

Richard Cardinal Cushing Oral History Interview—1966
Administrative Information

Creator: Richard Cardinal Cushing

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Biographical Note

Cushing, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston (1944-1970) and Cardinal (1958-1970), discusses his friendship with John F. Kennedy (JFK), the similarities between JFK and Pope John XXIII, and JFK's religious practices, among other issues.

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Richard Cardinal Cushing

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Oral History Interview

With

Richard Cardinal Cushing

1966

By Edward M. Kennedy

For the John F. Kennedy Library

KENNEDY: I thought we'd just talk a little bit about some of the early relationships with the family, about how you came to know my mother [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] and father [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], and then your personal opinions about the phases of my brother's [John F. Kennedy] character and work with which you are familiar.

CUSHING: My recollection of meeting for the first time your father and mother brings me back over a period of some twenty-five years. I first met them shortly after the Second World War. In that war, their eldest son, Joseph P., Jr. [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.], was killed. As a result of the death of this very promising young man, I gradually became a friend of your family. Ere long they conferred with me concerning a memorial for "Joe, Jr." Our decision was to build the present Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Memorial Hospital for mentally and physically handicapped children. That hospital is located on Warren Street, Brighton, Massachusetts, directly opposite the Brighton High School. It is owned and staffed by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, an international missionary community.

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It was about this time also the family was thinking of a new school for your sister, Rosemary Kennedy, who was suffering from a severe mental retardation. I recommended the

St. Coletta's School in Jefferson, Wisconsin. She has lived there ever since in a private cottage. The reason why your father and mother were interested in placing Rosemary in an institution like St. Coletta's was to have her live in a religious environment.

KENNEDY: I presume you met President Kennedy under the same circumstances.

CUSHING: No, I did not become personally acquainted with the late President until he entered politics and began his campaign for Congress. Over the years until his tragic death, our friendship increased and multiplied in many ways.

The first impression the future President made on me was his conviction that one's education was never finished. That accounts for his constant interest in the higher things of life. Every day seemed to be a school day for him in the sense that he was always improving his intellectual ability. He was a great listener and learned from many of his elders things that he would never find in books, despite the fact that he was a prolific reader. Today when I preside at the commencement exercises of colleges and universities, I try to convince the graduates that commencement exercises are only a new beginning, and I present the late President as one who was so convinced of that fact that he never succumbed to the temptation that education ended with a scholastic degree.

KENNEDY: Did the late President visit you very frequently?

CUSHING: Yes, whenever he was home he never failed to contact me by a telephone call or a personal visit. Our conversations covered many subjects: for example, the trends of the times, legislation in which the Catholic Church and other churches were interested.

KENNEDY: I presume he conferred with you concerning federal aid to education.

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CUSHING: Yes, we spoke frequently on this subject. He thought that private or church-related schools should be accepted as part of the educational system of the country and, if it was constitutional, these schools should receive some kind of aid that had no relation to religion. We also discussed time and again the great opportunities that Catholic-educated men could make to the welfare of their country. But the best of them hesitated to enter public life. Why this was so, he could not understand.

KENNEDY: He felt that in this role a Catholic could make a unique contribution to public life. He also hoped that only the best and those adequately equipped should seek political office. Special insistence he frequently made on the necessity of keeping the Church out of politics.

CUSHING: I was convinced from the earliest days of his public that if there was to be a Catholic elected President of the United States in this generation, John F.

Kennedy was the man. For me, he was the only Catholic, the only member of any minority group who had a chance in the foreseeable future of being president of this nation.

Back in 1966, there was a brief struggle at the Democratic Convention over the selection of a vice presidential candidate. One of the candidates for this position on the Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] ticket was Senator Kennedy. He did not obtain the Party's endorsement, but he surprised everyone by coming very close to it.

From then on I watched John Kennedy with an eye toward 1960 and a great hope in my heart that he might become the nominee of the Democrats for president. He certainly had what some politicians call the "political magic." But I feared it was still too early for a Roman Catholic to buck the strong, if mostly silent, tides of religious prejudice. Nevertheless, I was convinced if anyone could break through that wall of prejudice, our best hope was with John F. Kennedy. More than any other Catholic of the twentieth century, he was capable of facing this Herculean challenge. His liberal rather than conservative Catholicism, his magnificent educational background, his courageous war effort, his personal wealth, his political experience, his quick, facile mind, his effective oratory, his optimism, his youth that

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had passed through two world wars and a great depression, plus many other qualities of mind and heart were all in his favor.

