

**New England Jesuit  
Oral History Program**



**Rev. Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.  
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Editor: Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.  
Associate Editor: Paul C. Kenney, S.J.

Assistant Editor: Joseph V. Owens, S.J.

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Oral History Program  
Campion Center  
319 Concord Road  
Weston, MA 02493-1398  
781-788-6800  
[info@jesuitoralhistory.org](mailto:info@jesuitoralhistory.org)  
[www.jesuitoralhistory.org](http://www.jesuitoralhistory.org)

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Interview with Fr. Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.  
By Fr. Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.  
December 17, 2008

PROLOGUE

RR: By way of an introduction to your life's work, I understand you became very much interested, at one stage of your life, with the conflict in Northern Ireland.

RH: Yes. By 1971 the Northern Ireland conflict had been building up over the previous couple of years; the situation had gotten to look like the seventeenth century with its endless conflicts.

Around that time, as I was studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York, a suggestion came up that an inter-denominational mix of Catholic and Protestant theology students should spend a summer in Northern Ireland doing work projects to see if anything practical would come of it. It seemed that was obviously cut out for me, so I volunteered for it right away. This was a watershed for my life. I spent that summer doing that work, and much of what I have done ever since came out of that summer.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

RR: What did you do in Northern Ireland that summer?

RH: Two of us, a young Presbyterian seminarian from Pittsburgh named Jim Analin and I, were what we called the coordinators of a group of seventeen. The two of us worked on a building site, restoring several streets of houses burnt out in the rioting of the previous year, when those neighborhoods had boiled over on the day “internment without charge” had been introduced. All that summer I carried a hod with seventeen bricks, running up and down ladders. Lots of aches.

As coordinators, we had the one rental car and went around everywhere to see that the rest of the group were safe, happy, and doing something productive. I thus got to meet people all over Northern Ireland. I made a point of getting to know both the Catholic and Protestant sides. We got to know the local community people, of course, as well as the politicians and clergy. We also approached the paramilitary people in a serious way. This included the various IRAs, the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).

I started looking for something that would be common ground among them. The idea was to get them to admit they had common interests. Actually, that wasn't hard to find. It was jobs. Catholics were terribly underemployed, but Protestants were pretty badly off too.

## BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

RH: I proposed to them that I would go around the US and Britain to shop for investments in Northern Ireland, especially in Belfast. I asked them for assurances—I knew they couldn't give guarantees—of two things: (1) The safety of any new plants, that they wouldn't get bombed; and (2) Safe access to the jobs for both communities.

RR: That's quite a promise.

RH: Belfast was a crazy quilt pattern of Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods. One of the main reasons, a part of the obvious discrimination in employment against Catholics, was that the plants were mostly in Protestant areas. If you crossed into the wrong neighborhood going to work, you could get shot.

RR: That would make you think twice.

RH: Yes, at least twice, but I got positive assurances. My mention of a mixed work force put me right in the middle of one of the central questions over there, namely, fair employment. But the various paramilitaries all endorsed it.

I went back to New York the following winter of '72-73. I went around to all kinds of American and British companies; I got their agreement to go over there and begin new plants. We got such promises from twenty-seven American and three British companies.

RR: Really!

#### A MORE SERIOUS BREAKDOWN

RH: It was very attractive to them. These were the days of the Sullivan Principles, urging companies that had invested in South Africa to pull out of there in protest against apartheid. Company managements were fearful that if they did so they would precipitate the bloodbath we always feared in South Africa. But here was an opportunity for companies to enter a conflict region, not under the patronage of a government that was actually one of the parties to the conflict, but instead as a pledge of cooperation among the conflicting parties.

The proposition, in its fair employment dimension, also involved something very interesting to companies at the time: worker involvement in management. That interested even companies which were already there,

who saw it as a chance to improve their relation to the community.

But everything ended badly in October 1973, when the Middle Eastern War broke out and the OPEC started its oil embargo. General Motors had been expected to lead the charge as a signal to all the other companies preparing to invest. Given the OPEC crisis, they backed out of everything, and that led to a general slowdown.

But companies already in Northern Ireland enlarged to a degree, because they were somewhat assured by our proposals. Among them were Ford and Dupont, who picked up immediately on the fair employment part. They liked the idea of having communities decide such questions. So at that level things were going well.

Among those I'd approached was the Northern Ireland government ministry in charge of economic development. I found that they had never even made a survey to find where plants could be placed so that they were accessible from both sides. But they then made a survey and became very interested in the whole project.

RR: Lots of major business angles in all this.

RH: In any case, I realized that I had assurances from the whole spectrum of paramilitary outfits. I was working under the assumption that I was not dealing with psychopaths. I didn't approve of the violence they used to assert their communities' interest, but I realized these were people who had put their lives at risk for their communities' interest. For that, they could be trusted.

The problem was that no one else was defining the communities' interest except the paramilitaries themselves, because the people were disorganized, much as I had known other disorganized people in other places like Bedford Stuyvesant or East London. They had no

kind of community associations. The only ones defining the interests of these communities were the paramilitaries. The communities were people that things happened to, rather than having any power to make their own decisions about their own lives.

#### COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS GROW

RH: So I started working on community associations. There was a group of us, Protestant and Catholic, who started going around the neighborhoods to encourage community associations. It was somewhat like Saul Alinsky's community-organizing work.

We had to carry safe conducts from all the different paramilitaries as well as from the Brits. If we were asked when we arrived in a particular neighborhood, "What are you doing here?" we would need a name and phone number which we would suggest they call to see whether we were above board, before doing anything they might regret. I was looking for the communities to define their interests.

By February 1973, we had a complex of seventeen local community organizations across North Belfast. They covered a geographically contiguous patch of ground. And these seventeen organized a kind of umbrella organization. The UDA immediately declared itself a member, even though we never really accepted them. The IRAs also gave their endorsement.

And a group of thirty-five member associations, which came together to reflect on the situation, immediately sprang up in Greater West Belfast. At this point, I was into something that I couldn't walk away from. So what I had intended to be a summer's work there in 1972 turned into nine years. [Laughter]

RR: Quite a difference.

RH: Yes, and it's been the kind of work I have been doing since, there and in many other places.



## EARLY YEARS AND PARENTS

RR: Well, thank you for that overview. It gives us a good sense of the focus of your life. Now let's go back and start at the beginning with when and where you were born, as well as something about your father and mother.

RH: I'm Raymond Helmick. I'm seventy-seven years old. I was born in 1931 in Arlington, Massachusetts, outside of Boston. I entered the Jesuits right out of Boston College High School on September 7, 1949, my eighteenth birthday.

RR: Tell us something about your family.

RH: My dad is Raymond Glen Helmick, like myself. I'm a junior. He was a Midwesterner, originally Lutheran, from Peoria, Illinois.

We are a family with a long background in the United States. We have a German name along with a mix of nationalities. My mother was the Irish side of the family. The daughter of Irish immigrants, she was born in Jamaica Plain, Boston. My parents met in their twenties.

There are three of us children. My sister, Marie, was first, born in Florida when my parents were there selling real estate during the Florida boom. They were caught when the boom busted. I came along in 1931 and my brother Bill, who would also become a priest, was born six years after me.

RR: Tell us a bit about him.

RH: For seventeen and a half years, he was the secretary, first to Cardinal Medeiros and then to Cardinal Law, in each case before they got to be cardinals. And now, for twenty-one years, he has been pastor at St. Teresa of Avila Church in West Roxbury, and a monsignor.

## RENEWING THE CHURCH

RR: Isn't that the church you're working at now?

**RH:** I do a lot of things at that church. These days, I have dual residences. I have my place here at St. Mary's Hall at BC and a place at that church, because I do a lot of very basic craft work there. For example, I built a tabernacle tower in that church.

Placement of the tabernacle became a problem when my brother first became pastor and had to do a thorough renovation of the church. It was clear that the tabernacle no longer needs to be in the center of the church, where what you really need to see is the action of the Eucharist. The tabernacle can be elsewhere in the church. But we didn't want to demote Jesus by simply putting the tabernacle off on a side altar. So I came up with the idea of a tower structure, which was the custom in pre-Reformation days. At that time, the tabernacle was not the center of the church. So I worked at building the tower tabernacle there over a number of years.

Currently, I am working on another project. I am making a very large mosaic in a supplementary part of the building. The mosaic is about the healing miracles of Christ and is along a wall that has a wheelchair ramp for the disabled.

**RR:** I would imagine that the congregation there is fascinated by all this.

**RH:** Yes, that's the kind of thing I do.

## **EARLY SCHOOLING YEARS AND THE JESUITS**

**RR:** Tell us a bit about your education.

**RH:** When I entered the Jesuits out of BC High, there was a Jesuit, Fr. Richard P. Burke, who was a tremendously strong influence on me. He was a scholastic at the time; he was the kind of model that I really wanted to follow.

