

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection
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Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk
1986 January

RICHARD RUSK: This is an interview with Dean Rusk. Rich is doing the interviewing. This is January 1986. This topic is comments and response to my dad's letters from Oxford and Germany back during the 1930's. These letters were addressed to his family and are in the Dean Rusk Collection at the University of Georgia. Pop, I read those letters to you yesterday. Do you have any comments of a general nature about the letters you wrote back in those days?

DEAN RUSK: I enjoyed going over those letters more than I thought I would. But I think that you can see certain things there that tell something about me. There still were traces of my deep and active interest in church and religious matters. I've been very active in the church from my smallest childhood, through elementary school, high school, and at Davidson College. In my senior year at Davidson, I was President of the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], which was the student body organized in its religious capacity. And so I was very active in religious matters through Davidson. My father had gone to theological seminary, Louisville and at Columbia in Decatur, and he himself was, of course, deeply involved in religious questions, and so you saw some reflection of that, for example, in the thought that I toyed with for a while about trying to write something about the politics of Jesus Christ. I eventually slid away from that because I came to realize that the circumstances of the world at the time that Christ lived were so fundamentally different from the circumstances in which we were living now, that one had to be careful about drawing too many lessons from the Bible simply through metaphor. I tend to be skeptical now about trying to draw from the Bible guidelines for nuclear weapons in outer space and things of that sort, because those who wrote the Bible were necessarily a part of the world in which they lived. But anyhow, some of that long-standing interest in religion came through these letters. A second general theme that came through was a questioning of the capitalist system. The impact of the Great Depression was very strong on my generation of young people. Something clearly had gone wrong. The capitalist system was not working. It is very hard for people today to reconstruct the events of the Great Depression. And some of that is perhaps endemic to unchecked capitalism. Clearly something had gone wrong in the stock market, for example, leading up to and including the Crash of 1929. I suspect part of that is that the profit motive, which is a great dynamic force in a free enterprise society, can very easily slip over into greed of that sort that can destroy the capitalist system itself; that somehow steps have to be taken to protect capitalism from capitalists. So that's why we have the Federal Reserve System and the Securities and Exchange Commission and some of these regulatory agencies because some restraints have to be put upon capitalists if the capitalist system is going to work. Then over the years something else has happened in industry that I think is significant. We now have moved from the old fashioned owner-manager into a new period when managers are professionals. They are not really owner-managers in the sense that Henry Ford was when he first got the Ford Motor Company rolling. And these professional managers are victims of the bottom line. They are consumed with what the bottom line will be year by year because their jobs depend upon it; their bonuses depend upon it. And they may not be in the position of being

able to be business statesmen like the old owner-managers were. And so I think that has had perhaps a negative effect on the operation of our capitalist system. I think another thing that has happened is that competition, as we are so fond of describing it, has almost ceased being price competition in the usual sense of economic theory, and their competition has moved over to public relations type activity: to advertising, promotion, gimmickry, hype, rather than price. And I think that we consumers have paid for that. In this competition, on the promotional side of things, they have gone to very expensive types of advertising: commercials, television, and all that sort of thing. And we consumers pay for that. That itself, for example, is one of the reasons why we've been slipping in our competitive position in world markets, because we have added on to our price structure here a good many things that perhaps get in the way of an effective operation of a capitalist system. But in any event, in the early thirties while I was at Oxford, we were looking seriously at what the alternatives were to a free enterprise, rugged individualism kind of economy. Some of the ideas that were then and are now called socialist seemed pretty attractive. Now a number of young people of my generation turned to communism. I never did do that because I didn't like the communist systems that I saw and I didn't like the kind of Karl Marx approach to such questions.

RICHARD RUSK: Why didn't you like it? In theory, on paper it's a very idealistic type of system: everybody shares.

DEAN RUSK: Because, in fact, it turns out to be a fairly brutal authoritarian kind of system. I found it very hard to reconcile communism with democracy in my attachment to the basic ideas of Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence.