Furthermore, from his deep familiarity with history, John Kennedy knew his country and its past better than most presidents. From his own experience in war, he knew the meaning of the phrase, "live for country." From his own life in this century, he knew the nature of the dangers that faced his country. He deftly blended these areas of knowledge together to forge a guide for his actions. He loved America and its people. Seeing it as he did in the prime of its prosperity and power, he determined that he must do all that he could to preserve this image for its children and his. He had to reduce the threat of nuclear holocaust without resort to all out war. This was his crisis as the first government under the Constitution had been Washington's [George Washington]; the Civil War, Lincoln's [Abraham Lincoln]; depression, Roosevelt's [Franklin D. Roosevelt]. He knew from history that these men had met their problems with new ideas that drew criticism from friend and foe alike. He knew that contemporary popularity often evaded the innovator. Yet, he went ahead and proclaimed to the world, "Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate." Out of this proclamation came the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the "hot line" to Russia, the Peace Corps, and other such innovations. Some groups in America cried, "Soft on Communism!" to his efforts, for they could not fathom as he did that the American system was sufficiently flexible to utilize the many ways and means to preserve peace without risking weakness or sacrificing honor.

KENNEDY: Did his position on some of the issues—for example, on the federal aid to education, on the questions of birth control, the sending of an ambassador to the Vatican—cause the hierarchy of the church to have reservations about his election?

CUSHING: Some of the hierarchy of the church, I presume, were not in favor of John F. Kennedy being elected president. They feared that the time had not arrived when a president who was a Catholic could be elected. Some of them had very strange ideas about the influence the millions of Catholics in the United States might exert on a man who would be the first president of the United States who was a Catholic. Non-

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Catholics, seemingly very numerous, had the same impression.

On the matters of federal aid to Catholic education and related subjects, I think his attitude was correct. Some of the hierarchy, like myself, never enthused about such aid for we presumed it would include some form of federal control. Furthermore, there was serious doubts about the constitutionality of such aid.

On the question of birth control, a Catholic president would necessarily obey his oath of office. Every state in the union has legalized in one form or another the authority of doctors and others to recommend birth control in various forms permitted by their respective laws.

With regard to the possibility of a Catholic president advocating the exchange of ambassadors between the United States and the Vatican or of establishing formal diplomatic relations between the two—that was an absurd objection against the election of President Kennedy. I do not know one member of the hierarchy in the United States who in my lifetime favored such a step. Undoubtedly, there were some, but I never knew them.

The members of the Catholic hierarchy who opposed, privately, of course, the election of a Catholic president did so mainly because they did not believe the people were ready to accept one and, furthermore, they wished to be perfectly free in expressing their opinions on public affairs and legislation that directly or indirectly referred to the freedom of religion.

KENNEDY: Your Eminence, during the campaign itself there were a number of different issues which brought about a great deal of emotion. There were a number of questions which were asked of President Kennedy. He was attacked on the basis of the religious beliefs that he held. Let me mention, for example, a couple of different incidents. One surrounded the Chapel of Four Chaplains in Pennsylvania, where he was criticized for not attending an interdenominational faith service. Later he was attacked by Norman Vincent Peale. I know during the campaign itself there were these types of attacks on President Kennedy. I'm wondering if you remember any incidents when you were either consulted or called about these attacks and what your reaction to these were?

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CUSHING: There were hundreds of similar attacks made against the candidacy of President Kennedy, but for the most they were inspired by bigotry, prejudice, or ignorance. However, it was a shocking experience to countless citizens of all faiths that a man aspiring for public office, even though it was the highest office in the

land, would be publicly attacked for his religious beliefs and openly charged that a good Catholic could not be a good president. To the very end of the campaign, President Kennedy was so attacked. And there is no doubt in my mind that countless people voted against him solely because of his religion.

Along this line of thought, permit me to say here there were two great men of the twentieth century who live forever in the hearts of those who endeavored to live by the two greatest commandments of the Almighty, love of god, and love of neighbor. Both were named John. John F. Kennedy and Pope John XXIII.

Pope John XXIII was the first Pope in four hundred years who built, as it were, bridges of charity and mutual respect between Catholics and Protestants, Catholics and the Orthodox, and Catholics and Jewish and pagan people. When he was elected Pope as a successor to the scholarly, saintly Pope Pius XII, it was said by many that his election brought forth a “caretaker” of the Catholic Church for a few years and then a younger man would succeed him. On the contrary, he proved to be one of the most popular popes in all history, and the bridges he built between people of all religions were bridges of love, bridges of confidence and charity, tolerance, understanding, and kindness. As a result, the whole climate pertaining to the relationship between Catholics and non-Catholics has changed. No one in his wildest dreams would think that ten years ago we would be having dialogues with Protestant ministers, with Jewish rabbis, with peoples of all faiths. Dialogues are friendly conversations. They are not debates where one side wins and another side loses. Who would think that ten years ago, for example, that we would be having Bible vigils, services consisting of Bible readings and hymns and prayers acceptable to all Christians? Well, Pope John XXIII initiated all of this by his wonderful Christ-like spirit of charity.

