

CD-1020 Transcription

American Jewish Committee seminar-meeting [2]. 10 March 1980.

George Higgins:

In Vatican I, a hundred years ago, there were five or six hundred bishops, nobody from outside of Europe, except a few Americans, and a few from South America. In Vatican II, twenty-eight hundred bishops from all over the world. We are now -- you're in dialogue, you will be in dialogue today, with the Islamic world. That's new. It's new not only for Jews, it's new for Christians. We live in a world which is quite different from the world we thought we were going to live in 25 or 30 years ago, when we were arguing about issues which seem less important today than they seemed to be then. And that global aspect of what we have as Christians and Jews working together to contribute to the world community, in dialogue with the other religious groups, I think is one that will be high on our agenda, I hope it will be, in the years to come. [01:00] I've spoken too long. Jean can correct me, fill in, Marc can fill in, and I'll be glad then, to take part in the discussion which follows. Thank you very much.

Francis Mugavero:

Thank you very much, Monsignor Higgins. Before we go on, I'd like to welcome those of you who have just come in, in the past few minutes, in particular Nancy Lange, who is chairperson of the Washington chapter. Nancy, very glad to have you. As a response to the comments which the monsignor has made, we're very fortunate to have with us, Dr. Eugene J. Fisher, who is the executive secretary of the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. He's the author -- and I hope I have the title right, of *Catechetics and Prejudice*, which is -- no?

M:

Faith Without Prejudice.

Francis Mugavero:

Faith Without Prejudice.

M:

Catechetics is Pawlikowski, which is also a good book.

Francis Mugavero:

We stand corrected, thank you. [02:00] On Jewish-Christian relations. But I think more than anything I could say, the respect and the friendship which Monsignor Higgins has

demonstrated today, toward Dr. Fisher, really speak of his abilities and of his standing, and I'd like to welcome Dr. Fisher.

Eugene Fisher:

Thank you. About the only thing I could possibly disagree with George's beautiful presentation, is his demurral at the outset, about who should be giving this talk. I would like to mention, I think use this occasion, especially since I read in the minutes, he's going to get some sort of award today, I believe that award is well deserved. I don't think that I know of anyone in one real sense, who has done more for Catholic-Jewish relations than Monsignor Higgins. [03:00] He is the pioneer in this country in this field. He not only went to the Vatican Council and slogged through the trenches on that document, but he had it so nicely set up that almost before the ink was dry in the document, there was a secretariat, there was a commission, and he was sitting on the chair of that, keeping it warm and opening things up to make sure that people like Ed Flannery and myself would have a place to work, which is in a sense a very rare thing. As far as I know, I've got the only job that pays full-time, in Catholic-Jewish relations, from the Catholic side, in the United States, and I think one of only two jobs in the world that are full-time, paid positions in the field, that are supported by the

Catholic Church, the other one is at the Vatican, which doesn't leave me a whole lot of room of places, of options. But a lot of that is due -- and I can't emphasize this [04:00] too strongly, and the survival of the secretariat and the growth of it, and I think it has grown, is quite largely due to Monsignor Higgins and to my predecessor, Edward Flannery, who held the position for ten years, to the point where when I moved in, I was able to move in very nicely, into an ongoing situation, at the conference.

George is very right in saying that I don't have anywhere near the types of problems that might have occurred 40 years ago, and are still occurring within the National Council of Churches, in this kind of position. The position was carved out, so that the good things that I have been able to do, I think are only possible because of people, and especially George, on this, so I think it's very appropriate that he gave the major talk and I'm able to respond. I would agree with his general assessment of reasonable optimism, reasonable or cautious optimism.

I would say [05:00] optimism because we have, now today, a very extensive body of official statements, a rather large -- and here, I think I'm stealing a little of Marc's thunder from a couple of years ago -- network of personal relationships in this

country, that is unique in all the world in terms of interreligious relations in general, and Catholic-Jewish relations specifically, of people who know one another, have worked together, not only on the national level but on the local level, back and forth, through various issues, over a number of years. That's the type of thing that in terms of Catholic-Jewish relations, is unique to this country. There are some things I think we can be very proud of as Americans; this happens to be one of them, in the field that this country is really the leading forum for Catholic-Jewish relations, both by reason of the fact that it has the world's largest Jewish community, and by reason of the fact that Catholics and Jews have such a similar history and have been thrust into the same types of situations. [06:00] We're both largely urban, we're immigrant people, our patterns of immigration from the same areas of Europe, are just about the same.

