



**EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW WITH EDWARD M. KENNEDY  
AND VICTORIA REGGIE KENNEDY**

**Interview 13**

August 15, 2006  
Hyannis Port, Massachusetts

**Interviewer**  
James Sterling Young

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TRANSCRIPT

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**Young:** Well, we have other material coming in that—

**V. Kennedy:** Should be in momentarily.

**Young:** Momentarily? You want to wait for it to arrive, or do you want to go on to something else?

**E. Kennedy:** I think you might as well keep moving. OK?

**V. Kennedy:** Yes, if you're ready. Switch gears for a little while.

**Young:** OK. We're now switching the subject, this is in effect another interview, and it has to do with religion and politics and Ted Kennedy. There are several aspect of this that become interesting for history. One is the environment of church and state, religion and politics, and how it's changed. That's a public issue, how religion or one's faith figures into the public sector and public policymaking. There's another part of this, which is what religion means to the people who are making the laws and making the policy—what it means to them personally, what it means to you.

I'd like to start out with the more public part of it, and I thought last night that it was 46 years ago your brother John [Kennedy], when he was running as a Presidential candidate, he felt the need to declare his independence from the church, and to assure people that he recognized and would keep separate his religious persuasion, his religious precepts, from his public responsibilities. And I'm thinking about the atmosphere today, which is, it seems to me that profession of one's faith is almost a litmus test to qualify for public service. We have faith-based initiatives, we have a Christian right that is insisting that religion is the basis of the state of the union, and who deny any separation. And then you see actions like the [Terri] Schiavo case in Congress where the whole legislative body finds itself unable to resist a religious evangelical-inspired action, which is far afield from what Congress would ordinarily do.

So I think we might start, before getting to religion in your life, we might start with some reflections on that.

**E. Kennedy:** If we go back to the founding of the country and the reasons for the founding of the country, and the founding of the country in its earliest days, going up to the time of the Constitutional Convention, the people who came to this nation perhaps were concerned about religious liberty more than any other value. And this was certainly true in the earliest days. We have seen in our state the abuses of the witch trials and other kinds of activities, and persecutions of different groups that took place in Massachusetts over a long period of time, and very strong discrimination, even though groups came here for the freedom of religion. There was also enormous kinds of hostility and discrimination against various religions. And so one of the very important aspects of the Constitution was to understand that there was going to be a balance, a respect for the practice of religion but that there was not going to be the establishment of religion. The freedom of religion and the establishment clause have always had, historically in terms of public policy intentions—does the fire department come and help the church put the fire out? Yes, they do, but this is—

So there has always been that kind of tension. That debate still goes on, and I think is probably more complicated today by not only religious but broad ethical issues and questions. I think an awful lot of the ones we saw in more recent times are like the Schiavo case and the dealing with the right to die—not only the right to life, but the right to die. And some states have taken—Oregon has made some judgments and decisions on it, states have made some judgments and decisions. As a matter of personal kinds of conviction, I always felt you go—in those kinds of situations—to the people who are the closest to the individual, who are affected, whether—and those are the people who can be ultimately making the judgment because they are the people, by nature, disposition, and position, are going to be the ones who are loving, caring, nurturing, or being with the person for life as well as for death.

I think there are complicated ethical issues and questions that always need focus and attention, and we all need guidance in areas. But my sense is that on the one hand you have your basic moral and spiritual religious motivation, which helps to define your philosophy. You can go back and say, well, can you be agnostic and have values? A non-believer and have values? Many of them do. They say that that is part of the human gene—goodness and evil.

Others believe that the basic moral values comes from religious traditions, and great religions have common values of fairness and caring about the poor, others. My religion has the precepts which are laid out in its teachings, and which I find very powerful, and that motivated me—Matthew, about the hungry and the thirsty and clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger and visiting the prisoner, and the provisions of John—what you have done it to the least of these, you have done it for me. The very powerful passages that exist, which are uplifting, inspiring, and pretty clear as to the purpose of life.

So those have been a philosophical and political motivation in terms of my life, religious belief. But it's also with clear understanding and awareness that you're going to have in a pluralistic society, you're going to have different religions with different moral tenets, and that deserve respect. And deserve to be considered, not necessarily need to be dominant, but they have to be respected, and they have to certainly be considered. And as a political leader you have to work

through those in ways that are going to understand that you're dealing with a constitutional system, that is going to protect the freedom of religions, and if that is not going to be protected, then down the road my religion won't be protected. Therefore you have to deal with issues as they come your way. That's certainly what I try to do.

**Young:** But isn't it possible for there to be a tension between—let us take a sect of true believers who may be devout, true believers in their own way, and yet you take one of those people and put them in a public office and the values of the constitution require tolerance of others of different belief or actions or policies that would be unacceptable to your sect, so the tolerant attitude within the religion is sometimes not present, the tolerance of dissent. Many are not hypocrites; they are true believers, and yet they are participants in a constitutional democracy. Do you see any—

**E. Kennedy:** Well, I mean, you do, but that's what we have a Supreme Court for. Ultimately, you're bucking it down. But you have the Indians, the peyote case, where they believe it's part of their religion that they can smoke peyote. This was in opposition to the state laws and other kinds of laws. Justice [William] Brennan in that case—his ruling that this—I can't remember the detailed rulings that he had, but he was able to define it about what was consistent with the Constitution and what wasn't. Now, you have Catholics—people can't drink in the state under the age of 18 or 21, and yet we give wine in Catholic services, so is that a violation? It's a violation of the state law. You have the Hmongs, who believe that if you have an autopsy your spirit will never be safe, and yet we have requirements that you have to have an autopsy if there's suspicious death, and there are very religious monks who believe that this violates their very fundamental principles. And the list goes on. You have Jehovah's witnesses, and so it's used to debate bigamy—

