austin in 1960 and married Tom Hayden in 1961.]

Dr. Clemons: I know who you're talking about, but I don't think she was there when I was. I think that was after I was there. Now I'll tell you who was there shortly before I was there, was the woman that became Cathy Crosby, Bing Crosby's wife. [She] was a University of Texas student and went to the church that we went to, but she exited about the time that we got there.

Dr. Tollison: Okay, gotcha. All right, so you come to Greenville and what's your relationship with Furman early on in, say 1988, '89?

Dr. Clemons: Well, very positive for one thing. I felt very, very included. I came in in November, 1988, just as Furman was making its bid for the national championship, so the season was over. [Actually...] maybe I got there for the last game, and I think either two or three of those playoff games were played here in Greenville, so John and Martha [Johns] invited Ardelle and me to come sit in the president's box. When we won [...] there was a lot of kidding about well, with the new preacher in town, we're going to win the national championship; so, we got into that big time (... a lot of people are attracted to a university by its athletic program), and we got acquainted with a lot of people very quickly. Of course, every president of Furman all the way back has been a member of our congregation and a lot of the senior staff, a lot of the professors, deans, departmental chairs, [and] a lot of students, both Greenville and non-Greenville [have been, too]. We just always had a really tight and positive relationship with Furman, and for me that was a big drawing card; you know, I wasn't trying to leave Texas, but I was delighted about coming to a place that had a quality institution like Furman. Then when I got here and felt so included, you know, I really began to feel that I had come to the right place, and Furman had a lot to do with that.

Dr. Tollison: Tell me about the first...I guess there's only two, Dr. Johns and Dr. Shi, their relationship with the church.

Dr. Clemons: Well, actually, Gordon Blackwell was president emeritus [when I arrived in Greenville], and Gordon really reached out to me. You know, for one thing he was retired and he and Lib (Lib and my wife Ardelle really hit it off, and they kind of became buddies in a hurry)... and Gordon was a much more laid back person than Lib was, but he took real initiative to help me feel at home. He knew I was coming into a hard job, and he was kind of a big brother figure that kind of put his arm around me and said, "If I can ever do anything for you, you know, I've been through a lot of ups and downs in Baptist life and I can help you." And I turned to him several times just to pick his brain and get his take on the history of what was happening, and John and Martha [Johns] reached out to us and we became very good friends, you know, we were in their home frequently and they've been here in this room frequently, and so we felt like we were just kind of received like we were long lost family members. Then when David and Susan [Shi] got here we reached out to them because we had had David at our church to talk about his books on the simple lifestyle and that kind of thing, and he and I had gotten acquainted and discovered that we were both golfers and had a lot in common; so when he and Susan got here we invited them to come for dinner one night, and we sat here all evening and just talked and began our relationship. So I have felt very close to Gordon and John and David, and to each of their wives, which, you know, really adds to the validity of the relationship.

Dr. Tollison: Certainly. So tell me a little bit about your observations of [the] changing religious atmosphere. And of course that involved Furman, and the South Carolina Baptist Convention, maybe in '88 when you got here, in that period between '88 and '92.

Dr. Clemons: When I got here in '88 (as I said, I got here the first week of November), I think the second week of November was the South Carolina convention in Spartanburg. So I went and we took a full complement of people from First Baptist Church, and it was clear to me that the fundamentalists were not in charge of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, but that they were trying desperately to do here in '88 what they had begun in southern Baptist life nearly ten years earlier, in '79. [...] Because of that tension really, I was never much included in South Carolina Baptist life. I was the pastor of that church in Greenville, that they didn't see as a real Baptist church because we weren't lining up with what they liked to call the "conservative resurgence," and what I think is more accurately described (what Jerry Falwell called it recently), the hijacking. You know, he said, "I wasn't a part of that when they hijacked it, but I really am a part of it now." And that's what I saw in the scene as I got here. Having lived my whole life basically in Texas, I could see that what had begun in Houston, Texas in '79 in this hijacking or taking over of the Southern Baptist Convention, was going to happen in South Carolina if we didn't get something done quick. As it turned out, we just never could muster the votes to elect the people that were acceptable to us; and fundamentalist leaders one after the other were elected so that by 1992 when... (it was '92, wasn't it?), when the division came between South Carolina and Furman, you know, it was a slam dunk from both sides. Nobody really wanted it to continue. South Carolina Baptists did not want Furman to be something they had to give a couple of million dollars to if they couldn't control it. Furman didn't want the couple of million dollars if it meant control (and, well, you know, it was such a small fraction of their budget anyway—you know, two million

dollars sounds like a lot of money to me, but if you put it up against the size of the Furman budget, it isn't a high percentage number).

Dr. Tollison: I think it's about three percent. [Editor's note: So far I have only found the recent budgets. In the 2008-2009 academic year, the budget was \$133 million dollars, making three percent of that budget almost \$4 million dollars.]

Dr. Clemons: I think so. I would have said two.

Dr. Tollison: It's not ever insignificant, but it's a fairly small...

Dr. Clemons: Yeah, and you know, of course that much money is significant anyway. And they continued to do scholarships and to help Baptist students and clergy... students from clergy families come to Furman... I think the relationship has been pretty cordial. You know, I... there are a few people that have had a bad experience, but I don't think [there have been] really very many people. It's kind of been that southern thing about, "well, we may not have that much to do with each other but we're not going to be ugly to each other in public. "

Dr. Tollison: So how did this impact First Baptist Church?

Dr. Clemons: Well, it focused the fact that we needed to make a decision about who we were and where we were going to stand. I felt that I had come here because they knew who I was, and they wanted somebody that was going to stand where I stood, so there was no tension in it for me. I wanted to bring as many people with us as we could. I didn't want to alienate people, but we had people that just said "Well, my grandfather was a southern Baptist preacher, and it doesn't really mean that much to me, but I'm going to stay a southern Baptist no matter what." Our church was increasingly feeling [that it was not] a question of our leaving Southern Baptist, it's a question that they left us a long time ago with their attitude about women, their attitude about education, their attitude about missions, [and] their attitude about control... They were ceasing to be what Furman stood for, and what Richard Furman had in mind when the motto of the university became Christ In Learning. I think that was Richard Furman's way of saying, "We do not see theology and other forms of study as enemies. We see them as friends, and if you discover truth in a Bible class, that's a good place to discover it, or if you discover it in a chemistry lab or on an intramural football team, we're here to work for the partnership of faith and learning, and we don't see them as enemies." My viewpoint, and I did my doctoral dissertation on fundamentalism in general and on Harry Emerson Fosdick, who may be an old enough name that you don't even know who that is.