We've all gone through the same problems of losing our names getting off the boat, because they couldn't pronounce them. My wife's name is Ambrosiano, and you should hear what people try to do with that one. It seems like a simple name to me but it causes people -- "oh, how is that again, Amber-, ah, er," you know. Fortunately, her father getting off the boat must have spelled it out for them, the idiots at Ellis Island. But we have

all these things in common and I think this is bearing fruit on the local level. One of the things I would do is add a few places to Los Angeles. I agree with George, that's probably the most sophisticated, advanced, local level dialogue, not only in this country but undoubtedly in the world. They've got two groups going; one a priest-rabbi group, which cranks out very important statements on things like [07:00] covenant, which we on the national level have trouble dealing with, but given that input can follow up on, and they have a group that deals with life issues, ranging from abortion... They've handled all these sensitive issues and interestingly, the one that they say is the one that caused the most problem was not abortion, was not covenant, which are the major -- it was a question that would seem not so difficult, but it was a statement that they issued jointly in respect for dying and the issues surrounding that question. It's a fascinating statement.

To that list though, to Los Angeles, I would add places like the Diocese of Brooklyn. Bishop Mugavero, who is our moderator, has been with George at all of these international liaison committee meetings, and there's, I think within the diocese, three active groups; [08:00] one for Queens, one for Brooklyn, one for the Far Rockaway, and possibly more, that are active and moving on that. There's places like Milwaukee, which had a very strong

statement in honor of the 30th anniversary of Israel, and which will host the sixth national workshop, October, 1981, for Christian-Jewish relations. There's places like Seattle, which have had some very strong -- again, these, where they're good, they devolve upon key people, that's just the way it seems to work. The ecumenical officer there is very active and they have had some very good programs going on there.

Places like Memphis. Memphis is interesting again, because the national workshop is there, and it seems that where the national workshop has been, the group that created that and slogged through and tried to work it out with all the problems that come up, continue to do good things. They did a whole program, beginning a couple of years ago, [09:00] where they wanted to do a New Testament study, and they started with the Gospel of Matthew, and the booklet that they produced and got out to practically the entire Catholic population of Memphis, which is not large, is excellent on the key points of the understanding of the New Testament. It's the real answer to a lot of the problems and misunderstandings that Catholics have, which is good information, that brings the best of scholarship to bear on a popular level.

I would also mention, there's places like Detroit, where again, we had a national workshop. Father Al Brunette not only has been very good about that, but there's a subcommittee there on the Catholic side that has a counterpart. Again, they had a national workshop there. They, just last year, issued some very good guidelines. Some good groups that I know of in Boston.

Then there are places where things happen where [10:00] one might not expect it, but then again one might. For example, Philadelphia, which issued a curriculum out of its education department, for all the Catholic school teachers in the diocese, that is just excellent. It's about 60 pages and goes right through the problems and shows how improved understanding of Jews and Judaism can be integrated into the existing curriculum of the Catholic schools. Now this is real nitty-gritty type of stuff that gets down to people, where the delivery system in the church is, which is primarily through the educational system and through the liturgy.

Chicago, which has a number of good groups and also, probably the best group of exiled or -- can I use the term exiled? Priests, having coming out of Chicago that have had a massive impact on the whole country. Scranton, Pennsylvania and about a half a dozen other places in Pennsylvania. I was with Jim Rudin

at one of them, but I keep getting invitations [11:00] to small towns or medium size cities throughout Pennsylvania. Something is going on there that's very good. Cincinnati, Dayton area. Dayton, which started the national workshops, originally as a Catholic-Jewish workshop, and then somebody decided it would be nice to invite the Protestants in, which I think it is, because I think if Christianity is going to move, it's going to move as a whole in this.

One of the things that I would comment in terms of what's going on in the local level in this country is the south is on the rise in this. I keep getting invitations from places like Mobile, Macon, Georgia, Richmond, Memphis again. Possibly there, because both the Catholic and Jewish communities are relatively small, but there seems to be a great growing sense of humanism and inter-religious relations throughout the south. These are real signs, I think, on the local level, [12:00] where things really mean something in the long run, because statements only mean what people take them to mean and pick them up and run with them, that there is a real direction.

