

Bishop John J. Wright Oral History Interview –JFK #1, 2/8/1965
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Biographical Note

John J. Wright was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest, Rome, Italy (1935); St. John's Seminary, Brighton, MA, professor, (1939-1944); secretary to archbishop of Boston (1943); installed as first bishop of Worcester, MA (1950); Cardinal (1969). In this interview Wright discusses religion, and John F. Kennedy's [JFK] Catholicism, consultations with JFK regarding political life and church concerns, as well as Wright's reaction to the assassination, among other issues.

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Bishop John J. Wright, D.D. – JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

BISHOP JOHN J. WRIGHT, D.D.

March 7, 1966
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: Bishop Wright, what was your first contact with John Kennedy or the Kennedy family?

WRIGHT: It would be very difficult for me to isolate any specific first contact with the Kennedy family because we more or less grew up simultaneously in and out of the same circles during a long period of my life and during a considerable period of life of the eventual President. I first met the Kennedy family through Mrs. Rose Kennedy's dear friend, Marie Patterson Green, who was later to be very active in behalf of the Congressman, the Senator, and the presidential candidate.

Mrs. Rose Kennedy, the President's mother, belonged to several of the organizations of which I was chaplain, or spiritual director, or at which I gave lectures. She and several of his aunts and his Grandmother Fitzgerald [Mary Josephine Hannon Fitzgerald] used to attend lectures of the League of Catholic Women in the Hotel Vendome during the years that I gave the so-called Sustaining Lectures on Current Events, and Mrs. Green was president of the League. As a result of this, sometimes the Kennedy boys, during the years that they were in college and just after, would be in touch with me about things that came up in the Sustaining Lectures and that touched on the topics which were the subjects of animated discussion at the Kennedy dinner table -- and sometimes discussions which, included Mrs. Green and her friends, and on occasion myself, particularly at their home at Hyannis Port during the period that Jack was recovering from the distress in his back immediately following World War II.

Also, I moved in and out of their affairs and of their life when I was a priest in the Archdiocese of Boston by reason of the interest that Jack Kennedy developed at the first beginnings of his desire to enter political life, and certain questions which touched on church concern. I've always found it very ironic, for example, that in my office at the chancery office in Brighton, and at his initiative and instance, he came to draw up a proposed aid to Catholic schools program that as an aspirant for Congress he was very eager to put forth.

I also remember a time when he came to my rooms in the Archbishop's house, at 2101 Commonwealth Avenue in Brighton, at just about that same period in order to talk about the causes of World War II. I had just finished reading a book. I recall that it was a two volume thing by Waverly Root, a commentator on military affairs, and I remember that while I was shaving, I called out from the bathroom over my shoulder where he would locate it on the shelf in my bedroom. And I've often thought of the answer that he made. It was very typical of him in his relations with me, as with clergy generally, and I suspect with people fairly generally. He said, "Is it any kind of a brainwashing?" And I told him yes, it was, but not a brainwashing in accordance with any solution or lotion or astringent of mine, and if he was interested in reading it, there it was, and I'd rely on him to tell how much of it was objective and how much was brainwashing.

He made no comment, but neither did he read the book. I've often thought that the reason for that, however, was that it was a very thick book, two volumes, and although Jack had a very ready and very inquiring mind and an extraordinary gift for brain-picking and for fact-gathering and for asking the pertinent questions -- pretty much as would any excellent prosecutor in a district attorney's office -- he had in fact no taste for books, and particularly for big books or involved books or, as he said on one occasion, books with lots of footnotes. I remember joking him about this and saying that he shouldn't resent footnotes and critical apparatus so much because really the authors that put in all these footnotes were really doing for him that which in many of his conversations he was trying to do for himself, namely boil down all the information available without the trouble of having to read it. He laughed at that, and also acknowledged that aspect of his mind and of his approach. That same aspect is revealed in many other conversations in that period.

I'm referring now to the period immediately after World War II, and immediately before 1947, when I became Auxiliary Bishop of Boston. A favorite phrase on his lips would be, "Father, do you know any pamphlet that would cover this subject?" And I remember one time in a conversation he used this expression, "Do you know any pamphlet that would cover this subject," with regard to two matters which were encyclopedic in their scope. And so I kidded him about it and I said, "No, Jack, and I don't think I'd bother to recommend you a pamphlet on this subject unless someone finally succeeds in reducing the whole two thousand year controversy to one side of one card." And he laughed and he said, "As soon as that's done," he said, "I'd be grateful if you'd get in touch with me."

I mention this a little wistfully because, although I've always been aware, and very much aware, of the first-class mind that the late President had, I have always been a little dismayed by the pretense that he was an intellectual in any authentic sense of the word. He was not. He was a doer, an extremely eager and passionate doer. He was enamored of ideas and very much liked on occasion, though not on prolonged occasion, the company of people who liked ideas and who talked about them, but he was not an intellectual. I remember his

choices, for example, of his favorite music and his favorite books in the period before these choices would be of any relevance to an image of any particularly important kind, and I remember thinking to myself that they were pretty homespun and very attractive, but not on the grounds that they revealed any tremendous intellectual preoccupation.

In terms of first contact with the family, as such, it was in connection with their benefactions, and particularly to crippled children. On this level it was a connection with the Ambassador [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] who first entered into arrangements to help out some of the projects of Archbishop Cushing [Richard Cardinal Cushing] as a result of conversations that I set up, thanks to Mrs. Green. I was closely associated with the family in the period of their great religious worry surrounding the marriage of Kathleen [Kathleen Kennedy] to the young English nobleman. It's significant that during all this period, though, I saw a good deal of Kathleen in Boston and elsewhere and corresponded with people in England in her behalf and saw a good deal of her mother and, indeed, her father, I was never aware of the daughter who was the handicapped child. And I have no recollection that they ever mentioned her at that time. And yet I was not at all surprised later to learn of her existence and to know that this was the explanation of the extraordinary passion with which they gave themselves in typical Kennedy fashion to a work for like children in Boston and elsewhere. In that period, from time to time the Ambassador would phone, in the morning usually, from various parts of the world to make appointments and to set things up in connection with this work.

O'CONNOR: Would you contrast John Kennedy to some of the other members of his family as far as his intellectual ability is concerned? You just commented on the fact that he wasn't really an intellectual in the true sense of the word, although he had a very keen mind.

WRIGHT: He had a very keen mind. He had a very keen political mind. He had no mind whatever for speculation, no mind for philosophy. I was always amazed in later years when I would read some of the tag lines from Robert Frost and other poets that he would quote. Some of them were obviously chosen by people who knew certain aspects of his personality very well, but equally they were not chosen by him. They were inconsistent with his mind and yet very much befitted his temperament and his personality.

And in this connection I make a contrast that struck me at the time. When Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] addressed the Democratic Convention at Atlantic City, he used, with very dramatic and telling effect, a quotation from Shakespeare to describe the fascination for our generation of his dead brother. I remember thinking to myself how apt the quotation was. I remember thinking that Bobby had undoubtedly chosen it himself, and I remember thinking that Jack wouldn't possibly have done so, and contrasting, therefore, the types of their minds in terms of the quotation. I remember, too, in terms of this same sort of thing, listening to his acceptance speech the night that he was nominated in California and listening with mingled dismay and amusement to the historical allusion that he made to Cromwell [Richard Cromwell].

I was quite confident that he wasn't quite sure to which Cromwell he was referring, and I was almost certain that he couldn't have given the dates and the context of the two

Cromwells whom he contrasted in the speech. I recall getting up from the television set and going over to the Standard Dictionary of [National] Biography and looking up to make quite certain that I had straight myself the reference that I thought he was making. I didn't think that he could have been the author of the paragraph, if only for political reason, since he was talking, of course, to all America, but to an audience that included his relatives.

And later I was to learn from Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] that in fact he, Sorensen, had written that paragraph, and that he had been startled when he heard it on the air himself because it hadn't occurred to him until he heard it what an extraordinary gaffe it was merely as a piece of historical and literary allusion. And I remember thinking to myself that I hoped his writers would be more merciful and be doubly careful not to leave him in the position of saying things that would obscure the image they themselves were projecting, that he was a competent historian and a man at home with intellectual and similar allusions. Several times that happened in the course of his speeches.

But one never had the reaction that on these occasions he was being, in any sense, phony. That wasn't the thrust of it at all. It was quite simply that he was doing what it was instinctive for him to do as a very able political man. He was using the best available talent to get what would be the best available material. He was using it critically in terms of its practical and political implications and, characteristically, uncritically in terms of its deeper intellectual significance and so on.

O'CONNOR: You, as well as other people, have mentioned that he was a very able politician. But it has often been stated that he did not enter politics of his own choice, but this was the result of his father pushing him into politics. Do you have any comments to make on that?

WRIGHT: Yes, I have never bought that thesis. What I am about to say would probably sound unsympathetic and lacking in affection if it was said by anyone who came from a different background than from my own. I, too, in a very real sense, am Boston-Irish, less so than was Jack. Most of my Irish forebears were, I think, in Boston a little longer than Jack's but probably many of them about the same length of time. And such a mixture of other than Irish influences as there were in my blood and in my intellectual patterns were not controlling and not significant really. So that, in fact, I would see Jack, who was quintessentially a Boston Irishman, through the eyes of a Boston Irishman.

I never fell for the thought that he had in any sense transcended the world of the Boston Irishman. The virtues that he had were those of a very real class, and the limitations he had were those, too. He was able, as have many in other fields -- I think, for example, of others who went into the world of writing, Myles Connelly; some who went into other worlds -- he was able to accent these virtues and to tone down some of the air of the limitations in a most remarkable degree. Nonetheless, he was proud of the world of *The Last Hurrah*, very much indeed, and if he differed conspicuously from his grandfather, Honey Fitz [John F. Fitzgerald], and from their generation, he did so in details of degree of development rather than as the result of any chasms of kind that separated him from them.

In a conversation with him, even as late as a very short while after his election to the presidency, some of the humane little aspects but also some of the other little aspects of the

ward boss shone through. And it was no accident at all that he brought to the White House, in addition to the groups of intellectuals with whom his type of Boston-Irish would long since have been completely at home in any case, the little Irish Mafia, as it was called, which guaranteed that some of the resources and techniques of Martin Lomasney and Honey Fitz, and Jimmy Curley [James M. Curley] would continue no longer on the restricted stage of a Boston Democratic organization but on the wider theater of the national life -- and I think probably to the great good of the nation.

I find no suggestion that he ever brought this into the international life. I think he tried -- and this to me was extremely appealing -- to bring into the international life a personality and preoccupations and premises which did, in fact, transcend this cultural pattern. Only once in his international efforts did he depart from this and then, to me at least, most attractively, namely when he visited Ireland. There he was in the next parish right across from South Boston, in East Boston where his people came from [Laughter], and completely at home. And those who knew him most intimately and whom I trust most told me that they had not seen him in the years of his national life as relaxed and as at home as he was there. I was deeply touched by this same sort of thing when he named his little boy Patrick. This spoke volumes to me, and it said that much of the ersatz image projected was in fact ersatz and that he knew it and welcomed it.

O'CONNOR: Alright, there's a question you alluded to a little while ago that I'd like to bring up. You mentioned with irony, or mentioned in connections with irony, the attitude John Kennedy had in his early years toward aid to parochial schools, toward, you know, aid to education for parochial...

