

CD-1019 Transcription

American Jewish Committee seminar-meeting [1]. 10 March 1980.

M1:

Our principal speaker will be the Reverend Monsignor George Higgins. Monsignor Higgins is Secretary for Special Concerns of the US Catholic Conferences, the national conference of Catholic bishops. He is also chairperson of the advisory committee of the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Catholic Bishops' Conference. Monsignor Higgins has been very active in labor affairs with the UAW and farm labor groups. He's been active in civil rights and human rights. He was a consultant to Vatican Council II. Above all, he is knowledgeable and understanding in Catholic-Jewish relations. His topic will be these relations in the 1980s, evaluating the achievements of the '70s, and looking at the unmet needs in the 1980s. As a true friend, I would like to introduce Monsignor Higgins.

George Higgins:

[01:00] I read that article on Jane [Burn?] because -- I read it very carefully because I'm a Chicagoan on leave. On leave for 40 years, but still devoted to the city. And my reaction to it was somewhat different. Mine was of great sympathy for Gene Kennedy, the author, because I'm afraid that Gene will find it hard to

get an interview the next time he calls. You've got this program all mixed up. I'm listed as a speaker and Gene Fisher is listed as a commentator, it should be just the other way round. Gene is the full-time staff man at the Bishops' Conference on Catholic-Jewish Relations. He's highly trained academically in the field as I am not. [02:00] He gives full time to it, I give just a scattering of my time to it because I'm involved in other matters. So I really mean it when I say sincerely that I wish we had this reversed, so that I could comment on Gene's remarks. But I blame that onto Marc.

**M1:**

(inaudible) (laughter)

**George Higgins:**

When Marc called two or three months ago and asked if I would come to the meeting today, I didn't want to say it, but I had to say it, that since I was going to be traveling most of the time between then and now, I simply wouldn't have time to prepare a full text, and I apologize then again for speaking from notes, but it's the best that I was able to do under the circumstances. Secondly, Marc emphasized in our telephone conversation that he would like me to [03:00] talk specifically about the attitude of the present pope, the attitude of the Vatican under the present

pope, towards Catholic-Jewish relations, and I assume he meant specifically towards Israel. Well, it's my experience that Jews generally know much more about that than Catholics. I have never met the pope; Marc has. That's quite typical. If I went to Rome, there isn't a chance in a million that I could get an audience with the pope. Marc's chances are 50-50 at least every time he goes. Joe [Licton?], from one of your sister or brother organizations, lives in Rome and speaks Polish. I assume he has breakfast with the pope now and then. Or if he doesn't, he will soon find a way of doing it. But I will not speak to that subject except in very general terms, because frankly, I don't know any more about the current policy of the Vatican or the personal attitude of the pope than what I've read and heard. [04:00] And I haven't heard that much except in a recent trip to Rome I heard a few things, but nothing of great significance.

A brief personal word, then, by way of introduction. As I said, and I meant it very sincerely, I am not a full-time worker in the field of Catholic-Jewish relations. Gene Fisher is. But I had some experience at the Council as a consultant or staff, what they call [paritas?] to the Vatican II. And in that connection had a good bit of experience with the Jewish representatives who were in Rome. Marc was there, and many others, in and out of Rome during the Council. And a great deal

of experience with the bishops of the Council who were working on the document on Catholic-Jewish relations, so I have some background in that area. After the Council, when the American bishops responded, and responded quite rapidly to the [05:00] directive of the Council to set up an ecumenical office in each country, including an office on Catholic-Jewish relations, I fell by happenstance into the slot, temporarily being the staff member of that first Catholic-Jewish commission. The first Catholic commission under Bishop Leipzig. I was succeeded in quick order, and largely through my initiative, by Father Flannery, who held that post until Gene Fisher took over a few years ago. I have also, of course, attended most of the international Catholic-Jewish meetings, the most recent one being in Regensburg, Germany. I've attended several of those, and many other Catholic-Jewish meetings in the United States. So, it's against that background that I will be speaking this morning.