One of the things that Professor Federici said in his paper on the mission of witness of the church, was that the move started by the Second Vatican Council, toward a better understanding of

Judaism, toward a reconciliation with Judaism, toward the acceptance, on a full theological level, of the existence of Judaism as a valid religious system, as part of God's plan of salvation. He felt that was an irreversible move, and I really think it is, not only because subsequent documents the Vatican II have reemphasized what that said, but even more importantly, because people are becoming involved in it. That's the optimism part.

The caution part is that there are 57 million Catholics in the United States alone, [13:00] and it takes a long time for this sort of word to really take effect. There are more than a few Catholic, strange folks, wandering around. I don't know why I came up with a term like wanderer on that. There's a newspaper that they have.

M:

To the right of Ronald Reagan.

Eugene Fisher:

Yes, oh yeah, yeah. I'm not sure what could be considered left of it, but they -- there is a strong movement. The thing with that phenomenon, as Monsignor Higgins was saying, and I think it's very true, is that this is, (A) it's a minority

phenomenon, and (B) it's a phenomenon that really has no counterpart within the hierarchy. Even the conservative bishops and cardinals in the church are not of that sort of frenetic ilk. So that I think there's a very real sense, and I am very comfortable listening to the bishops debate issues [14:00] in terms of the way they approach things. Coming for a diocesan level, I've ended up being very impressed with the bishops in terms of how they attempt to handle things. This does not mean they're going to always handle them well or perfectly or for the best, but the maturity of approach I think is something that again, represents something rather irreversible from the way that the church -- at least how one used to perceive the church. I think there's a corner that's been turned.

I don't really have too much more to add, only that I would mention that the Dallas workshop is coming up again. It's April 28th to May 1st, in Dallas, and I would hope you would all be able to come. I think it's important to bring the troops out for this one. It's the national workshops, I consider to be perhaps the most important single event in Catholic-Christian-Jewish [15:00] relations that goes on, in particular, because they bring everyone together and they do so much for the specific community that they're in.

I'll mention one. I'll open up another topic that Monsignor Higgins didn't mention, which has to do with the whole area of New Testament studies. Here again, I see some real improvement on the best levels and on the practical level. On the best levels, we've been witnessing, in the last three or four years, a series of major works; things like Ed Sanders of Canada, coming out with a work on Paul and Palestinian Judaism, which just blows out of the water, most of the junk emanating from European biblical scholarship over the last hundred years. From Germany, there are not coming to be, at least on the Catholic side and I presume this would be true also, on the Protestant side, but the Catholics I happen to know about a little more because they were featured at Regensburg. [16:00] People like Franz Mussner, some very important scholars, getting into this area. In this country, people like Father Gerard Sloyan, have been doing wonderful work for years. This type of thing, I think is very important, because a lot of the problems that Christians have with understanding Judaism do go back to that New Testament period. It is the key area and the better the scholarship is, the better the textbooks will be and the better prepared Catholics will be then, to understand and dialogue with Judaism, without some of the subliminal blocks of the past.

One of the things that we're doing with Marc in this area, is attempting to put together a priestly formation booklet that could be used in seminars, as a service tool. Again, like the Federici paper will not be an official document, but it will go to every seminary as a way of helping them to work on their curriculum and their approaches to Jews and Judaism. I think there's a lot of hope in that because [17:00] priests, after all do, Sunday after Sunday, get up and comment on the scriptures. They do make the deepest impact in that sense. The priests and the Catholic educators would be the two key groups in terms of what the delivery system in the church is in terms of changing and improving the minds of its own people.

Now, I think what we should do at this point if there's time, is have an exchange, because I could go on forever about all the little pet projects I have and the things I think are wonderful, but if they're not what you have in mind, either George or I will have been much to your benefit.

Francis Mugavero:

Eugene, thank you very much. I do think we do have some time for some questions and comment and dialogue. Are there any questions that you'd like to raise, or comments that you'd like to make?

If not, I have one I'd like to pose to each of you, and that is

you alluded to church-state issues as being a problem, certainly much more so [18:00] 30 years ago perhaps, and school prayer, but I'd like to ask, what is the feeling in terms of Catholic-Jewish relations, of governmental aid to the parochial school system as such, in terms of the maintenance of the parochial school systems in the inner city and the problem that might be created if the parochial school system in the inner cities does not continue. Is there any anti-Jewish backlash, if Jews are perceived for example, as being primarily opposed to such aid. I'm not talking about prayer but just about the maintenance of the schools.