WRIGHT: This again was strictly political, strictly political. I have never been one to believe that he was the least bit hostile to parochial schools. On the contrary, I never looked upon him as particularly their patron. Schools generally were quite outside his immediate circle of interest, or passionate interest. At least that's my judgment of the matter. In fact, it's almost an irony that the thing that he was interested in was not directly schools at that time; it was bus transportation which was a problem of transportation rather than a question of the content or worth of education as such. As you know, he himself went to a Catholic secondary school, although that's never mentioned in the official biography.

O'CONNOR: I think that was just for a brief time, a very brief time.

WRIGHT: He ran into a little academic difficulty there.

O'CONNOR: I see.

WRIGHT: That was the Canterbury School. I have some recollections of that period but mostly on the basis of the things I heard his father say. And most of those were concerned again with this very point. They were not at all with any preoccupation with curriculum or content of that kind you see. And I never talked with him

about that aspect of his career or of his interest. But I do remember the distinction he used to make -- it was roughly the same as that of his father -- with regard to the importance that girls be educated under religious auspices, and I remember being greatly amused by the reason that he gave as to why it wasn't so necessary in the case of boys. It was a rather, as I've said, amusing statement of an outlook which I never thought was particularly profound in his case, as, as a matter of fact, I don't think it was particularly profound in his father's case.

O'CONNOR: What was the reason they described?

WRIGHT: Yes, he was speaking of a specific person, the name of the person I've now forgotten, but the type is a familiar enough type of person. He said, of this man, he said, "He represents the results of traditional Catholic education," he said, "in its impact on a man of his kind." He said, "It turned him into a debater." He said, "He debates everything." And he said, "He starts all conversations with his conclusions already reached. It's impossible," he said, "to talk with him because he starts with all his conclusions reached." And we joked about it; in the case of the man he was quite right. The man worked, by the way, for him because he was a man that Jack found extremely important among his resources at the time. But his evaluation was just one of the man. I never thought he knew very much nor, indeed, cared very much about the theory of education.

Years later, after I came here to Pittsburgh, he had some of the people close to him get in touch with me in an effort to line up for the post of the United States Commissioner of Education Dr. Calvin Gross, who was then the Superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools, and who was later to go to New York with such unhappy results for Dr. Gross. But the President was very eager to have him serve as Commissioner of Education. In thinking the matter over, I decided that here too it would never have crossed his mind to ask any questions about the man's philosophy of education or anything he had done on the content of the curriculum here in Pittsburgh, though that had been really Gross's outstanding accomplishment.

O'CONNOR: What did he have in mind?

WRIGHT: The question that he asked was, "Is he able to work with people? Can he bring together disparate groups?" In other words, how does he function, his interest for function. But these are important interests.

O'CONNOR: Sure. He never did talk to you much at all about why there was such a radical change in his view toward, or on the surface at least, a radical change in his view toward assistance, government assistance to parochial schools?

WRIGHT: I really don't believe that there was.

O'CONNOR: Well, on the surface there was a change, but as you have discussed it, it is very obvious it wasn't a radical change at all.

WRIGHT: Well, it wouldn't have been a change in philosophy at all. It would have been a change in the opportuneness of positions without reference to the content of the positions. The only way in which I ever felt personally, and I never felt officially anything in this regard on these matters, but personally I felt a very keen disappointment in the way he proceeded on that. But again I found it somehow typical and, therefore, something that one understood and more or less accepted.

I found it, in a way, in character and yet very disappointing that he asked his brother and the Attorney General's office to provide this extraordinary memorandum on the constitutionality of the matter, and did so without any time even to state the issues let alone find out what they were, and with very great suddenness and impetuosity, as it seemed to me at any rate. I found this disappointing although I perceived its tactical significance at the time. But it didn't strike me as in his best vein. And of course I anticipated that once he had the use of this opinion or decision, it would be lost to history and I suspect it probably has been, both to the history of education and of jurisprudence.

But I found this disappointing, as I also found a little disappointing since, in fact, my image of him was, and is, of an enormously greater person than sometimes in his political caution he let himself appear to be. For instance, I found petulant his feeling that every time the Catholic hierarchy said anything on any subject, whether it was contraception in Puerto Rico or education in Washington, they were somehow gunning for him or trying to put difficulties in his way. And some of the things he said at that time, both in private conversation and once or twice aloud, struck me as lacking the dimension of humor and the dimension of perspective which I knew him to have. I found them a little unduly short-tempered and short-sighted.

On the other hand, when he had a moment or two to think on things like that, when he wasn't caught off guard by a quick question of a reporter or anything of that sort, he could say the same thing with good temper, as on occasion he did. As, for example, at the Youth Convention of the Catholic Youth in New York where he thought -- he was particularly paranoid about the attitudes toward him of Cardinal Spellman [Francis J. Spellman], whom, temperamentally, he resembled in very many ways, and with whom, normally, he would have been very much at home since they came from a like pattern and had like approaches to the problems of the world so far as ways and means were concerned. And on that occasion to the young people he was very witty, how he had noted that the sisters tended to be Democrats but monsignori tended to be Republicans. This was good tempered and was so received.

On the other hand, the little explosion in the airport the night that the hierarchy felt bound to say that some of the procedures of Munoz Marin [Luis Munoz Marin] were exceeding the limits of what we take to be morality, and he wanted to know what did they really want to do, sink him, or if so, why didn't they say so in so many words, and so forth. I, through a friend, (said that to him) three or four days after that particular little explosion, said, "See here, Jack must understand that if he's going to be elected, as so many of us hope, we're not going to have to, for four years or eight years, go underground and fail to speak on any subjects." And I said that to the friend later when I met him, "What did he say when you said that to him?" "He said, 'Oh, of course I understand that.' He said, 'Of course I do, but this will all blow over.'"

And in this I think we have another measure of the man; there was his perspective showing again. I think he had a full awareness of his historic significance and cultural significance on the Catholic-nativist tension. I think he even rejoiced in it. In fact, I know he did because I remember the mood in which he sent Ted Sorensen up to talk about the speech he was going to deliver at Texas, in Houston, to the ministers. I think he welcomed it. I'm not entirely sure of the reasons why he welcomed it. Here, too, the quality of his Catholicism was a curious one. It was without any metaphysical dimensions at all. It was without any cultural depth at all, save to the extent that it was very familial and very Irish, and more particularly, very Boston Irish. In this, again, he's very like his father. But it was nonetheless real on that account. I remember a fellow who knew him better than I did during the years that he was a student at Harvard.

O'CONNOR: Who are you referring to right now?

WRIGHT: I didn't know him when he was a student at Harvard. I'd rather not say even for a long range thing because I have reason to think this man broke with him, and I have reason to believe, too, that he's been talked out of writing about why he broke with him. So I would never want anyone to justify the man. But I remember what he said. Someone said to him, "Is Jack a good Catholic?" He said, "Yes, in this sense: that he would die rather than die out of the Church." I think that there was, under a certain flippancy, a real truth here, a very real truth, indeed, evidences which one saw repeatedly in things that he said and in things that he did, things that I found very attractive, again, because they were bound up with the kind of people out of whom he came and of whom he was a very shining and good example. In this connection though.... There was something that I meant to say a moment ago and then when you interposed the question there, it momentarily went out of my head, but we'll undoubtedly come back to it.

O'CONNOR: Well, while speaking broadly about John Kennedy's character, a question that really relates to politics comes up. There is a debate as to whether he was a liberal or conservative, or whether the changes and the description of the changes that occurred during his political career.... I wonder if you have any comments to make on that.

WRIGHT: I'm not sure that I have very many important comments to make on it. I never thought, by the way, and I would want to underscore this, I never thought for a moment that any part of his commitment to civil rights was politically inspired. On the contrary. Here, in my own prejudiced judgment, he was again being quintessentially Irish. Here it was this aspect of his Irishness that was operative on all manner of fights and in all manner of circumstances. I think he would have always taken the underdog's position. I don't think there's any argument about that at all. I'm not sure that he would in personal relations, but I mean in public policies. In public policies, he would; in his approach to social questions, he certainly would.

If the questions were stated and he was confronted with them and he had to do something about them, then instinctively he would be revolutionary, instinctively. Now how

much of this would go into his personal life, I'm not at all sure. And here I'm not suggesting that there was any species of hypocritical or pharisaical or unworthy departmentalization of what he'd do in his personal life and the positions he'd take in his public life. But I do say that he would never want to be caught on the side that was putting down a revolution, never! And that if anyone could insinuate into his head the idea, not that this was necessarily the drift of the future and that he'd better ride with it, but that this was the revolution and that he would want to be found with it, that's where he'd wind up on public questions.

A man who often occurred to me in his troubles, real and alleged, with the hierarchy was Parnell [Charles S. Parnell]. And I remember thinking, once upon a time and at great length one evening, that certain aspects of his personality and character could have wound him up in an argument and a situation like to that which confronted Parnell before the Irish hierarchy, and I thought what a tragedy this would be because in all the good ways he was very like Parnell, and in nothing more than in his basic indestructible Irishness.

I used to note some of the phrases that he'd use as they were quoted in the *New York Times* after he became president and when he was talking his authentic self. For instance, the day that he visited Harvard and made the offhand remarks on the stoop of the -- I think it was of the.... It was in the Harvard Yard -- about how he'd say a good word for the guys in the yard there to me, but this was strictly political, instinctively Kennedy, and very Irish. It was the last thing that a Yankee boy would have said if he found himself coming back to Harvard as President of the United States. It was right out of Harvard Square but on the other side of the square, and it was very, very well termed and very attractive.

O'CONNOR: Alright. I'd like to get into a few specific issues. For instance, one of the major issues in his early political career revolved around McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy].

WRIGHT: Yes.

O'CONNOR: I wonder if you care to comment on Senator, then Congressman, and Senator Kennedy's attitude toward McCarthy, or Joseph P. Kennedy's attitude toward McCarthy? There's been a...

WRIGHT: Within the reserves of this conversation, I'll very gladly do so. He called me up three times about the McCarthy thing. You better tell me the year that that vote was taken that Mrs. Roosevelt so criticized him for...

O'CONNOR: I think it was 1953, wasn't it?

WRIGHT: ...absenting himself from.

O'CONNOR: I think that was 1953.

WRIGHT: No, it was earlier. It had to be earlier. We'd better pinpoint it because....

O'CONNOR: He was in the hospital October or November 1953, to...

WRIGHT: He was the second time. He had been in.... The time, by the way, that I spoke of earlier, when he was in the hospital and I went down to the Cape to see him, when he was in the New England Baptist, was while I was still in Boston, and I left Boston in March 7, 1950. The McCarthy hearings were while I was in Worcester. Yes, I guess you're right. That would have been '52 or '53.

O'CONNOR: He was in the hospital full time starting October of 1953.

WRIGHT: Not really. He phoned me from Washington twice and once from the hospital.

O'CONNOR: He didn't enter his Senate seat, at any rate, during that period.

WRIGHT: No, that's right. And he phoned. His questions were significant.

O'CONNOR: What were his questions?

WRIGHT: One was, "Will I get murdered if I vote?" [Laughter]

O'CONNOR: That's significant.

WRIGHT: He said, "Will I get murdered," by which he didn't mean would he get excommunicated.

O'CONNOR: Sure, he meant politically.