Let me add one further word of introduction. I will not, even under threat of torture, [06:00] discuss the White House snafu over the United Nations. I would love to hear it discussed, but I know nothing more about that than what I've read in the papers, and I do read papers very carefully, and I have my own reaction to it. I would only add this word of caution as an

outsider. And this is a political year, so I say this with some trepidation. If I were a Jew, I would be very careful, I would be very suspicious about the interest of Mr. Carter's opponents on this issue. The other night I heard four Republicans stand up and speak, oh, most emphatically, about their devotion to Israel, and I hope they have that devotion, I have no reason to doubt their sincerity, but somehow or other I had the impression that there was a bit of politics involved in the vehemence with which they spoke. I expect that from Teddy Kennedy, [07:00] I'd be very surprised if he didn't use the issue, and he has every right to do it, but beyond that, I have nothing to say on the issue except what I've read in the papers.

Now to the subject that you've asked me to talk about. I'm not going to spend any time talking about where we've come from. The history of Catholic-Jewish relations is tragic enough without my spoiling your morning by repeating the whole story again. You know it better than I do because you're Jews. You were at the receiving end of this history for a long, long time in Christian history. And it's a sad story, a tragic story, one for which the Christian community still has a long way to go before it can make proper amends. But I take it we're not here to rehearse that history in any detail this morning. More to the point, we

were, I think, expected to talk about [08:00] where we are today, and where we might possibly go down the road.

Let me state my own conclusion very briefly, and then try to fill it in. I am reasonably optimistic about where we are today, and where we're going in the future. I say that not as a scholar in the field, but as someone who knows, by sheer dint of experience of almost 40 years working at the Bishops' Conference, knows something about the Church in the United States, and a little about the Church in Rome, less about that than about the United States, but I know something about what's going on over there. The main reason that I'm optimistic at the level of the Bishops' Conference is that, contrary to what might have been expected, and I'm sure contrary to what many people would have predicted, and contrary to what has happened in other fields at our conference, [09:00] we've had the good fortune of having as the staff, the principal staff man on Catholic-Jewish relations ever since the Council, or almost immediately after the Council, two men who not only are competent in their field but are known across the country to be completely and absolutely committed to what most of us I'm sure would consider to be a constructive and positive and forward-looking approach to Catholic-Jewish relations. I speak of Ed Flannery and of Gene Fisher. I can't emphasize that too much, because if you know anything about the Catholic bureaucracy, and some of you do,

Marc knows a good bit about it, I don't think you would have expected this to happen. It's very easy in a big bureaucracy to look around for someone who can satisfy everybody, keep people reasonably happy and nevertheless have on your chart that you're doing what you claim to be doing. [10:00] It's quite a different matter to reach out and pick people who are thoroughly committed, and in addition to that are thoroughly competent. And the conference has done that, and I can say therefore, I think with some assurance, and with some authority based on long experience at the Conference, that at that level, at the level of the Bishops' Conference, things are in fairly good shape. I think I know as well as anybody in our building, because I've been there longer than any of them, what the attitude of the American bishops is, certainly what the attitude of the leadership of the conference is, and I can honestly say that, to the best of my knowledge, the leadership has never, at any time, given anything except support to the work of Ed Flannery and more recently to Gene Fisher. And have never at any time given anything but support to me when I was in the [11:00] temporary role of being the staff person in this field.

At the level of Rome, as I said earlier, I have no inside information as to the personal attitude of the present pope. I have a little information about the attitude of Cardinal Willebrands's office with his staff person being Father Mejia,

the Argentinean priest, Biblical scholar, who handles Catholic-Jewish relations under Willebrands's direction. All I know about the pope is what he said at Battery Park. You are familiar with his statement on that occasion. And what he said in his meeting with the representative group of Jewish leaders last year. I think Marc was present; maybe some of the rest of you were also present. Those speeches are known to you, they're available in full text, and except for the question, the clouded question, of [12:00] the recognition of the state of Israel and the less clouded question of the Vatican's reaction to the Jerusalem question, I think they were pretty good speeches. He declared himself quite openly as being in full support of the Vatican Council's directives and teachings on Catholic-Jewish relations, and committed himself personally to continuing the dialogue, to sponsoring it, to putting his full authority behind it.

