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Box 4, Folder 22, Response on receiving Pope John XXIII's
"Pacem in Terris", 13 October 1984.

RESPONSE BY RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM, DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, ON RECEIVING POPE JOHN XXIII "PACEM IN
TERRIS" MEDAL FROM THE COLLEGE OF NEW ROCHELLE, OCT. 13, 1984, 4 P.M.

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It is a high honor, which I deeply cherish, to receive the Pope John XXIII "Pacem In Terris" medal from the College of New Rochelle, headed so ably by Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly.

This is a notable and special occasion for me, a highlight in my thirty years of service in the cause of advancing understanding and friendship between Christians and Jews. It is "special" for several reasons:

First, it is a privilege to be included among such distinguished recipients as His Excellency Archbishop John J. O'Connor and Senator Jacob Javitz, one of the great heroic public figures in American life.

Second, Pope John XXIII of blessed memory was a loving humble servant of God who became the instrument for changing the course of the Catholic Church internally and in its external relations with other Christians, the Jewish people, and the entire human family. I have no hesitation in saying that as one studies the record of Pope John XXIII's declarations and actions toward the Jewish people, that he was "the best Pope that the Jews ever had."

The hearts and the history books of the Jewish people have already enshrined with abiding gratitude the imperishable memories of his loving acts toward Jews and his respect for Judaism. We will never forget that this Pope helped save the lives of thousands of Jewish children in the Balkans by giving them Catholic baptismal certificates. That led the Nazis to believe that the children were Catholics and not Jews and that act of mercy saved thousands of Jewish children from certain death in Auschwitz.

We will never ^{forget} this Blessed Pope John XXIII who stopped a liturgy in St. Peter's Basilica and ordered that the ancient and insulting prayer for "perfidious Jews" never be recited again in Catholic churches.

We will never forget his greeting to the first Jewish delegation that he received with his arms outstretched in a warm, loving embrace, saying, "Io Guiseppe fratello," "I am Joseph, your brother."

Above all, we will never forget that Pope John XXIII summoned Vatican Council II and ordained that one of its major concerns must be the adoption of a declaration that would help uproot the distorted exploitation of Christian teachings that foster anti-Semitism, and to build a whole new relationship between Catholics and Jews based on "mutual respect and fraternal dialogue." The adoption of that historic declaration, Nostre Aetate, on October 28, 1965, and the subsequent Vatican Guidelines on Catholic-Jewish Relations in 1974 have resulted in greater progress in friendship and mutual esteem between Catholics and Jews during the past two decades than at any time in the past two millennia.

As one Catholic prelate in Rome, president of a Papal university, told me in Vatican City, "This Pope John XXIII has brought about a revolution in mutual esteem."

Third, Pope John XXIII's far-visioned encyclical, Pacem In Terris, was a profound and moving expression of his sincere desire for brotherhood between men. It was a statement of his global humanitarian vision and his boundless confidence in the capacity of human beings to seek peace and pursue it. At the heart of his encyclical is his insistence on human freedom and the dignity of every person created in the sacred image of God.

He expounded in a more comprehensive manner than any previous encyclical or Papal document that order, based on God's moral laws, should prevail between man and man, between man and the community, and between nations and peoples, and in the world community at large.

His encyclical insists that trust rather than fear should be the vital factor in relations between states. He speaks of war and peace and pleads for an end to the arms race, that nuclear stockpiles be reduced equally and simultaneously by the countries concerned, that nuclear weapons be banned and eventually a general disarmament reached.

If we wish truly to honor his memory as one of the greatest spiritual leaders of our time, we should not only recall his words but act to translate his great visions into reality so that peace on earth will prevail, that war and bloodshed cease, that love and compassion and fraternity bind all of us together as brothers and sisters in God's human family.