RICHARD RUSK: You were able to make those judgments back in the thirties?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, yeah. Sure.

RICHARD RUSK: Based on what?

DEAN RUSK: Based on what one learned about [Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov] Lenin and the doctrines that he propounded. It was just unattractive in operation, even though in theory it sounded at times pretty good. But we moved a long way away from the rugged capitalism of the nineteenth century. The kind of capitalism that Karl Marx talked about has very little to do with the capitalism of the twentieth century. You see, we in the West started with the major premises of the individual. But over the last fifty years in this country, we have been groping for a greater degree of social responsibility. I once told the Yugoslav ambassador in Washington that if you base it upon the participation of the public purse in the economy of the country, the United States was more socialist than Yugoslavia, and Yugoslavia called itself a communist country. Similarly, in the communist countries, they began with the major premises of the collective. But in these last few decades they have been groping their way toward more room for individual initiative and individual enterprise and more opportunity for individual effort. So there have been some changes on both sides. My guess is that twenty or thirty years from now these ideological differences between free enterprise on the one hand and communism on the other will mean much less than they have appeared to up to this point because there have been changes on both sides in the direction of the other.

RICHARD RUSK: And you think that is the trend of things?

DEAN RUSK: I think that's the trend of things.

RICHARD RUSK: You thought so when you took office, I believe?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. But anyhow, this deep concern about what seemed to be the obvious fact that capitalism was not working was reflected in my letters from Oxford at that time.

RICHARD RUSK: Right. One of the things that struck me about your letters, Pop, was that there didn't seem to be a whole lot of middle ground. It was either capitalism or socialism in its various forms. And you didn't seem to anticipate the kinds of internal reforms that our own society was able to undergo under [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt's leadership.

DEAN RUSK: I was at Oxford during the Roosevelt period, and I didn't see first-hand the steps that were taken through N.R.A. [National Recovery Administration] and the Agriculture Adjustment Administration and W.P.A. [Works Progress Administration]: the New Deal institutions. I wasn't exposed to them until I got back home in 1934.

RICHARD RUSK: There was a letter from Mills [College] to your dad in 1936 or '37 where you still expressed considerable doubt and concern as to whether or not our capitalistic system was really going to make it. Even at that time there was some hesitancy in your mind.

DEAN RUSK: Well, there are a good many things about capitalism that creates problems. There are many points on which I have not agreed with John Kenneth Galbraith. But he, in one of his books, commented on the way in which big business and big labor put their heads together and come out with agreements which screw the consumer. They just pass those increased costs along to the consumer. So they tax us in order to make those agreements possible. But I think a good deal turns upon whether or not the profit motive is kept within reasonable limits by those who are driven by the profit motive. Now today we have a good many businesses that are making twenty percent, twenty-five percent on equity. Now that means that the owners of those businesses will get their money back in four or five years and still own the business. I don't see how that is possible if there were genuine price competition. But one of the things that has limited price competition is the fact that today business enterprise is on such a scale that it isn't easy for people to organize additional businesses for purposes of coming into the market and competing with those who are already established. And so the pure doctrines that might have been drawn from economic theory simply can't work because competitive production is much more costly, much more difficult.

RICHARD RUSK: Did the Great Depression touch your family?

DEAN RUSK: Not fundamentally, because my father was working in the post office. He was a civil servant. I was lucky to be a refugee from the Depression through these three years at Oxford, part of the worst of it.

RICHARD RUSK: It never appeared as if your family was going to lose its house?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, no. We weren't in that situation. There was a very modest mortgage on our home in Morningside, and that proved to be manageable. I think the mortgage was transferred over to the Home Loan Mortgage business during the Roosevelt years with relatively low interest rates and things of that sort.