My first year at BC High was my sophomore year because my ninth grade had been in St. Agnes School

in Arlington, which followed the nine-grade junior high pattern.

My interests were music and architecture. Actually, at that time, I had a piano scholarship to the New England Conservatory. I was also very interested in architecture. Then, at the last minute, I decided to go into the Jesuits instead. [Laughter]

RR: I imagine that it had been in the back of your mind?

RH: It must have been. When going through the novitiate at Shadowbrook, I had a curious experience. I actually got thrown out of the Jesuits after less than a year.

RR: How did that happen?

RH: I had an ulcer, and ulcers were a problem at Shadowbrook at the time. All the second-year people with ulcers were told to just stop taking medicine for this, get out of the infirmary, and get over it. But those in their first year like me were expelled. But I had already made up my mind about being a Jesuit. So I applied again and re-entered the Jesuits at Shadowbrook in February 1951. Things went along well, I completed philosophy in Weston, and then began regency in Jamaica.

#### TEACHING IN JAMAICA

RR: How did you like Jamaica?

RH: I had a very interesting time in Jamaica. For me it was a really new kind of world. It used to be the custom at that time that New England would send one fellow a year after philosophy to Japan. I sent the provincial several reasons why that was the right place for me to go. I included one of those throwaway lines at the end, "If you've got other ideas, that's fine with me." And that got me to Jamaica. [Laughter]

I taught history at St. George's College in Kingston. I had a big complaint about it, though. We were teaching the history of the British 18th century—a long cen-

ture, because it went from 1685 to 1815. I thought this emphasis was nonsense and that they ought to be studying West Indian and Jamaican history instead. So I battled over this during my first two years. And, in my third year, I was allowed to teach that subject. And of course, it also meant that I had to learn more about that history. Given the number of classes I had, it was heavy going at times.

RR: Did they continue those local studies after you left?

RH: Oh, yes. The West Indian history got to be the standard.

RR: Wonderful. That was a great achievement.

#### THEOLOGY IN GERMANY

RH: It was a good start. Then in 1960 I went over to Sankt Georgen in Frankfurt, Germany, for theology. Once again, I was in a different world. While in Jamaica I knew a German woman, a lay missionary named Elizabeth Mueller, who helped me a lot with my German. She had been nine years in the West Indies before she returned to Germany in 1963 for my ordination. So when I got to Germany I was reasonably well equipped for the language.

RR: Yes, I assume that your professors in Germany at that time were teaching the same old scholasticism.

RH: Yes, they were. We had had a pretty good time in philosophy at Weston. The philosophy courses dealt with scholasticism. It was neo-Thomistic, and the theses we studied were supposed to give us all the answers to all the questions.

The final exam was called the *De Universa Philosophia* [On all of philosophy], and we used to describe it as “De omne re scibile et aliquibus aliis.” [About everything knowable plus a few extras.] We were expected to complete the course with a kind of universal knowledge that allowed you to teach any subject. When

most of my classmates went from philosophy to some kind of graduate studies program and came face to face with real subjects, they soon found out there was a lot they didn't know about. But we had really read a lot of philosophers.

When I got to Germany we were involved with more of such scholasticism, but neo-Hegelian this time rather than neo-Thomist. And all this was just not working for me as I explored different systems. In many ways, we were still in the bad old days.

The supposition was that we needed no Scripture for our theology courses, so we didn't begin to study Scripture until third year. Then, at the beginning of my third year, along came Norbert Lohfink, who turned out to be my most outstanding teacher. He was just out of the Biblicum in Rome, and he strongly influenced me during my last two years.

RR: It sounds like it was a fruitful time for you, at least after he came?

RH: Yes. Before I left for Frankfurt, I wrote to a scholastic who had been there before me, asking him, "Tell me the worst thing I need to know about this place." He said it was the one-credit Hebrew course, and that I should do some Hebrew before I arrived. So I got me a copy of Jacob Weingreen's *Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*. I took a test with our Fr. George McRae, who was a real Hebrew scholar. It gave me the one credit I needed. But I had got the bug. All the way across the Atlantic on the Queen Elizabeth, I studied more Hebrew. Once at Frankfurt, we had a Fr. Haspecker, who gave us an elective course in the Hebrew Psalms, the only elective course we had in Frankfurt and the only Scripture we otherwise had before our third year. Once Norbert Lohfink arrived, fresh from his degree at the Biblicum, I put in most of the next two years doing Old Testament in Hebrew with

him. When I finished my studies in Germany, I returned to the US to do tertianship at Pomfret, Connecticut.

#### TERTIANSHIP AND BACK TO JAMAICA

RR: Right. Who was your tertian master?

RH: It was “Deus” Murphy, Fr. Bill Murphy. Over that year I put in several months of hospital chaplaincy in Boston and Springfield. That done, I went back to Jamaica. The expectation at that time was that, if you went to Jamaica, you’d be there permanently, just as they did in Baghdad. While I was in Jamaica, I developed a great interest in and even link with the Rastafarians.

#### WORKING WITH RASTAFARIANS

RR: Tell us more about them.

RH: I had a good friend who was running the children’s section of the Institute of Jamaica. So one day I went down town to see him, wearing a clerical collar and hence recognizable. I was walking across Queen Victoria Park in the middle of Kingston when I heard a voice coming from somewhere close by, saying: “Woe to you who scatter the sheep of my people.”

I thought that was an interesting conversational opener, so I went and sat by him on a park bench. His next offering was “White man must go, blood must flow,” but that didn’t stop the conversation. We talked for the next several hours. He gave me a very thorough introduction to Rastafarian lore and practice.

RR: An unusual encounter.

RH: By the end of the conversation, we had become very good friends. He told me then, in what is very familiar religious language, that he was very sorry that, while he was in life, I was in the death. We all use that kind of religious language.

I went along then to visit my friend at the Institute of Jamaica. When I came back out on the street, another Rastafarian came around the corner, dreadlocks and all. He lifted his arm, pointed at me and shouted: "Death!" I knew just where we were in the conversation, so I went along to another park bench and spent quite a while talking with him, making another Rastafarian friend. So as time went on, I got to know many of them in Kingston well.

Then a catastrophe happened to them. Many of them lived in about a thousand corrugated metal shacks in a squatter camp on Foreshore Road. It had been designated some time before as an industrial development area, but no industry had ever been developed there. Then, without any previous warning, one night their shacks were all bulldozed, so they were all moved out of there and scattered all over the island.

RR: A major disaster for them!

RH: I knew them well enough that I was able to track them down. I found them a lot of them along the roads at places called by such names as "Three Miles" and "Eleven Miles," some distance away from Kingston.

RR: What was the reason for the government to do that? Did they grow something illegal near their shacks?

RH: I never found out if anything was ever built on the Foreshore Road. I don't think the Jamaican government had any other plan than being very anti-Rasta. They were a scapegoat people. Anything that went wrong in Jamaica was blamed on them. It was always their fault.

These people had originally come from subsistence farming way out on the mountainside. When they returned back there, they found they had lost the skills. They lived on little quarter-acre plots, so steep that you could fall off the field. They didn't have the needed technology. It was like the people of the Exodus in the

Bible who wandered in the desert, disconnected from their ancestral nomadic habitat and with no idea of how to adapt to survive. They needed manna to survive in the desert.

I started connecting with people in the Agriculture Ministry. Ideologically speaking, it was a big problem for the Rastas to connect with the Jamaican society, which they called Babylon, identifying it with the old slave society. They had to be persuaded that it would be no connection with Babylon if they took some technical advice from government.

For Rastas, marijuana or ganga is their meditation weed, and the punishments for it were draconian. I used to go out to see people the day before someone was coming from the Agriculture Ministry to visit their plots. I wasn't about to tell them, "You can't have any ganga around." But I would walk around their plots and praise every plant in the garden. When I'd end up standing in front of the ganga plant, I'd say, "The man from the Ministry will be here in the morning." And in the morning the plant was gone.

RR: Did that work?

RH: Quite well. I had a very strong relationship with the Rastas. I used to write a weekly column in the Catholic paper. Its name was the *Catholic Herald*, but it was often called the "*Catholic Star*" after the local popular afternoon tabloid. I wrote a lot about this kind of thing.

#### UNION THEOLOGICAL

RH: Then there was a plan that I would go to teach in the seminary in Jamaica, which is no longer there. However I was encouraged to get some ecumenical theology. It was 1967—the post-Vatican II years when ecumenism was right at the heart of things. I consulted a lot of people about where to go. Gregory Baum told me, "Don't go off to Germany or to Europe and do



Luther or Calvin studies. Stay in the US, because most American Catholics don't know anything about American Protestants." So that's how I ended up at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Those were the years of the anti-war movement. I felt strongly myself about those issues. I even got to march with Martin Luther King.