At the international level, the Regensburg meeting being the most recent of a half a dozen international meetings, again I get the impression that progress is being made. It's no secret, of course, that before we went to Regensburg, when the location of that meeting was being discussed, the Jewish members of the international committee, for quite understandable reasons, were a little uneasy about the thought [13:00] of going to Germany. Naturally so. How many Jews are left in Germany after the



Holocaust? Thirty thousand, something along those lines. I think there was a very real fear that this meeting could be not only embarrassing, but might do more harm than good. I believe I would be fair in saying, be accurate in saying, that most, if not all, of the Jewish participants in the Regensburg meeting would agree that their fears were, to some extent at least, ungrounded. It was, I think, a successful meeting. It gave great encouragement to the Catholic leadership in Germany, that segment of the Catholic leadership which is working in the field of Catholic-Jewish relations. It meant much to them to have an international group including a large delegation of Jewish leaders from around the world come in to their country, work together harmoniously [14:00] and constructively for several days, it gave their work a great push, and for that reason I think it was a good thing that it was held there.

At the United States level, we're getting ready now within the next month or two for the Dallas meeting. I just showed Judy the program, which came in my mail this morning. I hadn't had time to look at it until I arrived here. I'm afraid that Catholic-Jewish relations are going the way of the flesh. There's not enough time in here to get a drink, let alone get anything to eat. They're going to keep us busy for three and a half days. But it looks like a good program. You know, of course, better

than I do, that there has been some difficulty about the participation of one of the major Jewish groups in the meeting. ADL, as far as I know, has not yet made up its mind what it will do about Dallas. I would encourage them to come, although I understand their objections and their misgivings [15:00] about the meeting. But I hope that can be worked out. Their misgivings, of course, center mainly around their attitude toward the National Council of Churches. I think you will understand that it would not be proper for me to get involved in that argument. I have my own opinion about the traditional policy of the NCC on Christian-Jewish relations, but I would not want to be in the position as an outsider of discussing it in a public forum. Jim Rudin, I've read all of his recent literature on it. I see Marc Tanenbaum has a manuscript in your folder going into the details of that argument. All I can say as an outsider is that I understand fully the objections of the Jewish community to what the NCC is doing or not doing, [16:00] and I hope and pray that a constructive solution to that very unfortunate controversy can be found as soon as possible. I've spoken briefly about the level of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops about the Roman situation, about the national meeting in Dallas. The bigger problem, and the more difficult one, of course, both for Jews and for Catholics, is the question of what's happening out in the field. And there I

must bow to Gene Fisher and to Marc Tanenbaum and others who are closer to the local communities in both their fields, both Catholic and Jewish, than I am. I would suspect that it would be accurate, as a generalization, to say that it's very spotty. Los Angeles, so far as I can tell, is very good. Probably the best one that we have from the Catholic side. It's a very close joint Catholic-Jewish relationship [17:00] with a very constructive, efficient ongoing program. The same thing is not true of many other cities. So there's no way that anyone could put forth an accurate generalization which would cover the whole country. It's very spotty, and I would think that those of us who work in bureaucracies, Marc and many of you, Gene Fisher, and myself, probably will have to give more time to that problem in the future than we have in the past. There's a tendency in any bureaucracy to think in national terms, cosmic, even international terms, but that takes us only so far. Unless our rank and file Catholics and rank and file Jews are getting the message that comes out of the national offices, there's something lacking in our total program. I used to argue with Father Flannery about that, [18:00] he was a very stubborn man. He once wrote a book, you know, called *The Anguish of the Jews*. I have always threatened to write one called *The Anguish of Father Flannery*, because he would sit around and complain bitterly about the lack of activity at the local level, about

the lack of response to his programs, his mail, etcetera, from local Catholic communities. I could sympathize with that, but I know enough, as a bureaucrat I know enough about the local community to know that that's part of the game. That we just have to find ways of finding individuals, a few individuals, who can take the lead in local communities and try to carry on what's being done at the national level.

In general then, and I'm quite open to disagreement on this, I'll try to be brief because with a small group such as this I think we will do much better if we have a free-for-all discussion rather than [19:00] a long speech, and Gene Fisher is in a much better position than I am to fill in the *lacunae*, at least on the Catholic side, so I won't spend any more time on those details. But I would like to turn now to a few matters that as I see them, as an outsider, outside from the Jewish community, of problems which I know are of concern to you, deep concern, and then speak to a few issues which are of concern to us.