RICHARD RUSK: You had serious doubts about your ability to get a job back here, even as a [Cecil John] Rhodes scholar?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, yes. Just by chance, while I was still at Oxford, I sat down and wrote Frank Aydelotte, who was then president of Swarthmore College and secretary of the Rhodes trust in the United States. I told him that I would be finishing up at Oxford and I did not have a job prospect and if anything came down the road that came to his attention I would appreciate if he would keep me in mind. Well, apparently, Aurelia Henry Reinhardt, the president of Mills College, found that she had a vacancy on her faculty. She wrote Frank Aydelotte to see if he had any suggestions to make, and he suggested my name. And that resulted in the invitation from Aurelia Reinhardt to join the faculty at Mills College. But no, jobs were hard to come by in those days. And a lot of young people were very much concerned. And it should not be surprising that a number of young people turned to communism in those days. Now, a lot of them, fairly quickly, swung away from communism later on. I'm sure that a lot of young people who were interested in communism during the thirties were deeply offended by the pact between Hitler and Stalin, which had a lot to do with the beginnings of World War II.

RICHARD RUSK: I'm sure a lot of those young people in the thirties were somewhat sympathetic towards those later generations of young people in the sixties and their wild rhetoric.

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think possibly.

RICHARD RUSK: I must say that I found those letters most interesting.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: And in a way they did read like the letters from, as you called it, "a woolly-haired, bomb-throwing radical."

DEAN RUSK: Several people have commented that it's normal for young people to be radical and for old people to be conservative. But we had our radical itches when I was at Oxford. Then, of course, the Labour Party in England was socialist. There were a number of faculty at Oxford who were known to be socialists and very active in the Labour Party. There was a labour society at Oxford of undergraduates who had speakers in, and I attended a number of those. Very little communism as such at Oxford though.

RICHARD RUSK: What about Mills? Did you get any trouble with fellow faculty or people off campus when you espoused some of these criticisms of the capitalistic system?

DEAN RUSK: Well, we had a community forum at Mills in which we talked about a lot of these public issues. Although the Board of Trustees at Mills was very conservative, it included Herbert [Clark] Hoover as a member and Aurelia Reinhardt was the National Republican Committeewoman from California, she nevertheless insisted upon complete free discussion and free speech there on the campus. And so in some of those community forum sections we had some pretty radical thought set forth and debated and argued. No, there was a fair amount of that.

RICHARD RUSK: You never had any adverse comment from Herbert Hoover?

DEAN RUSK: No, I think there was one brief period when Glen [E.] Hoover, our economic professor at Mills, came under some criticism from one or another of the trustees because he had been quoted in the press about something. Well, Glen Hoover was a very--

RICHARD RUSK: Herbert Hoover's son?

DEAN RUSK: No, no. No connection. No kinship. Glen Hoover was a very provocative professor. Very often he would say what appeared to be outrageous things to get students' minds opened up, to get them thinking, get them stirred up. And he was also fairly active in the Democratic Party in local politics there in Oakland. I think he served on the City Council for a period. And so it was a lively conversation there. But the faculty at Mills was not nearly as conservative as the Board of Trustees.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you ever get in trouble with your own dad about some of those views?

DEAN RUSK: Not on these economic matters. My father was more conservative from a religious point of view than I was. But that probably was a difference in generation. I think there is one other thing you will notice in these letters in that period: That I did not talk down to my father and mother. I did not patronize members of my own family because I respected them and their--

RICHARD RUSK: As opposed to your number two son during the sixties? (laughter)

DEAN RUSK: And their intellectual capacity. My father had a very good mind. And we had not experienced it as much as I would have liked while we were growing up because he was working very hard. But both he and my mother were very intelligent people and I respected that. And as you will see from my letters, I didn't patronize them or talk down to them.

RICHARD RUSK: Did he send you replies?

DEAN RUSK: Occasionally, but rather short.

RICHARD RUSK: Those doubts and uncertainties about whether or not our system was going to make it, when were those resolved in your own mind? It must have been sort of a gradual process.