RR: At this time you were right across the street from Columbia, right?

RH: Yes. And I had my distractions, too. I built my harpsichord while I was there.

RR: Yes, some recreation is essential during studies.

RH: It was a challenge, but the harpsichord turned out fine.

RR: So there you were in New York studying ecumenism.

#### JESUIT CONNECTIONS IN IRELAND

RR: By the way, when you went to Northern Ireland in 1972, what was your relationship to the Jesuit community? Were you working with them?

RH: Jesuits were rare, in fact not to be seen at all, in that part of Ireland. The Jesuits that were in Ireland were in a narrow strip that went across the island from Dublin to Galway. And most of the other religious orders were in the same strip. This arose, because the Irish bishops wanted no exempt-order priests around who were not under their jurisdiction.

RR: That's understandable.

RH: When you're not under a bishop's jurisdiction, you have to find some civilized way to relate to him. At first the bishop in Belfast thought a while about letting me be resident there, but then said absolutely not. In fact, there had been a slip-up. The fellow who had first made the arrangements for our mixed group of seventeen theology students to work in Northern Ireland for the summer of 1972—a Jesuit who worked in what we called the "God Box" in New York, the headquarters of the

National Council of Churches—had not gone to see the bishop to let him know about this. I'd always assumed that he had. When I found out that he had not gone to see the bishop, I went to see him myself and nearly got frostbite at the reception.

Now, at the time, the Jesuit Provincial in Ireland was Fr. Cecil McGarry, a great man and a great Jesuit. Cecil met with Cardinal Billy Conway, and between them they decided that, if I could not reside in Belfast, I could reside anywhere I pleased, presumably in Dublin or London, and from there I could visit Belfast as much as I pleased.

RR: OK.

RR: When Cecil wrote that to me, I wrote back that I was very aware that there were no other Jesuits in the North. What I did there could be either a credit for the Irish Jesuits or an unbelievable embarrassment, and I could not do it under his direction. He wrote back that he knew that, and thought that he was reasonably well informed about what I was doing. So he told me to go ahead.

#### A BASE IN LONDON WITH NEW ALLIES

RR: Good for him.

RH: I set myself up in London and worked with a man there who was a very interesting character. It was one of the great associations of my life. His name was Richard Hauser, an Austrian Jewish Holocaust refugee. His whole family had disappeared in Nazi times. He escaped from Austria and fought in the British Army during the war.

He was very involved in all the conflict resolution and social activities that I was interested in myself. He was married to Hephzibah Menuhin, Yehudi Menuhin's sister, and a pianist who did a lot of touring with Yehudi. Hephzibah treated her music as her

recreation. Her work was what she did with Richard and myself. We were this very curious trio involved in Northern Ireland as well as other conflict situations—prison work in England, school issues, and in a whole range of social activities.

It was all very advantageous to me, because if I had been living in Belfast, I would have had to be the expert on Northern Ireland, and you can't be that as a foreigner. Nobody would have believed me. But doing it this way allowed me to have some knowledge of Northern Ireland, some of Cyprus, some of the Middle East, and many other places. Our organization, the Center for Human Rights and Responsibilities, was the British branch of the Federation internationale des droits de l'homme, the International Human Rights Network that came from the Dreyfus Affair in France.

#### BACK TO NORTHERN IRELAND

RR: What was your focus then?

RH: The main thing I had to do with the community associations was to get them to take charge of themselves. And it was clear that this was an effort that would take some time to develop. In 1975 I did a lot of mediating work with the women's movement called the Community of the Peace People, founded by Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams, who won a Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. I worked with them and with other peace groups.

I also did a lot of mediating with all of the paramilitaries. I got involved with the early UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) declaration of a year's cease-fire, which was later extended, though not always fully observed. But the paramilitaries developed rules of engagement. By the time of the great hunger strike in 1981, I had been involved for some years trying to resolve the prison crisis. I had tried to find a way for an agreement that would end the protest. I argued to the

IRA people that they didn't base a revolution on the bad things that are being done to their prisoners. That would not lead to their goal, and they quite agreed with that. The Army Council people were anxious to find a way out. So for six weeks, in the summer of 1981, I was actually the mediator between the Army Council and the Northern Ireland Office, which was the British Government's Ministry of Northern Ireland Affairs.

A major part of the protest was against prison work, which the prisoners saw as a way to isolate them from their ideological colleagues, taking them out of their segregated cell blocks. My most basic suggestion was that it be made possible to use the prison as the place for designing the peace. This suggestion didn't really end the ongoing hunger strike, but it was what actually happened in later years.

#### A CENTER OF CONCERN FOR IRELAND

RH: One of the things that actually kept me there for several years was my setting up an institution for the Irish and British Jesuits. (The English Province is now the British Province.) There was talk in Ireland about setting up something similar to the Center of Concern in Washington. I told them they should make such an arrangement with the English Province. But there was a lot of resistance to that on the executive level of the English Province. At that time the more traditional members of the province were living with their seventeenth century martyrs and rather at some distance from the contemporary world.

Eventually, Fr. General Pedro Arrupe, who was very interested in these developments, along with his social consultant, Fr. Michael Campbell Johnson, S.J., pressed the issue; so we did get the Center. We called it the Center of Concern for Human Dignity. We were one

Jesuit from the English Province (Brian McQuarrie), one from the Irish Province (Liam McKenna), and myself. I agreed to spend two years there and then go back to the States, so that it would be an English-Irish program. During that period I was involved with the Northern Irish prison issues, but then I did return to the US.

I had learned a lot over the nine years I spent in London and Ireland. I'd been dealing with governments, though never for them: English and Irish as well as several continental governments. So I figured I needed to learn how things are done in my own country. I put in three years in Washington, staying at Gonzaga High School. Over that time I was very much involved in urging the founding of what came to be called the US Institute of Peace. It was also when I first got deeply involved with the conflict in Lebanon.

#### WORKING FROM WASHINGTON TO EUROPE

RR: So that's how and where that got started?

RH: I associated with a group that included the legal consultant to the US presidential commission on establishing what we at first called a National Peace Academy, my friend Charles D. Smith, and several others who were exploring the idea. We set up an institution called the Conflict Analysis Center, and registered it as a 501-C-3. I was the interim president until we got a board set up. We were all senior associates relating to a lot of people. Once we had assembled a proper board of directors, the man we eventually picked for chairman was John Norton Moore, law professor at the University of Virginia and an ambassador. He later became the first chairman of the US Institute of Peace.

I was very much involved with John Norton Moore. He had published an important documentation of the Middle Eastern conflict, and I had become very closely

associated with the Israeli-Palestinian Middle East.

RR: You certainly made a lot of connections.

RH: My friend Richard Hauser was one of the first British Jews that the PLO approached with peace proposals, as soon as Arafat became chairman in 1970. They were looking for contact with European Jews. They had a man in London, Said Hammami, and a man in Paris. I was seeing Said regularly until he was assassinated in 1975 by the Abu Nidal group, who were trying to undermine these peace overtures from Arafat. On visits to the Holy Land I also got to know people like Faisal Husseini, the leading Palestinian figure in Jerusalem, and a lot of Israelis and Palestinians.

#### CONTACTS IN LEBANON

RR: What about Lebanon?

RH: While I was in London, we were dealing with the Lebanese conflict from a distance, and I never actually got there until I was in Washington. We dealt with all sorts of Arab embassies and with an office called The Islamic Council of Europe to try to get some mediation in the Lebanese conflict that started in 1975.

Then, in 1982 when I was in Washington, there was the big Israeli invasion of Lebanon. I was ashamed of myself that I hadn't been there earlier. So I went over to Beirut a number of times, for a month at a time. I also went to other parts of Lebanon, and got very closely involved with people from all the different groups in the conflict. To make sure I was saying the same thing to all of them, I wrote a report which circulated very widely, and was translated and published in a variety of languages, including Arabic and French. I'm told by participants that it and other writings I had done had carried substantial influence when the Taif Agreement was crafted and signed in 1990.

I kept going there until the kidnaping of foreigners became common. Then I figured it was unfair to people there to risk kidnaping and become the problem instead of making any helpful contribution. So I stopped going. It's the only time I've ever actually been kept out of a place for this reason.

I did remain in close contact with people there, and held a two-year-long correspondence with Raymond Eddé, who would have been elected president in 1988 had he not been vetoed by the Syrians. That was all eventually published, in French, as a book, *La situation libanaise selon Raymond Eddé*, but I didn't get back to Lebanon until several years later, in the early '90s.