Obviously Soviet Jewry is still very high on the agenda of the Jewish community, and it should be. I think there has been a fair amount of Catholic support for that cause. Perhaps not as much as there should have been, but I never run into any

Catholics whose opinion is worth anything who are opposed to what is being done in that field, and I run into a fair number who are quite sympathetic to it. I would only suggest, again, rather diffidently, that [20:00] we be careful to broaden the scope of human rights so that the impression will not be left that Jews in the case of Soviet Jewry or Catholics in the case of Ireland or wherever, are concerned only about their own people. And this is one of the great contributions that Marc has made with his consuming interest and concern over the Cambodian issue. He has broadened the perspectives of all of us, I think, in showing us that human rights are indivisible, that whenever anybody's human rights are violated, no matter where he is, or what religious or ethnic background, the problem must be faced by the entire Judeo-Christian community. I'm very conscious of that in the case of the Catholic community, because while I understand what some of my colleagues in the Catholic community are talking about when they speak of [21:00] anti-Catholic prejudice in the United States, I must tell you that it doesn't bother me very much. I subscribe to the adage attributed to Cardinal Saliège of France, who was a great defender of Jewish interest in France, who once said, and I'm paraphrasing him, that the norm of justice, the way you tell whether a man is really committed to justice is whether or not he becomes more concerned when an injustice is done to someone else than when

it's done to him. And so long as there's anti-Semitism in the United States, and there is, so long as there is prejudice against blacks in the United States, and there is, so long as there are violations of other people's human rights, I, as a Catholic, I must say, cannot bring myself to lose much sleep about the occasional, and I'm sure demonstrable, prejudice against Catholics in some segments of American life. What I'm saying [22:00] is that I think that in our concern for human rights, and Soviet Jewry is a very major concern in the field of human rights, we will want to keep in mind that whole total picture of human rights throughout the world.

A few years ago, when there was perhaps even more talk about the Soviet Jewry problem than there is today, a group of Catholics and Protestants decided to set up a Christian commission or committee of some kind on the violations of human rights of Christians. I was asked to join the commission, and I refused. And I refused on two grounds. I said, "I do not like, in the field of human rights, to see any committee in our society which does not include Jews. I do not like to see Christians organizing social reform committees of only Christians. And secondly, I'm not happy, and I'm not at ease with myself when I hear people say [23:00] that they're going to set up a commission to talk only about violations of the rights of

Christians." And I suggested at that time, and I think Marc and I have talked about this before informally, I suggested at that time that some effort be made to bring together, perhaps not in one organization, but in one framework, our concern for Soviet Jewry, and our concern for the violations of human rights in other parts of the world, regardless of the religious or ethnic background of the people concerned. Because, I could be wrong about this, but my experience has taught me that when you begin to divide concern about human rights as between Jews, Christians, and others, you're doing something to human rights which in the long run will not be constructive. Human rights are indivisible, they're universal, and the sooner, it seems to me, that Jews and Christians and other people from other faith traditions can work jointly on these human rights, [24:00] the better it will be.

On the question of Israel, which is dominant in the thinking, has to be dominant in the thinking of all Jewish organizations and of every Jewish individual, I don't know what a Gallup poll or a Father Greeley survey from Marc would show about the attitude of 50 million Catholics in the United States towards Israel. I assume, sight unseen, in the absence of scientific data, that it would be mixed. But I hope I'm not being overly optimistic when I say that at the official level of the Church

in the United States, at the level of the National Bishops' Conference, there is a strong commitment, a very strong commitment to the integrity of the state of Israel with secure boundaries. I never hear that debated, I never hear it contradicted. What I do hear, and what is [25:00] inevitable, of course, given the political situation in the world today, is some disagreement, depending upon the individual you're talking to, about the details of Israel's foreign policy. And that's inevitable. But I would urge this audience and other Jewish groups throughout the United States to do two things for us in the Catholic community. Number one, to make even a greater effort than has been made in the past to help Christians, and Catholics in this case, to understand more clearly than they do out of their own tradition why Israel is so central in Jewish thinking. I think it would be fair to say that that was not always clear to the Jewish community. Zionism was not, until fairly recent times, a universally accepted development within the Jewish community, either here or abroad. If it was difficult for Jews to wrestle with this problem, you can imagine [26:00] how much more difficult it is for Christians to understand, in the depths of their heart, why Israel is so absolutely central in Jewish thinking. And I suspect that many of the Catholics who strongly support Israel politically and would vote the right way on aid to Israel, would vote the right way on any issue