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think that came largely in processes of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. The Supreme Court knocked out a number of those major efforts like N.R.A. and the Agriculture Adjustment Administration, and things of that sort. But nevertheless, Franklin Roosevelt saved capitalism from itself and he got the capitalist system going again despite the fact that many of the capitalists were his bitter enemies politically, I could see that happening. And then little by little the economy began to develop steam and we sort of got back into the groove again.

RICHARD RUSK: Now if J. [John] Edgar Hoover, during his security checks on you during the sixties, had come across the little box of letters from Oxford and Germany, do you think it would have given you any trouble?

DEAN RUSK: I would doubt it, because that was the general tone of young people during the thirties. I wasn't alone on that. And maybe J. Edgar Hoover himself had some thoughts along those lines. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Any other general thoughts about the letters, Pop?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I'll just mention in passing that the Rhodes scholarship stipend was then four thousand pounds a year, which in those days meant about two thousand dollars because a pound was worth five dollars in those days. But you will notice from my letters that I never pleaded for money from my family because I knew they didn't have it to send me.

RICHARD RUSK: In fact, you were sending some to them.

DEAN RUSK: I was from California, a little bit. But I don't know that I sent them any from Oxford.

RICHARD RUSK: You sent them a bit.

DEAN RUSK: Right. But although we in our family were of very modest means, we never let that interfere with being a family. I do remember in the summer of 1927, when I was getting ready to go to Davidson, my father told me in sympathetic terms, but nevertheless very specifically, that he simply could not provide me with funds with which to go to college. He couldn't make a contribution; he simply didn't have it. And I remember going back to the little cot in the back room where I slept and laying on the cot. I must have had some tears in my eyes, but my mother came back there and patted me on the shoulder and tried to comfort me a little bit at that moment of disappointment. But we never let money break into family life.

RICHARD RUSK: He must have been disappointed himself--

DEAN RUSK: Oh, of course he was.

RICHARD RUSK: --to have said that.

DEAN RUSK: Of course he was. And I realize that. I was not in any sense resentful or angry at him or anything like that because I knew it was true. He simply did not have it.

RICHARD RUSK: But that was true of all the children. Was it that which led to his depression? There was some talk about your dad entering a period of his life when he personally became very depressed.

DEAN RUSK: I don't recall that somehow. I don't recall that. A young man out of Harvard, John Henry, apparently got the impression from talking with some of my family that my father was thought to have gone through a period of depression. But I don't remember that at all. I have no sense of it or recollection of it. Now, John Henry himself was one of this new breed of psycho-historians who drive me up the wall. He wrote an article for [Richard Charles Albert] Dick Holbrooke's Foreign Policy magazine about me. And in the first draft of that article, John Henry had said that my views of the Presidency were due to the fact that I needed a father figure because my own father had been a failure. Well, it never occurred to me in my life that my father had been a failure. And how somebody could dope that out of whatever evidence was at hand is beyond me because I never looked upon my father as a failure. I always had great respect for him.

RICHARD RUSK: Didn't you see John Henry on a later occasion?

DEAN RUSK: Well, later I made an outrageous remark to John Henry. By the way, that particular part to that article was knocked out by Dick Holbrooke before the article was published. But I saw John Henry later and made an outrageous remark to him that caused his jaw to drop open. I said to him, "How could I think that my father was a failure when he was one of only fifty-four men who had been the father of a Secretary of State?" Well, that was an outrageous remark on my part. But it sort of put a stop to John Henry.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Pop, there's a lot of warmth expressed in those letters about members of the family. You were writing what I would almost call love letters. It's in there in the letters, and yet it's not readily apparent to those of us who knew your family. How do you explain that discrepancy?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think part of it was that we were rather reticent in our family about expressing our thoughts to each other about each other. I have mentioned that before in terms of the general atmosphere of family life in Cherokee County in those days. But when I moved to a distance of communicating only by mail, some of that came through. But it was always there. That feeling was always there. But we just didn't say those things to each other very often. I regret that I never had a chance to say some of those things face to face with my father before his death. He died while I was in India during the war. In retrospect, I think I should have let him know how deeply I felt about him.