#### THE IRAQI KURDS

RR: What about Iraq?

RH: I've been very closely involved with the Iraqi Kurds ever since 1973. The Kurds had come to Richard Hauser, my associate in London. In fact, they relied so much on him that they leased the house next door to us for their European headquarters. So I followed them very closely all through the seventies, but lost contact when I came back to Washington. I picked it up again in 1987. I had a very good friend, Kenneth Lee, a Quaker who was head of the English equivalent of the American Friends Service Committee. I used to call him the Quaker archbishop. In 1987, when he came over here, I put him up for a week or so here in St. Mary's Hall at BC.

We talked about the Kurds, and the Iran-Iraq War. It was winding down, and both sides realized that they needed to come to a peace solution. But they weren't able to do so without a lot of help from the international community. I'd known that the Kurds felt that they had no friends and could never expect any international help. I talked this over with Kenneth, that in

fact this was a time when they could have international help from the US and other major powers in the UN, in that moment when the Iranians and Iraqis so much needed international help themselves to end their war. But the Kurds needed to avoid the great mortal sin of disturbing international stability by messing with the border.

RR: A quid pro quo?

RH: Independence was not a real possibility. I argued that, if they looked for their safety in Iraq itself, then they could set priorities. This meant that the first priority would be their human rights in the face of genocidal campaigns in the several countries among which their people were separated. The second priority would be their cultural rights and language. They weren't permitted to use their language, or to teach their history and traditions. The third priority was free communication with the other Kurdish communities in the four countries they were in without altering borders.

I got to know Jalal Talibani, head of the Patriotic Union of Kurds and now President of Iraq, extremely well. Massoud Barzani, head of the other main party, the Kurdish Democratic Party, and now President of the Kurdish Autonomous Region, was in Iran at the time and was never allowed out, but I had a lot of correspondence with him.

RR: You were in contact with many different political leaders.

RH: Yes. Talabani got to be a very close associate. At one point he asked me over to London for a week to talk through the Kurdish situation. Hoshyar Zibari, now the foreign minister of Iraq, was the one that I knew best of the Barzani party. Whenever Talabani would come to the US periodically, I would always ask people in the State Department and White House to see him, but they would never do so until after the Gulf War



ended in 1991. I had gotten to know many people in the Middle East, Israelis and Palestinians, in Northern Ireland, and Lebanon. They were in the regular habit of contacting the US government, sometimes through me. I had very clear access through John Sununu, when he was chief of staff to the first George Bush, and later on I was in regular contact with Tony Lake in the Clinton administration.

#### THE KURDS AND THE WHITE HOUSE

RR: I see.

RH: I used to get immediate response when I wrote such things to the White House. For Talabani, I would write a month or so before he came to Washington to arrange for someone to meet him. I used to go down to Washington to see him myself. Then, about a month or so after he left, I'd get a letter from someone about halfway down the totem pole in the State Department, saying that the White House had got the letter about Talabani. They were very supportive of the human rights of the Kurds, but nobody was going to talk to any of them. [Laughter] And that's how things went until 1991, after the Gulf War. Suddenly they were very welcome, and I saw both Talabani and Barzani in Washington when they came over together. I was asked by both of them to be a monitor of their election in 1992, for which I went over to Northern Iraq. And I've kept in very close contact with them.

#### ARGUMENT ABOUT IRAQ AND SADDAM HUSSEIN

RR: That is important.

RH: In the late Bush and Clinton years, I had an argument about the whole way things were handled in Iraq. It seemed to me that all of the sanctions against Iraq were a very ineffective way of dealing with Saddam Hussein and his obviously problematic and frightful govern-

ment. I felt that there was a very clear way for the US to deal with him without a military invasion.

The Kurds were under a double blockade. They were included in the blockade against Iraq and were themselves internally blockaded by the Saddam regime in Iraq. Because of this, they were in a desperate economic condition. It would have been easy for the US to make the Kurdish autonomous area into a genuine political, economic, and democratic success. The Kurds had run the most democratic election ever seen in the Middle East. They were building real representative government institutions, and they were welcoming any Arabs who could manage it to participate, in that way building up cadres of Arab Iraqis with genuine democratic experience.

Had the US made the resources available to them to make a stunning success of their region, Saddam Hussein could not have survived that approach. There were a half a million Kurds in Baghdad alone. Everybody in Iraq would have been able to watch what was developing in the north, as well as see the things that Saddam Hussein was unable to provide them. They would then have gotten rid of Saddam, and would have people, Arabs as well as Kurds, who had the experience to build a truly indigenous free society without any external invasion.

#### ARGUMENT WITH THE US ABOUT INVADING IRAQ

RR: Ingenious.

RH: All through Clinton's years, that's what I argued. And I continued to argue this when the Bush administration came in and was so obviously warming up for an invasion. I argued this position, especially with Colin Powell. He was the only man in that administration that I trusted.

It was strange that, when I wrote to Powell about Israeli-Palestinian issues, I would get an immediate response. Powell would write the letters himself without a secretary. When I would write to him about Iraq, however, I'd get no answer at all. Even though he was Secretary of State, he was being shut out of the Iraq problem. And eventually, he was shut out of most foreign policy issues by the Pentagon. After that, I would no longer hear from him.

I then had a very interesting experience. I wrote to Powell in early January 2003, when I could see the invasion coming in March. Along with many others, I was arguing against an invasion. I told Powell that, if we were to invade Iraq, it would be played by the Pottery Barn rules, namely, "You break it, you own it." I had no answer, but, some two years later, when he was no longer Secretary of State, Powell began to give interviews to the press. He told them that he went to George Bush late January 2003 and among the things he told him was that, if we invaded Iraq, it would be played by those Pottery Barn rules "You break it, you won it." So I figured that he had read my earlier letter.

#### GETTING TO ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

RH: I'd worked very closely with the Israelis and the Palestinians. I had been over there several times, even when I was living in London. The only way I could get there then was by leading a pilgrimage group from London to the Holy Land, which would pay my fare. I would bring them over and show them around. In time I became one of the genuine experts on the Holy Land, since I knew where all the bathrooms were. [Laughter] I would bring them back out to the airport, wave goodbye and go find the people I wanted to meet with.

## RONALD YOUNG

RH: In 1985, back to Boston by now, I met up with a very good friend, Ronald Young, who had been over in the region for three years. He lived in Amman with his wife, who later became a Lutheran minister. He was there as the representative of the American Friends Service Committee in the Middle East. He had got to know all sorts of people, and in June 1985 he invited a mixed group of Jews and Christians to go over there, not only to Israel and the Palestinian territories, but also to the circuit of all the Arab countries. We did that, and in the course of it we met Arafat. He was already involved in a peace initiative along with King Hussein of Jordan. When we saw him in Amman, there had been a couple of guerilla raids by gunboats from Lebanon to invade the Israeli coast, neither of them successful.

## CONTACTS AND DISCUSSIONS WITH ARAFAT

RR: I remember that time.

RH: We hadn't really managed to have an adequate discussion about that at our Amman meeting, and I was resolved I should write further to Arafat about it. Then the cruise ship Achille Lauro was hijacked in the Mediterranean. I wrote to Arafat and told him I thought this was totally inconsistent with his peace initiative. I knew that he was being told by everybody, Americans, Israelis, King Hussein, and everybody else, that he must totally renounce any use of force. And I realized that, according to just war principles, he was entitled to resist, including armed resistance. If he renounced it, he was no longer the leader of the Palestinians. At the same time, I added that any kind of armed force was, in practical terms, completely useless.

The Palestinians could manage only pinpricks, which would simply provoke massive retaliations. There was

no future in that. I argued that he was able to do a non-violent resistance that would bring about a cease-fire. Normally, when you have a cease-fire, there is a terminal date after which shooting would be resumed. But his cease-fire could be of indefinite length, for as long as the peace initiative continued. And he had no intention of ending it.

RR: These are very complex matters to deal with.

RH: He found my letter interesting and I was invited over to Tunis, where I spent three days with him in March 1986. By the time I got there I had had long discussions with Cardinal Law, who had then brought in Archbishop Pio Laghi, the Papal Nuncio, with whom there were further long discussions. Laghi saw to it that I went down to see Cardinal O'Connor about this, and I took it on myself to consult Cardinal Bernardin in Chicago. I was to report on the meetings to the US Secretariate of State, and also to the Vatican Secretary of State.

I really felt licensed not only to get involved with this cease-fire and non-violence proposal, but also to take up all the three famous pre-conditions which were demanded if the US and Israel were to talk to the PLO. These were: 1) a recognition of Israel's right to exist, 2) acceptance of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, essential to make peace in the region, and 3) the renunciation of terrorism. My effort was to define clearly what we were talking about.

