Oral History Interview: John V. Moore

Interviewee: John V. Moore

Interviewer: Chris Waldrep

Date: January 7, 2010

Chris W. Okay, so this is January 7, 2010 and I'm Chris Waldrep with John Moore. And I'm interviewing you for publication, so if you say something that you would rather I didn't quote, just say so and I won't quote that.

John M. Okay, fine.

Chris W. And you've shared so much with me. [*Laughs.*]

John M. Well, it helped me recall a lot of those experiences, and I just felt better doing it for my own self, and I thought it would be helpful for you.

Chris W. It sure is, definitely. Let me ask you a very broad question. I don't know if you can answer it. But our annual conference, and maybe all the annual conferences on the West Coast, [are] very liberal, very progressive. How do you account for that?

John M. I think frontier religion has something to do with it. People come to California and to the West, in part, because they're looking at opportunities, but church membership in the West, all along the West Coast, is lower than any other part of the country. San Francisco, you can understand why that [is]— its whole history of frontier days and all of that, and the radical movement of the '60s.

Our children, two daughters, were in Peoples Temple and died in Jonestown, and they— I think the University at Berkeley. Stanford's not particularly radical, but in the '60s they were— the students acted up there as they did over in Berkeley. Northern California is— well, number one, you know most of what I'm saying, is that the Central Valley is a different world from the Coast. And I suppose the coastal areas are more cosmopolitan, and I think that they certainly, yeah, have—

Of course the major immigration is from Mexico into California, and that's a whole different story. I think the secular history in California has been— well, certainly on moral issues or values, it's very different, and the frontier was always that way. But there are— you know, San Diego is a very conservative area.

Chris W. That's true. That's for sure.

John M. I'm not doing very well to— I may think later of some of the things I might have said. I think metropolitan areas are more liberal, much more liberal, on average, on social justice issues. In the Methodist Church, the East, from New York up, that whole Eastern Coastal stretch, and California particularly, the coastal stretch, have been mainly the most liberal in the country, and they must have some characteristics in common, I would think.

Chris W. Now you are very liberal and progressive, and your father, you said, was a conservative Republican who voted for [Franklin] Roosevelt one time.

John M. That's right. Yeah, he was. I think, however, when his grandsons were going to the draft, facing the draft, he had some changes of mind and heart. He was— I won't say he wasn't a typical businessman, but he— Well, he and my mother met in Oklahoma and he came from Kansas and she from Iowa, and, you know, that's Midwest, and Long Beach was Iowa on the Pacific, so many Midwesterners were there.

I want to say two things about my father. I remember when my— stop me if I've told you any of these stories, because I'm writing several different papers. My sister was in junior high school, and I was four years younger, and she had a teacher, they were talking about the League of Nations. And my sister was positive about that we should have entered the League of Nations, and Dad said no, no, no.

And then years later, after I was— I left Long Beach when I went away to school, and trying to place— I can't date all of these conversations with my dad, but whenever I was home or my brother came home, he ended up taking us to his Lions Club in Long Beach. He'd been a longtime member of the Lions Club. And one time there was a speaker who just screwed the United Nations, and he stood up afterwards and said, well, I think we ought to have a speaker on the other side of the subject. And the other time—

Chris W. He had a change of heart.

John M. Yeah, yeah. The other time— he was a tolerant person. I mean, he had to be tolerant with his children, too. I'm sure my parents had a difficult time understanding me, although outwardly so, conventional. But I was at the Lions Club with him for luncheon shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and people were— they made to pass a resolution that Japanese Americans never be allowed to come back to the [West] Coast. That wasn't unusual along the coast; that was happening everyplace. And then years later, when I visited with him, there was a Japanese-American who was president of the club.

Chris W. [*Laughs.*]

John M. I didn't remind him of that. I think Dad changed. He was basically a fairly conservative person. When the New Deal came, and all of the regulations on business, that changed— he was a merchant all of his life, all of his adult life, and all of the rules and forms to fill and all of that, as a businessman, Roosevelt and the New Deal just complicated— so much paperwork and red tape and all of those things. So that was a major reason which I think he— he didn't like all of that. Just like all the other business people. They don't like anything the government does that means more work for them.

Chris W. Of course. You came to be a conscientious objector during World War II. Can you talk about how you reached that decision? It was a very hard thing to do, I would think. People were so excited about Pearl Harbor.

John M. Yeah, yeah. We went to a— My father's family were Christian Scientists. My father never set foot in a Baptist Church because of a childhood experience where the minister told his mother she was going to hell, so he had that feeling about Baptists, although his father-in-law was a strong Baptist, and he loved my mother's dad.

Our church— I had a Sunday School teacher who was a— in high school. I wouldn't call it, it was not a fundamentalist church, it just was traditional, kind of Iowa middle-of-the-road kind of a church, and didn't make a big deal about it. But in Sunday School, he had a map on the wall on Sunday of when the world was coming to an end and all of that, anti-evolution.

But then at summer camps and in our youth group with summer camps, it was an entirely different understanding of the scripture, historical understanding of scripture, which was, you know, I would have never become a minister, or wouldn't have lasted long if I hadn't had that part of that experience, which was important to me.