Dr. Tollison: No.

Dr. Clemons: But he... well, he is called by Clyde E. Fant in his *Twenty Centuries of Modern Preaching*, he calls it... no, *Twenty Centuries of Christian Preaching*, I believe, is the name of the twelve volume set [Editor's Note: The title of Fant's book is *Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching*]...he identifies Harry Emerson Fosdick as the father of modern preaching. He was the best known and probably most powerful pulpit figure of the early part of the 20th century and was pastor of Riverside Church in New York City (where John D. Rockefeller, Jr., was one of the key leaders and deacons). I did my

dissertation on the theology of Harry Emerson Fosdick. So I brought in to my ministry an already deep and passionate involvement that the fundamentalist idea that if you educate a person you're going to mess them up, is a false idea, and it is counter to faith as well as to learning. You know, Jesus said love God with your mind, heart, strength... Jesus didn't want to bifurcate the intellect and the spirit, and I think Jesus Himself was a wonderful example [how] you don't have to leave your mind outside when you come to church.

Dr. Tollison: They're not mutually...

Dr. Clemons: They're not mutually exclusive, exactly. So, you know, I brought that commitment to Greenville with me; I think that's one reason they wanted me to come to Greenville. They knew I had that background.

Dr. Tollison: Gotcha. Excellent. Well, let's talk a little bit more about the split between Furman and the South Carolina Baptist Convention. Did you and John E. Johns, Dr. Johns, ever speak about this?

Dr. Clemons: Yes. Yes, several times.

Dr. Tollison: He came to you or...

Dr. Clemons: Well, we just would kind of see each other at the same meeting and get off in a corner and talk. I don't ever remember our sitting down in one of our offices and saying, "Let's talk formally about this," but we talked about it a lot, and we were together a lot because we were invited to things at Furman and we were so delighted to be included that we went to the L. D. Johnson lectures or to the things in the music school or the athletic events or they'd bring in Will Willimon to speak and we'd be there, or Martin Marty—the top people in the country. Furman has always done such a beautiful job of bringing in the cutting edge of theological, religious, and in other disciplines—the minds that are really making a difference in our world. So it wasn't hard to get us to come to Furman for something, and we'd usually run into John and Martha [Johns] and visit and usually [talk] about what are we going to do about this crisis. [Editor's note: Will Willimon was the former Dean of the Chapel at Duke University and in 2010 was serving as a bishop in the United Methodist Church; Martin Marty is a Lutheran scholar who served as a professor at the University of Chicago's Divinity School from 1963 to 1998].

Dr. Tollison: What do you remember about those conversations? What's the sense you got from him?

Dr. Clemons: I remember him asking me, "You came here from Texas. What's the difference in South Carolina and Texas?" I remember him asking me questions like, "Do you think there is any way to prevail against this fundamentalist takeover mentality, or do you think we may as well just admit that the war is over?" And by the time I got here in '88... I probably still had that much hope that we might turn that around. People kept saying, "The pendulum will swing; the pendulum will swing." At the convention in New Orleans in 1990, I remember John Cothran and I were standing there together on the floor of the convention, and I was trying to get to a mic so that I could speak, and I could see that there was no way they were going to let me get to a microphone. I just remember

John and I looking at each other and saying, “This is over. If we want to spend another ten or another hundred years fighting with the fundamentalists we can certainly do that, because they really seem to love to do that, but what we need to do is go on with ministry and do things that they're not going to do anyway because they have such a narrow idea of what ministry is. Our idea of ministry is so much broader.” By then the South Carolina Convention was appointing trustees that A) had never been to Furman, B) knew nothing about Furman, and C) had no interest in learning who Furman was or what the heritage was. They just wanted to come in and take over and run the place and get rid of teachers they didn't like and that kind of thing, and I can remember saying to John [Johns], "John, I learned in Texas, you cannot negotiate with a fundamentalist mindset. To them, negotiation is compromise, and compromise is sin. They're not going to do it, and I think we have only a matter of time. If there's anything we can do to avoid being taken over by the South Carolina fundamentalists, we need to do that now." I was not privy to a lot of the discussions that were happening about going back [and] looking at the original charter. I was not a part of that strategy. They weren't seeking my counsel, and I didn't even know it was happening for a long time, but I certainly did applaud it and support it when I learned it was happening.

Dr. Tollison: Perhaps you can help me. People I have spoken with, and it sounds like this is...I hear you saying this as well... it sounds like the fundamentalist takeover began in 1979 and then increased over the following decade and a half or so. I guess it's still increasing. And most people talk about this as if it was a very explicit, intentional, strategic move on the part, on behalf of the fundamentalists. Was it?

Dr. Clemons: Oh, it was. Yes, in the mid-seventies, Paul Pressler, who was one of the architects, is that a familiar name?

Dr. Tollison: I have done a bit of research on...

Dr. Clemons: Okay, [he was] the judge from Houston, who incidentally, had been one of my students when I was campus minister at the University of Texas (he was in the law school, so I'd been in battle with Paul Pressler since 1956). In the mid-seventies, Paul Pressler made a speech in which he said, "We are going for the jugular. We have put together a plan by which we can take over the Southern Baptist Convention by electing our president each year for ten years, and we will have total appointment power, and we can get rid of the liberals in Southern Baptist seminaries." And that phrase, “going for the jugular,” became kind of the cry of the fundamentalists: “We've got to save the convention from the liberals.” In the early nineties, a reporter from *The Dallas Magazine*, you know they had a *Dallas Magazine* like there's a *Greenville Magazine*? [Editor's note: Actually, there is no *Dallas Magazine*. Since he refers to a *Greenville Magazine*, and there is *The Greenville News*, I looked to see if there was *The Dallas News*. Sure enough, *The Dallas News* is the primary newspaper in Dallas, TX. He may also be referring to *D Magazine*, a Dallas magazine that began being produced in 1974.] A lady from that magazine interviewed Paige Patterson, who was another one of the key players, and she said, "Dr. Patterson, tell me why..." (I believe it was 1985 by then), she said, "Why is it that for six years you all have gained power, gained power, gained power over the seminaries, now you have a majority on all the boards, and you have not fired a single liberal? Why is that?" And I can't quote him exactly, [but] I could get you the