WRIGHT: He didn't mean, "Will I be held intellectually in disrepute?" That would never have crossed his mind. It was, "What would happen at the polls if those savage Boston Irish, who are my cousins, discover this?" Do you see? Now his reason for calling me was that -- well, it was several fold. I was one of the several whom he used to call in those days, not for any reasons of my great personal profundity or insights, but because I was in a position where judgments of that sort would be floating through. And also because we had a bit, at that time, or an instinctive camaraderie.

I shall go to my grave thinking that President Kennedy, in fact, had, and really basically wished, no friends. He had tons of acquaintances and loads of co-workers and very, very many companions and a tremendous number of cronies, but he had no friends. I think his family was sufficient for that. I think then, indeed, he felt that his friendship was more than taken up there, and that, in my own perhaps uninformed judgement here, included even those who were closest to him and who survived from his undergraduate days. I think they were classmates and I think they were cherished acquaintances. I think some of them were even intimates in selected areas of his life. But he had a gift for departmentalizing the areas of his life in such fashion that they didn't cross from room to room.

One evening someone, the late Vin Greene [Vincent Greene], in fact, Marie Greene's husband, who knew them all well and who saw them through the eyes of what he was -- a schoolteacher and a student counselor -- one night at the Puritan Canoe Club in South Boston said, "Jack Kennedy could be entertaining simultaneously in twenty-one rooms of a large house twenty-one disperse groups who would never meet one another." And while I find the figure of speech is excessively oversimple, there's enough truth in it to warrant the feeling that I have that no one of them would have been an across-the-board friend. I detected in Sorensen's book that Sorensen was well aware of the areas of Jack's life from which he was excluded. I am certain that a personality like Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger] was excluded from *many* areas. So in any conversation one always knew the exact zone of the interest and of the conversation. That's what I'm saying.

He said, "Would I get murdered if I took a stand on this?" Now his reason for turning to me, apart from what I've said about a certain ability to communicate with one another, was the fact that I had been publicly very critical of McCarthy. And I had written some articles, one in *Commonweal* and one elsewhere, and given some talks which had been quoted, notably by Professor Goldman [Eric F. Goldman], who was then at Princeton, as an indication of a restiveness on the part of the Catholic hierarchy, or some of it or a bit of it, or me at any rate, with the McCarthy approach to life. And so Jack was making quite certain that he was talking to someone to whom he could say on a second's notice, "Yes, that's right," if it were critical, and who would give him -- since he was getting, I know, from his father the other side of it -- a qualified view of McCarthy and probably, therefore, offset what his father's friends and others would be saying to him about the fury of the pro-McCarthyites on this position.

O'CONNOR: What did you tell him?

WRIGHT: I said to him that I would have to draw a distinction. I said, "This much is certain." I said, "I'd be very happy if you took the stand," and I said, "I think you better." I said, "But it depends, Jack, on whether you're interested in the large letters of tomorrow morning's headlines or the small print of the eventual history book." And I recall as significant that he said nothing. I don't merely recall that he said nothing, but I recall noting at the time that it was significant that he said nothing. And I remember also deciding that he would be less interested in the small print of the history book at that time in his life.

Now, I have to say, not merely in order to attempt any point and counterpoints in phonic balance, I have to say that when he went into international things, later, my heart sang when I noted more of a preoccupation with the small print of the history book. And that developed unmistakably. I talked with a man in Paris who had occasion to observe his deportment at the State dinner that de Gaulle [Charles de Gaulle] gave. The man was a man whose name I don't know, but I met him in the apartment of Mr. Szekely [E.E. Szekely], an old Rumanina expatriate, and he said about him -- he was speaking about this familiar impression, if not legend, that de Gaulle held him in a certain contempt because of his youth. And I remember that same evening I heard the silly story of the alleged remark of de Gaulle

to Jacqueline [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis], and I remember how I bristled under it as an American. You undoubtedly know that story.

O'CONNOR: I'd like to have you repeat it if you wish to.

WRIGHT: You remember that she was alleged in gossip circles then to have said to de Gaulle, "You know that my family is of French origin." "Je suis d'une famille française." And de Gaulle is alleged to have said, "Moi, aussi." I remember the indignation of all the people in the room at that story as it was related. And this man spoke up who was in the French government in some one of the Quai d'Orsay offices and was simply there with a glass in his hand like all the other people were, and he said, "Well, if the General," he said, "made such a judgment of this young President," he said, "then he made a colossal gaffe. Because," he said, "my impression is of a man who has a lot to learn, to be sure, but who is very eager to learn it." And he said, "One might hope that the same thing could be said of the General." And that was all there was to it. But I remember thinking to myself, "That's very just." Whereas, as a younger man in the days when he was preparing himself for Congress, he had been terribly eager to acquire facts and draw up briefs of one kind and another, filled with knowledge. "Have you got a pamphlet that will sum this up?" That sort of thing. There was now a very clear developing dimension of wisdom as opposed to knowledge and of values as opposed to facts, and that's what made me, at least, weep when I heard the horrible news.

O'CONNOR: You didn't feel this was true of him earlier in his career. For instance, in connection with McCarthy he wasn't concerned whether you were right or wrong.

WRIGHT: No, not at all, not at all, in my judgment. May God have mercy on me if I'm wrong, but....

O'CONNOR: Sure, that's what we're interested in though, frankly.

WRIGHT: No, no, no, no. It was strictly the effect on the election returns.

O'CONNOR: Well, in this connection, also James MacGregor Burns, his criticism of Kennedy in the book that he wrote about Kennedy was that he was a noncommitted person. He was not committed as a liberal, as some people have maintained that he was, and not committed, by far, as a conservative.

WRIGHT: I think I mean that, save on that point of where is the revolution running, and that was visceral. That was not moral and it was not intellectual commitment. It was visceral. Who's getting killed? On which side are they? Do you see? Are they on our side? Is this on our side? I think he saw, in specific terms of the race question, I think he saw, viscerally, this whole tremendous tenth of the American population as somehow on "our" side. Our is there in quote marks, don't you know?

I was one of those who sat in the White House that appalling afternoon that, with exceedingly awkward grace, he or his advisers brought together the so-called religious spokesmen of the country to think about or, rather, to hear him on the whole civil rights question. Many, many thoughts went through my mind that day. First of all, how awkwardly it was handled, how very badly indeed. Here all these men, including several Catholic Archbishops, a whole run of Episcopalian Archbishops, Lutheran moderators, Congregationalist presidents, all sorts of people stood like Fuller Brush men at the outside gate to the White House for this session with the President which had been called. Upon arrival there, on the sidewalk where they were kept waiting 35, 40, 45 perhaps 50 minutes in the case of those who arrived early as I foolishly did, they discovered for the first time who the other persons invited were. The original invitation gave no hint of that. It was in the form of a telegram, which was characteristic, too, a long telegram. And I've forgotten now how many of them there were but the history book will show, or the date book there will show, and I think it will probably turn out to show that there were 120 or something like that. At one stage, in what struck me as a rather rambling talk, I counted them up to 60 during the meeting.

In any instance, they all went into the White House eventually after having their invitation all carefully checked by two ghoul-squads lads on the driveway. "Alright." They went in and sat, and at a given moment the President came in. He was accompanied by Bobby and by two other lads whom I've now forgotten. I remember that I knew at the time, but I've forgotten now who they were. I was very eager to see him, and I had deliberately situated myself so that I could see him and watch him, chiefly to see how he was, because I had seen him on the press conference television shows and in one or two pictures evidences that he was developing that strange moon face that came from what I took to be the cortisone that he was taking and about which he had once spoken to me. So I was eager to see him. I remember how tanned he was. He had apparently just come back from perhaps Florida or some place. In any case, he was very tanned. I also noted how trim he was, and I noted too that he had apparently changed his tailor because he had a peculiarly placed row of buttons, all of which were buttoned. And I remember thinking to myself that that, too, was to emphasize how slim he was and how tall, because at that time there was a very obvious taking advantage of anything which projected a certain height. I remember when he began to talk that he was, in fact, not at ease. And I remember thinking very sympathetically -- I don't want to...

O'CONNOR: Because of the audience or because of...

WRIGHT: Because of the audience, because there in the room there were the Protestants whom he deeply feared. I'll come back to that in a minute. And there were the Catholics whom, in fact, he distrusted. He didn't fear them. He knew them very well indeed, as they knew him. But he distrusted them. And I remember -- in fact I jotted it down and later put it in a note, in a dairy note -- I remember thinking to myself that as he sat there, waiting for whoever did the introduction to say the President of the United States, that he was probably thinking to himself, "I wonder how they will give me the leg?" And that's exactly how he would have been wording it. I'm certain that at no time

as he sat there was he thinking, "I wonder on which issue they have qualifications, or reservations, or go beyond the concept, or fall short of it?" I'm certain he was thinking, "I wonder how they'll give me the leg, or if indeed they will give me the leg? Or if perhaps they will find it consistent with something they have in mind not to give me the leg at all, but in fact to further this?" Do you see?

And I think I decided before the meeting was over that he decided they were not going to give him the leg, and therefore we never heard from that meeting again. There was no species of follow-up, do you see? He reached the decision that he was not going to be given the leg, do you see? There was no follow-up of any kind that I know of, at any rate. There was later the March on Washington, but he had no hand in that at all.

It was not a mere window dressing meeting either, by the way. I would underscore that. It was an effort to see if together with one another, the Catholics, the Protestants and Jews.... It was one of the illusions he had was that he had somehow brought them together a bit. Now there's a sense in which he had, but not the people who were in that room because all of them had spent the forty-five minutes while they were cooling their heels out on the sidewalk renewing old acquaintances and chatting amiably about one thing and another. Although I remember noting to myself then, out on the sidewalk, that no one of them mentioned the President, not one, because there was a certain reserve there too. The Protestants were being careful not to say Mr. Kennedy or the President or anything, and the Catholics were being equally considerate. So they talked about places we had met before.

I recall my own conversations were with some Episcopal and Presbyterian and Lutheran people whom I had met in connection with peace programs over the years. And no one of us, no one of us -- and I find this very significant -- said, "Well, is this nice, we're all invited in by the President." It would have seemed the most normal thing in the world to do; we did not because we, too, wondered what the ploy might be, do you see? What is the gambit? No one said, "Isn't it marvelous that the President has this deep commitment, or that he has this vision, or sense?" It wasn't that at all. It rather was -- I think, undeclared, at any rate -- it was, "This is undoubtedly bound up with making viable some one of the government programs, but...."

I think to that extent MacGregor Burns' analysis is probably correct. I would not buy it if it meant, as some people have sometimes suggested that they saw it to be that he was cynical. I don't think that at all. I think he was a realist, quite another matter, and very likely not a cynic. I would think probably not.

O'CONNOR: Well, you mentioned just a minute ago that he feared the Protestants, and you said you'd elaborate on that, if you would.

WRIGHT: Yes. He feared them greatly.

O'CONNOR: In what respect?

WRIGHT: Oh, a hundred ways, a hundred ways. This used to amuse me, in a way, because sometimes in expressing this he would say things that implied that

in a kind of a neighborly fashion he wanted to reassure me that they weren't as dangerous as I presumably thought. And since I didn't think they were anyway, it was kind of a wasted shot in the arm. But I'll cite three examples that were very interesting.