And we had our saints or heroes: Toyohiko Kagawa[1]—I don't know if you've ever heard the name—and Maude Royden[2] and others. Kagawa was in Japan, and he was a socialist, but he was opposed to the war, the Japanese wars, and he was much into cooperatives, and supported

[1] Toyohiko Kagawa (1888-1960), Japanese Christian activist, pacifist, and labor organizer.
[2] Maude Royden (1876-1956), American suffragist and preacher.

cooperatives, and so he was one of my heroes, one of my models. So I had—

And at our summer camps we had theological professors who talked about the prophets, and sort of that whole social justice, my own gut feelings were reinforced with social justice. And Kirby Page[3] and another man, I can't think of his name, were pacifists. But really, what my decision was, the first time, and in sixth or seventh, probably seventh or eighth, asked do you want to be baptized and join the church, and I said no the first year, and the second year I said no.

And then I thought about it and then I told my mother yes, I'd decided I wanted to be baptized. And so she called the pastor and I went downtown and met with the deacons that night and they said, "okay, you can be baptized, we think you know what you're doing." So that Jesus was very important to me. I took Jesus and his teachings seriously, very seriously.

And when it comes to pacifism, I couldn't reconcile following Jesus, being a follower, a disciple of Jesus, and killing people. So I think that was really what— I'm sure there were other factors unknown to me. I'm not aware of them. So that's basically—

But also I lived in a time when most of the nation was opposed to war up until, you know, as it drew closer to '39 and '37. I remember Eddie Cantor, who changed the song of World War I, "The Yanks are coming,

[3] Kirby Page (1890-1950), Disciples of Christ minister and social activist.

the Yanks coming, over there, over there." In the '30s he began singing, "The Yanks *aren't* coming, the Yanks *aren't* coming." So the culture was that, and a lot of people thought of themselves, and young people, as a pacifist, which they really weren't. So I was kind of a— Dad said you're a stubborn person, John, and you do what you feel is right to do. And so that was the beginning.

And that was reinforced as I went through school, went to a World Student Christian Federation Conference in Toronto, Canada in 1939, and there were people from all over, mostly— well, not just the European world, students, and then prominent leaders in the church— a professor from Czechoslovakia, Hromadka[4] and D.T. Niles[5] from Ceylon and others were there. So that all of that was nurtured. I don't know if I told you that. Any time I'm repeating what you know, just say.

Chris W. No, go ahead.

John M. I was conscious, I guess I had a feeling about fairness. That's the way, really, in childhood, it started—is this fair? I was playing with my friends. I was in grammar school at the time. And I said something about our maid, and [they said], "Your maid? You've got a maid?" So I never mentioned the maid again. That set me apart from—

[4] Josef L. Hromadka (1889-1969), Czechoslovakian theologian considered the father of Christian-Marxist dialogue.
[5] D. T. Niles (1906-1970), Sri Lankan evangelist, ecumenical leader, and hymnwriter.

We lived in a strange community. It was a prosperous, well-to-do, a lot of well-to-do people lived in Los Cerritos at that time. But there were also older homes where just modest incomes. In fact, the house next door to us was very modest. And then I asked my dad one time, now why do you and our family get so much from the business and the salespeople get so little, comparatively speaking? And he gave me an answer that a businessman that— well, I provide them jobs, and he didn't go much further than that. And so there's that sense.

Then I was in the store one time, and the star football player from our high school came with a woman into the store. It might have been his mother or his sister. He was Black. And I was watching to observe how the clerks treated him. And they treated— the clerk that cared for them had just the same way she did with White customers. There were not very many Black people that came into the store. It was— well, it wasn't a Bloomingdale's or anything like that, but it wasn't Target or it wasn't Penney's either, and there just weren't a lot of Black people in our town.

So those are two instances, I think, of my dad in terms of social sensitivities. And the retail business community asked him to be the point man meeting with union organizers, the retail clerks. And I asked him, "well, what are you going to do?" I don't even think I was in high school at that time, I might have been. And he said, "well, I'm going to meet with them and see what they have to say." They didn't organize, and I don't

know what— so there wasn't any follow-up on that. So that concern about social justice.

Oh, yes, in high school, we debated in our youth fellowship. That would be in the '30s. I was in high school from fall '34, '35, '36, '37. We had high school and community— and young adults who were out of high school who were part of that group, so it was much more mature than just a high school kind of group. And we did the usual things. I mean, we had a lot of games and fun, outings and that sort of thing, the beach. But we planned the program, the students did, the members. The counselors didn't. And we had someone, prayer or whatever. But we also argued about war and peace, and what would you do in the case of war and interracial marriages. We argued about social justice issues and peace, certainly about peace.

I remember one of the high schools girls—she may have been community college at that point—came back from Asilomar where there had a been a student—White, obviously—a student conference, and she came back talking about the capitalist pigs. Or what was it, you know, that kind of language. And so we were not all of one mind, and we were not a pietistic kind of group. We dealt seriously with biblical and theological questions, but we also talked, discussed and argued about these ethical issues and social justice issues.

And that carried on until when I was in college. I remember my first— I was a freshman in 1937, and one night I had the radio on, and from a station from Los Angeles, a man by the name of Chet Huntley[6] was giving the news report, and he reported that Pacific Electric, the transportation system, had just adopted equal opportunity employment for the first time, and began taking Black employees with the trains and the whole system, and I thought, gee, that's great.