#### TALKS WITH ARAFAT, ISRAEL, THE US, AND THE VATICAN

RR: An important contribution.

RH: The renunciation of terrorism condition was the one that touched on my initial cease-fire proposal. Arafat and I agreed on a definition of terrorism, which rested on an analogy to war crimes: the terrorist action is one

which is carried out by some person or group other than the official armed forces of a recognized nation, and which, if it were done by such official armed forces, would deserve to be condemned as a war crime. The definition did not preclude legitimate armed resistance by an agency that truly represented a dispossessed or oppressed people. This was a definition that Arafat could subscribe to.

On the other preconditions, I did an interpretation of what I understood to be the actual experience of the Palestinians since the time Arafat had become PLO Chairman. He had brought with him, from his previous position in the Fatah movement before it became part of the PLO, the proposition of the single unitary state, which would guarantee equality to two peoples, Arab and Jewish, and three faiths, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. This had been an important proposition for the Palestinians, because it involved recognition of the equal rights of Jews and themselves. It had taken a few years, to about 1972, to sort out which Jews they were talking about—anti-Zionists only (I told him there were those, even in Jerusalem, but they were meshuggahs [crazy people]), or those who were in Palestine before the Balfour Declaration, or those whose families were there before 1948. Eventually they recognized that they were talking about all of them. That understanding then had to be accepted by all the constituent bodies that made up the PLO, by the central gremium of the Palestine National Congress (PNC), and by two very distinct bodies of Palestinian public opinion: the resident population living under Israeli occupation and the exile population in their diaspora.

All this had been accomplished by about 1972. Three senior members of the PLO Executive Committee were present for this initial conversation, plus the Palestinian Ambassador to Tunisia, in whose house we met,

and a translator whom I had asked to have present, not to translate continuously but just to handle any technical term that we need to understand exactly.

Arafat, at this point in the conversation, said that the PLO had made a generous proposal, and that it had been rejected by Israel and the US. I added immediately that I reject it, too, because it means the termination of the separate State of Israel, which its Jewish citizens will not accept.

That exposed an internal contradiction in the proposal: if the PLO recognized the equal rights of Jews with themselves, and Jews rejected their proposition, they needed a Plan B, a better proposal. Recognizing this, they had, from 1973 on, proposed the two-state solution, beginning rather timidly with the proposal to establish a Palestinian state or entity (they used the term "entity" so as not to commit themselves at first to recognizing Israel as a state, but they soon passed beyond that) on any bit of Palestinian territory they could have free of Israeli occupation. That would enable them to declare a state and negotiate a peace as equals.

This, too, had to go through the same complex process, first of understanding and then of acceptance by all the constituent bodies and the two bodies of public opinion. This had happened by the later 1970s, and the evidence of it had been their ability to declare a unilateral cease-fire, as they in fact did in 1981.

The legal basis on which they did this, I interpreted, was the Right of Self-determination, a basic principle of customary international law, which applied equally to both parties. The basis of their recognition of the right of Israel to exist was therefore identical to the basis of their own claim.

At this point, the conversation became very dramatic. Arafat asked his translator, who had been doing

a full transcript, to translate exactly this last passage. Then he and his colleagues when into about five minutes of excited conversation in Arabic among themselves. He asked me then to rephrase it, which I did. That was similarly translated, and followed by further Arabic conversation. Now Arafat asked me to unpack, enlarge, and elaborate the concept, and this time the Arabic conversation lasted a good quarter of an hour. Then first Arafat, and then each of the members of the executive in turn—Farrouk Kadoumi, Foreign Minister of the PLO, Hani al-Hassan, their principal negotiator, and Abdel Rahim Ahmed of the Iraqi-supported Arab Liberation Front—said that represented exactly their experience. We had arrived at the precise formula by which the PLO could meet the demands of the three pre-conditions.

There were further meetings with Arafat over the rest of the three days, with varying casts of other participants, all essentially confirmation of what had been achieved in that first conversation. I had been asked to pass on the request of an Italian judge that he might interview Arafat himself about the vagrant PLO official, Abul Abbas, who had arranged the Achille Lauro hijacking, a request to which Arafat readily agreed.

At the same time, I was aware that Arafat had a further problem. If he made a statement accepting the three pre-conditions, he needed to know the result. He was aware of an agreement between the US and Israel that refugee questions dealing with Palestinians and Jews would be seen as an equal exchange: Palestinian refugees counted against Jews who had come to Israel from Arab countries, so that the result was a wash. Then if he agreed to the pre-conditions, he expected to be told, “That’s very nice. So why are you here?” There would be no result.

He needed to know what the outcome would be. I



spent most of the next summer traveling, including some three weeks to Israel, where I talked extensively with Uri Savir, Prime Minister Shimon Peres' immediate assistant, and with leadership of all the main Israeli parties, on to Baghdad where I expected to meet Arafat again (he had left before I got there), on to Jordan, where I saw King Hussein, eventually to Tunis, where I had a long further conversation with Arafat, this time a private meeting with himself alone. I would see him again in October in Kuwait. Between each of these conversations I went back to Rome to discuss it with Fr. General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, whose help and whose knowledge of the Middle East I constantly relied on.

#### ARAFAT AND THE BRIEF DIALOGUE

RH: From that time on I consulted frequently with American and Israeli governments about how they would respond if Arafat formally met the three pre-conditions. Eventually this had a great deal to do with that happened in 1988. After a meeting of the Palestine National Congress in Algiers had acknowledged the right of Israel to exist, Arafat wanted to come to the UN to declare his adherence to the three pre-conditions. The US refused to grant him a visa, but the entire General Assembly upped sticks, left New York and went to Geneva to hear him. The outcome, with several complications, was a US/PLO dialogue.

Besides going over to see Arafat in various places, I'd been in regular contact with his nephew, Nasser al Kidwa, who was head of the observer delegation of the PLO at the UN. When the US dialogue was declared, I wrote to him and all my Israel, Washington, and Palestinian contacts, and said that I was now going to get out of all this. There was now an official dialogue going on, and I didn't want to get in their way.

This hiatus lasted for a year and a half until the middle of 1990. It then became clear that there was no longer a dialogue going on. Also, there was another big do about a gunship that tried to land on the Israeli coast. It had been planned by the same fellow who had arranged the Achille Lauro attack, Abul Abbas. The US was demanding that Arafat denounce him and throw him out of the PLO. He didn't want to do that, because by then he was beginning to rely more on Saddam Hussein. When the Gulf War started August 1990, I got into a long argument with him about it.

#### TALKING TO OTHER LEADERS

RR: I see.

RH: A recommendation was made to me about this time by Rabbi Roland Gittleson, a close friend in Boston. At the time I was talking to a lot of Israelis and Palestinians. But I wasn't talking to any Israeli of Arafat's rank. Roland told me I really needed to get into the same kind of conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. So I wrote to him, and we did begin a correspondence on the urgent need Israel had for peace with the Palestinians. Israel had to provide for its safety, I recognized, but if it relied, for that, simply on the armed might of its small population and made itself a fortress in defiance of the whole numerous Arab world, it would guarantee its own ultimate failure. Shamir responded positively to these ideas and we began an indirect correspondence, a cabinet officer writing on his behalf.

That heavy involvement of mine with the Middle East has only grown since that time. During the Madrid Conference period, when the various parties met periodically in Washington at the State Department, I was there a number of times with Ron Young's US Inter-religious Committee for Peace in the Middle East to

meet with all the parties. I struck up a close correspondence with Yitzhak Rabin once he became Prime Minister in Israel, and have maintained that with each prime minister since, with the one exception of Binyamin Netanyahu—I couldn't think what there was to say to him, though later I did strike up a correspondence with Ariel Sharon. I've assembled all this Middle East correspondence over the years into three xeroxed volumes, which I update each year, for my BC course on the subject.

With Arafat, once he was established in the Palestinian Authority, I argued constantly that he needed to mobilize his people for a conscientiously non-violent civil resistance campaign against the occupation. He never acted on it, but tried to act as a one-man show.

I argued that, consequently, he had no real power to act as a serious peace partner. I also wrote this to Yitzhak Rabin in my continuing correspondence with him. Arafat, on his own, got no help from the Arab countries or from Europe. And he had the US, acting for the Israelis, against him. He had no power source unless he mobilized his people.

He was a terrible failure as an administrator of the Palestinian Authority. I have a lot of respect for him, however, because I think his life's work really was to prepare his Palestinian people for peace with Israel. This required a lot of steps, many of which I walked through with him in that March 1986 meeting. But once he was in as the administrator of a territory, not a government, he never put his confidence in anyone except the people who had been his associates when he was in Tunis.