RICHARD RUSK: In your letters, Pop, you write about the possibility of coming back to Georgia and getting involved with some truck farming with your dad, or teaming up with him on a book or two, and various projects. None of that actually materialized. What did you have in mind there?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I probably was simply boxing the compass a bit about possibilities. I don't know. I think my own interest in religion, as such, dropped off rather sharply during the thirties, and that put aside any thought about joining with him on any books or writing in the general field of religion. But you know when you are young you think about a lot of things and sometimes give expression to them. None of that materialized partly through simply the pressure of world events--

[break in recording]

DEAN RUSK: Well, I had remembered that a good many farmers in the general area of Atlanta would grow vegetables and put them in their wagons and drive down to Atlanta to sell them in the Atlanta market. I thought that process could be developed much more efficiently than had been done, and there was such a large market developing in Atlanta that there probably was room for a good deal of specialization of fruits and vegetables for the Atlanta market. I think that's still--I think the idea was valid but--

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DEAN RUSK: I soon came to realize that farming was not for me.

RICHARD RUSK: You said yesterday that you gave up that idea rather quickly.

DEAN RUSK: I still think that even today there is room in the area within reach of Atlanta for some modern, first-class truck farming to provide fruits and vegetables for the Atlanta Market. Such a large proportion of our fruits and vegetables are shipped in from California and Florida, places like that. And a lot of those things can be grown in the Atlanta area. But somehow that had never quite caught on the way you think it could around a large metropolitan center like Atlanta.

RICHARD RUSK: You've been boxing the compass as a young man, Pop. Did you think of any other real possibilities that you might want to do?

DEAN RUSK: Well I did, as you know, write the State Department about the possibility of employment by the State Department and that didn't get anywhere. I was attracted to the academic way of life, college and university teaching. Although there are not large financial returns to it, as a way of life it is very attractive. You have control of your time. You have a degree of independence on the job that you don't have in many other places. I think it's fair to say that I was never seized with the idea of simply making a lot of money, to get into the rat race of money-making as such. When I came back to California, while I was at Mills College, an Oxford friend, Eric de Costa, became the chief economic officer for the native state of Mysore in India, down in the southern part of India. And he wrote to me during the late thirties asking me if I

would be interested in becoming the sole representative of Mysore for the importation of sandalwood and sandalwood oil into the United States; Mysore being almost the unique producer of sandalwood and sandalwood oil. That might have produced a fair amount of money, but I just wasn't tempted to try to go down that trail.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. You wrote in your letters that your ambition seemed to have leveled off and even declined. You spoke rather critically of the Western materialism and you thought of your future role in rather modest terms.

DEAN RUSK: Certainly modest in financial terms. Well, I never had an overwhelming ambition in terms of position or money or things of that sort. As I indicated on an earlier tape, the most specific ambition that I am aware of having had was that I wanted to become a college or university professor of international law while I was studying law at Berkeley. But I don't think I was deeply influenced by personal ambition in the usual sense.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, you talked about writing a paper at Oxford on the politics of Christ. And you wanted to involve your dad on that. What did you mean by that? What were you trying to do with that paper?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I was giving some thought to what we could learn from Christ in terms of daily guidelines for living in the modern world. You see, during my experience in the Presbyterian church, when we went to Sunday School, church, heard sermons; it was almost all about religion and religious values. There was relatively little discussion in the church at that time, even in things like the Men's Group or Women's Auxiliary of things like that. There was almost no discussion of major policy issues affecting us all in our daily lives. And I wondered whether there were guidelines to be derived from the sayings and the life of Christ that might have some bearing on these many decisions that we all faced in our daily lives. But the more I looked at it the more I shied away from it because I found the process of analogy to be rather unsatisfactory. What do you derive today from the fact that Christ drove the money changers out of the temple? (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: Have you got any more of those?