And in college, Stanford was not very radical. I don't know that the other schools were, either. There was one Black person, in all my four years, that I remember. There were many Asians and there were many Jews. And I think in those years it was easier for Jews to be— had no problem with admission. They were very good students, most of them. But there were not very many in fraternities. And there were eating clubs, and I was in an eating club, and there were lots of Jewish students in those eating clubs. That was much more open.

Chris W. It was a social kind of club?

John M. We ate our meals together and we lived in wherever, in different dormitories or housing or wherever it was.

Chris W. You mentioned a Japanese socialist, I think, who was your hero?

John M. Toyohiko Kagawa. He was in Japan and a church leader.

[6] Chet Huntley (1911-1974), American newscaster.

Chris W. How did you find out about him?

John M. Oh, in Sunday School. The literature talked about prominent— well, prominent figures in the church who were doing all kinds of things. And there were— so that was it.

Chris W. I don't even know him.

John M. Yeah, yeah. And Barbara, my wife— there was a woman, not Maude Royden, who was a pioneer, but her name may come to me, in England, who established a settlement house there. And Barbara was in the Methodist Church, and she learned about people like that as well. Jackie Robinson[7] was a Methodist, and he— Barbara, in her book, wrote about him and how she was in awe of him, this Black athlete who was a student at UCLA and all the rest. I'll give you a book that my wife wrote if you'd like it.

Chris W. Sure, thank you.

John M. It tells a lot about our life together. She was a remarkable person. I think about the most radical thing on the campus in the time I was there was— and probably most of the students didn't even know about it—but Russ, I can't remember his last name, and some other students—Bob Peckham, I think, too, who became a district court judge, federal judge in San Francisco, he and some others organized a cooperative book store, and

[7] Jackie Robinson (1919-1972), African American baseball player known for breaking the color barrier in major league baseball.

they asked me to be president or chairman of whatever the group was, and they founded it on a, I want to say that English— [cooperative movement, Rochdale[8]]— it may come to me. The principles of cooperative movements. And I said yes.

They did that because the university— yeah, it was owned by the university— its book store, we thought we could compete with it, and we did compete with it, in terms of buying books back and of reselling them, and it became very successful, until the university book store adopted the same things that the co-op was doing. So that was a successful endeavor. In my last year we organized a cooperative men's house, and I don't know what came of that after, you know, when the war started, but— I registered for the draft when everybody else did, when that first registration— I think it was in 1940. Let me see— yeah, yeah. And I wrote it on the card I sent back, "I am a conscientious objector."

Chris W. Right.

John M. And then I wasn't classified until I was in school of theology. They didn't like to classify anybody as a CO. And then I was given a deferment or exemption, I guess it was, that clergy get, theological students got at the time. I was ready to go to a civilian public service camp, but when the time came, I said—well, it was after the war, I mean—well, I can do that, but I don't think I will, I think I'll be a pastor.

[8] Rochdale Principles, the foundation of cooperative movements, based upon the Rochdale Cooperative which successfully operated in the United Kingdom in the 1840s.

The hardest decision for my parents was my brother was in the service, all of the sons of their friends were in the military, one or another, and here I was not in the service. And that had to be hard for them. And they hoped that I would become a chaplain, but I thought I couldn't be— it would be easier for me to be a grunt in the army, an infantry person, than to be a chaplain. I wouldn't have that ambiguity of trying to deal with my convictions about war. Years later I would do something different, but that's what I was convinced of doing at the time.

Chris W. Why would you change your mind years later?

John M. Well, I read— a philosophy student was a member of our eating club and knew I was a pacifist. He said, "Well, you ought to read Reinhold Niebuhr,[9] *Moral Man and Immoral Society*," and so I read it, and it didn't persuade me then, but at the time of the Korean War, I realized that the only way that— well, conscientious objection and pacifism was kind of irrelevant to issues of world order and peace, that those are political issues, and that that's where that will happen.

Now, at the same time, I knew that [Mohandas K.] Gandhi believed in nonviolence and that he had accomplished a lot. Well, a miracle of eventually forcing the British out and getting India free. And I didn't know till years later, when I saw a book at a Berkeley book store, *Nonviolent Muslim*. That sounds like an oxymoron to me. I bought it and it

[9] Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), important twentieth-century American theologian.

was about a man, Ghaffar Khan,[10] I think that was his name. He had the honorable title of Badshah, which is like Mohammed.

And he was a Pashtun elite, a member of that society, and was trained as a soldier. But he organized 100,000 Muslims to stand nonviolently, to act nonviolently, along with Gandhi's Hindus acting nonviolently in relation to the British. And I've thought ever since, gee, that's really amazing that— So I think that there are situations where groups, I thought in Palestine that the Palestinians might have done better against Israel if Gandhi or that kind of spirit of Gandhi were— And at the same time, they just might have been destroyed, who knows.

Chris W. You went to Boston School of Theology?

John M. No, I went to Colgate. I was a Baptist. I grew up a Baptist, Northern Baptist. And I went to Colgate-Rochester [Divinity School], and that was a liberal Baptist theological school.

Chris W. Can you talk about what you learned there or what your experiences were like there?

John M. …Yeah. One of the interesting experiences at that school, in the fall a group of us went to Princeton University for a conference of seminary students. This was before December 7th. And that kind of a conference I enjoyed. And I remember walking into the Princeton chapel. It just took

[10] Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988), Muslim proponent of nonviolence who worked with Mahatma Gandhi for Indian independence.

my breath away. I'd never been in a Gothic cathedral or building of that kind, so that was a—

Also [I] remember driving over there. I said, how come all these forests are burned? Are they just burned over? Then I realized they were deciduous trees and all the leaves had fallen off early in the fall.

