

C-3145 Transcription

Unidentified oral memo to Marc H. Tanenbaum from female scholar  
pertaining to her research in Jewish/Christian relations.

F1:

Rabbi Tanenbaum, I'm very happy for the opportunity to talk with you at this point in time and to share a little with you about what I'm doing in terms of my research. I believe I met you some years back when I was in Phoenix, Arizona, but that was very early on in my ventures into Jewish-Christian relations, and I suspect you don't remember me. It seems much of the rest of the time I always seem to be in another place when you are visiting there, so I hope sometime our paths will cross.

As you also probably know, I was for six years executive director of the North Phoenix Corporate Ministry -- that group of five Protestant churches; [01:00] the Catholic church; and two synagogues, Beth El and Beth Israel -- in Phoenix. And I thoroughly loved and appreciated my opportunity there to work in the area of Jewish-Christian relations.

Because of my ecumenical and interfaith experience on the local scene, I was invited in the spring quarter of 1975 to be minister-in-residence at Pacific School of Religion at the

graduate theological union in Berkeley. And I found there a great opportunity to share and reflect upon what it was that I was doing from a different vantage point. I used to kid about the fact that I never thought when I first entered the convent I would end up as a minister in a Protestant seminary. But I began to realize that it would be terribly helpful [02:00] if more people could be involved in ecumenical seminary education in terms of this matter of Jewish-Christian relations. I didn't have this on my agenda and I didn't say it earlier when I was talking with Neil and Jan, but I have often reflected that one can graduate from any of the nine major seminaries at the GTU and probably not have heard anything about Jewish-Christian relations. I did teach a course there spring quarter for the Center for Judaic Studies as part of the GTU, but that was the exception, the first time anything of that nature had been done.

So I became very excited about the possibility of bringing together my practical experience, such as the work I had done in Phoenix, with my academic experience, and [03:00] possibly move into Jewish-Christian relations on another level. I had already completed a Master's in American History at the Catholic University of America in Washington, and I also completed a Master's in theology at the University of San Francisco. There I did a major part of my research in the area of Jewish-Christian

relations under Avery Dulles when he was a scholar there one summer. And I had very much appreciated, you know, his encouragement that I move ahead in this area. I continue to be in contact with him at least once or twice a year and appreciate all that he has given me in terms of both knowledge and support.

The conclusion of this background sketch on [04:00] my own life is that it dawned on me -- if I went into a Ph.D. program at the Graduate Theological Union in historical theology and majored in the sub-area American Religious Life and Thought and did a dissertation on Jewish-Christian relations, I could in a sense bring together all of the experiences that I had had and hopefully tie them together and at the same time make some contribution in this area.

So I returned to Phoenix and told them I would stay one more year but then I would be going on to study. I spent three years in Berkeley, loved every minute of it, completed all my course work and all my comprehensions, and knew, as I was [05:00] doing research, that I needed to focus more and more in on the person of Father Charles Coughlin and ask myself -- what were the possibilities for doing further work about him and the whole question of anti-Semitism in the United States?

I took one seminar, Transatlantic Themes in the History of Christianity, and decided that I would try to look for European roots to the anti-Semitism of Coughlin -- and found myself moving in all sorts of fascinating directions. I guess I would have to say from the beginning that I became conscious of the fact that people have written about Coughlin from sociocultural and political points of view, but very little has been done in terms of looking for the theological framework out of which he might have been functioning and the intellectual [06:00] underpinnings of his thought.

So that was my jumping-off point in terms of looking for a dissertation topic. I did then for that particular seminar write an 80-page paper which put me in touch with a great deal of material in this overall area. I was fortunate in that the University of California Berkeley had all the copies of Coughlin's newspaper, *Social Justice*, which I went back and dutifully read. And I began to realize that there were two or three names that started to surface, who always seemed to plug into something Coughlin was saying, mostly when he moved into the more -- I don't want to say "intellectual" statements he made, but if he was trying to justify what he was doing and [07:00] he was looking for a rationale.