**Young:** These are all—

**E. Kennedy:** These are all questions of some—

**Young:** I'm thinking of Father [Robert] Drinan, for example, which is not a case of litigation but a case of tension.

**E. Kennedy:** Well, if you're asking about whether you have the tension with regard to the hierarchical aspects of it, I grew up in a family where religion was very much a part of our own identity. I mean it was as much a part of our identity as the large family was, the Irish tradition was, the fact that brothers and sisters were members of the family. It was an inherent defining aspect of who we were. Now, I had parents who approached it in a somewhat different way. My mother was very accepting, rarely doubting, although she did doubt, particularly the loss of Bobby [Kennedy]. She doubted, how could the Lord take away the father of ten children? That was a very powerful question that she had to live with.

My father questioned the hierarchal aspects of the church, although many of those that were in the hierarchy were his best friends. Father [John Joseph] Cavanaugh who was the president of Notre Dame, was one of his four or five best friends. Every time he stayed here he said Mass at seven in the morning, my father was there. Every single morning he did that. Or wherever we were, if we were down in Florida or someplace and he was saying it, my father was there. Plus

my father—in this house every person went to church on Sundays, even a candidate for President of the United States—he can’t get in very late. No one showed up for lunch if they hadn’t been to church, or dinner, whatever we had.

But he was very close to Cardinal [Richard] Cushing, and he was very close to a fellow named Count [Enrico] Galeazzi, who was the architect of the Vatican and the personal advisor to the popes. Galeazzi used to come visit my father in France and my father went down to Rome to talk with him. And so he was very interested and he was a very strong believer, but he couldn’t—there were aspects of authority that he was not accepting, although he was very internally spiritual, and a very strong believer.

So in any event, religion was very enormously influential and very powerful, and continuing. I went to a Protestant school—every year my mother asked me to go, I had to go on a retreat, and more often than not she would go with me. The idea that you crank out a couple of days down at Cape Cod and drive on up to Lawrence, which we did, or—I guess it was outside, between Lawrence and Lowell, a wonderful retreat house up there.

**V. Kennedy:** You can tell that story about your going to that sailing—that’s always struck me. On your way to go sail.

**E. Kennedy:** Well, we were going off to—loved to sail, loved to race, and we had our crew all set, and we were going to this kind of regatta, and my mother called out the window, “Teddy, dear, this is the weekend you’re going on the retreat.” And I said, “Well, I think I’m going on the race.” “Oh, no, you’re going on the retreat, Teddy dear.” *[laughter]*

**Young:** How old were you?

**E. Kennedy:** Uh, probably sixteen, fifteen, sixteen.

**Young:** And you went on the retreat.

**E. Kennedy:** And off I went on the retreat. So I never—always getting to the retreat was the problem. Once I got to the retreat, I kind of enjoyed it, liked it, but the getting there was onerous.

**Young:** In later life did you ever go on a retreat?

**E. Kennedy:** Oh yes, I’ve gone on several with my children, I’ve gone with Patrick [Kennedy] up to one that’s right where the naval academy is in Annapolis. And we went again to Maryland with my children—Vicki and I haven’t been. What we try and do is go, when my children were going to Sunday school at Holy Trinity Church in Washington, they used to have after the mass, they’d have one of the teachers from Georgetown who would come over and lead a discussion for the grownups, which was enormously interesting—for the hour when the kids were in Sunday school. And then we’d all leave at eleven. Mass was at nine, it was over at ten, and it goes to eleven. And so we had talked about it at Blessed Sacrament [where Senator Kennedy and Vicki attended Mass in Washington D.C. with their children Curran and Caroline], and they started doing it, and we’ve tried to go over there even though our children—they do it before the Mass, so they didn’t quite get it. We’ve gone over there. One time—

**V. Kennedy:** Just before the Iraq war—

**E. Kennedy:** Iraq war, and we had the Dean of the law school at Catholic University—

**V. Kennedy:** Who's now out in the West Coast at Pepperdine. Doug Kmiec.

**E. Kennedy:** You know this guy—Kmiec, and he's before that Judiciary Committee every time I turn around on some right wing event. Dean!

And we had just seen the Pope send a letter to [George W.] Bush that Bush would not open or read at the time when the Papal Nuncio delivered it to him. It's about the war, you know.

**V. Kennedy:** Saying it's an unjust war.

**E. Kennedy:** Unjust war. That was for all the Catholics who were debating this issue about the war and proportionality in terms of 9/11. But he would not open it, but it was clear where he came out; he had real reservations about extending the war. And out comes Kmiec and just gives a carte blanche to the administration wherever they want to go. So we had a couple questions for him. But it was interesting. I went over there trying to get a spiritual, philosophical, uplifting—

**Young:** I wanted to ask, in these discussions after Mass, the ones with the children, for example, what was talked about? What would the priest talk to the parents and children about?

**E. Kennedy:** Well, this was just to the parents. The children would be off learning in the Sunday school.

But a number of the issues of currency that were before—talked about the church, women priests, a number of church-related issues.

**Young:** Were these discussions?

**E. Kennedy:** These were discussions, yes. He answered questions, and there was a very good group of—we had a number of—I think [Joseph] Califano was around at that time. There were a lot of parents there who—

**V. Kennedy:** And that's a Jesuit parish, so—Holy Trinity where you were going—

**E. Kennedy:** Married priests. How does the church justify the fact that—Vicki's Maronite, was Maronite Catholic—

**V. Kennedy:** Technically. I've always practiced Roman, but the family was Maronite Catholic.

**E. Kennedy:** But they had priests that are married. And the church recognizes them, but they won't recognize them here.