During the period of World War II in Boston a great dragonslayer was the Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam. Bromley was always pointing out where the long lean hand of Rome might be concealed at a given moment and always crusading for sympathy and understanding and making every effort to offset the fantastic manner in which the local Roman hierarchy were preventing such sympathy and understanding. Now Jack's father had an unholy horror of Oxnam. He looked upon him as a thoroughgoing bigot and as basically anti-Irish and anti-Catholic, and in all probability anti-Democratic Party, even though he might be elaborately backing Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] or Truman [Harry S. Truman] or anything else.

Typical of this -- it just flashes in my mind now -- I was standing in front of the Ritz Carlton Hotel one morning at this precise period and the Ambassador, who was having his own fights with Roosevelt at the time, came charging out the door of the hotel and he had the morning paper in his hand. He was mad as blazes. Some group of unfortunate people with Irish and Catholic names, but otherwise not identified as Irish and Catholic, had come out against Maurice Tobin on something. I don't even remember what the devil it was. It may well have been only an appropriation for a curbstone. And he said, "God Almighty!" he said, "When will we stop playing into the hands of the Protestants?" He said, "Look, they're knifing Maurice here," and he was terribly upset, do you see? Alright.

Now his father's reaction to Oxnam would have been that. Jack's would have been very different. Jack would have felt, "Here is a man who must somehow be placated." He wouldn't have said, "We must find out what makes him tick." Bobby would have, and on that famous trip that he and Bobby made across the country calling on people like Bishop Sherrill [Henry K. Sherrill] and Bishop Oxnam and Paul Blanshard, and any number of others across the land, Bobby's questions were the perceptive ones. But Jack's position would have been, "This man is dangerous. He really is going to do an awful lot of harm. He's going to upset all sorts of things. We must get those people together."

So he called me up one day, and he says, "Don't you think," he said, "that a person in your position should meet with Oxnam and have a talk with him about this thing?" They had just come back from Yugoslavia with some sort of a report clearing Tito [Josip Broz Tito] and saying that Tito's treatment of Archbishop Stepinac was, on the whole, pretty objective and just and kind and sympathetic. And he said, "Don't you think you should get together with a man like that?" And I said, "Jack, I know him well." I said, "I see him very, very frequently." I said, "As a matter of fact," I said, "before the late Cardinal O'Connell [William O'Connell] died, I arranged for them to meet." He said, "Where?" I said, "In the Cardinal's office. He came out and sat in Cardinal O'Connell's office, and we talked at great length."

There was a long silence, he didn't believe me. And he said, "O'Connell and Oxnam talked?" I said, "For almost an hour, Jack." And he said, "What did they talk about?" I said, "All manner of things." I said, "I helped Oxnam on with his coat, and he informed me that he never liked to have people help him on with his coat because he had once been a great football player." And I said, "So far as I remember, the conversation with the Cardinal was that Oxnam was telling him that as he was driving through the streets in some of the

neighborhoods where there were large numbers of Irish Catholics living, he had seen some anti-semitic chalk remarks on a wall, and he thought the Cardinal should know about.” And the Cardinal had said, “Oh, dear me, that was most unfortunate.” It was bad enough for the people of Oxnam’s age to have those sentiments or the Cardinal’s age to have them, but the children shouldn’t have them. I said, “That’s what they talked about.” This sort of thing was unreal to him. He thought they never met. And I think he had a wholly admirable feeling that if he could bring it to pass that we would meet more often, he’d feel the world would be happier and better.

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I]

WRIGHT: Now while he was in the stage of preparation for the Convention in which he was to be nominated, he came to see me here in Pittsburgh. He did it characteristically. He came all soul alone so no one would know he came. This was again a fear of the Protestants because Pittsburgh is a very Presbyterian town. He was meeting at the Hilton Hotel that morning with some of the party chieftains here. They included two protestants McClelland [William D. McClelland], the County Commissioner, and Roberts [David B. Roberts], the so-called prothonotary, both of whom had been for him four years before when Dave Lawrence [David L. Lawrence] and the Catholic Democrats of Pennsylvania had had great reservations in his regard. They had been for him. And apparently in his conversations with them the night before at the hotel, they had spoken of me with a certain regard. I was later to learn that he didn’t mention particularly to them that he knew me. But that was interesting. They weren’t afraid of him or me. But he was afraid of them.

And so he came around anyway, we had a very pleasant visit. He was astonished to discover the large number of Catholics in the United States who were not of Irish descent. And this was a real discovery, it was an astonishing discovery. He had rather uncomplicated Boston ideas about the distribution of Catholics in the United States, and he talked in these curious little stereotypes. He had read and heard that although the East Coast was heavily dominated by the Irish, by which he meant Cardinal O’Connell and Cardinal Hayes [Patrick J. Hayes] and Cardinal Dougherty [Dennis J. Dougherty] and, more particularly, Cardinal Spellman, nonetheless the Middle West was tremendously dominated by the Germans. That was an important relief. Where he thought the Italians were, at this moment, I have no idea in the world.

But he came into the office next door here, and he sat down. And I said to him, “Jack, this is very nostalgic.” I said, “There was a picture of you in *Look Magazine* when you were running for Congress that shows you seated by my desk.” I said, “It’s all piled all over the place.” And I said, “I look distraught and you look calm, and you’re listening very intently while I sat yakkety, yakkety, yak in front of your camera.” I said, “Underneath it says that you see the advice of all sorts of people in the community.” And he laughed and he said, “What advice have you got about this place?” He said, “Why is Dave Lawrence against me?” I said, “I have no reason to believe he is. I don’t know him that well. I haven’t made his acquaintance very deeply,” I said, “but I could imagine why he’d be very nervous as a Catholic in public life in this part of the world.” I said, “It’s heavily Presbyterian.” He said,

"Is it really?" I said, "Yes." I said, "Most of the people, like the Mellons, are from Northern Ireland, and they're in the Ulsterite tradition." I said, "They're from Wales; they're from Scotland." I said, "They're Presbyterian, they're Calvinist, they're rich, they're entrenched."

He said, "Some of them are Democrats." "Well," I said, "so was Woodrow Wilson." And that small bit of erudition impressed him and he said, "Yes, of course." He said, "That's right. Wilson," he said, "was a minister's son." I said, "That's right." And he thought on that for a minute, that struck him as extraordinary.

He said, "Do you know McClelland?" I said, "Yes, I've met him at different affairs." I said, "He's a county commissioner." I said, "By the way, he's for you." I said, "he was for you four years ago." "Yes," he said, "I know that. By the way," he said, "he mentioned that you mixed very well with Protestants here and that he had met you at a couple of Protestant affairs." He said, "Roberts did too." And I said, "Well, I know them, yes." And he said -- now here's this fear and distrust -- he said, "What do you suppose a guy like Lawrence and Barr [Joseph M. Barr]," he said, "wouldn't want to go along with me for?" This wasn't a fear thing, this was a distrust thing, you see? And he said, "Now, McClelland and Roberts, why would they," he said, "when the others are so hostile?" Well, I said, "I don't think they're hostile, Jack." I said, "I really don't think they're hostile." I said, "Some of them are ignorant, and," I said, "some of them are prejudiced, and some of them are blind." But I said, "I think they like you. I think they like you very much indeed."

He said, "How many people are in this diocese?" And I said, "About eight hundred and forty thousand." And I said, "Oh, and by the way, and very important to remember, in addition to that, there's Byzantine Catholic Diocese here," I said, "with a Bishop of their own." He said, "What's his name?" I said, "Bishop Elko [Nicholas T. Elko]." "I've heard of him," he said. "Where do they come from?" "Why," I said, "most of their ancestors are from the Ukraine." I said, "They're Byelorussians." And I said, "But a lot of them are Slovaks." I said, "The principal of nationalism is extremely strong among them, and some of them are Slovaks." He said, "Czechoslovakia?" I said, "That's right." he said, "They were followers, were they, of this Monsignor Tissot [Jozef Tisot], that priest," he said, "that..." "No," I said. "By the way, what put him in your mind?" I said, "Why are you thinking of him?" He said, "Someone mentioned him last night." I said, "Are you quite certain?" He said, "Yes, yes." He said, "They mentioned Monsignor Tisot." He said, "He was kind of a quisling," he said, "for the Czechoslovaks." Do you see? I said, "Well, that's highly debatable."

But I said, "Was it in connection with their saying to you that here in Pittsburgh Paderewski [Ignacy Jan Paderewski] had formed some aspect of the Polish government; and also that here in Pittsburgh the Czechoslovak government Provisional Committee had met with Jan Masaryk and that Tisot was opposed to that? Was that it?" He said, "I guess so. Yes," he said, "yes, you're right." He said, "There was a man there named," and he gave a name that I didn't know. He said, "He said this." I said, "Fine. Well, they're here."

He said, "Alright. And you say there's almost eight hundred and fifty thousand Catholics in your diocese? Most of them Irish?" And I said, "No, they're not." I said, "This is something you're going to have to give a little thought to." I said, "When you would come to me and the Boston chancery office," I said, "if you had said to me at any given moment, 'How many girls work here in the Boston chancery office,'" I said, "I probably would have replied maybe forty, and of those forty thirty-seven would have been of Irish descent, one

would have been Polish, one Italian, and one French-Canadian. "But," I said, "as of this minute, under this roof there are sixty-three girls working. They're all very devout Catholics." I said, "Chances are all sixty-three will vote for you." And I said, "Five of them are Irish." And do you know what he said? He said, "My God!" [Laughter] It was a horrendous thought for him. The thought was "good night."

"Now," I said, "perhaps that will explain to you something of Dave Lawrence's problem." I said, "Dave Lawrence is of Irish descent and Catholic." And I said, "Unlike your grandfather, he couldn't go before a community that was ethnically in empathy with him and unite it behind him against anyone." I said, "He has to sell himself to all these people as well as to the religious groups." So he sat for a moment, and he looked up and said, "I guess I'd better see Lawrence." He said, "I'd better see him." Obviously this presented some pragmatic problem of a very real kind, do you see? Very real. So, on the level of political people I'm talking about now, and of Church personalities to the extent that he would see them as political forces, he had, I submit, a very real fear of the Protestant reality, and a distrust of the extent to which the Catholic ones would, oh, I think he'd probably say "do the right thing" in the matter.

Now, on that something else is significant, this fear factor. A fellow from Boston who did a good deal of writing about Kennedy, and I sometimes think maybe for him, too, although I don't know -- I know he does writing for Chub Peabody [Endicott Peabody], and I know he does writing for a couple of other people -- a fellow by the name of Sheehan, Edward Sheehan, who is living presently in Paris, wrote an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* a year or so ago about Catholicism in America. He is a very alert and informed guy, has published a novel which is a crypto novel which attempts to tell of Boston Irish and Yankee, and Republican and Democrat, and nativist and immigrant patterns in America through the key romance of a Persian or Arabic or Egyptian, Middle Eastern diplomatic situation, a rather readable novel.

Well, Eddie Sheehan, in doing his article for the *Saturday Evening Post* on the Church in America, came down to talk with me and during the course of the conversation he said, "By the way, let me throw this out." He said, "Kennedy didn't have a Catholic mind, did ye?" And I said, "No, that's true, Ed. He didn't." He said, "Alright, alright." He said, "Now, he had a Protestant mind, didn't he?" And I said, "No, he did not. That he definitely did not have." I said, "He had a secular mind. He had a completely secular mind." He said, "He did not." He said, "He had a Protestant mind." He said, "His mind was formed at Choate, at Harvard," he said, "along Protestant lines." I said, "It was not." I said, "He managed to escape any species of specifically Protestant or any other theological or aesthetical outlook." I said, "He no more had a Calvinist mind than he had an Ignatian mind." I said, "He no more had an Anglican mind than he had a Roman mind in the theological sense." I said, "He didn't have a theological mind at all." I said, "He had a strictly secular mind." I said, "On many points he had a Catholic heart, I think. And on some things he had perhaps a Protestant vocabulary, but," I said, "I don't think he had a Protestant mind at all."