One of those persons was an Irish theologian named Father Dennis Fahey. Well, the more I saw him quoting Fahey -- and he mentions in one of his radio speeches that he even phoned Father Fahey from Detroit to Dublin in November of 1938. So I thought, my, this couldn't be just some plain, ordinary relationship, if in fact they -- how many people called from Detroit to Dublin in 1938? So I dug out of the library Fahey's books and started reading things like *Mystical Body of Christ in the Modern World*; *Mystical Body of Christ in the Reorganization of Society*; *Money Manipulation and the Social Order*; *The Rulers of Russia*; *The Kingship of Christ and the Conversion of the Jewish Nation*. And the more I read of this unbelievably anti-Semitic kind of -- [08:00] in quotes -- "theology," the more I began to say, "This is where Coughlin certainly was drawing when he went to find some source which would provide for him a rationale for the kinds of things he was saying." And I guess I have to say that that is a key question I started out asking, and that was: How could this man -- and in this instance, I would say either Father Coughlin or Father Fahey -- men who supposedly were good Catholic priests, how could they come up with some of this unbelievable material?

So I had to put aside my research to finish my comprehensives, but just a year ago, in January, after all the comprehensives

were behind me, I discovered that there was a former provincial from the Irish Holy Ghost [09:00] Fathers studying in Berkeley. And his name was Father William Jenkinson. So I invited him to lunch one day and Willy turned out to be a marvelous person and a wonderful friend. In fact, Willy had studied under Father Fahey when he was just a novice, and he had just unreal stories to tell with this beautiful Irish brogue. And the upshot of our luncheon conversation was that, number one, he thought -- he wasn't sure -- he thought there may be some material of Fahey's in Ireland, but he didn't ever remember seeing it in the regular archives. But at least it was worth exploring. Secondly, he agreed to write to the present provincial, tell him that he thought I'd be a competent girl, (laughter) would you believe, and that they should [10:00] trust me to have access to this material, because everybody realizes that this is very sensitive material. And so he also said -- the third point was that they generally have a 25-year moratorium on writings, and he would check to see when it was that Father Fahey died and would I in fact have the possibility of looking into this material.

So he called me back to say that the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Father Fahey's death was January 21, 1979. This was exactly five days after Willy and I had had lunch together. I couldn't believe it. It seemed to be providential, to say the least, that if there

was material, that the dates were so perfectly set up that I might in fact [11:00] be able to dash over to Ireland and look at it.

Part of the complication was that I was going to be teaching this course spring quarter at the GTU and so therefore had to be back at the end of March to begin teaching April 1<sup>st</sup>. Another difficulty arose in that my sister-in-law had to have brain surgery and I had to delay my trip to Ireland somewhat. About the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February last year, I left Los Angeles and flew to London and then on to Dublin.

I arrived on the very day that the Holy Ghost fathers were having a big special (inaudible) celebration for an anniversary of some kind of their first founder. And so I was introduced to this group of about 300 priests as the American sister who had come to do research on the relationship between Father Fahey and Father Coughlin. I had no sooner sat down when a dear little [12:00] old priest tapped me on the shoulder and said to me, "Sure, and I have all the books that were in Denny Fahey's room when he died, and I've kept them in a special place in the library and I'll show them to you." Well, Denny Fahey wrote on every margin and in all the leaves of every book that was ever in his room. He underlined everything. He wrote his agreements

and disagreements with the theory of the author all over every volume in his possession. And I had an occasion to spend a few days going through these 200-some books and pamphlets, Xeroxing a good part of his handwritten notations about all of these books. Of the 200 books, I would say at least 85% of them [13:00] were on Jews, Freemasons, and the money question. It was actually astounding to me that he just had tunnel vision; he had blinders on. The Jews as Communists and money manipulators really possessed his thought, to the point where many people who knew him had to say that he was really not completely rational on this issue.

Well, you may ask, what is it I'm trying to say about his influence and what he contributed along the way? I tried to look, then, at this man, Father Dennis Fahey, and say -- who was he and where did he come from, and why could he be important for understanding anti-Semitism in the United States? My conclusion, [14:00] after studying his life and talking to many people about him, was that it's important to recognize that he did his research in Rome around the time and shortly after the whole explosion about the Modernist crisis, which is about 1908 to 1912. He studied at that time under people like Cardinal Billot, Henri le Floch; he lived at the Seminaire Français in Rome. He also came out of a religious community that had been founded in



France. And the more I started to explore aspects of this, the more I began to realize that there were connections between Fahey and a lot of the right-wing radical conservative movements in the Church in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century -- the hangout from the Dreyfus Affair, the Axiom Français, [15:00] and all of those kinds of movements. Now, I'm not sure that I'm going to be able to prove all of that immediately, but I feel very sure that there are real connections here, the exploration of which will be a real contribution.