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I always felt that John F. Kennedy was a forerunner in this field of Pope John XXIII because he never allowed his faith to interfere in any way with his relations with others. He was the greatest representative of brotherhood, I think, that we had among the laity. The attitude that he took towards his religion and its relationship with all of the constituents that would be under him as president of the United States were the very attitudes that a man of the type of Pope John XXIII assumed when he became the Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church. It is true that there were those who opposed Jack Kennedy as president on the basis of his religion, but I think they did so not out of any malcontent or any bigotry or bitterness. There surely was some prejudice against a Catholic president in the White House, but I think that those who opposed his election did so on account of ignorance and for that they are to be excused. But when he talked to the group of some five hundred ministers in Texas and subjected himself to all the questions they wanted to present to him relative to his religion, he respected and esteemed conscientious religious beliefs of all peoples. And at the same time he gave the entire country the assurance that as president of the United States, his first and most solemn duty was to fulfill the Constitution of the United States in its spirit and in its letter and under no conditions would he be influenced in any way by the Catholic Church or the Vatican in the fulfillment of his official duties. And as far as I know, while he was President no influence of that kind was ever brought to bear upon him.

Hence, I repeat, John F. Kennedy and Pope John XXIII were the great pioneers of what we now call the ecumenical spirit which is intended to wipe away all form of bigotry by knowing, respecting, and esteeming the religious beliefs of all peoples. From this same ecumenical spirit we pray, study, and carry on conversations, especially among Christians, with them hope of creating a better atmosphere within which all Christians will one day be united in one fold under one Shepherd.

KENNEDY: If we could go back, Your Eminence, I remember that you officiated at Jack and Jackie's [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] wedding down at Newport. That was a wonderful occasion. I was wondering if your had any memories of that, when you were driving down or at Newport or at Hammersmith Farm?

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CUSHING: Yes, I remember the wedding very, very well. I was proud to have a part in the ceremony. I had not met Jacqueline prior to that time, but I can visualize years later the wedding in all its dignity and spirituality not overdone in any way whatsoever, and I concluded at the end of the wedding that here, indeed, were an ideal couple. Culturally, spiritually, and socially, they were well mated and as time proved, they both seemed to aspire to the higher life in the field of culture and scholarship. Into the White House, they brought this beautiful atmosphere.

You will never be able to fully comprehend, unless you move around a great deal among young people, the lasting affect that "Jack" and "Jackie" have had upon young men and young woman. I meet many of the youth of our day from all parts of the world. They have impressed me as serious-minded and ready to change in time the injustice, the inhumanity and other evils that mar the present social order.

I recall, for example, meeting a young doctor applying for the position of medical director of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Memorial Hospital. The position would pay a minimum of thirty thousand dollars a year. This young man had a few years' experience in pediatrics. Prior to entering medical school, he was a leader in the Catholic Youth Organization of the Archdiocese of Boston. There he had developed many characteristics of leadership. I said to him, "You're only a young man, doctor. How can you aspire for this position?" He said, "The late President Kennedy gave every young man in this country a challenge, and as a result I accepted my challenge to fill this position. Following his example and recommendation, I accepted the challenge for success as head of a hospital named after a brother who was killed in the Second Word War. I am sure that through the inspiration of President Kennedy I will be a credit to you." We gave him the position. He was a tremendous success. A few months later, he was drafted, and today he is in Vietnam. He'll have another challenge over there, but he has set up the hospital in such a way that when he returns he will always have in mind the challenge he received from our martyred President. For it will be returned to him at that time.

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Something of the same can be said of Jacqueline, that valiant woman, first described in the Old Testament. I meet young women today who were so impressed by her attitude at

her husband's funeral, by her dignity, her poise, her bravery, that many of these young girls now look up to her as an ideal. Whereas formerly they were chasing after moving picture actresses and other popular idols, now they look to her as an example of genuine greatness.