quote if you were interested. Patterson said something like, "Well look, lady, everybody knows there's no such thing as a liberal in Baptist life. There's no such thing. Some of us are a little more conservative and some of us are a little less conservative, but we were worried about a neo-orthodox drift in the seminaries, and we didn't feel like anybody would pay any attention to us if we said that. But if we said, 'Hey, we got all these liberals that don't believe the Bible,' then people will rally around our flag." And that's... I don't remember whether she used it or he used it, but one of them said, "That's why the L-word became the operative word for your takeover." And he said yes. So it was a pointed, well-orchestrated, highly computerized (way before moderates were getting computerized)... they had all of these lists of trustworthy and untrustworthy people, and they were busing all of these people to the convention to vote, and they were denying that they were doing it. I had a conversation with Pressler at the convention in Los Angeles in either 1980 or '81, (maybe '81), and at that point he was... he said to me, "Hardy, I did not say we are going for the jugular. That is a lie; the liberal press is trying to smear my name and make me look like a troublemaker. I did not say that." And I said, "Well, Paul, how do you account for the fact that Presnell Wood, who was the editor of *The Baptist Standard* in Texas at the time, has it on tape?" Paul turned around and walked off. So the answer to the question is yes, there was a carefully orchestrated, kind of a D-day, kind of planning and scheming to move in and take over, and that was being focused on Furman in the early nineties when these people that knew nothing of Furman were being appointed to the trustees.

Dr. Tollison: So at Furman there was a sense of urgency there in terms of... before more are appointed we need to go ahead and get the votes split?

Dr. Clemons: Yes, yes. And I'm convinced, now that we've got ten, twelve years luxury of looking back on it, I'm convinced if Furman had not done what they did when they did it, that at least by two years, maybe by one year later, Furman would have been gone like all six seminaries are now and like most colleges in Baptist life are gone. As far as having this ideal that Richard Furman articulated by saying, "Faith and learning is why we're here. We want to integrate the two, and we want people to learn as much as they can learn about their disciplines and bring excellence to that, and we don't think that's going to hurt their faith; we think that's going to help their faith, and their faith is going to help them with their learning." And if you want a good Furman example of that, sit down and talk to Charles Townes. You know Dr. Townes?

Dr. Tollison: Oh, yes.

Dr. Clemons: He is as articulate about faith as he is about astrophysics. He's knowledgeable, you know. [When he was growing] up, his parents went to my church (he went to Pendleton Street Baptist Church), and [he] went to Furman (when it was downtown). [He] has become one of the renowned Noble Prize people, and I think [people like him] is exactly what Richard Furman had in mind [for Furman]. He wasn't just trying to establish a preacher school. He was trying to integrate in the South in the 1820s and '30s (when almost nobody had a good education, maybe not even an education)... he was trying to bring a commitment to education and to faith that would augment and support each other.

Dr. Tollison: Was that... I understand that he was a highly respected leader nationally.

Dr. Clemons: Yes, he was.

Dr. Tollison: Were these ideas progressive? Unusual?

Dr. Clemons: Yes, they were, and there were a lot of people that didn't agree with him, but evidently he was a genius at getting people of different persuasions to talk with each other. My experience with that has been: if you can get people who are really at odds to sit down and talk with each other, they will generally discover that they have more in common than they do at divergence. I had that experience a few years ago. Russ Cassell here in town (you know Russ?) moderated a panel that had me and Mike Fair and one of the deans at Bob Jones and two or three other people. Of course, Russ Cassell was trying to get us to fight about something, and we weren't interested in fighting. We were there to talk about [whether or not] the school system becoming too New Age, and some of them had the viewpoint of, yes, of course it is and we need to stop that. My viewpoint was: I don't think it's New Age to teach children to imagine, and I quoted Jesus, "Consider the lilies of the field. They toil not, neither do they spin." The dean at Bob Jones said, "Well, by golly, you're right. I never had thought about Jesus teaching imagination." This was the big hew and cry from the anti-New Age people, about well, we just, we can't have them teaching students to imagine. They just need to learn.

Dr. Tollison: Suppressing independent thought...

Dr. Clemons: Exactly.

Dr. Tollison: Gotcha. Well, tell me a little bit about how First Baptist came to split with the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

Dr. Clemons: Well, what I said a moment ago is, I think, the heart of it. We don't feel like we left them; we feel like they left us. That's not just a way to put a little political spin on it, because they moved more and more and more away from this stance that I'm talking about that is inclusive and more broad-minded, rather than exclusive and narrow-minded.

Dr. Tollison: So how did this take place? I mean was there a vote among the congregation? How did this happen?

Dr. Clemons: Yes, we... well, it actually happened when a group of the leaders of the church made an appointment with me and came...

Dr. Tollison: Do you remember any of their names?

Dr. Clemons: Gosh, if I can remember... I wonder who was in that group? Well, they were people like (and I'm not sure I can name the people that were in the room)... Bill Carpenter, that was the CEO of Serrine; Dr. Louie Stanford, who now teaches at the Governor's School, that you probably know; Ann Quattlebaum, who had served as a deacon and had served as president of the Alliance of Baptists (that our church is very supportive of)... People like that, who were the substantive leadership...

Dr. Tollison: All familiar to me.

Dr. Clemons: Okay, well, Louie Stanford at the time was chair of the deacons, and this would come up every year about the time of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Dr. Tollison: ...which is always held in November.

Dr. Clemons: No, it's usually in June. The South Carolina Baptist Convention is November, but the Southern Baptist Convention is in June usually. They would do something that would be embarrassing to our people, like jump on Disneyland, and try to get their people to boycott Disneyland was one big thing.

Dr. Tollison: And that was a result of the homosexual...