The next thing that dawned on me as I started reading a good part of Fahey, a large part of which is eclectic, is that he drew on French authors, German authors, the situation in Rome, and he put all of this in English. What I began to realize was that men like Coughlin, Gerald L.K. Smith, never claimed to be scholars. They were popularizers in the worst sense of the term. But in a certain sense, they always wanted to look to somebody and say, "Well, now, there's this famous scholar and he says thus-and-so." [16:00] Because they couldn't probably read French or German, or certainly not with much facility, it was very helpful for them then to have somebody who could take these French and German sources and other material and put it together in some kind of form which would be usable for them.

So I guess part of my dissertation is really -- or a good focus of the dissertation is going to be the fact that a lot of European currents got channeled unbelievably through a very little-known Irish theologian, partly because he was able to translate a lot of this into English and make it available to others who wouldn't read it in a foreign language.

Now, were there others who did this as well? I'm sure there were some others. But what I have found fascinating is [17:00] that there are these connections among these people.

I think I mentioned to you that Fahey's books -- *The Mystical Body of Christ in the Modern World* and *The Mystical Body of Christ in the Reorganization* and so forth -- set forth a key theme as the kingship of Christ. But Fahey was typical of the theologian who saw the whole world as divided into, you know, those who were for Christ and those who were against him. And so therefore the counterpart of the mystical body of Christ was a kind of mystical body of Satan. He was always talking about Satan's program of organized naturalism, and he always identified Jews and Freemasons with everybody who belonged in that other category -- people who were literally carrying on demonic programs. He, of course, [18:00] accepted as authentic the famous forged documents, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

-- as Coughlin did, too. But there's a whole, I think, theology behind this which I feel very sure is going to in some way astound many people who, as a result of Vatican II, perhaps, would think that none of that really existed since the Middle Ages.

That question of the Middle Ages also becomes key, I believe, because as many Catholics did during that period look back at the 13<sup>th</sup> as the greatest of centuries and that whole approach to a neo-Thomistic revival and Gothic architecture and Gregorian chant and all these other things that Catholics were very excited about in that period. I have another theory, and that is [19:00] that some of the negative fallout from that attitude was that by a kind of osmosis, I'm afraid, many Catholics probably, you know, inhaled, or whatever the proper word would be, an attitude toward the Jews which existed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century too.

So I think there are just all sorts of important questions that need to be explored here. I'm leaving here for you a copy of my dissertation proposal, and also a copy of an article which I have -- a draft which I am reworking entitled "Father Charles E. Coughlin: Roots of His Anti-Semitism." I would hope that you would have a chance to look at those. The article on Father Coughlin, I also include an extended section on [20:00] his

possible relationship to Hilaire Belloc. I need to look into that more fully as well, but Belloc was a visiting professor at Fordham back in -- I think it was 1937, '38. And every single week there was an article by Belloc in Coughlin's newspaper, *Social Justice*. And of course, to read Belloc's book on the Jews is devastating. So no wonder, if Coughlin was drawing on people like Belloc and on people like Fahey to give him some kind of rationale for the kinds of things he was doing and saying, it just -- it becomes, at least to me, more clear that he thought this was just a very acceptable way to go.

I might add -- some of the exciting little things [21:00] that happened when I was in Ireland were experiences like taling to the old brother who took the first phone call that Coughlin made to Fahey in November of '38. And how many phone calls went from Detroit to Dublin in 1938? So that was a very exciting day at the seminary in Kimmage.

I also had the opportunity to talk to the son of the former rabbi at the Dublin Hebrew Congregation, whose father had attempted to talk to Fahey -- wanted to make an appointment to talk with him and try to say to him, "You have misunderstood my people." And there are in the Fahey papers seven letters between them, and they're very, very sad, but they show the real [22:00]

un-accepting attitude of Fahey toward anything that was Jewish, which is rather heartbreaking indeed.

Now, let me move on and tell you the last chapter of my story here, at least for the moment. (pause) I'm just checking the tape to make sure it hadn't expired.