**V. Kennedy:** How about this one? Anglicans who convert, who are married Episcopalians who convert to Catholicism, and they become priests and they still have wives. [*laughter*]

**E. Kennedy:** So these—we could keep you here all morning on these kinds of issues. But these things are serious kinds of issues that—and it's a just war, what's the proportionality in a just war, the morality of poverty, what was happening in there where the church is—

**V. Kennedy:** It's just interesting, Ted, you had been asked to speak at St John's Episcopal, which is the church of the Presidents, basically across the street from the White House. You had been asked to speak at their gathering, after their service, a couple of weeks before Doug Kmiec spoke. And you gave a speech on just war. And you went through the canon law—

**E. Kennedy:** There's eight different kinds of canon law about the tests, I mean they spell this out very clearly, the proportionality—

**V. Kennedy:** And so Teddy had just given this speech basically saying it was not proportional, our military budget is a gazillion times what the Iraqi budget is; they don't have an air force; we're bombing them—you go on and on. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] But the point of this really is that we're always, I mean you always have, and we always do together, we're always going to these things, learning, questioning, having discussions, talking to priests, trying to understand, so it's a little bit less of a blind acceptance, but still very much practicing Catholics, but always trying to question and make sense about these things, learning about them.

**Young:** And these would be—would the priest be taking the position of the hierarchy?

**E. Kennedy:** They're discussions. They're basically discussions. A lot of these priests are very thoughtful people, and not necessarily are as orthodox as perhaps others.

**Young:** Yes.

**E. Kennedy:** It wasn't really very argumentative; it was all rather kind of thoughtful. They would give you different things to read that you might not know about. We've had continuing meetings of Catholic members with the Cardinals, which I'm very much a part of. We've had the Cardinals—the last one we had was—

**V. Kennedy:** Immigration, [Theodore] McCarrick—

**E. Kennedy:** I've got to call McCarrick—we had Cardinal McCarrick, who came up just when he was leaving, we had a nice breakfast for him. But prior to that he had brought together probably six or seven of the Cardinals, we had eight or ten of the Democrats talking over some of these issues—the right to receive communion, and whether they're going to get involved in the political life of the era, and how they were going to handle this. And we've opened up good lines of communication with the bishops conference—

**Young:** These are only Democrats?

**E. Kennedy:** These were only Democrats, although we asked for it, we initiated it—they set the building off, and once we did, they called Republicans to see if they'd set one up too, although they hadn't asked for it. So they went over to do that too, because they didn't want to let it look

like well, we were the ones who initiated it, asked for it. So now that they had it, the question was when are we going to get together, that sort of thing. I mean it's obviously not going to happen before the election. The question is whether we can institutionalize this.

**Young:** How did this come about? Whose initiative was this, this dialogue with the Cardinals? Was it initiated by the Cardinals?

**E. Kennedy:** By the members.

**V. Kennedy:** Yes. Can I say something to set the stage, because we've sort of shifted to something that is unbelievably important, and that is that throughout most of our lives, religion has been a private matter. It was certainly fundamental to who we all were, but it was a private matter, it wasn't the sort of thing that was out in the public square. You referred to President Kennedy and what he said, and I think that certainly for Catholics that I grew up with, and certainly Teddy in public life could say the same thing. Then all of a sudden in the last little while, it's become something that is so much in the public square, and very aggressively anti the positions that the Democrats take.

It's an interesting sort of thing, because the aggressive right wing version of is not pro taking care of the poor; it's not about feeding the hungry; it's not about that. The so-called issues of life. As one nun I have great respect for says, "You mean issues of birth." So these divisive things. And in this last Presidential—in the 2004 presidential campaign—it caused enormous pain to a lot of very feeling, thinking Catholics, and a lot of Catholics in public life. So the House of Representatives have lots of meetings among the Catholics, people whose whole motivation was Catholic social justice. They were trying to meet with the Cardinal and talk about it, and letters have been in the press that many House members—both people who are so-called pro-life and pro-choice—both signed on to saying we've just got to get back to what the teachings are.

And the Senate Catholics—Democrats are the ones we obviously have the biggest contact with—also have been deeply concerned and had been talking among themselves about what was going on, and how there are certain people in the hierarchy, or want to be in the hierarchy, who were basically espousing a very aggressive Republican—not just Republican, right wing, radical agenda under the guise of being religious. And so there was a real problem in the threats of denying communion to public officials; I even wrote an op-ed piece about that in the *Washington Post*. It was because it was just so tormenting of so many people.

So Teddy and others really pursued having a dialogue with the church leaders.

**Young:** What good comes of it?

**E. Kennedy:** Well, I think first of all we're in the early stages of it. You've got to find out the willingness of the Cardinals—whether they really want to try and do this. The initial reaction they had is go talk to your own Cardinal; that was their initial reaction: you talk to your own Cardinal, he knows what the teachings are. We tried to get them back together, which they did do. I think we have to run through this election cycle and get some handle on it.



**V. Kennedy:** It's interesting; some of the evangelical churches it's been written about have now started to say—this one pastor in particular, I think he's down in Texas, he's now started to say that it's blasphemous to make religion and politics as blended, that that's the wrong place for them to go, and I read that he lost about a thousand of his five-thousand-member church. The four thousand people are kind of hanging in there and saying they were feeling uncomfortable, that everything had become all about their particular theology, advancing it in the public square, and that it had gotten off base. Because basically Jesus didn't really say anything about tax cuts and that kind of thing. So it's gotten skewed. It'll be an interesting thing to see how the pendulum swings on that.