George Higgins:

I can't answer your question authoritatively, on whether there's a backlash directed against the Jewish community. I would say in the room, and I say it as a friend, because I get along very well personally with Leo Pfeffer, but I think Leo Pfeffer is still [19:00] a symbol in the Catholic community on the school aid question; not so much because he disagrees, that's life in a pluralistic society, but it's rather the philosophical approach which he brings to it, which makes some kind of an absolute, which forestalls and prevents any kind of dialogue on the issue. I think 20 years ago or 25 years ago, there would have been a fair amount of backlash against the Jewish community, in some

segments of the Catholic community, over the school issue, but that's why I said that I thought that in the last 15 or 20 years, thanks to the work of the AJC and of the ADL and others, this issue is now being dialogued in a much more constructive way.

I don't think anybody in his right mind should ever expect anything like unanimity on any controversial public policy issue, but what has offended many people [20:00] in the recent debate, and this does not involve the Jewish community, it involves a man, say like Harrington of the Liberal Party in New York. Whatever one may think of Pat Moynihan's bill on tax credits, Harrington's response to it was widely interpreted as being anti-Catholic. There are a good number of Catholics who are very offended by the propaganda being put out by some of the public school associations, which leave the impression that parochial schools are havens for whites who are trying to escape the blacks, when as a matter of fact, in most big cities, and New York would be a classic example of it, I think roughly 60 percent of the kids educated in the parochial schools in New York City are either black or Hispanic, and that means they're very poor. So I think there's less Catholic-Jewish [21:00] friction in the issue today than there is just a broad disagreement on the philosophical issues involved. I talked to

Pat Moynihan about it just casually the other night and he feels very strongly that much of his mail and much of the public reaction he's got, has an anti-Catholic tinge, but he in no way suggested that was a Jewish problem. He was speaking more of the general educational community.

I have personally had some experience with the AFT on the issue. Shanker is a very good friend of mine. The fact that he's Jewish has nothing to do with my reaction. I just think the AFT's position on school aid -- and again, not because I disagree with their conclusion, but I think it's ideological and it makes it impossible then, to have a serious discussion or a serious debate. When Pat Moynihan's bill was being [22:00] debated a year or so ago, the AFT put out a special issue of their paper which was just disgraceful, in my opinion, absolutely disgraceful and it was very strongly slanted against the parochial schools, as though the parochial schools were un-American, that they were a haven for whites who were escaping the blacks, etc. Most diocese that I know anything about, I wouldn't speak for all of them but I think it's true of most of the major diocese, there's an official policy that they may not, under any conditions, take in whites who in any way can be detected as coming there because they want to escape the black issue. So that if the debate, the dialogue can be carried on at

a level where these issues do not become red flags, then I think we can make some progress. And I can honestly say that I say that as one who has never been involved in the school debate. I have many other things to do besides that and I do not think that the world is going to end if we don't get aid to parochial schools. [23:00] But I do think that the debate in the American society, the dialogue in American society will suffer if it's locked in to ideological position. I don't hear very much about -- that is among responsible people. I don't know what's said in the barrooms of Queens or wherever these issues are talked about informally, but at the official level, I don't hear very much Jewish fiction over the issue, but I do hear a deep concern that the problem is not being debated adequately.

Eugene Fisher:

Agreeing with that entirely. Maybe I should disagree some more, you'll begin to think the Catholic Church is monolithic. One of the things I would emphasize is in terms of the dialogue and understanding one another. A couple of things. Monsignor Higgins mentioned the idea of Catholic schools being viewed as [24:00] un-American, which having grown up in them is amazing. The flag was in every classroom and, you know, almost too American to some extent more American than Christian at times is what went on. But I think what the people in the Jewish community need to

do is sit down again and dialogue, talk to Catholics, find out what is going on in Catholic schools. I really believe there's a residual feeling within the Jewish community that Catholic schools teach Catholics to hate Jews.

Now, my doctoral dissertation was on a textbook study of 16 Catholic school textbook series; five on the elementary level, well six on the elementary level and ten on the high school level. Have you ever read your way through 16 textbook series? One of the things I found out is there's immeasurable marked [25:00] improvement in terms of those textbooks and what therefore is really being taught to Catholics, in terms of the images and understandings and attitudes towards Jews and Judaism that Catholics get in those schools now, as opposed to what they did in the past. The interesting thing is that one can question whether the same type of turnaround has gone on within, say the public school systems or other schools, private school systems, whatever, but it has gone on in Catholic school systems. Probably in one sense, and I'm not saying that the textbooks or the teaching is fully adequate. In fact, I would say very strongly that it's not fully adequate. It's about, well the old thing about the glass that's half empty or half full. This would probably be a little bit more than half full in terms of what needs to be done, but a lot of that has been done, it is

working. This needs to be [26:00] taken into account and I really think Jews need to begin to understand this sort of thing, that right now Catholic school systems are teaching more positive attitudes towards Jews and Judaism probably anywhere else in the world, and in a very real sense. That should be part of the understandings in the internal debate within the Jewish community.