Dr. Clemons: Yes. Their argument was, they have a day when they invite homosexual people to come and enjoy Disney World. So evidently that's what motivated Southern Baptists to get their people to boycott it. The boycott did not go well, but it embarrassed people that are not that narrow minded (and that's primarily who our church is made up of). Well, I would have, at first, individuals and then sometimes groups of individuals would come to me and say, "Why don't we just get out of the Southern Baptist Convention? We're not Southern Baptists anymore. Our church had messengers at the establishment of the Southern Baptist Convention in Augusta, Georgia in 1845, but that isn't who we are anymore, that's not who they are anymore. Why don't we just admit it and get out?" I'd say, "Well, I just, you know, let's give it another year. Maybe they'll wise up. Maybe we can get into communication." And I was kind of trying to be a cool head that kept us from just...boycotting them. [It was] the year after (I guess it was '98, must have been June, July of '98), when they made their strongest attack against women. These leaders came to me, and maybe I can remember who was in the room. I'm not sure any of those three [were], but those were three key leaders, and I was having conversations with them, I know, and they said, "Hardy, we really respect your judicious, wise, whatever stance here, but we've had it. We know you don't want to lead the church out of the Southern Baptist Convention, and we don't want to lay that on you. We don't see that as a pastor's decision." That's one thing I kept saying: "I don't want to lead you out of the Southern Baptist Convention." They said, "Why don't you just stand aside and let us approach the church, and let's just let the church talk about it and decide?" So we set up all of these town hall meetings, and we got all this information together and tried to present it. We were not trying to spin it our way. We were trying to just say, "Here are the issues. If you feel this way, you probably are going to support the Southern Baptist Convention. If you feel this way, you may be ready to say, 'Let's get out of the Southern Baptist Convention,'" and we did that for several months. During that period of time, I had decided to retire; so I was saying to them, you know, "Hey, I'm already past 65. I'm going to be retiring soon." When we [left the Southern Baptist Convention], *The Greenville News* ran a story...that just sort of assumed that I was leaving the church because I didn't agree with decision. Well, I had come back from the convention in New Orleans in the summer of 1990 and said the next Sunday morning from the pulpit, "I don't know what this is going to do to my tenure here, and I don't know how you're going to feel about what I'm getting ready to say, but let me tell you, as of now, I do not consider myself a Southern Baptist. I was educated by Southern Baptists. I have friends in all

levels of Southern Baptist life. I know personally a lot of these leaders of the takeover group, and I'm not a Southern Baptist anymore. My commitment is to First Baptist Greenville. My commitment is to our being the kind of church we need to be, but as far as I'm concerned, I don't ever want another dime of my money going to the Southern Baptist Convention for any reason, and if you guys, if y'all don't want a pastor who has that attitude... I'm not going to try to push this down your throat, I'm not going to try to lead you out of the Convention, I'm just telling you, I'm not going anymore, and I'm not going to be a part of it."

Dr. Tollison: So that's when you stopped attending the SBC Convention?

Dr. Clemons: 1990 was the last one I went to as a messenger. Then it took ten years, and after all the town hall meetings and the discussion and all of that, we voted 92% to distance ourselves from the Southern Baptist Convention in a very carefully worded resolution that tried very hard not to say, "They're the bad guys and we're the good guys and we're going our way." We just tried to say: "Who they are is not who we are. Whereas, we were original members of the Southern Baptist Convention, we don't want to do that anymore, and we're not going to."

Dr. Tollison: So very non-inflammatory.

Dr. Clemons: Yeah, we tried to be non-inflammatory. The *New York Times* interviewed me, the Atlanta people sent sound crews and film crews up here. Of course they wanted to get into a fight about it, [but] my stance was: "the fight is over. They have won the war. They have taken over everything they could take over, but they haven't taken over Furman, they haven't taken over churches like our church, and we're going to go ahead and do what we think is valid. We're not going to worry about Southern Baptists. We don't wish them any ill will, but that's not who we are." They wanted to make it the women's issue. "Well, it really wasn't the women's issue." "It was the women's issue." "It wasn't really education, but it was education." You know, there was no one issue where everybody just said, "Okay, that's it." But [it was] a building up over the years of the narrow-minded, restrictive, judgmental attitude that Southern Baptists came to adopt. That's not who (you know First Baptist Church longer than I)... That's not who First Baptist Church has ever been. It's always been more on the side of a... (it's certainly not a liberal church. Man, anybody that went there thinking it was liberal would really be disappointed)...but you really can't say it's conservative.

Dr. Tollison: There's a generous spirit.

Dr. Clemons: It's more moderate. It's certainly not fundamentalist, and all of us are pretty conservative people. We live conservatively. You know, we were talking a while ago. I grew up in Texas. Texas people are not conservative. They build a bigger house, they drive a bigger car, they've got a bigger diamond ring... Whatever it is it's got to be bigger and better, and if it costs more money, we can get it from somewhere. That was a real adjustment for me when I got here because people were saying, "Well, if we're going to do that, we're going to have to do it slowly. We can't just jump out here and do it (which is what I had grown up with in Texas)." I much prefer this way of doing it. I think it's much wiser, and it builds a better foundation. You see that in a place like Furman, where

the root system is so deep and so rich that you're not starting over again all the time; you're building on what you did last year all the time.

Dr. Tollison: Do you remember the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship? You said you were a moderator in the 1990s while First Baptist Church was still a member of the South Carolina Baptist Convention?

Dr. Clemons: Yes. Well, and really we still are a member of the South Carolina Convention. They don't really consider us very good members, and we don't really participate much, but I don't think we have been divorced from the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

Dr. Tollison: Okay, so there's a difference between being divorced from the Southern Baptist and the South Carolina Baptist....

Dr. Clemons: Yeah, in a Methodist church you've got a connectional form of government where the local church relates to a kind of an area, and then the area relates to a bigger area, and finally the bigger area relates to the jurisdictional conference and decisions are made there and then passed back down...

Dr. Tollison: Hierarchical?

Dr. Clemons: Yeah, a hierarchical approach to government. Baptist churches are congregational.

Dr. Tollison: Very democratic.

Dr. Clemons: Very democratic. The preacher is a member of the church he serves. My Methodist colleagues are not. They're members of the conference.

Dr. Tollison: The conference places them in the....

Dr. Clemons: And the conference places them in the position. They don't have a search committee that gets Schaeffer Kendrick and a bunch of people to go find me. We relate to the county organization, to the state organization, to the national organization, to the Baptist World Alliance... We relate to each of them independently; you can be a member of all of those or none of them except one and still be a Baptist church that is relating to the Baptist world. So right now we do not relate to the Greenville County Baptist Association. We do not relate to the Southern Baptist Convention. We do relate to the South Carolina Baptist Convention, which is pretty Southern Baptist. We relate to the Baptist World Alliance, to the Alliance of Baptists, and to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, but all of that is independent.

Dr. Tollison: Okay. So there's never a vote to say, "let's join, let's become part of this body now..."

Dr. Clemons: Not really. We just send representatives, and they represent us.

Dr. Tollison: Tell me a little bit about the relationship between Furman and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and any other Baptist organizations.

Dr. Clemons: Okay, well, real early, when the Alliance of Baptists was established in 1987 before I came to Greenville, they were invited to have their meeting at Furman. Then because of some construction problems, it was moved and... I believe it was moved to Mercer...

Dr. Tollison: Furman invited...