**EDUCATED PALESTINIANS AND THE AUTHORITY**  
RR: So you could only do so much?

**RH:** These Palestinians in Tunis were wealthy entrepreneurs. They were also pretty corrupt. The other Palestinians referred to them as the Tunisians.

The Palestinians themselves had always relied on education as their best help. They were competent and serious about their government or semi-government in the Palestinian Authority. But Arafat paid little attention to their elected assembly. The children, too, who had been the Intifada, were never allowed into any power. So as grown-ups they eventually began throwing bombs in a Second Intifada. They were very disappointed, disillusioned, and alienated.

In any case, Arafat never picked up on what I have described as a rigorously non-violent resistance. So when he eventually died, his legacy remained very uncertain.

#### **THE BALKAN WARS**

**RR:** Was the Middle East your only focus?

**RH:** No. I did stay in contact with other Palestinians, and will come back to the subject. But in the meantime I had another major involvement with the Balkan wars. Through the 1990s I had been wondering how one could get even a finger grip on the war situation in the Balkans. The tide turned against the Serbs in 1995, when the NATO forces began bombing their artillery emplacements. After sweeping all before them up to that point, the Serbs were suddenly in retreat before the Croats. It struck me as the Catholic moment in the war. I wanted to see an appeal to the Croatian Catholics, that they not repeat upon the Serbs the ethnic cleansing that the Serbs had practiced on them and especially on the Muslims.

How to communicate with Catholic Croatia? My thought was that the Catholic bishops could be enlisted for this cause through an appeal from the Pope. Had

they done this, the whole climate of the war might have been changed. I wrote this in a fax to Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican Secretary of State, copying it to my old friend, now a Cardinal, Pio Laghi, who argued for it in a meeting of the Secretariate of State, to Cardinal Law, and to Fr. General Kolvenbach.

I don't really know what happened as a result of that. I heard of Cardinal Laghi's intervention. Fr. Kolvenbach replied that I was not the only one to have thought of this and that it was a very difficult thing to do. I never heard of any public papal appeal, nor of any action by the Croatian bishops. The ethnic cleansing did indeed take place. A sorry death-march procession of Serbs was driven from the Krajina region of Croatia. They trickled, in carts, on foot, carrying their elderly, across Northern Bosnia and the panhandle stretch of Croatia, under attack all the way, knowing that when they arrived in Serbia their President Milosevic would herd them onto trains to ship them down to Kosovo as fodder for the next war. Some even mounted rebellions on those trains to escape that fate. When, several years later, I was in Belgrade during the Kosovo war, I found that this agonizing exodus was the only thing that remained in the popular Serbian memory of all the wars.

Having taken that tack with the Holy See, I then wrote to the Bosnian Muslims to say that the best route to reconciliation was that they allow Serbs who had been exiled or displaced through the wars to return safely to their homes. Whom to write to was the question, but an American-educated Bosnian, a college football hero from Texas, Mohammed Sacirbey, had been called to the Bosnian Foreign Ministry from his position as Ambassador to the UN when the previous foreign minister died. I thought he would best understand this appeal. Writing to him, I had all my Muslim friends

here in Boston write in support.

Milosevic was next. When he got to Dayton for the negotiations over Bosnia, I wrote to him how he had to represent the Bosnian Serbs there, because the Bosnian Serb leaders themselves, Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic, had so disgraced themselves. There would now be no Greater Serbia, and the best he could do for the Serbs in Bosnia was to foster the return of all the refugees and displaced, Serb or Muslim, to their homes.

It has been my custom for many years, working with Dr. Rodney Petersen, who directs the consortium of theology schools in the Boston area (BTI: the Boston Theological Institute), to bring a group of students from the schools of the consortium on a workshop-seminar visit overseas, often to conflict areas. In 1996 we took them over to the Balkan countries, and were able to get acquainted with a lot of people there. There were helpful contacts in Serbia, including the Patriarch Pavle and Bogoljub Karican, an entrepreneur and university-founder.

During the Kosovo War, I went over there with Jesse Jackson and an inter-religious group. Three American soldiers had been captured in the Serbian war. We persuaded Milosevic to release them and brought them back home. We also tried to re-introduce some diplomacy where there was none, only continued bombing. There was also some contact with William Jefferson Clinton about all this.

#### WORKING WITH JESSIE JACKSON AND HAMAS

RH: In 2002 I went to the Middle East on another inter-religious trip with Jesse Jackson. We visited Jerusalem and the Palestinian Territories, spoke with Arafat and with many Israeli cabinet members—all round a useful trip. I argued to Jesse that we should visit not only the

politicians and the peace activists, many of whom were a- or anti-religious and saw the religious groups and leaders only as trouble. But we should also see the religious leaders themselves, especially those who were most troublesome, whether in the settler movement or in Hamas. We had an appointment to see the whole Hamas leadership including Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, but turned back when we heard over the cell phones, just as we were approaching the Erez crossing point into the Gaza Strip, that Hamas had just set off a bomb in the cafeteria of the Hebrew University. We went visiting victims in the hospitals instead. But on returning home I took up a correspondence, by e-mail via a friend, with Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, arguing ways Hamas could get to the cease-fire they had wanted, but which had been averted twice. This gave me some initial contact with Hamas.

Hamas won the Palestinian election in January 2006. I had been making a pest of myself with Jesse Jackson for over a year by saying that we needed to do that trip again. After Hamas won the election, I wrote to Jesse, saying we had to start this trip in Damascus and meet with Khalid Mish'al, who by then was the Hamas leader. That didn't happen until July 2006, after the war that year. But in the meantime I began writing quite frequently to Mish'al. We went then on a visit, once again with an interreligious group, that began in Damascus, with much of a day with President Bashar al-Assad, and then a four-hour conversation through the night hours with Mish'al and four of his colleagues in the Hamas Political Bureau. From there we went to Beirut, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem, then back to Beirut at the request of the Israeli government. We had been asked both by Hamas and Hezbollah to mediate prisoner exchanges, and the Israelis wanted Hezbollah to provide signs of life for the two Israelis they held as

prisoners.

Jesse and I had the conversation with Mish'al without the rest of the group. I came back with a really positive impression of what we had done.

#### A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF HAMAS

RR: Yes, indeed.

RH: One thing I'm convinced of is that Hamas is not made up of religious fanatics. They are very open to making peace with Israel. But they don't want to recognize the legitimacy of Israel for a number of reasons. 1) They want some parity. In 1988, and again in the Oslo Accord, the PLO and the Palestine National Congress had recognized the legitimacy of Israel as a state. What the Israelis recognized in the Oslo Accord was that the PLO was the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." That was the formula used by the Arab League in its Rabat meeting in 1974. That the Israelis accepted it implied, but only implied, that the Palestinians are a people deserving of legitimate representation. Hamas wants parity and the recognition of the Palestinians' entitlement to a state. 2) They also want to know what the borders are. If they recognize the legitimacy of Israel, where is it? They don't want it to be assumed that they accept the Israelis' taking from them any territory they choose.

#### HAMAS AND ITS THIRD ISSUE

RR: I see.

RH: I understand that both of those arguments are not permanent. There is a third issue about which I am talking to Hamas. It is the whole question of whether it is legitimate for Muslims to accept that territory that has been Muslim can ever cease to be such. I knew of no statement that required this in the Koran or the Hadith [oral tradition], and I have checked with Muslim scholar



friends and have found that there is no such mandate. It's rather a folk religion conviction with no standing in basic Muslim doctrinal sources.

So I asked them, "What about Spain? What about India?" But the conversation is, of course, about Palestine. And I talked to them about Christian experience with territoriality. We, like them, have no requirement of territorial permanence.

Of course, we Christians started off as outlaws in the Roman Empire, with no responsibility for the state. Constantine, in his Edict of Milan, decided at first that all religions were legitimate, but he quickly got over that and decided that for the sake of the empire, the imperial government needed uniformity of religion. So he decreed that everyone in his empire would be Christian or be punished. The imperative here was entirely political, not one of faith. Transferred to the Western Europe of the Middle Ages, this territoriality was given the name "Christendom," and the requirement that everyone be Christian or be punished remained firmly in place. Jews know all about that.

Our experience of territorialism led to the Inquisition, the Crusades, and all sorts of unpleasantness. With the Age of Discovery, Spanish colonialism decided to make all their territories parts of Christendom. But Portuguese colonialism didn't deal in the settlement of continents, but instead placed trading stations around the periphery of Africa and India. You get no territorial Christendom from that. Even at the great Edinburgh Mission Conference of 1910, basically a Protestant meeting which was the origin of much of the ecumenical movement, the aspiration was to spread the reach of Christendom. Western Europe and North America, they felt, were Christian territory. They weren't too sure of South America with all those Catholics. But by the end of the 20th century all of Africa

and Asia should have become parts of Christendom. As we know, it didn't happen.