Weeks later I got a letter from Sheehan, and he said, "The editor made the same point you did. He struck out Protestant culture and put in secular mind." And I think that we were both on target and that neither of us deserve much credit for being because I think it's the fact. I think he had a secular mind. This showed up on many things. It didn't show up in

connection with practice, although in a way it did, too. But it showed up in connection with thinking.

Long, long before the Convention, back at the time when the Convention was being held in which there was talk of the vice presidency -- and here, too, by the way, that's symptomatic of the same thing, of this attitude toward Protestants -- he told me that he had been coming home on a boat from Europe and he met the Episcopal Bishop Sherrill. He said, "I had loads of chance to talk with him." He said, "We had a lot of chance to talk." And he said, "He doesn't think what you people think he does at all." And I said, "I don't think he thinks what you think I think he thinks at all, Jack." I said, "I have a rough idea what he thinks," on the matters that we were discussing.

Now all of his conversation indicated that he was very much afraid of what Sherrill thought. He didn't distrust him. In fact, he trusted him to act consistently with his attitude toward Jack as a baptized Catholic, you see, he trusted him to do that. But he greatly feared what it might prompt him to do, do you see? He even said that. He said, "You can imagine that fellow," he said, "putting out a statement saying that I was for Franco. He might." I said, "I doubt that he would." I said, "He might have a hard time finding any reason to say so." But it was a fear. Alright.

So that day he said, "If you people," he said, "if priests, if you people met these people more often," he said, "They wouldn't be so antagonized by us." And I said, "Many of these people that you're talking about are my good friends. They're my good friends." And I said, "There's nothing I as a person could do or say that will take care of this." I said, "This isn't an individual person thing. It's a group thing." I said, "It's as old as the hills." I said, "Now here's a book I want you to read." And I mention this. I never got the book back, and I don't say it to complain. It was in a good cause. [Laughter] And I mentioned once in an article that I never got it back.

I had on my shelf the first edition of Cardinal Newman's [John Henry Newman] famous letter to the Duke of Norfolk in which Cardinal Newman was attempting to reinforce the Duke of Norfolk as a Catholic layman in Victorian England with regard to how he should best comment upon and live with Gladstone's denunciations of the definition of infallibility by Vatican Council I. And I said, "Jack, it's as old as this, to go no further back than England, and no further back than the last century." And I said, "I wish you'd read this thing."

He took the book, and he said, "Newman, Cardinal Newman, that's the Newman Club fellow." He said, "They named the clubs after that man." [Laughter] And he said, "The Duke of Norfolk's a very important fellow." He said, "Do you know what he does," he said, "in the.... He's a Catholic?" I said, "That's right." He said he's called the something, he gave his exact title, I think, the First Marshal, Field Marshal or something of the sort. He said, "He is in charge of the coronation ceremony of the King." I said, "That's right." And I said, "However, he couldn't be Keeper of the Great Seal," said I, pushing my small point of erudition, "because the Keeper of the Great Seal must not be a Catholic." But I said, "This good man," I said, "is as you observed, is a Catholic." And I said, "There he is." Well, of course he said, "This would have been who to the present fellow?" He said, "I met the present fellow." And I said, "I don't know exactly. I don't know how the line ran, but," I said, "anyway, he's it. And Newman wrote to him on this very problem which you're upset about

and worried about.” And he said, “I’d better read this. I’d better read it.” I knew he wouldn’t. He said, “I’d better read it.”

And he turned a couple of pages of it, and he said, “Infallibility,” he said, “that isn’t an issue. That isn’t an issue.” I said, “That’s right, it’s not,” I said, “but Gladstone thought it was. Gladstone thought it was,” I said, “but now you know it isn’t.” I said, “See the advance we’ve made on that?” And he said, “Yes, yes.” He said, “Yes.” He said, “This is concerned now with the conflict between your obligation as a Catholic and your political obligations. Is that right?” And I said, “yes. In conscience on both sides.” “Yes,” he said, “Yes.” And he put the book like that, quick in his pocket, and I never saw the book again. It was characteristic in every way, shape and manner. Characteristic, and I have to add, to me at any rate, nostalgic and attractive to the point of tears because it wasn’t the idea content that was at issue at all.

O’CONNOR: That sounds like the very man that you were describing in the beginning of this interview.

WRIGHT: Oh sure. Now Ted Sorensen told me -- I don’t know -- but Ted Sorensen told me he resisted, like a stuck pig, the idea of including in the Texas speech the suggestion which grew out, after years later, out of that very conversation and the recollection of how he reacted to it, when I suggested that in his talk to the ministers in Texas if asked what he would do if there came a conflict between his conscience and the Constitution as interpreted by the Court, what would he do. I said, “Ted, tell him to say he’d resign. That he’d resign, rather than violate either, he’d resign.” And Ted said, “I don’t think I’d better tell him that.” He said, “I don’t think that’s anything he should say in public.” I said, “I think it’s something that would be very refreshing.” I said, “A lot of Catholics would then know that he took his conscience very seriously, and a lot of Protestants would know that he took the Constitution very seriously, far more seriously than they do.” And I said, “He might add that he hopes any other candidate for public office would do the same thing.”

O’CONNOR: That’s just exactly what he did say.

WRIGHT: Although Ted said he resisted it. He said he didn’t take very kindly to the idea, but he finally came around to it. Again, on what premise I know not, except that sometimes when I’m thinking about him, I think the premise is on the one that he’d rather die than die out of the church, and sometimes you would have the idea that it was “Well, that nails it anyway.” Do you see? And which it was I don’t know, and I don’t think anybody does.

O’CONNOR: Within this picture of the President that you’ve painted, I wonder if you would care to fit in the question of Curley. Back in 1947 John McCormack was going around to members of Congress asking them to sign a petition...

WRIGHT: Yes, he came up to the Archbishop’s house.

O’CONNOR: And of course John Kennedy refused to sign it.

WRIGHT: Jack called up and asked me why the Archbishop did. I said, "He'd sign anything that would get a guy out of jail, Jack." I said, "Whether the guy was Curley or whoever it was, he'd sign anything that would get a guy of out jail." I said, "We Irish don't like jails. I suppose that's why he did." He said, "Would you sign?" I said, "No." And he said, "Why not? And I said, "I just plain wouldn't." I said....

O'CONNOR: Do you know whether this was after he had signed, or was this after the question or before the question? He was calling you up for advice or...

WRIGHT: He was under pressure then to sign. However, if you have been talking to people close to his family, you know all the reasons why he would not sign for Curley.

O'CONNOR: I wondered if you felt that was the reason.

WRIGHT: It had nothing to do with politics.

O'CONNOR: Yes, I wondered if you felt that was the reason.

WRIGHT: The infallible touchstone on anything here, friends, anything, is when it hit the family. This was visceral. It had nothing to do with morals or intellect.

O'CONNOR: Or even politics, which is kind of surprising.

WRIGHT: Nothing at all, nothing at all. And he would have taken the same position either way on that, whether it cost him votes or didn't cost him votes. As Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] did on Judge....

O'CONNOR: Morrissey?

WRIGHT: Morrissey, Frank Morrissey [Francis X. Morrissey]. That touched his family. Judge Morrissey's the one who stood by when Papa was getting well. Now that would say very much about it.

O'CONNOR: Alright. It's difficult to pinpoint specific contacts that you had with the President, but I pinpointed one that was in the 1952 campaign, or just prior to the 1952 campaign beginning...

WRIGHT: '52 that was Congress?

O'CONNOR: No, that was Senate. He decided to run for the Senate against Henry Cabot Lodge. As I understand it, he had decided to announce just about the time of

Palm Sunday. And he called you and wanted to know what you thought of this, what you thought of his announcing during Holy Week.

WRIGHT: Yes. Did you pick that up from someone else?

O'CONNOR: Yes, there are a few people near to the Kennedy Library who, you know, are still closely connected with...

WRIGHT: He would have had two or three reasons for calling me on that, by the way. One, I was friendly with Henry Cabot Lodge -- not as friendly as he, by the way, but I was friendly with Cabot Lodge off and on on things, sometimes on civic things, sometimes just on odds and ends of things. He would have called on that. He also would have called because of the....

By the way, he called personally on that. Sometimes, in my case, his father called, and then I would know that Jack had asked him to or that he had said he would. Now the reason for that was not at all because he would hesitate to ask you the question, or not at all because he didn't want to hear your answer. But I very frequently felt, and I've seen evidence in his experience with others that leads me to the same conclusion, that he frequently used one channel as the filter of another to see how much of it stood up on its way through the filter. This happened twice. I want to jump away from that a moment, and I'm going to come back to it. This happened when there was talk about should he take the vice presidency. His father made all those phone calls. Yet you almost had the feeling that he was there. His father called from Florida twice on that.

O'CONNOR: Called you, you mean?

WRIGHT: Yes. But this other thing was when I used to run a thing called the Lord's Acre Day in a little town in central Massachusetts when I was Bishop of Worcester. And Chub Peabody and Jack and a couple of other guys would always show at it as part of their general fence-mending in central Massachusetts. And I can't help feeling that that particular moment that you're referring to was at the time of one of the Lord's Acre Day things. I don't think it was whether he should announce it, at least I don't recall it that whether he should announce it in the Holy Week. I don't think that was it.

It seems to me that the question that was at issue then was again something to do with McCarthy. It was some -- my diary will show and I'll check because now I'm intellectually interested whether it was or not. But he called himself then, and it seems to me it was whether or not.... Do you happen to be able to answer these two questions? Was the St. Lawrence Waterway thing under issue then?

O'CONNOR: I suppose that was just about the time, yes. I'm not sure whether it was before or after.

WRIGHT: Because he brought that up once. He said, "How many of 'our' people." It was always that. And that's a phrase that I always bristled at and used to pan

in occasional talks in Boston. I'd pan the phrase out in kind, and an aunt of his, Pappy Fitzgerald [Mrs. John Fitzgerald], told him one time that in the talk that she had been present at I'd panned the phrase, and he said, "That's funny." He said, and by implication almost, "What else are we?" But in any case it seems at that time he said would our people be very much disturbed about the stand he was thinking about on the St. Lawrence Waterway. The year of that will clear up in my mind what it was that he was worried about on Cabot Lodge.

O'CONNOR: I wish I could clear that up right now, but I'm not sure. I know I can't remember.

WRIGHT: By the way, something I don't know and it might release a log and let some other logs flow. Didn't he talk over with Cabot Lodge before he made that announcement, the timing of the announcement? I think he did. My recollection is that he did.

O'CONNOR: I've never heard that before.