**Young:** Let's hope there is a pendulum.

**V. Kennedy:** Let's hope there is a pendulum. What's interesting to me, and encouraging, although sometimes extremely frustrating, is to watch the Catholic members who—where sometimes you might say, “Just forget about it, they're just putting pressure on, and Democrats don't agree with what we're trying to do, and we're trying to do what we think is the right thing—” But they don't. They don't say, “Just forget about it.” There's this overwhelming sense of what you just described, Teddy, I think it was identity of faith. And that matters so much to who they are.

**E. Kennedy:** I would say that they have more of a sense that they're not outside of the faith, that the faith is leaving them, they're not leaving it. [REDACTED]

**V. Kennedy:** But I think more than just that it's leaving them, it's more like, “It's my faith, and I'm not going to let them take it. It's my religion and I'm not going to let them do this.”

**E. Kennedy:** Not going to let them hijack it. And serious about this.

**Young:** Do you have a sense that the Cardinals are on both sides of the fence here? Or is there a position in the American hierarchy that is inclined to the right?

**E. Kennedy:** I think that's the sense. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Lindskog:** This so-called non-negotiables that you were referring to—pamphlets, and mass-going, the five non-negotiable issues—

**V. Kennedy:** Right. What's interesting about the non-negotiables, if you just think about it, and this is where I think that some people in the hierarchy realize the church has been painted into a corner, is that it only deals with legality. It doesn't deal at all with reducing the number of abortions. You could have as a matter of public policy in our constitutional system very easily, and totally consistent with our constitutional system, a policy that would encourage adoption, you could have tax credits or something that would do that. A policy that would give prenatal care to all women, a policy that could make sure that sex education and birth control was out there, things that would—

**E. Kennedy:** Child care.

**V. Kennedy:** Child care. Economics that would allow people to be able to keep their children. And that's an abortion reduction thing. Half of all abortions in the world, just about half, happen in places where they're illegal. So illegality is not the way to stop abortions, at least if you look across the world. I think there are some members of the hierarchy who are beginning to understand that. Because when you start with the legality issue you run headlong into church/state issues, and when life begins as a religious issue; it's not a scientific issue.

There are some faiths who actively believe that there can be in certain circumstances a moral imperative to actually abort a fetus if it would kill the mother, or if it would prevent children from having a parent, etc. And you're dealing with issues of individual conscience. So there's a way to do it, but that's not what—you're considered not pro-life if you're trying to reduce the number of abortions. So it's very black and white. And it shouldn't be black and white, and there are some members of the hierarchy I think who get that, but they're sort of painted into it.

[REDACTED]



[REDACTED] I think there's also an attack against members of the hierarchy who try to moderate—

**E. Kennedy:** [Joseph] Bernadin—

**Young:** Out in California.

**V. Kennedy:** Bernadin. They attacked McCarrick viciously. They ran off the Archbishop of Minneapolis, whose name is escaping me, because he was the most progressive liberal person. I can't remember the name. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Lindskog:** The two of you worship at multiple dioceses, both in Massachusetts and Virginia.

**V. Kennedy:** Not Virginia. D.C.

**Lindskog:** Have you noticed diocesan effects, where the teachings to focus on have been different?

**V. Kennedy:** We've been pretty lucky I think, because in Washington the churches that we worship at are either where the older kids, Teddy's kids, did their sacraments at Holy Trinity, we do that sometimes. My kids did their religious education and sacraments at Blessed Sacrament, and that was—it's always been a wonderful thing and priests were different. One of the priests from there is now at a church right near us in Washington, Father [Percival] D'Silva, and we go there. Or Saint Matthew's Cathedral, which is now very close to where we live in Washington. All of them are good, wonderful parishes. We tend to go here at Our Lady of Victory parish in Centerville, and it's just fantastic because the pastor is fantastic. It's jam packed with families with kids and people can't wait to get in. There are uplifting and enlightening sermons and stuff like that. So we've been pretty lucky. But I think there are other dioceses around the country where it's a lot different.

[BREAK]

**Young:** So we adjourned our discussion about religion and politics and public policy and Edward Kennedy. We started out with a discussion about the public aspect and the public atmosphere of religion and politics. I sort of started it out by mentioning John Kennedy's speech. The Senator followed up by talking about the principles of the Constitution and the family, which were right on, and I'd like to hear more about that because it shows your thinking on the issue, and that's what we're really trying to get at. What you see as the importance of religion.

We had been talking when we broke about internal conversations and dialogue among Catholics in office with priests, Cardinals, members of the church. I found that a very important thing to get historically, and maybe there are a few more things you want to say about that. Because this

is something that is not generally recognized. As always, what people see are tips of the iceberg, and they don't see the substance if you're not there. So before we get more personal about this, religion in your life, I thought you might want to say a few more things about that dialogue.

**E. Kennedy:** Well, just to—I'm not quite exactly sure where we left off, but we had been talking about the opportunity to interact with some priests in different church settings, to try to continue an ongoing dialogue both in terms of the traditional values of religion and also some of the more modern issues and questions. We may be legitimately accused of church shopping a little bit in our attendance on Sunday masses. I've got a very special priest I like to hear, and is Father D'Silva, who's at—

**V. Kennedy:** He's now at St. Thomas the Apostle, but he had been at Blessed Sacrament.

**E. Kennedy:** In Washington. He really gives a terrific homily in the classic sense of the word. He calls me in my office when he's going to give a homily, for example, on the sin of goodness. About all the people who think they're so good, and they're really not. And who are really the children of God? And he's got this terrific presentation. He gave a spectacular presentation just a few Sundays ago about immigration, moving from Matthew about clothing the naked and feeding, and talked about the immigrants going across the hot desert coming into a strange land and being welcomed. That the only real amnesty that there is for all of us is when we die and whether we go to heaven.