I had a strange experience, and this is, you know— One of my good friends, one of my better friends at the seminary, he and— he had two students with him. They came into my room. My door was probably unlocked. And they wrestled me down so that my friend could kiss me. And they knew I was furious. And it ruptured our relationship. There was nothing that could really mend it. We were civil after that, but it simply wasn't the same.

Later on, a year later, my mentor, a pastor, was visiting— I was a second year at Berkeley Baptist [Divinity School], a school in Berkeley. He chased me around the shower until he was clear I didn't want to be chased around the shower. And so those were my two experiences of aggressive people who wanted to engage in sex. And the pastor actually, we asked him to marry us, and he did, and we were good friends ever since.

And Ken, the student, we were cordial, but that was all. It couldn't be the same. You know, being violently held down, it's kind of like a rape. It wasn't a rape, but that's different from somebody who's coming on to you and you can just say no…

It was a good education for me. We had very able professors. I'm sure the Old Testament course was a step I was prepared for, the documentary hypothesis of the writing of the Hexateuch. And we had an interesting person. I had church history the year I was in Berkeley, and that was a—

Chris W. Why were you at Berkeley?

John M. Well, I decided, after the war had broken out, that I wanted to be closer to home, so I went back. I went to Berkeley that middle year. And the most valuable course for me at Berkeley was the—

Chris W. Was that the Pacific School of Religion?

John M. No, it was a Baptist school. It's called the American Baptist School of the West now, and it's a part of the GTU [Graduate Theological Union]. And I'm not sure what— Their campus was on Dwight Way. They had a number of buildings on Dwight Way across from the Christian Science Church and People's Park.

The most important thing that happened to me that year is that I went to my friend's, who was a student at Berkeley with me. He invited me to his wedding, and I took a friend, and that's the first time I ever saw Barbara. So when we came back to Berkeley, they introduced Barbara and me by mail, and we corresponded about three months before we ever met. And that was in February, maybe. And by the time August came around, we

were married and headed for Rochester, New York for my last year of seminary and her last year at the University of Rochester.

I had friends who went to Union [Theological Seminary], and Reinhold Niebuhr was there at that time. I would have— we didn't have anybody like that. First Walter Rauschenbusch[11] was a pioneer and had been at the Rochester School of Theology, so we had that legacy. And the school— well, there wasn't student activism in those days at the seminary, I don't think. I don't recall anything like that.

Chris W. Was social justice something they talked about?

John M. Yeah, yeah. We talked about social justice, yeah. And the main issue, of course, after December 7th was what do we do about the draft, and what do we do in chaplaincy, or go to CPS camp, or go enlist. And some enlisted.

We had a student who came the second year who had been in the service, and he was a violinist. He just was an excellent violinist. So I guess he'd served his time, and I don't know how he was discharged. Another one had to go back to Nebraska because his draft board wouldn't give him a clergy student classification, and so it went to court and the draft board was reversed on that.

[11] Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1916), Baptist preacher and social activist who developed a theology of the Social Gospel during the Progressive Era in the U.s.

We had some great preachers who came and visited. Ralph Sockman.[12] And I can't remember if Harry Emerson Fosdick[13] came, and also— well, George Buttrick[14] came, a number of the prominent— And when I was there, preaching was where it was.

And changing the subject, preaching was not where it was in— I think in 1966 I went to a summer school at Pacific School of Religion, and all of the— And although Gerald Kennedy, Bishop Gerald Kennedy[15] was an excellent preacher, noted for his preaching, he drew fewer people to that than the theologian Schubert Ogden.[16] The times had changed, and it wasn't the preachers that were drawing people, but— And there were a lot of Catholics who came to that, too, because that was— I guess that was— yeah, that was the John XXIII[17] period. And today— you know, all of us in school knew that preaching would be an important part of our careers, and that's not quite the way it is today. There are a lot of other things going on.

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[12] Ralph Washington Sockman (1889-1970), professor at Union Theological Seminary popular speaker on the weekly National Radio Pulpit, and author of books on the Christian life.

[13] Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969), liberal Baptist preacher and professor at Union Theological Seminary, best known for his critique of Fundamentalism.

[14] George Buttrick (1892-1980), pastor of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church from 1927-1955, before teaching at Harvard and serving as Preacher to the University (a position later held by the late Peter Gomes).

[15] Gerald Kennedy, bishop in the United Methodist Church from Los Angeles, known for his preaching, and a keynote address he gave at the 1964 General Conference, which put him on the cover of TIME Magazine.

[16] Schubert Ogden (b. 1928), important theologian, ordained United Methodist minister, interpreter of Rudolf Bultmann to American pastors.

[17] Pope John XXIII (1881-1963), known for his ecumenical spirit, convened Vatican Council II, which radically transformed the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960s.

I didn't really become a— I'm not a scholar, but my last year in seminary were my best grades, even when I was married and all of that. I took preaching very seriously through the years.

I remember I went over to the Baptist Church. Right out of seminary I was an assistant pastor, Sacramento First Baptist Church, and we had a cooperative church school in the summer for children with a Christian Church [Disciples of Christ] and maybe another church. And the teachers all decided to have a film produced the War Relocation Committee on the Japanese relocation.