involving the security of Israel, many of them still do not understand intellectually and emotionally, the reasons that prompt Jews to be so concerned about this issue. The whole question of the connection between the land and the people is very simple to you, it's your tradition. It is not simple to Christians, and a greater effort, I think, must be made to help us in this joint dialogue -- I'm not speaking about myself, I think I understand it as well as an outsider can, but I'm talking of those people who do not give [27:00] much thought to this in the normal course of their daily life, and they need help.

Secondly, on the question of Israel, I think you will just have to live with the fact, the state of Israel will have to live with the fact and the Jewish community will have to live with the fact, that there is going to be disagreement over some of the political aspects of the policies of the state of Israel. There is no way that you're going to get anything like unanimity among Christians, any more than you would get them among any other group, as to what to do about the West Bank. That's an issue which is going to be debated. Hopefully it will be debated constructively, hopefully it will be debated with a full understanding that whatever is done in the negotiations, the essential rights of Israel, its right to sovereignty within

secure boundaries, permanent boundaries, will be fully respected, [28:00] but the debate will go on. And I saw that because I would not want it thought that if a particular bishop or particular identifiable Catholic spokesman happens to say that he disagrees with Prime Minister Begin on some specific point that that necessarily means that he's turning against the state of Israel. I think we just have to learn to grapple with that, and again I would ask the Jewish community to help Christians, and in my case Catholics, to understand more clearly than they do now what the reasons are for the policies that they may espouse with regard to the political realities in the Middle East today.

The question of the attacks on Zionism in the United Nations, in the ILO, the whole question of Arafat, the obscene rhetoric of the Ayatollah Khomeini, again you have every right to expect that the Catholic community [29:00] will support you 1,000 percent on that, and to the extent that Gene Fisher and I influence policy at the national level, and we do influence it greatly, I think you can count on that support from the Conference of Bishops. I see no support whatsoever in any official level of the church of the United States for any of the obscene rhetoric and political maneuvering that goes on occasionally in the UN, went on in the ILO, that's one of the

reasons we got out. We're back in now, I hope that the ILO has been taught a lesson. I see no sympathy for that kind of maneuvering, nor do I see any sympathy for the rhetoric of Arafat and the Ayatollah. I do see sympathy for Arafat, and to a lesser extend for the Ayatollah, in the black community. You know that better than I do. The Andy Young fiasco is still very fresh in your minds and in my mind. I was gravely disappointed in Andy Young's style, to say nothing of [30:00] the substance of what he was doing. And gravely disappointed that even today some black leaders are still flirting with Arafat. Some brown leaders are. There's a rival union to the United Farm Workers called the Texas Farmworkers Union, headed up by a man by the name of Tony Orendain. Mexican-American, a former colleague of Chavez's, and they broke for whatever reasons. A year or so ago he went to the Middle East. He hasn't got two dimes to rub together, so you have to ask yourself who paid for his trip. He came back, and he wrote three articles, which meant he signed his name to three articles written by someone else which were straight propaganda for Arafat. Fortunately that is not typical of the brown community insofar as I know the community. Cesar Chavez is a very strong defender of Israel. And his whole union [31:00] is. So that Orendain, I believe, was a maverick in this regard. He did it, I suspect, for publicity purposes for his own use, but I'm sure he didn't write the articles, and I'm sure