I moved on then to become Assistant Academic Dean, Dean of Students, and on the faculty of the School of Theology at Claremont. I taught a course fall semester in Jewish-Christian relations similar to the one I taught in Berkeley. But what has become very clear to me is that there is no way that I can do these two and a half jobs in Claremont and ever finish this dissertation. And I am really convinced that there is something really special here that [23:00] needs to be explored so that we can better understand this whole experience of anti-Semitism in this country in the years 1934-1954. So one lovely day in December I receive a letter from the archivist in Dublin, a marvelous man. And he proceeded to give me the exciting information that they had sold one of the old scholasticate buildings at the seminary. And when they were cleaning out the basement, they found a locked press, and in it was another whole stacks of letters and manuscripts of Father Dennis Fahey. Well, I couldn't believe this. It was just too good to be true. You

know, the historical theologian always dreams of finding the trunk in the basement, but to find two of them [24:00] almost seemed to be overwhelming. So he wrote -- his letter was just priceless, and he said to me: "Ah, now, it was a very difficult job. The mice had gotten into the cabinet," he says. "But being Irish mice," he says, "they were very intelligent mice, so they only ate the covers of the letters and a few continental ones in French." (laughter) Well, I was all ready to hop in a plane and go to Dublin, but obviously that wasn't possible. And so I wrote back to him and said, you know, "How much material is there really, and would it be possible for me -- or would it be possible for you to Xerox it and mail it over to me, or would I in fact really need to go back to Ireland myself?"

So on, then, about the middle of January, I get this [25:00] envelope -- good-sized envelope. And I open it up, and in it are seven legal-sized sheets, single-spaced -- except double-spaced between each letter of the alphabet -- of entries of material. Of more letters and manuscripts and papers that they had found. Well, right away, of course, I looked, and there were more letters of Coughlin and more letters of Gerald L.K. Smith, but I nearly dropped when I saw a letter from J. Edgar Hoover, three letters from Jacques Maritain... this was just too much. So I began to realize that for me not to finish this dissertation at

this point in time is really wrong. As you will notice, Moses Rischin is on my committee. He's just a marvelous person [26:00]; I dearly love him. And I have asked him, as a matter of fact, along with the other people on my committee, to send letters of recommendation with -- to the American Jewish Committee regarding my hope that perhaps you can give me some assistance in finishing my dissertation. Moses Rischin really thinks I may have found a missing link in terms of understanding the relationship between anti-Semitism in Europe and the British Isles and Ireland and what was going on in this country during that period of time.

So my hope at the present time is that I will be able to go back to Ireland, look at it this summer, Xerox as much of that material as I need; now that I know it's there... I have enough practically to write a dissertation with what I have, [27:00] but the new material is entirely too exciting. I couldn't possibly discount it. So I need to go back and then come back to the United States and try to get this dissertation shaped up and written as quickly as possible. Because I do think it is important for us, both as Catholics and Protestants and Jews, to look at the interaction that was going on; to look at the influence of patterns of thought, one on the other, and how

maybe we can understand ourselves better in the present time as a result of it.

So therefore, I guess what I'm saying is I really want this study to be something that can have some real contemporary impact. For one thing, there are still a lot of people around who remember Father Coughlin. I was in some correspondence [28:00] with him and had really hoped I could interview him when I came back from Ireland, but as you know, of course, he died last October. But I got this delightful letter from him where he said the doctors wouldn't let him discuss and be interviewed anymore. And he said, "I'm very sorry I can't help you, but when you're 87, you'll understand." (laughter) So it was not just a letter dictated off by some secretary, but rather, I felt at least a personal interest and concern there.

So I have not been able to talk to Father Coughlin, but oh, won't it be fascinating when his papers eventually, if ever they do open up, to find out if there's further information that would be helpful for this kind of study. [29:00]

My other very real difficulty at the moment is that because I terminated my study grant with my religious community to go back to work, according to the guidelines, it's not possible for me



to get further funding from them at this point. And I have not been able to save very much money from the not-very-splendiferous salary that I have received at the School of Theology. And funding for the next year is going to be a real problem for me. If I -- I may have -- I plan to go back to Berkeley and write the dissertation. I have thought about possibly doing some part-time teaching. But all of this is going to, of course, delay the dissertation as such. My hope and my request [30:00] would be that if it's at all possible for the American Jewish Committee in some way, shape, or form to help fund my trip back to Ireland this summer and give me some additional funds to live for the next year, I hope that I could finish my dissertation in about a year's time. I guess we're talking there about \$2,000 probably for the trip to Ireland and about \$8,000 to live on for the coming year. So that would be a total of about \$10,000.

I'm really convinced that this could be a very important study, not only from an academic point of view, but because my only experience has been grass-root-sy, if I can put it that way, as well as an excitement about scholarship and research. I would hope that I really could put together [31:00] material which could reach out to people in a popular way as well, to help us all understand who we are. And I guess my bottom line would

really be that unless we know who we are and what we have been  
in the past, there's really no p--

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