These thoughts all come back to me when I recall the wedding of Jack and Jacqueline. They impressed me on that occasion especially to the extent that in the future they would be a source of great inspiration, and indeed, a challenge to the young people of modern times. That to me is the greatest inheritance the far-famed Kennedy's left behind after one thousand days in the White House. That impression they left not only in the United States but also in Ireland and Germany and every foreign country. That is so true that many of the people in foreign lands who had not seen President Kennedy at close range but who had always followed everything he said or did, hoped that one day they would have their own "Jack Kennedy." These young folks were governed during a lifetime by old men. They were talented men, men of experience, men who were needed at the time of their rise to fame, but they were too old to inspire a generation that had been through two wars and many economic depressions. The youngsters of this generation wanted a leader like President John F. Kennedy.

KENNEDY: Your Eminence, did you baptize Caroline [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy]?

CUSHING: I baptized Caroline in Saint Patrick's Cathedral, New York, and Francis Cardinal Spellman [Francis Edward Spellman] was present at the ceremony.

KENNEDY: If I could go back to the time of presidency again, Your Eminence, I would like to ask you about the abortive invasion of the Bay of Pigs. I know that this was a matter of great personal concern to the President: the loss of the men captured by the soldiers of Fidel Castro, imprisoned, treated harshly, and murdered. This tugged at the heartstrings of President Kennedy, who felt a very deep personal failure of the United States to support an attempt of exiled Cubans to reclaim their own country from the Communists.

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CUSHING: As for Castro, I was among the very first who publicly branded him as a Communist. I recall some of the language I used, for example, "When I see a bird walking like a duck, waddling like a duck, swimming like a duck, eating like a duck, I know that bird is a duck. And when I see a man imitating Communists, following the line of Communism, acting like a Communist, I know that man is a Communist." The results: I was criticized by practically all the media of public communications in the United States. They said I didn't know what I was talking about. But the fact of the matter is, I had pretty good proof that Castro was a Communist.

I think that the hopeless invasion of the Bay of Pigs was looked upon by President Kennedy as the Achilles heel of his brief term as President. The invasion failed for at the last moment the President, making his own decision, had refused American armed support. Did he do right or wrong? That will always be a debated question. Personally, I think his judgment overriding that of those who advocated the opposite was correct. If he permitted air

support for the heroic invaders, it might have started a third world war. Probably, the Chinese Communists might have moved into the picture because at the time, and even now, they seem to have great power throughout Latin America. Thousands of students from Latin America have been trained in the communistic universities of China as well as in Moscow. For a while, it seemed to men that Russia left Latin America to the supervision of the Chinese Communists.

In any event, the forces of the United States, as such, did not support the invasion. Without that support, those who took part in the invasion of that Bay of Pigs were doomed. The President felt very, very sad about it all. It was the first time in my life that I ever saw tears come into his eyes. The second time was when we buried little Patrick Bouvier Kennedy from the chapel of the Archbishop's house in Boston,

Sometime after the invasion, Castro was willing to make a deal for the liberation of some of the prisoners. The deal originally called for sixty-two million dollars. Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, the father of the late President, telephoned me and asked me if I would serve on a committee with Eleanor Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt], Adlai Stevenson, and other outstanding citizens to collect this extraordinary ransom. "Mr. Ambassador," I replied, "I'll be happy to be of any possible service, but no matter who serves

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on this committee, we can never collect sixty-two million dollars in the United States for the liberation of these prisoners."

The plan was abandoned. Then there was a committee set up by the Cubans themselves of which I was one of the sponsors. It was the Committee of Cuban Families for the liberation of the prisoners who were caught in the invasion at the Bay of Pigs. This committee was made up primarily of Cubans who lived in the United States. I gladly became one of the officers even though I knew it was a hopeless cause. We couldn't collect more than a very small amount. Castro was evidently convinced the money could be obtained. Then in a final effort, he sent twenty or thirty paraplegics to help the appeal of the Cuban Families Committee. These helpless wounded were no help. When their time in the States expired and they were to return to Cuba, they refused to go. Then into the picture came James Donovan [James B. Donovan], a New York attorney who had succeeded in liberating an American air pilot from a Russian prison. He conferred with Castro and succeeded in getting a commitment in the form of goods that would equal the money ransom previously demanded. The argument was finalized and timed to have the liberated prisoners in the States before Christmas. That would have removed some of the bad publicity received by the Administration, resulting from the failure of the United States to give military aid to the invaders. But Castro changed his mind and demanded \$2,900,000 in cash in addition to the millions of dollars worth of materials of all kinds. Where he got that idea, I don't know. In any event, I understand that General Lucius D. Clay [Lucius D. Clary, Sr.] borrowed \$1,900,000. One million more was needed. Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], then the Attorney General, telephoned me, described the problem, and wanted to know if I could get them \$1,000,000 before the day was over. It was then only a couple of days before Christmas, and they wanted these prisoners in the United States prior to that day. I replied, "I'll call you back in three hours." I did so, and I promised to have the money delivered to

him at the White House about 6 p.m. Where did I get the money? I borrowed it from Latin American friends and those in the United States and promised to pay it back within three months.