that somebody put him up to it. I read just yesterday in one of the Washington papers that a Hispanic leader here in town was going over to visit the Ayatollah. I would think we really don't need any more emissaries at the present time, but it's a free world and if he wants to go over, that's his business, but I just trust that he's not going over there to be taken in by the anti-Zionist propoganda of the leadership in that country. Your concern, you always have been, of course, the Jewish community for reasons that I think I understand very well, with the symbolism involved in the prayer in schools controversy, the symbolism [32:00] involved in the observance of religious holidays in a public manner in our schools and in our communities, I believe I understand your position on that matter, on both matters, and I don't happen to feel very strongly on them in any event. I'm not one of those who spends much time worrying about whether we have prayer in the public schools, or whether we have religious symbols in a public manner at Christmastime, or on other Christian holidays. But I would urge you to, just as you would want, and do want, and rightfully want, Christians and Catholics to understand where you come from on these issues, I would hope that you would, by the same token, make a special effort, as I know the AJC does, to try to understand where people on the other side are coming from. There are great fears, there's a great uneasiness in some segments of

the Christian community, I think more in the Protestant community than in the Catholic community, [33:00] about these issues. I don't agree with many of my Protestant friends in the area, but I have to make an effort to understand where they come from.

You're concerned, as you should be, about the question of proselytism and conversion. This is a subject that Gene can speak to much better than I can because he's academically much better equipped than I am to talk about it. But I can only ask you to believe me when I say that on the basis of my own experience, which is mainly what I have to speak from, that I see no evidence whatsoever in the Catholic community in the United States that anyone in the Catholic community, except maybe an occasional nut here or there, but I'm talking about people who can in any responsible way be credited with speaking for the Church. I see no evidence that anyone in the Catholic community is thinking at all in terms of proselytism or conversion of the Jews. There are some fringe Protestant groups, evangelical groups and others who think in these terms. You're more familiar with their work than I am. [34:00] But I do not see it in the Catholic community.

At the theological level, the theoretical level, the level that Gene could speak to far better than I can, there has been a great development I think in recent years, notably in the Federici paper that came out of the Venice international meeting. That paper has been widely distributed, both in the Catholic and the Jewish community and in Europe as well as in the United States. Now there was some discussion at the Regensburg meeting, led mainly by [Bel Brichner?], asking why the Federici paper had not been made an official Church document. And here's a point I think on which we could profitably spend a few moments.

I think you have to understand, just as I would have to understand what takes place in the Mormon community and the Jewish community and the Islamic community or wherever, [35:00] we have to understand what our structures are. And that is not the way official documents come out of the Church. And it is not the way I would want them to come out of the Church. I would much prefer to see a gestation period take place in which scholars and people conversant with the field would debate, talk about, argue about the points of view expressed by scholars in their papers until we get some kind of understandable theological consensus on a very complicated problem. But the fact that the Federici paper, which has been widely distributed,

even by official agencies in Rome, has not yet become the official document of the Church, I think should not be taken too seriously. It means that there is a serious debate going on, debate in the sense of a theological dialogue, which will take time to develop. But meanwhile, I don't know what's happening in other parts [36:00] of the world, but I see no evidence in the United States that there is any inclination whatsoever on the part of any Catholic group to think in terms of proselytism or conversion.

The last point that is of great concern to the Jewish community, there are many others, but I'm being selective, is the whole question, of course, of quotas and affirmative action. I don't want to get in -- it would be improper for me to get involved in an argument between the Jewish community and the black community, for example, over this issue. But I would say as a friend that you will have to take a good, long look at affirmative action before any final decision is made. I do not think that there will ever be any reconciliation between the black community and the Jewish community unless this issue is honestly wrestled with. I'm not speaking of quotas, now. I'm speaking of affirmative action. I myself have the same difficulty with quotas and affirmative action [37:00] that the Jewish community has. Nevertheless, as a realist who has been

around for a good long time in the social action field, I'm convinced that we will all have to wrestle with this issue in dialogue with the blacks and the browns and others in the American society, perhaps more than we have in the past. The issue will not go away, and so long as it's there festering, it's going to lead the Andy Youngs and others I think to do things which will be of benefit to no one. I do not believe that the black community is primarily concerned about the Middle East. I don't think they know much about the Middle East. The rank and file blacks, they haven't reached that stage in their own development where international affairs are dominant in their thinking, but they are almost universally greatly concerned about affirmative action, and some dialogue will have to take place between all of us. Not only the Jewish community, [38:00] but the Irish, the Poles, my friend Father Greeley's going to have to wrestle with it a little more than he has in the past. It will not do, it seems to me, in our society to say that Poles are discriminated against the same way that blacks are. It's not true. Blacks have a distinctive history, they came here as slaves. They didn't come here as free men. They didn't come of their own volition, and there has been a terribly bad American history which we all have to wrestle with, perhaps more constructively than we have in the past.