DEAN RUSK: What do you derive today from the fact that Christ had turned water into wine at a wedding? Now, I still think that there are certain sayings of Christ that continue to be relevant. To me the greatest sentence ever spoken was, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." So there are things of that sort that are permanent, I think, and enduring. But I couldn't find much guidance for many of our daily practical problems and did not care very much for the elaborate analogies that people cook up to somehow link Christ with a lot of these very practical issues we have to deal with.

RICHARD RUSK: And why were you trying to do this?

DEAN RUSK: Well, it was simply a continuation of a long involvement with religion and religious matters throughout my life, up through my experience at Davidson College. See, in high school I was giving serious thought to becoming a Presbyterian minister and gave some

thought to that while I was at Davidson. But I was drawn away from that when I was at Oxford and when world affairs moved in upon us. And I found myself turning to an interest in world affairs because I recognized, I think in those years of the thirties, that we were heading down the slope to some great events. As I told you before, I felt that the Japanese invasion of Manchuria was a very serious matter, and that the inability of the community of nations to deal with that problem was also itself a serious matter. And then came the Spanish Civil War, the intervention there by Hitler and [Benito] Mussolini with their own armed personnel, again the Western democracy sitting on their hands and doing nothing about it.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. You also talked in your letters about the inability of Christianity to deal with these problems and you expressed some discouragement about that. As a matter of fact, at certain points you thought that, if anything, Christianity would be among the forces of reaction rather than reform in trying to right some of these wrongs.

DEAN RUSK: Well, that was more a reaction to the institutions of the church, Christianity. After all, the Catholic church was a very conservative organization in those days. The Protestant churches on the whole were pretty conservative. Now there were some religious elements in the motivation of some of the pacifists of that period: Quakers, for example, and others. But I was thinking not so much of the Christian philosophy, what one finds, say, in the New Testament, so much as the impact of religious institutions. See, we had reconciled ourselves to poverty partly through things we found in the Bible. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go to Heaven. Well, that gave comfort to poor people. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: It looked pretty good back in Cherokee County.

DEAN RUSK: It sure did. It sure did.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Pop, I'll ask a tough question. It looked to me like you underwent quite a transformation coming out of a very religious-oriented family, and a personal transformation too, in which you were quite taken up with religious interests as a child and as a young man. And later in life you seemed to move away from it very fundamentally. Your religion, as I knew you as your son, was very much of a private thing. And I don't recall you ever discussing with me your religious views. You more or less left it up to each of us to work out these problems and these questions as we saw fit.

[break in recording]

DEAN RUSK: For you kids to work it out for yourselves to the extent that you wanted to. Then I also came to be very allergic to--

RICHARD RUSK: Incidentally, do you think that's a good way to do it?

DEAN RUSK: I wouldn't want to give advice to anybody else as to whether they should go that way. I'll leave that to them. It's a very personal matter. But then I also became allergic to links between religion and politics.

RICHARD RUSK: Although earlier you were trying to come up with a study for politics based on the politics of Christ?

DEAN RUSK: That's right. But what I reacted against was political leaders wrapping the mantle of God around their own ideas, ambitions, prejudices, and glandular reactions and claiming that God was on their side. When I was Secretary of State I only went, I think, to one Presidential prayer breakfast. I don't think I went to any of the Congressional prayer breakfasts.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you go to church services on your own as Secretary?

DEAN RUSK: No, again I reacted a bit to the idea that churches in Washington liked to refer to themselves as the "President's Church" or the "Secretary's Church", that kind of thing. And I didn't like that very much. And then I went to the office every Sunday morning. There were always some things to do in the office. So I did not involve my office as Secretary of State with the church and religious matters. I told you before that I think you won't find a single instance when I was Secretary of State where I ever claimed that God was on my side. I thought we should leave that to the Almighty. I tried to take out of presidential speeches references to God. I didn't always succeed because there is something about the chemistry of being President that causes them to love to call on the deity. (laughter) But the way that religion has become confused with political questions in other parts of the world can be almost terrifying. And I have commented on that earlier.