WRIGHT: I think he did. It's something to look into. I think he did. And I think this was the thrust of any call that he made to me at that time. Because I know that on the St. Lawrence Waterway thing he was extremely careful to make sure where Saltonstall [Leverett Saltonstall] was going to be, very careful. I remember kidding him about that. I said, "We shouldn't have two senators. We should just have one, and you guys should swap showing, going different days." And he laughed, and he said, "Well, Salty'd know more about votes than I would," he said, "on that stuff." I don't remember what he called about. I do remember what he talked about, but I don't remember why he called. I don't remember the occasion of the call. I'm certain it wasn't whether it had religious significance.

O'CONNOR: That was what I was led to believe.

WRIGHT: No, because I remember a very much later conversation on that point, very much later indeed. Much later than 1952. It seems to me that it was in connection with Lodge as a vice presidential candidate. What year was Lodge the vice presidential candidate? He was with Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], wasn't he, in the campaign against Kennedy?

O'CONNOR: Right.

WRIGHT: It was in that. It was in connection with that that he did phone one day. He phoned from an automobile, from somebody's automobile. But that was here, while I was here. That's very recent. He said, he never used the expression, "What's all this jazz?" But he did use an expression that's very similar to it -- you know, similarly colloquial -- about Cabot Lodge's Catholic convictions. But these again,

these were fear things. These were very peculiar things. What use would a Protestant make of them.

In fact, I think I would have to say that although Jack Kennedy understood perfectly, from the point of view of politics, the mind of the average Catholic of his background and general New England community, he did not understand at all the mind of Protestants. And it's because he didn't understand it that, while he might distrust as he did many Catholics, he feared Protestants. That's precisely the reason, I'm convinced, he did not understand the Protestant mind at all.

One day we were talking about -- not it makes it sound as if it was a long conversation. It never was I need hardly say. The conversation on these matters would never last more than a very few minutes. A cross examination of them might if he was intent on arriving at a practical conclusion. But a conversation, I can't imagine one lasting all that long. But I do remember a conversation about a talk which I had just that day heard by a professor of philosophy at Harvard then, Bliss Perry was his name. And Bliss Perry had given a talk to the Catholic Philosophical Association, which that particular year had held its convention at Emmanuel College campus in the Fenway, Boston. And Francis Meehan had been the chairman of it, and I gave a talk and Bliss Perry gave a talk. And I hadn't just heard the talk when I was talking to Jack Kennedy. I had just read the talk in the published proceedings a long time later. And I was mentioning to him the central thesis of it, which was a fascinating one, and which, for pragmatic reasons, appealed to him very heavily.

Bliss Perry's point had been that perhaps it was the function of philosophers of our respective traditions and groups, as opposed to theologians, to arrive at what he called the horizontal foundations on which we could rally and stand in discussing our agreed areas and in planning our separate vertical structures within the American culture. That was the thrust of the talk. It's a long time ago, but that was the thrust of the talk. Jack then was in the just-before-running-for-Congress stage, at that period of his life. And now he said, "What would that involve?" He said, "Now where would that put" -- and then he named two or three Protestant theologians whose names had been brought to his attention as very important. I think it was the first time I ever heard him mention Niebuhr [Reinhold Niebuhr], whom he always used to mention as an important theologian.

Sometimes he'd even say -- but again, in my own judgement, with a certain fear of what the heck is a man like that apt to be. He'd say, "What would Niebuhr think," do you see, "on this?" "Oh," I said, "it's nothing that's crossed his orbit, Jack." I said, "It's a totally different kind of problem." I said, "He isn't discussing that sort of thing." He said, "What about Oxnam?" I said, "No, nor Oxnam." I said, "Oxnam's not a theologian." I said, "In my own judgement, he's an agitator. He's a social gospel Methodist who dislikes Catholics, or has fears about them, and worries about them, and whose worries have been heightened by the fact that we've just been in and coming out of a world war in which he thinks the Vatican has probably played footsie with powers that he distrusts, and above all Spanish ones, and the black legend and yak and yak." And I said, "No, this is a different thing," I said, "This is much more academic." He dropped it.

O'CONNOR: That's really funny.

WRIGHT: He dropped it. I would be very curious to know, and of course there's no way I can know. Given the limits of the work that you're doing it would be improper for me even to ask, so I merely raise the question speculatively for you, as someone who's working on a very important part of history, to think about. I have read more than once that sometimes in a certain period of his public life when asked what was his favorite book, and before he used to reply that it was *The Young Melbourne*, he used to say that it was Duff Cooper's *Life of Talleyrand*. Now this is an extremely interesting answer. This is interesting for a million reasons. It fits in with a very real reading of Jack's mind and of the aspects of the Church that fascinated Jack. And it would fascinate him to the day he died.

The personality, the complexities, the messes in which Talleyrand found himself, the conflict between the constitutional clergy and the Papacy, the whole cynical business of Talleyrand, this fascinated him. Talleyrand, of course, was a man completely without an idea, totally destitute of an intellectual preoccupation, whose comment at the end of all the horror of the French Revolution when asked what he did during it, do you remember, was "I survived." There he was, do you see? Alright. Talleyrand, moreover, now that I sit here and think about it, and I've never thought of this before, would have died rather than die out of the Church in spite of all the things he did. You will remember the care with which he turned his hands over when they were being anointed as he was dying. The unfortunate terrified priest who was brought in to anoint this monstrous man started to anoint the palms of his hands, and Talleyrand, dying as he was, turned his hands over and he said, "You can't do that." He said, "They were anointed when I was made a Bishop. You have to anoint them on the backs of the hands." He said, "That's the ceremonial." And then with all his -- as Duff Cooper puts it so beautifully on the last page -- with all his papers in order he set forth for what country he knew not, but in any instance ready to have whatever was needed to pass the frontier in the dogana control. Alright. That's very interesting.

When Jacqueline was in the hospital down there at the Cape in that moment when the whole bunch of us were burning our hearts out with prayer for him, and he brought her books to read, significantly he brought with him Xavier Rynne's *Letters from Vatican City*, the whole *New Yorker* account of the intrigues of the first season of Vatican Council. That was the book he brought her. This fascinated him, do you see? Now you will comb that book in vain for any discovery of the great mass of themes of the Vatican Council. That was the book he brought her. This fascinated him, do you see? Now you will comb that book in vain for any discovery of the great mass of themes of the Vatican Council, or any of the key ideas of the Council. It has the names and numbers of all the players, do you see? A curious book to bring your wife. In the circumstance a very touching book, to me a very touching book, that he brought her. But I can't imagine -- well, nevermind. But it kind of goes with that Duff Cooper thing, too. Now in this he differs again from Bobby. When Bobby and Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] would be having those little salons in McLean, Virginia...

O'CONNOR: Hickory Hill seminars.

WRIGHT: Yes. They would be bringing in Niebuhr, by the way, to pick his brain and ask him what he thought; and that marvelous night when Bobby said,

“Ethel, what the hell, do you know God?” and so on. Do you see? They would bring in, they used to bring down to the Cape Fulton Sheen when he was talking on television. They’d bring down Father Keller [James G. Keller] on brain-picking expeditions. Jack couldn’t have sat still through those. He couldn’t have sat still through them. He’d be very elated to know the pragmatic add-up of it, but I can’t imagine him sitting still through them. If he sat still through them, I’ll be the most surprised person to ever find it out. I’ll be amazed.

O’CONNOR: You don’t feel there was much development in him along this line as he became older, as he became even President, except in the international sphere, do you?

WRIGHT: Well, it began to reveal itself in the international sphere. Some little thoughtful things he said indicated to me that it was showing up in other spheres too. But to me -- how am I going to say this because I have another idea of what was the providential aspect of that horrible death? To me, if you merely view a man’s life as something personal to him, which I do not, of course, and if you merely view the story of his life in terms of how much of his potential is realized, which I do not, the tragedy of the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy is that he was just beginning to bloom. And we have no idea what the flower would have looked like and done. All we saw was a kind of a tough stalk and the green things around it, very green things around it, and the first breaking of the bud and some of the aspects of the first violent color and quiet color, but no idea of what was going to happen.

To say that I sense it in terms of the international thing, the things he said to Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev] indicate it, and the way he said them. The mood in which he approached his audience with Pope Paul was the end of it, very unlike the somewhat cold little fellow who went to see Pius XII many years before, many, many years before, and only a student. But I think that if one were to make a contrast, a terribly oversimple one would have been that on these kinds of missions whether to Pope Paul, whether to de Gaulle, whether eventually elsewhere, there was less of the district attorney and the fact-finder and the brain-picker, and more and more of the question-asker who words his questions now in the form, not of direct demand -- “What do you think about peace? What are your last territorial demands?” -- but in the terms of tentative observations.

He acquired a tentative quality after the Bay of Pigs and around and through all that period which, in my opinion, had he been able to keep a certain ruthlessness and a certain pragmatism, might well have meant that by the time he was sixty he would have had a considerable amount of the sympathies that made Adlai Stevenson so attractive and his own extraordinary ability to make decisions and do things that Adlai Stevenson never had. And he would have been, therefore, probably a kind of urbane and refined and Celtic Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]. He then would have been able to get his programs, and he would have been able to talk with warmth. Of course everybody.... I would like to add one little word about the attitude toward him, since undoubtedly all sorts of people have added what they have to say on this, of Europeans. Is that of any interest to you?

O'CONNOR: Surely.

WRIGHT: Everyone in the world, of course, knows exactly what he or she was doing at the moment when he or she learned that the President was dead. This is very significant to me. I don't know of any other person of whom that's true. I don't happen to remember what I was doing when I learned that John XXIII [Pope John XXIII] had died, though I loved him dearly. I don't happen to remember what I was doing when I learned that my father died. I have a vague recollection that I was somewhere between Pittsburgh and Boston, but I don't remember what I was doing. But everyone has total recall of what he was doing when Kennedy died. I was having my dinner in a cheap restaurant in Trastevere in Rome. I was having supper with a man who very much disliked Kennedy.

O'CONNOR: Is he an American or a European?

WRIGHT: An American priest, a rather famous theologian, Monsignor Fenton [Joseph C. Fenton], the former editor of the *Ecclesiastical Review* and a very violent opponent of John Courtney Murry and of me. And so one night a year we had a little supper. We were having supper, and the radio was playing on the cashier's desk. It was that kind of crude little restaurant. We chose it because it has good fish. And all the people there were people from the neighborhood in Trastevere, poor as cats, and they were romping and gabbing and yakking away and it was noisy.

All of a sudden the man -- the woman who was at the cashier's desk didn't have the heart to do it. She was listening to what was on the radio as I was not, and she went over to her husband and said something to him, and then she started to cry; and he came over to our table and he said, "President Kennedy has been assassinated." He said, "He's dead." And Monsignor Fenton burst into tears and fell over on the table -- he's a very heavy man -- and he fell over on the table. As a matter of fact, he got sauce all over himself, and he cried. I did not.

I stood up, and I said to the people at the tables there, I said, "President Kennedy has just been assassinated." And I said to most of them, that's a communist area, and I said, "Would you people stand up and say a prayer with me?" They all did, and then all of those people without exception left untouched the meals they had ordered and went home. Every single one of them. We stayed last because I didn't know what I was going to do with Fenton. He had had a heart attack over two or three years, and so we stayed; we didn't eat, we just stayed. We then went out, and I went over to the post office and cabled home a message for the papers here. And he went up to the embassy and he stood for a couple of hours to sign the book, which started almost immediately, as I recall it, that night anyway.