Dr. Clemons: Furman invited the Alliance of Baptists to meet on their campus. Then in 1989 the Alliance of Baptists met at our church because Furman was still in session and there really wasn't any place for them to meet at Furman. The other times they would have met in the summer. So from the very beginning, Furman established itself as being friendly toward these Baptist organizations that were not in sympathy with the Southern Baptist takeover. [In] '87, '88, '89 the Alliance of Baptists was really the only game in town (as far as the national Baptist scene was concerned), so all of the churches like our church were relating to the Alliance of Baptists (which has never become a very large organization, but is a very fine organization, and has really done a lot of good work to stand up for Baptist freedom). By 1991, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship... well, really, following the '90 convention in New Orleans (that I have referred to a couple of times)... we came away from that convention and several of the leaders were saying, "We have got to get a group of us together and face the fact that we have lost this war and it is over. We need to ask ourselves, "Are we going to keep trying to take this thing back, or are we going to go our way?" And somebody said, "Well, I know some people at Calloway Gardens. How many people do you think we could have at this meeting?" "Well, we could probably get three hundred people there." "Well, I think Calloway Gardens could handle three hundred people." So a meeting was announced for Calloway Gardens: if you want to come, here's who you call, here's who you write. Just like that, three thousand people said, "I want to be there." So they moved it to Atlanta, and we met at the Omni in Atlanta, and it was just a meeting of, "Okay, what are we going to do now?" Out of that a steering committee was appointed. We didn't have a moderator, we didn't have any staff, we had two part time secretaries that answered the phone, and they... We met in Atlanta and established a steering committee to decide what we [were] going to do with churches like us that really aren't welcome in southern Baptist life anymore, and we don't want to be in Southern Baptist life anymore. Then out of that there was another meeting in Atlanta a year later, and it was at that meeting, I believe, that we chose the name Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and elected a moderator, John Hewett [who] was pastor at First Asheville. He was elected the first moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and then Patricia Ayres, who had been a very strong leader from Texas (but also nationwide), was the next moderator, and then I was the third. By the time I became moderator, we still didn't have a staff, we didn't have any missionaries, [and] we didn't know who our support was. It was just, if you want to be a part of this, whatever it is, let us know. We were trying to deal with these people and get things organized. By the time I finished my term as moderator, we probably had a staff of six or eight professional people, and a mission staff of probably fifty I'm guessing (you know, say 40 to 60 people scattered all over the world). Our concept was, "We're not going to go compete with southern Baptists, we're going to go places where they don't serve, and we will serve there." We don't want to take this controversy to a worldwide venue. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship began to try to get organized and try to get

focused and decide [if] we want[ed] to be a denomination[or if we didn't] want to not be a denomination. Are we Southern Baptists, if not, what are we? We battled through all of that and basically decided [that] we are not Southern Baptists, but we are not anti-Southern Baptists. We're just going to do things that they don't do.

Dr. Tollison: What's the membership?

Dr. Clemons: We have about, I think, fifteen or sixteen hundred churches from Alaska to Hawaii to Maryland. It's a nationwide organization. We have probably 160 missionaries worldwide now. We probably have a staff of fifty or sixty people in Atlanta, and it's really coming together. My standpoint through the years has been, as a historian (and history was really important to me, although my major was theology, historical theology was so much of theology) my viewpoint is: Why would you want to establish a new denomination in the post-denominational era of Christian history?

Dr. Tollison: Meaning... things are more ecumenical?

Dr. Clemons: Things are more ecumenical, and even if they're not ecumenical they're less denominational. People don't have brand loyalty like they did when I was a child. When I was a child growing up in a little town in Texas, if you got the Church of Christ preacher and the Methodist preacher and the Baptist preacher, (which were the only three preachers in this little town) to debate something, boy, it would draw a crowd. Now, I bet you couldn't fill a decent phone booth if you got Susan Leonard Ray and Jeff Rogers and Lud Weaver to talk about why they're Methodists or Presbyterian or Baptist. Nobody gives a fig, and nobody's loyalty is to [that believe that] we've got to preserve a massive denominational presence in this country. The loyalty is more to the local church, and I think that's good. I think that's a step back toward... I don't think Jesus ever wanted to establish these monolithic organizations. He was trying to establish relationships of health and development with people.

Dr. Tollison: That's interesting. Just thinking historically, since Martin Luther in 1517, this is a very recent phenomenon. In the past... I know even when my parents were growing up it was a big deal to say "I'm a Methodist" or "I'm Episcopalian" or "I'm a Baptist," and these were very distinct cants. God forbid you were Catholic. Is this how you see it in the big picture of, you know, since the 1500s, is this... this is a very recent phenomenon in that, I mean was it really this way since Martin Luther?

Dr. Clemons: Yeah, I think Martin Luther sort of let the cat out of the bag as far as saying, "Hey, our loyalty is not to Rome. Our loyalty is to God. And our loyalty is to these people that we're here to serve. The medieval Catholic Church is shearing these sheep instead of feeding these sheep, and somebody needs to do something about that." And, man, I took everything about Luther I could take and everything about the Reformation I could take in school, because I felt like we were a part of the continuing Reformation. I think that's where the church is going; I think that's why places like Furman are so important [because] we're not just trying to staff churches with Baptist preachers. We're trying to teach people to think about faith, to think about life, and to integrate them so that they grow in faith as they grow in knowledge, and they grow in knowledge as they grow in faith, where they're constantly re-examining. You know, faith

is not certainty—that's why we call it faith. But the fundamentalists want to make it certainty.

Dr. Tollison: ...which is inerrant.

Dr. Clemons: Yeah, inerrant, and that is a word the Bible never uses about itself, and it's a word that was never used in Christian history until recently.

Dr. Tollison: Tell me a little bit about... you've been a trustee since 1988. Tell me a little bit about your observations of Furman's religious identity from an institutional perspective and then in terms of student life as well.

Dr. Clemons: I do not see much change as far as the emphasis on having a faith identity. I felt like that was strong when I first got here, and, you know, students would seek me out and tell me about what they were struggling with and seek my guidance as a pastor or my input. All the time I was at First Baptist Church that occurred. I had good relationships with students. I spoke on campus about this and that on a pretty frequent basis, went to the pastor's school, worked with Jim Pitts and Dick Green, was on the search committee that called Vaughn Crowe Tipton as our new chaplain. I was chair of the Heritage and Values Committee that put together the heritage and values statements that we now have...

Dr. Tollison: Tell me about that.