**V. Kennedy:** It's the only border that matters.

**E. Kennedy:** —that matters in terms of life. So he was—

**V. Kennedy:** He called in advance. He's an immigrant from India, and he's just—I love him dearly, and he was my priest where I went, where my kids were making their sacraments before Teddy and I were married. He's just been so loving to us. He was the first priest in the country to ask Cardinal Law to resign after the child sex abuse crisis. From the pulpit. And he would say to people at Mass, "I want you to know your children are safe with me, and I swear to you I love them." He had this magical quality where children gather around him during the celebration of the Mass. He'll call them behind the altar and say "Jesus is coming, Jesus is here." He's an unbelievable man. So we—

**E. Kennedy:** And he has, like on Martin Luther King's birthday, he always has a homily about Dr. King and about racism in our society and the teachings of—

**V. Kennedy:** He had that one homily, Teddy, that was Martin Luther King's birthday, it was [Mahatma] Gandhi, some commemoration of Gandhi, and it was also the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. And he took the three of those issues, and it was the most healing, beautiful homily you've ever heard. And on the issue of *Roe v. Wade* he said for anyone who suffered through the tragedy of abortion, we say, "We love you. Come home, we're here for you, come talk to us." It was about nonviolence and tying Martin Luther King to Gandhi.

**E. Kennedy:** So we go to the cathedral, with the wonderful Monsignor [W. Ronald] Jameson, who really is very eloquent generally, on Sundays.

**V. Kennedy:** We have our Father [Mark] Hession here—

**E. Kennedy:** Father Hession's here, who's very eloquent. And he comes sailing with us, last summer sailed back from Nantucket with us, and sort of had a continuing dialogue about different kinds of church issues.

And Gerry Creedon, Father Creedon, was just here visiting Ethel [Kennedy], who's been a long-time personal friend of the Robert Kennedys and of ours—Irish priest, and he's been in the Dominican Republic. He asked the bishop there about if they get an increased collection for Catholic charities, could he get a certain percentage of it, he asked that. He said, "I think we can double our allotment, but I'd like to get a percentage of that if we get it doubled." And as soon as the bishop heard that, sent him on the missions. He didn't want this rabble rouser around, and he went out on the missions for three years down there. He's just come back and he's got this parish out in northern Virginia. But he's a good personal friend. He's come on vacations with us down South.

Father [J. Donald] Monan in Boston, the former president of Boston College, goes to the Boston Pops with us when we go there, and is a very important, incredible educator and leader for Boston College, but has been very close to all of us.

So this doesn't make other than the point that we've maintained a personal relationship with thoughtful people in the church who continue to have an influence, a very positive one.

I can go on back to the early days if that's what you want.

**Young:** Yes.

**E. Kennedy:** I know there's not probably much more on this other part now. If you want to go back—

**V. Kennedy:** Well, it's interesting, there were a couple of things there, Teddy. I think if we're going back even a little bit to the continuing discussion and conversation, and we talked a little about—

**E. Kennedy:** Before you leave this, we might mention the Cardinal McCarrick, who we've had a good personal relationship with. I do a dinner every year with John Boehner, to support the Catholic schools. It's always interesting because the church teachings are that someone with my position on the issue of *Roe [v. Wade]* not go to Catholic University. You can go and make a general kind of speech. At Boston College I could go if the issue is on education or something like that, but I could not—they wouldn't let you go, they cancelled me out of going to Fall River, remember a few years ago, what was a general kind of reception in the basement of a Catholic church, and the bishop said no.

**Young:** Even though you were talking?

**E. Kennedy:** No, no, I was being honored. And several years later—listen to this—I got the public servant award, and Cardinal Law was going to give it to me. And he got such anxiety about doing this that he called me and said, "Would you mind if we do it at the Cardinal's

residence instead of doing it at a hotel?” I thought, whatever’s good for you is fine with me. But I said, my God, the purists are going to say this is even worse.

**V. Kennedy:** He was trying not to be public.

**E. Kennedy:** And he had 150 people and had the dinner at the residence. And the people were saying, “This is ridiculous. We could have had a thousand people and made more money, and we’re still doing the event.” And McCarrick, we do this dinner for the—Boehner and I do this dinner to support these inner city kids, and he comes to the dinner all the time.

**V. Kennedy:** He came to your 70<sup>th</sup> birthday at our house.

**E. Kennedy:** So I don’t make more out of a relationship with him than just that he’s a good pastor. He speaks very well, he’s always glad to see us and we’re glad to see him.

Now, do you want go back to the earlier days—

**V. Kennedy:** I was just going to finish up with this notion that we’re talking about of continuing to talk and make sense of some of how to be a Catholic in public life, or even a Catholic in non-public life, dealing with some of the teachings or some of the directions that the church is going. And again the 2004 election, that for me in a personal way was very difficult, and angered me. I was very angry with my church, very angry. Teddy was unbelievable. That’s the first time in my life I didn’t want to go to Mass, and so Teddy would find churches that he thought I would be willing to go to. So he said, “We’re going to go to Georgetown today,” so we’re with students and Jesuits, so of course I wasn’t going to say, “No, I’m not going to go.” He was just very sensitive, was very sweet, because I was in a bad place.

But we met with Catholic priests, I don’t think we talked about that with the tape running before, Catholic priests in Boston, a theologian, a Jesuit theologian, and a professor at Boston College, and an ethicist, to talk about what was happening in the church. Just Teddy and I were there, and I remember Michael Myers from your office, who’s the son of a Baptist minister, whose brother is also a Baptist minister. I love Michael Myers, he’s very in tune to these issues. So we talked that night just about public policy.