A year later on the first anniversary of his death the Italian television, the R.A.I. ran a Sunday evening show recalling Kennedy in the retrospect of the year. The principal news commentator for the R.A.I., who would correspond roughly to one of our Walter Cronkite or Eric Sevareid types, came around to the Vatican Council and said that the United States government or some agency, or maybe some foundation, I know not, had provided this television show, and that it had interventions, five or ten minute little declarations by

different people who had been connected with Kennedy in various ways and who recalled him at the end of the year, and that he, the editor for the R.A.I., was very disappointed about this series because, he said, "If I put it out as it is over the Italian television," he said, "all my own political preoccupations apart, it will be shocking to the Italian public, Catholic and communist alike, because there is not hind in this program of a religious or a spiritual dimension to the man." And he said, "Of course here in Europe, and particularly among our young people of the socially alert and active groups," he said, "he's associated with the name of Pope John and with the same general mood in the church and in the same chapter." He said, "There's no hint of that in any of this." He said, "In fact, quite the contrary." And he said, "So we would be grateful, we were told that you might be able to speak to that dimension." He said, "We're going to take out one of the ten minute sprockets of this thing." And he said, "If you come to the R.A.I. studio, we'll have you talk into it." And he said, "They're all in English and we intend to translate over the voice and to add this dimension."

So I did go around to the R.A.I. studio and they played the half hour show. It was a half hour show. They played it. And I saw exactly what he meant. And I could well imagine the effect it was going to have on some of the university students that I had met and who had asked all sorts of questions about Kennedy, and so on and so forth. So I did read into the thing this recollection in this regard, and so forth and so on.

About a month later I received letters from several university students and other people in Italy who had seen the show -- it went over the national network -- and who commented on it. One from a girl in Asti, whom I don't know, said how grateful she was for it, because she said her husband was entering politics, that he was a member of the Christian Democratic Party, that he was renouncing a very good opportunity with an Italian industry to go into politics, that he had been motivated to do so precisely by the image that Kennedy projected at a time that he had made this little European tour and so on and so forth. He had in fact demanded of her a very great sacrifice in order that he could change his career at this stage -- they were twenty-eight or nine -- and go into public life. Therefore, she was grateful that in the midst of this otherwise totally secular presentation an American bishop had found it possible to say these things about Kennedy.

Well, this is a little strange too, isn't it, because more than once we've commented on how secular was his mind and how secular was his interests. Yet it's consistent with this other thing that I'm certain was in process of evolving, a little awareness that he had. And it was not limited to the phrases of rhetoric that he allowed in the speeches, as, for example, "When we do our work, it's God's work we're doing." No. That's not what I mean at all, or the dreadfully superficial things in these little books, the religion of John F. Kennedy, but that he was acquiring nowhere near, with the Calvinistic sort of depth that Woodrow Wilson had of it, a sense of his place in history which was a lot for him to acquire. And then, that in the providence of God, he was getting that. I'm absolutely convinced of it, absolutely convinced of it. And again I saw with tears that it had no chance to develop, not particularly.

[BEGIN TAPE II, SIDE I - Interview continued on June 21, 1966]

WRIGHT: Among the things I regretted I didn't mention in our last conversation were three that I'd like to read into the records. Someone once remarked, one of

the young Catholic writers of the group now called the “new breed” and who, by the time this is available to history, will probably be museum pieces.

O’CONNOR: They’ll be the old breed.

WRIGHT: There will be probably footnotes in a book no one will read. But in any case some of them remarked, specifically Michael Novak, who was a great admirer of the late President and looked upon him as kind of a significant breakthrough in the history of the Church and of Catholic attitudes, and more particularly as a kind of symbol of a new American dimension in Catholicism and in the relationship of a practicing Catholic to the historic Church. Well, Novak specifically, but some others have remarked that signs that Jack Kennedy conformed to what they’re talking about, something they call a nonecclesiastical Catholic, is the fact that the President even as a young man would always address the Bishops as Father. This is always suggested as a sign that he was more or less instinctively aware of the feudal history or the European aristocratic background of titles like Your Excellency, or Your Grace, or Your Eminence, or anything of the sort.

I mentioned this matter because I think that this characterization of the President’s Catholicism, and in any case this explanation of some of his mannerisms, both of speech and of etiquette, are in fact unfactual and, from one point of view, unjust to the man. Since I know that there are enough articles and books already in libraries containing references to this sort of thing I think it important to shed a little light on it, or to make another observation in its regard. Michael Novak, in an essay in the first volume of a set of books presently coming out in *Commentary* on Vatican Council II, speaks of what he calls the nonecclesiastical Church of the future. And in a footnote in the middle of this theological essay, or essay on theology, he cites President Kennedy as an example of what he means, the so-called nonecclesiastical Catholic or Catholic whose Catholicism functions outside the usual structures of institutional Catholicism and outside the patterns of what Novak in the essay is seeing as sociological Catholicism, traditionally structured Catholicism. Viewed from one point of view this is total dream talk.

The fact is that for all the years of his political ascendancy Jack Kennedy functioned very definitely within the structures of Catholicism in its highly institutionalized form as found in Boston, Massachusetts, in the 1950’s. That is to say, far from being anyone who found uncongenial or unwelcome the sociological structures -- represented by things like, oh, say, Knights of Columbus, and Holy Name Communion Breakfast, and the other things which Michael Novak and the others specifically indicate are things to which the more emancipated Catholic of the American mid-twentieth century is allergic -- Jack Kennedy took to them like a fish to water, or rather like the political, astute guy that he was, to structures, and precisely to structures.

As a matter of fact, I have often reflected that as contrasted with a certain older type of Catholic -- and I’m going to mention the name to you in connection with this in a minute, because the name itself enters into the Kennedy saga in a way -- Jack Kennedy was a very structured Catholic and a very traditional Catholic whatever the depth of his theology and things of this sort apart. I always remember his father saying to me one time in terms of his own Catholicism, and when we were having a little argument in connection with the grave

difference of opinion we had in the character reading of a certain prelate, that he, the father, was deeply devoted to the nine First Fridays and always had been. I thought that this was a little bit of rhetoric on his part in terms of the argument we were having at that moment, but I later found out that it was profoundly true when a friend of his told me that he'd get off a train in the middle of the Sahara Desert to make the nine First Fridays, though he would very likely make a mildly anticlerical speech at breakfast following Mass. [Laughter] In any instance Jack had a similar kind of devotion and in, I think, our earlier taping I did mention being touched by the fact that when his baby died he was so careful to place the medal that he did with it and a very few details of that sort to show that there was in fact a very large amount of folklorist Catholicism in his system rather than cultural or theological Catholicism, and that, as a matter of fact, he was quite the reverse of what Michael Novak's footnote would seem to suggest.

I think all that Mike meant was that he was an Irish descent Boston Catholic who went to Harvard. And I think this struck Mike as extraordinary because Mike, who knows a good deal about Catholicism, knows almost nothing about Boston, coming as he does from Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and McKeesport, Pennsylvania, where attendance at Harvard, or for that matter a trip to Boston would be sensational. And I think that there he misreads the significance of it.

It is, however, true and it was always very interesting that when the President, as far back as I can remember him, would be talking to anyone, Cardinal Cushing included, or Cardinal Spellman or anyone else, he always called him Father. Now to this Mike attaches great significance and one or two like writers. In fact, it has no significance at all. It's another bit, in my own judgment, of homespun Catholicism as opposed to any alleged secular Catholicism or emancipated twentieth century democratic American Catholicism. Al Smith called everybody Father. I remember that being pointed out to me one time by a man who had done some speech-writing for Al Smith. Al Smith had a very old fashioned species of reverence for the hierarchy, notably for Cardinal Hayes whom he always called Father, as he did others. But at the other end of the social and cultural spectrum I have always noted how the lads in private schools tend to do that. And I want to read that into my observations with regard to the President's folkloristic Catholicism and other dimensions of his Catholicism because I would like to indicate one man's reading of it as having nothing whatever to do with either his respect for the Church or affection for the Church, except perhaps to the extent that it might indicate, as I suspect, that he was considerably more at home with these sorts of things, as indeed he should have been, given all the circumstances of his childhood, than some of those who have interpreted them thought.

At that time of year when we were talking before, too, I neglected to mention something that I would very much want to be the part of any permanent record about the late President, if only because so often some of the most disarming and attractive and even affectionate things that he did are seen as a part of his political genius rather than of a dimension of a very real tenderness that was, in fact, in his temperament, if not in his evolved political personality always. What I have in mind is this: early in the time that he was in the Senate some students in Toronto, at the University of Toronto, took advantage of my visit there to give a lecture in order to ask if I could prevail upon Senator Kennedy to come to Toronto to talk to a kind of student assembly that they have in a traditional British-Canadian

pattern in the so-called Hart House, the student union center of the University of Toronto. They have a tradition comparable to that in the Cambridge and Oxford Universities at these occasional meetings in which someone is asked to be the guest of the house and to reply to questions and so on and so forth.

Now, I hesitated to ask the Senator to go there, or to bring it to his attention even, for several reasons. The first one was that the dates that they were asking for were the dead of winter, and I had seen him a very short time before and he looked to me utterly exhausted. And secondly, I didn't want to ask him because I was virtually certain that he would refuse, and I didn't want to relay that word to them. It was at a time when there was a certain amount of tension between the United States and Canada growing out of some one of those little incidents that grew up over security, I think, in which Mr. Pearson [Lester B. Pearson] was involved. In any instance, I did ask him.

Now what I would like to underscore is this, that there was, in fact, no political capital in this kind of visit at all, none. The University of Toronto has in its affiliated colleges many American students, but they are American students and they would be scattered from all over America, and they wouldn't add up to fifteen beans politically or vote-wise. Secondly, there'd be no publicity connected with it of any sort whatever, neither in the United States nor in Canada. And I want to underscore that.

I called him up or wrote him, I've forgotten which, but in any case he said certainly he would go. And he went alone. He went through a snow storm, and he arrived in Toronto at the airport, the plane being tragically late. He was met by these students -- some of them were from St. Michael's College, the Catholic College affiliated with the University, some of them from Hart House. He was dog tired. The boy who had chiefly been in touch with me, and to whom I had said that I hesitated to ask him because he looked so tired, later told me that it looked to him as if he was dying. He was that exhausted. He had only made two stipulations. One of them was that there would be a board in the bed that he would sleep in and that none of the students except the lad who was making the arrangements would know that. And the other stipulation was that since he was remaining overnight, he would not be obliged to give any talks or be expected to visit anything very taxing or demanding the following morning.

On the way in from the city one of the students told him that I had passed on -- the student who was handling it -- told him that I had passed on these recommendations, and he said, "We only regret one of them, Senator." He said, "We had hoped that in the morning you would come over to St. Michael's College to the refectory to the dining room, and at least walk through it, put in an appearance because," he said, "that is the Catholic college and we're very proud that you've come up." He said alright, he would. He went to the student union thing that night. He did an extraordinary job. He couldn't possibly have been more popularly received. I know that he got less than five hours even privacy over night, and I suspect that he got no sleep. He went to the dining room. The boy who had worked out the arrangements said that it was transparent that he was in physical pain. He shook hands with every blessed fellow and girl in the room. He stayed there an hour and a quarter. He did speak to them informally. He answered an awful lot of questions, and so on and so forth, and went his way.