Dr. Clemons: Well, that was an attempt to just update. It's been ten years since we reaffirmed who we are. Are we still who we were, or are we something different?

Dr. Tollison: Who initiated it?

Dr. Clemons: The board. I don't know really whether it was David Shi or the chair of the board, but the board came to me and said, "Would you chair this committee?" They had a student representative, a faculty representative, an administrative representative, an alumni representative, and then four or five trustees. We looked at this whole thing (of course Max Heller and I had talked by the hour about the religious identity and our openness toward people of other religious persuasions than Christianity,). I think Furman, if anything, is stronger now than it was in '88 as a place where faith and learning are both valued, and I know there are people at Furman that don't go to church or don't believe in God or don't talk about religious matters; but it seems to me, comparing Furman to the other campuses I'm on, there is a healthy investment in looking at faith and experiencing faith in a way that helps you become a better person. People [said] to me all the time while I was on the board, "Why would you be on the board at Furman? That's not a Christian school anymore." And I'd say, "You know, I don't want to be defensive about this, but tell me why you don't think it's a Christian school?" "Well, they separated from the South Carolina Baptists." Well, they did, but they didn't reject Jesus Christ. [Editor's note: A Jewish man who emigrated from Austria just before the outbreak of WWII, Max Heller served as mayor of Greenville from 1971 to 1979 and as a member of the Furman Board of Trustees from 2000-2005].

Dr. Tollison: They didn't reject their heritage.

Dr. Clemons: They didn't reject their heritage, and as you talk to them, they say, "Well, boy I'm glad to hear that."

Dr. Tollison: They're just misunderstanding.

Dr. Clemons: I think it is just misunderstanding, but then you have people in town, (some of them Baptists), who say [that] since it's not South Carolina controlled anymore then it couldn't possibly be Christian anymore. They'll pick some issue and say, "Well because of this it's clear that they're not Christian." None of those issues have seemed to me that we were less Christian. They have seemed to me we were doing exactly what Furman did when it said, "Hey, wait a minute. It is wrong for every student we have to be white. We need to invite some black students here, and we need to treat them like citizens and brothers and sisters in Christ or whatever. When Gordon Blackwell came here as president from Florida, he came with the agreement that they would integrate (and Frank Bonner, who was the dean at that time, was a fierce proponent of integration. Well, the South Carolina Baptist Convention had a fit. "You can't integrate." So there would be people that would have told you then and maybe now, "Well, Furman is less Christian now because it's integrated." Well, my viewpoint is we're more Christian because we're integrated, and it's not a token integration. My gosh, look at how many African-Americans we have on the board, and they're not window dressing. My gosh, those people... I don't know whether you know any of them personally or not..."

Dr. Tollison: Lillian Brock-Fleming, Stanford Jennings, Angela Franklin...

Dr. Clemons: Okay, yeah. You know, these people are substantive people who are excellent in their own fields, and who are really committed to Furman. It has been a privilege to me to serve with people like that, or Max Heller, who is Jewish (you know, my gosh, Jesus was Jewish). Would we rule him out as a trustee because he's Jewish? Jesus never joined a Christian church. In fact, Jesus never went to church on Sunday. Jesus went to church on Saturday, the Sabbath. You know, it was after Jesus that we started messing with that stuff.

Dr. Tollison: What are some of the other issues that you feel have been important in terms of, or from the trustees' perspective since you have been...?

Dr. Clemons: Well, there was quite a lot of discussion about including domestic partners in insurance. A lot of people just assumed I would be against that because I was a Baptist minister.

Dr. Tollison: A lot of people...?

Dr. Clemons: I think a lot of people on the trustee board, people in the community, other Baptist preachers, lay people...

Dr. Tollison: What about your congregation?

Dr. Clemons: I think they knew me well enough to know that it's hard to predict where I'm going to come down, because I don't tend to look at the flag and then get on the ship. I tend to look at the direction the ship's going and then get on the ship, and I think by then

they knew that about me. You know, what people would call me or write me and say is: "Well, the Bible says homosexuality is sin, so we ought not to have insurance for domestic partners." And I said, "Well, let's don't talk about sin, let's just talk about domestic partners. Do you suppose we have ever had a professor at Furman who cheated on his or her income tax? Do you suppose we've ever had anybody in the history of Furman that's had an affair with somebody? Do we have anybody out there that's greedy?" The Bible doesn't just talk about one kind of sin. If you want me to grant you that that is a sinful thing (and it can be, just like heterosexual activity), I don't assume that all sex in marriage is... un sinful. I've been a marriage counselor for thirty years, and am a certified marriage counselor. I can tell you that there are a lot of sinful things done sexually in marriage with people using each other and not respecting each other and manipulating each other. Let's don't just label people, and let's don't exclude somebody who has a domestic partner to whom they are committed. To rule them out from having a valid insurance program or as good an insurance program as a heterosexual couple has does not seem to me to be Christian, and it is not against the ethic of Christ. To me, it is because of the ethic of Christ that I think we're doing the same thing with domestic partners that we did back in the '60s with African-American students. I respect people who don't agree with that, but are we going to cancel some professor who has an affair? Are we going to go cancel his insurance?

Dr. Tollison: Was this a fairly controversial point of discussion among the trustees?

Dr. Clemons: Fairly is a good operative word. I don't think anybody fell out with anybody over it. Nobody became judgmental and argumentative. There was certainly a healthy discussion. But to me, that issue has become kind of what the racial issue was in the '60s when I was cutting my teeth. Nobody really wanted to discuss the issue. There were these mantras: "Well, you wouldn't want your sister to marry a black person, would you?" was the answer everybody gave you if you were talking about, "Well, what would be so wrong about the black children and the white children going to school together?" Or as, you know, I don't think anybody questions Billy Graham's conservative credentials. I heard him about a year ago on the Larry King show. King [said], "Tell us, honestly: Is homosexuality a sin?" Dr. Graham said, "Well, the Bible says it is, but if you'll notice, every one of those lists that includes homosexuality, adultery, whatever, every one of those includes greed." Tell me why Baptist preachers are so loud and so strong against some of those sins and never mention greed? Well, I think that is sound theology. I don't think Jesus treated people with... sexual sin as worse sinners than people with what some ethicists call the cold-hearted sins. In fact, I think the reverse is true: that Jesus... you know, the woman that was taken in the very act of adultery and brought into His presence... It says right here in the Law of Moses, "We're supposed to stone this woman. What do you say?" and Jesus says, "Well, how about whoever doesn't have any sin just throwing the first stone?" [Then] He says to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more." That says to me that when Furman stands on the side of grace and inclusion, we are standing with Jesus Christ. We are not standing against Jesus Christ.