There was to be no publicity. However, when Congress met after Christmas, they decided to have an investigation as to where all this money came from. They knew of General Clay's help, but

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where did the additional \$1,000,000 come from? To forestall any investigation, I gave a news release to the press. Some were skeptical, but these are the facts, and all who loaned the money have been repaid.

KENNEDY: Moving to another event, Your Eminence. The time was 1953 and 1954. The President underwent a serious operation in New York and was dangerously close to death on two or three different occasions. Do you remember any time during that period of visiting President Kennedy?

CUSHING: I visited him when he was writing the book, *Profiles in Courage*.

KENNEDY: But prior to that time, when he was in the hospital in New York.

CUSHING: Yes. Very close to death.

KENNEDY: Do you remember the times that you visited?

CUSHING: I visited him twice. On one occasion, I didn't think he was going to survive. But he had tremendous courage. I don't think that from the time of his injury in World War II that he spent a day without some kind of pain, great or small. In truth, from his youth, it seems that he was never without pain. He had a tremendous amount of courage, never complaining, always calm.

No matter what his handicaps, he fought his own battles while at all times he was improving himself, enriching his mind and strengthening his will and perfecting his public image as a very effective leader. So in the natural order and in the supernatural order, I think he was an extraordinary man with a special mission to fulfill and he fulfilled it. I would guess that mission was to be an inspiration to the young people of modern times and to remind them by example that God was not dead, patriotism was still alive, their country needed them for future leadership.

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Some folks have asked me if he was a practicing Catholic. He was just as good a Catholic as I am, and he had ideas similar to mine. I don't like to parade my religion. I try to live as I'm supposed to live. He was the same. He would be present in his church every Sunday or a Holy Day, but he never liked the idea of being in the public eye when he was at

prayer. His religion was between himself and God, and that's just what religion is. It's the bond that unites the creature with the Creator. But he spent more time in private prayer than many people know. Time and again, he would drop into the Archbishop's House in Boston when I would be broadcasting the evening rosary and participate in that prayer.

KENNEDY: I think you probably know this, and I think a lot of other people know this. He was always somewhat hesitant, for example, to perhaps kiss a bishop's ring or to genuflect before him.

CUSHING: Correct, he never kissed my ring nor did he ever genuflect when greeting me. But why should he? It is by no means a universal custom that a Catholic should genuflect on meeting a bishop and then kiss his ring. Look at that ring on my finger. That ring was given by Pope Paul VI to the bishops attending the Second Vatican Council. No one could kiss that ring. It looks like a metal band. Furthermore, I know prelates in Italy and other countries who would never let anyone kiss their ring. Personally, I allow very few people to kiss or try to kiss my ring or even to genuflect before me. Ere long, that old custom will end. In fact, they are doing away with it at the present time. That is what I mean when I say that President Kennedy was a forerunner of Pope John XXIII. All of these customs, kissing the ring and elaborate robes by bishops and so forth, they are all antiquated customs that have come down from the days when the papacy was a great temporal power as well as spiritual power. They came down from the days of royalty. Now they're passing away. All things that single out bishops as men of worldly ambition and not as good shepherds of souls are changing. Thank God they are.

KENNEDY: Did President Kennedy ever meet Pope John XXIII?

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CUSHING: No, but Pope John had great esteem for him. I was with the President at the Boston College stadium where twenty thousand people were commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of that institution. He was the chief speaker. He held in his hand a copy of *Pacem in Terris*, the famous encyclical letter of Pope John XXIII on the social order. This encyclical, written in simple understandable language, was received with much acclaim, so much so that even the Communists tried to make propaganda out of it, saying, "This is just what we are preaching to you people." On the other hand, this is what the program of President Kennedy was aiming at. He realized that the objectives of the American Revolution were never fully attained. Hence he was spearheading the fight for human rights, Medicare, aid to education, the elimination of poverty and unemployment, and other legislation pertaining to a better social order so that every man, woman and child in the United States would share in the tremendous wealth and strength of their country.

When President Kennedy arose to speak to the twenty thousand people at the Boston College stadium, he held a copy of *Pacem in Terris* in his hand and, having summarized its contents, he said, "Because of this encyclical, I proudly proclaim before the world that I am a Roman Catholic."