And a woman from a Disciples Church, she didn't like it at all. She said, "I won't participate and our church won't participate." And I had a call from her pastor, and he said, "Well, can't we just do this to get along," and I said no, that the teachers had said that they want this, and I'm certainly not going to overrule them, and I said I'll ask them again. But they didn't change their mind. So I've always kind of looked at that as a— just a little thing that— But to bend one way or the other makes a difference down the road.

Chris W. What do you mean?

John M. Well, if I— you know, in terms of pleasing people. Pleasing the congregation. And I saw that I had a need to please. It became very— that I, you know, had been able to psych out my parents and my mother, and I wasn't too interested in psyching out the teachers at school. I don't know

why, you know, do I— what do they want, give them what they want. I just wasn't that interested in studying. Well, I mean, I studied, but not seriously.

And it was in 1958, when I left a church in Hayward, that a fine man—he'd been a farmer in Iowa or Nebraska or Illinois, someplace—Illinois, I think—and he came to California, and he had his own backhoe, so he would work in digging trenches, foundations and that sort of thing. And I had been there six years, and the church had just boomed, because churches were booming in the '50s.

And he said, "John, I've never known a pastor who was as well-loved as you are." And he went on, "Well, you know, 90% of the people in this church don't want you to leave." And I thought, how come the other 10%— [*Laughs.*] And then when we went to Chico, I resolved, "John, you've got to do something about this," and so my resolve was to be wary of being compulsively pleasing or compulsively rebellious. So I've always kind of known that about myself. But it's— I have stood up in the churches, and have kept my— I've felt that I've kept my integrity there.

Chris W. Now, did you think about homosexual rights at all before you came to Glide, or is that something you discovered only after you came?

John M. At Stanford the only thing I knew about homosexuality were the female impersonators at Finocchio's in San Francisco. Some of my friends would

go up there to watch the female impersonators. That was my image of the homosexual person.

When I was at Chico [Trinity United Methodist Church], just before we went to Glide— I'm trying to get the story straight. Someone came to me and her partner or his partner had left, and I realized that her feelings were the same as a heterosexual person when they're forsaken or abandoned by their partner, so I was aware of that. And there was some talk about women in the physical education department being gay or lesbian. But, you know, that's not much education about homosexuality.

I did, as I told you, and answered your question, that counseling and clinical training was Freudian in its orientation, and so that I got Freud's theoretical understanding of psychosexual development, in which homosexuals just never moved beyond the stage of homosexual attachments, and others of us did.

So when I went to Glide, I didn't have any idea that that would be an agenda item. I went to Glide hoping, you know, that— I was a solid preacher, that maybe my preaching might bring some kind of response. Well, it didn't. But I still kept working, and I always worked on my sermons. And it wasn't till— the first major confrontation with understanding of sexual orientation was in the spring of 1965. Did I write about that workshop I went to?

Chris W. Oh, yeah, absolutely.

John M. Yeah, yeah, where—

Chris W. California Hall was the first confrontation, wasn't it?

John M. Well, the workshop was at Glide, and Ted McIlvenna, of course, in his exploring the city, discovered there were many, many, many gay lesbians. So that the [Glide] Foundation, along with leaders of gay and lesbian organizations, organized a three-day workshop. Half of those participating would be gay and half would be straight, presumably straight. And that it— the gays and the lesbians insisted that there be as many clergy as possible involved in that workshop. So that was an eye-opening experience for me, sitting across the table and listening to people tell their stories. And so I just—

And then that group organized the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, and that council, along with gay and lesbian groups, organized the annual ball, New Year's Eve Ball, I think it was. And I hadn't planned to go to it, but I had a call about 8:00, "You better come down here, John. We need you. Put a collar on."

And so I went down in the lights, blaring lights in the street. It was right near the Federal Building. I think there was a— well, it was a block running into the Federal Building, or by the west end of the Federal Building. And just lights blaring, and the police were all around, and they were taking pictures of everybody who came. And so we walked in— I walked in.

Chris W. You saw the police taking pictures?

John M. Mm-hmm, yeah. Anybody who went in. They took the picture of anybody who went in. Then when we got inside, there was a confrontation between police and two attorneys, a judge— a man who became a judge. And I can't recall the names right now. Two attorneys, and they refused to—

Chris W. Herb Donaldson?

John M. Herb Donaldson, and I want to say Lavender. That wasn't—

Chris W. I can't think of it either, but Herb was there.

John M. Yeah, Herb. And they were arrested. And with that, the police closed the dance down. And they were— there was nothing violent. There was no fighting. That was the first public event of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual that was done cooperatively with the gay/lesbian community. That was a big impetus for the council to develop a program, which it did: all kinds of workshops in San Francisco.

And I gave a— I was on some radio station there for about five interviews with a man by the name of [Wardell] Pomeroy, who was an associate of Kinsey[18] and that study. And talked about that subject. And so the fall, I just thought I was ready, maybe, to preach a sermon on this. And when I

[18] Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956) established the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research and Indiana University and is best known for the Kinsey Report and the Kinsey Scale, which attempted to describe sexual habits of Americans.

told Lew [Durham] and some of the others, "You're not going to do that, are you?" I said yeah. And I worked hard on it.