The second thing I think that this dialogues needs to do from the Jewish side is that Jews need to sit down -- and this is probably where I would fault Leo Pfeffer and others, who got at it ideologically and ask themselves the question, why did Catholics set up the Catholic school system in the first place. Once you go through that history, you find some interesting things. Catholics got to this country, it was Protestant dominated, and the so-called public schools were not public, they were teaching Protestantism, as far as Catholics were concerned. The Catholic response to that situation was to set up, in the name of pluralism, their own school system, because they didn't feel that there was a real place for Catholics within the public school system [27:00] at that time. It may or may not have been the best strategy. I think the Jewish strategy, because bumping into exactly the same problem, had to do with well, let's clean up the public schools and make sure

they're public. Both of those strategies I think are reasonable ones and I think both, in the long, strategic run of what's needed, are really very compatible. These types of things, I think we should be seeing more and more discussions over, but on this kind of a real basis of who are we, where are we coming from, why do we do the things we do, and work it out through a dialogue. Again, that doesn't mean we'll come up with unanimity. We're both committed to fairly different strategies, but strategies that as far as I can see, are logically very compatible, because they're growing from the same principles and coming to the same conclusions about pluralism and about the non-establishment of religion and things like that.

But I think the better Catholics and Jews understand one another on these types of issues, [28:00] the more mature that discussion will be and the less will be apt to be tied into ideological absolutes that breach and stop any kind of communication, because it's when communication stops that people then, from the two sides of the ditch, start throwing rocks back and forth at each other. That's not the same as a backlash but it can be a friction causing and a tension causing thing and break down coalitions that should be moving along on even more basic issues I think, than that.

George Higgins:

I'll just add one thing, just one brief word. I mentioned Paul Blanchard and I, I do it reverently because he just died, and he was a good friend of mine, although we didn't agree on anything. But I thought it was a very happy day, that he died in a Catholic hospital, I'm sure tended by some good nun. The point I wanted to make is that when Blanchard was in his heyday back in the '50s, I used to run into him at meetings, we'd have very good arguments, [29:00] until we'd adjourn for a drink and then we could be very good friends. Blanchard was thought of in those days as being anti-Catholic. I always thought -- and his autobiography, which he published just a few years before he died, I always thought that it was much deeper than that, that he was really anti-religious. And he admitted that and I don't say that critically of him, this was in his autobiography. I mention that because I think in the Catholic-Jewish dialogue over the issues such as the school issue, the one thing that Jews were criticized for 25 or 30 years ago, whether rightly or wrongly, this was just a perception that people had, was they were thought to be playing into the hands of people who were anti-religious, whose secularism was so deep and so ideological, that they were really deserting their own religious tradition by taking such a strong stand. I do not think that that's generally

true today, and I don't hear much discussion of that today.

[30:00]

Francis Mugavero:

Thank you. We'll take one or two questions, because we have something very important to go on to. Yeah, Mrs. Coleman?

Mrs. Coleman:

The mention of Paul Blanchard and the question of abortion and aid for parochial schools, makes me ask a question of you. I'd like advice. Certainly, why are the Jews perceived as being the chief opponents to aid for parochial schools or on the question of abortion, against the right to life groups. There are very strong Protestant -- when we think of Protestants united against -- for separation of church and state. We've seen many strong Protestant positions on abortion, and there are many equally strong Jewish positions, the Orthodox community, concerning aid for parochial schools and anti-abortion. Yet, in the popular mind, it is Jews who are the bogeymen in this problem.

George Higgins:

Well, number one, I want to make it clear, [31:00] and I'm sure you will agree. I didn't say difference in Jews. I was speaking to a Jewish audience and we were talking about Catholic-Jewish

relations. I never meant even to hint that. Secondly, I think it's not quite accurate to say that in the Catholic community, people speak only of Jews. Blanchard was far from being a Jew, he was a Unitarian. I suppose that Catholics, when he was riding high back in the '50s, spent more time attacking Paul Blanchard than attacking anybody in the country, and POAU.