Pope John XXIII was close to death at that time. From the Vatican they checked with me to confirm the statement of the President. I replied, "I was there. I know it was true. I sat alongside of him when he made the statement." Pope John was so pleased that he hoped against hope that he would live to meet President Kennedy. But it was too late. He was dead when President Kennedy came to Rome after the tremendous reception he received in West Germany. Meanwhile, however, he gathered many personal gifts which he planned to give the President in addition to the official gifts that it is customary for a Pope to give to the Head of a State. Among these gifts were medals and other tokens of recognition received by the Holy Father. But the most precious of them all was one of three autographed copies of *Pacem in Terris*. The second one is in the Vatican library; the third was given to U Thant, the head of the U.N.

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When I went to Rome for the Conclave that elected Pope Paul VI, now gloriously reigning, I was asked by the Vatican authorities to present these personal gifts of Pope John to President Kennedy. This presentation took place immediately after President Kennedy's audience with Pope Paul VI at the North American College in Rome. After the presentation, the President personally greeted all the students.

During the audience the President with Pope Paul VI, he received from His Holiness a statue of the *Pieta*, similar to the original, which was then on exhibition at the World's Fair in New York.

Speaking about medals, may I add that Jacqueline, the valiant wife of the late President, gave me what was called in the military forces Jack's "dog tag." Years ago, this tag was worn on the wrists of the members of the armed forces. It is a metal identification made of aluminum and worn now around the necks of the troops. When Jacqueline gave me her late husband's identification tag, she gave me the only item of its kind in all history. The inscription on it reads as follows: "Kennedy, John F., Commander in Chief." Then there is a zero (0) indicating the character of his blood, and at the end the words: "Religion – Roman Catholic."

Since John F. Kennedy was the first Roman Catholic who became the Commander in Chief of the United States military forces and the first Roman Catholic as president of the United States, there is no other identification like the one I possess. Eventually I'll give it to the Kennedy Memorial Library.

KENNEDY: Your Eminence, I think all of us remember the Inauguration in 1961. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

CUSHING: I'll tell you first that there's a little humor identified with that. I was never at an inauguration ceremony of a President. I was invited to give the prayer at this one. I thought I was the only one offering a prayer. So I worked hard on a prayer. I thought it was a pretty good prayer. When I arrived for the ceremony on a terrible wintry day, I found that four clergymen were to offer prayers.

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There was my friend, Archbishop Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Church, a Rabbi [Dr. Nelson Glueck] and a Protestant minister [Reverend Dr. John Barclay] from Texas and myself. I was sitting between the Rabbi and the Protestant minister from Texas. The minister said to me, "Are you going to the luncheon after this ceremony?" I said, "No. I've been up all night." I came in that afternoon by plane and on reaching stormy Washington the plane was sent to Philadelphia; from there it was sent to John F. Kennedy Airport. There we had to sit around anywhere until three o'clock in the morning when we got a train to Washington, riding all the way on baggage. We arrived in Washington in time to offer Mass at the Shrine in memory of the martyred President. After Mass, I went to Archbishop O'Boyle's [Patrick A. O'Boyle] house, and from there he accompanied me to the Inaugural. I was tired and could hardly keep my eyes open.

The Protestant minister sitting next to me asked, "Are you going to the luncheon after the ceremonies?" I said, "No, are you going?" He said, "I haven't got any tickets." I said, "You mean to tell me you haven't got a ticket, and you seem to know everybody up on this stage. Here," I replied, "take my ticket and take your wife with you because I'm in no condition to go to a luncheon after sitting out in the cold aisle of a train with my suitcase as a chair."

Here is where the humor comes into the picture. When I stood up to say my prayer, there was smoke coming up over the podium. Everybody saw it and started looking around, under the podium, the stage, everywhere to find the source of the smoke. I said to myself, "Here's where I steal the show. If that smoke indicates a bomb and if the bomb explodes while I am praying, I'm going to land over the Washington Monument." But, no, the smoke came from a couple of wires that got crossed.

Of course, millions witnessed the scene on television. I have a terrible speaking voice because all my life I have suffered from severe emphysema and asthma. Having read my prayer in my naturally crude way, I forgot the past and looked to the future. Two weeks later, I received a letter from a man in California. This man evidently didn't like me. He sent a letter

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from which I quote: "Dear Sir: You gave a prayer at the Inauguration of President Kennedy. Let me comment. Number one, your prayer was too long. Number two, you sounded like a circus barker. Number three, during your prayer there was smoke coming up over the podium. Wherever there is smoke, there's fire. Probably you would like to know the symbolism of all this. That smoke was the devil asking for equal time."

KENNEDY: What are your recollections of the funeral services?