**E. Kennedy:** He’s my chief of staff of the HELP Committee.

**V. Kennedy:** And we had Jim Wallis over, who’s the editor of the *Sojourner* magazine, a Protestant minister who ministers to the poor. He’s a progressive. He just wrote that book *God’s Politics*. How the right got it wrong and the left doesn’t get it. It’s a good book. But we had him over and talked to him about the role of faith and public life. So it’s an ongoing process; it’s something we talk about a lot—to each other a lot, and read a lot of books, and also talk to people who can be helpful.

**Young:** Just let me make one other little observation. You referred to shopping for churches. It seems to me that would be almost unheard of amongst Protestants. I mean, you’re a member of *that* congregation, and you don’t go shopping for congregations.

**E. Kennedy:** That’s right, when you’re not supposed to—

**Young:** Because they've all got their own little thing, and you're inured in that, and that opens a new vista on the possibilities—

**V. Kennedy:** Certainly Catholics never did either. Your parish was where you were, the church that was closest to where you lived.

**E. Kennedy:** My mother and father went to Francis Xavier here—

**V. Kennedy:** —which I won't go to that church, to be honest. It's just—

**V. Kennedy:** But more people do. I actually started going to Blessed Sacrament because they had a good religion program for young children, so I started going to that. You find different things, and then you connect with a priest and sort of follow him around.

**Young:** Going back to your upbringing and the early years, let me just put a broad question: there was no member of the family, it was a large Catholic family, and there were no priests among the children, no one who went into the priesthood, and nobody went into the sisterhood and became a nun. Is that something that needs to be explained, because it was very common in earlier times at least for each family to have one of the sons go into the church?

**E. Kennedy:** I really don't think so. So much of the circumstances were so dramatic at the time that the older members of the family were growing up, I mean the war was upon us before the very crucial, critical time when people are thinking about what they might have been doing. This was something that was all encompassing, and I think all compelling, and I think the question—Joe might have, my older brother Joe was very religious. He was very devoted and very religious, and he left law school to get in the service. Jack, after Joe had gone in, felt that he had to go. Bobby was 18 and went in the Navy. Suddenly they had three or four years out of their lives, and I think the quieter time and that kind of an aspect when you're spending more thoughtful times, I think was a very tumultuous kind of a time. My mother always used to talk about, "Maybe it'll be this one," looking at me as someone who would go into the church.

You know I think my mother thought that Bobby was sort of on his way, and I think Bobby probably could have gone in very easily. Moral righteousness, belief, and he was a very strong practicing Catholic. The Newman club up at Harvard, he was the one—it's an extraordinary story. Came down and told my father, said, "You know, they're teaching, I have a fellow priest up there, Father [Leonard] Feeney, teaching that there's no salvation outside of the church." My father said, "Bobby, you must have it wrong." "No, no, I got it right." So over my father went and said "Why don't you drive right up and talk to Cardinal Cushing. He'll see you right now about this."

So we went up and talked to Cardinal Cushing. Cardinal Cushing said, "Well, let me think about it and send somebody over there to listen to this person." And this was just about the time of later, it was John the twenty-third's meeting and gathering, and when the issue came up of whether there was salvation outside of the church, they thought Bishop [John] Wright was going to make the presentation. Cardinal Cushing said he wanted to make it because he had gotten so interested in this. And he made the presentation, which was accepted, which was the basis of the ecumenical movement.

And that's where it all opened up, in terms of all the other religions. The Catholics said there is salvation outside of the Catholic Church, and that—eventually they took Father Feeney and told him he could not teach any more religion in a sacramental place. He went back to try and teach, and they had to defrock him. He was on the front page of *Life* magazine. And it really all started with Bobby. It's an amazing story, and I remember it just as clear as a bell. My father just sort of challenged him, you know, "Get back in your car and go drive back to Boston. Come on, I'm calling Cardinal Cushing right now. If you feel so strongly about it." And this was something that was very strong with Bobby, and I think under other circumstances he might have gone that way.

**V. Kennedy:** But he met Ethel.

**E. Kennedy:** But he met Ethel. But he could have—my sisters were all very strong.

**V. Kennedy:** They went to Catholic schools all the way through.

**E. Kennedy:** And the next generation, they thought that Timmy Shriver was going to be—because he reads everything, he's almost—

**V. Kennedy:** But then he met Linda [Potter].

**E. Kennedy:** But he was really on his way.

**V. Kennedy:** Still, a very spiritual person, very—

**E. Kennedy:** Very, underneath. Does all the readings, writes so much like my sister Eunice, thinks about the retarded being in the image of god, he's got these marvelous lines. He reads all these Catholic philosophers and theologians, and he's very involved in—

But that's a—I think it might have been different at a different time.

**Young:** So you mentioned—

**E. Kennedy:** We had in the Fitzgeralds, the point is made though, like in the Fitzgeralds, my mother's brother—their son Father Jack Fitzgerald who was a priest, we were first cousins. I think one other too—that generation, my grandfather's children, my mother, and I think there's probably one or two.

**Young:** It's noteworthy that I heard you say your mother thought that maybe Bobby might be, or maybe you might be a brother. In other words, there was no shaping a child, one of the children, to be that. You were on your own. And your parents were waiting to see, or just interested to see who might choose that. Or you might have the qualities that—

**V. Kennedy:** This is a vocation, you're called to a vocation, but your mother certainly gave you total exposure to the faith. To see if you were called.