#### CHANGES FROM VATICAN II

RR: Major changes looming all around.

RH: By the latter half of the twentieth century, we had our Vatican II, whose decisions on freedom of religion and freedom of conscience have been accepted by practically all other Christians. There can no longer be any territorialism in Christianity. No longer will Christians say, "Be Christian or be punished."

So I ask Hamas, "Where do you stand on this?" In recent years, I've been up to my eyeballs in Middle Eastern questions. I don't see much of Northern Ireland any more, now that they're no longer fighting. I'm still pretty heavily involved with the Balkans and, of course, I'm now teaching at BC, something I've hardly mentioned earlier. After my nine years in London, working with the Northern Ireland and other conflicts, I spent three years in Washington, trying to learn how to deal with American government. So I was out of the academic world for many years. Yet after doing a number of these interventions, I really needed to be somewhere close to a critical academic community.

#### TEACHING AT BOSTON COLLEGE

RH: So in 1984 I came here to BC, and I've been here ever since working in the Theology Department. Most of my courses deal with Conflict Transformation. I've learned to prefer that term to Conflict Resolution. What it means is that you can deal with a conflict, but you really can't fix everything. What you can do is to help people relate to each other. The Mennonite term for this is Conflict Transformation.

One of my favorite things since I've been teaching is to see students going into this kind of work. I'm constantly writing law school references for them, and that is a great lead into this kind of work. I have stayed in very close contact with these students over the years. That includes a lot of the overseas Jesuit doctoral students we have in the house here at St. Mary's Hall. We've had so many of these here, and I've kind of nudged a lot of them in this direction. That is especially true of conflict studies for African students. I regularly sent them down to the Mennonite Summer Peace-Building Institute held at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia. You can get a master's degree in this in four summers. You can get thoroughly acquainted with this field.

What I really wanted to see was that in those dangerous countries, the African countries among them, we would have young Jesuits who had at the least learned where the resources were in this field, and who knew one another as resources for when the trouble came. The African Jesuit provincials have caught on to this and are very encouraging of it. Many of these students go to George Mason University to get their doctorates in this field. This is especially true of several of our students from Kenya.

#### JEWISH AND MUSLIM HELP

RR: Any plans for the future?

RH: I work a lot with Rodney Petersen who runs the BTI. Every spring term I give a joint-teaching course at Boston University on peace-building as Mission of the Church together with Rodney and Tom Porter, a lawyer and Methodist minister. Tom has organized an agency called JustPeace Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation for the United Methodist Church.

Rodney and I decided to teach a course together at

BC called "Toward an Abrahamic Family Reunion." We knew we had to have both Jewish and Muslim help. What we thought of first was running occasional panel discussions to which we would invite Jews and Muslims. What has developed since has been a four-teacher course. We have Rabbi Sanford Seltzer, a Professor at Hebrew College, and a Muslim, Professor Abdel-Rahman Mohammed, who used to teach at BU.

We're holding a conference in June 2009, followed by another other later on. We'll run this course again in fall 2009, rather than wait for the spring term. We want to prepare a number of people to take part in the Congress of World Religions that is happening in December 2009.

Several institutions are interested in the conference. These include two co-sponsors: the Massachusetts Council of Churches and the Interreligious Center on Public Life, founded by Hebrew College and the Andover Newton Theological School. The Fetzer Institute is helping with funding.

#### BOOK ON THE EUCHARIST

RR: Are you working on any writing projects?

RH: I have a book in process on what I regard as the ongoing civil war among Catholics in this country and elsewhere. The title is "Living Catholic Faith in a Contentious Age." I think of it as a theological methodology.

Another big interest of mine ever since I worked with Norbert Lohfink in Frankfurt is a whole series of "Do not Fear" texts, which I see as basic texts about faith. They run all through the Hebrew Bible and are then taken up on the New Testament regularly as theophanies with regard to Christ.

#### GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL CARE

RR: If you look back over your years as a Jesuit and con-

sider all you have done for peace and for the church, have you felt some kind of providential guidance and support in your life?

RH: Going to Jamaica happened so accidentally yet taught me so much. Certainly my stumbling into Northern Ireland was a watershed. Ron Young's invitation to the Middle East in 1985 was another key turning point. It introduced me to an altogether different level of work, and brought me to a higher level of the work I had been doing. The Hamas question has also been a very important one for me.

In the latter part of 1982 I was in Beirut. It was after the Israeli invasion and I was dealing with Muslims for the first time in the midst of a war situation and having to reflect seriously on how I related to them. It was similar to what I had learned about Jews from growing up in the middle of World War II, experiences that put me very close to what was happening to the Jews. We learned a lot during Vatican II. I was really rooting for that council to succeed. I was in theology at the time, and the things that were developing were things that I had been foreseeing and looking for. I was particularly influenced by *Nostra Aetate*.

I had known Palestinians over many years before I got to Beirut, but they didn't have a Christian-Muslim problem of serious dimensions. Their identity is primarily Palestinian. I went to Lebanon, and found Christians and Muslims in a civil war that was purportedly about religion, but actually no more so than with the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

I had to ask myself, "What do I really believe about Islam?" Well, I talked about this to everyone, and found that it was an existential as well as a theological question. I concluded from my discussions that the people who lived there had never really asked themselves that question. I didn't write this up at the time, but, when

I was involved in the Balkans in the late 1990s, I discussed this with a wonderful Franciscan friar over in Sarajevo, Ivo Markovic. He asked me for an article about it, which he has published since in Serbo-Croat. That's the only way it has been formally published, but since that time it has circulated widely among Muslims.

RR: It must have made quite an impression?

RH: Oh, yes. I have had very strong relations with Muslims over the last few years. In fact, I was involved through the Interreligious Center on Public Life in a question that came up in Boston. The local Muslim community were building a large and very elaborate mosque in Roxbury, and a very right-wing Jewish group tried to prevent its being built. The dispute lasted several years, and engendered high-flying and expensive lawsuits that were poisonous to community relations. I was asked by the ICPL to set up a little task force, and brought together a group of four Christians and Jews from our board. We eventually got everybody to withdraw all the lawsuits and allow the mosque to be built. So now I go to all their parties. [Laughter]

#### THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

RR: Were you able to draw on your Jesuit formation for your work?

RH: Yes, I reflect sometimes on the Jesuit character of the work I do. It is a rarity for me to give a formal Ignatian retreat. I have done it in special circumstances, especially during my years in England and working constantly over in Northern Ireland (1972-1981). Then I worked closely with the Irish Christian Brothers, as they were going through the critical time of discerning their corporate vocation while losing the numbers that had made their school system workable. I also worked with the Sisters of Sion, in England and at their

headquarters in Rome, as they were working through the shift from being an order of perpetual prayer for the conversion of Jews to the concept of developing Christian-Jewish mutual understanding. In both cases Ignatian retreats were a part of the exercise, but the discernment and response to signs of the time represented a much broader process than the retreats themselves.

That corresponds to my sense of the essential character of the Exercises, as not so much designed for the annual retreat, a sort of periodic refresher course, as rather for the forming of basic vocational decisions for a life in Christ, a once-and-for-all process. I'll do the annual retreat, but in fact, for that annual refresher in faith commitment, the liturgical cycle and particularly the Lenten exercise as preparation for the Easter renewal of baptismal promises is, for myself, far more central, and in dealing with others I always emphasize that more.

My work, very much networked, has for many years been with peoples in conflict, violent conflict, hence with people who need that once-for-all reorientation to the central features of their lives. In essence, this is a work of reconciliation, and in that sense very consciously Christian mission.

Jon Sobrino's recognition that, in dealing with the poor, we are always encountering the Christic, resonates strongly for me. My particular experience keeps showing me that the poor, the deprived, and the oppressed whom I encounter are often angry and violent, most often disillusioned with society and Church, often themselves abusers of others, including not only enemies but wives and children, in short, at least as obviously sinners as the rest of us. And they are still, even when most alienated from faith or religion or religions other than their own, Christic, as Sobrino sees,

in the ways that I am actually encountering Christ hungry, thirsty, in sorrow, imprisoned, etc.

As I draw on the Ignatian Exercises, the essential page for me is the *Praesupponendum* [Presupposition, Premise. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, No. 21]: that it is proper to the Christian—proper in fact to the human, but indelibly written into a Christian spirit in particular—to save the proposition of the other rather than to condemn it as false. Ignatius amplifies this to cover all the hard cases, and of course those are what I am primarily encountering. In recent years I have tended more and more to express that very plainly, invoking the Ignatian Exercises when I speak with people in these situations, and I find that it resonates powerfully, not only across the whole Christian spectrum, but with Jews, and Muslims, and others I meet in these circumstances.