CUSHING: I went right home after the burial. Archbishop O'Boyle and his Auxiliary, Most Reverend Phil Hannan [Philip M. Hannah], now the Archbishop of New Orleans came with me to the airport. We were dressed up in our vestments. Having thanked them for their kindness and hospitality, I went immediately to the office of the airlines on which I was traveling to change into civilian clothes. Then a man came over to

me and shook my hand and threw his arms around me, and he said, “Cardinal Spellman, I was proud of you this morning.” I said, “Don’t mention it, brother. Glad to be of service.”

KENNEDY: You made an arrangement with the Library where you turned the proceeds that were made available to you through the *Profiles in Courage* back to the Kennedy Library. Could you tell us just a little bit about that?

CUSHING: When the publicity firms in the United States and elsewhere went to the President to televise *Profiles in Courage*, I wasn’t there, but Tom Walsh [Thomas Walsh] was there. Tom is in charge of the offices of the Kennedy Foundation. The President didn’t want the profits from the television program. Who should receive them? After thinking it over and at the suggestion of Tom Walsh, the President named me, or the Archbishop Cushing Charities, Inc., as the beneficiary. He sent me a contract that I had to sign which he and the publicity people also signed, and with it he said, “Now you’re in the television business.”

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All of this was only a few months, I believe, before the late President’s assassination. Sure enough, I had almost forgotten about the whole thing because he had done the same thing with me on the American edition of his book, *While England Slept*. From there also I was to get the royalties for our missionary works in Latin America. To the present time, I have received in royalties from the television programs of *Profiles in Courage* about \$400,000.

These were not only the occasions when the President sent me money. The President, as a matter of fact, was unique in many ways. I don’t think he ever carried money with him. If you had a cup of coffee and a doughnut with Jack, you’d pick up the tab. But he was very, very generous, and I know a lot of people whom he helped through me, but he said nothing about it.

KENNEDY: I know he very deeply appreciated having these conversation and the fact that he would gain some insight, at least, into your thinking about issues. I think there’s no question that it influenced him strongly. I think there’s no question that it influenced him strongly.

CUSHING: I have seen so many indications of the fact that he was what I call a forerunner of John XXIII. John XXIII could have done a great deal for John F. Kennedy because John XXIII was unique.

I think he ought to be canonized because I, even now, pray to him as a saint. One reason I think he was a saint is he was about the only one who was ever in a high position who ever understood me and I don’t understand myself. [Laughter]

As for conferring with me on political issues, he did so quietly and casually but he had the best brains in the country around him and he did not need my limited knowledge. All I could tell him was the reaction to his policies by the man and woman on the street. But that was just what he wanted from me.

KENNEDY: Do you remember, Your Eminence, the death of Patrick Bouvier and the circumstances that surround that?

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CUSHING: I certainly do. It would break your heart. The little child was brought to the Children's Hospital, Boston, and every means known to medical science was used in an attempt to save the child's life. Well, the baby died. Jack had tremendous love for his children. The death of Patrick Bouvier Kennedy broke his heart. The family wanted the Mass of the Angels offered as part of the services. I offered the Mass and read a few appropriate prayers at the end.

The little chapel in the Archbishop's Residence accommodates about sixteen people. Only the members of the family were present. Jacqueline was too sick. Cardinal Spellman came from New York. His Eminence had called me the night before and wanted to know if he could be present. I said, "Sure." He then informed me that when President Kennedy was senator, he went to his mother's [Ellen Conway Spellman] funeral services. "I think," he said, "I owe it to him to be there on this occasion." So he came. There was nobody else outside of myself and the family. All the family arrived for the services in helicopters. They landed in the ball field of the seminary.

I wrote a special prayer that I gave to Jacqueline after I read it at the end of the Mass. Then they all filed out, and for the second time I saw tears in the eyes of Jack Kennedy, and they were copious tears. He was the last of the family to leave the little chapel. I was behind him. The casket was there. It was in a white marble case. The President was overwhelmed with grief that he literally put his arm around that casket as though he was carrying it out. I was right behind him. I said, "Come on, Jack. Let's go. God is good. We're only about ten minutes from the cemetery." We went out then to the Holy Cross Cemetery, where the Kennedy family had a reserved section. Senators Bob and Ted [Edward M. Kennedy] and their wives rode with me to the cemetery. A few moments after our arrival at the grave, the casket that had been placed in a bronze container was gently, silently, and devoutly placed in the bosom of the earth.

KENNEDY: Years before, at Newport, Jacqueline lost another baby. Did she not?

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CUSHING: That's right. I think she had lost three children during the brief time of their marriage.