**E. Kennedy:** I think that's true. We mentioned earlier, every year that I went to a Protestant school I was off at a retreat, and when I was off at a Protestant school, I had religious instruction




during the week. My mother would find out who the other Catholic boys were in the class and get a hold of their mothers and ask them if they wanted to go. When I went to Milton Academy every Wednesday or whatever it was, study hour, we met over at the cathedral and the Catholic priests from St. Sebastian's taught—and some were better than others.

But in college, when I was at Harvard I used to—John Droney, who was a friend of my brother's, and a fellow named [John] Zamparelli, who's still around—he's obviously old, but he was—they used to go to church every morning, and at Lent time I went every morning. They would call my mother, and my mother was so pleased. They were smart enough. You know, they ran *against* each other for district attorney and Droney won. Hated each other. They ended up being best friends. And they went to church all the time, and they were both very strong supporters of my brother Jack's. And they didn't know my mother, campaigned with her, and they were smart enough, they'd call up, "Well, your boy's at church over here. Good boy." [laughter]

But in any event—when we were growing up, there were always three basic tenets that were non-public. One was the family, this house was always a very sacred place for all of us. I don't ever remember my father having a political meeting in this house. There was never a cocktail party in this house. Other than maybe for lunch at times, basically towards the end when Jack was running. Never any other time. My brother Jack didn't have them, my brother Bobby didn't have them, I didn't have them. This place was really a sacred place for us. But he had family, and everybody was—he had that wonderful saying that home holds no fear for me. You go out and do the best you can, and you can always come home.

He had this family, religion, and patriotism, they were all assumed, and you didn't have to wear those on your sleeve. Which was very important. Everybody went in the service, my brothers went in the service, everyone went in the service. My brother Jack would have done anything for anybody who was wounded, but didn't—in the beginning until he ran for President he didn't support the GI bill. He said everybody, his generation, we're all called in there. Anything for the wounded, but there's no—then when he ran he supported it. Religion was assumed in the family, respected in the family, and the patriotism was all assumed.

Now the politics has changed. Now people who are not involved in that outwardly flaunt it.



We've been run over, our side has been run over on this thing because we didn't flaunt them. I think that's a political reality. We've got to be clever. If you want to stay in the game you've got to be clever enough to win. Obviously there are ways of being able to do it without flaunting it. But this is certainly true about it.

George Bush, [Richard] Cheney, seven deferments, whatever that is, John Tower—biggest hawks in the Senate are people that never went to war. Biggest dove, George McGovern, was a hero, an authentic hero, and he got pilloried. So it's—but to get back to the other aspects of it,

that was something that was never explained, no one ever explained that to us. The family, religion, and patriotism was something that you were born into, and it became a part of us. My father never said, “Boys, look, we’ve gotten through the summer and didn’t have a political event down here. Isn’t it wonderful?” But at the end of the day you just knew it. We have some now, try to keep it, obviously, in the summer. But they never confuse that.

**Young:** So nobody would think of not going to Mass.

**E. Kennedy:** No one. Everybody went. My mother, right up to the end, everybody went. And more often than not, they wanted to go when she went to Mass. “What time are you going to Mass tomorrow?” I mean it was either eight o’clock or nine o’clock, there wasn’t really much—if her stomach had bothered her she said, “I’m going at nine o’clock.” Otherwise at eight. Everyone, all my sisters, up to the time that she left when she was 90, 95 down there, then was here the last nine years of her life. Whenever, everybody wanted to go with her, wanted to be with her, to chat with her, talk with her. Everybody wanted to go now.

They didn’t—there were exceptions. My brother was two years away from getting the Democratic nomination and was going to miss the eleven o’clock Mass. My father pulled in down here, trying to get across the fence over on the other side, sent me out there with a car to pick him up and make sure he could get to Mass.

There’s that wonderful story in there that I told about my father and President Kennedy, just about the family, and that is that when my brother was President and we were coming over here for dinner and I’d gone over to visit him at his house, and actually we were playing checkers. He liked to play checkers, my brother played checkers, but he talked with you when you played. You’d chat, and—seven o’clock was when the cocktail hour started here, and at 7:29 we went in there for dinner. It was a Friday night, and you’d been out working, but only since probably ’56, you know we never had liquor or wine served in the house until about ’55 or ’56. My brother was elected to the Senate and then my father would—I don’t ever remember hard liquor, he’d have daiquiris, never wine. Friday night, there was a little glass—if you hung out, you could have one. Two of them on Saturday night. And there weren’t any daiquiris served on Sunday night because you were leaving for work, if you hadn’t left for work, which you should have. But if you stayed over Sunday night, to leave for work on Monday, there were no daiquiris served.

**Young:** This was when your brother was in the Senate?

**E. Kennedy:** Senate. And we’d come home on a weekend for something like that, law school, and he’d be there, my father here. On the weekends. I mean there was nothing served during the week. But on weekends. So we came over to his house at 7:00 and walked across, and as the story is told, he and I were walking through that little gate that’s over on the side here by the Robert Kennedys’, that faces our house on what would be the west side. Caroline came around the front, my father came around from the front of the house, and Mac [McGeorge] Bundy said, “Mr. President, they want you—the White House wants you in here.” My brother said, “Teddy, take Caroline. I’ve got to go in there and take the call.” And he went in by the kitchen and my father saw this and I talked to Caroline. We turned around. We walked on in. My father walked into the dining room and sat down. He was just teed off.