But in answer, in general answer to your question, I think there are two reasons for it. One is anti-Semitism. People in our society tend to take six million Jews and make it appear as though there's 60 million Jews here and that they're running the country, and one statement by a Jew outweighs 50 statements by someone else. [32:00] I think part of it is that. Secondly, I think it's the dominance of New York City. New York City is the communications center of the world, it's where statements are made. It's a much more influential city in many ways, than Washington, because it is the great communication center of the world and because so many of the ideological issues in the United States get debated in New York City and not in Kansas City or not in Springfield, Illinois, not even in Washington, DC.

But the first reason I think is latent anti-Semitism, people singling out the Jews on whatever the issue is. I just reviewed

Norman Podhoretz's recent book, his second autobiography, and I won't tell you what I think about the book, that's another matter, but I did say, facetiously at the end of it, that I could really, as a Chicagoan, live happily ever after if I never had to listen in on another [33:00] round of gossip about the family. New York is really not the beginning and the end of the world, and least of all is the Upper West Side the beginning of the end of the world, but I'm afraid that Norman, at times, unconsciously leaves the impression that it is, and he does that because that's where these issues are debated, that's where they become crystallized, more than they do in any other city in the country, and Jews just happen to be such a dominant group in New York, that given the American anti-Semitic tendency, they get stuck with some of the prejudice I think.

Francis Mugavero:

As an old Hyde Parker, I agree with you. We'll take one or two more. Inga and then Marc.

Inga:

I'd like both of you to respond if you could. As a Jewish feminist, one of the most meaningful experiences in working for the American Jewish Committee is that sense of working with Catholic and Christians, who are very pro-feminist, [34:00] at

least the ones I've worked with. Many Jewish feminists of faith, and I say feminists of faith, specifically because I'm talking about the women who want to stay in the synagogue or the church and change it, not leave it, and say because you're not perfect, we don't want anything to do with you. Many Jewish feminists, we're very inspired by Sister Kane, which leads us back to something you said you weren't allowed to do. But I am interested in what you feel about the rising wave of Catholic feminists feelings not just the monsignor and Catholic nuns, but also priests and lay people, and what you see as the future of that.

George Higgins:

Oh, I think it's very good, long overdue. I think it would be just an absolutely tragic mistake for the Catholic church to underestimate the importance, [35:00] the significance of the desire on the part of women for liberation and for greater share and responsibility in the institution. I think we've done that in the past. It's become bogged down in the Catholic community today, for better or for worse, over the specific issue of the ordination of women, and I must say, that's not going to be resolved very soon. There's nothing I can do to resolve it any faster than it will be resolved. I do not agree with those who

say that it will never be resolved, but that's another matter. It won't be resolved in my lifetime.

On the question of the women's movement, I would think that the church is way behind the times in that regard, as I suspect large segments of the Jewish community are, but more so in our case I think. We'll be asking for nothing but grief and trouble, I think, if we don't catch up to it. Take, for example, [36:00] the complaint of women about their lack of representation.

Leaving aside the ordination of women, even in those congregations in Rome which directly control the lives of women religious. Women don't have anything to say about it. You have a bunch of old cardinals who don't know from nothing about the concerns of women, and that's a very legitimate demand on their part. Same thing is true up and down the structures of the church.

There's been some misunderstanding, I think, about Sister Kane. She's a marvelous woman and a lot of people, I think have been led to believe, because of the flurry of excitement over her intervention out here at the shrine when the pope was here, that she was somehow or other held at a distance or people had disdain for her. It's my information she's about to have an audience with the pope. She's been well received by the American

bishops. I didn't detect very much antipathy towards that at all. She got a lot of criticism [37:00] from other sisters, who thought that it was not the proper place or the proper time; that's a matter of judgment. But I know that the authorities in our own conference, because I live with the bishop who is responsible for the conference, he holds her in very high respect and did not take the slightest bit of offense at what she did, but I have seen some criticism from other sisters.