KENNEDY: Some time after the death of the President, you made the arrangements to move both the children to Arlington Cemetery.

CUSHING: Yes, I accompanied the little body of Patrick Bouvier Kennedy to the Naval Base in Rhode Island, and you and Jacqueline's mother [Janet Lee Auchincloss] were there to meet us.

KENNEDY: That's right.

CUSHING: With me on the occasion of that transfer was Francis X. Morrissey and the undertaker, having had the body of Patrick Bouvier Kennedy taken out of the grave at Holyhood early in the morning to avoid photographers and reporters. On the plane, the *Caroline*, was the tiny body of the child who was buried in Newport.

KENNEDY: I've just one final area, Your Eminence, and that's about the death of President Kennedy. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about some of your reactions to his assassination. I know it's very difficult—but something of when you heard about this.

CUSHING: I was in the office at the Archbishop's Residence when I heard the tragic news and, like everybody else, I was bewildered and shocked. I thought that the story was a hoax. Why should anyone assassinate the President of this country, the most generous, the most helpful to others in the history of mankind? But, as we all know, it did happen here. The words of Christ on the Cross of Calvary came repeatedly to my mind: "Oh Heavenly Father, why has Thou abandoned Me?" Probably at that particular moment the Divine Redeemer was atoning for all the sins of mankind. That moment when Our blessed Lord cried out to his Father in Heaven: "My Father, My Father, Why has Thou abandoned Me?" It was an agonizing moment. Our Lord may also have been atoning for all our lack of confidence in him. How often do we cry out when suffering and

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sorrow comes: "Why am I sick?" "Why am I unemployed?" "Why am I carrying this cross or that cross?" Everyone is asking why, why, why? So my thought was that here is the most difficult "why," and I have no answer for it.

In any event, this generation nor any generation will ever forget it.

Two years later, in August 1965, I was in Ireland as a Papal Legate for the dedication of a new cathedral. There in the baptistery of that church—no, in what they call the mortuary chapel of that magnificent cathedral, the people would wake the bodies of their loved ones the evening prior to the funeral obsequies. I mention this in passing for there is a window in that little mortuary chapel in memory of John F. Kennedy.

In Rome, I built a residence for student nuns from Latin American countries. This residence is owned and staffed by Mexican Sisters. The chapel in that residence is dedicated to President Kennedy. It's a beautiful memorial. I doubt if there is a country in the world, be it ever so humble, that has not one or more monuments to this youthful but most promising President.

KENNEDY: After you heard the news, I know you, of course, came down to Washington, and said the Mass down there. Could you tell us a little bit about this?

CUSHING: The bereaved family did not request much. They wanted me and Archbishop

O'Boyle and the then Bishop Hannan, now Archbishop of New Orleans, to meet the body at the entrance of the cathedral, which we did. The Apostolic Delegate represented Pope Paul VI at the Mass. In the afternoon, he went to the White House to convey the personal condolences of the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI. It was suggested that during the course of the Mass someone should read some of the favorite scriptural texts of the late President. He was a great reader of the Bible and he frequently used a biblical text in his talks. It was suggested that these texts should be interspersed throughout the Mass. This was a request that was not insisted upon. But since there was no eulogy, I suggested that Bishop Hannan should read these favorite biblical quotes at the end of the Mass before the final prayers at the burial service. All agreed. Then at the end of the Mass we went to the grave; his body was put to rest; the perpetual flame was lighted; Jacqueline received the American flag that covered the casket; and the darkest day in this generation was over.

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It's too bad that on that occasion we didn't have the vernacular in the Mass because that Mass was televised throughout most of the world. However, people in Europe are familiar with the Latin, at least of a requiem mass, but I had to follow the rules and regulations. I remarked at the end of the Mass: "I hope some day this liturgy of the church will be, in greater part at least, in the vernacular so people will know what is being said." That day came to pass with the Second Vatican Council.

It was a very, very simple funeral, following as close as possible the services in memory of the martyred Lincoln. No fanfare, everyone bowed in sorrow, tears flowed in abundance. On the way out, I was preceding the casket, and I went over to Jacqueline and shook hands with her. I kissed little Caroline and shook hands with her. John John [John F. Kennedy, Jr.] was getting a little bit restless, so he was down in the rear of the Church. Outside at the end of the Mass, John John saluted the flag, the most touching thing I ever saw.

That was about it. Everything was very, very simple. Everyone was overwhelmed, not only with sorrow—but with a mystery yet to be solved in the minds of many. How could this happen in the U.S. Why? Why? Why? Someday we shall have the answer. Meanwhile, keep his ideas and words green in our hearts.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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