Oral History Committee
Mill Valley Library Association

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Mill Valley, California

GORDON FOSTER

An Interview Conducted By

Carl Mosher

The Reverend Gordon Foster

Born August 28, 1914 in Detroit, Michigan.

Resident of Mill Valley since 1947.

Interviewed July 1977 in his home at 3 Elma Street, Mill Valley.

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GORDON FOSTER

Carl Mosher

This is July 15, 1977. I'm Carl Mosher, talking to Gordon Foster, much-beloved pastor of the Mill Valley Community Church for twenty-three years. After considerable Jungian training, Gordon is now enjoying a new career as a counselor.

It's quite obvious that these two occupations -- the ministry and counseling -- go together beautifully. I think it would be nice to start our discussion by talking just a little bit, Gordon, about how you feel about the two professions and how your general philosophy has developed over the years in Mill Valley.

Gordon Foster

How I feel about my work is rather a large topic. I was in the active ministry for twenty-five years, after graduating from seminary in Berkeley. My first church was in Santa Rosa during World War Two. I had not only one church there but actually two; I handled the Presbyterian Church as well as the Congregational Church during the shortage of pastors from 1942 to '46. Then we spent a year in New York at Columbia University, in Union Theological Seminary, working on a doctorate in philosophy. We came to Mill Valley in the spring of 1947. We feel it was the most fortunate move we ever made. The years in Mill Valley have been rich in so many ways.

My life as a minister, of course, had many facets to it. It was good training, as you suggested, for the work I'm doing now, since much of the Protestant minister's time is spent in working individually with persons with all kinds of needs. So one has a basic experience in counseling as a result of pastoral work. After a few bouts with poor health in 1970, it seemed wise to let go of the full-time pastorate and take on a less physically arduous kind of work. It was a natural progression from the pastorate into counseling as a profession.

Mr. Mosher

I'm very much interested, and I think everyone will be, in how you happened to feel the call (to use the usual phrase) to the ministry. But first let's talk about your family a little bit.

Mr. Foster

I met my wife, Marjorie, while we were both in college in southern California. I was at Whittier College, and she was a graduate of Occidental College doing some work on a Secondary Teaching Credential the year we met. We were married two years later, in Berkeley, after I started to study for the ministry at the Pacific School of Religion, working for my Bachelor of Divinity degree.

We have four children, all born while we were in Mill Valley. All four went to Old Mill School, right across the street from where we live. Three of them went to Tamalpais High School; our daughter went to Katharine Branson School. Now they are all married and living in various locations in northern California.

Mr. Mosher

And grandchildren?

Mr. Foster

We have five of those so far. It sounds almost indecent in the current context. Four children is a big family these days, given the kind of philosophical and ethical principles the young people are now announcing about flooding the world with too many people. We're glad we lived in an earlier time, however, because we can't think of one of them we would give up!

Mr. Mosher

Can we go back a minute to your parental family?

Mr. Foster

My father was a professional YMCA secretary. In his last position, at the time he died, he was dean of Springfield College, which was known as the International YMCA College, in Springfield, Massachusetts. Before that he was a chemistry teacher at Temple University in Philadelphia. At the time I was born, he was a Boys' Work secretary in Detroit, Michigan.

My mother and father had already adopted two children who were delinquent at the time. My father got interested in these children along about their early teens, and he adopted a girl and a boy and raised them. Many years later they had three children of their own, so they led quite an active life.

My father died in 1927, and two years later my mother brought all of us out to California. We lived in Pasadena, where I went to junior high school and Pasadena Junior College and from there to Whittier College. That was the last of our residence in southern California.

Mr. Mosher

One of the big events of your youth, of course, was a major illness, which I'm sure influenced your life.

Mr. Foster

Yes, as much as anything that occurred to me, I suspect. At the age of eleven, while we were in Springfield, Massachusetts, I contracted polio. It was then a disease that no one knew very much about in terms of prevention -- and even less in terms of aiding a person after he contracted the disease. At the time that I got polio in Springfield, there wasn't another case within four hundred miles. It's a complete mystery how one person is picked out for something like that.

In any case, it was a significant event in my life. It meant, in the first place, four years out of school, just basically recovering the ability to walk and to use one arm. Halfway through that period my parents discovered the Warm Springs Sanitarium in Georgia, which had been opened a short time before by Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was himself a polio victim.

Mr. Mosher

What year are we talking about?

Mr. Foster

We're talking now about 1926 to '30. I think it was in 1926 that I got polio.

Mr. Mosher

What did you do about schooling in this period?

Mr. Foster

I didn't go to school for those four years at all. When I finally came out to California and resumed school, I was four years behind my age group. This was a very curious experience in many ways. Subsequently it turned out to be an advantage.

Mr. Mosher

I didn't mean to interrupt your comment about Warm Springs.

Mr. Foster

It's interesting from a historical point of view. Roosevelt had discovered this old summer resort about ninety miles south of Atlanta when he, himself, was looking for something to help his own polio. He found that the natural warm water that came out of some abundant springs and filled the pool was very helpful to him, so he bought the entire estate. It had been a hotel. He then began to invite other polio victims to come down.

I was among the first dozen to appear there. My parents took me down for a six-week trial to see whether it helped. It did help, and when that term ended I was invited to stay on there in the care of another polio patient, a woman who didn't have any children. I remained with her for almost three years, for long stretches of time. I would go home to Springfield for a month or two each year; the rest of the time I spent at Warm Springs.

Mr. Mosher

Did you meet the Roosevelts while you were there?

Mr. Foster

Yes, we got very close. This, of course, was before he ever began to run in politics. It was before he was elected governor of New York. In fact, we were at Warm Springs when he ran for governor, and we were all very interested in the campaign. He would still come down to Warm Springs on his vacations after he was governor. So we got to know FDR and Eleanor, his wife, and three of his sons who came down. Two of them, Franklin and John, were close to my own age, so we played together quite a bit. It was a very interesting period.

Mr. Mosher

What was your impression of the family at that point? Did you see him as a man? This is particularly interesting because he's a historic figure.

Mr. Foster

One has to remember that we saw him primarily as a fellow victim of polio. We didn't see him as a political figure at all. We all loved him; every patient down there loved him. His trips to Warm Springs were occasions of great pleasure. There were banquets and welcomes and feasts whenever he was there.

He was a great person in the swimming pool. He was a strong swimmer, although he used only his arms. We used to play water polo. We all regarded him almost as a father figure for all of us at that time. I found it hard, later on in his political career, to separate my personal feelings about him from the political figure he became. Fortunately I agreed with most of his politics, so it wasn't a difficult thing to do.

Mr. Mosher

Did you have any contact with him later on in life?

Mr. Foster

I was in correspondence with him even after he became president. And I did see him once after he was president, on one of his campaigns in Los Angeles. He came for a political rally, and I waited in the hotel for him to come up from a speech he was making. I hadn't seen him for eight or nine years. He stepped -- well, he didn't step; he was in a wheelchair -- he was wheeled off the elevator into an anteroom, with Secret Service people all around him. I was allowed to be there. The elevator door opened, he saw me, and he said, "Well, Gordon!" It amazed me that he remembered my name after all those years. But that was the kind of impression he made upon all those who knew him at Warm Springs. It was very personal, very warm.