So my brother finished and came out, saw everyone in the dining room, sat down. My father said—he would start the conversation depending on what he wanted to talk about. My brother was on his way to Vienna to meet [Nikita] Khrushchev. My father said, “Jack, I know you’re thinking about meeting Khrushchev. Let me just tell you something. Nothing you do as President is going to be more important than how your daughter turns out. And don’t ever forget it.” Wonderful line. This was from a person who did everything to elect him President, and had this wonderful line. You didn’t really have to tell him that. My brother was a great father. But in a way it was just sort of reflective of this fundamental atmosphere and climate that existed here from the very beginning. He had the priorities straight.

**Young:** But as a kid, this was something that was a given and something that you had to do. It was part of life here, it was part of the family, it was a given. When you leave the sacred place and you go out on your own, it’s nothing you have to do anymore, is it?

**E. Kennedy:** Well, probably something other than that. For us it was as meaningful as breathing or loving our parents or relationships with members of our family. It was all intertwined, all intertwined, it was all part of—sure, you drive to church on Sunday, but it was all intertwined, all part of this whole package, as much as love of the sea and you walk to the beach, it’s the love of a faith and following the rituals of it. And I think, what of course happens is very quickly, and maybe it’s more ritualistic when you’re very small, because you get people bundling off, but what happens is that at the time when you’re sort of leaving the nest, so to speak, it is at some point fixed in your heart and soul and your being in terms of its source of inspiration, its source of hope, its source of solace, and its source of strength. I mean it fits into this. The teachings become inspiring, you find out, do some of the things that these parables sort of go, you find out that this is enriching to your life, it adds an additional dimension to it. This compounds itself, becomes even more of a factor or force.

There are obvious dramatic events that shake those foundations. You certainly face those. In the 70s my son lost his leg with the cancer, and others which are dramatic. But I always found that at the end of the day this was a wonderfully constructive and positive force in my life. And I think it’s part of the eternal optimism, that makes me sort of an optimistic person. I think it’s the hopeful aspects of the belief. Leave it to others to do the analysis, but for me those teachings and that uplifting aspect of faith is the one that gives a great deal of hope and optimism to me.

**Young:** So you’re leaving the nest and the ritual is there, and now you’re seeing the applicability to your life and to life and to the things you’re doing.

**E. Kennedy:** And the things that give you satisfaction.

**Young:** It becomes deeper in a sense.

**E. Kennedy:** Deeper in a sense, yes. I think it has to be embraced. I suppose there are people who reject it but if it’s a warm and embracing heart, I think this has the powerful impact in terms of one’s soul and beliefs and basically outlook.

**Young:** You mentioned it’s a solace, you mentioned several things, and hope. What is it about it that gives you hope?

**E. Kennedy:** Resurrection. The resurrection. That's the essence and belief, the resurrection is the hopeful aspect, the rising. It can be pretty grim and pretty dim as it was in that part, but that's the sense of the resurrection, the hopeful aspects of what's going to be out there. And the solace, I mean that's the quietness. The attachment to the sea and all the rest of it. When you go out—you didn't see much of it yesterday in the bluster, but you spend time out there and the quietness at times has a spiritual aspect of this too. Beliefs, close to nature—

**Young:** Is this where the religion and the spirituality meet the physical, on the water?

**E. Kennedy:** It does, it does for me. Nature, natural, the wonders of nature too. You're exposed to the darker side obviously, you see it. Just turn on that channel 42 now and see it. The grimmer aspects. And we have the beautiful luxury, we don't watch violent films or other kinds of arts. Your lives are exposed to that every single day. If you're a Senator who tries to represent what we try to represent, you're exposed to these enormous difficulties that people are facing, and injustices or pain.

**Young:** The darkest aspects, the violence, that must sorely try one's faith, I would guess.

**E. Kennedy:** It's senseless, the senselessness of violence.

**Young:** You mentioned a moment ago sometimes it shakes your belief, it shakes your faith. But you said at the end of the day there is hope.

**E. Kennedy:** There is hope. I think you have to develop a kind of a climate, an atmosphere to be able, moments where you'd be able to feel that. I think you can't get yourself in a constant kind of a spiral. You can get yourself into a downward spiral, the depression, negativism, loss. I think—and people do. But I've been lucky enough to be able—when I start down there, I've been able to see another side, or know of another side that can try to catch you on the way, which has been important in terms of my own life.

Obviously Vicki's been a big part of it. She's been a great source of inspiration and strength and love, and she's—I like having a common, in this case faith, an underlying belief, has been something that has been enormously important, certainly it has been in my life, and I hope in hers.

**V. Kennedy:** Absolutely in mine. Our shared values, shared faith, are huge in our happy life. Absolutely.

**E. Kennedy:** Well, there are times that she tries to—that are trying.

**V. Kennedy:** Unlike you. You're *never* trying.

**Young:** Your faith is a vital force in your life. That is such an important thing to understand, and the ways in which it is renewing, perhaps, a source of hope in the times—

**E. Kennedy:** Well, I think it's also, I mean for me a part of the reason—I think continuity and continuing, because that is something that continues. It's kind of eternal. Your view of life, your work here on earth, is a continuing aspect. You can, you have an opportunity to do some things.

It's a calling in that sense, of continuity. That comes with the territory as well, it seems to me. It's not the only source, you may be inspired by the causes of injustice, of unfairness, of violence I find in a very visceral sense. But the other is an aspect of the continuity of continuing, ongoing, working.

**Young:** You never stop.

**V. Kennedy:** He never stops.

**E. Kennedy:** I will. If that wind comes up any more this afternoon I might stop. *[laughter]* But it doesn't look like it's going to.

**Young:** Well, I think this is just fine. It's going to add a lot to knowledge and understanding. The idea is to understand, it's not to judge, not to excuse, it's to understand. I think this is a big contribution.

**E. Kennedy:** Good.

**Young:** It's very useful.