RICHARD RUSK: As Secretary, Pop, did you ever make your own private appeal to God?

DEAN RUSK: In my own private life I felt that a relationship between an individual and God is a very personal matter. You see, it's in the Protestant tradition that each person is his own priest. And I've never tried to talk about such things. As a matter of fact, to me there are inscrutable elements of mystery in religion, and I am content to leave those mysteries to God and not myself try to solve them in my own mind. So there are a good many things there that I don't talk about, partly because I wouldn't really know what to say, because to me there are some unanswerable question there.

RICHARD RUSK: Did those elements of mystery come at the expense of your own belief?

DEAN RUSK: Well, again we're getting now into something I just don't talk about because I don't know how to talk about it. You're not my father confessor. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: That's for damn sure. I could never play that role. That's for sure.

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: What do you call yourself in terms of religious faith?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I call myself a Protestant Christian. I grew up in the Protestant faith and I have not made any transfer to anything else. But there are some things about which I leave the answers to God. I have some doubts about the literal interpretation of the Bible as the word of

God because I think there is a great deal of metaphor in the Bible, many figures of speech. The Bible was written by living, breathing human beings who reflected the situation of their times, the knowledge of their day. So I don't spend much time worrying about the reconciliation of the Bible say, with science because that seems to me to be somewhat irrelevant.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, you say that God does exist for you. Is there a larger purpose to man's existence on this planet? Is God somehow involved in this?

DEAN RUSK: Well, these are still things about which one must, as far as I am concerned, continually grope. But there are some things that involve faith that are important to me. For example, I do not believe that the human race is on this earth for the purpose of reaching out and grasping the power of the sun itself to burn ourselves off of it. I don't think we are here so to indulge our insatiable appetites to turn this beautiful earth into a moonscape. I don't think we are here so to infest this one planet with our own kind as to drive us all back to the jungle snarling at each other for each morsel of food. I do have a respect for the human race itself. There is a certain element of nobility in Homo sapiens. Now you can explain that as part of that mystery that I leave alone.

RICHARD RUSK: There are some of my generation who think that God is simply another one of man's inventions. How do you respond to that? I don't necessarily include myself in that school.

DEAN RUSK: Well, I don't think that is true. I think it's not just a coincidence that wherever you find groups of human beings you find them reaching out toward a divinity, a divinity with different names, along paths with different symbols. But I think there is something in common among Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Hindus, Buddhist, Muslims and groping toward pagan deities, in what we call pagan deities, in a good many parts of the world. I think that yearning toward a higher being is a pretty universal experience, among others.

RICHARD RUSK: How about the question of man's mortality, Pop? What happens when a man dies? The way you conceive it?

DEAN RUSK: There are two experiences that are shared by every human being on earth: birth and death. Immortality, in an earthly sense is simply not a part of the human condition. We are born; we die. What happens after death is something that I am content to leave with the good Lord. It's a part of that mystery that I won't try to penetrate. I don't object to those who posit a life after death. But I won't try to explain it. I don't try to argue the point.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you believe it?

DEAN RUSK: It's part of the mystery that I will leave to God. But since death is an experience that is common to every human being, I am not afraid of it.

RICHARD RUSK: You're not nervous about it?

DEAN RUSK: No, because I know that among the billions of people that have lived, at some point everybody dies. So why should one be afraid of something that is a common experience of all mankind.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, I can agree with you now. I might be a little different when I hit my sixties or seventies. Pop, didn't Lucy Baines Johnson become a Catholic during the Presidency? And what was LBJ's [Lyndon Baines Johnson] reaction?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, she became a Catholic. And LBJ took that right in stride. It didn't bother him at all. Indeed, during one of the crisis he had, he commented that he had gone over one night to talk to Lucy's "four little monks," as he put it. (laughter)

END OF SIDE 2