I would only add one thing and perhaps you wouldn't agree with me on this. I see a certain problem in the fact that our sister, nuns, are so publicly taking the leadership in the women's lib movement, because it's resented by some lay people. They figure that the sisters are getting far more attention than the numbers deserve, and secondly, some lay women and especially housewives, middle class, working class women, are beginning to look upon the women's lib movement as it's represented by sisters, as a bit elitist. [38:00] They're not concerned whether Sister Joan can get a second PhD, that isn't at the top of their agenda. They're concerned about things which are much more pragmatically close to the. So I think the sisters will have to guard against that, that it doesn't become just a little enclave of -- our sisters in the United States are the best educated sisters in the world and therefore, it's natural that they should take the

leadership, but I think they'll have to be a little careful not to pretend that they're speaking for the Polish housewife in the South Side of Chicago, which very often they're not.

Eugene Fisher:

I consider myself a feminist, so I would agree that this whole thing is long overdue and something that the church is going to have to come to grips with very deeply. One of the problems that I would say, within the Catholic community, and all of these issues is that we are a worldwide church. [39:00] So that the United States, its bishops and its people can't move out too much farther or faster than the rest of the Catholic community in the world. Now, think about where that is. Heavily in Latin America, Europe, quite a few in parts of Asia, in some sections of Africa. The whole questions of feminism as we have raised them in this country, in large groups of the rest -- chunks of the rest of the world don't even exist yet. I can remember at a dialogue that I was in a Christian-Muslim-Jewish dialogue, which is a good way to run that I think, we had kind of an anomalous situation of a white western male and a Pakistani Muslim woman arguing vociferously with a Catholic woman professor from France, who was -- the one from France was arguing very strongly, we don't need all this feminine liberation stuff that you have here in this country. We can get all we want by [40:00]

maneuvering the men in the bedroom and things like that, and I'm going what is this? After about an hour and a half, I looked at her and said, "That's a slave mentality." So there are differences.

Now in terms of church policy, which is going to move despite all the fissures and cracks and breaks, and you know, the whole range of opinions within the Catholic Church. When you talk about moving at a policy level, there has to be, or usually is, when it's working well, some sort of a consensus from a lot of places. That's going to be one of the difficulties, is in Roman Catholicism, you are dealing with so many different cultures and people at so many different levels. The American bishops are not going to simply say, well we're going to ordain priests where nobody else does, that would constitute a schism. So they can't do that, for reasons of keeping the community together. That's why it's going to take a long time. I mean, the ideas are just going to have to [41:00] percolate around in various other places besides the United States, before it starts coming back and coming together again. It's a problem.

Francis Mugavero:

Thank you. I know there are other questions but we will have to vacate the room soon for lunch, and we have one very important

item on our agenda this morning. It should be listed on your agenda for noon, but I think this is an appropriate time to do it. I'd like to call on Marc Tanenbaum please.

Marc Tanenbaum:

This was intended as an unexpected surprise, but if you looked at the agenda, you know that we've exposed the surprise prematurely. Yesterday, I spent part of the time I had [42:00] in New York City, attending a meeting of tenants committee in my apartment house building, and one of the decisions that the tenants made was that the time has come for our building to have two doormen instead of one. And apparently the rationale that seemed to have emerged out of the confused discussion was that one doorman was needed to listen to the complaints of the tenants and the other doorman was needed to ignore them. I think it's evident this morning, as it has been to all of us at the Interreligious Affairs Commission of the American Jewish Committee on the AJC generally, that in both Monsignor George Higgins and in Gene Fisher, [43:00] we have had great and inspired friendship, from both Monsignor Higgins, as well as from Father Flannery, and certainly now, from our dear friend and colleague in many areas of work, Dr. Eugene Fisher. We wanted to have this occasion to hear in particular, Monsignor Higgins this morning, because as many of you know, he is moving

toward a period of what none of us really believe is going to happen; some form of retirement from his role as a senior advisor at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and we wanted this occasion to have the benefit of kind of summary of his insight and thinking on a number of issues that are important to us, and I must say that [44:00] I don't think he disappointed any of his, neither he nor Gene Fisher, both in the candor, the honesty and above all, the spirit of empathy with which he has dealt with so many of the concerns that have been outstanding over the past decades of our relationship.

Let me just say a word before I present in behalf of this commission and before we go back to our subsequent consultations, where we'll be talking about making policy and talking about program for the coming year and more, a personal word about what George Higgins has meant to all of us over the course of many years. In fact, our relationship with Monsignor Higgins goes back to [45:00] years before the Vatican Council, before there was even an agenda item called Catholic-Jewish relationships. There was the time when we met virtually underground. There was a kind of catacomb Catholic-Jewish dialogue, when in order to have --

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