That was a rather interesting part of my childhood. This was still while I was in junior high school, before I went on to high school.

Mr. Mosher

How did you feel about the adjustment of the Roosevelt boys with whom you played?

Mr. Foster

At the time I knew them, you must remember, they were my contemporaries. They were just friends, and we played together at Warm Springs. I never saw either of them afterwards, so I didn't have any further contact with them. I wouldn't know them if I saw them now.

Mr. Mosher

Your father died in 1927, and your mother brought you to Pasadena -- at which point you were confronted, among other things, with the job of catching up in school.

Mr. Foster

That's right. I started in in the seventh grade at John Marshall Junior High School in Pasadena. I've rather forgotten how many years I actually lost. I think I started school further along than I deserved to be, but it turned out all right.

Mr. Mosher

Did you have tutoring on the side?

Mr. Foster

No, that's the strange thing; I had no tutoring at all. All those four years I was working mainly on my physical problem, getting back my ability to walk and to do some things for myself.

Mr. Mosher

At what point did you start considering going into the ministry? Of course your family was oriented in that direction.

Mr. Foster

At the time my father was in the YMCA it was considered almost a religious vocation. It was the Young Men's Christian Association, and that was emphasized. More recently, in the last several decades, the Y is primarily a group movement and physical education program. At the time he was in it, he saw it almost as a form of ministry. He always wanted to be a minister and never was able to take the time, apparently, to complete his education for that.

Originally, when I went to Whittier College, my purpose was nothing more than to become a YMCA secretary in my father's footsteps. But I got very active in the Student Christian Movement in college and made a decision in my junior year to make my vocation in the church. From then on it was clear that that's what I wanted to do.

Mr. Mosher

Do you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Foster

I have an older brother and a younger sister. I was the middle one.

Mr. Mosher

For one of the children to have such a traumatic illness must have affected the relationship with the family to a certain degree.

Mr. Foster

I think it was very hard on my brother and sister, entirely discounting what it meant to me, because I became the central concern of the family for a number of years. Perhaps this is inevitable when one child is seriously handicapped or ill. I can't answer for how my brother and sister felt about it, but I imagine they had some trouble with it.

A curious thing was that in later years I performed a marriage service for my brother when he married for the second time, and I married my sister the first time. So if there was any alienation, it didn't survive too many years.

Mr. Mosher

Did either one of them go into religious work or anything connected with it?

Mr. Foster

No, they had no interest.

Mr. Mosher

It was a Whittier College, you say, that your orientation in that direction took shape?

Mr. Foster

Yes, it was the leaders that I met in the Student Christian Movement that really interested me in a vocation in the church.

Mr. Mosher

We were talking about a president with whom you had contact earlier, President Roosevelt. Don't I recall a more recent president who attended Whittier College?

Mr. Foster

Yes, Richard Nixon graduated from Whittier the year before I started. We heard nothing about him until he began to run for office, then we heard nothing but Richard Nixon. Many of us at Whittier weren't exactly in his camp politically. We found it rather trying, as the years went on, to be considered his supporters merely by virtue of being fellow alumni of the same school -- which is the attitude that was taken during some of those years.

Mr. Mosher

He didn't represent the finest qualities of Whittier, in your view?

Mr. Foster

In my view, no. You could get many others who would give the opposite opinion. Perhaps not now, because of recent events which have tarnished so much of his reputation, but certainly for many years he was considered the No. 1 alumnus, and circulars that came out rather assumed we were all his adoring supporters. It was rather irritating.

Mr. Mosher

You referred earlier to the fact that when you were at Whittier you met Marjorie, your wife, who was attending Occidental at that time.

Mr. Foster

Yes. That's another small private college in the Los Angeles area, about twenty miles from Whittier. We met in the summer, at a conference in the Sierra that was attended by students from many colleges. Then we went back to our separate schools while I finished and she did

graduate work. We weren't married until the end of my first graduate year in seminary in Berkeley. This was in 1940. I was attending the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley.

During my senior year at Whittier, after I had made up my mind that I wanted to be in the ministry, I applied to a number of theological schools -- Chicago Theological Seminary, Yale Divinity School. I was actually admitted to both of those but decided against going there because at that time they wouldn't allow students to be married while they were on scholarship, and I wanted to get married. Pacific School of Religion said, "We don't have any objections to your being married." Perhaps that's a rather suspicious reason for choosing a theological seminary.

Mr. Mosher

It's a pretty good one, at that.

Mr. Foster

It's turned out so.

Mr. Mosher

How did your religious and philosophical thinking develop, generally speaking, during your attending these two schools?

Mr. Foster

My chief interest at Whittier in undergraduate years was philosophy and psychology. When I went to graduate school, to seminary, my chief interest was theology and also psychology, so they remained the same. I did my major work at seminary on the religious writer and thinker of 150 years ago, Sören Kierkegaard of Denmark, who was at that time very little known among English-speaking theologians because his work had not yet been translated very much into English. I was somewhat ahead of the field in choosing him. I had a great time with Kierkegaard and wrote my dissertation on him. My interest in theology has maintained itself ever since, and also my interest in psychology. These have been the two main foci of my intellectual interest through the years.

My interest in Carl Gustav Jung and his Analytical Psychology also began in college, with a professor who was

a devout student of Jung. I began reading Jung's works in college and continued to be familiar with a lot of his writings all during my twenty-five years as a pastor. When I wished to continue studying in that field, it seemed natural to try to go to Switzerland, where Jung did his work in Zurich, and study there for a year -- which we did.

Mr. Mosher

The Community Church in Mill Valley, like a lot of modern churches, is not particularly orthodox in the old sense. Would you care to comment on that?

Mr. Foster

At the time I came to Mill Valley and to the Community Church, the church was independent. It had no connection at all with any denomination; it was a single, independent, Protestant church. It was founded in 1925 by a group of Mill Valley people who, for a number of reasons, were not content with any of the then-existing churches in Mill Valley. Perhaps half of them were members of the faculty at Tamalpais High School. They met together, and they began to talk about having an independent community church. They finally organized in 1925 and began to meet in the Outdoor Art Club, as an available space. They met there on Sunday evenings for five years. They called as their first minister a professor of Christian Ethics at San Anselmo Seminary, a Presbyterian, Dr. Lynn Townsend White, Sr. He served the church from 1925 until about 1942, with a break of a year and half some time in there when it was served by Lawrence Cross, who was a Congregational minister from Berkeley and was at one time mayor of Berkeley -- a great liberal minister and, it turned out, politican in Berkeley. He became mayor back in the forties.

As I say, the church met in the Outdoor Art Club for five years. They liked the architecture of that building so much that, when they decided to build their own church, they wanted it to look like that. They secured property on the corner of Olive Street and Throckmorton -- kind of an odd-shaped piece of property, kind of a wedge shape. They contracted with a draftsman to draw plans for a building, and their instructions to him were to draw it after the fashion of the Outdoor Art Club. Anyone who goes into the two buildings can see at once that they're almost identical in beam structure inside. They're not quite similar on the outside, but the roof beams inside are identical.