But when I preached the sermon on homosexuality, I didn't know if I was right or wrong in what I was saying, but I knew— and it was years later, or maybe some time later that I realized what I was saying wasn't what my parents said, wasn't what my church said, it wasn't what my culture said, and it wasn't what anybody said except a very few people. But I got a lot of mail, a lot of mail. And I wrote this to you about the Bishop—[Harvey] Tippett. I felt I was on the right track when there was one side of the mail were blasts at me and the other side were almost tearfully thanking me and expressions of gratitude. I said, I think I'm going in the right direction.

Chris W. Yeah.

John M. And then Herb Donaldson—this may be repeating something I said, except I didn't say Herb—I was giving a talk about homosexuality to one of the workshops. People had come in from different places. It was sponsored by the Council on Religion and the Homosexual. And I said, well, I think same-sex marriage and relationships is good, I mean, if you have a solid relationship, but that marriage of a man and a woman is the best.

And while I was saying that, a voice was saying, "John that's not true about Herb Donaldson, and he's sitting right in front of you, and his partner." And I realized that, you know, I just had to say it wasn't best for

them. It had been hell for them, and hell for a lot of others who tried to be in a heterosexual relationship when they just didn't have any capacity for it. So that was another turning point. So it's been a growing, changing attitude toward that.

Chris W. Tell me about Lew Durham.

John M. Lew Durham had been director of education at First Methodist Church Los Angeles, and Bishop Tippett had been pastor there before he was elected bishop [of the Northern California-Nevada Conference]. And so there was a vacancy in the leadership of the [Glide] Foundation, and Bishop Tippett wanted to ask Lew Durham to take it. Lew was a very creative person. He was a hang loose kind of person. He was willing to experiment and do anything. And Don Kuhn was a public— I mean, yeah, public relations, but that doesn't do him justice.

So that they got creative people like Ted McIlvenna, and they did creative things. We created a—meaning the Foundation, and I was part of it—the Intersection, which was a center for religion and the arts. Of course with Ted they had Huckleberry House for runaways.

Chris W. These were people that were really open to—

John M. Yeah, absolutely.

Chris W. They turned out to be very open to homosexual rights.

John M. Absolutely. Yeah, that's right. I remember a UCC [United Church of Christ] executive at that time, or Congregational at that time, maybe, I can't remember the history. He came out and he'd worked in Chicago and the urban center there, and he just chuckled. He said, "I can't get over it. Here's a Methodist Church where you can't smoke in the church, but they're talking about homosexuality." And involving gays and lesbians and all the rest.

Chris W. On the other side, there's the Transforming Congregations.

John M. Yes, right.

Chris W. Their view is that homosexuals choose to be homosexual, and therefore they can choose not to be. Is that an issue that you folks talked about or were concerned about at that time?

John M. No, I think we just didn't— That program came as a response.

Chris W. It came later, yeah.

John M. Yeah, it came as a response.

Chris W. I mean, did you tell yourself homosexuals can't help but be homosexual? Is that the way you looked at it?

John M. Well, I'd like—

Chris W. Or maybe you didn't think of it.

John M. Yeah, no, I thought about it. I was persuaded by the Kinsey scale of zero to, what was it, six, of— that never had any homosexual relations, and then the next had never had any fantasies about that, and up into kind of a middle spectrum, so that my understanding was that there's almost an infinite variation in sexual affiliation and identification. And so that that made sense to me.

Chris W. But you don't think it is genetics?

John M. I— the studies indicate that with psychotherapy—at that time, you know, this is 40, 50 years ago—that if there was highly motivated clergy, highly motivated to change, and they didn't say it this way, but I would think that those who were at the center of that scale, neither way over here nor way over there, that they could live a— whether they're heterosexual or homosexual, they would be free— I mean, they would have to be highly motivated to do it, and that's what those studies showed, that they could live a chaste life. But those people who were at the extremes, there's no way.

Chris W. Extreme [*inaudible*]?

John M. Yeah, yeah.

Chris W. What do you think about politics and this? It's a political thing that the church votes to discriminate, basically.

John M. Yeah.

Chris W. It's a political action.

John M. Yes, it is.

Chris W. But it's a political action to fight against that.

John M. Yeah, that's right. Well, Congregational Churches can deal with that issue better. That's why the UCC Church was one of the first that— local churches could do whatever they want. But the Methodist Church, if the denomination takes a stand, local churches aren't free to do whatever they want to do.

And as I told you, that sword cuts two ways. With women, the Methodist Church was great, because once they became members, they were guaranteed appointments. A local congregation didn't have to approve them or call them as pastors, because they were appointed by the bishop.

I've often fantasized that a good lecture would be, or a workshop, "The Pastor as a Political Leader," or as a politician, because that, you know, you're working all the time with people, and it's a political process that's being done. And how do you arrive at decisions? And how do you arrive at decisions that the people will support? Anything that comes from the national church, the people are not just going to adopt that and do that.

Well, Albert Outler,[19] do you know that name? He was an excellent historian on Methodist history, John Wesley. He died some years ago. I was on a theological study commission of the Methodist Church.

Chris W. Oh, I do know that name.

John M. And it was first proposed at one of the General Conferences, whenever it was first proposed, Albert was opposed to anything in terms of recognition of gays and lesbians. He was almost apoplectic in his— well, he was passionate in his opposition. And I was on the other side.