Dr. Tollison: It's a... I shouldn't use the word grand. I'm trying to think of a more appropriate word, but it's a type of Christianity that is based on acceptance, as opposed to a judgmental approach to others.

Dr. Clemons: Yeah, well, like the Lord's Prayer says, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us." That sounds like that's kind of conditional. If you and I get crossways, and I'm not willing to forgive you when you come and say, "Hey, I don't want our relationship to go in the tank over this thing; let's put it back together," and I'm not willing to forgive you, and then I go to God and say, "Forgive me of my sins." I need somebody to explain to me how it is Christian to be that unforgiving when Jesus had as much to say about forgiveness as He did. A summary statement is, I see Furman (whether you want to use the domestic partners issue or the race issue or, you know, lots of issues)... now they do serve drinks at very designated, very controlled places on campus. Well, the scripture doesn't call for us to be teetotalers, even if you take scripture literally. Paul says take a little wine for the stomach's sake. I don't think that if you don't drink that makes you a Christian, and if you do drink, it makes you a pagan. I think the scripture teaches moderation. That's what we're practicing at Furman, and I think that's a Christian thing. You know, when Jesus poured that wine at the last supper it wasn't Welchade.

Dr. Tollison: So do you feel that Furman has reached a very... it's policies, it's approach, reflect a very pure Christianity? Perhaps the type of Christianity that Richard Furman intended?

Dr. Clemons: You know, that'd be really hard for me to say since I don't really know that much about Richard Furman. If you just take his writings at face value, and don't give him the privilege of updating himself, Richard Furman used the Bible to talk about slavery being a righteous thing to do. I don't know [that] if Richard Furman were here now (from what I know of him)... I think he would affirm the decision about letting Lillian [Brock Fleming] and those people come to Furman when we first did it. I don't really know that, and, you know, it's just hard to know that, but I do think if Richard Furman could have sat in on the Heritage and Values thing, and we met for two years; man, we worked hard on that thing, we struggled with that thing... [Editor's Note: On February 15th, 2003, the Furman University Board of Trustees authorized a statement on Heritage and Values entitled *Furman University: Character and Values*. This document affirmed where Furman stood on questions of faith after their fairly recent split with the South Carolina Baptist Convention. It emphasized the importance for its students and faculty to continue the quest of truth, discussed the importance for everyone to respect and encourage one another regardless of religious or social differences, and re-affirmed the values Richard Furman had when he founded the University].

Dr. Tollison: The final draft. ..

Dr. Clemons: Oh, yeah, and tweaking it and doing it over and running it by more people and doing it again. I believe Richard Furman would at least say "those people... had their hearts in the right place on trying to make this institution what I envisioned it being, which is a place that does not see faith and learning as enemies."

Dr. Tollison: Did you all consult professors on the Heritage and Values Statement?

Dr. Clemons: Yes.

Dr. Tollison: Do you remember the names of several of the professors?

Dr. Clemons: Tom Buford was there, Helen Lee Turner... we had a meeting, we invited all the professors to come, and we set out copies and said, "Come talk to us about your concerns, what you think..." Gosh, who else was there? Jim Edwards was there... I believe David [Shi] was there...

Dr. Tollison: Jim Leavell?

Dr. Clemons: No, this was after Jim had retired. Vaughn CroweTipton was...and in fact I asked for permission to ask Vaughn CroweTipton to join the committee because I felt like we needed the chaplain. I felt like we could help him get up to speed as the new chaplain, and he could help us with the perspective that he would have that none of us had. He was a real player on the committee.

Dr. Tollison: Anything else you'd like to add about your experiences at Furman, the historic relationship between First Baptist and Furman? Anything else that you think would be important?

Dr. Clemons: Well, I don't mean to make it sound idealistic, but it has been truly a positive relationship in any place I have dipped into it. I feel like it's been a real partnership between the local church and a university that started out as kind of...what would you say...a regional college...

Dr. Tollison: Certainly.

Dr. Clemons: ...where probably ninety percent of the students that went to Furman the first fifty years or the first hundred years or whatever came within a pretty small circle around Greenville. Now, my gosh, they come from everywhere. If you want Furman to be a little Baptist college that staffs Baptist churches, you're going to be disappointed with Furman. I don't think that's ever all Richard Furman wanted it to be. I think he wanted it to be a place of excellence. His background was Episcopal, you know...

Dr. Tollison: Initially? In the 1780s...?

Dr. Clemons: Yeah, as what we'd call a young man these days. Richard Furman had a good education, which is probably why he was such a powerful leader. A lot of those people did not have a good education. You know, they had learned what they could learn from their parents, but schooling was hard to come by in the early 1800s in South Carolina, but Richard Furman was an exception to that. I think he would be pleased. I just, you know, I couldn't prove that, but...

Dr. Tollison: But you feel it's in line with the context of who he was at his point in time...

Dr. Clemons: Very much, very much.

Dr. Tollison: Okay, great. Anything else that you'd like to add?

Dr. Clemons: No, I don't think of anything. I've certainly enjoyed our conversation.

Dr. Tollison: I have as well. Thank you very much for sitting and talking with me.

Dr. Clemons: Well, thank you for asking me to do this. I'm delighted to be included in this.

Dr. Tollison: Of course.

Dr. Clemons: I hope I can see some of the others at some point and hear what other people are saying.

Dr. Tollison: We have...who have we talked with so far? Do you know Eugene Proctor? Ralph Hendrix?

Dr. Clemons: Yes.

Dr. Tollison: [I] did Max and Trudy Heller yesterday.

Dr. Clemons: Okay, I bet that was a real trip.

Dr. Tollison: It was. We had a lot of fun.

Dr. Clemons: They are so wonderful.

Dr. Tollison: Yeah, they are. They were great. I was supposed to do the Johns on Monday, but they had to cancel at the last minute. Steve Plyler?

Dr. Clemons: Yes.

Dr. Tollison: Who else? I interviewed Gordon Blackwell several years ago...

Dr. Clemons: Oh, good. I'm glad you got him.

Dr. Tollison: ...primarily when I was doing my research on desegregation. It was a wonderful conversation and I have those on tapes as well.

Dr. Clemons: What was your specialty in history?

Dr. Tollison: Civil rights.

Dr. Clemons: Okay.