In 1930 they raised the magnificent sum of $12,000 and built that beautiful building. For $12,000! The plans were drawn finally by a draftsman who was on the faculty at Tamalpais High School. I can't recall his name. He was also a ship draftsman; he worked in Sausalito. The building was erected, superintended by another teacher at Tamalpais High School, the Manual Arts teacher down there. He privately contracted and built the building -- a beautiful job. The pews, the pulpit, and the chancel furniture were created in the woodwork shops by students at Tamalpais High School. The whole project was a community adventure, in a sense.

I neglected to mention that, at the time the church was organized, the group of independent religious people inquired of the three existing churches (the Episcopal Church, the Congregational Church, and -- well, I can't speak for more than those two) whether they would join them and make it a really authentic Community Church representing Protestants in Mill Valley. The other churches considered it. When the time came for the decision, the Congregational Church, which had a building in the first block up Summit Avenue (the building still exists)[1], voted to come into the new church. That was a struggling church and couldn't really afford a full-time ministry staff, so their congregation voted to sell their property and come as a group into the Community Church, which they did. This meant that the founding of the Community Church didn't increase the number of churches in Mill Valley at that time.

The building was dedicated in 1930. It consisted at that time of just one large room, sanctuary, which was built in such a fashion that it could be used for multiple purposes. The pews were movable, and it had a small kitchen off to one side. When I came there, this was the only building. It was quite customary for us to use the church as a sanctuary on Sunday mornings and then to have the young people come in on Sunday evenings, move all the pews off the main floor, and have a folk dance. At other times during the week they would move the pews and set up tables and have church dinners. It was used quite a bit as a community hall by other groups. It was a very adaptable building.

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[1] 24 Summit Avenue.

We used it that way until 1952, when the church began to grow so much in numbers that it became apparent additional space was needed. After considerable effort and two building drives, the church erected a large social hall, educational building, adjacent to the old sanctuary. This first required the removal of two houses that were there, and it took considerable negotiation to accomplish all this. The new building was built between the old sanctuary and the building on the corner of Olive and Lovell, which was the Christian Science Church at that time.

At that same time the church acquired a property across Olive Street, on the corner of Olive and Throckmorton, a two-story house and a vacant lot on the corner. We were very optimistic at that time (as were all Protestant churches). People were sure that within a short span of ten years we would have to enlarge again, so we acquired this additional property. It didn't come to that, and eventually the property was sold. However, in the 1960s we did purchase the Christian Science Church when they moved out to Camino Alto, just outside Mill Valley, so now we have the property on Olive from Throckmorton up to Lovell Avenue.

Mr. Mosher

I've noticed that your new addition isn't in the same architectural theme as the original building. How did you happen to vary at that point? It would have seemed logical to carry on the original theme.

Mr. Foster

There was a good deal of discussion of that. One must remember, however, that in 1930 there were very few restrictions against building public buildings all out of wood. By 1952-53, fire codes and building codes wouldn't permit that kind of construction for a building that was going to have public use. It would have been impossible at the time to construct a redwood building.

We hired Eugene Crawford, a very fine Marin County and Mill Valley architect, who did construct a building that doesn't clash too much. It's of brick building blocks with redwood trim. It's a different style, but we all were very happy with the result. It gave us a lot of space, and it conformed to the various codes that we had to meet at that time. It's interesting that, while the original building cost $12,000, the addition was closer to $200,000.

Mr. Mosher

And the times have changed in other ways, too.

Mr. Foster

Yes, you're right.

Mr. Mosher

You said Dr. White was the original minister. Was there one other before you came?

Mr. Foster

Yes, Reverend G. Arthur Cassidy, who was a close friend of mine. After he left Mill Valley in 1945-46, he went to the First Congregational Church of Palo Alto and was there for some twenty-eight years. I had known Art Cassidy during my college years in southern California and after that at Pacific School of Religion. It was interesting that we should follow him here in Mill Valley. He was pastor of the Mill Valley Community Church during the difficult years of the war. A wonderful person.

Mr. Mosher

He probably had something to do with your coming here. Were you in contact with him?

Mr. Foster

We were friends, but he actually had nothing to do with my invitation to come here. That came about through our denominational executive, who was asked for candidates. Although the church was not a denominational church, they inquired of Dr. Harley H. Gill in San Francisco if he knew any ministers that he would recommend for Mill Valley, and he named me. At that time I was back in New York. We got an inquiry from the church in 1947 as to whether we would like to come here. At that time we were thinking about coming out here. I already knew about the church and had been in it because my friend Art had been pastor there, so it seemed a natural choice.

Making the leap from New York to Mill Valley seems strange and kind of accidental, but it wasn't so accidental, the way things worked out.

Mr. Mosher

Your total career as a pastor, then, has been here in Mill Valley?

Mr. Foster

Except for the five years in Santa Rosa during the war.

Mr. Mosher

I'm curious to know what aspect of the ministry you relished the most -- and what aspect the least.

Mr. Foster

(Laughs) During the early years, when I had a lot of vitality, I suppose I delighted most in the work with young people. We had a very successful youth program during those years. We were perhaps the only church in town at that time that had a really active youth program going, with many, many young people in it. I've kept in touch with a number of them through the years. After the church grew larger and I had other duties that were equally pressing, we employed an associate minister, Reverend Jack Bartlett, who then took on the youth work, and I concentrated on other aspects of the work.

I felt most useful, perhaps, in the individual work with people -- in counseling, hospital visits, small-group work, that sort of thing. Preaching was a constant, heavy challenge which I worked very hard at but always felt was a heavy responsibility. I can't honestly say I enjoyed it as much as some other parts of the work, but it's an indispensable part of the ministry.

Mr. Mosher

Your sermons always showed evidence of a tremendous amount of thought and preparation. How much time did you spend during the week, on an average?

Mr. Foster

I worked rather hard at that. Throughout my years in the ministry I was very jealous of the morning hours. I customarily worked in my study at home from eight or eight-thirty until noon. I was incommunicado for the most part during those hours -- sometimes to the exasperation of people. I did my reading and my writing and preparation of sermons during those hours. At one o'clock I went to the church and did the necessary administrative work. I spent the afternoons largely in counseling and visitation in homes. Then of course I spent many, many evenings in committees and group work. It was a very full kind of life.

Mr. Mosher

Apparently the personal contact part of it was very congenial to you -- which certainly fits into your new career as a counselor.

Mr. Foster

Yes, it was. I think I'm a fairly extrovert kind of person -- at least I was during those years. I really enjoyed people, really enjoyed being in groups and organizing groups and organizing programs. I'm less so now; I'm very content to have some hours to myself.

Mr. Mosher

During your years as pastor of that church, there were a lot of interesting and even eminent people who were members and attended the church. Let's recall a few of those names and talk about them a bit. I think of the Overstreets, just as a start.