And so four or six years later, I think the General Conference was in Oregon, and I can't remember what that date was, in Portland [1976]. And he came up to me in the hall before the conference. "John, I finally understand you. I understand you. I've been in California for a month, and they're just like you." And I thought afterwards I should have said, "Albert, I know that. And the people in Dallas are just like you, and you're just like the people in Dallas." So that your view isn't much different from the people in Dallas. It wasn't different at all.

And I thought of him when one of the bishops in Dallas, a big article in the gay state magazine about this gay bishop, and it was Albert's bishop. It had to be hard for him.

Chris W. Bob Moon and Doug Hayward and you were all conscientious objectors.

[19] Albert Outler (1908-1989) historian and theologian of the United Methodist Church, known as a scholar of John Wesley.

John M. Yeah.

Chris W. And you were all leading people in the conference. I wonder if that— I almost want to think it's a generational—

John M. Yeah, I think it must have been a generational— But this conference had liberal clergy, some liberal clergy, long before we ever got here. There were clergy and laymen in our conference who created the Methodist Credit Union— And the pool of money they had, which was a few hundred dollars, that's how that endowment board gets its money from— That's what came of— They were raising money, creating a board that endowed funds for subsidizing pastors. Well, they now give over a million dollars a year for the pensions, so that's $4 million every four years. So that began with some Methodist laypeople and clergy in the Bay Area, Oakland, I think, maybe. Don Cunningham's father-in-law was a part of that. Wilson, his wife's maiden name was Wilson.

Then they also created the Berkeley Co-op, which was a big enterprise. It was a very big enterprise. They also, many of them, were named by the [California] Assembly Committee on Un-American Activities, including Bishop Tippett. But I can name off these people: [Roy] Wilson and [Dillon] Throckmorton and Bob Moon and a whole number of them.

Chris W. These were all clergy?

John M. Mm-hmm.

Chris W. A generation before?

John M. Mm-hmm, yeah. Bob Moon's generation and mine. Well, even before Bob, yeah. Yeah, they were before Bob. But they were still with us. They were leaders. So the conference has always had that— that— had leaders in that.

Now, the conference also had leaders on the farm boycott issue, which divided the church. Bill Dew, who is living and is in Sacramento [d. 2010], was a pastor in Lindsay, and he supported Cesar Chavez, and he lived through— wasn't kicked out of his church. Harry Shaner, who was district superintendent, he is retired in Las Gatos. They both are living and their phone numbers are in the book, if you want to talk to either of them.

They were United Methodist [unintelligible] who supported Cesar Chavez, because they were right down there in the Valley. And the churches were very unhappy with that, that the leadership of the church was fighting— You know, the churches, they were small farmers, for the most part. And Cliff Crummey was a supporter of that. He was an executive of the California Council of Churches in San Francisco, so that those people, on that issue, the United Methodist Church—

Well, we had the Social Principles that— the first Social Creed in 1908 said that we believe in the right of workers and employers alike to have a right to organize and bargain collectively. But you read that in a local church, they wouldn't agree with that, even today, probably.

Chris W. Yeah. Yeah, it does seem that the clergy were more liberal than the people in the pews.

John M. Yes, they were. Yes, they were.

Chris W. I interviewed Barbara Hall. I don't know if you know her.

John M. Yes. She was on the same theological study commission I was on. Is that Barbara Hall? Ruth Hall, no.

Chris W. The Barbara Hall I'm talking about was on the Reconciling Committee of the Conference.

John M. Oh, mm-hmm.

Chris W. But she was of the World War II generation, and she says there was a— she called it a covenant, and I think it was a poll of churches, asking the congregations to accept a Black minister or a Japanese minister.

John M. I wrote that covenant.

Chris W. Oh, really?

John M. Yeah.

Chris W. Oh, tell me about that.

John M. I don't think anybody knows that. I think it was in the '60s that we thought what we can do, and Open Pulpit Covenant I think is what we—

Chris W. Tell me about that.

John M. Well, it was a time of equal opportunity, and I just presented a resolution to the conference, a very simple one, that we covenant to declare we are open to acceptance of appointment of clergy of whatever race, Black clergy. That was the group. Anybody that reads that is going to say that John's claiming credit for something that— too much, but that's where it came from.

Chris W. She said one congregation, I forget which church it was, said they would take a Black minister, but not a Japanese.

John M. Oh, yeah, I'm sure. I'm sure, yeah. Well, Marvin Stuart was pastor of a church in San Francisco in December of 1941, and he was very active in supporting the Japanese-Americans who were being evacuated. There were many others who were doing the same thing.

And when I was appointed to Hayward, there was one Japanese family who had been deported, you know, moved out, and they came back to their little ranch, small farm, and they were so grateful, they threw all kinds of gifts on us, at Barbara and me. And it was my predecessor who had stood by and stood with them as they went through that ordeal, Myron Harold.

Chris W. Myron Harold?

John M. He's a retired clergy and his name is in the journal. He could tell you more about that.

Chris W. Wow. Let's see, Lloyd Wake, is that— ?

John M. Lloyd [WA-KEE]. Lloyd Wake.

Chris W. He was—

John M. He was for years pastor of Pine Methodist Church. Pine is green in Japan, and so Pine is now a church out in Presidio, out in the Richmond District now, and it's a historically Japanese church.