Working to that Presupposition involves, of course, all sorts of care with discernment and signs of the time—the tasks most heavily involved in the Ignatian process. Jesuit/Ignatian labeling, for me, is not important, and even the Catholic or Christian labeling has to be carefully kept from being proselytism. But my source in the Exercises has to be known, so that people will know where I am coming from, and if what one of us does is helpful to others, that presupposition has its effect.

I've found myself in circumstances, as with Northern Irish Protestants, where "Jesuit" is the most frightening word in the language. ("Ignatian" would be unintelligible without explanation.) I used to avoid clerical dress, dealing with anyone in Northern Ireland, Catholic or Protestant, knowing that the collar was a power statement that made straight conversation impossible. People would speak to the collar without distinguishing among the faces above them. And yet I



realized that people had to know, within the first paragraph of any first meeting, that they were dealing with a Jesuit, as otherwise they would have felt betrayed. Elsewhere in the world, say with Muslims, being Catholic and Jesuit is an advantage, something people will know, even if most likely only slightly, and respect, but I have to know enough not to push it.

Curiously, now that I am back in the US, I find that Catholics tend to feel orphaned by the fact that there are few clerical collars to be seen other than around the stiffer necks of the far right, and I've taken to wearing it quite regularly for that reason, working to disinfect it of that power statement.

Given that context, I keep finding now that the work I do is strikingly consonant with the major themes of the Exercises, that my understanding of the Presupposition is constantly enriched by my recognition of its grounding in the Ignatian insights, and that even as I keep that Ignatian element visible but low-key, the work of reconciliation carries inevitably the Jesuit and Ignatian branding, in a way that needn't be trumpeted. (I've become addicted, as I said above, to the Mennonite term "Conflict Transformation" in place of "Conflict Resolution," a recognition that you don't really fix all the problems, but that the objective is to change attitudes and relations.)

I stumbled into this work with peoples in conflict very early in the game, when it was not yet an academic discipline. The pioneer generation of us who followed our instincts had to invent the approaches. It took me, consequently, quite a while to analyze what I was doing and formulate it into my own version of the discipline. I've been conscious lately that most of my writing has been direct correspondence with the responsible figures in the conflicts I have worked with, and that I haven't published an analytic study of the

approach. I need to do that in a form that is accessible to the non-religious practitioners, without concealing the faith basis of it in my own life, but also in a form that puts it explicitly in those terms.

The essence of what I do is a work of interpretation, asking quite simply what is going on in a conflict—already the Ignatian discernment process. It would always be simply presumptuous for me or any outsider to come in with an interpretation of others' conflicts on our own. It can only be done in conversation, and totally respectful conversation, with all the parties to the conflict, however strident or abusive they may be. My experience is consistently that this is a process welcome to people in conflict—so long, at least, as that element of respect is kept firm.

In violent conflicts, people live their bubbles, isolated from their antagonists. They will normally have strong negative stereotypes about them, but they are curious to know what their enemies are really all about. It is a welcome thing to take part in a conversation that includes the others, even if it is only at second-hand, through someone like me. It will most likely lead to their being able to communicate directly with one another.

But I've found on several occasions that doing this interpretation provides new insights—that conversation with Arafat and his colleagues in March 1986 was an instance. I always want to have a whole menu of alternative options from which people can choose. Everyone, whether they have ever been exposed to Just War Theory or not, understands that, when there are alternative options, violence is no longer legitimate. People may act violently simply because they are so angry that they want to. They often try some alternative that they know will never work—an ultimatum—so that they can say afterwards that they have no other option. But if

they can truly be convinced that an alternative could work, they will choose it. That's been my life, and I see a lot of work to be done yet.

RR: As we conclude, it's been very impressive and illuminating. I hope you were able to include everything you thought important. Thank you and God bless you.

*Take, Lord, and receive—  
All my liberty,  
My memory,  
My understanding,  
And my entire will—  
All that I have and possess.  
You have given all to me.  
To You, O Lord, I return it.  
Dispose of it wholly according to Your will.  
Give me only Your love and Your grace,  
For this is sufficient for me.*

St. Ignatius Loyola

**Fr. Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.**

**Born:** September 7, 1931, Arlington, Massachusetts  
**Entered:** February 1, 1951, Lenox, Massachusetts, St.  
Stanislaus Novitiate / Shadowbrook  
**Ordained:** August 27, 1963, Frankfurt am Main,  
Germany, Bartholomeusdom  
**Final Vows:** August 15, 1973, London, England, Farm  
Street Church

1945 Arlington, Massachusetts: St. Agnes School -  
Student, ninth grade  
1946 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston College High School  
Student  
1949 Lenox, Massachusetts: St. Stanislaus Novitiate /  
Shadowbrook - Novitiate [September 7, 1949-  
June 28, 1950]  
1951 Lenox, Massachusetts: St. Stanislaus Novitiate /  
Shadowbrook - Novitiate, juniorate  
1954 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College- Studied  
philosophy  
1957 Kingston, Jamaica: St. George's College - Taught  
history, English, religion  
1960 Frankfurt, Germany: Hochschule Sankt Georgen -  
Studied theology  
1964 Pomfret, Connecticut: St. Robert's Hall -  
Tertianship  
1965 Kingston, Jamaica: St. George's College - Taught  
religion, English  
1967 New York, New York: Fordham University Jesuit  
Community - Studied theology, Union Theology  
Seminary  
1972 Belfast, Northern Ireland: Residence at Farm  
Street, London, England - Peace Work  
1973 London, England: Farm Street - Associate Director,  
Centre for Human Rights and Responsibilities,

- Institute for Social Research, Community Projects  
Northern Ireland
- 1979 London, English: Heythrop College *also at*  
Dublin, Ireland: Leeson Jesuit Residence -  
Centre of Concern for Human Dignity [joint  
project of the English and Irish Jesuit Provinces]
- 1981 Washington, DC: Gonzaga College High School -  
1981-1984 Work to establish the United States  
Institute of Peace, initial work in  
Lebanon
- 1984 Senior Associate, Conflict Analysis  
Center
- 1984 Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts: Boston College -  
1984- Instructor in Conflict Resolution,  
Department of Theology
- 2002-2004 Senior Associate, Program in  
Preventive Diplomacy, Center for  
Strategic and International Studies,  
Washington, DC

### Degrees

- 1952 Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College-  
Boston College
- 1952 Master of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College-Boston  
College
- 1953 Licentiate in Philosophy, Weston College
- 1964 Licentiate in Theology, Hochschule Sankt Georgen,  
Frankfurt, Germany
- 1967-1973 *Doctoral studies at Union Theological Seminary,*  
*New York*

## Publications: Books

- A Social Option: A Social Planning Approach to the Conflict in Northern Ireland.* Co-authored with Richard Hauser. London: Institute for Social Research, 1975.
- La Question Libanaise Selon Raymond Eddé.* Paris: Cariscript, 1990.
- Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy & Conflict Transformation.* Edited with Rodney L. Petersen. Foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. London & Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001.
- Negotiating Outside the Law: Why Camp David Failed.* Foreword by Jesse Jackson. London: Pluto Press, 2004.
- Forthcoming: "Living Catholic Faith in a Contentious Age," T. and T. Clarke, Continuum Book Series.

## Video Documentaries

*With Prof. John Michalczyk,  
Boston College Fine Arts Department*

- "Out of the Ashes: Northern Ireland's Fragile Peace." 1998.
- "Prelude to Kosovo: War and Peace in Bosnia and Croatia." 1999.
- "South Africa: Beyond a Miracle." 2000.
- "Unexpected Openings: Northern Ireland's Prisoners." 2001.
- "Different Drummers: Daring to Make Peace in the Middle East." 2003.
- "Killing Silence: Taking on the Mafia in Sicily." 2004.

AMDG

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ORAL HISTORY

Oral histories are the taped recordings of interviews with interesting and often important persons. They are not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. They are the voice of the person interviewed. These oral records are, in many instances, transcribed into printed documentary form. Though only so much can be done, of course, in an hour or sometimes two, they are an important historical record whose value increases with the inevitable march of time.

For whatever reason, New England Jesuits, among others around the world, have not made any significant number of oral histories of their members. Given the range of their achievements and their impact on the Church and society, this seems to many to be an important opportunity missed. They have all worked as best they could for the greater glory of God. Some have done extraordinary things. Some have done important things. All have made valuable contributions to spirituality, education, art, science, discovery, and many other fields. But living memories quickly fade. Valuable and inspiring stories slip away.

This need not be. Their stories can be retold, their achievements can be remembered, their adventures saved. Their inspiration can provide future generations with attractive models. That is what Jesuit oral history is all about.