Mr. Foster

They were perhaps the best-known members of the church -- Harry and Bonaro Overstreet. At that time they were very busy lecturing and writing books together. I think they wrote almost a dozen books together. They lived in Mill Valley and surprised us all by coming to church one day and then coming regularly every Sunday for almost a year. When I finally went to see them and asked why they didn't join the church, they said, "That's a good idea." So they did. Subsequently they moved to Falls Church, Virginia, but they were very much a part of our church for some important years. They were difficult years for many people because of the hysteria of the so-called McCarthy period. Mill Valley was subject to many fears and anxieties on the part of many people who concluded that it was a dangerous, radical community.

Mr. Mosher

Were you under attack personally during that period?

Mr. Foster

Oh, yes. Anyone, I think, who had any social conscience or breadth of insight into what was going on in the world was under attack in Marin County during those years, and particularly in Mill Valley. Some scandalous things happened in the community, and they were very hard

to bear. For the most part we did all survive them, but it was a time when rumors were rife. They couldn't help affecting anyone in a position like mine -- constantly speaking to the public and trying to deal with relevant ethical and social issues. One quickly became tainted in the eyes of certain people, and very strange things went on.

Mr. Mosher

Did your attacks come from within your congregation -- members who were critical of what you were saying in the pulpit?

Mr. Foster

There were a few in the congregation who were very unhappy. If I were honest I would have to say there were a number of people who eventually left the church because they disagreed with the social philosophy of the minister. The heaviest attacks, however, came from groups within the county and within the community that were attacking almost anyone who expressed himself publicly and didn't express their views. It was a phenomenon of the times, not just of the church, certainly.

Mr. Mosher

Since this is a kind of historic document, and since this is a part of the history of the country as well as of Mill Valley, you might comment further on the general effect of this period which we call McCarthyism.

Mr. Foster

The effect was to make us all very anxious about what we said and how it was reported, by people and by newspapers. Mill Valley, for example, had a period when there was an official endorsement by the mayor of a thing called Anti-Red Week, "Send Them Back to Russia" Week. The newspaper solicited funds to send certain Mill Valley presumed radicals back to Russia, and funds were actually contributed.

Mr. Mosher

That would seem to say that it was built largely around the Communist issue. However, I'm sure it was a much deeper consideration than that.

Mr. Foster

Yes, I think so. It was a time of fear.

Mr. Mosher

Fear of what?

Mr. Foster

I suppose one would have to say a fear of radicals in general -- whatever people meant when they used that term. It was a fear that certain groups of people were trying to overturn the American principles, the American way of government, the American style of life. It was much wider, of course, than Marin County. It was a national phenomenon. It was heightened, made almost insane, by such men as Senator McCarthy.[1] Many people suffered from it -- and for years afterward.

It was an assistant mayor of Mill Valley, come to think of it, who, during the absence of the mayor, issued an official proclamation endorsing Anti-Red Week and soliciting funds. Some of us were very disturbed by this and made various kinds of public statements in opposition to this sort of hysteria. It was a very disturbing time. Strange things happened.

There were members of my congregation who left the church at that time because of my outspoken feeling about things like that. And of course we were attacked as a church because of my leadership -- by people in Mill Valley and in other parts of the county.

Mr. Mosher

That is particularly shocking in Mill Valley, which is presumed to be a liberal, avant-garde area with a lot of intellectuals. I seem to recall that once Bonaro, Mrs. Overstreet, was cancelled as a speaker at the Outdoor Art Club, and there was a furor over that.

Mr. Foster

I don't recall that, but I know that both Dr. and Mrs. Overstreet were scheduled to speak at a public meeting

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[1] Joseph R. McCarthy, Wisconsin Republican, headed a Senate subcommittee investigating communism in government operations. His free-wheeling hearings created a political climate in the United States that approached hysteria.

in a local church and were giving their lecture when one of the leading members of that church stood up and challenged them as subversives. Things like that happened.

Mr. Mosher

When this leading person in the church (and probably in the community, too) attacked them as subversives, what was really in his head when he used that word? He knew they weren't trying to overthrow the government, but it represented a point of view that was so rife then.

Mr. Foster

As I recall, the things that agitated people were, for example, considerations of support of the United Nations, talk about disarmament, talk about racial equality. This was the kind of theme that apparently upset people a great deal. A fear pervaded the entire country that there was some sort of underground conspiracy of tremendous magnitude going on in the country that at any moment, if we weren't careful to identify these people, could take over federal power and actually make us a Communist nation.

I recall a similar period when I was in college in the thirties. The same kind of thing went on -- what we then called Red-baiting. So this was a recurrence of something that is sort of endemic, I guess, in this society and comes out in times of fear.

Mr. Mosher

It's sort of historically prevalent in every society, a kind of mini-inquisition, in a sense. I guess it went on in nearly every community, but it was particularly interesting here. Amazing!

Mr. Foster

Well, Mill Valley survived.

Mr. Mosher

So did the other communities, but they were affected by it. I'm sure your ministry was affected in certain important ways.

Who else do you think of in the congregation who was particularly interesting?

Mr. Foster

I don't know that I can claim national attention for

other members of the congregation. We had fascinating people just as regular members of the church -- people in all kinds of professional roles in the community and in the city.

Mr. Mosher

Were the Ralston Whites involved in the Community Church?

Mr. Foster

They were not directly involved, but their niece, Jean Barnard, Mrs. John Barnard, who subsequently became city councilwoman and mayor of Mill Valley, was always a very devoted member of the church -- she and her husband. Through them the Ralston White estate, called the Garden of Allah, was deeded to the United Church of Christ, which is the denomination that the Community Church entered. Our church was largely responsible for the fact that this property became a retreat center and was deeded to the denomination many years ago.

I remember how that came about. Mrs. Barnard came into my study one morning and said that her aunt[1] was finding the Garden of Allah too heavy a responsibility to maintain financially and was trying to find some way to let go of it where it would be preserved and not made into housing units. At that time I happened to know that our denomination was looking for a place to establish as a retreat center for religious meetings and conferences, so I brought the two parties together. It was worked out right away; within six months the property was deeded as a gift to the United Church of Christ and became the Ralston L. White Retreat. Our church felt very responsible for that development. It's interesting how these things work out through the years.

Mr. Mosher

I know another prominent family, the Wheelwrights, who were in the church.

Mr. Foster

Ah yes. George and Hope Wheelwright and their family had, in the late forties, purchased some eighty

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[1]Ruth White Bowie.

acres of land extending from Muir Beach to Tamalpais Valley. George at first conducted a school for children on that property. Later he went into cattle ranching. He imported some very precious Hereford bulls from England and started a breeding farm there. By means of an intricate irrigation system, he turned the valley into a lush green. He raised cattle there for maybe fifteen years.

George and Hope became very active members of the church and loaned their property many times for things that the church had -- group meetings, young people's meetings. We felt at times almost as though the Green Gulch Ranch was part of the parish.

George was one of the co-inventors of the Polaroid Land camera. To put it more accurately, he and Land, for whom the camera became named, were the pioneers in developing Polaroid lenses and the use of Polaroid lenses in eyeglasses during the war. Later on Mr. Land invented the instant Polaroid camera. George was a partner in that but was not the active partner at that time.

Mr. Mosher

Was he a scientist by profession?