Dr. Tollison: Desegregation of higher education in the South actually was my dissertation. I've got a chapter on Furman and Wofford and, sort of the different approaches of Protestant denominations, and I actually do have a Catholic institution in there as well, as sort of a comparison and contrast.

Dr. Clemons: Okay, good.

Dr. Tollison: Who else have I interviewed? Ted Ellett?

Dr. Clemons: Oh, Ted is one of my all-time favorite people.

Dr. Tollison: She's great. Marguerite Hays? You knew her?

Dr. Clemons: How about Marguerite Childs?

Dr. Tollison: I'm going to talk with her.

Dr. Clemons: I sure think that'd be a good thing.

Dr. Tollison: I look forward to that.

Dr. Clemons: Oh, listen, she's been at Furman and into Furman and she is.... I haven't seen her in a while, but I think she would be very helpful to you.

Dr. Tollison: I look forward to... I'm trying to find the... I can tell you who all is on... they all have been so fruitful in terms of just providing so much information and, not just information but context, and a perspective that you don't get from dates and numbers and...

Dr. Clemons: Right, well, I think this oral history thing is such a valid thing that we now have the technology to do and that's, you know, my gosh, that's new.

Dr. Tollison: Well, it's my hope that this will be very useful to researchers for decades and...

Dr. Clemons: I would think so.

Dr. Tollison: Ann McCuen. She was a student at GWC, [and] she's still involved in the research at Cherrydale, Greenville history. [Editor's Note: GWC is Greenville Woman's College.]

Dr. Clemons: Okay.

Dr. Tollison: I'm doing John Plyler tomorrow. John Duggan, do you know John Duggan?

Dr. Clemons: I know who he is; I don't really know him very well.

Dr. Tollison: He's an attorney in town. He was very involved in the late 1960s with student activism at Furman in terms of the speaker ban during Gordon Blackwell's presidency and he was part of the Southern Student Organizing Committee and anti-war activity. Ernie Harrell?

Dr. Clemons: Oh, yeah, Ernie is priceless.

Dr. Tollison: John Crabtree? Jim Pitts?

Dr. Clemons: An awful lot of these people are members of my church.

Dr. Tollison: Yes, that's right! Who else? Joe Roberts? Minor Mikel?

Dr. Clemons: Yeah, she is really seriously ill.

Dr. Tollison: I think I'll probably talk with her daughter... Mrs. [Minor] Shaw

Dr. Clemons: Shaw, yeah.

Dr. Tollison: Anyone that you would suggest talking with?

Dr. Clemons: I believe I'd want to talk to John Cothran. John went to Furman. He's had two or three boys graduate from Furman, and has been on the board and chair of the board. I sure think I'd want to get John's perspective. Maybe Larry Estridge. I'm trying to think of people that would have seen Furman as somebody, that knew about Furman, [or] somebody that went to Furman to college and then got away from it and now is on the board or has been on the board, and you've got a lot of those people.

Dr. Tollison: Here's a printout of the trustees.

Dr. Clemons: Well, Gordon Blackwell. Gordon is really knowledgeable. My gosh, that guy is a walking encyclopedia. Randy Eaddy was one of those early African-American students [that] grew up in South Carolina [and] went to Harvard, and he is one of the big deal lawyers in Atlanta, I understand. Gosh, I believe I'd want to interview Tom Hartness.

Dr. Tollison: He's on the list.

Dr. Clemons: Okay, yeah. And Gordon Herring, is he on your list?

Dr. Tollison: Nope.

Dr. Clemons: Gordon went to Furman, you know who he is at all? He's the guy that... he was one of the principals in the establishment of the Weather Channel, and either his mother or maybe both of his parents went to Furman (and then he went to Furman) and [his parents] were missionaries in China. I don't. . .well, gosh, Richard Reilly.

Dr. Tollison: Yeah, that's another good one.

Dr. Clemons: Because, my gosh, you know. [He was] a grad of Furman, grew up in Greenville, and all he's done as governor and secretary of education and, you know, he is certainly a world citizen who would have a unique perspective about Furman. Well, any of these people would be great, but the ones I've spotted I think are the ones that probably would be the most articulate and would have the freshest perspective.

Dr. Tollison: Great. Well, thank you very much.

Dr. Clemons: Well, you are welcome. I am so glad to get better acquainted with you.

Dr. Tollison: With you as well. We're also trying to use this as an opportunity to beef up the archives. For instance, I'd like to include any types, if you've written extensively about your experiences at Furman, the relationship between Furman and First Baptist, any types of materials that are relevant to topics that we've covered in our conversation. Each person's going to have a file, so we'd like to add copies of articles like that, or if you

have photographs, even, that you'd like to consider... [We'd] make copies of [them] for you and then put [them] in the folder as well in terms of...

Dr. Clemons: I don't know that I would have that much that would be useful to you. I might just look through and see if anything I'm not thinking of, but it, in the best sense of the word on my watch, our relationship with Furman was just kind of something that was a given. None of us worried about it much. It was comfortable; it was very open, and there wasn't controversy about the relationship. Everybody just knew that we had a deep relationship with Furman, and that didn't mean we were joined at the hip, but it did mean we took each other seriously.

Dr. Tollison: Well this has been wonderful.

Dr. Clemons: Well I'm glad you're back at Furman.

Dr. Tollison: Me, too.

Dr. Clemons: And I hope our paths will cross in other ways.

Dr. Tollison: I hope so. Let me tell you how the process is going to go on from [here]. I can't let you off the hook yet. This tape is going to be sent to a transcriptionist who is going to type it all out. That'll probably take two or three weeks or so, and then I'll get a copy of the transcript. I'll send a copy of that transcript to you, in which case you will have an opportunity to read over the entire interview and, for instance, if things came out in a way that you didn't necessarily intend or you feel that, you know, this could better be said this way, there'll be [an opportunity to] make a little note in the margins or include an entirely new typed up version or handwritten or whatever you're comfortable with. I almost forgot... I mentioned in the letter that I sent out that there's a very standard form for oral histories that every interviewee will need to sign, and this is the form. It basically says right here that you allow Furman to keep this in the archives. Here are exceptions to the oral history agreement, and now that the interview has been completed, I don't think there 's anything that you would... I don't think that you would find this relevant. These exceptions are for people that said things... for someone, for some reason someone's very upset that Furman split with the Baptist Convention (which I haven't interviewed anyone that has been), but they might want to seal off portions of the interview for a period of five or ten years (things like that), and then you're welcome to look over it if you'd like, and here's a...

Dr. Clemons: Okay.