And I think it was '72 [Jurisdictional Conference] that they elected bishops. And Lloyd got votes up so high, but there just were all of the others who would not vote for a Japanese, especially. They might have voted for a Japanese-American. Well, they did vote for a Chinese-American when Lloyd pulled out, but because he [Lloyd] performed a wedding or a covenant service between two people of the same sex, that was what was against him.

And I feel confident that that— You know, he was obviously the strongest Asian that we had in our conference at that time. And he was also maybe the most Americanized. I suppose he'd lived all his life here.

John M. The Methodist system, we don't elect bishops for our own conference. The jurisdictions, as you know about, every four years after General Conference, there's jurisdictional conference. And in the West, that would

be virtually all the churches west of the Rockies, or the Western Jurisdiction. And so if there's a vacancy in the episcopacy, then that jurisdictional conference elects a person to fill that vacancy.

But I think there's a Committee on the Episcopacy. I think they appoint those bishops to go to one of the five areas. So if Lloyd had been elected, he would not have been a bishop with this conference. He would have been assigned by that episcopacy committee to one of the other areas. Areas are geographical and there might be more than one conference in an area. In California there was one— well, northern and southern, California, that whole history. But there are provisional conferences, Japanese provisional, Oriental provisional, Mexican provisional.[20] And the bishop presided over all of those conferences, too.

Chris W. But the opposition to him came from within our annual conference?

John M. Yeah, yes, yeah. Well, the vote was at the jurisdiction. That's where the vote was. The jurisdictional delegates are elected by the annual conference. All who are elected at General Conference are also members of the jurisdictional, and that same number are elected just for the jurisdiction. And that was in Seattle. And I think our conference voted for Lloyd. The jurisdictional delegates voted for Lloyd.

Chris W. Plus other conferences?

[20] Provisional conferences were all absorbed into the United Methodist Church during the 1960s.

John M. Yeah.

Chris W. Okay, so our conference wasn't divided?

John M. No, no. No, our conference was supporting Lloyd. That doesn't mean everybody in the conference.

Chris W. No, no, that's impossible.

John M. But the jurisdictional delegates, the majority of them, by far, supported Lloyd. And then when he didn't get the needed number of votes, he withdrew, and then Wilbur Choy was nominated, and he was also from our conference, and he was elected. But he didn't have that baggage.

Chris W. Right, right. Was it unusual for him to perform that kind of ceremony?

John M. I think he may have been the first. I don't know whether Ted McIlvenna did or not.

Chris W. Who?

John M. Ted McIlvenna. He could have provided a ceremony of union for people. I don't know whether he did or not. He very likely did. But Lloyd was the first one in our conference who did that.

Chris W. Was that very widely publicized?

John M. I'm sure it must have been. I can't remember exactly. But yes, it certainly was publicized.

Chris W. It would have been in the ‘60s.

John M. Yes, it was. And you could call Lloyd.

Chris W. Yeah, I will.

John M. He’s a wonderful person. Modest person, but just a strong, strong person.

Chris W. Great.

John M. He can tell you about the history of the Japanese conference, but you probably know enough about— generally..

Chris W. I know what’s in the journal.

John M. Yeah, okay.

Chris W. That’s all I know. Was Bishop Tippett a progressive force for the 1950s, do you think?

John M. He certainly was in Los Angeles. And he was outspoken.

Chris W. Well, he was appointed bishop in ’48.

John M. Yes, he was.

Chris W. He was in Los Angeles.

John M. He was elected by the Western Jurisdiction, and the committee appointed him to San Francisco. Northern California and Southern California had been one conference, and he was the first one just of Northern California.

Yes, I think he was— Well, he certainly was supportive of the [Glide] Foundation. And I felt he was supportive of me.

And Cliff Crummey certainly was supportive of me. He got a critical letter about me, a long letter, and it might have been [a flake] or somebody who the letter was from, I don't know. And I wrote the bishop my response. I have a copy of that. No, I think I gave that. It must be in the file.

Chris W. I think I saw that.

John M. It must be in the file. He was supportive of— on the boycott, supportive of Cesar Chavez. He was supportive of that.

Chris W. Bishop Tippett was?

John M. Yeah. And he was— I think he was supportive of campus ministry, too. He had a problem with me. I think I told you, Cliff Crummey said to me once, Bishop Tippett would say, every once in a while said, "Oh, that damn Baptist!" [*Laughs.*] Well, I was, you know, in spirit. But I was a loyal Methodist, too. I was thinking there was another issue that— Well—

Chris W. But he came around on homosexual rights?

John M. Yes, he did. I think that was just new to him. He hadn't really— But he bent on the side of justice. Of justice and freedom.

We also had a strong lay leadership in our conference; very strong lay leadership in those years. It just wasn't clergy. And we had people who, in

the business world, were successful, up on the top of— Well, one of them was a high executive in Standard Oil Company for years, and another one, Cliff Crummey's family, his father— FMC, food, products, manufacturing, a big producer of tanks during the war or whatever else it was. A very wealthy man, and was a very pious Methodist and supported it. His son was Cliff Crummey. There was a president of one of the savings and loans, and attorneys, so people of stature. We don't have any laypeople, hardly any laypeople like that today in conference leadership. I think they've all gone to the Presbyterian Church [*laughs*], or one of the other churches.

Chris W. Or they don't go to church at all.

John M. Yeah, maybe so.

[*End of recording.*]