Mr. Foster

Yes, George was a physicist and had taught physics at Harvard University at one time. He has had careers of various kinds. He was a navigator on long-range navy bombers during the war, flew many times in the Pacific theatre as a navigator. He was a teacher, he was a physicist, a cattleman -- all kinds of things.

Mr. Mosher

He had a tremendous range of interests. Then came the tragic day when his wife suddenly became ill.

Mr. Foster

Yes, Hope died of cancer. George subsequently re-married and bought an extensive cattle ranch on the border of California and Nevada, eighty miles northwest of Reno. At the present time he's living in Belvedere, and at the age of -- well, perhaps I shouldn't mention his age, but he is now teaching skiing at Squaw Valley during the winter.

Mr. Mosher

Shall we say mid-seventies?

Mr. Foster

Yes.

Mr. Mosher

That is a remarkable career. But he's a remarkable man.

Does anyone else come to mind in your congregation? I know you had a lot of wonderful people who were perhaps not as eminent but were great workers.

Mr. Foster

My memories of the church are of people very alive. The thing that made it an interesting period was partly sociological. We came to the church in '47. That was the beginning of the big movement of men who had been through the war and were, for the first time, establishing homes and beginning families. In Mill Valley at that time we had hundreds of young families, professional men and businessmen, who largely worked in San Francisco but chose to live in Mill Valley. They were really beginning their first homes, getting their families started, and this was the first time in their lives they had been able to do so because of the war.

It was an exciting community at that time. The schools were growing; there was a great deal of interest in education. In the church there were hundreds of young couples who found the church a natural place to associate with other couples and become acquainted with each other. It was quite a different situation than it is now.

At one time, for example -- just as a sample of what was going on in the community -- our church school had approximately three hundred children coming on Sunday mornings. We ran out of space. We built the new building to take care of this. At one time we actually were using classroom space at a church a block away, in addition to our own. Everyone thought this was going to be the permanent state of Mill Valley -- not only churches overexpanded but schools overexpanded.

Now we see questions being raised as to whether schools need to be closed. Teachers are being laid off.

In the church, instead of three hundred children on Sunday morning we have maybe twelve to fifteen children. This doesn't just represent a religious change (although it's partly that), but it represents the sociological change in Mill Valley because of increasing property values, costs, and taxes. This has meant, over the last ten or fifteen years, that young families can't easily come here to live. So they don't. They move to surrounding communities, further north in the county. The child population of the town diminishes, affecting the churches and the schools and all the other things that we do in the community. We're now becoming a town where retired and older people find it difficult to hold onto property after retirement. Young families can't buy property, so we're getting to be a middle-aged community, largely of people from, say, thirty-five to fifty-five.

Mr. Mosher

And largely pretty affluent.

Mr. Foster

Yes, one has to be to come into this community now. Those who have been here are finding it hard to hang on. This is true not only of Mill Valley but of all the towns in Marin County.

Mr. Mosher

While we're speaking generally, we might speak of the changes that you've observed in the general character of the town between 1947 and now.

Mr. Foster

It's hard to know where to begin. I suppose the first thing I would mention is that it's a much busier town. One has only to walk downtown on a Saturday, for example, to be caught in traffic problems and people by the hundreds -- where ten or fifteen years ago there would be people by the dozens.

Mr. Mosher

An inverse ratio, more or less like your Sunday School attendance.

Mr. Foster

Exactly. The type of business has altered somewhat.

There are many more boutique kinds of shops that are continually changing, moving in and out as people try various things here. Some of the stable and staple businesses are still here, of course, but even those have changed a great deal. One thinks, for example, of the Mill Valley Market, which has continually expanded and moved to larger quarters over the last twenty-five years.

Mr. Mosher

In 1947, when you came here, the market was quite different, wasn't it?

Mr. Foster

Yes, it was right next to the Old Mill Tavern, on Throckmorton, where the Mill Valley Laundromat is now.[1] I understand that before I came to Mill Valley it was further up Throckmorton, near Dowd's, somewhere in there. So it's made three moves.

We used to have a fairly large department store, Albert's. It later became Mayer's. Both are now gone, and the building is used for a number of different things.

I do feel, though, that Mill Valley has changed less in some of its essential atmosphere than other communities I've seen around the county. The downtown area is much busier, there's much more movement, much more life, much more traffic -- but the uniqueness of Mill Valley has been that, at least on the hill parts of the community, houses have been built back in the woods through the years (by the hundreds, I suspect) in ways that one hardly realizes they've been built. So the town's population is much larger, but one still has the feeling, on some of the roads, that he is pretty far away from civilization.

Mr. Mosher

Because of the terrain, you can't see the changes, but the feeling has changed considerably.

This has always been a desirable place to live for artists and media people and musicians from the metropolitan area. I think that has had a lot to do with the difference in atmosphere you referred to.

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[1] 118 Throckmorton.

Mr. Foster

Those of us who were around twenty-five years ago remember how it was possible to stroll downtown any evening and see hardly anyone. There were very few cars, very few people, no stores open. Now we have a crowded downtown almost all the time, even on Sundays.

Mr. Mosher

A lot of people who are in touch with the history of Mill Valley feel that, in a sense, its direction was changed when a song -- I think it was entitled "Mill Valley Is My Home"[1] -- was recorded by a group of school children and started Mill Valley on a kind of new period of notoriety.

And now we've gotten into the drug scene. Do you have any comments on that?

Mr. Foster

It was a very serious time during the last years I was at the church, from about 1965 through 1970. We had hundreds of young people who were really caught up in the drug scene and all that means, wandering through Marin County, some of them in very bad shape. The churches at that time established rooms where people could come and stay for one, two, or three nights when they had no place else to go. There were many, many problems attendant upon that.

The Community Church initiated, during those years, a coffeehouse that we thought would serve this group. We managed it for about a year, when it became just unmanageable because of the drugs that were brought onto the scene, the pot that was being smoked, and the general deterioration of property and carelessness on the part of those that were using the property, the anger of neighbors who had justified complaints about the noise and the litter. After a very earnest attempt to provide a service for the drifters that were coming through, we simply couldn't continue. The Methodist Church managed for almost two years to keep a place where people could come and stay overnight. They had very serious problems there, too.

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[1] "Mill Valley," written by Rita Abrams and recorded in 1970 by her third-grade students at Strawberry Point School.

The downtown area was an aggravation to many citizens because the former bus depot in the center of Lytton Square became almost an encampment for young people of the type that were footloose and unattached to any family or community. We had all kinds of problems with litter, drugs, and some violence. It was a very bad scene for four or five years. My impression is that it's much better now, as far as one being able to notice what's going on, although some of those things are, of course, still going on.

Mr. Mosher

There was irresponsibility back in the twenties and thirties with the young people, too, when you were growing up. This has always been a kind of characteristic of youth; they're experimenting. I raise this point to ask what basic differences, if any, you sense between today's community and the days when you were young.

Mr. Foster

Well, if you go back to when I was young, it's a very different kind of world.

Mr. Mosher

I know it is on the surface, but I wonder whether you see a difference in basic attitudes.