On the question of Catholic issues, let me preface my remarks on this score by saying that I am, and I think I can say this with absolute sincerity, I am totally opposed to anything like a quid pro quo approach to the Catholic-Jewish dialogue. It just drives me right up the wall when I read Catholic columnists or editorials in the Catholic press or hear Catholic individuals say, "Well, we are supporting Israel, [39:00] what are the Jews doing for us in return?" It seems to me that's totally destructive of dialogue. And I find it completely abhorrent. I'm not discussing these issues then in those terms. But I would congratulate the AJC on wrestling quite effectively with two issues which are of deep concern to many people in the Catholic community. More to some than to others. And that's the question of school aid, and the public policy aspects of the abortion controversy. Again, those two issues are not going to go away. And there has to be a dialogue about them, not leading to agreement, I'm sure that anybody with any realism knows that there are always going to be disagreements within various segments of the American community on public policy aspects. But I think what the AJC has succeeded in doing, perhaps more than any other Jewish group in the last [40:00] 20 years, is conveying to Catholics who are concerned about these issues that they are trying to understand where these Catholics come from, and are not dismissing the issues out of hand without a hearing.

And they're dialoguing about them. The Los Angeles Catholic-Jewish committee, to which I made reference earlier, I think has given us all a good lead in this regard. Here you had a group of rabbis and a group of Catholic representatives patiently, over a long period of time, doing what most people would have said was impossible. And that is putting out a joint statement on the public policy aspects of the question of abortion. There wasn't anything like complete agreement, that wasn't the aim. The aim was for both sides to understand where they came from, and both sides to accept the sincerity of the other in wrestling with a problem which will be with us for a long, long time, and perhaps a problem to which there is no final solution. [41:00] But it showed what dialogue can do. They've done this on other issues, and they plan to do it on still a further list of issues down the road. I don't know of any local group that has done a better job than they have in this regard.

My final summary remarks would be that, autobiographical, when I came to the Bishops' Conference 36, 37 years ago, and for let us say 20 years after that, roughly up 'til the time of the Council, the Vatican Council, I went to more than my share of interfaith dialogues before the word ecumenism became a popular part of our language. Marc was at many of them. Many other Jewish leaders around the country were present at them. And my

recollection, vague recollection, is that in those days, we were very skittish of one another. [42:00] There was no real dialogue. There was a fear on both sides, the church state issue was the dominant issue in those days. In the background, outside of our two communities, we had a man like Paul Blanchard and others, raising this to an absolute of frightening terms, and the discussion never seemed to get much beyond this sparring over issues which I think, in the course of time, have been softened a bit. We've come a long way from there. We are now at the stage, nationally and to some extent locally, as in Los Angeles, where real dialogue is taking place. Not with the aim of agreement on every specific issue, certainly not with the aim of conversion, but dialogue in the truest sense of the word so that we begin to understand our common concerns, our common religious backgrounds, and our common responsibility for each other. [43:00] And this would be my closing theme, that we do have a great responsibility for each other. We come from the same tradition, religious tradition. A large part of the world does not share that tradition. A large part of our own society does not. And I think history will look very poorly, will judge very harshly, both the Jews and the Catholics of the United States, it would judge them harshly if it were to be said 50 years from now that they spent more time arguing with one another over legitimate differences of opinion than they did

trying to dialogue their way through to a clearer understanding of their common responsibility for their common faith tradition, and their common responsibility to the society in which we live. And this, I think, has been one of Marc's great contributions. He has hammered away, in season [44:00] and out of season, about our responsibility as Jews and Christians, of course to our own people, of course to our own concerns, but in the wider sense to the total human community out of our own faith tradition, which we share together. Karl Rahner, probably our most celebrated, most distinguished living Catholic theologian, an old man now, but still writing as much as ever, had an article in the *Theological Studies*, the last issue of *Theological Studies*, that's our quarterly Jesuit theological magazine, published here in Washington, in which he said that he thought he was speaking here as a Catholic to Catholics, he thought that we were at one of the truly major turning --

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