Now the image that he projected there was fed back to me by many of the students orally and a couple of them in letters. And it was a very different image from that that he frequently projected on campuses here -- I mean by here in the United States, or at least I mean in New England -- where he struck many of our students as having his guard up a lot, there he did not. I thought of this later when I heard descriptions of him in France and in Vienna, and it made me all the more wistful about the fact that he never did get a chance to develop what I think I mentioned in the earlier tape I often thought to be his chief contribution, through the presidency, to political life, namely some contribution to the relaxing of international tensions and the building of a sense of neighborliness among nations.

But that Toronto thing I cherish as an example of the sorts of unheralded things he did. As far as I'm aware, there's nowhere even a newspaper clipping refers to the trip. And it must have really been an exhausting experience for him at the time he made it and under the circumstances, he was a short while leaving the hospital.

I also mentioned that I would like to read in one or two more things about certain aspects of his relations with, and attitudes toward certain public personalities in the Massachusetts Church and in the general political area. I've re-thought that a little bit. I think I'd rather not, certainly now, but perhaps at some later time when it would be more just.

O'CONNOR: Perhaps when the personalities wouldn't be as public?

WRIGHT: When one of them at least wouldn't be.

O'CONNOR: Alright.

WRIGHT: The other is Paul Dever, and I'd rather not discuss that now because since I sent this memo in March, I have heard another side of that and I think that it may not have been quite what I had originally been told. So I correct that one there, suggesting only that a complete reading of the history might make wise someone's checking somewhere along the line, if it's a matter of interest to the historian, the relationships of the Congressman as he then was to the then Governor Dever, and in perhaps in special terms of their respective attitudes toward then Archbishop, now Cardinal Cushing. I think that's probably all I want to say on that point.

Sometimes you hear it said that one of the late President's ambitions was that when he had finished with the presidency he might wind up his days as president of Harvard. Any number of people said that including, on one occasion to me, a man who very much hopes that before he dies he'll be president of Harvard, and he was rather terrified that his chances of becoming president of Harvard were greatly diminished by the fact that President Pusey [Nathan Pusey] looked as if he could well be president until Kennedy's terms would be over. And he said that he thought he would have no chance to be president of Harvard if Jack Kennedy were available at the time. He too had heard this sometimes recurring rumor that it was one of Jack's ambitions to be president of Harvard.

A number of theses spun around in conversations about this ambition, if in fact it existed. One of these theses is one that recurs in the character analyses of other Boston and

greater Boston Irish types. For instance, Mrs. Dorothy Weyman, long time *Boston Globe* writer, lady journalist, did a life of the late Cardinal O'Connell of Boston. And Dorothy Weyman, writing out of the mentality and outlook of a woman who, although a convert to Catholicism in Japan, was from a Yankee New England family, honestly believed, apparently, that the great dynamic in the life of Cardinal O'Connell was the dream that some day he would get an honorary degree from Harvard. And she develops her whole book, as a matter of fact, chapter by chapter in terms of the progress of Cardinal O'Connell toward the day when he would finally receive the highest of all accolades, short of eternity in heaven, for what she understood to be a Boston Irish Catholic type, by being given an honorary degree at Harvard.

To some of us who lived fairly close to the Boston Irish mentality and to Harvard, Dorothy's thesis was almost a Gilbert and Sullivan satire rather than a serious bit of writing. But she meant it very, very seriously indeed. And the description that she gives of Cardinal O'Connell's reaction to the news that he would finally receive an honorary degree from Harvard, and the state of elevation in which he travelled from his house on Main Street over to Harvard on cloud nine in order to receive his honorary degree is written straight-faced, by many people. But to some of us it's a trifle on the almost ludicrous side, certainly the caricature side, though she didn't intend it as a caricature at all. She saw it as a perfectly honest bit of interpretation of the psychology of the Boston Irish.

Well, some people in conversations so interpret this alleged ambition of the late President to crown his days, even after finishing with the presidency of the United States, and for all practical purposes would be a position in the affections of the world or the head of the world, by settling down as president of Harvard -- and, of course, accomplishing some species of collective and atavistic urge on the part of the Irish to display that they were total successes in the American and the intellectual world by becoming the first Irish Catholic background person to become president of Harvard. For my own part, I think I would have been inclined to believe that this too was satirical in the case of the late President, were it not for two details that I find more or less supportive of this rather weird psychological analysis. The first one is something of which I was a personal witness, and which I found at the time incredible and amusing, but in retrospect perhaps not without some measure of psychological significance.

I was standing outside the Lahey Clinic on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston one very pleasant afternoon when the late President's father came out of the clinic, and we exchanged greetings on the sidewalk, and he told me that he was on his way to the airport and would I give him a ride? I was very happy to do so. And we drove over to Logan Airport. On the way, with an enthusiasm that was at once boyish and somehow quite fierce, he told me that upon arrival at the airport he was going to make a phone call to a man who would be able to tell him whether in fact Jack had been elected that afternoon to the Board of Overseers at Harvard. And it isn't too much to say -- and I say it with great affection but little truth -- it isn't too much to say that he clearly was eager to get out and run on ahead of the car in order to get to the airport as rapidly as possible in order to get this sensational news. And he commented on the significance of this in terms of Irish Catholics. He commented on it in terms of the significance and in terms of the Boston-Harvard situation as he, at least, saw

it -- which was never quite as tense, I have to add, as I ever saw it, but in any instance as he saw it -- and how tremendous a breakthrough this would be.

He said to me at least twice, "You realize, don't you, that if Jack is elected he will be the first Catholic to have been elected to the Board of Overseers." He was so intense about this and so happy about it that I couldn't summon the courage to tell him that, in fact, Jack would be the third or second. I wasn't sure which it was, but I was sure he wouldn't be the first. In any instance, there was no chance to because he was caught up in the whole thing. We arrived at the airport, and we went into the American Airlines waiting room where the station manager from American Airlines was waiting for him and greeted him very affectionately and asked him to use his office to make any phone calls he wanted to make. And the Ambassador did, and he came out of the office really very happy, and he told me that Jack, had, in fact, been elected to the Board of Overseers, and that he had just received the word, but that nobody else would know it for a while. We shook hands, and I was happy because it was a very real recognition of Jack, and in its own funny way, perhaps a symbol of later things to come, and that made any of us happy who loved the whole saga as I certainly did.

In any instance, I then forgot the matter, I think, or at least so far as I now remember I forgot it, until I heard Mrs. Lincoln [Evelyn Lincoln] after the President's death talking about the President on the Merv Griffin Show, I think -- if not Merv Griffin than the other fellow. And she spoke with a kind of, were she not a woman, I would have called avuncular possessiveness with regard to the President, not maternal. It wasn't maternal and I don't know what the aunt form is for avuncular, so I'll say avuncular. [Laughter] She spoke with great possessiveness about it, and this dimension of her presentation on the television show that night made me do what I probably wouldn't otherwise have done -- that is to say, look up her book, which she was on the television show to plug. And in the book I found a description by her of the day that the President learned, while a Senator, that he had in fact been elected to the Board of Overseers.

Well, this was thrilling to me because here was a throwback indeed. I had seen his father's reaction, and now I was reading his reaction. And it sort of brought back that same sunny day. It was a very sunny day indeed. As we drove down the Storrow Embankment toward the downtown tunnel to the airport, I remember looking out of the car and noting how the water was dancing on the Charles River and I remember thinking to myself, the very waters know how Ambassador Kennedy feels about this because they were laughing, rippling in the sun. It was a very happy day.

So here was the picture on the other end, and it was every bit as buoyant, and I have to say I suspect every bit as fierce. She says, if I remember correctly the passage in the book, that he came into the office that day with a box, or opened a box in the office that morning, and in it was a tall hat, silk hat, that he put on his head and he said, "You know I'm the first Catholic," she quotes him as saying that, "to be elected to the Board of Overseers." Well, it was altogether too late for me to get in touch with him and correct him on that point now, and since I hadn't corrected his father, I didn't think I should get in touch with Mrs. Lincoln. And I think she points out, although I'm not sure, that it wasn't entirely true. But in his boyish -- and she describes it as boyish -- enthusiasm he was jumping up and down with joy. She said she'd never seen him act quite as he did. And he insisted on wearing a hat all day except

when very important people were coming to the office. And he explained to her a couple of times that now you have the right to wear this at commencements. Then I began to wonder if maybe there wasn't something in this psychology that I had heard about, and then I began to wonder if possibly Dorothy Wayman had been right about Cardinal O'Connell. [Laughter] But remembering what Ambassador Kennedy and Cardinal O'Connell thought of one another, I thought I'd better not think about that any further, so I dropped the whole matter.

This whole pseudo parapsychological commentary has significance for me in connection with the earlier thing we were talking about of the interpretation placed by Michael Novak and John Cogley and two or three other Catholic writers of the moment, 1966 A.D., concerning the relationship of the Jack Kennedy type -- the ivy league type, the third generation Irish type -- to their Catholicism and their understanding of the relationship of their Catholicism to other institutions, notably Harvard and the world of intellectual things. This very boyish, almost hypertensive enthusiasm about the tall silk hat and the first Catholic to do a, b, c and d at Harvard or Yale or what-not in the 1950's and 1960's contrasts, in my mind, very significantly with the very casual attitude which an earlier generation of Catholic intellectuals, in fact very much more identified with Harvard and with the American cultural pattern, demonstrated.

For instance, when I was a young priest in Boston, when I was Auxiliary Bishop in Boston, I used to frequently have lunch at the Club of Odd Volumes with people identified with Boston cultural events like the law lectures and things of this kind. And I well remember the evening that we had a dinner for Father Gerald Groveland Walsh. And among the guests at the dinner at the Club of Odd Volumes, was Professor Jeremiah Ford, who was that year finishing his many years, several decades in fact, of work as a professor at Harvard. Jeremiah Ford again, then a very old man in the middle 1940's, was not at all the first Catholic to have been high in the intellectual life of Harvard. But I recall the urbanity and serenity and absence of excitement with which he discussed all his connections both with the Church and with Harvard.

I remember being impressed by the same attitude on the part of Professor Louis Mercier, who was perhaps even more significant in a way because Louis Mercier was, of course, not a Boston-Irish Catholic, but a New England French Catholic. And after years of very intimate association with the academic and intellectual life of both Harvard and Radcliffe still was able to discuss both his Catholicism and his intellectual associations in life with extraordinary calm and with very great poise, and was able to reminisce very beautifully about whole areas of it.

I remember, too, the things that so many of her students had had to say about the relationship to Radcliffe and to Harvard of Miss Emma Forbes Keary, after whom a guild at the Cenacle Convent in Boston had been named and of which I was the spiritual director. And this was the most significant to me because among the members of the audience on one occasion when the Emma Forbes Keary Guild, which dated back therefore to Harvard-Catholic relationships in the period at, and even prior to, World War I, I remember seeing present several of the late President Kennedy's aunts, and so on.

So that I was never quite able to adjust to this extraordinary sense of breakthrough which seemed to be associated with election of a millionaire to the Board of Overseers of Harvard University. [Laughter] At least I never saw it as proving quite what John Cogley and

Michael Novak, and perhaps, for all I know, the President himself, though it proved. I think I just want to make that contrast because a cultural historian might someday want to look up the long history, beginning with Thomas Dwight, Dean of the Harvard Medical School, of much more intimate Catholic associations with Harvard on the level that I have always assumed Harvard existed to serve, namely the intellectual life.

[END OF INTERVIEW]