Mr. Foster

My main comment about that would be that, when I was in junior high school and high school, no matter what we were doing contrary to our parents' knowledge, we were still very much located in our homes and saw that as a place where we wanted to be. We were certainly not drifting off through the countryside or living in communes with other young people. We got into mischief, as every generation does, but it was still a home community, by and large. People were related to their parents and their families. Parents, too, were more likely to be together than to be divorced and remarried and divorced again. There were a lot of changes like that.

Perhaps one always looks back and thinks that one's own childhood was in some ways better. In some ways perhaps it was, although some of the young people who have come out of recent events are turning out to be very superior human beings after they have gone through their Sturm und Drang and their rebellion. So I don't care to say that one era was all good and one bad; it isn't true.

Mr. Mosher

As a student of Jung, I guess you would feel this is part of the growth process which makes for wholeness. It's been pretty violent in a way, hasn't it?

Mr. Foster

If I were speaking psychologically maybe I could say more positively that I do believe there are in all of us positive and negative factors that are part of our natural psychic endowment. Perhaps there will be a better generation in the future because young people have acknowledged more of the negative side of life, have lived it through, and have come to some kind of terms incorporating that consciously. Perhaps it's possible to dream that there will be a greater maturity in adults a generation from now than there was in the past.

Mr. Mosher

It will be interesting to see what kind of parents these people make on the whole. That's where the chain is.

Mr. Foster

In our own family, for example, I feel that our youngest son, who was caught in that whole period of the drugs and everything else and who had a very bad time in high school, has nevertheless turned out with a kind of maturity that is really phenomenal when compared with his sister and his older brothers. I would say in some ways he probably has a better emotional foundation than the older children. It will remain to be seen, of course, what happens with that.

I've seen many young people who were in that terrible era of seven or ten years ago and have now gone through it and have been able to use the experience as an enriching one rather than a totally destructive one. Of course you can also point to the others who didn't survive it and are perhaps marred for life. I can think of individuals in this community who are going to be casualties of that scene for the rest of their lives. So it's a mixture, but perhaps the overall picture will be more positive than one has felt at times in the last years.

Mr. Mosher

We talked about some of the characteristics of the

fifties as they were reflected in the Community Church. Can you think of anything comparable for the sixties? Social trends or church history that was particularly typical of the sixties?

Mr. Foster

The point of greatest social agitation for the church during the sixties focused around two areas. In our church, at least, and in the denomination (United Church of Christ), we were divided sharply over the farm labor issues and over the Vietnam War, with racial issues being a third important factor which excited people and produced anger and bitterness within the congregation and within the denomination.

The Vietnam War was a very divisive period within our churches, as it was for the whole country. Many members of the professional ministry were actively opposed for ten years to our participation in the Vietnam scene, very outspoken about it. Many of the lay people in the congregation did not by any means share these views, so there was a great deal of strife within congregations and within denominations over this. Many ministers lost their jobs; many people left the church over the stand that their ministers took.

Down in the San Joaquin Valley, where the farm labor problem was intense -- the unionization of farm laborers -- our churches were equally divided, with many of the ministers supporting the unionization and many of the members on the other side, being ranchers themselves and owners of property. Since our denomination as a whole took a strong position in support of farm labor unionization, some of our churches down in the valley actually left the denomination. This was true of other denominations, too, other churches in that area.

Those were the big issues of the sixties, and they were very bitter issues.

Mr. Mosher

Particularly the Vietnam War. You had a reputation, I know, through all your years in the ministry here, of discussing all these social issues and things that were important. You weren't fearful of bringing up these subjects, and you related them to what you believed to be proper Christian...

Mr. Foster

I tried to. It may have been that at times I was fearful as I did it. Certainly it was not easy at times. I developed a habit, in the last ten years in the ministry, of automatically tape-recording every sermon that I did. I found this useful when people would later charge that I had said thus-and-so. I was able to answer that kind of a charge by saying, "Would you come down to the church next week, and I'll play the tape recording of the service. You can point out to me where I said what you say I said." Invariably it was a misquote or a misinterpretation. Someone heard what they perhaps wanted to hear, rather than what I actually said. A tape recorder was of benefit to me, where it turned out not to be a benefit to Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Mosher

What subjects were they generally interested in? The Vietnam War primarily?

Mr. Foster

One could get into that kind of trouble in touching on any of the things I just mentioned. If one mentioned the grape strike, for example, or even discussed the problems of youth in the community -- which was a hot potato -- one could be sure there would always be someone in the congregation who would be either openly angry or secretly angry at something one had said.

It was difficult for all ministers. None of us wanted to become men who were so careful about what we were saying that we didn't say anything of significance. That was the danger. It got to the point where one could be attacked on a variety of subjects, so that the only safety lay perhaps in a kind of pietistic, religious kind of preaching which never raised any vital issues having to do with contemporary life. There are many churches that can do that quite successfully. I never was able to do that as a minister, and I considered myself very fortunate to have been in a church for so long where such a large degree of freedom was granted to me. Certainly never was there any attitude on the part of any official body in the church telling me that I could not say this or I could not talk about that. There were individuals who perhaps would have liked to have that happen, but never did it happen in an official sense.

Mr. Mosher

In addition to the comments on Sunday, did you have membership meetings, where these relevant matters could be discussed?

Mr. Foster

Yes, we debated many of these things in congregational meetings, in discussion meetings, in seminars and classes. In addition to preaching in those years, I had for many years, a nine-thirty adult class in which we discussed almost anything that anyone wanted to discuss. That was good, because it gave a chance for people not simply to sit and listen to the minister give his thoughts but to participate themselves and to argue back and forth. That both builds tension and relieves it. It's a better process than just one man talking to people in a worship service, where the etiquette says you can't talk back.

Mr. Mosher

What other churchwide activities come to your mind, either during the week or on Sundays, that affected the community and the membership?

Mr. Foster

I'm not sure just how to answer that. My philosophy has been, about churches and their effect upon the community, that a communion or fellowship of Christians does more through what the individual members do and the way they live their lives in the community than does the church acting in concert as a body. In other words, it's much more effective if a hundred people listening to and participating in a service of worship get a conviction about what they would like to see happen in the community -- and then go out individually wherever they are to influence the community -- than for a petition to be signed by a hundred people taking some kind of concerted action representing the Community Church.

As a matter of fact, we could never do that; part of our church philosophy was that the church does not speak on issues in the name of everyone. The most that the church can do is say, "Twenty-five members of the Community Church take this position," which acknowledges that maybe there are seventy-five other members that haven't agreed. Even that was prickly, because people felt that if anyone spoke in the name of the church it somehow represented them. All churches have had this problem.

I can't think of any social programs that our church ever conducted in the community, as a church -- with the exception of the attempt to conduct a coffeehouse for the young people for a while.

Mr. Mosher

Did you have an ongoing conflict of any sort with people in the church who wanted a more orthodox type of old-fashioned-religion presentation?

Mr. Foster

No, that was never a problem in the Community Church. It was a kind of open church, in the sense that there was no formal, written creed to which one had to subscribe to become a member of the church. It is a very broad, inclusive kind of church. The old battle between liberals and fundamentalists, for example, never was a problem. There would be individual people who would disagree with the Biblical interpretation of the minister, perhaps, but they would talk that over with the minister. They wouldn't be angry, particularly, about it. We never had that kind of division to deal with. The liberal, conservative political opinions were more sharply drawn sometimes. But that was not just because it was that church; it was a part of society's division which reflected in the church.

Mr. Mosher

I happen to know that in the years of your ministry, Gordon, you were very highly regarded in every respect, but perhaps particularly for your conduct of funerals and weddings and other peripheral events, if you would call them that, of the church organization. Would you care to comment? Let's talk about funerals first, then a more pleasant subject, weddings. You had a tendency to personalize all these things, and to do it in such a thoughtful manner. It would be interesting to hear how you approached a funeral service.

Mr. Foster

I think many ministers try to do this, if one doesn't belong to a strictly ecclesiastical ministry. There are churches, for example, where there is a formal burial service which is invariably the same, no matter whom it is in memory of. I never was in that kind of church, so I never developed that kind of service. My attempt was always to visit with people before a funeral, to know them as well as I could. Of course this was easier when they were

members of the church and I had had years of acquaintanceship with them. Then I tried indeed to be as personal as possible in any remarks that were made in a memorial service.

I don't know what more can be said about it than that, except perhaps about the process of going to visit a family as soon as one hears of a death -- and often as a pastor one has been connected with the family for a long time beforehand. If there has been a long illness you've been a part of that experience with the family, so it isn't something abrupt and new. But always one tries to get from the family some expression of what they want the service to be like. I tried, then, to reflect this as well as I could in my comments about that family and that person. It was difficult to do in services where one was called the day before by the mortician, who said, "We're having a service, and we need a minister." Sometimes one didn't even have an opportunity to meet with the family beforehand. It's a difficult thing to be personal in those respects.

The grief experience, to any pastor who is conscientious, is recognized as one of the pivotal experiences of life. If he is allowed to share this with a family, he is admitted to a kind of personal area that is very precious for future relationships and past relationships. So this is an important part of the ministry.

Weddings are, of course, a totally different thing. In most cases they are joyous occasions. I certainly did a lot of weddings. I have a card file of them -- four hundred and some weddings I did in those years. They were all different. I consider myself fortunate to have lived during a period where a minister was more or less allowed to do the marriage service that he thought was appropriate. In recent years the attempt has been toward uniqueness in marriage services, so that now, when one agrees to do a marriage, one has to listen to the bride and groom as they write their own service. It may not be anything that you particularly want to do, as a minister, and I'm rather glad I'm not doing weddings now, because of that problem.

Weddings really were joyous occasions. If it's made that kind of occasion in the church, often that family remains a part of the church, and the children who come remain a part of the church. I'd say it's one of the more positive experiences of a pastor.

Mr. Mosher

In my experience, you used to always get a marvelous combination of responsibility and hope in your wedding ceremonies.

Mr. Foster

In comments to the bride and groom?

Mr. Mosher

Yes.

Mr. Foster

I suppose I developed some verbal formulas that became traditional as the years went along.

Mr. Mosher

They were a joy to hear. I think that's why you had so many weddings.

Unless you have more comments in general on the sixties, I'd like to talk about the Jung Institute and your experiences in Switzerland.

Mr. Foster

When I left the Community Church in the spring of 1970 I had arranged to go to Zurich on a fellowship for a year's study at the C. G. Jung Institute, which is the original institute for training Jungian analysts. The Jungians now have institutes in various parts of the world. There's one in San Francisco, one in Los Angeles, one in New York, one in Chicago, one in London, and other places. But the original place was Zurich, where Jung lived. Many of the first generation of his students are still teaching at the Jung Institute in Zurich, so one meets the people who knew Jung in his early years and are still training others.

We timed it just right. Our fourth child, a son, was going off to college, so that meant we were without any children for the first time in about thirty years.

Mr. Mosher

Was Marjorie studying too?

Mr. Foster

She attended a few classes over there, but she

was doing other things that interested her -- attending concerts and visiting art museums, largely.

With all the children having left home, we were able to go just as husband and wife to an experience that was simply marvelous. We had a beautiful apartment in Zurich within walking distance of the institute. The schedule was very relaxed. In that kind of school over there they have long periods during the school year when classes cease and everyone goes skiing or hiking. We had a month to travel before school started, then a month at Christmas time, and six weeks at Easter time. We got into every part of Switzerland over and over again. We did our traveling by walking and riding trains and buses; we didn't have a car. We learned very early to pack a light backpack with clothes for a week and simply take off from Zurich and walk from village to village and up in the mountains and stay wherever we felt like at night.

In between these trips I was studying at the institute, doing a training analysis with an analyst there, which was part of my training. I worked with her three times a week and attended classes the rest of the time. It made a very stimulating year. We spent the year almost entirely in Switzerland. We did go to Germany at the very end of the year to attend the four Wagner Ring operas in Bayreuth. These are performed every year in Bayreuth in the Wagner Festspielhaus. We also went to France. We went to Milan to go to the opera one time. We traveled to Salzburg on a trip once. Other than that we spent the time in Switzerland and got to know the country very well.

Mr. Mosher

Is it in Switzerland where they perform the Passion Play?

Mr. Foster

That's at Oberammergau in Germany. It's performed every ten years in that German village. I remember when my family took us to Europe when I was nine years old, and my parents went to see it while they farmed the children out with some sitters. We were considered too young to see it at that time, and I never saw it as an adult.

Mr. Mosher

In your hiking in that gorgeous country over there, did you ever visit the Jung home, which I understand he built more or less with his own hands?

Mr. Foster

That was at Bollingen, his private retreat. No, we never did go down. At that time we were discouraged from going there. We asked about it and were told it wasn't open to the public. I think if I were over there now I could get permission to go, because they are now accepting some visitors from the institute. We did see his home in Kusnacht, which was his regular home.

Mr. Mosher

The home at Bollingen had symbolic as well as other significance in his life, didn't it?

Mr. Foster

Yes, very much so. It had no electricity, no telephone. He cooked over an open fire. He did all the stonework himself. I've seen pictures of it, and it's magnificent. He carved figures and Latin mottoes in stone. He actually did all the stonemasonry himself. He built the entire building himself. It was where he went when he wanted to go inward, to introvert and get in touch with his own psyche. He did some of his writing there, although not by any means all of it. He also wrote a great deal at his home in Kusnacht. But he had a large family, so I expect there were times when he retreated.

Mr. Mosher

What do you do when you want to retreat inwardly and contemplate?

Mr. Foster

I come here to my study. I still do a great deal of reading, both as a hobby, just as entertainment, and also to keep up with psychological material. And I still have some of my theological books which I dip into when I'm interested in that.

Mr. Mosher

You've had a tremendously varied and contemplative and thoughtful life. I'd love to hear you comment on your philosophy of life generally.

Mr. Foster

That's an awfully big order, isn't it?

Mr. Mosher

I know, yet I'd love to hear it.

Mr. Foster

I'll try to say something about that. I think the first thing that comes to mind is the feeling that grows on me with every year I live that life is by no means long enough for any of us to arrive at very many ultimate truths. I rather feel as though the older I get, the less I'm sure of -- but what I am sure of seems more certain. Does that make any sense?

I think that as I grow older, more of my values and thoughts and opinions are my own, rather than just the imitation of someone who has impressed me. I think for instance in preaching, as a younger man, I was often simply reflecting and interpreting what I had been reading in the past few months. I did a lot of reading and studying, and it was out of that that I would develop my preaching. As I look back at some of those old sermons, I realize that a lot of what I was saying, while perfectly valid, was not exactly my thought but what I was getting from others.

There's nothing wrong with that. I think we all do it, earlier on. But later sermons and later writing became more my distillation of my own life experience and the experience I had seen others have, so that it became more personal. At the same time you have less material that you can easily use if you want to be honest. There's less that you can say positively.

I think that process will probably go on the rest of my life. I would not be able to be very fluent in talking about a great range of things that I believe. That's a transition that I very much feel.

What I believe philosophically now -- that's a big word. People still continually ask me what I believe about life after death, for example. I tend to shock people now by saying, "I know nothing for certain about life after death." I can construct a logical -- to me, logical -- thesis that life doesn't end with physical death. I believe that, without being able to guarantee it to anybody. I say that largely on the basis that I see life in terms of a graph now. We begin physical life at birth, and we live that physical life until we die.

For anyone, for example, who lives sixty, seventy, eighty years, you can almost plot a graph of a physical life. It starts at zero at birth. One grows very rapidly up until about twenty, as the body reached its maximum period of development in the early twenties. Then there's a long period where, if you're in good health, it's rather level. But inevitably for everyone, the physical lifeline begins to dip down again and at death ends at zero again.

You can visualize a graph like that -- steep up until the middle twenties, then a gradually declining line until toward the end, when it may go down rather rapidly 'til death. So, physically, one ends where one starts.

My experience of life and what I see in other people, however, is that in the psychological, spiritual development of life one starts at zero and there's very little growth for many years. Then, if you're plotting it as a graph, the line starts to go up and, with maybe a few dips for periods of depression, discouragement, and so forth, the line ascends and continues to ascend. If one leads a fairly good life and is not caught by senility, at death one is at one's highest psychological and spiritual point.

Taking that as the basis of what I understand life to be, I think it's legitimate to hope that the spiritual lifeline, instead of ending as the body does at death, may go on into some other dimension of experience that we know nothing about. It seems to me just as logical to project that spiritual lifeline into the future as it is to say it ends when the body ends. There is a great deal of evidence that many people are paying a lot of attention to -- about what may happen at death. I'm not a pessimist about that. I recognize, as we all must, that death comes, but the most I'm prepared to say about it is that I don't know. There's a lot of logic for me in the picture I just drew, which suggests that there's at least an equal chance that something follows death as there is that nothing follows it. I choose the positive because that makes me feel better. I think it makes everyone feel better.

Mr. Mosher

That's a very interesting formulation.

I want to ask you another question; I hope it's a

fair one. To what extent do you consider yourself your brother's keeper?

Mr. Foster

I think I'm very much my brother's keeper -- in terms of people I meet in my individual life, that is, that I meet face-to-face and have something to do with. I have a high degree of responsibility for what I do to them and what happens to them and what I can perhaps do for them and with them. That's one dimension.

I have a collective responsibility as a member of a community and as a member of a society and, through the instrumentalities of the community and the society, for people in large numbers that I never will see but are fellow citizens with me of the city, state, country, and world. I don't feel this in the same personal sense as those I'm rubbing shoulders with every day, but the responsibility is there.

If you wish to expand the term "I am my brother's keeper," I'd have to say yes, I think at every level I have some responsibility to other people who inhabit the world with me. There's less I can do directly for people who live in Africa, perhaps, than I can do for people who live in Mill Valley. It's conceivable that some call might make me decide I had to do something about that -- which is why people go as emissaries and missionaries to other countries. They simply remove that immediacy to some other locale, but they feel it just as deeply.

That phrase certainly doesn't offend me. It's a part of my philosophy -- that I have an infinite responsibility, as long as I'm alive, for other forms of life that touch me in some way.

Mr. Mosher

In a very general way, do you think of anything else you'd like to say about your years in the church?

Mr. Foster

Only that, while I'm not directly responsible for the conduct of the local parish now, I still believe very much in the church. I participate in the church as much as my time and strength allow. I believe that a community like Mill Valley, for example, that had no churches would be the poorer for that fact.

I think the church will continue to exist in our societies. The form of it is continually changing, as it has from the very beginning. There are some ways in which even my own church that I lead for so many years -- some of the changes that take place leave me feeling I'm being left behind. But I think that's inevitable. I think whenever one retires from a job or a profession one looks without total enthusiasm on some of the changes that are made by younger leaders as they come along. But the church itself, I think, is going to be here in some fashion for as long as there are human beings in the world. People have to have some sense of a transcendent reality and the means of keeping in touch with it and serving it if they can. I think that's essential.

There are many new forms of human relationship today which aren't called churches but are serving much the same purpose. Take all the psychological groups that people join now. They're all attempts to stay in relationship with each other and with one's own inner landscape. And that's what the church is, too.

Mr. Mosher

You believe in the significance of ritual, then, to quite a degree, don't you?

Mr. Foster

Yes, I do, very much so. Whether we know it or not, every one of us has rituals that are important to us, that is, things we repetitively do because they have some significance that we're not totally aware of but that are part of the structure of being, and being alive, and being a psyche. A person without ritual would have to be a person in total isolation from everyone else -- and even from any awareness of himself, I think. Even a person in a condemned cell, say, for the rest of his life, develops certain ways of walking around that cell and doing the things that he has to do which become ritualistic.

I could give a long lecture on the two elements, form and spirit, which I think are always indispensable in life. Form tends to suppress spirit; spirit comes along and breaks form. There's always that tension between the two. You could put it differently: tradition gets hidebound and forces people to break the tradition -- in order to form a new tradition. If tradition gets too hidebound it spawns revolution and revolt and rebellion,

but as soon as the people who have revolted gain the power they begin to create a new tradition -- and then it has to be done all over again. That's the history of the human world, the history of societies, and the history of the individual psyche.

This is what Jung calls "the tension of the opposites" within which we have to live. The opposites are there, and you deny one opposite at cost to your own richness because you're denying a part of what is life. You're seeing only one side of the dichotomy. It's the tension of the opposites that creates life and gives people interest and stimulation. If you get too much on one opposite you've lost a half of life, and therefore life becomes stale and mediocre.

The church -- any organization -- is an illustration of that. You could probably document that in terms of your own experience as a businessman. Every once in a while you have to break through what's become your standard way of doing things and find some new ways -- just for your own self and also to stimulate your business. Isn't that true?

Mr. Mosher

Yes. I can see how this would be one of the basic blocks in the Jung "wholeness" development. You take away any one of those and the structure would be materially different -- and weakened, of course.

Mr. Foster

That's right.

Mr. Mosher

I see our time is running out, Gordon, which is a pity. I want to thank you for talking to me. It's a rich and interesting tape.

Mr. Foster

It's been fun. Doing something like this brings to mind a lot of things you haven't thought about for a long while. I thank you for the privilege.